NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Vol. XLVIX No. 1 Spring 1995

FIVE DOLLARS

Keeping in Touch

How the Media Can Connect With the Public

"...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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Curator's Corner

An Improvement That Makes Matters Worse

The questions discussed in this issue of Nieman Reports arose out of conversations about the coverage of the 1994 midterm elections. Many of the conversations were about the relationship between being better informed and the enormous amounts of information available today, about the application of communications technology to rival that deployed during the Persian Gulf War and an ever-growing number of channels for distribution of information. In the case of the 1994 elections the fact that many people were surprised by the results led us to pose the questions addressed in this issue.

Underlying much of the conversation is a concern for what Lewis Mumford has called a "paradox of communications." Mumford observed that new communications technology creates new and intensive interaction. The first result of that interaction often is to unmask previously unnoticed or hidden conflicts. Maybe what is happening today is the result of a previously unnoticed conflict between what should have been two positive trends of this era of journalism—the trend toward better-trained journalists and the trend toward application of a more powerful technology to journalism.

Never before have journalists been better trained. Not only are most journalists now college educated but many have advanced degrees. Mid-career study programs like the Nieman Foundation are widely available. Short courses in specialized reporting are commonplace. University-based journalism research centers like John Seigenthaler's First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt and Everette Dennis's center at Columbia University provide a steady stream of insights into the art and craft of journalism—its impact on society. There is the Poynter Institute dedicated solely to journalism research and training. Where in the 1950's there was only Nieman Reports, today at least a dozen serious journalism reviews continue to find an audience. Organizations of like-minded journalists meet regularly to discuss standards, ethics, and training for a journalism in the public interest.

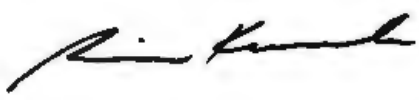
Converging with this better-educated, focused and dedicated work force is the revolution in communications technology. Today's journalists are harnessed to the power of computers, worldwide databases, instant communications access. More and more journalism occurs at the console of a computer connected to the whole world.

But here is the paradox: much of today's reporting is of a stream of data from which people have been abstracted. This is where the 1992 campaign coverage may have uncovered the sort of paradox Mumford described. It is what Paul Stoop (a Nieman Fellow from Germany) would call *Verschlimmbesserug:* an improvement that makes things worse. The marriage of better-trained journalists and powerful technology has cut back on person-to-person reporting in favor of the mass data computers make possible. Journalism is growing more and more distant from the public on which it reports.

The implications of this paradox might have surfaced most clearly in political coverage because of the election process itself. Journalism is about informing people. The election process is shaped by politicians whose goal is to influence public behavior. As New York University's Jay Rosen says: "Elections are about winning and losing. Campaigns should be about a discussion among citizens." Typically, election coverage depends primarily on survey research, not person-oriented reporting. Election survey research screens out suspected non-voters. As a result, two-thirds of the population may be abstracted from the data. Coverage based on such a process is effectively disconnected from the thoughts, fears, ideas, inspirations, and hopes of two-thirds of the public. It is not a journalism which is likely to make sense to—or for—the bulk of the people for the simple reason that they are excluded from the reporting base.

Unfortunately, the response of many media organizations has been to rely ever more heavily on market research and other devices that study people as homogeneous statistical groupings. Meanwhile more and more journalists disappear from the streets each day to perch behind computer screens.

The concern among newsroom managers is that journalists fail to give the public what they want. But that concern is misplaced. The public is not turning away from a journalism that does not give them what they want; the public rejects a journalism in which they do not see themselves or their interests reflected. ■



What They're Saying

T.R. Reid:
Social Order Is No. 1

" I think they [Washington Post editors] know that our young readers really don't care that much about the power of the weakling Prime Minister of Japan. But if you can write a story saying that women between the ages of 24 and 30 in Japan don't want to get married because they've figured out Japanese men are pigs, that's a pretty interesting story. That ran on the front page of my paper. They liked that story and that kind of thing. I've really done very well with those stories, just what life is like there. The strongest story I have going for me right now...is social order, how they built a society without crime, why the Japanese were so shocked when those two guys were carjacked in L.A. One reason is they don't have a word in Japanese for carjacking....I couldn't find any police official in all of Japan who had ever heard of carjacking cases. They never heard of the crime until those two Japanese boys were killed. This is a very powerful story, the most powerful story I've had in five years with our readers. The reason the Japanese get so upset is because they've built a society where it doesn't happen."—*T. R. Reid, Northeast Asia correspondent for The Washington Post, based in Tokyo, at a seminar for Nieman Fellows February 3, 1995.*

KIM ARRINGTON, WASHINGTON POST

Ellen Goodman:
We're Disconnected

"I think that the thing people most resent about journalists is this disembodied authority figure telling you what you should know, what you should think, what you should care about, and that we have become yet another Washington, in that sense. Disconnected. Knowledgeable. Patronizing.
"...We have become a mobile class of people, who move from what the television people know as one market to another. And how many set down roots, how many live the way a lot of other people do in communities? Not that this isn't a mobile [society]; it is, but how many of you feel a part of the community that you live in? How many of you have stayed there for 20 years? 30 years? So, in fact, are you disconnected? Do you move from one market to another? Do you live the same lives as the people in your path?
"...When I came to The Globe, 27 years ago, it was a very parochial paper. Everybody had grown up in Boston and most of it was a Boston/Irish and Boston/Yankee community. There was almost nobody outside of that. All white male Irish/Yankee. That was it. Very parochial, very Boston. That was true everywhere. Newspapers were very parochial, newspaper people were less well educated. In the years since I've been at my own paper the overwhelming majority [of the staff has become non-Bostonian.] I'm one of three people who know how ward 20 voted in 1952, and I'm not even writing locally. Overwhelmingly [we are] not connected in time and space to the people that we report on. [We are] much better educated and less street smart. So there's a piece in which that perception of us is accurate."—*Ellen Goodman, syndicated Boston Globe columnist, at a Nieman Fellows seminar on December 12, 1994.*

MARION ETTLINGER

Pete Dexter:
Facts Over Style

In his new novel, "Newspaperboy," Pete Dexter, former Philadelphia Daily News columnist, writes about the conflict between reporters who dig out solid facts and the stylist who is careless of the truth but knows how to tell a story. The book concerns Florida newspapermen chasing a big story.
"I'm more interested in the person who trusts the events, the names, the facts, and lets them speak for themselves," Dexter says in an interview in At Random, a Random House publication.
"I'm talking about a lot more than journalism here. You can apply that premise to fiction, business, the way you live your life with your family. You can choose style over substance. And substance has been out of style for a long time."
Dexter's view of journalism is clear:"I would think that the truest line in the whole book—next to 'There are no intact men'—is that nobody who is the subject of a calamity ever trusts newspapers again."

Keeping in Touch

A Discussion of How Journalists Can Widen Perspectives Of What Is News and Who Is Newsworthy

Have reporters and editors built walls around themselves so they do not know what the public is thinking? Are their interests so limited that they do not even care to report news involving those with different views of the world? Is such arrogance a major reason why the media is under heavy assault by critics?

These questions form the backdrop of the articles in the first half of this issue of Nieman Reports. The discussion actually begins in the preceding pages. On Page 2 Bill Kovach explains a paradox: journalists are better trained and have more tools, but people are abstracted from their reports. On Page 3 Ellen Goodman says journalists are "overwhelmingly" not connected "in time or space to the people we report on." Throughout the discussion, editors and reporters are urged, in Roy Peter Clark's words, to "let the voices of the young and the poor and the old to be heard." We begin with articles by newspaper editors describing their efforts to keep in touch with their readers. Essays from different viewpoints follow.

Kurt Cobain, School Prayer And 1,557 Chili Recipes

The Louisville Courier-Journal

By David V. Hawpe

When Kurt Cobain died we carried a little photo on page A-1, which referred to a 16-paragraph story on page A-9.

Big mistake.

I was confronted on the matter by Morgan McGarvey, age 14, who lives down the street from me. I had stopped at the McGarvey house for pie and coffee. Judy McGarvey is one of the great bakers. Risking his mother's ire (Judy is determined that both her pies and her children are going to turn out right), Morgan cornered me.

"You guys blew it," he said, with all the authority of a teenager who doesn't know what he doesn't know.

"Oh yeah? What are you talking about, Morgan?"

"You didn't really have anything on Cobain's death."

"Who is Cobain?"

"Come on, Mr. Hawpe." (Disgusted pause.) "Come on upstairs."

A visit to Morgan's second-floor bedroom revealed walls decorated with Nirvana posters (I knew who Nirvana was...I just didn't know the lead singer's name...shame on me). Morgan had created a kind of memorial.

Now this is not "problem" teen we're talking about. This is Morgan, all-American boy. There are nine baseball pennants on his walls. There's a Michael Jordan poster on his door. And a layout of super-models, bulging out of their bikinis. Also a picture of Lorena Bobbitt, on which Morgan has written, "She deserves death."

Several days later, my newspaper got around to running a longish Post-Intelligencer piece, describing Cobain's final days. By that time, the tabloids and

David V. Hawpe has been Editor of The Courier-Journal since 1986. Earlier he served as reporter, copyeditor, editorial writer, City Editor and Managing Editor in Louisville. A 1974-75 Nieman Fellow, Hawpe is Adjunct Instructor in Journalism at his alma mater, the University of Kentucky. As a member of state and local organizations, he has been active on minority issues and in journalism education. He spends time reading and listening: one son is determined to be a writer and another wants to be a rock star.

teenzines were bulging with everything Morgan wanted to know about what had happened in Seattle.

We just didn't get it. At least not fast enough. Of course, it's not for lack of trying. We do reach out to readers. But let's be honest. Too many of us just don't like doing it.

I think newspapers are most hesitant to let others "intrude" into the editorial process. News coverage is one thing. Editorial policy is something else. Most obviously, the editorial positions of any newspaper are deeply individual to that institution. Members of most editorial boards see themselves as keepers of near-sacred traditions. A newspaper's very personality is implicated in its editorial views. Letting "outsiders" muck around in the editorial process is dangerous, or so we tend to think.

As a Gannett newspaper, The Courier-Journal has had its self-satisfaction challenged by the demands of a company-wide program called News 2000, through which all the group's properties are learning to be more and more reader-driven. It's an important lesson, if we are serious about meeting readers' needs and desires. Or if we are serious about empowering readers, and sharing the civic dialogue with them, rather than dictating it to them. Or if we are serious about surviving, as the last local mass medium.

Challenged by News 2000 to find new, useful ways to reach out to readers, last January we sent every news and editorial staffer—everybody from the editor himself to the obit clerks—into the field, to talk with five people about our newspaper. We asked our folks to strike up conversations at barber shops, doctors' offices and grocery stores; in Sunday School classes, union halls and basketball gyms; on line at the cinema and on benches at the mall. We took down what readers had to say, put it all into our computers and made it available for every staffer to study. This led directly to some specific stories, and to some changes in coverage.

But it was just a wake-up call.

Since then, we have built into our news operation an ongoing commitment to reader involvement. We convene panels to discuss coverage challenges before we address them. We seek out readers to assess what finally runs in news columns. This will be most obvious in our coverage of the 1995 gubernatorial campaign in Kentucky, in which our stories will be guided and critiqued by readers in a series of forums, roundtables and focus groups.

At the end of some stories, we ask readers to write us or call us with their views. Sometimes we choose the most interesting and representative comments, and run them in the newspaper. It's not a substitute for scientific measurements of reader attitudes and reactions. But it does help us put a human face and voice on some issues.

Often, readers and groups of readers seek us out. Almost everybody in the building speaks to some gathering, sometime during the year. Many make multiple appearances. Often those invitations are triggered by issues in the news and our coverage of them.

We also co-produce the journalism course at a Catholic high school in downtown Louisville. That keeps us in touch, on a daily basis, with a changing cast of youngsters, as well as their teachers and families.

The Ombudsman hears from some 20 readers a day. Many of them parse our coverage of government and politics. When something really big happens—say, we leave the real estate transfers out of the Sunday newspaper—we get more calls. We received about 80 complaints after the real estate agate fiasco. He shares reader comments in his daily report to the staff, and in a (too infrequent) column in the Sunday paper.

Outreach takes many forms and leads us in many directions.

Sometimes it starts in the kitchen.

In addition to reporting, speaking at public events, visiting area farms and debriefing local restaurant operators, food Editor Sarah Fritschner and her assistant, Alice Colombo, sit by the phones in our test kitchen every single Wednesday and do nothing but chat with readers from morning until 1 in the afternoon. They answer questions, take requests for recipes, offer advice—and do it in person. And they get story ideas. One example was their decision to offer an "infosheet" full of chili recipes, which readers could request by fax or mail. As of this writing, we have mailed out 1,073 chili infosheets to readers (who sent us stamped, self-addressed envelopes) and faxed another 484 to homes and offices. And the requests are still arriving. This week, we're doing the same thing with chocolate-chip cookie recipes.

In addition to identifying such "hot button," high-interest foods, our "Hot Line" call-in sessions have steered us toward particular lead stories (like an upcoming story on single cooks, or another that's planned on low-fat desserts).

But it's not all chili and cookies.

- Our major 1994 series on how people dealt with rising health costs by Pat Howington began with suggestions from a reader panel and continued with the help of reader interaction.
- Our technology writer put his weekly column on-line. As a result, he gets about a dozen E-mail letters a week from local people, responding to something he has written.
- We altered the content of our Graduation Section last year, based on the meeting we had with a dozen students, counselors and parents.
- We used a youth panel to help develop questions for last summer's poll examining the cultural and political attitudes of teenagers in the Louisville metro area. The stories ran on A-1 for five days.
- After last year's blizzard, our Neighborhoods section asked readers to tell us about all the Good Samaritans. More than 100 readers responded and we ran a "Snowstormers" package.
- Our second-day of coverage concerning the possible closure of a financially strapped girls' school, Presentation Academy, was shaped by the reader's call-in line. We ran a box with our first-day story, asking for memories and reaction. Some of that was used in the follow-on coverage. We even got one caller who pledged $10,000. The

principal credits us with the most help in raising $700,000 and saving the place from closure.

• We did a reader call-in about a month after the city switched to once-a-week garbage pickup. We got a couple of hundred calls. Rather than using them for mugs-and-quotes, we used the information to focus on the problem of garbage piling up in the Old Louisville neighborhood, and on the fact that Louisville doesn't require dumpsters for multi-family dwellings. The story was a major factor in pushing the city to take a look at strengthening its garbage ordinance.

• Section editor Judy Rosenfield really listened to the kids when she appeared at a local high school journalism workshop. They led her to do a story about why young people feel unwelcome at some restaurants, and why some restaurants are not crazy about serving them. Judy and her colleague, Bob Deitel, also combed our teen advisory board application letters for insight, and came up with a story on why so many kids have auto accidents.

• In some of our outreach sessions, Business Editor Linda Raymond met Jerry L. Stephenson, Director of Hoosier Valley Economic Opportunity Corp., and Mark White, owner of a landscaping business. Later, when we needed a local reaction to the minimum wage increase talk in the President's State of the Union address, she decided we should tap the views of some minimum wage earners and people who work with them, such as Stephenson—as well as their employers, such as White. Business writer Joe Ward called Stephenson, who in turn put him in touch with Beverly Walters, who actually shucks corn for a living.

All this may sound...err...corny. But seeking out your readers really works. We are trying to do a better job of it.

Ask Morgan McGarvey.

If he doesn't give you the right answer, I'll tell his mother.■

Lots of Information, Not Enough Analysis

The Chicago Tribune

By George Langford

Reading our readers is something The Chicago Tribune does in a rather scattershot fashion that can often produce accurate results. The success of recent niche feature sections for women, children and certain lifestyle areas, and the zoning of information, resulted from an ability to ascertain areas of interest and design sections to fit them.

How that information has been collected and analyzed is an amalgam that includes everything from formal focus groups to the gut reaction of experienced editors.

There are times our imprecise methods fail us. Our inability to detect the magnitude of political change in 1994 is an example. There are other miscalculations on a smaller scale that suggest we need to improve our understanding of the public.

What we already possess is an incredible amount of information about attitudes. What we don't have is a system to recognize, collect, organize, analyze and act on that information.

This information comes to us from sociological studies, polls, focus groups, interaction through the various communication vehicles, and business and marketing indicators.

We know that the one way to stay in touch with people and understand them is to talk to them. And the most accurate way newspapers historically have accomplished this understanding is through their reporters. The more trained reporters a newspaper can deploy into its community, the more likely that newspaper will grasp the attitudes and needs of the people.

Unfortunately, thorough local reporting is easily the most expensive ticket in journalism. Therefore, we resort to supplementary approaches. Political polls, The Tribune has found, are the second best method. But because only about one-third of the population actually votes, polls are hardly comprehensive when trying to determine political attitudes. Polls rely on projections and the honesty of the participants, a sometimes risky combination.

We commissioned 65 focus groups with 405 consumers in 1994 that provided some meaningful marketing data and some significant changes in the structuring of our newspaper. But focus groups are not particularly helpful in capturing the mood of people.

We have a public editor who has direct contact with people through phone calls, letters, meetings with local

George Langford has been at The Chicago Tribune for more than three decades. He has held a range of jobs, from Sports Editor to Features Editor to Associate Managing Editor for Photography, Arts and Graphics. He is presently The Tribune's Public Editor.

Langford went from the 1961 graduating class of Vanderbilt University to reporting for United Press International in St. Louis, moved on to UPI in Chicago and New York before joining The Tribune in 1963.

interest groups, etc. While the collective results from these contacts provides leads for further investigation of trends, they are hardly valid statistically and usually only put us in touch with information seekers (those who already read us).

A combination of extensive local reporting and political polling enabled The Tribune to detect the Republican shift on the Illinois state ticket in November 1994. It told us the Republicans would sweep the ticket—the first time in forty years. Unfortunately, we did not take this reporting and polling below the state level, partly because we had trouble believing our information and because we lacked the resources required.

As a result, we did not anticipate the defeat of Illinois Congressman Dan Rostenkowski. Nor did we extrapolate our information to a national level even though reporters we sent to Tennessee, Texas and California accurately foresaw the Republican surges in those states. Thus, The Tribune did not signal the Republican takeover of the House and Senate. Had we done more extensive local and national reporting, we would have been more confident in our information and could have predicted the political change.

Obviously, the reporters who are sent into the community have to understand that part of their everyday assignment is reading attitudes. There has to be a process which makes reporters aware of the importance of this agenda and is set up to collect and analyze their findings. Training programs to this end would be helpful for reporters and editors.

We should be organized enough to gather all the varied contacts we have with the public and interpret them. Of all these resources, however, the most reliable for understanding social trends and attitudes is local reporting. Think local. Concentrate your energy and resources in that direction. We discover who people are and what they want by covering every part of the area in which they live and work. That sort of homework should give us the confidence that we are in touch with our society.■

Printing Reporters' Phone Numbers

The Portland Oregonian

By Sandy Rowe

In Oregon, my adopted state, you would have to work at it *not* to be in touch with citizen views. Oregonians have a history of speaking out and doing it loudly, if not always with a unified voice. One of the many differences between Oregon voices and the East Coast southern sensibilities I know best, is that in Oregon people really believe they own the government, the schools, the press. What a surprise for me, a newcomer of 18 months. Public institutions—or those claiming to be, including us—belong to the public. Like most citizens, I had been trained to disbelieve it.

One piece of evidence should be persuasive: in the November elections, Oregonians were choosing a new governor, electing congressional representatives and local officials, and voting on 18 public initiatives (Oregon's most obvious and beloved rejection of representative government). Neither United States Senate seat was on the ballot. Sixty-eight percent of registered voters went to the polls. Other states would cheer that turnout. We were disappointed. It was lower than expected.

Oregonians write letters, too. We get about 25,000 local letters to the editor a year. There are only 3 million people in the whole state, roughly half of those in our primary metropolitan market. We have a daily circulation of 360,000. Twenty-five thousand of them write every year. Before I retire we could hear from every single subscriber.

They are not all happy campers. Most Oregonians, I am discovering, are strongly opinionated. It has been a fascinating dichotomy to try to understand. Oregon has the friendliest, warmest, most welcoming people you will ever find. "My God," an editing applicant asked after a day of touring the area, "are people here *always* so happy?" Yep. Oregonians pride themselves on their politeness and friendliness, especially to outsiders. Just don't get them angry. There's an in-your-face element to much of the political discourse and the mail that crosses my desk.

Although it's easy to be in touch with readers in Oregon, it's difficult to generalize about them. Jon Franklin, professor of journalism at the University of Oregon and a transplanted East Coaster, said it best to me when I moved to Portland. "Oregon," he said, "is a little bit of everything, none of it very soft. Aging hippies smoking marijuana and skinhead Nazis with cigarette packs in

Sandra Mims Rowe is the Editor of The Oregonian in Portland, Oregon. She moved to Portland in June 1993. Prior to that she was the Executive Editor and Vice President of The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star in Norfolk, Va. She is a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, Treasurer of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, a member of the Board of the Knight Center for Specialized Journalism at the University of Maryland and a member of the Advisory Board of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. She was on the Nieman Selection Committee in 1987.

their t-shirt sleeves. Bible-thumping fundamentalists. In-your-face-gay-rights advocates, down-and-out ex-loggers....Environmentalists....The impression one gets in the first year or two is of this angry political cacophony." There is a center though, he said, and it is pretty sane. But you can't generalize. Franklin is right.

So, back to our readers. How do I get past the cacophony?

Here, and I expect in most places, we start by opening the phone lines and the doors. We're still learning how to do it, but every reporter and editor who has made the effort has found it worthwhile. Managing Editor Peter Bhatia (also new to Oregon) and I made getting to know readers and having our coverage make connections to their lives one of the five priorities of the paper.

We started publishing the phone and fax numbers of columnists at the end of their columns and encouraged beat reporters to do the same on stories. The Public Life team, which includes all our politics and governmental coverage, was the first newsroom team to embrace the idea. Some reporters were reluctant, but once they began including phone numbers on virtually all stories, they quickly became enthusiastic. The calls give them support for their work and contribute to an underlying citizen perspective that is too often missing from political and government coverage. Plus, they are getting good story tips.

Michele McLellan, the leader of the Public Life team, says that when journalists from other papers read The Oregonian's political coverage of the last year, they almost always mention the voice of the coverage. They note that it is clear, that it is accessible, that it brings real information in a way that encourages people to be involved.

During a statewide sales-tax vote in late 1993 and again this past fall during the general election campaign, the team ran phone numbers almost daily asking readers what issues they wanted us to explore, what questions they wanted candidates to answer. We got hundreds of calls. Many of our stories were a direct result of those calls. For the first time, we believe we are finding a way to let citizens, not politicians and their agendas, define our coverage.

Other reporters and teams have followed the example of Public Life. As I started to write this, I sent a computer message asking reporters who had received more than 25 calls on a story within the last few months to send me a message. Within an hour I had messages from more than a dozen reporters telling me of responses that ranged from a handful to almost 75.

Tom Hallman, a crime team reporter, thinks running his phone number at the bottom of his stories is great. "I've received several good story ideas, material for a number of columns and it allows me to get immediate feedback on my work. Too often reporters are isolated from the people we write about. Letters are wonderful, but the calls are much more spontaneous and a more accurate gauge of what readers think. The emotion is right there on the surface. They read. They react. It can't get much better than that," Hallman says.

Our Metro front columnist, Steve Duin, always runs his phone number with columns and almost always gets responses. A December column on the controversy over the atomic bomb stamp netted 75 phone calls and a fistful of faxes. "The availability of those numbers allows readers to bombard me with visceral reactions. Much more often than not, that's a healthy exchange for both me and the readers," he said.

Last year we used a newsroom opening to create an ombudsman position at The Oregonian. In a normal week (around here that's defined as a week when we have no story on Tonya Harding) he gets about 150 calls, faxes or letters. Bob Caldwell is our first public editor. The biggest surprise, he says, is the goodwill readers have expressed toward the idea of an ombudsman and a reader advocacy column. "I suspect we really could never go back to not having one now, because people have latched onto the idea and have a sense of ownership toward it. The position has done a lot to narrow the psychological distance between the paper and the community."

We're also fairly new to the audio text game. We just finished our second year of operation during which we received more than six million calls. We are currently averaging 750,000 calls a month (in a metro area of 1.5 million) and have had as many as 45,000 in one day. Anywhere from a quarter to a third of the calls each day are generated by the newsroom—either musical sound bites we offer; updates from sports reporters; reader response lines for specific stories and news updates (such as on the O.J. trial).

All that said, do we keep in close-enough touch with what people in our region are thinking about social and political issues? Hell no. As an industry and as a newspaper we are just beginning to learn to listen to readers and try to understand what they are really saying to us about their lives, their opinions, their concerns.

The best tool I've seen with true understanding of what is being said by the electorate is the Times-Mirror Center for the People and the Press. Its September study, "The New Political Landscape," while not attempting to be predictive of election results, certainly captured the restlessness of the voters and criticism of the media better than anything I have seen.

Where the Center for People and the Press succeeds, I think the rest of us fall short. Before the election, its study of voter attitudes and values reported the shift away from party, the unattached middle, the anger of many white males. Correct on all counts. Too many of the rest of us, without the benefit of professionally designed studies, tethered to our newsrooms and traditional associations, have a circle of acquaintances whose opinions and experiences differ not a whole heck of a lot from our own.

Many of us would feel the same amazement an editor expressed to me on election day upon discovering that a mid-20s, college-educated editorial assistant in our office had proudly proclaimed she voted a straight Republican ticket. Straight Republican? Young single female? Until November, it wasn't in our frame of reference. Now it is.■

Eyeballing Works in Texas

The Dallas Morning News

By Ralph Langer

There we were, a half-dozen senior editors of The Dallas Morning News, chatting with 40 or so members of the Asian-American Chamber of Commerce. They were telling us they were unhappy that we hadn't been covering one of their major annual events. It was news to us. But it shouldn't have been.

That was a number of years ago during one of our early self-invited sessions with various community groups. It was mutually embarrassing. We hadn't been aware of the annual charity affair and they had never told us about it. They thought newspapers "just knew things" and if we didn't cover something it was because we thought it was of little news value.

Like most newspapers we've always had the usual contact points with readers. Sometimes they wrote letters to the editor, and the editorial staff published as many as they could. Sometimes readers called us to complain about coverage they thought was inadequate or unfair or unnecessary. Once in a while, in a public gathering of some kind, readers would ask about coverage or launch a verbal missile with "j'accuse" written all over it. They questioned our objectivity, our fairness, our professionalism—and sometimes our parentage.

For more than a decade, The News has stepped up efforts to better understand real people—readers or not—in our diverse community. When the competing Dallas Times Herald ceased publication, significant space was added to expand the number of letters that could be published.

We've long had a news department rule that any reader calling to inquire or complain was to be treated on the assumption that the complaint might be correct. And that the caller deserved a check of the facts and a response, whether the complaint checked out or not.

Certainly, over the years, we've conducted lots of highly sophisticated surveys of attitudes and demographics to help give us information on who lives here and what is important to them.

But one of the best sources of information has been going out and, as some say in Texas, eyeballing.

We provided speakers to invitations from community groups wanting to know more about the paper. But a significant step forward was inviting ourselves to meetings and sometimes creating gatherings of readers or potential readers. We let many groups know that editors of The News were interested in what they thought of the paper and its coverage. We've told them we were willing to answer any question and note any criticism.

It hasn't always been fun. There have been heated conversations with some groups or individuals. Criticisms have ranged from right on target to totally bizarre. We've been used as a forum for demagogues, for the terminally politically correct.

The main themes, with variations, center on groups wanting more coverage of their activities and interests, and they want it fast and correct and complete. They want the media generally, and us specifically, to put more importance on what they do. Our main themes emphasize that we're really listening, that some changes are possible and that we are human beings making honest judgments and sometimes making mistakes.

We've also found good story ideas from every session. We've made contacts and established rapport and shown people that we're not a faceless part of the monolithic "media."

After one Saturday morning session in a predominately African-American community center, I was packing up my materials as the room cleared. A middle-aged man who had stood at the back of the room for more than an hour approached and said: "I appreciate the time you folks took. You're not as big an asshole as I thought you'd be." I told him I'd take it as a compliment.

We've met with church groups, gay/lesbian groups, homeowner associations, businesses and ethnically based organizations. Formats have included sit-down dinners, buffets, coffee and pastries,or being part of an organization's regular meeting. There have been morning meetings, lunch meetings, dinner meetings, night meetings. There have been bus tours of a community and walking tours of business operations.

And what are the results?

Ralph Langer is a journalism graduate of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His first journalism management post was as Managing Editor of The Port Angeles (Wash.) Daily News. He is a former copy editor of The Detroit Free Press; Managing Editor of The Dayton (Ohio) Journal Herald and Editor of The Everett (Wash.) Herald. He joined The Dallas Morning News in 1981 as Managing Editor. In 1983 he was named Executive Editor, in 1986 was named Vice President and Executive Editor and in 1991 was named Senior Vice President and Executive Editor. If those jobs have tended to keep him inside, it is also true that Ralph uses the pursuit of fish as an excuse to get outdoors.

They're not subject to precise measurements but clearly including much improved communication channels on a micro- and macro- basis. We know that many participants feel more comfortable contacting us as an organization because now they know us as real people. Individual contacts are also improved just by key editors talking face-to-face with readers and news sources.

We always gain story ideas.

We know we've improved our understanding of readers and of their views. And readers know more about how we do what we do than they did before. Both sides have modified perceptions of each other and, often, changed procedures.

We strongly believe that all of these things improve our ability to better understand who's out there and what they're thinking about and what the important issues are. By putting human faces on The News we believe that we get more helpful feedback than before.

But as everyone knows, striving to achieve and maintain a high level of understanding of readers is a process without end. It must be pursued with persistence and with patience.■

Blight of the Educated

"...it is evident that the mangling of the language today comes from the educated class, of which journalists form part. You do not hear the construction worker say that the building he is working on is a metaphor for urban overcrowding, or the enlisted man at Fort Sam Houston complain that his sergeant shouts harangues at him during drill. It is the sizable part of the population that now goes to college who talk and write these absurdities. College apparently does nothing to prevent the blight, those who teach being infected like the rest of us."

—Jacques Barzun, critic and historian, in The American Scholar of Autumn 1994.

Surveys, Polls, But Above All—Dialogue

The San Diego Union-Tribune

By John F. Muncie

Right around spring training time a few years ago, we ran a story saying the oldest Little League in our county was dying. The league was in an impoverished area; it had no sponsors; there was little parent involvement. Worst of all, the managers, some of whom had been involved for more than 30 years, were getting too old to continue. Their average age was 66.

It was a good story. A tear-jerker. It touched on such salient sociological questions as drugs, crime, changing demographics and the breakdown of family values. But none of those questions were as important to the readers as this one: whom do you call to offer help? All they could do was call the newspaper. We were overwhelmed and scrambled to route them to the right people. When the dust settled, all 12 teams had sponsors and new uniforms and new coaches and the league had $8,000 in the bank.

The league wasn't the only beneficiary. The paper learned several valuable lessons. Among them: we weren't as smart as we thought we were.

"Dialogue" has become a trendy word these days, but it's a valuable one when it means talking to and listening to your community. We got the Little League story and stopped there. The readers didn't. They were affected by the story and they wanted help dealing with it. If the newspaper had "dialogued" better, we would have known that.

Over the years, The Union-Tribune has taken this lesson to heart. We discuss more; we listen more. It began formally in 1975 when The Union appointed one of journalism's first ombudsmen. Our current "Readers Representative," Gina Lubrano, is probably the newsroom's top listener.

"Many call in with concerns about accuracy—it's our policy to correct errors of fact," she says. "But just as often it's just to let off steam. Reacting to the same story, one reader will say, 'You're so right wing I can't stand it,' or 'You are so liberal....'" Lubrano is particularly taken with callers who complain, "Your editorials are so biased!"

In weekly columns, the Readers Representative explains why newspapers do what they do. Usually twice a year, she publishes a you-be-the-editor column asking readers how they would handle a series of sensitive stories. Their responses are compared to those of

John Muncie started his newspaper career in 1970. The last 15 years he has been at The San Diego Union-Tribune in various feature capacities. At one time or another he has created or helped develop that paper's Science, Family, Travel, Homes, Fashion, Computer, Feature, Arts, Entertainment, TV, Books, Holiday and Restaurant sections, and other special sections he has since forgotten. He's a longtime member of the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors and a prize-winning travel writer.

two dozen editors. This particular dialogue has generated hundreds of responses and has helped us understand the role readers want us to have in the community.

For example, one scenario involved the death of a man once prominent in the community who lost his job after becoming involved in sexual misconduct and drug addiction. The question was whether to use the information in the obituary. (The original accusations did not result in criminal prosecution.) Nearly all of the editors, 89 percent, said they'd use the information. Most readers, 83 percent, said no. Some news, they believed, is none of anybody's business.

Soliciting reader opinion has become commonplace at The U-T. And it goes far beyond the obligatory what-are-you-thankful-for holiday write-in. Our Religion and Ethics writer has challenged readers to test their ethical standards on issues ranging from euthanasia to filching office supplies. Teens are writing to our advice panel. The Features section has jumped into the middle of the abortion debate.

Several times a year the Business department contracts with professional accountants to offer free tax and financial advice over the phone. This generates hundreds of calls and has become a kind of market research. During the last tax-advice day, for example, Executive Business Editor Jim Drummond discovered that one of our advice-giving CPAs had received four calls from people who, unable to pay their mortgages, simply walked away from their homes. "It was a perfect example of something that didn't occur to us," says Drummond. Several weeks later, Business followed up with a personal finance story on what happens when you abandon a mortgage.

Focus groups are another piece of the dialogue. In the past four years we've tested our weekly entertainment guide, our weekly Computer tab and a proposed weekly Teen tab on small groups of readers and nonreaders.

Over the years, we've expanded the traditional letters-to-the-editor column to such specialty sections as Sports, Travel and Homes. The controversy over the infamous "bitch" quote from Newt Gingrich's mom, for example, spilled over into the Arts section. Dozens of readers reacted to our TV columnist's thoughts on the issue. Then dozens more reacted when the Readers Representative criticized his column.

We also use more scientific yardsticks of public opinion. In 1992, the morning Union and afternoon Tribune merged. It was a traumatic event in the county's media history. Because management was hypersensitive to the community's reaction, we commissioned a readership survey covering everything from zoning to comics. Much of the new combined product was based on what the surveys told us. In 1994, we conducted a sweeping follow-up survey in which we focused on San Diegans' attitudes and issues as well as readers' reactions to the merged paper. In addition, we have frequently polled our county on hot issues, both social and political.

As useful as they are, most reporters and editors believe that surveys and polls cannot substitute for dialogue.

During our last San Diego city council race, for example, the Metro section sent reporters to each district to find out what the grass roots concerns were. And those concerns dictated much of our coverage, not the spin doctors, press conferences and political position papers.

In our conservative county with its white-collar demographics and voting history, it was easy to predict a Republican sweep in the last election. Few were surprised when California's controversial Proposition 187, which severely curtailed public services to illegal immigrants, passed overwhelmingly. But our grass-roots effort helped us foresee a far less obvious trend: the rejection of many right-wing school board candidates.

"Covering politics is always humbling," says senior political writer Gerry Braun, with a smile. "I was shocked that Clarence Thomas was confirmed by the Senate and stunned that President Bush nominated him in the first place."

Speaking for many reporters, Braun says the key to keeping such surprises at a minimum is direct contact. "When I go to speeches and meetings I go early to talk to people. I go to the cocktail parties at fundraisers to work the crowd."

Braun and others also keep in touch by speaking before groups and getting feedback from them.

"You learn so much from questions," he says. "For example, once at a journalism class somebody asked me what was the worst mistake as a journalist I have made and if I had ever hurt somebody. The fact that someone asked that question is an indication of their idea of what journalists do."

This idea of personal contact is pervasive. We've set up advisory panels of citizens to help us improve coverage in our north county zones. The paper's top officials meet regularly with business leaders in Tijuana, our sister city just a few miles south in Mexico. Reporters speak to Rotary clubs; editors meet with mayors; the editorial board discusses issues with a steady stream of experts, officials and dignitaries.

The day after Mexican presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was gunned down in Tijuana last year, The U-T printed a front page color photo of his body. Many readers complained about giving the blood-spattered corpse such prominent display. One letter came from students at a predominantly Hispanic elementary school near the border. "How could you demean such an important political figure?" wrote the kids.

Editor Jerry Warren visited the school himself. He talked with the young students about the right to information and how that is balanced with questions of propriety and taste. Are we confident we have our finger on the pulse of San Diego County? Not entirely.

One problem is newsroom demographics. We are neither as ethnically nor as economically diverse as the county we cover. Our staff is generally middle class and middle-aged. Mostly we live in comfortable, safe neighborhoods. Metro Editor Todd Merriman points out that the medium household income in San Diego County is $34,000,

but in the newsroom, especially in two-income families, the medium income easily may be more than twice that.

It's not hard to lose perspective. Too often we turn our backs on news that doesn't match our interests. Surveys and letters indicate that religion, patriotism, community organizations and success stories—good news, if you will—are important to San Diegans. Yet, we are reluctant to give these issues priority in our newspages.

Which brings us back to Little League.

Readers want to know how to save those kids. They want to know about solutions and about community institutions that provide solutions—including newspapers. We wouldn't write the same Little League story today. We have an additional role, to create what New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen calls "community connectedness."

Like many papers, The Union-Tribune is re-examining the ethic, "We're journalists, we can't get involved." Based partly on such civic efforts as The Wichita Eagle's "People Project," The Union-Tribune is planning to adopt certain public issues and causes as its own.

In the past months a huge cross-section of San Diegans—from Pan-Asian community leaders to social service workers to cops—have talked to us about the county's critical problems. Eventually we will attack certain of these problems with stories, editorials and a facilitating hand.

We're even considering a weekly section devoted to helping readers build and rebuild their communities. The content of this proposed section has been shaped by focus groups of community activists.

We're listening.■

Turning to Readers To Cover Big Stories

The Richmond Times-Dispatch

By Louise Seals

Virginians do their best to keep newspaper editors on their toes. In 1989 they voted the nation's first elected black governor, a Democrat, into power, but no Democratic presidential candidate has carried the state since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. In 1994 Virginians returned the incumbent Democrat to the Senate while the rest of the country was electing Republicans.

Just a year earlier, though, Republican George Allen swept into the Virginia governor's office with a 17-poiot victory on promises to attack crime and rein in government. Even after four years of government reductions under Democrat L. Douglas Wilder—which were forced by the state Constitution's requirement of a balanced budget—Virginia voters opted for even less goveroment. In 1994, so did voters in other states.

The Virgioia Senate race involving Oliver L. North, Senator Charles S. Robb and Republican-turned-independent Marshall Coleman was not a typical campaign for 1994 because it turned as much on questions of character and integrity as on public policy issues (crime, health care, education and the economy). North carried baggage from the Iran-Contra affair and Robb from allegations of past drug associations with drug users and womanizing. Our public opinion polling and calls and letters from readers reflected that.

Virginia's contrarian political record makes an editor wary of professing to know the people's "mood." And just when one hazards a prediction about what "conservative" metro Richmond might think, along comes a public opinion survey showing that local views on abortion and gun-control mirror the nation's.

We use statewide survey research and increasingly use local focus groups, but we are still routinely reminded that we have not covered the spectrum of popular opinion. Readers call our ombudsman and our editors and contribute a flood of letters. The editorial pages published more than 2,500 letters last year; hundreds more were not published and a few hundred more not intended for publication were sent to the news department.

Louise Seals is Managing Editor of The Richmond Times-Dispatch. Before becoming M. E. in 1994, she ran the night news operation for 10 years, led three redesigns, and helped start the paper's acclaimed Urban Journalism Workshop. She is a director of Associated Press Managing Editors, past president of Virginia Press Women and a Pulitzer juror, and is active in Virginia Press Association. She holds degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University and West Virginia University. She also worked at The Democrat & Chronicle in Rochester, N.Y., and The Daily News in Dayton, Ohio.

Some of the complaints and compliments directed to the news department come in response to a "From the editors" column that appears every three weeks in the Sunday Commentary section. The topics vary from how we plan to cover an event to how we make decisions. Columns inviting comment usually succeed; sometimes they're mentioned by a caller months after publication.

Richmond's demographics assure a wide division of opinion on many political and social issues. The city itself is relatively liberal, with an African-American majority that supports Democrats with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The surrounding suburbs are predominantly white and generally elect conservatives, of either party.

Beyond the metropolitan area, The Times-Dispatch covers a state that ranges from the gridlocked suburbs of Washington to the Southwest's coalfields and Southside's tobacco farms, from the Shenandoah Valley's neat farms to sleepy Chesapeake Bay fishing communities, from white-columned county courthouses to the neon strip of Virginia Beach. The spreads in income and education are as sweeping as the geography.

We try to stay tuned in any way we can: survey research, focus groups, a youth advisory board, feedback from speaking engagements, reader calls and letters, and newsroom discussion.

For judging the moment's hot stories and spotting fads, staff feedback from neighbors and friends works well. What are parents saying as they stand on the sidelines at their kids' soccer games? What styles do middle school students absolutely have to buy for school this fall? This is the metro version of small-town readers cornering the editor in the barbershop or at the post office.

Staff feedback, though, has drawbacks, and a big one for us is demographics. Our staff's median age is 41. In a metropolitan statistical area that is 30 percent black and a state 20 percent black, our staff is 10 percent black. Thus chunks of our potential audience are underrepresented or not represented in our planning, assigning and editing.

That's one reason we are turning to our readers more in reporting big stories. We learned some years ago that when ordinary folks are given the time to delve into an issue, most of them reject sound-bite analysis and either-or solutions in favor of more complex approaches to difficult issues.

Early in the 1989 gubernatorial campaign that Wilder eventually won, we asked thoughtful people of many occupations and backgrounds in different parts of the state to chat with us about their concerns and hopes. Those views helped us write several stories that might not have been developed by our reporters and editors.

We did the same thing on crime and corrections last summer when The Times-Dispatch joined with The Associated Press, and three other metro dailies—The Daily Press in Newport News, The Roanoke Times & World-News and The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot—to study Governor Allen's no-parole plan and how states with similar policies fared. The project team used structured but unscientifically chosen discussion groups that we called "community conversations."

Gathering in eight groups around the state, the more than 90 citizens knew that the issues were broader than depicted by the politicians and too complex to be solved in one special legislative session. They doubted that government could or should resolve the issues alone, and they placed great importance on working with the next generation.

The citizens' opinions and the results of a scientific opinion poll appearing across the state just before a special session of the General Assembly apparently reflected the views of a substantial number of Virginians. Almost six months later, the legislators have not resolved all the issues related to the no-parole policy, even though a majority in each house had signed on to the proposals before the special session in September.

Given the complexity of a newspaper, though, readers can probably find a misstep—in commission or omission—for each success. Communication with readers is still as good a short-term barometer as any for measuring what we cover and how well we do it. If they know they'll be heard, they will call and write.■

Mencken on Correctness

What ails the beautiful letters of the Republic is what ails the general culture of the Republic—the lack of a body of sophisticated and civilized public opininn, independent of plutocratic or governmental control and superior to the infantile philosophies of the mob—a body of opinion showing the eager curiosity, the educated skepticism and the hospitality to ideas of a true aristocracy. This lack is felt by the American author, imagining him to have anything new to say, every day of his life. He can hope for no support, in ordinary cases from the mob: it is too suspicious of all ideas. He can hope for no support from the spokesmen of the plutocracy: they are too diligently devoted to maintaining the intellectual status quo. He turns, then, to the intelligentsia—and what he finds is correctness. In his two prime functions, to represent the life about him accurately and to criticize it honestly, he sees that correctness arrayed against him. His representation is indecorous, unlovely, too harsh to be borne. His criticism is in contumacy to the ideals upon which the whole structure rests. So he is either attacked vigorously as an anti-patriot whose babblings ought to be put dowo by law, or enshrouded in a silence which commonly disposes of him even more effectively. H. L. Mencken in Prejudices, Second Series, 1920.

From: "The Second Mencken Chres-tomathy," published January 30, 1995, Alfred A. Knopf, New York; $30.

A Constant Conversation With the People

The Daily Tribune of Ames, Iowa

By Michael Gartner

We talk to people. We wander around town. We go to meetings. We go out to coffee. We read our mail. We invite folks in. We answer our own phones. And we report and report and report.

That's how we know what's going on in town and what the people in our town think. That's how we keep in touch with our readers.

It's that simple.

The Daily Tribune in Ames, Iowa, is a tiny newspaper. Our circulation hovers around 10,000, and our news staff totals 18. We can't afford polls or ombudsmen.

But we are not a typical newspaper, and Ames is not a typical town.

The newspaper is owned by three of us, and two of us are working at the newspaper every day—reporting, talking, listening, probing and generally having fun while we determine what's going on and what people are doing and thinking.

The town is a university town and a government town. The population is about 50,000, including the 25,000 students at Iowa State University. The city owns the hospital, the bus company, the electric company and the water company. The university is a state university. A major employer is the state Department of Transportation, which is headquartered in town.

So nearly everything that happens comes under the Iowa open-meetings and open-records laws. And that's the main way we keep in touch with the attitudes of the people. We simply cover every meeting—from the city council to the hospital board, from planning and zoning to the board of supervisors, from the board of regents to the budget hearings. Townsfolk go to those meetings—Ames is the definition of participatory democracy—and they speak up. We're there, and we listen.

We also pore over public documents—from the university's athletic budget to the county's permits to carry concealed handguns. (We ran that list the other day as an editorial, under the headline "Know Your Neighbor.") Like many small newspapers, we run the names of everyone admitted and released from the three hospitals in the county (all three are owned by the taxpayers), and we also run the names of everyone going in and out of the county jail.

We're an intensely local newspaper. We're an afternoon newspaper, with a weekend edition on Saturday morning, and many of our readers read another newspaper on weekday mornings—The Des Moines Register or The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal or USA TODAY. None of those newspapers, of course, cares about Ames, and we do. So the dialogue about Ames takes place in our pages. Our editorials—which last year won the American Society of Newspaper Editors editorial-writing award and the Inland Press editorial award—are always local. Our front page usually has five local stories, one national story, a local photo, and a news summary.

So with the coverage of meetings, the printing of lists, the insistence on local editorials, and the scrutiny of documents, we try not to let anything happen in town without it being in The Tribune. (We sort of live by the motto of the Aspen, Colo., Times: "If you don't want it in The Times, don't do it.")

The editorials and the news stories prompt a lot of letters, and we run them all. Our readers are very well educated, and the letters more often than not offer thoughtful comments on our views or thoughtful solutions to community issues. This is, of course, a wonderful way to keep in touch with the readers and to find out what they think.

The truth is, our readers—and I suspect readers everywhere—care far more about local issues than they do about national issues. They care more about property taxes than about the Mexico bailout. They care more about a fight over the future of the hospital—a simply wonderful way to get their views about health care—than they care about

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Michael Gartner is Editor and co-owner of The Daily Tribune in Ames, Iowa. In 40 years in the news business, he has been Page One Editor of The Wall Street Journal, Editor and President of The Des Moines Register, Editor of The Courier-Journal in Louisville, General News Executive of USA TODAY and Gannett, and President of NBC News. He is a former columnist for The Wall Street Journal and a current op-ed columnist for USA TODAY. He also writes a twice weekly column on words. He was on the Pulitzer Prize Board for 10 years, is a former member of the Nieman Advisory Board and is a past president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He is also a lawyer who often writes on First Amendment issues.

Martha Stewart

term limits. They care more about parks and clean air and roads and schools than they care about the balanced-budget amendment.

No one cares about the size of Dee Dee Myers's office.

And attitudes aren't changing much. The town tends to vote Democratic, and in the last election it continued to do so. It elected Democrats to its two open seats in the Legislature, and it supported the losing Democratic candidate for governor. It re-elected the Democrat and the Republican running for the county Board of Supervisors, because both are hardworking and honest and—probably because of thorough coverage in the newspaper—the voters knew that.

No one in town was surprised.

We don't get entwined in the so-called power structure in town. But some of the young men and women who work for us—not in the news department—do. They're in the Chamber of Commerce or on the Economic Development Commission or things like that, and through them and friends we keep pretty close tabs on what those folks are thinking.

We don't serve on any corporate boards or things like that, either, but, again, through friends we keep pretty close tabs on what the business community is doing and thinking.

We do spend a lot of time with public officials. I'll drop in City Hall to chat with the police chief or stop by the county building, in a town 10 miles away, to talk to the sheriff or a county supervisor. I'll have lunch with the city manager or coffee with a politician. The city and county officials are extraordinarily open and accessible, and the university officials understand about open meetings and open records. Reporters are always working, and since we're a tiny newsroom with no walls or offices, we all talk to each other about what's going on.

The Managing Editor, Jim Flansburg, each year asks six readers to be an informal advisory board, and he meets with them every couple of months. They talk, about what's going on in town and at the newspaper, and everyone, including Jim, seems to come away from each meeting a little better informed about this issue or that one.

And that's it.

We're kind of an old-fashioned newspaper—locally owned, more interested in news than features, devoted to covering the town and the university and the county—and we keep in touch with our readers in an old-fashioned way: we talk to them.

And they talk to us.■

A Voice From the Past On Covering Labor

"The so-called 'great dailies'—Tribune, Times, World, Post and such—have neither sentiments nor interests of the working laboring people, who constitute five-sixths of the population of the city. They oppose them in regard to every matter which concerns them, and invariably take the side of the classes from which their own patronage is derived. They make the mistake of supposing that these hard-handed multitudes are more selfish, or more thick-headed, or more wicked than the rest of us, and the idea that such people actually have opinions of their own, seems to them quite ridiculous....A few days ago all the papers here struggled to get up a great anti-inflationist demonstration, and yet they were unable to assemble one-half as many people as attended a workingmen's meeting on the same night, which was hardly mentioned in any paper, and at which inflationist speeches were delivered. The one meeting was made up of rich men, and the other of poor men; but the poor man counts on election day, as well as the rich man. I have been present at scores of workingmen's meetings within a few weeks, at which inflationist speeches were made or resolutions passed—and mind you, this correspondent is an anti-inflationist—and you'd never have known, by reading the papers, that they were held. Why, this very week there is an 'Industrial Congress' sitting at Rochester, in this State, at which delegates from every State in the Union are present, representing societies which number hundreds of thousands of voters, and which has adopted a series of inflationist resolutions, and yet it is a fact that but one daily paper in this city has even mentioned it, and that only in a dispatch five lines long. I repeat it, that the 'leading' daily papers here do not, in any way, speak for the multitude, or represent their interests: but rather boast that they stand up for what they are pleased to call the 'more intelligent sentiment'—more properly called the advertising sentiment."

—A New York-based writer in a column for The Cincinnati Commercial, April 20, 1874.

"You shouldn't write if you can't write. What do you have to cry about it for? Go home. Get a job. Hang yourself. Only don't talk about it."

—Ernest Hemingway, in Paris in the 1920's, responding to a complaint that writing was "so terribly difficult."

Civic Journalism—Growing and Evolving

By Ed Fouhy
And Jan Schaffer

In Edgar, Wisconsin, three women who used to hunker down to watch their afternoon TV soap operas now have become C-SPAN junkies, converts to a new cause of civic engagement.

In Charlotte, N.C., citizens recently opened their newspapers to read a list of things critically needed in five of the city's most crime-ridden neighborhoods. They were so moved that more than 500 immediately volunteered to help. Most had a solution or two to the problems right in their own hands.

In Tallahassee, more than 300 citizens met in an electronic town hall, taking a new pathway to civic engagement. Without leaving their homes, they simply turned on their computers and dialed into the Tallahassee Freenet, there to spend two hours talking about their community's needs. "It was a real gas," said Tallahassee Democrat associate editor Bill Edmonds, who suggested taking the newspaper's Public Agenda project on-line. While it may have been frustrating, at times, to have more than 300 people trying to "talk" at once, "It was oddly energizing ," he said.

All these citizens have come face-to-face with journalism that is a little different in their local newspapers and on their television and radio stations.

It may not be entirely new, but it does have some new names. Variously called civic, public or community journalism, it has energized not only citizens, but also editors and news directors who have been trying it in dozens of communities across the country in the last year or two.

Simply put, most civic journalism initiatives make a deliberate attempt to reach out to citizens, to listen to them, and to have citizens listen and talk to each other. Sometimes this happens in large town meetings, at other times in more intimate living-room conversations; sometimes at public debates, at other times in focus groups.

If attendance and response levels are any indicators, most citizens who have had the experience seem to like being invited to take a more active role in their communities, to help define just what the problems are, set an agenda, establish priorities and figure out solutions.

As the three Wisconsin women discovered, it can be a lot more challenging and even more fun than the afternoon soaps. They're now regulars on the Wisconsin town meeting circuit.

By now, enough civic journalism efforts have been printed and broadcast to demonstrate that they are good journalism—as well as good catalysts to civic discourse.

It would be hard to top the kind of neighborhood reporting The Charlotte Observer has undertaken in its eight-month-old "Taking Back our Neighborhoods/Carolina Crime Solutions" project. Their tough, old fashioned, shoe-leather information gathering led the North Carolina Press Association to award the series a first place prize for public service.

This year will see ever more civic journalism projects launched. Indeed, the Pew Center will help fund 12 of them. Among them are not only new projects, but efforts by experienced practitioners to let their initiatives evolve in new directions.

The Charlotte Observer, for instance, wants to figure out where next to take its crime series. "We have been astonished at the civic energy the series has unleashed," said Editor Jennie Buckner.

The Wisconsin State Journal, a partner in one of the nation's longest-running civic journalism efforts, is plan-

Ed Fouhy is the Executive Director of the Center for Civic Journalism, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which seeks to stimulate civic discourse and debate of public issues. He is also Executive Producer of Concord Communications Group, a Washington-based news and public affairs television production company. He produced the 1988 and 1992 Presidential debates, seen by more viewers than any political broadcast in history.

Focused Images

Jan Schaffer, former Business Editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, is Deputy Director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism. As Business Editor, she directed the reporting and editing of two investigative series that were named finalists for the Pulitzer Prize. As a federal court reporter, she helped write a series of stories that won freedom for a man wrongly convicted of five murders. The stories led to the civil rights convictions of several Philadelphia homicide detectives. The articles won several national journalism awards, including the 1978 Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Public Service.

Focused Images

ning to tackle even more controversial issues than it has up until now, including the venerable, but sprawling 26-campus University of Wisconsin and the racial theories expounded in the controversial book "The Bell Curve."

Similarly, newspaper, television and radio partners involved in U.S. Senate and gubernatorial election projects last year, led by National Public Radio, are eager to apply the lessons they have learned to the 1996 presidential primary and general election campaigns.

As the types of civic journalism initiatives are evolving, so, too, is the understanding within the profession. Early criticism is turning to curiosity as editors ask to see more and practitioners profess total puzzlement at how their efforts could possibly be tarred with such labels as boosterism or advocacy.

"Facilitating a meeting is not the same as participating in the outcome," says Wisconsin State Journal Associate Editor Tom Still, who with partner Dave Iverson, Executive Producer of Wisconsin Public Television, have spearheaded the successful "We the People/Wisconsin." That three-year-old partnership, which has grown to include public radio and WISC-TV, the CBS affiliate, has continually evolved as it seeks to introduce citizens variously to election campaigns, federal issues, state problems and to engage young people in the process of citizen deliberation and decision making.

Likewise, NPR Editorial Director John Dinges, who oversaw the 1993 election coverage, said, "The Citizens Agenda, not objectivity vs. advocacy, were at the heart of the NPR Election Project."

The project involved intensive reporting by newspaper, radio and television partnerships in six cities on issues citizens wanted political candidates to address. Overall, more than 50 radio stations participated.

"Questions of objectivity or advocacy have not been a factor in any of our projects. Our stations and newspaper partners also did not 'organize' in the community," Dinges said.

Civic journalism is nourished by a concern among top editors that something is amiss in their relationship with their readers and viewers. But they aren't so out of touch with them that they don't know they aren't in touch.

"The 11 o'clock news doesn't reflect anyone's life," says veteran New York City television news producer Paul Sagan.

Richard Brady, a Cincinnati-based executive with Suburban Communication Corp., owners of suburban newspapers in several big cities, has a sign over his desk, "Change isn't an option anymore. The option now is to become an agent of change not a victim of change."

Both men are face to face with the paradox of journalism in the 'Nineties: 1994 was a great year from a business point of view, with a total recovery from the recession, but each is facing declining audiences and the gnawing feeling that the ground is shifting under their feet and no one quite knows what to do about it.

For many big media companies under pressure from Wall Street, the way to deal with the uncertainties of the future is to seek alliances with hardware producers or owners of what are now called communications networks—previously known as telephone companies. But for some journalists worried about the future, there is a new willingness to consider other changes.

Paul Dolan of ABC News is one. He is looking for ways to protect the news franchise of the highly profitable stations that Capital Cities/ABC owns in such rich markets as New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Chicago. He says he is convinced that one way to deal with the future is to return to core journalistic values.

That theme is echoed again and again among editors who are turning to civic journalism techniques. Consider the "We the People/Wisconsin" project. Now entering its fourth year, that media coalition has sponsored regular explorations of key state issues. The partners, with help from the market research firm, Wood Communications, host town meetings and focus groups around the state to begin conversations on issues citizens have told the partners they consider vital. Reports appear on page one and on the six o'clock news. Call-in radio programs give everyone who wants to participate an opportunity to do so in the weeks leading up to the live television specials that are the climax of the quarterly process. But at the heart of the process is hard, shoe-leather reporting that transcends the easy, traditional formulas so characteristic of much of journalism.

Similar practices were used in dozens of other civic journalism projects underway in 1994. This year, new initiatives are being headed by The San Jose Mercury, The Detroit Free Press, The Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald, The St. Paul Pioneer Press, The Bergen Record, The Dayton Daily News, The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, The Manhattan (Kan.) Mercury and The Seattle Times.

Their proposals range from studying solutions to children beset by violence in Detroit, to holding a community conversation in Grand Forks; from studying the quality of life in Bergen and Passaic Counties, to exploring citizen willingness to end traditional school boundaries in Rochester.

Civic, or public, journalism experiments have been underway since 1990 when The Wichita Eagle's Editor, Davis "Buzz" Merritt Jr., still smarting over the cynicism of the 1988 presidential campaign, decided his newspaper would no longer be manipulated by the political consultants. Instead, citizens would be the focus for his paper's political coverage.

The idea was embraced and advanced in 1992 by Rich Oppel, then Executive Editor of The Charlotte Observer. Oppel formed a partnership with WSOC-TV, the Cox-owned ABC affiliate, to extend the reach of what came to be called "Your Vote in '92."

Last year Ed Miller of The Poynter Institute for Media Studies teamed with NPR to extend the concepts of civic journalism Merritt and Oppel had pioneered. NPR, supported by a grant from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and the Carnegie Foundation, recruited top-flight public radio stations in Seattle, Boston, San Francisco, Dallas, Wichita and New Hampshire for a wide-ranging election year experiment de-

signed to break with past practices.

When the news directors of the stations and their newspaper partners gathered in San Francisco in December, 1994 to assess their experiments, they were still a little taken aback at the project's impact. Citizens had connected with the political process; they flooded voice mail lines and call-in shows. Perhaps even more surprising, many reporters, initially resistant to any change, bought into the methods of civic journalism. One of the participants, Walter Robinson, The Boston Globe's Managing Editor for Metro News, wryly reflected on the attitude in his newsroom: "Reporters tend to reflect the interests of the institutions they cover rather than of their readers."

Others talked about the impact of the project on readers. Sheri Dill, Executive Editor of The Wichita Eagle during the 1994 campaign, cited a post-election survey in which 75 percent of readers said the paper's coverage was quite effective in interesting them to vote. That was up from under 35 percent in 1990. More than 88 percent of its readers said they were "satisfied" with the coverage, up nine percentage points from 1990. And 86 percent of readers—up from 72 percent in 1990—rated the Eagle's election coverage as "fair."

Most striking, however, was the startling drop (from 55 percent to 38 percent) of readers who called television the "most helpful" source of information for voters, while The Eagle's ranking as the "most helpful" source went from 30 percent to 39 percent. Moreover, Dill said, voter turnout in The Eagle's circulation area was up three percent in the face of a two percent drop statewide.

While the Election Project editors expressed varying degrees of satisfaction about their efforts at their San Francisco gathering, they were all eager to talk about how they could use civic journalism techniques in day-to-day news coverage and to begin planning for the presidential campaign. No one wanted to return to the old ways of covering politics.

Next year's front-loaded primary season—with 27 primaries and caucuses scheduled to take place in just 39 days—has already prompted some editors and news directors to begin designing election-year projects with a focus on voters, not just the candidates, their consultants and their pollsters. They are fearful the presidential primary will occur at such an accelerated rate that the extended conversation candidates are supposed to hold with voters will be reduced to 10-second sound bites and 30-second negative TV ads, the HIV virus of American politics.

Television-newspaper-radio partnerships, in some cases building on the foundation of the 1994 NPR-Poynter-Pew election project alliances, are coming together in New Hampshire and other key states. The purpose is to create a series of citizen-centered campaign events, debates, town hall meetings, candidate-citizen conversations that will be too important for the candidates to ignore.

So what's ahead for civic journalism? Some projects, begun last year will continue. In Charlotte, as a result of the civic journalism partnership, more than 500 citizens and groups have volunteered to help out, an eyesore in one neighborhood has been demolished, another neighborhood is getting a new recreation center and local law firms have rallied to file pro bono lawsuits to close crack houses.

"We used to heighten conflict. We'd say to people, you go fight, we'll hold your coats and write about it afterwards," said Rick Thames, one of The Observer's most experienced editors. "But we've learned that doesn't serve our readers very well. They are tired of the conflict. They want to see solutions."

In Florida, a community conversation begun by The Tallahassee Democrat and CBS affiliate, WCTV, under the rubric, "The Public Agenda," is also continuing. It's a conversation designed to find, focus and begin deliberations on such key community issues as roads and growth. It's taking place in living rooms, churches, community centers, and, yes, on the local computer bulletin board, where citizens want to continue their conversations, but just one issue at a time. The role journalists are playing in Tallahassee would have been familiar to newspaper editors of a hundred years ago. The Democrat and its TV partner have created an extension of the town hall, something that newspapers once commonly did. The Tallahassee media partnership provided what public opinion guru Daniel Yankelovich calls the "public space" where citizens can gather and undertake the deliberation that must occur before they can reach a consensus.

Some civic journalism critics have confused this convening function with boosterism. Journalists, they say, have no business taking a role in any civic enterprise, except to report on it. Charlotte Observer Executive Editor Jennie Buckner doesn't see it that way. "Our experience has been the opposite of boosterism," says Buckner. "We have told the community hard truths about itself. We have asked the people of Charlotte and the neighborhoods [spotlighted by The Observer and its broadcast partners] to look at some of the most damaging pathologies in cities today. They have looked at them, owned up to them and decided to do something about them. We have not skirted around issues, we have taken them on. We have entered into a dialogue with the community about how we came to have these difficulties, but we have also talked with the community about solutions and committed to change."

Like the neighborhood initiative in Charlotte, the Tallahassee project has little to do with politics and everything to do with governance, obviously a vital function in a democracy but one often regarded as boring to readers. Governance is, after all, the decisions political leaders make after the election that affect the lives of citizens.

As one editor said at the San Francisco meeting, "Governing may be boring to us, but it's what our readers care about. Maybe we should dare to be boring. Our readers might surprise us."■

For more information, Contact the Pew Center at 601 13th Street N.W., Suite 310-S, Washington, D.C. 20005. 202-331-3200. Fax: 202-347-6440. Internet: News @pccj.dgsys.com

Empathy—Path to a Different World

By Lou Ureneck

The least celebrated quality of the best reporters may turn out to be a skill that is rarely taught. It may even be impossible to learn except from life itself. The quality is empathy, the ability to step into the shoes of another person and see the world in a different way.

Empathy is an enormously important part of the complete reporter. Unfortunately, it is also a sadly underdeveloped and unevenly cultivated dimension of most news reports. It is especially important now when so many journalists ask themselves why they were ambushed by the 1994 election results. The scarcity of in-depth empathetic reporting from points of view widely dispersed in our society may point to a bigger problem: the gap between people in the newsroom and people in the rest of the country.

According to the election's winners and a legion of analysts, the results of the 1994 midterm elections pivoted on fundamental shifts in the public's attitude about government, society and relationships among people. If a fault opened in the political earth, as The Economist magazine depicted the results in its cover illustration following the election, shouldn't journalists have felt early tremblings of the ground?

Empathy is many things but first it may be an opening of the mind to other points of view. Before we can see the world as others see it, before we can crawl into their skins to know their aspirations and anxieties, their daily disappointments and the circle of their horizons, we need to let go, at least temporarily, of our own closely held views and experiences, a very difficult task indeed. It can be a long arduous trek into the viewpoint of another person. We may have to scale Grand Canyons of race, religion, class, education, gender, family, work, income and even personality.

Reporters who work at empathy may find that they not only see the world in a different way. They may come to see a different world.

Most of us who have worked in newsrooms have seen the blind spots. Religion and conservatism are two that come to mind. Many reporters simply may not find these topics interesting. The impulse to go out and learn about them is missing. So the stories, as an unconscious act of omission, are not in the newspaper. How many profiles of traditional Catholics or pro-life activists have you read recently? From time to time, all of us as journalists need to think about the master story lines that run through our minds at some deep level. These are the social and political narratives that tell us what is news. To stay fresh, we need to challenge them.

So openness is important; then comes imagination. The act of putting ourselves inside the life of another person takes a strong act of imagination. But openness and imagination are only the beginning of empathy for journalists. The toil comes around, as it usually does in all good journalism, to exhaustive and honest reporting. For reporters, empathy requires us not only to enter the lives of other people. We also must come back with the story, a story that is dense with the information that is convincing in its detail and authenticity. Empathetic reporters go to the places where people live and work and put in the time and energy of observation and query.

If you are going to write about police, says Anne Hull, a 1995 Nieman fellow and ASNE writing award winner, you have to drink the same lousy coffee and stay up the same hours. The same advice, to live the life of your subject, applies to writing about overwhelmed teachers, laid-off factory workers, illegal immigrants, women looking for their first jobs after divorce, people picketing abortion clinics, young gang members, men who can't meet child-support payments, migrant farm workers and powerful CEO's. Their lives are in the details.

One of the jobs of journalism is to bridge the distances between people, rich and poor, conservative and liberal and all the other antipodes that embrace life in America, to make the experience of the entire nation, in all its variety, manifest to readers and viewers. It is difficult for society to negotiate change without a sense of shared experience. Coverage of the American civil rights movement in the 1960's provides an outstanding illustration of how social change can be encouraged by making the experiences of one group within the society the experience of the nation, if only vicariously through newspaper stories and television images.

Examples of successful empathetic reporting appear in the best newspapers and newscasts. So do the missed opportunities.For example, as this ar-

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ticle was being prepared, a model of serious empathetic reporting appeared in the December 18, 1994 edition of The New York Times Magazine. The reporter, Jason DeParle, crawled inside the life of Mary Ann Moore, a black woman on welfare in Chicago. He gave readers a powerful insight into a person, a real person and not a statistic or political cliché. The piece, in conjuring her life as it is actually lived, piled up the details of her life: broken-down cars, sick babies, hostile co-workers, dangerous neighborhoods and irresponsible boyfriends. Her trouble, we come to see, is not so much getting a job as keeping it and living on its wages. The piece demonstrated the irrelevancy of much of the current political debate to the reality of her life and the problem of welfare in America. Readers met a person who may live galaxies away from their life experiences but with whom they can build a connection of understanding. As the piece drew out the experiences of Mary Ann Moore that are common to all—concern for her children, desire for a better life, fear of crime—readers might have even begun to identify with her. A bridge was built, a bridge that in some small way may even improve the national discourse on welfare.

On the other hand, the same issue of the magazine contained a piece that raises the issue of whether the empathetic skills of the press extend to people or groups whose views may be at variance with its own. As a missed opportunity, it may offer a clue to the blind spots of the press. The piece, headlined, "The Last Victim," looked back on the midterm elections. It began with an informative review of the results, demonstrating through a careful analysis of the numbers that white male voters swung the election to the Republicans. One man, Ben, shows up in the piece. He is the author's cousin and earned his spot in the article by airing his grievances against the Democrats at a Thanksgiving dinner of the author's family.

Unlike the previous piece, which created a rounded portrait of a person by getting inside her life and letting her speak, the second piece used its subject as a foil to state the author's politics. The piece made no effort to see the Democratic party, or at least that part of it personified by Bill and Hillary Clinton, through the eyes of a person who decided to cast his vote for the Republicans. Instead, the author dismisses the movement of Democratic men to the Republican party as male rejection of a strong First Lady. She blames the media for fanning a backlash against women's rights by focusing on incidents that exaggerate the impact of affirmative action. "The result," writes the author, Susan Estrich, "is that men like my cousin Ben wind up with a fairly distorted view of the world."

What that view is exactly, we never get to see in any depth as a lived experience. Much more valuable would have been a piece in which the author used her imagination to cut free the cords of her own strong views and sought to connect Ben's views to the details of his experience. She need not agree with him. The best empathetic reporting is a dialogue between immersion and distance, sympathy and critique.

The idea of journalists' being surprised by the moods, viewpoints and election-day decisions of the public is not comforting to those of us who think that journalism ought not set itself apart from the people. In fact, the disconnection between press and public attitudes on a range of issues should be worrisome for all who see journalism as a calling that derives its purpose from service to the public. Journalism, at some level, needs to take heed of common wisdom: it is the distilled experience of millions of regular people making judgments based on the witness of their individual lives. This, I think, is what is meant by democracy.

Surely all the meetings we attend, places we go and people we talk with should alert us to seismic shifts among the people. If not, we need to question whether we are going to the right places for news and talking to the right people and whether the people we move with are in touch with anything beyond their own ambition. We also need to question whether journalists themselves have become part of a professional class that is out of phase with the great mass of Americans. It is for good reason that we cringe at the stereotype of the reporter who starts his workday with a cup of gourmet coffee and finishes it with a bottle of imported beer. This is not how the rest of the nation lives.

It is ironic, of course, that the press finds itself surprised by public attitudes at a time when the practice of market research has become so prevalent in

Tips on Empathy

The best places to look for stories that can be reported with empathy are where we find the actions of people inexplicable or where people are caught in the shifting plates of a changing society.

Some tips on reporting with empathy:

1. Keep an open mind and begin with a basic respect for the person whose life you are about to enter.

2. Ask open questions, the kind that elicit revealing responses. Avoid argumentative questions, at least at the beginning. Learn to listen.

3. Gather lots of information. Find the revealing details. Spend lots of time with the person you are writing about in as many different and natural settings as possible.

4. Populate the story with other people who are important to the person you are writing about. They can serve as refractors of point of view, providing texture and depth.

5. Identify and develop the universal experiences of your subject. Find those elements that others can identify with.

6. Avoid sarcasm, coodescension and flip judgments.

newspapering. Never has the public been surveyed so often and in such depth. On reflection the phenomenon may not be surprising given the clumsy questions often put to people on surveys and the ways in which limited-response options channel answers into simplistic formats. People are complicated, nuanced and open to learning and deliberation in ways that surveys do not acknowledge and can not know. Survey questions say as much about how the pollsters see respondents as the answers say about how the respondents see the world. Just before the midterm elections, a Time-CNN poll gave Democrats the edge and reported that voters put the blame for governmental gridlock on the Republicans. The election told a different story.

Market research has its place, of course, especially as a way for the new breed of journalistic nomad who moves from city to city to get a quick study on his new "market," but journalists and managers who rely too much on market research to understand their audiences and edit their newspapers ought to consider the plight of politicians: the more they seek to match their rhetoric to the results of opinion surveys, the lower they seem to drop in the public's esteem. They win the elections but lose the people. The armies of pollsters and consultants employed by politicians have only worsened the people's alienation from their government. Politics and journalism at their best are still more than games of numbers. They are a conversation between responsiveness and leadership, involvement and detachment.

Somewhere in that conversation there is a place for empathy, the acknowledgment, understanding and maybe even the appreciation of the world as it appears to other people. By working at empathy, we may find ourselves less often surprised.■

Henry McNulty:

After 75,000 Phone Calls, Is There Any Progress?

"Have I made progress in the past decade or so? That's hard to say.

"In 1984, [Hartford] Courant readers complained to me about inaccuracy, insensitivity, press arrogance, a liberal bias, poor judgment, lack of fairness and balance, disregard of privacy, grammar and spelling errors, glorification of unworthy people and a lack of local news.

"Now, almost 11 years later, the same issues still constitute the Reader Complaint Top 10. It's hard to find much progress in that regard.

"But there is this. Since the first day I took the job, any reader with anything at all to say about how The Courant has reported the news has been able to talk with someone who is in daily communication with the newspaper's top editor. I've heard the readers, they've heard from me and the staff has been told what's on their minds every day.

"That's maintaining a two-way channel of communication, and I think keeping such a channel open is the main task of any news ombudsman."

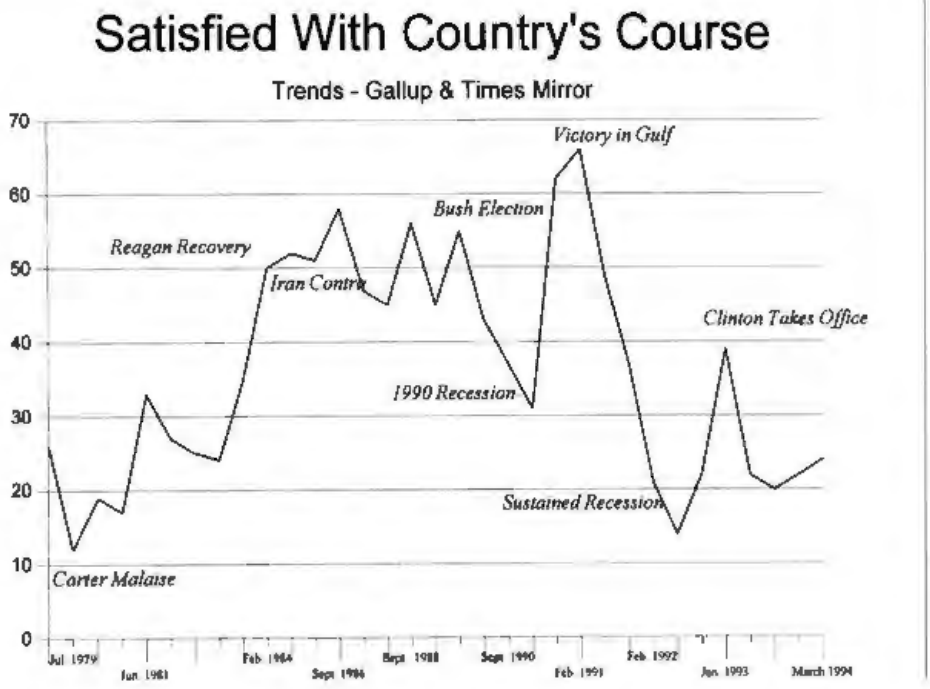
—Henry McNulty, on leaving the job as The Courant's ombudsman after fielding about 75,000 telephone calls and writing 2,511 internal memos and 215 columns.

Public Opinion And The Mid-Term Elections

By Andrew Kohut
And Robert C. Toth

Without much argument, the 1994 mid-term election was a historic event. The Republicans swept to power in the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years despite a Democrat in the White House. But the outcome should have come as no surprise to those who followed the opinion polls closely before the election.

Most polls did a good job of finding and tracking the Republican lead throughout 1994. By the fall, most national surveys showed the unusually high level of GOP support, suggesting a major Republican victory. Some polls were better than others in explaining what the high percentage of support would mean in terms of the outcome of congressional elections, however. Those polls that came closest to the mark focused on intentions of the *likely* voters rather than the *registered* voters or the *eligible* voters. And of them, the surveys of most value attempted to understand how the popular vote would translate into the potential shift of seats in the House. The Times Mirror Center watched public opinion unfold with four surveys, starting in the spring and extending to the final weekend before election day in November. In them we plumbed the mood of the electorate with questions about their values and attitudes as well as their party affiliation and past voting behavior. Our polling benefited from having measured these basic attitudes and values in the public regularly since 1987, so that by the summer, we had a very good sense of how significantly the national mood differed in 1994 from previous pre-election periods.



Andrew Kohut is director of The Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press, a public service arm of the Times Mirror Co. He was president of the Gallup Organization from 1979 to 1989 when he founded Princeton Survey Research Associates, an attitude and opinion research firm specializing in media, politics and public policy studies. A graduate of Seton Hall University, he did graduate work at Rutgers University. He is current president of the American Association of Public Opinion Research.

Cliff Moore, Princeton Stock Photo

Robert C. Toth is senior associate at the Times Mirror Center. He retired from The Los Angeles Times in 1993 after serving as its national security, diplomatic and White House correspondent, as well as its London and Moscow bureau chiefs. Among his honors are several awards for foreign correspondence and for diplomatic reporting. He was graduated from Washington University in St. Louis and Columbia University, and was a Nieman Fellow 1961.

Our March poll found that the economic recovery had "little impact" on the public mood as a whole. It continued to be "sour," with less than one in four Americans saying they were satisfied with the way things were going in the country, even though the public sensed the positive economic turnaround. The graph on the preceding page plots responses to this question for 15 years.

Economic concerns were eclipsed by crime as the most important national problem, for example. But Americans remained "highly dissatisfied with the state of the nation, financially burdened, and fearful about their future." Continued discontent with earning power of jobs was inhibiting celebration of the economic recovery, while politically, the Whitewater investigation weighed down Clinton's approval ratings.

The disparity between how individuals felt about the state of the nation compared to the conditions of their community was greater than usual. Just 24 percent were satisfied with the country's course (essentially no change from the previous October when it stood at 22 percent), while 68 percent were satisfied with the way things were going in their local community and 83 percent were content with their personal life. The public usually feels better about conditions closer to home, but the difference between its view of national vs. local and personal conditions was particularly striking because the public was feeling that the national economy was on the mend and concerns about unemployment and the recession were well below the 1993 levels.

Clinton's approval rating was not buoyed by the rising tide of economic indicators largely because jobs remained a top problem during the spring and the public was not optimistic that any benefits that were occurring would last. More than half (52 percent) of respondents said they or someone in their family had lost a job, taken a cut in pay or benefits, or worked where job cuts have occurred. While the public saw crime as the top national problem, it listed the job situation as first priority for Clinton, just as it had four months earlier. Some 44 percent of American workers said they had a job that paid them enough to lead the kind of life to which they aspired, but only 33 percent said they expected to say the same in the future, a level essentially unchanged from 1992. A bare majority (51 percent) said they worried greatly that their children would not have good job opportunities.

Whitewater appeared to be sapping public confidence in Clinton, in Washington, and in the media. His approval

A Handy Guide to Polls

Of all the tools in journalists' tool boxes, none is more misused and abused than public opinion polls. Reporters more and more lean on the work of pollsters to supplant old fashioned leg and telephone work that could produce valid reflections of public attitudes.

Reporters turn to polls because they do not trust their ability to measure attitudes through traditional means, or they find the issues too big and complex, or they are lazy. Or, their editors believe polls shore up credibility; don't blame us, look what the polls showed.

There seems to be a poll available to answer any question on any issue. If not, we will hold one of our own by posting a telephone number and counting the calls.

If reporters and editors persist in following this path, at least now they have a handy reference to guide them through the thicket of the polling jungle: "A Journalist's Guide to Public Opiniou Polls," published by Praeger in paperback for $14.95.

This reference describes most of the risks contained in using polls as material for news stories from the most technical to the most obvious such as the well-tagged "SLOPS," self-selected listener-oriented public opinion surveys dear to the hearts of radio and television persoualities.

As a shortcut, the authors, Sheldon R. Gawiser, a polling consultant, and G. Evans Witt, assistant Associated Press bureau chief in Washington, offer, in an appendix, twenty questions to be answered for journalists who use polls in their work. Full discussion of the questions is included in a pamphlet written by the authors and published by the National Council on Public Polls. Copies of the pamphlet can be obtained by contacting the NCPP office at 800-239-0909.

Twenty Questions

1. Who did the poll?
2. Who paid for the poll and why was it done?
3. How many people were interviewed for the survey?
4. How were those people chosen?
5. What area—nation, state or region—or what group—teachers, lawyers, Democratic voters, etc.—were these people chosen from?
6. Are the results based on the answers of all the people interviewed?
7. Who should have been interviewed and was not?
8. When was the poll done?
9. How were the interviews conducted?
10. Is this a dial-iu poll, a mail-in poll or a subscriber coupon poll?
11. What is the sampling error for the poll results?
12. What other kinds of mistakes can skew poll results?
13. What questions were asked?
14. In what order were the questions asked?
15. What other polls have been done on this topic? Do they say the same thing? If they are different, why are they different?
16. So the poll says the race is all over. What now?
17. Was the poll part of a fund-raising effort?
18. So I've asked all the questions. The answers sound good. The poll is correct, right?
19. With all these potential problems, should we ever report poll results?
20. Is this poll worth reporting?

An additional source for journalists is the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). It can be reached at 313-764-1555. n M.S.

rating fell to 45 percent (from 51 percent in January) and his disapproval rating rose to 42 percent (from 35 percent in January). A majority (52 percent) felt a cover-up was going on, and a much larger majority (81 percent) felt Whitewater was disrupting important business of the Federal government (crime, health care reform, economic policy) by either a lot (44 percent) or a little (37 percent). A majority (55 percent) felt the press was giving too much attention to the issue.

Clinton's health care reform plan, which he said was the defining issue of his administration, was losing public support as it began to look like another big new government bureaucracy in the making, even though health care reform per se continued to rank high on the public's list of national problems and on its list of high priority items for Clinton to tackle. Welfare reform began rising as an issue on which the public wanted action during the early spring of 1994.

We conducted our major trend survey of the public during the summer, resulting in a new typology of voters that was released in late September. "The American electorate is angry, self-absorbed, and politically unanchored," it reported. Voters showed no clear direction in their political thinking "other than frustration with the current system and an eager responsiveness to alternative political solutions and appeals."

The two-party system was weaker in mid-1994 than in the 1980's and the link between what people believed and their partisan ties was also weaker. Tolerance issues and social class divisions were splitting the Republicans—the religious right dramatized their divisive elements—at the same time that cultural conservatism emerged as a bigger attraction for the GOP than economic conservatism. For the Democrats, the historic schisms between working class conservatives, liberals and disadvantaged groups continued to be underscored by racial issues, and the younger New Democrats who supported Clinton in 1992 were expressing less anti-business and more economically conservative views than traditional Democrats. "Independents will play an even more crucial role in the outcome of elections."

New economic realities had reshaped the center of the electorate since our previous political typology surveys. The largest bloc of independent voters represented a post-industrial working class with deep skepticism of the political system because of their struggle with their own economic limitations. Their pattern of political beliefs was incompatible with a traditional partisan point of view and inclined them more than any other group on the landscape to a new third party. But many other respondents were also attracted to some alternative political solution, and particularly to political outsiders.

Voter frustration continued to grow, as did animosity toward the media. And the public had become more polarized on issues of social policy and cultural change. The mood was meaner, with greater indifference to the problems of the poor and minorities, resentment toward immigrants, and more cynicism about what government programs can accomplish. Discontent with Washington, rising through the late 1980's, was greater than even two years earlier. Voters increasingly wanted traditional politicians to step aside; their experience was seen as a vice rather than a virtue. Criticism of the news media, especially television news, was sharply higher. A very large percentage of Americans—fully 71 percent—said the press gets in the way of society solving its problems rather than helping society solve its problems.

Our national poll in late October found that the public anger was manifesting itself in building a Republican lead that could produce a GOP majority in the House as well as the Senate. There was considerably more support for Democrats than a few weeks earlier but also "an unprecedented plurality of registered voters inclined to vote Republican. More importantly, as the election nears, it also finds the GOP with a sizable lead over the Democrats among people most likely to go to the polls." Their motivation was anti-Clinton and anti-Washington. The anti-incumbency sentiment had diminished somewhat but not the GOP lead. Turnout would be the key. Republicans were enthusiastic because they were energized. Democrats were despondent.

The difference between basing forecasts on likely voters rather than registered voters can be seen in results of this survey. Of 1,577 registered voters polled, 47 percent said they would vote Republican, 44 percent said Democratic. But of those registered voters, 995 were most likely to vote, based on expressed intentions to vote and past voting history. Of the likely voters, 51 percent said they would vote Republican, 43 percent said Democratic. "Further, the survey suggests that turnout may well be as low as it was in 1990 and 1986, when only one in three citizens cast a ballot." Low turnouts traditionally help the GOP, high turnouts help the Democrats.

Moreover, the trend showed a steady increase in support for GOP Congressional candidates among the two bedrocks of the party—the fiscally conservative and the socially conservative groups in the Times Mirror typology. "No such trend toward Democratic Congressional candidates is seen among the core groups of the Democratic Party," the survey found. In fact, one core Democratic group—dominated by social conservatives and trade unionists—showed a significant drop in support for Democrats over previous months. Among independents, we found a middle-class, mostly female group feeling high financial pressure that shifted back toward Democrats, but "the question is not only how they [members of this group] will vote, but whether they will bother to vote at all, given their low level of interest in politics."

The final Times Mirror pre-election poll, released Sunday night before the voting, predicted that the popular vote would go Republican by a wide margin: 52 percent vs. 48 percent. The only issue was whether the vote would be converted into enough seats in the House to give the GOP control there as well as the Senate. "The survey finds the Republican party with about enough popular support to capture control of

Table 1: VOTER INTENTIONS IN TIMES MIRROR POLLS, 1994

	REGISTERED VOTERS (%)			LIKELY VOTERS (%)		
	Rep	Dem	Other	Rep	Dem	Other
Nov. 3-5	45	43	12	48	43	9
Oct. 20-24	47	44	9	51	43	6
Oct. 6-9	52	40	8	—	—	—
September	48	46	6	—	—	—
July	45	47	8	—	—	—

the House of Representatives, but not enough to *guarantee* such an outcome," the report said.

It pointed out that Democrats had closed the gap somewhat and the anti-incumbency sentiment was waning. "The trends observed in the survey suggest that the Democrats may narrow the margin even more" in the final days of the campaign. The poll found the number of *registered* voters statistically tied for the first time since September: 45 percent inclined to vote Republican, 43 percent disposed to vote Democratic. Ten days earlier it had been 47 percent to 44 percent, respectively. But among *likely* voters, the Republican margin was 48 percent to 43 percent, slightly less than the 51 percent to 43 percent ten days earlier. Table 1 summarizes this and earlier data.

If the current party standings did not change, the report said, and if undecided voters split as our statistical analysis suggested, the result would be a 52 percent to 48 percent Republican win in popular vote. Since the popular vote does not translate directly into congressional seats, the GOP needed somewhat more than 52 percent to be assured control based on the historical relationship between the popular vote and the division of seats. The Republicans, because they register greater turnout in the districts that they carry, require a higher share of the vote than the Democrats in order to control the House. Table 2 summarizes the final predictions of major polling organizations.

The different results seen in the final voter intention table can be due to many factors, among them the precise wording of the questions, placement of the questions within the survey, and size of the sample. The larger the overall sample, the greater the number of registered voters, and likely voters. Times Mirror interviewed a total of 2000 respondents to find 1,468 registered voters and 923 likely voters. To filter out likely voters, we asked a series of 10 questions that ranged from "how much thought have you given to Tuesday's election" to "do you happen to know where people in your neighborhood go to vote" to "are you absolutely certain you are registered to vote" as well as "do you, yourself, plan to vote" and which candidate was supported. Other polling organizations did similar work, using techniques developed over many elections. In particular, it should be noted that in the 1994 election, there was no statistical difference between the Gallup and Times Mirror results before the undecided vote was allocated. We allocated the undecided through a statistical technique called multiple regression. Using such factors as the demographic profile (i.e., race, region of country) and political attitudes (i.e., approval of Bill Clinton) of decided voters, the regression equations predicted the likely partisan preferences of the undecided voters in the election.

In the end, we were pretty much right on the money. The turnout was 38.7 percent of eligible voters on Nov. 8. The Republican margin was 52.4 percent to 47.6 percent for the Democrats. Based on unofficial results, the percent of seats won was 52.9 percent for the GOP, 46.9 percent for the Democrats. The Republican gain in House seats was 52, which produced a majority of 26 seats. Not since Eisenhower's pull in 1954 had the Republicans gained control of the House. Not since 1946 had the President's party lost as many seats in that body.■

Table 2:
FINAL VOTER INTENTION RESULTS OF MAJOR POLLS

ORGANIZATION	REGISTERED VOTERS (%)			LIKELY VOTERS (%)		
	Rep	Dem	Rep Adv.	Rep	Dem	Rep Adv.
Yankelovich (for Time/CNN)						
Oct. 25-26	36	42	-6	38	44	-6
PSRA (for Newsweek)						
Oct. 27-28	46	44	+2	—	—	—
N.Y.Times/CBS						
Oct. 29-Nov. 1	49	45	+4	—	—	—
Gallup (for CNN/USA)						
Nov. 2-6	46	46	0	51	44	+7
NBC/Wall St. Journal						
Nov. 4-5	40	37	+3	46	35	+11
Wash. Post/ABC						
Nov. 3-6	—	—	—	46	47	-1
Times Mirror						
Nov. 3-5	45	43	+2	48	43	+5

Shoe Leather, Shoe Leather, Shoe Leather

By Haynes Johnson

Newt Gingrich has his New Wave—pardon me, Third Wave, or some such Toffler wave—that carries us irresistibly into the cyberspace of our electronically interconnected future. There, we'll all find ourselves linked, wired as it were, enabling us to converse on the Internet, to shop, bank, and write, all courtesy of the wonders of the exploding computer technology world. And we can do it all alone. We'll never even have to leave the comfort, and isolation, of our home office work space. We can exist, if we choose, without ever having contact with a single soul.

I say this not out of either marvel or of trepidation for that future. It is upon us already; nothing anyone can say or do will change it. My concern is how this increasingly isolated futuristic world affects the practice of daily journalism.

Editors increasingly worry, and rightly, about the loss of readers. They worry even more, and even more correctly, about how to win them back.

One solution is the often-mocked "news-you-can-use" formula. I do not disparage this. Journalism is a service, a practical service as well as a public service. If readers believe their papers are providing them with useful information about money matters or health and consumer advice, so much the better. Nor does this kind of journalism have to be pandering or represent a "dumbing down" of the press. Done well, it can help rebuild a critical relationship of mutual trust and need between readers and their papers.

Another solution is now much in vogue. That is the so-called "public interest" or "community" journalism where teams of reporters are assigned to focus in greater depth on concerns in their communities. This requires breaking the boundaries of traditional "beat" reporting to go beyond City Hall and examine the reality of life inside public housing or schools or police and fire departments. It is an admirable attempt to reconnect the ever-more disconnected strands of contemporary American life that have left more and more groups removed from each other.

Which leads me to my principal concern—and complaint—about too much of today's daily journalism. Too often, we've forgotten that people are the heart of our business. Or, to put it another way: too often we simply don't talk to people.

Oh, sure, we talk to "experts." We corral the usual suspects—the spokesperson or "spin-doctors," often anonymous, for competing politicians, economic, or diplomatic sides—and parade them before our readers, complete with the jargon of the insider. We cite studies, and even quote ourselves. But we spend precious little time and effort at the old-fashioned art of simple door-knocking.

In the past, if you wanted to report on a labor dispute, you talked to a steelworker. If you wanted to understand the problems afflicting rural America, you sat with an Iowa farmer at four o'clock in the morning, drinking coffee and talking about how the price of soybeans in Brazil was affecting him. If you wanted to understand the deeper undercurrents of our public life in an election cycle, you headed out with maps of voting precincts and went door to door interviewing people in their homes.

Today, we rely on polls to tell us what people think. Surveys supplant individual reportorial legwork.

Don't misunderstand me. The polls and surveys are useful when properly handled. They can provide evidence of wider public trends and shed light on changing national attitudes and values. But they do not replace the greater insights that can be gleaned from the laborious, time-consuming process of face-to-face interviewing. That is the journalist's principal province, and responsibility. No poll, however well designed, can plumb the complexities and contradictions of individuals. Polls ask people to respond by answering yes, no, or don't know. Real people are not so simple; their attitudes do not neatly fit into yes-and-no categories.

In recent years I've spent many months on the road interviewing Americans. A persistent theme, expressed repeatedly and literally everywhere, involved the growing distrust of Americans toward all leaders and institutions. That's what the last two elections were all about, both the "Clinton Change" and the subsequent "Gingrich Reaction." ("Revolution" it may prove to be, but not yet.)

Along with this pervasive public disaffection, I heard another complaint regularly voiced about the press: that too often what people read in the press does not reflect the reality of their lives. Aloof, distant, elite, arrogant, out-of-touch—these criticisms are common when people characterize today's press.

That's another way of saying many Americans feel increasingly alienated toward a press that supposedly exists to tell their stories and to help them understand what others around them are experiencing.

Moral, and not so original either: get back to basics, brothers and sisters of the trade.

In the old days, journalists used to cite approvingly Joseph Pulitzer's famous adage about what formed the essentials of effective journalism: accuracy, accuracy, accuracy. Speaking from the perspective of the dawning of a new journalistic century, I would add another maxim as applicable to that future: shoe leather, shoe leather, shoe leather. Shoe leather, that is, worn and expended in search of the real-life stories of real people. A little bit of knocking on doors is one useful step along that journey. You don't get there by cyberspace alone.■

Haynes Johnson won the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1965 for his Washington Star coverage of the Selma civil rights struggle. His father, Malcolm Johnson, also won a Pulitzer, for his 1949 series "Crime on the Waterfront" in the old New York Sun. In his journalistic career with The Washington Star and The Washington Post, Haynes Johnson has been a reporter, an editor and a columnist. He is now working on his twelfth book, in collaboration with David S. Broder, about the workings of the American political system—an effort that has involved countless and repeated interviewing over the last two years.

How Technology Spoils Reporters

By Paul Delaney

During one of our periodic discussions on solving the world's sports problems and to talk about our first love, journalism, a reporter who covers New York City professional teams was lamenting pack journalism. His point was that in his own work he tries to get away from the herd by boycotting the predictable pablum served up at meetings between coaches and writers, gatherings more akin to pajama parties. Instead, he would wander about looking for something different, seeking original sources and angles other than the official line.

But he ran into a snag. He could handle the constant bellyaching by the coaches, who did not particularly care about the stories he turned up, but the unexpected heat from his colleagues was what really bugged him. They were disturbed by his wanderings and his articles because of the pressure from their editors, who justifiably inquired into their whereabouts when my friend was coming up with stories they missed. These reporters certainly could not admit to their bosses that they simply were too lazy to pull away from the convenience of the spoon-feeding by a corps of cooperating coaches. Therefore, the least difficult thing to do was to turn on their colleague and demand that he ease up and join the party.

My friend's tactics exposed two phenomenons in daily newspapering: the shrinking of sources to only one voice, or a few voices, and the resulting adaptation to such a convenience by reporters. Modern technology and techniques have speeded up the trend.

These developments are not limited to the sports department, unfortunately, but can be found in the city room, business desk, features department and others. And it is not a simple matter of reporters having become shiftless and lazy. All kinds of other factors contribute to the belief that the only way to report nowadays is to stay in the office and work the telephones.

The reasons include the demands of technology (I remember when computers were introduced into the newsroom we were told that, unfortunately, deadlines would be pushed up, but eventually would return to the original times, and possibly be extended beyond those of precomputer days. Hah!)

Also, distance and traffic—urban sprawl—make it almost impossible to simply jump into a car or use public transportation to rush to the scene of news or to see sources, and—right you are—make those early deadlines. In addition, city streets have become much too dangerous for even freespirited reporters with intrepid reputations (Bob Reinhold and John Kifner of The New York Times come to mind) to schlep around town (truthfully, Reinhold is now an editor at The Los Angeles Times while the aging Kifner still does it occasionally.) And the omnipresent fax machine is a new player in the gathering of news.

I do not accept the proposition that young reporters have become too elitist to want to go to the ghetto on assignment. I find young journalists and prospective reporters—in my classes, for example—just as courageous, enthusiastic and eager to succeed as past generations, willing to go to the action wherever it is, when editors so direct. I find the same healthy conflicts, traditional in newsrooms, between editors and their young reporters who do not see eye-to-eye, youngsters who feel that editors do not move fast enough or grasp or share with vigor the same seriousness about the controversy of the moment. That phenomenon may be one explanation for the belief that newsrooms are hotbeds of liberalism.

Over the last few decades, there has been a perceptible shift in where editors assign reporters, in what is considered important news, and important, career-enhancing beats. Much of that is natural. For instance, since conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador are over, there is little news from Central America now, and the journalists who were there have packed their gear and gone on to promotions and the newest career-enhancing assignment.

On the other hand, some of the shift is not natural. Deliberate decisions were made to cut off coverage of the civil

Paul Delaney, while a reporter in the Washington Bureau of The New York Times, moved his family from the suburbs to the inner city—back to the ghetto, he said—because he did not want his children to be reared without a black urban experience. Besides postings in Chicago and Madrid, Paul served as an editor on The Times National Desk in New York and as a senior editor involved in recruiting reporters and newsroom administration. He is now Chairman of the Department of Journalism at the University of Alabama.

rights movement, for example, as a result of internal and external newsroom politics. The media withdrawal from civil rights followed political shifts in the White House during the 1980's by administrations that were hostile to the rights movement.

At the same time, the makeup of the newsroom has also undergone a dramatic change in personnel, with more conservative and right-wing editors and reporters in positions of power finding themselves welcome, while the overall perception remained that most are liberal. It was not too long ago that mainstream journalists held their noses and snubbed the right-wing upstart Washington Times, owned by a corporation controlled by the Unification Church. Now Times editorials are quoted, its articles followed up and its reporters sought after for talk show analyses.

To be candid, I am convinced that the majority of big-city newsroom staffs were much more conservative than had ever been acknowledged, and others have gradually turned to the right over time. Of course, I am referring specifically to white editors and reporters, since non-whites have little or no real power or impact on newsroom policy at the bulk of American dailies. For example, I do not argue that when polled, many reporters say or indicate that they are liberal. But why should one believe they were any more truthful than those people in exit polls who lied when they said they voted for David Dinkins for re-election as mayor of New York in 1993?

After the 1980 presidential elections, Abe Rosenthal reminded a room full of his senior editors at The New York Times—we of the Eastern establishment elite, we nattering nabobs of negativism—that Ronald Reagan and his conservatives had won the election and that we should give them their say in our news pages. A reasonable directive. It meant taking the conservatives seriously as sources and subjects. Yet, the right wing has been having its day ever since, although screaming it isn't so. I wondered after last year's right-wing election triumphs what Abe would say to his staff today, were he still Executive Editor of The Times.

What was actually going on, though, was a steady rightward march that began with the election of Richard Nixon as president. Combine his "Southern strategy" with Reagan-Bush outright antagonism toward the cities, minorities and the poor and we have to conclude that more not less media attention should have been paid to inner-city problems. But we in the media took our cue from Washington, not necessarily by duplicating its hostility, but by gradually de-emphasizing their importance with reduced coverage and attention. Our fellow Americans picked up our lead.

For example, for a much-too-short period, the way to success in big-city newsrooms was by reporting on the problems of the poor, minorities and civil rights and civil liberties. The Republican administrations in Washington turned their backs on minorities, except for crime and welfare in the inner city, and so, too, the newsrooms of America.

It was during this period, in which reporters narrowed their sources to the leaders and officials and highly-paid flacks who made themselves conveniently available, that technology prompted new kinds of reporting. This meant further isolation of reporters from human contact, from their live sources. Reporters could, day in and day out, get on page one without ever interviewing a single source face to face.

When I was recruiting reporters at The Times, we looked over the clips of an applicant whose work was impressive and had made a lot of impact. But something was missing, his stories seemed too mechanical. Finally, when he came in for an interview, we found that he had difficulty relating to people, to put it mildly. It seemed that all of his work, every story, had been completely done in the office. He had not talked in person to a soul.

Armed with good excuses for using phone interviews, relying on limited numbers of sources to speak for the masses, and placing too much faith in narrow but sensational events, journalists lost touch with much of what was going on at the bottom, with the people. Anti-abortion protests do occur and are newsy, sensational and sometimes deadly. But polls show that a majority of Americans support the right to abortion, a legal and constitutional right supported by the Supreme Court. Therefore, the issue faced by the media is to keep the issue in perspective while covering a Randall Terry and other abortion opponents. Is that done by concentrating on the leaders on both sides, or the rank and file of each? It sure is more convenient to talk to the few leaders than the masses of followers. So far, the focus has been more on the leaders, it seems.

I believe that by sticking close to the phone and fax machine, reporters did not get out in the communities between the 1992 and 1994 elections to capture early the intensity of the rapidly increasing anger welling up in Americans. We certainly had enough coverage of Ross Perot as the spokesman of disaffected Americans. He paid for a lot of it, of course. We still hear from Jesse Jackson as the spokesman for African-Americans and other minorities. He has his own television program now. It is easier to cover the Perots, Terrys and Jacksons than to get out and pound the pavement and find sources from among the people behind these leaders. There may be a huge gap between what the rank-and-file abortion foe thinks about killing doctors and what the media quote the leaders saying.

Another example comes to mind. The press has found a number of black right wingers to highlight: they're in vogue. But reporters have yet to understand how to deal with the fact that those conservatives of color are representative of a mere small slice of the huge African-American community. Even then, not too many journalists have sought out grassroot conservatives among blacks, thereby getting themselves and their papers into the same trap as in the past in covering black America. By focusing on small windows of that community—such as the frustration many blacks have with the NAACP, the state of civil rights and current civil rights leaders—journalists

arrive at erroneous conclusions about what "the black community" thinks and wants.

There was a time when reliance on single sources was appropriate and legitimate. During the civil rights movement, it was necessary to run to the leaders to find out about and report on plans and strategy. They were excellent sources (sometimes the only sources), the issues were pretty straightforward, leaving little difference between leaders and followers, and the leaders were reliable and representative of the people they led. But such reliance became the rule and it spoiled many reporters, who found it convenient to continue the practice. The habit became the forerunner of the isolation that the computer age fed. Face-to-face, intimate contact became the exception, in many cases.

Computers speeded up finding, selecting and sorting information, court records, for instance. They are unquestionably helpful in this fast-paced age of the information superhighway. But speed isn't everything. For instance, sometimes, by not personally looking at the documents themselves, reporters can miss important written entries, alterations and changes and other notations not picked up by the computer. And much of the writing from such reporting surely is wooden.

As daily papers struggle to find themselves and their place in the new electronic age, one strategy to counter cable television's worldwide, instant 24 hour news is to provide more analysis and perspective on the news. For the most part, this means even more isolation of reporters from the people, since analyzing events entails making phone calls to favorite talking heads, after pulling up background information on Lexis-Nexis and receiving from the talking heads faxes and videotapes of their latest speeches and appearances on gang-bang TV talk shows.

Not to worry. There is a new movement by journalists to "reconnect" with readers, in the words of Buzz Merritt, editor of The Wichita Eagle. He is a leader of a campaign to get papers to refocus on readers and what they want from their newspapers and for their communities. This is done by reporters and editors and photographers—guess what?—heading out into the community to establish relationships. To reconnect. Basic journalism. There is such a need because papers lost readers and their communities by locking them out of the process, save as spectators, in favor of the spokesperson.

The separation occurred simultaneously as the other forces were negatively affecting the profession. Many papers, in panic, turned to the sensationalism of tabloid journalism, papers and electronic media, and, in the minds of many, abdicated their mission and responsibility and lowered their standards. People who were not too highly regarded in the first place lost a little more esteem among the public.

To regain lost stature and status, journalists will have to come to terms with the new age, and they will have to go back to their real sources, the people.■

The Future of Public Broadcasting

Following are excerpts from a discussion January 15, 1995 on Alex Jones's On the Media program on radio station WNYC in New York. The guests were Henry Cauthen, Chairman, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Tim Graham, Associate Editor of Media Watch of the Media Research Center.

Jones— Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich has called for zeroing out the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Public Broadcasting System's funding arm, which he says is a "little sandbox for the rich." The Speaker claims he merely wants to privatize public broadcasting, but his critics say he wants to kill it.

Cauthen—The Corporation for Public Broadcasting simply provides funding for the local stations throughout the country that are independent stations. We're not a network. It's 145 independent television stations and over 600 radio stations.

Jones—Tim Graham, regardless of how you think this has been executed, do you have a fundamental problem with the concept of Corporation for Public Broadcasting?

Graham—Yes. I think that conservatives believe that there shouldn't be such a thing as a government-operated news agency or a government-operated broadcasting agency. What we're saying right now is: you defund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I'm not saying that the system, such as it is, can't continue to exist as a nonprofit, non-government sort of institution.

Jones—What do you think is going to happen?

Graham—We have a media system that constantly talks about "here comes the axe," and yet these programs just continue to grow and grow and grow. This notion that somehow PBS is outnumbered and outflanked and outspent in this debate is completely laughable in that here we have three or four guys who are conservative, and a couple legislators, against a system which spends two or three million dollars a year on advertising itself, who has a network with 600 radio stations and what are they all saying to their listeners right now: write your legislator.

Jones—I think they're saying that Congress is trying to take away their funding.

Graham—If you're a libertarian, this is your nightmare. And that is that government spends government's money advocating more government.

Cauthen—We certainly are the underdog, at least on Capitol Hill, when you have the Speaker saying that he is going to zero out public broadcasting. You have to take him seriously. The result of a major cut or zeroing out is going to be the demise of public broadcasting.

Graham—This is an issue where they have the public opinion upper hand because the first thing they do is: you're going to kill Big Bird, you're going to kill Mr. Rogers. I think the much harder argument is ours. When we have to pick between The Frugal Gourmet and feeding the elderly, we're going to prioritize.

Jones—Why can't the Corporation for Public Broadcasting find that money somewhere else?

Cauthen—Well, the Corporation has no real means or mechanism for raising money. Its purpose is to distribute the federal funds.■

Reading the Public From the Arts Pages

By Charles Champlin

Through the Sixties and Seventies, when I was juggling two berets as the arts editor and also the principal film critic of The Los Angeles Times, a question thrown at me frequently was, "Do the movies shape us or reflect us?"

When the question was asked accusingly, as it often was, the import was clear: the movies were leading us down a primrose and popcorn-strewn path to unrestrained sex, violence and bad language, plus socialism bordering on anarchy, and how could I as a critic and editor deny the truth of it?

I certainly could deny the truth of it, but I am bound to say that the area of violence was troubling even then and is more troubling now.

The new rating system for films (voluntary self-regulation, as Jack Valenti is ever at pains to point out) had been adopted by the industry late in 1968, giving American films a latitude of expression they had not had in modern times. Those in the society who have traditionally feared the persuasive power of the movies saw the new alphabet ratings as opening floodgates of filth, a phrase that recurred in my mail.

The alarums, since expanded to embrace television, have not died away, and indeed the thoughtful concerns about the cumulative and inuring effects of screen violence (on any sized screen) cannot be dismissed as right-wing rant.

But what was, or is, to be said about movies and television as mirrors and/or shapers of us all? My answer then, and not much modified since, is that they mirror us in their hesitant fashion, but that their shaping effect is modest if not miniscule compared to the larger forces—poverty, unemployment, racial tensions and drugs—affecting the society.

The iron law of movies and television is that they are marketplace commodities, surviving by the consent of as large a section of the audience as they can command. What works is repeated endlessly, until it stops working. What fails is not tried again. Another way to say it is that movies and television are consensus media, which put themselves at financial risk if they depart too drastically from the tastes, expectations and beliefs of the marketplace.

With the exception of the superpatriotic "The Green Berets" in 1968, a film that exists as testimony to John Wayne's personal clout as a star, Hollywood stayed clear of Vietnam until after the withdrawal in 1974. It was simply apparent that no consensus existed in the country about the war, and there seemed no way to write a story acceptable to both those for and those against the war. "The Deer Hunter," "Apocalypse Now," "Platoon" and other films about the Vietnam involvement looked back, later.

When in the late Sixties, wife-swapping created a minor furor in the news columns, Hollywood used it as the basis for a romantic comedy, "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice." In the end no one's virtue was compromised, no marital vows were dented and, despite the poster shot of two couples in one bed, monogamy prevailed. Wife-swapping had not acquired an approving consensus among us, and therefore not in Hollywood.

Sexual matters are treated far more explicitly in both film and television than in 1969 when Bob and Carol was released. Monogamy is sometimes as hard to find as men wearing hats; marriage is no longer mandatory and living happily ever after no longer the automatic presumption at the last fadeout.

But for the most part, movies and television seem only to be reflecting the changes in the way Western society conducts its romantic life, and it seems as true now as in the Sixties that the movies can best be seen as a kind of delayed-action replay of what we're up to. The replays, of course, are seldom kitchen-sink reality. The expectations of the customers toward movies and now television have not changed in their essentials in the century since the movies were born. These expectations, or demands, principally include excitement, escape or temporary diversion from humdrum everyday life, reassurance and uplift (not preachment but a momentary sense of well being). What constitutes excitement and the other expectations has evolved hugely in a century, of course, as the sophistica-

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Charles Champlin is Arts Editor emeritus of The Los Angeles Times and an author, teacher, lecturer and television host. He contributes "Criminal Pursuits," a monthly column of mystery reviews to The Times, along with frequent articles. His interview program, "Champlin on Film," is still seen on the Bravo cable network. Since 1985 he has been an adjunct associate professor in the School of Cinema-TV at USC, conducting a course in theatrical film analysis. He was born in Hammondsport, N.Y., to a family long involved with the wine industry. He served in the infantry in World War II and was awarded the Purple Heart. He was graduated from Harvard with honors in 1948. After 17 years as a Time-Life writer-correspondent, he joined The Los Angeles Times as arts editor and columnist in 1965. He wrote close to three million words for the newspaper.

tion of both the audience and the technology has grown; yet a reassertion of the primacy of loving kindness links Chaplin's tramp with films as different as "Forrest Gump" and "Nobody's Fool."

At that, the most confounding and difficult read-out between film and television and the common weal continues to be violence. It is complicated because of the very long Hollywood tradition of violence defined simply as action and somehow implicitly accepted by the audience as make-believe. The gangsters mowed down by Tommy guns will arise to be mowed down again in the next picture; the cowboys and Native Americans will shake off the dust and toddle off to the commissary wagon for sandwiches.

Violence on the screen was for years a proxy for sex, which was thoroughly proscribed, especially under the Hays Code that governed the making of American films from 1934 to 1968. The relative attitudes toward sex and violence did reflect American norms.

Sam Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch" in 1969 redefined just how graphic screen violence could be. Its re-release a quarter-century later is still controversial and the film, with some trimmed footage restored, has been threatened with a NC-17 rating (which replaced the inflammatory X).

When one of the first furors erupted about screen violence, I asked a Beverly Hills psychoanalyst to do an article on the subject for our Sunday arts magazine, Calendar. His conclusion was that the real danger was the steady reiteration of the implicit message that only violence solved problems, and that discussion and negotiation were unavailing. That struck me as sensible then, and it remains central to my troubled belief that a prudent human being must feel deep concern about the possible effect (if only in numbing the consciousness) of watching quantities of gratuitous and exploitive violence.

During an interview a few months ago, Paul Newman got onto the subject of the film "Pulp Fiction." It's "marvelously inventive and eccentric," he told me. "But I don't know what to do with the violence. It's one thing to make fun of guys who are slugging each other on the ice [as in Slapshot, a film he made in 1977] and another thing to use comedy to ameliorate the brutality of a guy getting his head blown off." Just so, and what can be said about the film's endorsements by several critics groups, who enthuse about its style and are silent about its exploitive violence? One answer must be that critics become inured to violence by over-exposure, as audiences at large do, too.

Indeed, the subject of violence is further bedeviled by the confusion of a commercial phenomenon with a social phenomenon. The principal customers for theatrical films these days are the 25-and-unders, who account for perhaps three-fourths of tickets sold. They like action films. The big Hollywood studios make far fewer films than they once did, no more than a quarter as many, but at an average cost of some $30 million each before prints and advertising. The cost breeds caution, a reliance on big action films and, accordingly, there is a shrinking in the variety of choices available to filmgoers. The alternative choices, independent films, are less widely distributed than the major studio releases. Films of violent action thus become self-fulfilling commercial prophecies, since they often open simultaneously on more than 2,000 prime screens, preempting those screens from quieter fare. The violence in many of the action films is undoubtedly intended as make-believe, preposterously larger than life, or death, even as in the simple old days; but it is also graphic in the Peckinpah tradition.

The box office success of non-violent films like "Forrest Gump," "Nobody's Fool" and in earlier years "Big," "On Golden Pond" and "Driving Miss Daisy," suggests that audiences, including young viewers, will opt for alternate fare if it is available. But each of those films in its way was a high-risk venture, the kind of films that usually remain orphans, minus descendants.

For an arts editor, probably the most direct reading of the audience, or a significant part of it, is available in the area of popular music, rock most especially. I was working at Time Magazine in London when the Beatles moved from Liverpool into cultural history. And not only the Beatles, but the Kinks, the Animals, the Dave Clark Five and, most especially, the Rolling Stones.

It was clear that the significance of the phenomenon was more sociological than musical, and it continues to be so.

The Beatles could be seen then as the embodiment of a youthful postwar optimism in Britain, their Midlands accents somehow affirming that an accent need not be a bar to success, as it had been. And with one twang of a guitar, so to speak, music had displaced film stardom as the dream route of escape from the boredom and frustrations of lives with low ceilings of non-opportunity. You didn't even have to be handsome. Seen now the Beatles look romantic and even conservative in their black suits and ties, their individualism expressed in long hair and winklepicker shoes. It's easy to forget how threatening they appeared to their elders—threatening in their cheeky defiance of class and all else. It was as if the class structure had melted in the fires of war, as had been predicted.

It hadn't, of course, and the Rolling Stones, rising almost simultaneously with the Beatles, were from another end of the spectrum. They could be interpreted as a later symbol: of a post-optimistic postwar cynicism, druggy, existential, anarchic, self-centered. The two groups were alike in dismissing, in different tones, the persistence of the status quo.

What became important journalistically was to explain the extraordinary, occasionally hysterical response, first to the Beatles, then to the Stones. (My original suggestion to Time for a Beatles story was rejected in a cable that read, "Showbiz bypassing Champlin suggestion obscure Liverpool rock group.") It was not quite so simple as the teenaged adulation of the young Frank Sinatra; it was perhaps closer to the worship of Elvis Presley, Elvis being himself a symbol of an unfettered independence that was, however, like the Beatles', fundamentally and traditionally romantic.

Like jazz—equally controversial when jazz moved out of the brothels and gin mills into polite society—the new music raised senior hackles and

said something about its times. Bob Dylan, whose voice was compared to a buzz saw hitting a hickory knot, did not casually rename himself Dylan, having been born Zimmerman. He demonstrated that lyrics had come a long way from moon-June and were worth careful attention, as a form of protest poetry. Dylan and other rock lyricists sang of alienation (the great buzzword of the late 20th Century), anger, rootlessness, the end of a kind of collective optimism. The singers and the groups manifestly spoke *to* a young audience that was affluent and mobile but still full of angers and angsts, along with hope that the times they were a-changin'.

With the invaluable aid of MTV, pop music is as shrewdly conceived and marketed as ever the movies dream of being. But for all the hype, the sounds and the words come out of the performers' feeling about themselves and the society and, too, from their keen perceptions about what their listeners feel and want to hear. The music can be disliked, sometimes easily enough, but it cannot be dismissed or ignored. The demand on the rock critic is to be able to sort out the slick and faddy from what truly catches the vibes of its audience.

Rap has been the latest rock subgenre for editors and reviewers to cope with. Its sing-song messages have been literally hate-filled and hateful, and will likely be again. And they undoubtedly reflect a cynical fulfillment of what rap's audiences want to hear. Who can doubt that rap accurately expresses an assertion of black identity and of the rages and frustrations of a population that continues to perceive equality as elusive?

Popular music is a sensitive barometer of the public's state. Even the renewed popularity of Tony Bennett and a Frank Sinatra nearing 80 can be read as a kind of counterculture impulse appearing from above (in age terms) and suggesting that there is much to be said about music that is neither defiant nor angry but upbeat, lyrical and romantic.

If pop music gets an unusual amount of coverage in The Los Angeles Times and other papers, it is in an attempt to persuade a new generation to acquire the newspaper-reading habits of their parents. It's not an easy job, but some surveys The Times conducted in the late 1980's suggested that the number of younger readers of the Sunday Calendar section was in fact on the rise, stimulated not only by the editorial content but also by the ads for the rock concerts and information on where to order tickets.

Radio had been back burner news on the entertainment pages for years, reflecting the shrinkage of radio from the days of network glory to local rip-and-read newscasts briefly interrupting canned music in a variety of formats. Radio seldom made news unless a zany morning deejay did something particularly naughty. Talk radio has changed all that, enjoying an upsurge so swift and in some cases so virulent that it has leapt from the low hummocks of the entertainment section to the political news columns. At its best, philosophically, talk radio gives voice to listeners who otherwise feel themselves mute. But that will not quite do as a rationale for the unchecked and unbalanced spew of host opinions that are given a certain level of credence by being said on the same medium that once carried Elmer Davis and Edward R. Murrow.

Newspapers, struggling with their identities and their futures in a time of revolutionary change, still seem magisterial in the breadth and depth of their coverages and their attempts to understand and be a positive force in their communities. You pray for their health, not least after a little time with talk radio.

In the postwar years, the entertainment pages of most dailies have reflected and reported a cultural revolution in American society. A variety of forces—universal higher education funded by the GI Bill, the LP, FM radio and paperback books and a wave of civic pride and optimism—all conspired to produce an unprecedented expansion of cultural edifices, performing groups and arts events. And newspapers by their nature were principal supporters and encouragers. (Dorothy Chandler's heroic efforts in Los Angeles were in a class by themselves.) The performing arts—opera, dance, symphonies, chamber groups, public theater—received editorial space splendidly disproportionate to the size of their audiences and their non-existent ad budgets.

The critics championed the avant-garde in all the arts, challenging the essential conservatism of the best-heeled supporters of the arts. When I went east to hire Martin Bernheimer as the music critic of the paper, I was told to tell him, "You protect Beethoven, we'll protect Bernheimer." It was prophetic; his fearless reviews earned him the Pulitzer Prize and considerable hostility.

When recessionary times hit, the arts revolution flagged in several cities. Symphony orchestras went bankrupt, ballet companies still struggle. But major newspapers have continued their backing of the arts. Now, in a new Washington climate, inimical to PBS, the national endowments and the whole philosophy of government support of the arts, newspapers are challenged to join the fight, to minimize the cutbacks and to encourage private sector giving (because there will certainly be cutbacks).

It is a truism, or if it isn't it ought to be, that editors can't read their audiences by their letter-writing. Silence is the norm and, worst luck, it is approval that is most often mute. The gleeful and taunting detection of error, disagreement expressed as diatribe, arrows directed at the messenger instead of the message—these fill the mail trays, but usually not very deeply at that.

Disagreement (with reviews) expressed as diatribe makes an arts editor's mail very lively indeed, as I found. I suspect that only sports fans are more vociferous. Yet beyond the disagreements, the mail revealed a shared passion for the arts between critic and consumer. In the struggle to protect the arts from vandalism, readers of newspapers may rediscover their common cause with the paper, and newspapers, struggling to assert their identities amid technological upheavals, may rediscover their strong links to readers.■

Fair's Fair...Or Is It?

Reassessing the Need for a Doctrine to Insure Minority Representation on the Airwaves

By Marilyn J. Matelski

Over the last few years, as I've witnessed my three nieces grow from toddlers to teens, I've noticed a definite evolution in the term "fairness." At the pre-kindergarten stage, fairness is seen as a sort of "turn-taking," i.e., having the front seat in the car, sitting next to grandma at dinner, or playing checkers.

However, as individual personalities begin to emerge, and previously unknown interests arise, the notion of fairness often becomes redefined as "equitability," e.g., a weekend ski trip versus a mountain bike or a CD player. Also, at this stage, the ultimate decision between what is fair and what is not involves other factors such as economics, technical expertise and social expediency.

Ironically, the evolutionary standards of personal fairness seem to parallel those facing the electronic media today, and industry professionals must work continuously to stay in touch with their public's interests and needs. The task is often monumental.

Recently, Coogress has made yet another attempt to revisit an earlier decision revoking the broadcast industry's previous framework for fairness accountability—the 1949 Fairness Doctrine. The Fairness Doctrine was promulgated to protect and encourage participation by minority voices on the airwaves, following the basic tenets of a representative democracy. Prior to 1987, the Doctrine had served as a watchdog, charging radio and television station programmers with the responsibility of speaking to controversial issues of public interest as well as providing multiple viewpoints on each of these issues. Through the decades, several historic court cases challenged the necessity of such a directive; but in 1987, as an indirect result of a celebrated 1982 suit pitting the Syracuse Peace Council against the Meredith Corporation, the FCC voted to abolish the Fairness Doctrine. The decision was in keeping with the deregulatory climate of the Reagan administration. Still, tremors could be felt throughout Congress and the nation, causing unlikely alliances between seemingly dichotomous politicians and special interest groups. South Carolina Senator Ernest Hollings teamed up with Massachusetts Representative Edward Markey, for example, to decry what Hollings referred to as a "wrong-headed, misguided and illogical" decision; and broadcasters like Tom Goodgame (then president of Group W TV stations) mourned the loss of a doctrine that had been "a great thing [because] it protected the rights of the people." Other groups claimed victory for a decision that had been long overdue.

Since the 1987 ruling, several attempts have been made to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine in its original form or with modification. Each has failed and neither side seems willing to negotiate a compromise.

The alliances formed during the process of this latest debate have been interesting, to say the least. However, before identifying the members of both sides, it may be useful (in the interest of fairness) to review the historical context of the issue, tracing the notions of "equitability" and "accessibility" back to their infant stages in broadcasting. Perhaps then it might be easier (in the spirit of the Doctrine) to reveal the opposing perspectives.

In 1949, NATO was established, "All the King's Men" dominated the Oscar presentations, and Arthur Miller won a Pulitzer Prize for his play, "Death of a Salesman." In the world of broadcasting, radio and television continued to expand throughout the country, claiming station totals of 2,600 and 51 respectively. The newly accessible medium of TV exposed its viewers to such entertainment innovations as the telethon, the Emmy awards, and "The Life of Riley." In addition, the FCC looked more seriously at broadcast news and public affairs, overturning its previous anti-editorial stance in the Mayflower

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decision. Instead, it permitted editorials to be aired in a limited way (and with at least one opposing viewpoint). Shortly after the Mayflower decision was reversed, other court cases strengthened the FCC's commitment to editorial balance, and soon the notion of a "fairness doctrine" was born. Congress later adopted a formal amendment to the 1934 Communications Act, reinforcing its claim that if the airwaves were public, station owners should be required "to afford reasonable opportunity for the discussion of conflicting views on issues of public importance."

Almost immediately following the inception of the Fairness Doctrine, many broadcasters protested it vehemently, contending the law had violated their First Amendment rights as well as creating a discriminatory chasm between them and other media owners (primarily newspaper and magazine publishers), who were free to editorialize without fear of reprisal.

Proponents of fairness legislation, however, maintained that some form of legalistic framework was needed to make the electronic media truly democratic, i.e., safeguarding the rights of minority voices. They contended that broadcast licensees were unique from other media owners in several ways, namely: 1) license allocation was limited by the technical nature of the electromagnetic spectrum; 2) the costs of running such an operation (even in a small community) were relatively steep; and 3) unlike their counterparts, broadcasters were bound by the rules of the 1934 Communications Act, which declare the airwaves to be public. Because of these special circumstances, the First Amendment premise of free trade in ideas (put forth by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes) had been altered to "level the playing field" for all who desired access. Years later, in a 1987 essay, author and legal specialist Louis Cooper argued that a truly free trade of ideas might be overly idealistic: "Perhaps, then, the more practical goal for this society is not free trade in ideas but fair trade—some assurance, in other words, that one particular viewpoint will not completely drown out others because of its adherents' power (financial or otherwise) in the ideological marketplace. This kind of assurance likely requires some sort of government intervention."

Clearly, the battle lines had been drawn between those who felt the necessity for governmental regulation of the airwaves within a democratic forum versus those who favored a free-market approach to rules on fairness. In 1969, twenty years after the Fairness Doctrine had been adopted, the FCC felt it had finally put the controversy to rest, when in the landmark Red Lion case, the Supreme Court ruled that "a licensee has no constitutional right...to monopolize a...frequency of his fellow citizens." The Doctrine continued to be challenged at both local and federal levels until 1987, when the FCC, feeling the pulse of Reagan-era deregulation, once again reversed itself, and revoked its legal definition for fairness.

According to FCC spokespeople, the decision to rescind the Fairness Doctrine had occurred, in part, because broadcasters had moved into a different era technically, economically and socially. The emergence of cable as well as the UHF television frequency negated the earlier spectrum limitation argument—in fact, 1987 figures showed that over 1,300 television stations and 10,000 radio stations were now broadcasting throughout the country; they were also operating longer programming schedules. Further, this technological "growth" of spectrum space also provided added opportunities for diversified ownership, i.e., those who had been previously denied license accessibility were now given a greater chance to acquire broadcast property. Finally, some evidence had suggested that the Fairness Doctrine had actually *discouraged* programmers from airing controversial issues because of the mandate to provide opposing viewpoints. FCC officials argued that the latter problem, known as the "chilling effect," could only be remedied by removing the onus of "equal time," and instead, providing a free forum for all forms of discussion, not merely those labeled as "news" or "public affairs."

Since 1987, several unsuccessful attempts have been made to reverse the FCC's most recent decision on the matter of "fairness." They have come to

Roy Peter Clark:
Let the People Speak

"The voices in American journalism for too long have been too monotone and monochromatic, coming most often from white male authority figures. The language of journalism has the flexibility to be more inclusive if journalists will expand their reporting strategies and let the voices of the young and the poor and the old be heard. I agree here with Jay Rosen. A goal of journalism must be to improve the nature of public conversation on issues of concern, to define problems, sharpen arguments, and seek common ground. The adaptation of traditional forms (such as oral history) and the creation of new ones (edited transcripts of town meetings) will model modes of public discourse that will revitalize democratic feelings and impulses."—*Roy Peter Clark, senior scholar at The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, where he has taught writing since 1979, in his new book, "The American Conversation and the Language of Journalism."*

Anna Quindlen:
Dad's Lesson

"My dad is a management consultant and he's done some work for newspapers and he always says the first thing he does when he goes in to sit down is say: 'What is the mission of a newspaper?' And the first time he asked me I said, 'It's to bring news and information to the public.' And he said: 'Wrong. The mission of the newspaper is to make money. A newspaper that doesn't make money folds and the newspaper that folds can't bring news and information to the public.' So it's this kind of circular construct and when you get to top management you're aware of how it works because that's when the veil becomes the thinnest. Not because anyone is saying to you, get the tobacco story off page 1, but because you know how the bottom line impacts your ability to hire reporters, to send them out on certain stories, to put more people on the desk.... But the bottom line is, nobody interferes."—*Anna Quindlen, former New York Times columnist, at the 13th annual Key West Literary Seminar, January 15, 1995.*

Joyce Ravid

little or no avail, although many members of Congress have joined forces to decry what Senator Daniel Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, describes as "the FCC's willingness to ignore clear Congressional intent and disregard a standard that has served the public for forty years." Supporters of new Fairness Doctrine legislation contend that minority viewpoints will always take a back seat to more popular perspectives; as such, they must be *guaranteed* access to the airwaves. Further, the arguments of First Amendment infringement and the "chilling effect," are groundless. The Communications Act of 1934 addresses clearly the special responsibilities of broadcasters as procurers of public airwaves. As for the "chilling effect," Dr. Patricia Aufderheide, through a grant from the Donald McGannon Communication Research Center at Fordham University, conducted a study to test its veracity. In a 1990 Journal of Communication article, Aufderheide interviewed 17 broadcasters from both radio and television stations in large, medium and small markets. She asked each if he or she could provide a single example of controversial programming that would have been omitted prior to the Fairness Doctrine's demise. According to her results, 16 of those interviewed were unable to provide any evidence of a segment of controversial programming they would have been unable or unwilling to do before.

Gigi B. Sohn, Deputy Director of the Media Access Project in Washington, D.C., concurs with Aufderheide's research in a 1994 essay. Sohn asserts that "the doctrine has had virtually no day-to-day impact on the operations of broadcasters, affording significant protection at almost no cost....Elimination of the...Fairness Doctrine has resulted in an overall *decrease* in coverage of controversy....Editorials are almost non-existent."

And so the debate continues. Such strange bedfellows as Ralph Nader, Phyllis Schlafly and President Bill Clinton have banded together in favor of the reinstatement of some form of the Doctrine. Their opposition comes from equally incongruent partners (including Rush Limbaugh, The Wall Street Journal, the National Association of Religious Broadcasters, and former governor Mario Cuomo) who agree with Vice President Al Gore that the Fairness Doctrine "reflects an era when America was a rural country and the word *telecommunications* was not yet in the dictionary."

While it is true that "telecommunications" would probably not be found in a dictionary forty years ago, neither could terms such as "leveraged buyouts," "MSOs," and "political correctness." Yet these terms bear as much (if not more) consideration when discussing fairness and equitability. In short, nothing is as it was several decades ago—technologically, economically, politically or socially. If anything, this observation argues strongly for more structure and framework when defining (and enforcing) fairness and equitability in today's world.

First of all, it is important to put the popular "expanded technology equals greater access to information" myth to rest. True, the public has access to more electronic media and more channels within that media than ever before. Recent statistics show that in 1994, there were over 1,500 TV stations and almost 12,000 radio stations in the United States. In addition, TV Guide notes that 90 percent of all American households have access to cable television, 63 percent subscribe to basic cable, 28 percent get pay cable, and 79 percent have a VCR. But what is available on all these channels? Most of the already existing options feature either entertainment, sports, nostalgia or shopping. Of the 101 proposed new channels featured in a recent Broadcasting & Cable issue, most are still dedicated to those four categories (albeit with minority interests), with few "equal opportunity" political accessibility networks. In short, you'd have better luck seeking information on home repair, international sports betting or regional personal ads than a debate on tax reform. The number of available channels is not as important as the programming placed on them—a topic related directly to ownership.

One of the most alarming effects of deregulatiun in the last few years has been the relaxation of ownership rules and regulations. In 1992, radio owner-

ship limits were raised from a maximum of 12 AM/12 FM stations to 30/30. At present, the same fate seems likely for TV broadcasters. Encouraging this type of station accessibility seems only to enhance the specter of monopolistic control. Coupled with the emergence of new networks (a revolutionary concept 40 years ago), the shadow looms even larger. These networks, some of which are tied directly to the film industry—notably Fox, Warner Bros. and United Paramount—further threaten the future of independent production and distribution in television.

In the late 1940's, vertical integration in the film industry was banned because it would eliminate the independents. Special controls were needed to ensure that a single company could no longer influence both the production and exhibition of a single movie. Like the fate of the Fairness Doctrine, the prohibition against vertical integration was lifted in the late eighties during the Reagan administration. Those of us who enjoy foreign or independent films (most likely to be shown in independent theaters) have since found these opportunities fewer and further between. It takes little imagination to foresee what type of program fare might be shown on a network which also happens to be a film and television production company as well as a distribution complex. Witness, for example, Sumner Redstone and Viacom Inc.'s recent acquisition of Paramount Communications. According to Boston Globe reports, this mega-merger combines a newly formed television network with over 50,000 film and television titles from Paramount, Simon & Schuster's 300,000+ publications and Blockbuster Entertainment's 5,000 video and music stores. When added to Viacom's other properties, such as MTV, Nickelodeon, several theme parks, and a complement of owned-and-operated radio and television stations, the opportunity for outside influence seems limited, at best.

Relatedly, issues of public interest and social need should also be raised within this context. The FCC's move toward ownership deregulation has, in turn, created a plethora of leveraged buy-outs, major budget cuts in news and public affairs departments (as well as in offices of standards and practices and minority affairs), and a decided lack of true public interest programming. In addition, there is no question that the current Congress is considering monumental funding cuts in public broadcasting—perhaps the last bastion of non-commercial radio and television—and station managers will either be forced to raise more income themselves (to make up the difference) or risk program, or even station, loss. I'm not sure how many viewers can tolerate more pledge weeks or auctions, but my guess is not very many. Thus, one of PBS's alternatives would be to "go commercial," a move that would be hard to reconcile with the original goals and objectives of public broadcasting. It might also cause America's free press image to plummet even further in the minds of other Western democracies where public television, fairness and regulation are very evident in programming and policy-making.

With these concerns in mind, it seems difficult in a democratic society not to argue for some type of formalized structure for fairness in the electronic media. While it is true that the world is a very different place than that reflected in the 1949 Fairness Doctrine, it can also be said that without some mandate for responsibility to the public, it is easy to slip into an ethical vacuum. The dissolution of the NAB Code shortly after the FCC's move toward deregulation exemplifies this point clearly. One cannot exist for very long, either personally or professionally, without some code of morals and standards. Practically speaking, most industry executives would acknowledge that the Fairness Doctrine had little impact on programmers' daily lives. However, its presence served as a symbolic safeguard for public interest concerns. Fairness might need to be redefined, revised and recodified as radio and television enter into the next century; but it should not be removed from formal discussion.■

Alvin Shuster:
So Wonderful, So Difficult

"I don't want to sound immodest, but the things I did as a foreign correspondent are illustrative of why being a correspondent is so attractive, so appealing, so wonderful and so difficult. Take the variety of things that I covered. One minute I was a war correspondent in Vietnam, the next minute I was covering the wedding of Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis. One minute I was trying to track down Carlos the terrorist in Algeria and being carried to my flight by a couple of hefty customs agents, and the next minute I was dressed in top hat and tails to view the opening day at Ascot.

"One minute I went to Prague for two weeks and stayed seven months because of the Soviet invasion, and the next minute I was in Jerusalem interviewing the hostages freed in the raid in Entebbe.

"That mix of stories—some momentous, some less so—are a reflection of what being a foreign correspondent is all about."—*Alvin Shuster, on retiring as Foreign Editor of The Los Angeles Times.*

Talk Radio: Finding a Different Public

By Christopher Lydon

It feels like a different democracy out here in talk radio territory. I am a rookie in the region, an old hand trying to learn a new game, but I am in love with the differences. Talk radio can be different, first, from the towel-snapping adolescent "guy" gags, the yahoo frenzy that is supposed to go with the medium. And it's different as well from the dyspepsia and despair, the pretentiousness and disconnection that have come to be standard fare in print journalism.

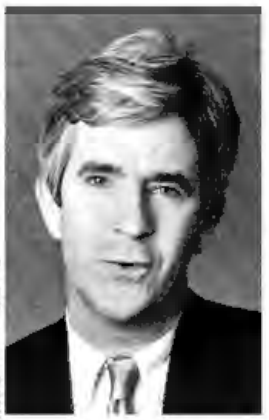
We are finding a different place, a different psychology, a different politics. I would call it "liberated" more than "liberal," and "confident" more than "conservative." The old labels seldom come up, and politics, in any event, runs well behind workplace economics and spirituality among the favorite topics of conversation. The audience is hipper than I am to the new media, and it's old-fashioned literate at the same time. Musical subjects, from Mahler to the Rolling Stones, make the phones ring. Our talk-show territory, in short, is like nothing in the world so much as my lifelong notion of Boston as a peculiarly gabby, open, autodidactic, Emersonian capital of self-improvement and moderately accomplished chatter. All things considered, as they say in public radio, it's a happy place.

"The Connection" was born on Labor Day, 1994 on WBUR, which is both the dominant NPR voice in New England and the most popular drive-time news source in Boston. Our first hour worked off former US Labor Secretary John Dunlop and his commission report to President Clinton on the expanding peonage in the American work force. In the second hour we talked with the author Padraig O'Malley in Boston and with Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness in Belfast about the Irish Republican Army's breakthrough ceasefire. From our first minutes on the air, we had more callers than we could get into the conversation. We continue to get more women callers than I hear on talk radio elsewhere, and more wit than at many coffee shops or your run-of-the-season dinner party.

"The Connection" is broadcast live from 10 a.m. till noon Monday through Friday, and gets "rolled over" on tape for a different audience between 8 and 10 p.m. every evening. Our mid-morning call-in hours do not mean what a sour-grapes editorialist at The Boston Globe tried to suggest, that the people heard on daytime talk radio tend to be unemployable. On the contrary, we get calls from people who listen in their offices, and others who work at home; from students and salesmen in their cars; from full-time moms and high school teachers on a break.

We have not found a subject so narrow that there isn't a quick quorum on the phone line to chew it over. We have had spirited hours on Vampirism, on the Age of the Universe and on the music of Ornette Coleman. The poet Robert Pinsky read from his new translation of Dante's "Inferno," and John Updike read from "The Afterlife," his new collection of stories. We have summoned listeners' fantasies about the Perfect Crime and, on another day, their experiences of the Sublime. When the subject is the Balkan war, we are buried in calls with Serbo-Croatian accents. But then when the exotic travel buff Colin Thubrun came to talk about Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and his book about "The Lost Heart of Asia," it seemed that all our audience had been to Central Asia and knew Samarkand almost as well as they know Harvard Square. Robert Levin, the piano virtuoso who improvises in the Mozart mode, gave us a marvelous hour on the "unfinished Mozart," including the deathbed "Requiem" that Levin had dared to complete. He precipitated a shower of knowledgeable calls. "This is ridiculous," Levin commented on his way out of the studio. "I think if you said: 'the subject is glucose,' people would call up and talk about glucose." We haven't tried glucose yet, but he may be right.

"The Connection" was launched in a high season of Massachusetts politics. Mitt Romney was taking a hard run at Senator Ted Kennedy. Governor William Weld, on his way into a national campaign perhaps, was consolidating his four-year devastation of the State House Democrats and of his challenger



Bill O'Connell for WGBH

Christopher Lydon covered politics for The Boston Globe in the 1960's and for The New York Times Washington Bureau in the 1970's. For nearly 15 years he was the host of "The Ten O'Clock News" on WGBH, public television in Boston.

Mark Roosevelt. Each of the principals took "The Connection" microphones for an hour or more. In the District Attorney's race, we hosted a debate between the anomalous black Republican appointee, Ralph Martin, and his hapless challenger, old-boy Jerry Malone. We also did the obligatory hour on each of the many Massachusetts ballot questions, from Rent Control to the Graduated Income Tax. The shock to me was discovering that politics is no longer the meat and potatoes, the steak and whiskey of Massachusetts conversation; it is no longer what high-school football is said to be in Texas: the year-round center of grown-up talk. Almost anything but politics gets more vibrant voices on the phone line. Harvey Cox, the theologian, for example, discovering the fire of Pentecostal Christianity in this country; or his Harvard Divinity School colleague Diana Eck relating her own confrontation with Buddhist spirituality in India.

One of our first monster crushes of calls engaged MIT's Frank Sulloway on his theory that birth order—at the head or tail of the family litter—is destiny. Alexander Theroux declaimed from his book on "The Primary Colors," and far from putting people off with his amazing erudition, he got a chance on talk radio to elicit callers' own sometimes intimate experience of color—the transformation of mood, as one woman explained, that came with donning a red dress! Jill Conway, the first female president of Smith College, came to talk about her memoir of graduate school, "True North," but immediately callers to "The Connection" made it a counseling session for women in their thirties straining to reconcile professional and family vocations.

Local life apart from politics can provoke passionate and incisive calls—on the threat of teachers' strikes, for example, in Greater Boston schools this winter. We opened a gushing vein of memory when we asked for thoughts on redesigning Government Center Plaza, the wind-chilled void at the core of Boston's downtown renewal in the 1960s. We did an hour last fall on the "code of silence" in the Charlestown neighborhood that has protected drug dealing and murder from prosecution. The mother of a victim upstaged all the commentators with a raging call we had not expected, detailing how her son had been shot in front of 37 witnesses, then dragged out of a barroom to die on the street so as to protect the liquor license on the premises. The murderer had never been charged, the mother said, but she had had the satisfaction of spitting in his face!

We do not traffic in Hillary Clinton jokes, or bait Rush Limbaugh's "mainstreamliberalpress,"—not as much as we should perhaps. If there is a version of the infamous talk-show anger in our territory, so far from the Beltway, it shows up on work subjects. I'd heard the commonplace that the biggest single segment of the "new jobs" of the Nineties had been filled by Temp agencies. But it was raw voices on the phone that drove home the humiliation, the hurt, the need that have blossomed in this new economy. I am thinking of the secretary who cried that the temp agency took 40 percent of her pay and gave her no health benefits, and paid her nothing when an office manager decided he didn't need her, or didn't like her looks. I am thinking of the university teacher who called to say she'd been re-engineered after 16 years and six books to a "permanent temporary" standing and a salary of $4500 per semester, with no benefits. A man's voice I won't forget said, "we are slaves in denial." Studs Terkel's classic book "Working," on the job life of Americans, was born on a version of talk radio, which may be the ideal medium for our serial sequel, "Un-working," on the post-industrial job market.

But even on work issues, anger is not the prevailing tone in our talk-show territory—much less despair. We keep reading about the dangerously seething populism out there in radio America, but I am not *hearing* it on the phone lines. Talk radio is not a handwringers' medium—any more than the classic New England town meeting ever was. Not to confuse the two, or equate them; but come to think of it, a certain boisterous but constructive style of argument may carry over, on "The Connection" anyway, from town hall to the airwaves.

What we don't hear on talk radio is the tone of learned lament that is so common and so tiresome in print journalism—all the more so when the lament is about talk radio. My epiphany on this point came in an interview on "The Connection" with the literary critic Sven Birkerts about his book, "The Gutenberg Elegies." Subtitled "The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age," Birkerts' book is his self-consciously Luddite, resolutely pessimistic farewell to civilization as we've known it. It bids farewell to solitude and deep reading, farewell to used-book stores, farewell to the subtlety and inwardness of, say, Henry James. How can any of those old treasures survive, Birkerts asked piteously, in a world where the rushing ocean of electronic entertainment is, on the darkest night of any man's soul, just a keystroke away?

Well, the answers came readily from listeners and callers to "The Connection." First: lighten up and get a grip, Mr. Birkerts. Radio didn't destroy books, and movies didn't defeat radio. Television didn't kill movies, and the Internet won't wreck civilization. It might in truth promote reading and has already done wonders for letter writing. Callers sensed that Birkerts' argument was driven not just by nostalgia but by fear, and they responded with common sense: the interactive electronic technologies, explained Bernie from Newton, are the natural enemy not of books but of television! Couch potatoes, beware! But readers, relax! Hadn't Birkerts discovered that we can all do several things at once—listening to the radio, talking on the telephone, washing dishes, as several callers seemed to be doing? And for all the joys of deep reading, what about the pleasures of grazing, electronically and otherwise? Partly to tease Birkerts, I reminded our listeners that if the phone lines were busy they could also check in by e-mail, another of those demonic novelties. Scores of messages flooded in, many from self-styled "deep readers," and many as well-crafted as Birkerts' book. Doug in Waltham

prescribed cultural bifocals: "The Net is the best thing since sliced bread for 'telegrams,'" he observed, "but I still write real letters on fine crunchy watermarked paper when I want to convey a professional impression....Please pass this telegram on to your author with my comment that it cost me less than three cents to send and was far easier than pen and ink...and suggest that he revisit the scene in five years to see what's become of it." Lisa from Cyberspace assured Birkerts that the book is not in danger, if only because "you can't curl up with your PC....New media don't replace, they augment; and a defensive attitude toward those new media doesn't protect the old media, it hurts them. Older technologies wither and die when we cease to see them anew, and new technologies provide a valuable chance to do that crucial re-envisioning." I was proud of our audience, and determined from that moment to have done with the Victorian hysteria about the new machinery, and catch up with the early adaptors.

Time magazine fretted in a cover story this winter that talk shows and the electronic media may be undermining the Founding Fathers' representative democracy—by feeding back too much public opinion too quickly. On the same principle, I suppose, the Founders might say that ultrasound pictures tell us more than we ought to know about our babies in embryo. The real answer, I'd argue, is that the Founders on a return visit might be as perplexed as any of us about the electronics of 21st Century democracy; but they would hear in the talk radio audiences the spirit of openness and opportunity, the robust irreverence, the unregulated and sometimes rowdy give-and-take that they, and we, deem the essential American sound. And then they'd turn to Ben Franklin, who'd explain just how it all works.■

Another Link With Readers

By Peter Calamai

On February 24, 1993, Brian Mulroney, the Prime Minister of Canada, announced his resignation. Within hours, The Ottawa Citizen had jumped into an interactive electronic link with readers that continues to expand.

The link gives the newspaper new ways to solicit reader feedback, shortens the lag between receipt and printing of letters and opinion articles, expands information gathering by reporters and creates a new category of news.

The same interactive link, however, has also generated some major managerial headaches and proved disappointing as an agent of public journalism.

When it all began, two years ago, I was simply looking for a quick way to get letters commenting on the career of Prime Minister Mulroney. The idea of accepting letters to the editor by E-mail had been floating around for several months, since the launch in Ottawa of the National Capital Free-Net (NCF).

Like freenets elsewhere, the NCF is a no-charge local electronic bulletin board open to anyone with a computer and a modem and providing restricted access to the Internet. The Ottawa Citizen was present on NCF from the beginning but the presence was largely passive—entertainment and sports calendars adapted from the paper, regurgitation of capsule movie reviews, telephone listings for key staffers and a quick crib about local government. Our high-tech writer acted as the sysop and tried to answer questions from the several thousand registered NCF users.

Then Brian Mulroney resigned. I challenged the NCF boss:

"Get me a sign-on announcement in the next 20 minutes that we're accepting letters about Mulroney's legacy and I'll make E-mail letters a permanent feature for The Citizen."

He did and we received 15 letters electronically within a few hours. E-Mail letters have been a permanent feature ever since, providing somewhere between 10-15 percent of the 200+ letters to the editor we receive weekly. And the involvement with the NCF (and through it, the Internet) continued to expand. It now also encompasses:

- Free-Net addresses for 30 reporters and editors, connecting them electronically to the 34,000 registered NCF users locally and to millions of Internet users worldwide.
- Regular submissions via Free-Net for features such as our consumer action line columnist and weekday high school page.
- In-paper solicitations for submissions via Free-Net on special projects, like reader questions for candidates during local elections or D-Day memories for anniversary coverage.

Peter Calamai is Editorial Page Editor of The Ottawa Citizen. He is a 1982-83 Southam Fellow, the Canadian counterpart to a Nieman Fellow. His E-mail address is ac583@freenet.carleton.ca.

• An active feedback area in The Citizen Free-Net menu, moderated by a newsroom copy editor who prods departments elsewhere in the paper for answers to user inquiries.

Being plugged into NCF and the Internet has also brought rapid development of a new class of news—articles about the potential and pitfalls of this brave new world. In a front-page article Feb. 19, for instance, The Citizen reported on a local resident who wound up spending three weeks in jail and losing his job after he posted an inquiry about antique firearms to an Internet discussion group, mentioning a gun show in Syracuse. (The man was on parole from a drug conviction and police jumped to the conclusion that he had left Canada because of the Syracuse mention, thus violating his parole conditions. He hadn't but by the time the confusion was cleared up, he'd lost his job.)

But our major use of Free-Net is to improve communication with readers. In this regard, the technology can be both a blessing and a curse.

On the blessing side, this new form of communication undoubtedly appeals to some local residents who haven't been regular contributors to our letters columns or op-ed page. They like the ease of typing comments and then seeing them fly off the screen, rather than having the bother of faxing or mailing letters. The freshness of these voices initially meant they were probably overrepresented in the letters that got into print (it didn't hurt, either, that these letters didn't need to be retyped).

Yet while the number of registered NCF users has continued to balloon (100 newcomers a day), the same names now keep reappearing among E-mail letter-writers and the number of usable contributions each week hasn't changed appreciably over the past six months. I suspect the novelty is wearing off.

There's also the difficulty of capturing in print the "thread" concept that adds excitement to electronic communication—the higgledy-piggledy piling up of comments upon comments, often within no more than an hour. The letters section on The Citizen's Free-Net menu works the same way—letters are posted by the sender on the open list where everyone can read them, and comment, long before they get into print. (We guard privacy by letting the writers send phone numbers for letter verification to a private E-mail account.) We've published a few of the resulting threads but they haven't been as exciting in print.

The curse is that your electronic address can be "spammed"—flooded by junk messages from across the continent. For a short time we provided a direct Internet address that shot submissions right into the letters portion of The Citizen's NCF menu. We got Zionist propaganda daily from a zealot in Florida, fundamentalist religious diatribe from the U.S. Mid-West and so on. This junk angered contributors who were local or at least had gone to the trouble of connecting with NCF and first reading the discussion from other letter writers. So we pulled that plug.

There's also an unfulfilled potential for better public journalism in these electronic links. We made one stab at it and hope to make another when we figure out where we went wrong. The premise was to use the convenience and immediacy of the NCF connection to extend the deliberative debate that's a regular full-page feature in our Sunday paper.

This feature, known as Editorial Forum, sees three or four contributors providing different viewpoints each week on a topic that we pose as a pointed question. A list of reference materials, print and electronic, is also included. Our plan was to post the text of these submissions by Wednesday each week, invite reader comment and either incorporate that comment on the page Sunday or in follow-up letters the next day.

It didn't work. People were interested in commenting on the topics we selected; but they largely didn't bother to read the submissions first—or didn't read them carefully. Readers responding later to the printed newspaper made far more thoughtful contributions.

What was the problem? Partly, it's the low quality of public debate on the Internet generally. Check into many discussion groups and you'll find rumors posted as fact and exchanges at the intellectual level of a phone-in show.

More importantly, this poor response reflects a much wider and more troubling misconception in our society about what thinking actually is. Thinking is not processing information, but perception, the developing and refining of ideas rather than the sheer gathering of data.

So it's not the potential of the technology that will determine the shape of the Knowledge Society—that simply helps us gather more information more easily. It is our own existing wants and desires that really matter. So if we now have shaped a world, or a nation, or a community that is intellectually flabby and morally bereft, then that's the sort of Knowledge Society we're likely to wind up with as well, despite all the data flooding in via the Internet, or National Capital Free-Net.

Edward de Bono, the father of lateral thinking, said it better some time ago:

"Many people believe that if you collect enough information it will do your thinking for you and that the analysis of information leads to ideas. Both are wrong."

It's simple enough to link electronically with your readers. For newspapers, the real challenge is to use these new electronic links to confront the intellectual flabbiness that too often passes for thinking in North American society. ■

Newspaper Profits: A Delicate Balance

By James C. Lessersohn

When I entered the newspaper business some sixteen years ago, a wise old Boston Globe executive took me aside and said, "Newspaper economics are simple. Circulation revenue covers the cost of newsprint. Advertising pays for everything else and delivers the profits."

Could it really be that simple? The numbers checked out. Circulation accounted for about 25 percent of The Globe's revenue; newsprint expense was virtually the same amount. Besides, when the price of the newspaper went up, the notice to the readers almost always began, "Because of the rising cost of newsprint..."

Somewhat cautiously, I decided to accept the rule of thumb. For years the relationship held up. As the 1990's approached, however, strange things started to happen.

The trouble began with advertising. Seeking economy and flexibility, many retailers started shifting ad dollars to direct mail. When newspapers lowered their pre-printed insert rates to combat the direct mail threat, other retailers were inadvertently encouraged to abandon run-of-paper advertising in favor of less costly pre-prints. Demands for rate concessions came next. Newspaper rates became negotiable, and few advertisers seemed interested in negotiating prices up.

Weaknesses in retail advertising were largely hidden by exploding classified volumes until the stock market crash of 1987. As the nation slid into recession, real estate, help wanted and automotive advertising sank with the economy. In 1991, total United States newspaper advertising revenue fell 6 percent, its first significant decline since 1961.

With advertising in what felt like a free fall, newspapers looked to readers for relief. Industry leaders took to calling the daily newspaper an outrageous "bargain" in speeches to each other. The implication was obvious: readers should pay more to offset advertising declines and restore the industry's rightful 20+ percent profit margins. After all, hadn't the cable industry already trained people to pay $25 a month for what used to be free TV?

Before the price tolerance of readers could really be tested, profit relief came from an unexpected source: newsprint prices. Tumbling advertising volumes led to a supply glut, which drove paper prices down 25 percent after 1987. By 1994, newsprint prices had fallen to levels not seen since 1980.

The old rule of thumb looked a little sore, to say the least. In 1994, circulation still accounted for roughly one of every four revenue dollars, but newsprint chewed up only about 15 percent of revenue at most newspapers. With advertising volumes recovering faster than rates, many publishers were grateful that circulation revenue not only covered expense, but also compensated partly for the newspaper's eroded ad pricing power.

This compensation didn't last long. Modest increases in advertising volume quickly ended the newsprint glut. Determined to make up for lost time, papermakers entered 1995 announcing one price increase after another. By June, newsprint prices will reach all-time highs, 40 percent above 1994 levels—enough to knock about six points off a typical daily's operating profit margin.

Under pressure to reverse this deteriorating profitability, publishers undoubtedly feel tempted to dust off their "newspapers are underpriced" speeches as a prelude to sizable price increases. Subscriptions to most American newspapers cost less than $10 a month. There is certainly room for higher prices, but how much higher given newspapers' already documented problems maintaining household penetration?

Price increases frequently cause a 3-to-5 percent drop in circulation. Time brings back most buyers (all too often with the help of a discount subscription offer), but no publisher wants to be the first to discover the penetration level that marks the point of no return for advertising.

A newspaper that prices too many readers out of its audience can simultaneously lose large chunks of its advertising base, its social impact and its profitability.

With circulation prices and advertising rates constrained by competition, publishers are employing a wide variety of non-price strategies to cope with rising newsprint costs. Publishers are challenging their management teams to:

- Develop advertising programs, both print and electronic, that reach non-subscribers as well as newspaper readers. These programs are designed to compete head-on with direct mail, niche classified publications and emerging electronic information services.
- Cut costs. Every aspect of the newspaper is being scrutinized for opportunities to streamline operations. Many editors are already clashing with their publishers over staffing and space budgets. They can rest assured that their colleagues on the business side are facing no less pressure.
- Find a sustainable profit margin. If competitive pressures recede, profit margins will take care of themselves. But publishers know that aggressive price increases can become counter-productive and that cost-cutting eventually approaches a practical limit. At this unpleasant point, margin reductions become unavoidable if newspapers are to maintain the circulation and advertising volumes necessary to cover their high fixed costs.

Of course, all this turmoil does have one happy aspect. As paper prices rise and market reality puts a lid on circulation prices, the time may be approaching when newspaper novices can again be taught that circulation revenue covers newsprint expense and that advertising provides everything else—including, we trust, a profit. ■

James C. Lessersohn is Managing Director, Corporate Planning, for The New York Times Company.

Coming to Terms With Your Fear

FROM DAVID BRAUCHLI
DATE 22-JAN-95
SUBJECT GROZNY'S BURNING

I left Grozny yesterday. I'm sitting in a Moscow hotel, having showered (extensively) and shaved, reflecting on my time in Grozny. I had more close encounters in the last three days than I care to recall. I think when you realize you're a short-timer, you become more aware of your own mortality. I got caught by a tank, partly because I was stupid, but probably more because I was curious and saw a scene that would have yielded the most dramatic pictures I would have shot in Grozny. That stands out as the closest to death I've come in a long time. It also brings out the most confused emotions in a photographer, to stop and help, shoot or to keep on going because of the safety factor.

Two days ago I was headed out the door without my cameras. I figured I was going to file and come back, when a little fairy said to me, never go anywhere without your cameras, you never know what you may see. I grabbed a couple of video tapes, stuffed them into my belt pouch, and my gear. It took maybe an extra twenty seconds to grab all the stuff and head out to the car.

By this time the artillery, rockets, bombs were coming in thick and fast, but mostly, it sounded like, around the center of town. The day before a car had been shot up near the bus station, near our house and a photographer who had gotten out of his car immediately afterwards to shoot pictures had taken a round and a piece of shrapnel had gone into his small intestine. He was in Nazran where they had operated on him. I said to our driver Said, as we drove by the destroyed car, "I don't like the bus station" and he concurred. We sped off down the road when there was a loud bang fairly close by. I said, "must be the bus station "and he agreed again.

David Brauchli, AP Wide World Photos

Five bodies, a jeep, but no wallet

We rounded a corner and there was a scene of horror in front of us (yet, every photographer's dream). Two cars had been shot up, one Lada Niva jeep, one Moskovich. There were four people lying on their backs, apparently dead, two crawling for cover, both badly wounded. The dust was just settling. "Jesus," I said to Said, "stop the car, we have to help." I didn't know what to do. I wanted to help these people, get them out of there and to a hospital. I wanted to take pictures; it is so rare when you get a chance like this, immediately after an attack, when the pain and shock are etched on the faces of the dead and wounded, where the scene is so vivid and real, the pictures would take themselves. But underneath my concern and eagerness was a wariness—something wasn't right and I didn't know what.

Photographer David Brauchli, a Syracuse University graduate, has covered much of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as well as South Africa, Somalia and the Middle East. While shooting pictures in Sarajevo in 1992, he was wounded and a colleague was killed. David was stoned in Somalia and beaten up by white extremists in Bophuthatswana. On his latest assignment he kept a diary of his experiences covering the siege of Grozny in Chechnya for The Associated Press and Sygma. He sent the diary by E-mail to friends and family, including his brother Marcus, Nieman Fellow 1992, and sister-in-law, Maggie Farley. Here is the entry for his last day there.

I took two steps toward the wounded and then opted for cover behind the Lada jeep. I wanted to see what was up. I snapped three quick frames of the entire situation, the jeep, its radiator smoking, the dead and wounded on the ground, the earth on the road and the factories smoking in the background. I was about to emerge from my position when the screech of a tank round and the blast of the concussion took out a small hillock to my left. I ran the opposite direction and hit the deck, next to a Chechen fighter in a snow suit. We were hiding behind a small cement post. Unfortunately I was wearing black, black coat, black trousers, and stood out like a sore thumb on the snow-covered landscape. I fumbled into my pouch for a tape and ripped off the plastic covering. I put it into my video camera. I couldn't make stills, I couldn't get position, but I could shoot the scene for TV. Another round came in, faster, closer, maybe thirty seconds after the first one. I ate snow and dirt with the Chechen. It's a tank, I thought, and he's got a bead on us. I started to babble to the fighter, I told him I really wanted to take these pictures, I wanted to help these people, but I didn't want to lose my own life doing it. He nodded, knowingly. Another round, closer.

I'd had it, I got up and ran, fast and hard to a garbage dump 50 meters away. I dove for cover and discovered three other civilians also cowering there. The tank shifted his target and put a round directly behind where we were, maybe 15 meters away. These bastards, I thought, have a good pair of binoculars and have got a good sight on us. The fighter I was lying with in the snow came over and dove for cover as well. We stayed huddled in the ditch for 20 minutes as shell after shell impacted. The tanker knew we were around, but he couldn't see us because of the snow and because we were in a depression. Still, if he managed to land a round on the back side of the depression, the concussion would kill us all.

I started to rue my decision to get out of the car and try to make pictures. Stupid, selfish, I thought, I should have carried on. That would have been selfish as well. WHAM! Another round. I had left the video camera on to capture the noise, it is truly amazing noise, the rush of a round and the impact. If you live, you're amazed, if you die, well, I don't know. I focused on the guys I was cowering with, I figured that would be better than focusing on the sky and would take my mind off my current situation. Still, as I looked through the camera, I thought, Christ, he can stay there all day, he probably has night vision, and we'll all freeze to death before he gets bored. But why would he want to kill civilians? Probably for the same reason the jets were bombing the neighborhoods. Then, Whoosh! A jet came over, low and loud. He circled and came back. At this point I was truly terrified. The tank surely had communications with the jet and he was looking for us so he could missile or bomb us. A most unpleasant ending to a pretty pleasant life. I was getting pretty upset.

Then I noticed my wallet and digital diary were missing. Now I was really upset. I couldn't lose those! All my credit cards, my money, my phone numbers, my expenses, my receipts. Jesus, I put them in the same place as the god damn tapes, jerk. I forgot about the tank, I forgot about the jet, I started to look for my stuff. Isn't that weird? It wasn't where we were lying, it must have fallen out as I ran for cover. There was an instinct pulling me back to find my stuff. Fortunately my head took over and said, Hey, jerk! stay where you are, this is serious. I took that advice, but I was bugged.

The jet came back. We all cowered. It left in a roar over downtown. Maybe it wasn't looking for us. I sure hoped so. The tank hadn't taken a shot in about three minutes and we were getting antsy. We all wanted to live and we all wanted to leave. One fighter in a snow suit jumped up and raced away. The jet came back. Rat-a-tat-a-tat went his machine gun at the plane. BOOM ! went the tank in reply. Jerk, I thought, he gave our position away. Sure enough more rounds followed on the heels of the first one and we ate dirt for another five minutes.

Then, silence. No booms, no jets, no whizzes. We could hear the sound of cars as they drove slowly up to the destroyed jeep and Moskivich and then as they speeded up and fled, away from the scene and possible destruction. I counted perhaps five cars and concluded it was safe to get out of there. I popped my head up to take a view of the situation. There was the Independent Televison News crew I had handed my tape to. They had their tripod out and were doing a shot when the tank tried to nail them. I've never seen four guys in helmets, flak vests and gear get into a car so fast and speed off. Frantically I waved for them to stop and get me , almost crying with fear. They pulled alongside and I dove in. I slammed the door shut and said "Thanks, you guys have just saved my life." I meant it. Then I gave them my tape.

Said was waiting down the road. Behind us, on the road, were the two civilians I was lying in the ditch with. I told Said to stop, reverse and pick 'em up. They leaped into the car and we sped off. At the reservoir there was a huge crowd. Someone who had had more guts than I picked up one of the wounded guys. They were putting a tourniquet around his leg, but he was already going waxy. I bullied my way through the crowd, made five frames, couldn't handle it and left.

We sped out of town to the office where I filed one picture. I think it's the grimmest picture I shot of the war so far, five bodies and a jeep. It was the most personal assault I felt during the war. Ugh. If I had had my stuff with me, I would have spent the night in Goiti. But I wanted to find my wallet and diary. I knew where they were. If the tank wasn't still positioned there, it would be possible to find them. At dusk I left the office to go back to Grozny and hopefully to find my wallet.

That night I slept uneasily. I had a runny nose and every time I managed to drop off I dreamed about being huddled in the ditch and losing my wallet. I contemplated going for a walk to see if I could find it. Absurd, of course, considering the amount of lead flying around outside. When we did leave the next morning, we drove by where the attack had occurred, but it had snowed and it was impossible to look for anything. Bummer. The wallet really was gone.■

Press Suppression in Indonesia

By Murray Seeger

The government of Indonesia, long known for its controls on foreign correspondents trying to visit the country, last summer closed three weekly magazines, issued official warnings against three other publications and placed three more "under watch." Their offenses included reporting on human rights demonstrations in East Timor, the former Portuguese colony that has been a scene of unrest for several years.

Tempo, the country's most popular magazine, was closed for endangering national security. The magazine, founded in 1973, reported a fight within the cabinet over the potential cost of refitting former East German Navy ships purchased by the government. Tempo said the minister of industry and technology sought $1 billion and was sternly opposed by the Finance Minister who felt a poor country like Indonesia could better spend the money elsewhere.

To soften the international impact of these actions, Indonesia found support immediately north in tiny Singapore, another country that keeps its media under close control. The two countries in July agreed to make a joint effort to combat "superficial" reporting on their internal affairs by foreign journalists.

The Straits Times of Singapore prints an edition that is sent for sale in Indonesia after removing any articles or pictures that might offend the government of President Suharto.

"The fact that Tempo and other print media are at the mercy of the government through its licensing system is symptomatic of much wider and deeper problems Indonesia faces," one journalist commented. "It reflects a lack of openness, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and freedom for individuals to better themselves....Economic success should have led to more political openness. In Indonesia's case it has not. Hopefully, this is only a temporary phenomenon."

Indonesian journalists believe Suharto ordered the closing of Tempo after B.J. Habibie, the industry minister, complained about its coverage of the cabinet dispute. The editor of Tempo, Goenawan Mohamed, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, is fighting through a court suit to restore the magazine.

He has gained support among other Indonesian journalists who formed the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) in opposition to the government-sponsored Union of Indonesian Journalists (PWI). Journalists who signed petitions in support of Tempo were threatened by the government that their publications might also be shut down.

To further weaken opposition, the government reissued the publication license formerly held by Tempo to Bob Hasan, a prominent businessman with close ties to Suharto. He started a new magazine called Gatra using the same format and style of Tempo. The government contends that Gatra is the new Tempo, but observers contend the magazine has lost its spirit as personified by Goenawan Mohamed.

The 1994 government crackdown ended almost two years of relative press freedom. In November 1992, the international press reported government troops killed demonstrators in East Timor. Indonesian journalists followed suit with careful reports on human rights abuses in East Timor.

Through 1993, the military and the official Ministry of Information applied increasing pressure against reporting from East Timor with the climax last summer. In addition to Tempo, the news weeklies Editor and DeTik were accused of "ignorance of press ethics" and closed.

A month later, at the end of July, the English-language Jakarta Post, the magazine Sinar and legal journal Forum Keadilan, were officially warned because of their reporting on East Timor, and Indonesia Business Weekly and two dailies, Kompas and Sinar Pagi, were placed "under watch."■

Murderers of Journalists Escaping Justice

"It is an outrage to see how crimes against journalists pile up in the courts, while those responsible for these criminal acts remain beyond the reach of justice. And it is alarming that one of the first consequences of this impunity is citizen frustration and, with it, a general loss of confidence in the authorities, the law and the courts.

"This curse has reached dramatic proportions in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, the three countries with the highest levels of crime against journalists. In these three countries, the number of such cases that go to court is almost nil. And when it does happen, judges, witnesses and lawyers often become new victims of the criminal aggressors.

"Putting the brakes on impunity is one of the major challenges facing free journalism in the Americas."—Eduardo Ulibarri of La Nacion, San José, Costa Rica when reporting to the Inter American Press Association last October 17 that 144 journalists had been murdered in the Western Hemisphere in the last six years. He was a 1988 Nieman Fellow."■

Shu—A Paradox of Chinese Journalism

By Judy Polumbaum

My favorite journalist is a citizen of the People's Republic of China, an idealist, a crusader and a true investigative reporter, the finest I've encountered in 15 years of studying mainland Chinese journalism. I believe he is worthy of acclaim and emulation, but I won't use his real name for fear that my praise might get him in trouble.

Not that there's anything officially wrong with his attitudes or activities. By government standards, he possesses stellar credentials as a longtime Communist Party member whose patriotism is beyond question. Nobody can dispute that he is a man of the people and a genuine practitioner of what Chairman Mao called the "mass line," who listens to and writes about ordinary folks.

But not everyone with influence in China is ready to accept the sort of commitment to truth, justice, and plain old dogged reporting that my favorite journalist represents. Thus, for the time being, I'll call him Mr. Shu.

Mr. Shu is the chief provincial correspondent for a prominent national newspaper in Beijing. A few years ago, he showed his mettle by going after a petty tyrant with the only weapons at his disposal: a sense of outrage, a willingness to expend shoe leather and a pair of fine-tuned ears. In the process of gathering information on a figure I'll call Old Tu, the much-feared manager of a government foodstuffs company, Shu wandered the streets of an unfamiliar city for several months. He found the fortress-like home Old Tu had built for himself, a building surrounded by high walls, with guard dogs at the gate. He followed people onto and off public buses, eavesdropping on conversations about the latest beatings administered by Old Tu or his henchmen. He lingered on the sidewalks on hot summer evenings as grandmothers rocked cranky grandchildren to sleep to warnings of the fate that lay in store for babies who didn't stop crying. This wasn't like other places, where wolves or tigers or bears would come eat you up if you were naughty: in this city, it was said, Old Tu would come and get you.

I first learned about the investigation of this petty despot in a magazine I picked up while visiting China, and I knew almost immediately that Mr. Shu was the intrepid reporter I didn't even realize I'd been waiting years to meet. Shu had been alerted to Old Tu's doings by one of Tu's victims, a man who had suffered a brutal beating and been refused medical treatment. Finding local authorities unresponsive, this man had turned to the news media—whereupon he was thrown in jail at Tu's behest. Meanwhile, Shu and several colleagues pursuing the story went on to substantiate what local people already knew: that Old Tu had used official privileges and public property to elevate and enrich himself, while retaliating, often with brutality, against those who displeased or criticized him. Their work resulted in Old Tu's arrest as well as the release of the long-suffering informant.

Reading the magazine article, which had been reprinted from a newspaper in south China, I was struck by the timing of the exposé. The journalistic spadework had taken place from spring to autumn of 1991, just two years after the crackdown on the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in mid-1989, amid an atmosphere of political caution that made investigative reporting in China more difficult than ever. Indeed, the reporters' findings initially had been disclosed in confidential reports with limited circulation rather than in the general press. But the fact that these individuals had pursued the story at all reflected a rare spirit of journalistic enterprise.

I was struck even more by the role of Shu, the evident activist in a group of six reporters from four news organizations. Shu's age was stated as 58, which surprised me, perhaps because I automatically assumed that any Chinese journalist with the audacity and energy to go after corrupt officials was likely to be young. The account indicated that Shu possessed unusual courage and integrity. He'd been tailed, threatened and offered a large bribe to abandon the

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story, which he had rejected even as corruption was becoming endemic among journalists. He had prevailed over the intimidation and stuck with the story, redoubling his efforts after a cursory official inquiry determined that Old Tu merely needed some "criticism and education."

In short, the magazine article provided enough information about Shu to make me certain I had to meet him.

This was in the 1990's in China, where locating a stranger can be difficult, and convincing him to talk to you even harder, especially if you are a foreigner. I turned to a friend in Beijing whose husband had recently retired from the newspaper that employs Shu. After work hours, she visited a neighbor in charge of bureau correspondents, who contacted Shu on my behalf. Since I was a foreigner, my friend also cleared my request through the newspaper's liaison office. She obtained Shu's home and work telephone numbers for me, and told me everything was set. I made plans to visit the provincial capital where Shu was based. Pressed for time, I would take an overnight train from Beijing, stay away just two days and one night, and return to Beijing by another overnight train.

Once I had my outbound ticket, I telephoned Shu's home. It was Sunday morning; I'd be arriving Monday morning. Shu was insistent on meeting me at the station, and wanted to know the train and carriage number; if I didn't find him on the platform when I disembarked, I should stay put, he said. He asked me to describe some identifying characteristics, so I told him to look for a foreigner of medium height with curly hair and glasses. He said he wore glasses, too.

Lao Shu—Old Shu, as I call him—wears very thick glasses, it turns out. By U.S. standards, he may well be legally blind. He has long held a driver's license, until recently a rare credential in China for anyone other than full-time drivers. He used to take the wheel quite a bit in the course of his work, but no longer does because of his poor eyesight.

His reporting sense more than compensates, however, as I quickly found out. When I arrived at the train station in his city that Monday morning, someone fitting his description who seemed to be looking for someone fitting my description was nowhere to be seen.

After some unsuccessful phone calls, I gave up and registered at a high-rise hotel built right into the railway station. I prepaid, prevailed on the desk clerks to help me book a return train ticket (one cannot buy round-trip train tickets in China), and took the elevator to the thirteenth floor. Once in my room, I sat down at the desk to try more phone calls.

After more calls the phone rang, and it was Lao Shu himself, calling from the reception desk downstairs. He and his wife, in a borrowed car with a borrowed driver, had been caught in traffic and arrived at the train station late. Lao Shu had traced my steps, asking the train attendant, the telephone attendant, the waiting room attendants and finally the hotel attendants if they had seen a foreign woman of medium height with curly hair and glasses. He'd been following about ten minutes behind me all the way.

In an instant, a small, wiry man with a crewcut, his merry eyes magnified behind pop-bottle lenses, was at my door. Informing me that he'd arranged accommodations elsewhere, he whisked me downstairs and conferred with the hotel manager to retrieve my money while I chatted with his wife. A woman as cheerful and gregarious as her husband, she'd recently retired as factory Communist Party functionary and started a new career in public relations.

Mr. Shu, I soon learned, had become a newspaper reporter only in the mid-1980's, after more than 30 years as an army man assigned to "propaganda work." The newspaper recruited him, he says, because he possessed three qualities desired of local correspondents: writing ability, political reliability, and a large network of contacts. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in his youth, and other than spending a couple of years in Korea during the Korean War, he has lived most of his adult life in the region where he now works. He knows people in all walks of life and at all levels of society, not simply because his time in the army enabled him to travel and make many acquaintances, but also because he is the sort of person who collects friends wherever he goes.

Given a day's notice to report to his new job, Shu spent three years in the newspaper's Beijing headquarters before returning to the provinces as a correspondent. He was happy to leave the bureaucratic environment of Beijing. He particularly enjoyed an eight-month period when his paper assigned two young reporters to apprentice with him in a province adjoining his home province. They lived together "like three bachelors," as he describes it, collaborating on stories, editing each other's work, sharing meals and living quarters, and talking late into the night. But he was happy to get back to his wife and his home city, where his children and grandchildren also live, and where he grows flowers and raises fish and keeps two Pekinese dogs.

The investigation of the despot Tu represents a high point in Mr. Shu's career, having earned him a modest award from his paper, some notice in the media and letters from readers all over the country. However, it did not make him rich or particularly renowned. Nor did it give him inflated ideas about the power of investigative reporting in China.

By the time I met Lao Shu, Old Tu had been tried and convicted of abuses of power, but had yet to be sentenced. Those familiar with the case, including Shu himself, were not especially surprised at the delay. Functionaries were said to be haggling over the final disposition, worried that too light a sentence would infuriate ordinary people, while a heavy sentence could embarrass influential associates and backers of the convicted man. Shu anticipated that in just a few years, Tu might be out of jail and seeking retribution. "I've already made ideological preparation," Shu declared in a tone of resolve, using the common Chinese phrase "sixiang zhunbei," suggesting he was steeling

his mind for some terrible psychological and political ordeal. I said, only half joking, that if he needed to escape for his life, I'd invite him to the United States.

As I'd surmised, Shu had been the principal force behind the exposé. One of just a handful of journalists who took the initial informant's woes seriously, he'd convinced the others to look further. The team tried to keep their investigation under wraps as long as possible. When they needed a safe place to meet, a friend of Shu's at a factory provided a room. "He opened the back door," as Shu puts it, no questions asked.

Eventually, word got back to Old Tu as well as to higher authorities. In September of 1991, a group of provincial and local officials assigned to investigate the problems essentially exonerated Tu. A month later, the reporters' team published their joint report in an internal Communist Party publication. Shu separately wrote reports for limited circulation to selected government functionaries—a common practice in Chinese journalism when it comes to sensitive stories that sensitive editors wish to keep out of the public arena.He did one for his newspaper in October, with a follow-up in November.

In the meantime, an emissary sent by Tu had offered Shu 50,000 yuan (about $9,000 U.S.) to drop the matter—and indicated the figure was negotiable. After refusing the bribe, Shu received threatening phone calls and found himself being followed and videotaped. Each time he went off to gather more information, his wife told him to make sure to come back.

With pressure from central authorities, another official investigation resulted in Tu's arrest in December of 1991. The man who had originally put journalists on his track, still jailed at the time, was finally freed a few days later. Lao Shu's chief editor in Beijing commended Shu's internal bulletins with a 200 yuan award (about $35 U.S.).

The story remained confined to internal communiqués for months, and if not for a casual conversation, might never have reached a general audience. On a summer evening in 1992, as Shu and several younger colleagues sat chatting in a restaurant, a reporter for the province's major daily complained that Chinese journalists were too passive. Lao Shu offered evidence to the contrary from his own experiences, including the tale of Old Tu. The reporter followed up on the information, and when editors at his own newspaper declined to run his story about how Shu's team had pursued its investigation, he offered it to a local youth newspaper, which published it on July 31, 1992.

As that issue was snapped up at newsstands, other local and provincial news organizations jumped on the story. Meanwhile, reprints of the piece in the youth paper appeared in newspapers around the country, followed by reprints of the reprints, such as the magazine article that caught my attention. In all, more than 30 mainland Chinese publications carried reports.

Lao Shu received about 3,000 letters from readers, most writing to praise him, but more than 300 asking him to investigate corrupt officials in their own localities. To help, some even sent money, amounting to thousands of yuan, which Shu returned. A few visited his bureau to plead in person for his services. The outpouring overwhelmed him. "How can I, one journalist, solve all these problems?" he asks.

Only one letter criticized Shu, on a point he doesn't dispute. Chinese journalists often mock their own timidity by saying they "swat flies instead of beating tigers." Old Tu may have been a tiger, but he surely wasn't the biggest tiger in the land. "What's so great about exposing a petty section chief?" Shu's critic chided. Shu wrote back, concurring that nothing was so great about it as long as worse villains at higher levels remained at large.

Lao Shu would probably aim higher if he thought he would get anywhere; meanwhile, he does what he can as a reporter, in itself an unusual attitude among China's jaded press corps. Rather than following the path of least resistance, he tends to take the harder, more time-consuming, certainly more frustrating and often less rewarding route. He is unwilling to accept official versions of events as delivered by bureaucrats. He goes to the scene, uses his own eyes and ears, and seeks out ordinary people's views. His reporting on the case of Old Tu may have been out of the ordinary in terms of degree of risk involved, but it was not uncharacteristic of the way he customarily works.

Lao Shu has a favorite reporting memory involving collaboration with one of his former apprentices, whom I will call Xiao Ma, or Young Ma. In late 1991, aware of complaints about delays in highway transport, Shu and Ma set out to write a favorable story on a vehicle inspection station that had been commended as an "advanced unit." So as not to disturb the authenticity of the scene, they arrived by bike, disguised as shabby locals, a tape recorder and a camera hidden beneath their greatcoats.

Instead of model behavior, the two reporters discovered a bottleneck of graft where trucks trying to move cargo were backed up for hours and even days. The pair wrote an exposé of corruption and inefficiency. Their editors were bold enough to put the article in the daily paper rather than consigning it to internal channels, and the negative publicity prompted highway authorities to tighten supervision over inspection stations.

A small triumph, and probably temporary in its results, but such a story nonetheless constitutes an achievement in the world of Chinese journalism. The fact that individuals can exert initiative in an occupation circumscribed by rules and regulations, monitored by what the Chinese call "mothers-in-law" of all variety, permeated by taboos and beset with dangers is one of the paradoxes of Chinese journalism. It means that someone like Lao Shu, working within a state-run media apparatus that operates primarily to represent those in power, sometimes can give voice to the powerless.

In another paradox, Communist Party tradition and ideology provide the best of ammunition in this subversive endeavor. Lao Shu is nothing if not a loyal Communist Party member, whose instincts and commitments reso-

nate with what the party once had a reputation for being all about. Indeed, his bottom-up style of journalism reflects noble traditions consistently touted in party rhetoric, although only sporadically practiced since the 1950's. Nowadays, sophisticates recite Deng Xiaoping's call to "seek truth from facts" with a wink and a smile. Lao Shu, constant in his faith in the party leadership and its stated policies, actually tries to carry out that backneyed slogan. In an age of cynicism, he is a throwback to more innocent, idealistic times. His ingenuous belief in what others dismiss as empty words is refreshing, and one of the many qualities that make him so likable.

One might think Shu's determination would be an inspiration to younger reporters, but what he seems to inspire most is wonder. His partner on the highway inspection story, Xiao Ma, a modest, soft-spoken fellow in his late twenties, who recently left an editing job in Beijing to go into business, happened to be running an errand in Shu's city when I was there. Ma belongs to the younger generation of well-educated, critically inclined journalists, and as the son of a peasant family, he also has firm roots in the realities of Chinese rural life. Ma greatly admires Lao Shu for his crusading spirit; at the same time, he sees Shu's relentless idealism as anachronistic and somewhat impractical. When I asked Ma if China has many journalists like Shu, he responded with a bemused expression—clarified, once he saw I was asking in earnest, with an answer in the negative.

Lao Shu, for his part, expresses nothing but esteem for successors like Xiao Ma. In an attitude rare among Chinese elders speaking of younger counterparts, he rejects the metaphor of teacher and student, saying his junior colleagues are also his teachers. Of his two former apprentices, he says, "I may have known more in terms of experience, but they knew more about writing."

Lao Shu's enthusiasm for work and grassroots approach to reporting mirror his approach to human relations in general. One of Shu's old "comrade-in-arms" from army days, a driver who at Shu's invitation came out of retirement to chauffeur me around in a van, puts it this way: "The special thing about Lao Shu is that he makes friends among the commoners wherever he goes."

As any Chinese will tell you, one can't do without friends in China, and Lao Shu has friends and contacts all over. Another army comrade now manages the downtown hotel where Lao Shu booked me a room. A daughter-in-law works at a restaurant that supplies kitchen scraps for Lao Shu's little dogs. Through connections at the railway station, Lao Shu helped Xiao Ma and me buy our return tickets to Beijing. Lao Shu knows government workers, factory directors, department store managers. He knows parking lot attendants. He knows restaurateurs and shopkeepers in his city's insular Muslim quarter.

Yet he is well aware of the fine line between dependency and abuse, and in the view of some colleagues, is almost naively upright when it comes to work. I asked him about the phenomenon of "red envelopes," payoffs to reporters for attending press conferences, which had become a ubiquitous practice by the early 1990's. "I refused to take this money, even if they told me it was for carfare or lunch, because, first, I wasn't used to it, and second, it might carry certain obligations," Shu said. "Then I found that departments weren't calling me anymore!"

Friends consider him foolish for not keeping pace with the times. On one occasion, an official who knows him well pressed him to accept several hundred yuan—as much as an average reporter's monthly salary. Other reporters took the money, but he wouldn't. Feeling pity for this unenlightened journalist with failing eyesight, the official had a reading lamp sent to Shu's home. Shu relates this anecdote with obvious discomfort.

If Lao Shu looks slightly trendy, it's not because he means to. He wears the type of leather money belt that's become a fashionable indicator of wealth in China, but in his case it's to carry his prescription sunglasses. He does believe in knowing about the latest fashions, however. Since shopping is the new hobby of the Chinese, for example, he conducted me through his city's biggest department store.

Following my morning at the provincial television station, I found myself sprinting alongside Lao Shu toward a pagoda set atop a grassy hill in the city's rural outskirts. Shu's wife and their young friend had stopped halfway up. Below them was the main attraction we'd come to see on my last afternoon: a notorious "weird slope," a short section of dirt road where cars mysteriously roll uphill. A trucker had discovered the strange properties of the place when his truck broke down there, and the municipal government was turning it into a tourist site, disrupting the soothing contours of the mountainous landscape with construction of shops and restaurants, and charging an extravagant admission fee of 40 yuan (then about $7) per vehicle, which Lao Shu managed to talk his way around.

Some people say the weird slope is an optical illusion, a trick of the topography, while others swear an underground counter-gravitational force is at work. Xiao Ma and I took turns behind the wheel of the van, rolling up the slope in neutral with the ignition off. We also tried by bike, coasting uphill without pedaling. I tried my hardest to be a skeptic. I left wondering if there was something to the anti-gravitational theory after all.

When friends back home made fun of me for my credulity and told me there was a similar optical illusion hill in New Brunswick, Canada, I told them you had to be there. Seeing may not be believing, but one shouldn't even begin to believe without seeing. Certainly, this is Lao Shu's philosophy.■

Islam and the Dangers Facing Journalists

Last December 7 the Nieman Foundation presented the 1994 Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism to Abdelhamid Benzine, editor of Alger Republicain, a newspaper that was closed earlier in the year by combined pressure from the Algerian military government and Muslim extremists who resented its position in favor of an open, secular society. The presentation had been delayed because Benzine had been in hiding before escaping to Paris. The award was presented by Sam Fulwood III, Chairman of the 1994 Lyons Award Committee.

The ceremony was part of a seminar on current developments in the Islamic world where the speakers, in addition to the guest of honor, were Jane I. Smith, Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs, Iliff School of Theology, Denver; Roger Owen, A. J. Meyer Professor of Middle East History at Harvard, and Rami George Khouri, co-owner and General Manager, Al Kutba Publishers, Amman. Bill Kovach, Curator of the Nieman Foundation, presided at the seminar. Excerpts from the transcript are printed in adjoining columns.

KRIS SNIBBE

Abdelhamid Benzine

ABDELHAMID BENZINE

In the name of all who work for my newspaper, Alger Republicain, sorely tried since it came into being—that's to say for 56 years now—in the name of its martyrs, those who fell in the anti-Nazi resistance; those who fell in action during our War of Independence; those who have fallen so very recently, victims of Islamic terrorism; in the name of them all: thank you all so much. And thank you to the Nieman Class who has done me the honor of giving me the 1994 Lyons Award.

After all, I consider that rather than to me personally, this distinction is bestowed upon the Algerian journalists who, in the dangerous circumstances of which you are aware continue to practice our noble profession.

As regards Islam and Islamism, there is a need to clear up certain confusions. We who live in the hell of this murderous fanaticism know all the differences that exist between Muslim, Islam, Islamic and Islamist. We have moderate Muslims, tolerant, open to everything, peaceful and pacifist, ex-members of the resistance, believing and practicing, some of whom I saw die courageously in the ranks of the Army of National Liberation. Yes, there exists a moderate Islam, but there exists no moderate Islamism.

Notwithstanding, all the parties in Algeria that lay claim to Islam are Islamist parties. That is, parties that recognize no sovereignty but that of God and no other constitution than the Koran. Both the phenomenon of Islamism and the terrorist barbarity that accompanies it are not confined to Algeria. It is rife in other countries—Egypt, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, etc.—and this phenomenon has also shown itself, in varying degrees, even in the U.S. and Europe.

At the root of this phenomenon, which we call neo-fascism, there lies the distress and subsequent protest of those sections of society that are deprived, and especially of a youth, which is alienated, left to itself and which without hope for a better future, takes refuge in the religious past considered in some mystical way as a Golden Age of a society where there was no antagonism and no contradictions. There is a search for balance, social stability and peace in a world where anxiety and insecurity rule.

But what happens in a complex political situation is that this distress and this legitimate protest against extremely shocking inequalities are hi-jacked by politico-religious sorcerers who, making use of a reactionary and populist discourse—like Hitler in his day—in reality serve vast financial interests, those of grand-scale corruption and speculation, those of all sorts of traf-

ficking, who, misappropriating the petrol and gas revenues of our young state, have amassed fortunes in Western banks.

I consider that in giving me this prestigious Lyons Award, you are sending a message of sympathy and encouragement to the journalists of Algeria, a message of solidarity to the widows and orphans left by our assassinated colleagues, and beyond that, to all of the democrats of Algeria who, men and women, faithful to the secular tradition, are offering exemplary resistance to this vile beast, which nearly all over the world, is manifesting itself.

JANE I. SMITH

What I would like to do is share with you five areas in which I think there is a great deal of conversation and discussion going on these days among Muslims themselves. And these conversations range from those who are more extremist in interpretation, to those who are more liberal, perhaps even more secular. They are thinking about these kind of issues.

The first one is: what form should Muslims' attempt to distance themselves from the West take? This has been a century of an enormous amount of push and pull in various parts of the Islamic world in regard to the West. From a time when there was a kind of awakening in saying: we want to be more like the West. We want to have what they have and we want to do what they do. We even want to think the way they think and we want to dress the way they dress.

The movement has come full cycle, has passed through stages of not just how do we want to be like the West, but: how do we get rid of the West?

And then there are many who would say: now, wait a minute. That is an unreasoned kind of response. And what we need to do is sift through what it is that we can take, use, apply and interpret as being truly Islamic at the same time that we have a better understanding of what it is that we don't want to accept, and we want to leave to the West.

So there are various ways in which Westerners have imposed on the thinking of many Muslims. The most obvious, of course, is just plain old imperialism.There is now a very popular sort of catch-phrase that's catching a lot of people's interest, which talked about the whole imperialist thrust of the West. And so it is often described as the "Crusader imperialist missionary Zionist plot to destroy Islam."

We have those who would say that, in fact, the West is the Great Satan. At the same time, there is a response on the part of many Muslims, not only that they do not share that kind of extreme response to the West, but they're offended by the propagation of the notion that they would be unthinking and uncritical enough to adopt the kind of Great Satan response to the West.

My next question is: how can Muslims and Muslim societies think about peace when it appears to them that justice has not been served? Islam is a religion of peace. There's a lot said about that. Well, how do we reconcile that with axes and bombs and self-immolation? Islam is also a religion of justice. And God is justice. Throughout the Koran it talks about God as being the one who is a just judge and in so far as human beings recognize and acknowledge God's oneness and God's justice, they're called upon to do justice and to be just.

And I'm not going to defend extremism. But I will say that I think there is a great problem for many in the Middle East who believe and understand that their own lives are ones in which there is not justice; they are not participants in power; they are not living lives that are, in any sense, the kind of fulfillment that is promised them by the Koran. And they hear leaders talking about ways to address those issues. And it's hard for them to know what to do and how not to follow.

I think it's essential to understand that there are really deep causes of injustice, a deep-felt sense on the part of many—certainly in the Palestinian area—that the peace that they are being called upon to accept, is not a peace that serves them and not a peace that serves, ultimately, the Palestinian people.

The third area in which there is controversy: is it desirable or essential—or not desirable at all—to implement the Sharia [Islamic Law] and to establish an Islamic state?

This is a really hot item. Many say that as soon as there is some kind of power base that it is essential to establish the Islamic Sharia. And some people want to say we need to carry this farther and we need to establish an Islamic state and it needs to be done by a revolution.

Others in the Islamic world say that they want to move a little bit more slowly. That revolution will come but it will come easily and it will come as people are persuaded in the rightness of the Islamic state.

How do you have an Islamic state which acknowledges the rights of those who are not Islamic? In fact, who acknowledge the different points of views of different sectarian movements within Islam? Or that in fact acknowledges the equality, if it does, of men and women? We won't talk about that.

My fourth question: what does it mean that the gates of ijtihad are open? This is not jihad, this is ijtihad. Both words meaning, in effect, effort—individual effort, trying. Ijtihad means using your head. Using the brain and the interpretative powers that God gave you.

If we're going to establish an Islamic state, how can that be one which is truly open to all people? And if not, what are the reasons for it? And how do we live as good if we're not in that kind of Islamic state? Now, it can be very dangerous today. As it is dangerous in Algeria, it is also dangerous in other places. It's dangerous to be one of those who advocate ijtihad, that those gates are open and that kind of thinking is coming.

One of the areas—and this will be my last point—in which ijtihad is being viewed is: how are we going to think about the Islamically appropriate roles for women in society today?

And it certainly is the case that part of the more conservative, reactionary Islamist kinds of movements, include an attempt to segregate the sexes, to keep men and women separate; to relegate women back into the "traditional" role; where they turn to the traditions of the prophet for keeping them behind the doors and all of that, is starting to take shape now.

But as acknowledging the fact that Islamic societies are going to really function, they have to function with a participation of one hundred percent of their members and not just fifty percent.

Roger Owen

Any of us who have come to lecture and write on the modern Middle East are enormously worried about the state of the press in various parts of the Middle East. It seems that wherever there is a moment in which the press has sufficient freedom to make some kind of difference to enter a political debate, it is subject to attack. And it is possible to think of a number of Middle Eastern countries in which the press is specifically under attack at the moment. I think of Turkey where there have been many, many murders of journalists who have assumed to be, or assumed to have supported the Kurdish cause. And in the Algerian case we've heard there have been many murders of Algerian journalists, and a sense in which Algerian journalists are between a hammer and an anvil, pressed on one hand by the state; and on the other, terrorized by forces outside.

The crisis in Algeria is an example of a process of perestroika and glasnost, which went very, very wrong. It proceeded, or it came about, for many of the same reasons that one party states began processes, or were subject to processes of reform, in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world in the last twenty years.

It owes its origin to the fact that the consensus which governed Algeria and Algerian politics and the management of the Algerian economy, since the foundation of the state and Algerian independence in 1962, began to fragment in the 1980's as a result of a growing economic crisis. The result of this was a process of economic retrenchment, necessitated by the collapse in oil prices in 1985 and '86, which in turn triggered off country-wide demonstrations against FLN management and mismanagement.

And the response was to bring in a new constitution, in 1989, which replaced the one party state with what [the president] took to be the framework for a more pluralist kind of politics, and in which various groups were encouraged to come forward in order to take part in an electoral process.

What remains unclear is why the Islamic fundamentalists, the Islamic Salvation Front, [was allowed] to present itself for election, even though the constitution specifically barred religious parties.

What is clear, is that the military, and various members of the regime, felt threatened by—directly threatened by an FIS government and took to heart some of the slogans that had been uttered and some of the statements made by the FIS leadership during the election, both about the management of the economy as well as the future of the Algerian armed forces.

And this is a situation of great polarization, in which it is extremely difficult to think new thoughts, and particularly to think in a positive way about how one might get out of this impasse. But by the same token, Algeria is a country which desperately needs new thinking and new ways of addressing the crisis.

And it's here where the press should and could and does, to some extent, play a very important role. Members of the press are threatened from both sides. They have been killed by members of the Islamic armed groups. They have been imprisoned by the state, as Mr. Benzine has been.

Nevertheless, it is greatly to its credit that it remains much freer than the press in its other—than in its North African neighbors. The Algerian press has bravely remained much freer in this extraordinary atmosphere. And we can only hope that it continues to do so.

Rami George Khouri

I look at the American press, I look at the American culture, I look at what I live with every day in the Middle East, and I get very angry. And being a journalist, being somebody who was trained in the West, who writes for Western publications, who also works in the Middle East, who spends my whole life basically trying to communicate between the Orient and the Occident and the realm of the Middle East and the West—I think the American media is doing an absolutely atrocious job, verging on the criminal.

And I think if the American media were to report on American blacks or American Hispanics like it reports about Arabs and Muslims, it would get slapped with so many lawsuits that it wouldn't have any time to do any work because they'd be so busy defending themselves in court.

First of all, I would say that the American media obviously is driven by powerful commercial and competitive instincts, has started to—the majority of it, taking apart the small quality press—has gravitated or degenerated into a pattern of sensationalism and entertainment that is really quite shocking.

This tendency to degenerate into sensationalism and entertainment is also spilling over into political coverage. And I see it very clearly spilling over into coverage of the Middle East. And what you have is this amazing spread between these jamboree of love and peace, signing peace agreements, King Hussein and Rabin and Clinton and Arafat and there is love and peacemaking at one extreme. And the other extreme is the terror and the killing and violence and the hatred and the savagery that we see practiced by both sides. Though it's mostly reported when it's practiced by Arabs. But it's also reported when it's practiced by Israelis.

In between these two extremes, the whole vast middle class of people in the Middle East, the Arab Islamic world—and even I would say in Israel—is not very well reported. It's like trying—it's like if somebody were to come to the United States and read The Reader's

Digest and Playboy and nothing in between—this is what American culture is all about.

And I would suggest that what we need to really get from the media, is perhaps a deeper, more accurate explanation of the reality on the ground. And the reality on the ground in the Middle East is that both the state and the opposition to the state, have been engaged in a cycle of dreadful and vicious and brutal violence—that has gone on for years and years and years—because the masses of people in the Middle East are basically scared.

The people in the Middle East are basically scared because their states are not functioning very well. Because in the decade from 1980 to 1990, the average per capita GDP—gross domestic product—for the whole 21 or 22 members of the Arab League actually declined by about thirty percent. The reality is that the vast majority of Arabs are poor and they are getting poorer. The average per capita income in the Arab world is probably now around nine hundred to a thousand dollars.

The Middle East is the most militarized, violent, unstable, martial part of the world. The number of soldiers per thousand population in the Middle East was fifteen, the highest in the world. The defense spending in the Middle East, in the Arab countries, as a percentage of GDP or as a percentage of federal government budget is the highest in the world.

And the minute there was some problem in the Gulf, they had to spend another 50 or 60 billion dollars to hire the American and British armies to come in, in 1990; and then have to hire them again to come in 1994.

There is not a process by which the average people—who are mostly Muslims, who are all decent good people—there is no process that allows these people to form better states. Out of desperation, out of fear, they are turning to the only thing that is left to them. And there is now a brutal, violent confrontation between the states, the regimes, the armies, the governments on the one side and some of the commercial elites who are with them.

And, on the other hand, a small group of violent, ruthless, vengeful Islamic militants who draw on the fact that the majority of their people, in fact, asked for a greater Islamic component of society as a regressive grievance because the secular, Western-styled national state that was basically imposed on the region in 1920 is not working very well. What you need to do—what the press needs to do—is to look at the Middle East and try to see it through the eyes of its own people. Try to recognize that the people in the middle East are yearning for democracy or some kind, or democratization that is compatible with their Arab and Islamic tribal identity. ■

Pressing the Panic Button

BY V.V. ESWARAN

Disasters such as famine, floods, drought, earthquakes and pestilence, are common to India. And if nature is benign, people create their own disasters. This is what happened when plague was the major news story in the Indian media for nearly a month last fall.

The disturbing fact was recognized by newspapers and magazines themselves. Wrote The Indian Express: "Ironically, while in far-away Geneva, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave New Delhi almost a clean chit for plague, the local authorities here have, through their panicky reactions, succeeded in creating a scare. Newspapers have also fueled the scare by reporting deaths and [falsely] attributing them to plague."

India Today, a fortnightly magazine, noted that some journals reported that 1,000 doctors fled Surat at the outbreak of plague and that journalists of local newspapers created and spread panic by "publishing concocted death figures in the hundreds at a time when less than 30 people had died."

No sooner had the epidemic been reported in mid-September than the Ahmedabad bureau of the United News of India (UNI) flashed a report that 200 people had died in Surat, quoting a minister who requested "anonymity" whereas at that point of time the total death toll stood at 58, with Gujarat accounting for 52. Gujarat ministers were tardy in visiting Surat and hardly spent much time in the city. Yet the news agency quoted one of them. The BBC also erred. Its Asian broadcast mentioned a figure of 300.

Did these conflicting reports reflect competitive pressures? By September 25, Press Trust of India (PTI) reports from New Delhi quoted 50 deaths, Gujarat Mitra 45, Gujarat Samachar 40, Sandesh 50, and so on. The Indian Express once led with a story giving an "unofficial figure of 200." Sunday, a weekly from Calcutta, said: "By September 26, within five days since the outbreak was reported, the disease had claimed over 100 lives." As days went on, the death toll figures continued to fluctuate.

How large was the exodus from Surat? Sunday said it reminded one of the days of the partition (of India and Pakistan in 1947) and estimated that 700,000 Suratis had quit their city. The Week had the same figure while adding that the railway authorities had sold 250,000 tickets to those fleeing the city. Not to be outdone, India Today said that the exodus resembled biblical proportions and 400,000 people left the city during the first four days of the epidemic.

Strangely enough, photographs did not appear to support these figures and gave no indication of a mass panic. There were no pictures of packed trains with people sitting on top of the compartments (as mentioned in the news reports). In fact, one newspaper carried a front-page picture which showed half a dozen people, with masks over their mouths, seated comfortably inside a rail coach. The point to remember is that, even on non-plague days, second-class coaches are not that empty. Inquiries made at the suburban stations revealed that the trains from Gujarat did not bring hundreds of thousands of people.

It has to be recognized that journalists had to work under deadline pressure. Access to some of the worst-hit areas was limited and they had to protect themseives. Yet Indians, by and large, tend to exaggerate facts and some of the newspapers knew that carrying inflated figures and pressing panic buttons were guaranteed to sell more copies.

But reporting the epidemic and quoting death figures without proper verification brought swift international repercussions. A fear psychology was created both at home and overseas. Several nations cut off contacts with India and the economy took a beating. ■

V.V. Eswaran is a 1960 Nieman Fellow.

7 Principles of On-Line Publishing

By Tom Regan

In his recent article for Wired Magazine, "On-line or Not, Newspapers Still Suck," New York media critic Jon Katz attacks newspapers for backward thinking, lack of imagination, and a fearful attitude toward change of any kind. To top things off, he says that the much-heralded rush to put newspapers on-line won't work either.

It's a damning indictment that everyone involved in running a newspaper should read. Because Katz is right....

To a point.

Or perhaps it's better to say, Katz's argument makes sense so long as papers continue to try to replicate themselves on-line, creating clones of their everyday, on-the-street product, which is—to be quite blunt—a fool's errand.

Yet an on-line paper doesn't have to "suck." Quite the contrary, it can be dynamic, forceful, journalistically sound, and fulfill an important role. And all this can be done without costing the mother paper an arm and a leg. In fact, you can even make money.

But before any of these things can happen, newspapers (especially big papers) need a number of profound attitudinal shifts, and it's here where Katz strikes closest to the target. Right now, all over the United States, you can find numerous on-line projects that will sink like the Bismarck—not for a lack of dollars, not for a lack of editorial excellence, but for the lack of understanding of the on-line culture.

Just because snmething works in the "real" world, doesn't mean it will work in cyberspace. And the sooner newspapers realize this, the sooner they'll get on the right track, and save themselves lots of money.

So what does work? Well, after being on-line for several years, two of them with an interactive newspaper column on the Internet, and for the last eight months as the Co-editor of The Halifax Daily News On-line, I've concocted what I call the Seven Principles of On-line Publishing.

Those seven principles are: Geography, Interactivity, Readability, Diversity, Creativity, Visibility, and Profitability.

1. **Geography**—The redefinition of what is local. In cyberspace, boundaries and borders are eliminated. Your local market is literally the planet. The Daily News On-line has readers from around the world, most of them Nova Scotian or Canadian. They want news from home, and many have told me they would be willing to pay for more news.

2. **Interactivity**—Perhaps the best innovation, and the hardest for papers to handle. Immediate feedback. On the one hand, you connect to your readers in new and exciting ways. On the other hand, it threatens our role of gatekeeper of the news. Readers in the on-line world want a lot more control over their information, and you've got to be willing to give it to them. The best advice I can give—shut up, and listen, listen, listen.

3. **Readability**—The on-line culture is quite different from a traditional newspaper culture, both in terms of reading habits, and in terms of how long they'll wait for information. On-line papers designed to look like their printed cousins won't work in cyberspace—yet. Why create a paper that looks fabulous, but takes the average computer user, with a 9600-baud modem, a half an hour to download?—which they will only do once, believe me. Know the culture, and know what is possible technologically.

4. **Diversity**—There is no such thing as *the* way to publish on-line. On-line publishing invites diversity, both in its format and in its content. Many features not available in the printed world can find a home in an on-line paper, from greater local sports scores to news about the gay and lesbian communities. Be flexible.

5. **Creativity**—Use your imagination. Some of the best features we've added to The Daily News On-line have been created by just blue-skying. In fact, the on-line world expects this from its information providers. You are free to experiment and change your style, format and presentation in ways that would never be acceptable in the printed version. And you won't lose readers. They expect you to do it.

6. **Visibility**—You must let people know you're around. Once you learn the rules of cyberspace, you'll also learn how you can let people on-line know about your product. Advertise locally, write about the availability of the new on-line publication, just as ynu do with your audio-text products. With more and more newbies on-line everyday, you have to repeat yourself to let them know you're around.

7. **Profitability**—If you offer information only on a subscriber basis, people won't buy, at least that's my opinion. Information on the Internet is like water in the ocean. Internauts will just go somewhere else to get the information for free. Yet you don't want to give it all away for nothing. Making money is important. The answer is a combination of free services, paid for by advertising, and per fee services, extras that people will buy. If you want to advertise, you must know the culture. If you try to advertise in the same way that you do in a printed version, you'll get slam-dunked. Again, learn about the culture. Also, in the on-line world, you can offer much more than you can in the printed version. Direct connection to advertisers' data bases. Music. Books. Magazines. Specialty services. It's a world where you can take risks on new products without losing your shirt.

Realistically, we're about two-to-four years away from on-line publishing being really profitable. But if you snooze, you'll lose. In the on-line world, David can compete with and beat Goliath on a regular basis. So Goliath had better get moving. ■

Tom Regan, Nieman Fellow 1992, is Co-Editor, The Halifax Daily News On-line.

The Media, They Say, Helped Chase Them Out

Or Why So Many Lawmakers Chose Not to Run

By Mark Carter

POSITION AVAILABLE:
$133,000 in salary with superior benefits and retirement packages. Opportunity for extensive travel. Complete flexibility in choosing staff of 10 to 20 professionals. Challenging, high-profile projects. Well-established firm with more than 200 years in business.

That is a description of the kind of job professionals covet in an era when high-quality white collar opportunities are shrinking. Yet, last year dozens of members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate chose to leave those jobs, deciding not to run for re-election. Some left because they expected to be defeated, a wise decision in view of the repudiation given Democratic lawmakers at the polls in November. The retiring lawmakers included those who had been involved with well-publicized personal or professional scandals—Senator Dennis DeConcini, Democrat of Arizona, cited for his involvement in the Savings & Loan crisis, and Senator David Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, who was accused of fathering a child out of wedlock. Some departing lawmakers barely won election last time around, others just tired of the frustrations of the job and Washington.

Why did they anticipate defeat? What were their frustrations? Did the fault lie with their own failings or is the system in which they are forced to work now strikingly flawed?

To understand the reasons why so many in the House and Senate voted with their feet, I ran fifteen retiring Representatives and Senators through an open-ended "exit interview." Many of the concerns expressed in those discussions are familiar to even the casual observer of Washington politics. A summary of their answers to the type of poll questions typically put to voters is contained in Table 1 on the next page. Congress, it seems, is not a pleasant place to work these days; thanks in part to the constant need to raise money for campaigns, a lack of opportunity to address the country's major needs, growing partisanship and the power of special interests.

But the fifteen departing lawmakers most often spoke about changes in press coverage of Capitol Hill and politics in general. They were as angry at the media as the voters were at many candidates in November. Most of the retirees were convinced that the aggressive, intrusive journalism currently practiced in Washington, coupled with a surge in political talk shows, now undermine good government.

An "exit interview" is routinely given to a senior executive before he or she leaves a company in the private sector. These debriefing sessions are designed to capture insights of professionals before they move on to the next job. The presumption is that on his way out an executive has little to lose, and tends to be honest about the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Certainly some of the retirees were blunt. Senator DeConcini, for instance, said he could no longer stomach the demands of campaign economics, which, he claimed, now require three hours a day on the phone wringing money from supporters, for a full three years leading up to an election. He spoke about

In some ways, speaking with outgoing Congressmen and Senators was nothing new for Mark Carter. "I've covered 'big headed' people before," he says. Mark is shown here on a shoot for an archaeology feature piece on Mount Nemrut in Turkey—shot on the way back from covering the Kurdish refugee crisis. Mark became familiar with "exit interviews" while working at a management consulting firm. He has worked for four broadcast news organizations, and spent the last two years covering policy issues for CNN. Carter is a current Nieman Fellow.

Table 1
Retiring Congressmen and Senators were asked to analyze changes in Washington since they arrived, with the following "poll" questions:

1. Is the power of special interest groups getting: Stronger, Weaker, About the Same
2. Is the intrusiveness of the media: Greater, Less, About the Same
3. Is the partisanship on Capitol Hill: More, Less, About the Same
4. Are the rewards of the job: Greater, Fewer, About the Same
5. Is your belief in the system: Stronger, Weaker, About the Same
6. Is your belief that real change is possible: Stronger, Weaker, About the Same
7. Is the mean spiritedness in Washington: Greater, Less, About the Same

Official	Party	Years in Office	Power of Special Interests	Intrusiveness of Media	Partisanship	Rewards of the Job	Belief in the System	Belief That Change Is Possible	Mean Spiritedness
Jim Bacchus (Florida)	D	4	Stronger	Greater	More	Fewer	Stronger	Weaker	Greater
Mike Kopetski (Oregon)	D	4	Same	Greater	More	Same	Stronger	Weaker	Greater
Alex McMillan (North Carolina)	R	10	Stronger	Greater	More	Fewer	Weaker	Same	Greater
Alfred McCandless (California)	R	12	Stronger	Same	More	Fewer	Weaker	Weaker	Greater
Tim Penney (Minnesota)	D	12	Stronger	Greater	More	Fewer	Weaker	Stronger	Greater
Earl Hutto (Florida)	R	16	Stronger	Same	More	Fewer	Stronger	Weaker	Same
David Durenberger (Minnesota)	D	16	Stronger	Greater	More	Same	Same	Weaker	Greater
Dennis DeConcini (Arizona)	D	18	Same	Greater	More	Fewer	Weaker	Weaker	Greater
Austin Murphy (Pennsylvania)	D	18	Weaker	Same	More	Fewer	Stronger	Stronger	Greater
Malcolm Wallop (Wyoming)	R	18	Same	Same	More	Fewer	Weaker	Stronger	Greater
Butley Derrick (South Carolina)	D	20	Stronger	Greater	More	Fewer	Stronger	Weaker	Same
Stephen Neal (North Carolina)	D	20	Same	Same	More	Fewer	Stronger	Stronger	Greater
Hamilton Fish III (New York)	R	26	Stronger	Greater	More	Same	Same	Weaker	Greater
Romano Mazzoli (Kentucky)	D	26	Stronger	Same	Same	Greater	Stronger	Stronger	Same
Don Edwards (California)	D	32	Stronger	Greater	More	Same	Stronger	Same	Greater
			Stronger 10 **Same 4** **Weaker1**	**Greater 9** **Same 6**	**More 14** **Same 1**	**Fewer 10** **Same 4** **Greater 11**	**Stronger 8** **Weaker 5** **Same 2**	**Weaker 8** **Stronger 5** **Same 2**	**Greater 12** **Same 3**

the subject without much diplomacy. "I've had enough of the bullshit of raising money," was his tag line.

But most often the press was the target of Congressional bile.

Florida Representative Jim Bacchus was something of a media darling during his two terms on Capitol Hill, appearing occasionally on CNN's Crossfire program. Bacchus once covered Washington as a print reporter. He maintains that things were fundamentally different a decade or two ago:

"When I was a reporter, an elected official was generally given the benefit of the doubt. Unless there was some indication that some guy was on the take or not of high repute, we generally assumed that they were sincere. That is no longer the case. Once, there was a presumption of basic honesty of officials, now the presumption is just the opposite. The upshot is that it's eroding the basic confidence people have in their institution and diminishing the ability of us to make a difference."

Like many political observers, Bacchus believes Watergate was the turning point. "It's fallout from the Watergate scandal. If someone looks honest now, reporters believe it's because he hasn't been found out."

Press criticism of Congress is hardly new, but former members say the issues can be increasingly petty. Former Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop says the media controversy over the Congressional gymnasium and cafeteria is evidence that no "scandal" is too small. "The Senate gym and dispensary were portrayed inaccurately. There isn't a major corporation that doesn't have a dispensary. There aren't very many major corporations that don't have exercise facilities for their employees because it makes them better employees and there are very few that don't have cafeterias," he said. Wallop was angry

that top Congressmen didn't fight back in the press. "Our leadership, Republican and Democrat, hasn't stood up for their institution. They have absorbed the charges that we're venal and that we're crafty and that we're all kinds of bad things."

But most of the departing officials pointed accusingly at journalists. Republican veteran Durenberger, who has been plagued by ethical difficulties in both his personal and professional life, joined the chorus. "The press is looking for a scalp to put on their wall now. They see their jobs as trying to keep an official's pants pulled down...not enhance his ability to get things done." Many of the Representatives and Senators leave Washington convinced that the general standard of reporting has changed, eroding public support, limiting Congressional effectiveness, and reducing the rewards of the job. "It's awfully hard to work 100 hours a week for people and have them think you're spending your time on the beach in Jamaica," adds two-term Democratic Representative Jim Bacchus.

Nine of the fifteen former lawmakers interviewed believe what many press practitioners concede—the media are more intrusive in the private lives of politicians than in even the recent past. Not surprisingly, many retiring officials see the fallout of this expansion of the people's "right to know" as a diminished capacity of "the people's house"—Congress—to do business. Former Representative Butler Derrick, a South Carolina Democrat, has observed the change over his twenty years on Capitol Hill. "There's not enough room for reflection. We know too much about our public officials. We don't elect perfect people to public office, but their personal lives have very little to do with good government." Despite a strong win in 1992, Derrick felt it was time to move on.

Fellow Democrat Earl Hutto of Florida says he believes the change is not only driving some talented legislators out of Washington, but that it's keeping others from ever coming. "Public officials are criticized for just about everything. There's a lot of abuse that spills over on to the family. I know that there were some very good candidates in my district that didn't offer themselves because of that." Hamilton Fish III, the patrician Hudson Valley Republican who served for more than a quarter of a century, believes that reporters do intrude in new ways. Still, Fish was one of few dissenting voices who sees more media scrutiny as better. "It must have been lovely forty years ago to pretty much do what you like and call it personal, but I don't think that was really so terrific. When you seek public life your character should be an issue. Voters have no idea what issue that official will be asked to deal with over the course of his term—that's why his character becomes more important."

While a few outgoing officials defended more intrusive standards by the Washington press corps, political talk shows received bad reviews from virtually all the retirees. The disdain was consistent across party lines and was aimed both at syndicated and network television roundtables and those shows with stated political agendas. Ex-Representative Derrick believes the power of many of the programs now dwarfs that of special interests: "Talk show hosts are almost running Congress today," he contends. Durenberger also has little patience for the shows or their parade of pundits. "Go on a talk show, shout real loud for a few minutes and you can get $10,000 a speech. There doesn't have to be any truth to the banter on the talk shows....There's no such thing as libel and slander anymore when it involves public figures," he added.

The departing politicians did not express particular concern about the effect political talk shows have on their individual careers; instead, they insisted that the programs were corrosive to legislative debate and effectiveness. Democrat Romano Mazzoli of Kentucky said the sheer number of shows was driving participants to extremes. "People have to say things sharply and simply to not get lost in the static." "Complexity is not possible with the shows," said Republican Alfred McCandless of California. Fellow Republican Alex McMillan of North Carolina went even further, arguing that the growing power of talk-show hosts and what he sees as the failure of the media to cover significant issues debated on Capitol Hill became unbearable for him. "I had to do handstands to explain to my constituents what was really going on in Congress," he contended.

The lone defender of the political talk shows was former Senator Wallop, Republican of Wyoming, who saw the proliferation of right-of-center radio and television programs as leveling the playing field. "One of the reasons talk shows are starting to be part of the information providers of the nation is that now you're getting some more balance."

Whether they blamed the press, partisanship or the lack of public concern, many of the departing lawmakers asserted that they didn't have the opportunity to address the nation's most pressing problems. And even with the ambitious agenda of the new Republican-controlled Congress, some issues cited by the outgoing legislators are unlikely to be debated. "We somehow need to restore a sense of community in this country," said Durenberger. Don Edwards, a thirty-two year Democrat from California, agreed. "We're a divided nation and becoming more divided all the time. We live in an unfair and unequal America, and if we don't face up to that we're going to have real difficulties. You're going to lock your doors more often in ten years if we leave a devastated, angry sub-class with no stake in society."

The retiring lawmakers feared that many of the issues of concern to them would languish in legislative limbo, but, in some cases, the November surprise at the polls could change that. Hamilton Fish shared Edwards' worries about the creation of an ever larger underclass that is being left further behind. "The numbers are so overwhelming it's hard to make a difference," Fish argued, "and the issue is on very few people's political agenda." Welfare reform Newt Gingrich style may not have been what Fish had in mind, but the new Congress is poised to put debates about welfare, illegitimacy and poverty on the top of the national political agenda. Similarly, ex-Representative McMillan left office

contending that no one had forcefully addressed the question of expanding entitlement programs. He offered these solutions: raising the retirement age, means testing for Medicare, and capping Medicaid payments. Working drafts of proposals by the new Republican majority have shown some evidence of those ideas.

Senator Wallop suggested making Social Security voluntary. "You can't find many people who contribute who believe that it will be there for them when they need it," he argued. Oregon Democrat Mike Kopetski left Washington wanting to consolidate the armed forces, while popular Minnesota Representative Tim Penney departed still concerned about the health of private sector pension funds and the need for honesty in the federal budgeting process. "Every year there's 200 billion dollars in funny money that doesn't exist put in the budget, so we never really have to make the difficult decisions about what to cut," he said. Now, current moves for budget reform amendment could focus greater attention on all aspects of the way budgeting is done on the hill. Crime, deficit reduction and finding America's role in a more complicated world order topped the list of concerns of other departing Congressmen and Senators.

All but one of the fifteen retiring officials believed that Washington was more partisan than when they arrived. North Carolina Republican McMillan echoed the conviction of many retirees that the result was diminishing legislative effectiveness. "Today, mean spiritedness is an occupation on Capitol Hill. Good results and effective legislation depend on collegiality, and that is absent now," he said. DeConcini had his office staff investigate voting patterns, and argues that the new more partisan standard was clear in 1993. That year, Republicans in Congress filibustered important pieces of legislation proposed by President Clinton. Democrats, DeConcini pointed out, might have killed key legislation put forth by the Reagan White House in 1982 but chose not to do so.

Austin Murphy, a Pennsylvania Democrat, lamented that these days Congressmen from different parties rarely even get together socially. When the two sides do meet on the floor of Congress, the growing partisan spirit has produced a new political reality: legislative amendments aimed at embarrassing officials in the next campaign. "There are clearly some amendments designed not to win, but to put people on the spot for something—to inject electoral politics into the legislative arena in ways they never were before," argued Stephen Neal, a North Carolina Democrat. But Republican Hamilton Fish III said the Washington he knew was always partisan, and occasionally nasty. He recalled wandering into the House dining room in the early 1970's and sitting at a table with Democratic peers. "The conversation immediately turned to attempts to impeach Richard Nixon. It was clearly an attempt to make me feel uncomfortable; they let me know that I'd sat down at the wrong table. Partisanship has always been here," he said.

Senator Durenberger offered one of the few hopeful voices that partisanship might ease. "Behind the scenes there [were] more personal relationships being formed, at least on the Senate side during the last eight years, than in the previous eight years. People meet together, eat together, pray together."

"Wrapping up the plaques in my office, I'm at the stage where I'm asking myself, where's the meaning in what I've done? How many of these plaques will I really hang on to," Durenberger observed during the last week in his Washington office. Like most of those who decided not to run for re-election, the senator found the rewards of the job to be fewer on his departure than when he was first elected.

The retirees believed it was time to move on—generally to careers in business or academia. But while emerging opportunities helped pull them to new careers, the strains of the job—and voter discontent—were clearly pushing many out the door. Officials spoke of having taken salary cuts to go to Congress and many anticipated a higher standard of living outside the Beltway. "You don't make the kind of money here to send your kids to the kind of colleges that cost $20,000 a year. So you can't even do things like that for your family these days," noted three-decade veteran Don Edwards, dean of the California Congressional delegation.

The legions of unhappy voters deepened the frustration of the retirees. Even Congressman Fish, a popular Republican who left for health reasons, joked about Congress's eroding status with the electorate. "I haven't been stoned by voters yet," he quipped.

The Congressmen were initially interviewed before the November elections. Few in the group said they had any inkling that voter anger was running unusually high last fall. Democrat Romano Mazzoli was an exception, predicting popular support for immigration reform—one of the year's political hot buttons—which was once his chief focus on Capitol Hill. Together with Wyoming Republican Senator Alan Simpson, Mazzoli wrote bills reforming immigration policy. The passage of Proposition 187 in California, limiting benefits to illegal aliens and their children, did not surprise the retiring Mazzoli who believes, once again, California should be seen as a bellwether state on a major political issue. "I've said for a long time about illegal immigration that unless you close the back door, you won't be able to keep the front door open," he added.

Former Senator Wallop was the single retiree to go on record predicting the Republican landslide. "I think people are increasingly frightened of their government. They don't believe the federal government can solve problems," he said, days before the election. His colleagues seem to agree. More than half the fifteen retirees left with a weaker belief that real change in Washington was possible. ■

The Stepford Anchors

The Importance of Appearance on the Nightly News

By Anna Martinez

Why do so many television reporters and anchors have the same hairstyle or, at least, variations on the same theme? More importantly, why should this question be posed in a publication that deals with journalism issues? I can think of no good answer to the first question. That, to answer the second question, is the very reason I've chosen to write this article.

I am a television reporter, a television journalist. About the time I started working on my high school newspaper, in 1973 or so, I started letting my once chin-length hair grow long. It grew almost to my waist. I left it that length through college. It is about the same length today.

In the 1970's, many young women had long, straight hair. I kept mine long even after the style died and resurfaced a few times. For me, it is a form of self-expression. I am Hispanic and I also have Apache blood. My grandfather was born on a reservation. I didn't grow my hair long as a statement of my ethnicity. Through the years, however, I've come to realize my hair is very much an expression of what I am on the inside. It is as much a part of me as my hands, my feet, my heart. It is part of my identity.

My first taste of just how difficult it would be to maintain an individual look came with my first job.

I began my part-time job as a weekend weathercaster and sportscaster in 1978, the year before I graduated from college. It was a small market—Lufkin, Texas. I had no experience and essentially trained myself as I went. This was true in all areas, including the all-important "on-air look." I was barely making minimum wage and it was the 70's. My clothes and hair reflected that. I wore my hair long and straight, parted in the middle. I always put my hair behind my shoulders, but there was no getting around the fact that it was long.

The good thing about a market like Lufkin is that you can make mistakes, look unpolished and still get paid. Best of all, you get experience.

What I didn't get was much guidance about how I was supposed to look. In some ways, that's proven to be a real blessing. I found my own look—a look that's worked for me through many years in this business, a look that I believe does not hinder my ability to perform as on-air talent or as a television journalist.

When I graduated from college, I went full-time at the Lufkin station as a weekday reporter, weekend news anchor and weathercaster. My duties included assigning my own stories, shoot-

Martinez with her hair down...

...and up.

Anna Martinez , a general assignment reporter for WFAA-TV in Dallas, is the Vice President of the Dallas-Fort Worth Network of Hispanic Communicators and is a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. She was on the program committee of Unity '94, the nation's first gathering of journalists of color. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Radio/Television/Film from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. The daughter of a retired Air Force sergeant, she grew up on Air Force bases around the country.

ing and editing my own video, producing my own newscasts and weathercasts, and, of course, doing my own hair and make-up. It was a great opportunity for someone eager to learn.

It was about that time that my news director told me I should lose weight. I was five-foot-six and weighed 135 to 140 pounds. I had already thought about losing weight, but I was much more concerned about improving my writing, editing, shooting and producing skills. Losing weight was not much of a priority for me. When my boss told me it was a priority for him, I was shocked and hurt.

I'd taken many journalism classes in college where writing techniques and grammatical rules were emphasized. It occurred to me that during the "5 W's and H" lesson, I hadn't been told that "W" stood for weight. I found it difficult to understand why my weight should be a matter of concern for my news director. He didn't criticize my writing, on-air reading or newsgathering abilities. Instead, he wanted me to lose a few pounds.

I realized then, of course, as now, that I work in a visual medium. I realize, too, that as a TV reporter, I am the storyteller and not the story. If my weight is excessive, if my appearance in general is distracting, then I run the risk of becoming the story. That is something I do not want to do.

On the other hand, I still find it hard to understand why a newswoman, who at worst might be 15 pounds overweight, is told to lose weight when the same does not hold true for a newsman. I've seen this issue resurface in other television newsrooms over the years. If my male colleagues have undergone the same scrutiny, I am unaware of it, as are most of my female colleagues. I have seen little evidence of my male colleagues' weight or general appearance taking priority over their journalistic abilities.

I am told the TV screen adds 10 pounds to a person. But, if you can gather the information, write the story, get the facts straight and meet the deadline, I don't understand why 15 or 25 pounds or more should make any difference for a woman.

The news director who told me to lose weight was doing both on-air reporting and anchoring at the same time he was news director. He was what could politely be referred to as "heavy." If someone ever told him to lose weight during that time in his TV career, he did not heed the advice.

Nor did I. I didn't tell him that I would not cooperate. I just concentrated on my work and not my weight. Fortunately for me, my work steadily improved.

A new news director was soon hired. He never mentioned my weight. He was more concerned with my hair! He recommended cutting it. When I indicated that I was reluctant to do so, he suggested I wear it pulled back with a hair clip. That suited me since I often pulled my hair back to keep it out of my face.

That news director did not make a big issue out of the length of my hair, nor did he push to know my reasons for not wanting to cut it. He simply seemed to respect my desire not to do so. I was young and naive enough to believe that if I preferred not to do something, I would not have to do it. I also believed that if I worked hard, did my job to the best of my ability and kept my hair out of my face, I would keep my job.

My news director was naive enough to agree with me.

My second job was in Tyler, Texas. Although it, too, was a small market, it was bigger than Lufkin—big enough to have TV consultants. At that time, consultants were still relatively new in the industry. They carried and still carry a tremendous amount of clout. Television stations pay consultants to do market research and to observe what works and what doesn't work. Consultants are also paid for coming up with suggested improvements.

After a couple of years as a reporter in Tyler, I tried out for weekday anchor. Given the anchor experience I'd gained in Lufkin, I felt I had a good shot at it. I did, with one exception. My Tyler news director—and the consultants, I assume—believed that my long hair would be inappropriate for an anchor.

At that time, I was still wearing my hair long and straight, clipped on either side away from my face or sometimes pulled back in a ponytail. I told my boss I preferred not to cut my hair. I told him it was a part of my identity. He was more determined than my previous boss. He also had something I wanted—an anchor job.

Nevertheless, I told him I felt strongly about my hair. He said if I could find a good compromise that suited him, the anchor job was mine. I went to a hairdresser and asked her to help me figure out a way to wear my hair up in a bun. It was no easy challenge. My hair was still waist-length, straight, thick and heavy. But she found that if I pulled it up in a ponytail, braided and wrapped it and used hairpins to hold the braid in place, I ended up with a neat, compact hairdo. She cut the front into bangs with a little bit of feathering.

My boss was pleased. Apparently, so were the consultants because no more was ever said about the style I chose. I got the anchor job. From that day to this, I've maintained two separate hairstyles, two distinct looks. At work, I always wear it up to look "professional." At home, I wear it down to look like me.

After four years in Tyler, I was eager to make a move to a bigger market. When a station in Austin, Texas expressed interest, I applied. During my interview, I wore my hair up—the "professional" look. I told that news director my hair was long, but that I always wore it up on the air. He didn't have a problem with that and I got the reporting job.

Up to that point, I had never worked outside small-market TV. The move to Austin gave me the chance to watch and learn from my new peers in a larger, more sophisticated market. Until then, I had never fully understood just how subjective television news can be. It was also then that I realized just how easily a person's self-image can be affected, for better or worse, by an employer's whim.

All three women anchors at that station watched their weight. Two were chronic dieters also devoted to daily exercise routines. They had been called into the news director's office, at various times, and told to lose weight. One of them was actually quite small, but

weight gain tended to show up easily on her round face.

The second anchor was pencil thin. Co-workers at the station told me that when she started there she weighed 15 to 20 pounds more than when I met her, but the news director wanted her to lose weight. One day I became aware of how well she'd succeeded when she stood near my desk doing her hair. She was wearing a form-fitting dress. As she raised her arms to put her hair in curlers, I realized I could practically count her ribs. She used to eat a baked potato with mustard for lunch every day. When she was in the mood to splurge, she had two potatoes with mustard.

The third female anchor at that station had dark hair when she began working there, initially as a reporter. Before she started anchoring, the station's consultant had suggested she would look better with blond hair. When I met her, she was a blond.

Despite the tribulations of my female anchor friends, I was still interested in trying to prove my own anchoring abilities in that market. Eventually, I got my chance. I'd been at the station about a year and the news director who'd hired me was no longer there. I should note that, contrary to the experience of two of the female anchors who preceded me, my weight was not an issue at that station. By this time, because of a bad case of food poisoning, I'd long since dropped the 10 to 15 pounds that concerned my first news director.

While my weight was not an issue, my eyelashes were! The consultant told me to wear false eyelashes on the air to make my eyes bigger. I did as I was told. Never mind that I failed to see what the illusion of larger eyes had to do with the way I read a story during a newscast. Never mind that the eyelash glue irritated my contact lenses and made my eyes water and turn red. And never mind that my biggest concern as an anchor was not how well or how accurately I read a story on the air. Rather, I fretted over whether my eyelashes would stay put. I had images of one or both of the false lash strips coming unglued and sliding down my face as I read an important story.

Still, wearing false eyelashes did not require me giving up a part of myself. I just had to embellish my looks a bit. I felt silly, but I did not feel as if anything had been taken away from me.

I got the job with no mention of my hair. That didn't last long.

About six months after I debuted as weekend anchor, the consultant told me the news director wanted me to change my hairstyle. She said he wanted me to cut my hair. That, of course, was something I felt I could not do. I explained to her that when I was hired by the previous news director, I'd discussed with him the length of my hair and the way I wore it.

The news director who'd given me the reporting job had no problem with either. His replacement, the man who had promoted me to weekend anchor, knew how I wore my hair when he moved me into that position. He had not mentioned my hair, much less made it a stipulation of the promotion, when he told me I would be the new weekend anchor.

The ratings were good. Our weekend newscasts were still number one. We had no complaints—none that I was aware of—about my hairstyle. Most of all, in nine years of television reporting and anchoring, I felt I had proven I was a solid television journalist.

Why, I asked, was my hair a problem? That was a question the consultant could not answer. She told me the news director was determined that I should get a new hairstyle, that the style I wore—the bun—was not "feminine" enough. She said he wanted me to get it cut into a shoulder-length style, the well-known "anchor bob." She told me it might come down to my job or my hair.

This matter caused me no small amount of distress. I remember having nightmares about my news director standing over my head with scissors trying to cut my hair. It sounds laughable now, but at that time I was quite upset. I really don't remember whether my anxiety over my hair affected my on-air performance, but I am sure it must have. I know it certainly affected my mood and my self-confidence. In a business where confidence is crucial, that's a serious issue.

I knew I had to make a decision. I chose my hair. I told the consultant I would not cut it. I explained it was part of me—that I felt as equally attached to my hair as I did to any part of me. Without saying so specifically, I tried to let her know that cutting my hair was tantamount to cutting out my heart. I told her I was willing to give up my job if it came down to it.

The consultant arranged a meeting between the station manager and me. The manager calmly listened as I explained my position. I told him I was willing to change the front of my hair, to make it look "softer" and more "feminine" on the air. But, I told him, I could not cut the length of it.

Much to my relief, the general manager accepted my decision. I never heard another word about it. My news director never directly discussed the issue with me. I kept my job and my hair through that news director's tenure and through the first part of his successor's tenure before I moved on.

When I interviewed for that next job in a larger market and for my current job as a general assignment reporter in Dallas, a still larger market, I asked both news directors whether they had a problem with the way I wore my hair. Both were comfortable enough with my hair and my ability as a journalist to hire me.

At this point—more than 16 years into my career—I am a reporter who is rarely called on to use my anchoring skills. To be honest, I miss anchoring. There's a certain satisfaction that comes in sharing the day's news with an audience of television viewers. But, as much as I sometimes miss anchoring, I never miss the attention my former bosses, consultants and even viewers gave to various aspects of my anchor appearance. That's not to say attention isn't given to how TV reporters look.

As a reporter, I get the chance to concentrate on getting and telling "the story." In a "live shot," "stand-up" or "cut-away," those few seconds when my face is on the screen, what I look like is usually taken into consideration by my boss and the public at large. But in my opinion, no reporter's appearance and for that matter, no anchor's appearance, should become more important than the information that is being

conveyed.

I meet dozens of young female college students each year who aspire to be television "stars." They don't understand that writing is the key tool for both print and broadcast journalists. True, the writing styles are different, but a journalist in either field must be intimately familiar with the writing style of his or her chosen medium. Too many young people interested in pursuing careers in television news don't seem to realize that TV reporters and anchors are, at least in theory, TV journalists.

I got into journalism because I loved the idea of being able to write about matters of substance, of being able to make a difference in people's lives, of being able to effect change. I found that television journalism married video and audio to words in a very special way. I found it fulfilling to be able to write a television news story that used not only words, but pictures and sound, to make an impact. I still love this profession because it offers that kind of opportunity. Journalism gives me the chance to do something important for other people.

We, as local TV news reporters and anchors, have become known for our superficial coverage of superficial happenings. I believe that it is no coincidence that such superficiality comes from an industry that has put so much emphasis on appearance and far less on our fact-finding or news writing abilities. I believe that trivializes what can and ought to be a noble profession.

That frustrates me. I feel this business has wittingly or unwittingly reinforced a certain stereotype about how TV journalists should look. I also think it has wittingly or unwittingly failed to reinforce the message that there's more to being a good television journalist than just stylish clothes, good hair and a shapely figure.

If my hair were purple, it would be different. Then it, and I, would be distracting. If I wore my hair long and straight, I can see how that might be distracting—especially on a live shot on a windy day. I choose to compromise and wear my hair up. This is a good compromise for me. I like my hair up. It stays out of my way. When I go home at night, I literally "let my hair down." I guess it's the way men feel when they take off their ties at night.

But it's much more than just a tie. My hair is part of the image I present to the world. It is an extension of what's inside—part of what makes me "me." My unique hairstyle sets me apart from the rest. I like that because I am unique. We all are. As women, as television journalists, as people, we bring our own unique appearances and perspectives to the newsroom. Someday, I will most likely get my hair cut. I would like to be the one to choose the day and the style.

At a time when television newsrooms across the country are touting diversity, hair and personal appearance in general will become an increasingly more challenging issue. Many Asian, Hispanic and Native American women like and wear long hair. Many African-American women prefer very short hair or very long braids. A hairstyle can become a way of expressing pride in one's heritage. Native American men traditionally wear their hair long. In many tribes, a man cuts his hair only when he's mourning the loss of a loved one.

For many women of color, the traditional "anchor bob" seems unreasonable and inappropriate. It is a cookie-cutter image that someone, somewhere, deemed the appropriate look for female television journalists.

As TV journalists, we are called to tell it as we see it. But, by and large, we are told we must look very much the same in order to tell it credibly and effectively. I believe that different eyes see stories differently. When all the storytellers have blue eyes, the story looks the same. When those storytellers have eyes that are blue and brown and black and green, the story is told in many different ways.That's diversity. That's journalism. What troubles me is, is it television journalism? ■

Calendar Still Turning on Mintz Story

This is an update of "The Silence of the Editors" (Nieman Reports, Winter 1994), which chronicled my failure as a freelancer to elicit a simple, straightforward "yes" or "no" from a series of editors to whom I submitted an exclusive investigative report. The story concerned a senior federal judge, Robert R. Merhige Jr., and a sworn accusation of "judicial extortion" leveled at him by Joseph Luter, chairman and president of a Fortune 500 company.

"The Silence..." ended on an optimistic note based on conversations with David Ignatius, a Washington Post Assistant Managing Editor. The Post's Sunday Business section, which he runs, seemed to be a natural venue for the report. In recent years, however, it's been jam-packed with financial advice stories and columns, week after week. In such surroundings, I've wondered, is an investigative piece a party-pooper?

I had sent the article to David on Aug. 21. We went through an editing process, on the phone, on Nov. 7. I "was expecting the piece to run" in the Post, I wrote on Nov. 23. David sent me this fax on Dec. 12: "Apologies for the delay in getting the Luter piece in the paper. I haven't forgotten about it and hope to get it in soon. Happy Holidays!" We've had no further contact, and the report has not run.

As of this writing David has had the report for more than six months. Then again, I had first offered it to Legal Times, on June 7, 1993, and it took four months of angry complaints to get a response—no—from its editors. It took me seven months to get a no from National Law Journal.

One might assume that the appetite for investigative stories is shrinking, fast, and that freelancers who go after them will likely waste their time and resources and invite frustration.

—Morton Mintz, March 13, 1995

Letters to the Editor

Journalism Schools

Editor:

Al Balk's critique of journalism education (Nieman Reports, Winter 1994) is right about so many things that one hesitates to pick on him. Nevertheless, I rise in defense of one of his examples of silly-sounding research reports.

The Journalism Quarterly piece titled "Validating a Scale for the Measurement of Credibility: A Covariance Structure Modeling Approach" has a history that is firmly anchored in the close cooperation between the newspaper industry and academic research that Balk would like to see.

In 1984, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, concerned that loss of credibility was a source of readership decline, created its credibility committee and put David Lawrence in charge. A national survey on the topic by MORI Research (headed by a communications Ph.D., Kristin McGrath) was commissioned. Lawrence wisely brought a group of academic researchers into the design and conceptualization of the project by meeting with them and McGrath in Chapel Hill. He did this over the objections of some of his industry colleagues.

"Why do we need these people?" one such critic asked. "Because," he was told, "no single study will answer all of your questions. Our attention span is long, and we will be here, worrying about these issues, long after the industry has moved on to other things. We are your best hope for continuity."

Continuity is what the article ridiculed by Balk is about.

As the good social scientist that she is, Dr. McGrath made her data available to other interested researchers to examine. She also published scholarly articles about it with her colleague Dr. Cecile Gaziano. I published pieces in both trade and scholarly journals critiquing their work. In the Autumn 1988 Journalism Quarterly I criticized the 11-item index used to measure credibility, suggested that its apparent internal consistency was an artifact of a flaw in the way the questions were framed, and proposed a more precise definition of credibility that separated the dimensions of believability (the most obvious aspect of credibility) and community connection. The two concepts were commingled in the McGrath report. I proposed separate scales.

Survey research has many sources of error. One is that researcher and respondent attribute different meanings to the same questions. Scales that use several questions to measure a single concept are a way around this problem.

While I was working on it, one of my students, Mark West, became intrigued with the problem of determining whether a particular scale behaves consistently (reliability) and measures what it is supposed to measure (validity). He continued to work with the ASNE credibility data after becoming a professor himself at UNC-Asheville.

West's report, "Validating a Scale...," which Balk views with self-described shock, applied more sophisticated mathematical analysis to the scales proposed by the rest of us. He confirmed my claim that the original ASNE scale was mixing some apples and oranges, gave qualified endorsement to my stripped-down credibility scale, and argued that my proposed community-connection measure needs further work.

This is how knowledge is advanced—in bits and pieces and in full public view. Credibility in the media is a problem today more than ever. And we can't begin to deal with it in a practical way if we cannot articulate the concept, much less measure it.

The mission of journalism education has grown beyond supplying cheap labor to the newspaper industry to embrace the basic functions of teaching research and service. Of the five research projects denounced by Balk because they are hard for a non-specialist to understand, I have personal knowledge only of West's. But all of us should consider the possibility that the others are advancing knowledge and have at least a potential relationship to the training of journalists and service to the industry.

Phil Meyer

Phil Meyer, Nieman Fellow 1967, is the Knight Chair in Journalism Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Alfred Balk responds:

My lament in Phil's example was partly the gibberish that affronts journalistic values—especially in something called Journalism Quarterly, from a body governing "journalism education." Of course "others are advancing knowledge...with a potential relationship to training journalists." I'm aware of the few respected ones, and spread their ideas—but in English. "Everything in its place." But it's not, and that's destructive. That's my point.

G. K. Reddy's Career

Editor:

The note in the Winter 1994 number on G.K. Reddy, a Fellow from India, perplexed me because it differed from my memory of knowing Reddy while I reported from India between 1959 and 1964 and following his career later. I therefore wrote to an Indian colleague. After consulting Reddy's widow, the current New Delhi bureau chiefs of The Hindu and Blitz, and V.V. Eswaran, to whom the Nieman Reports note is attributed, my correspondent reported a much different career path:

Reddy wrote in the late 1940's for Blitz, a Bombay tabloid that by the time I knew it in the late 1950's was strongly pro-Communist and virulently anti-American. In 1951 Reddy became a foreign correspondent for The Times of India, and it was from that position that he became a Nieman Fellow. After his fellowship, his paper made him its London correspondent. He returned to India in 1962 to become The Times of India's New Delhi bureau chief. He held that post until moving to The Hindu as its New Delhi bureau chief in 1969. Writing for The Hindu, he was one of the most respected journalists in India at the time of his death of cancer in New York on 17 August 1987.

The memorial award that Eswaran reported is a fitting tribute to an outstanding reporter and news analyst.

Henry S. Bradsher
Nieman Class of 1969

BOOKS

Trashing Bill and Hillary by a Middle-Distance Journalist

On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency
Elizabeth Drew
Simon & Schuster. 462 Pages. $24.

BY JOSEPH R. L. STERNE

If news dispatches are the first rough draft of history, then books written very soon after the events they describe can be considered second rough drafts. Reporter and commentator Elizabeth Drew, whose portrait of the first year of the Clinton administration is the most definitive that has yet appeared, calls this "middle distance journalism."

In its modern dress, such "middle-distance journalism" is extremely important and influential. Reporters and historians rely on these summaries for ready reference rather than wade through hundreds of daily stories on microfilm or in electronic data banks. With repetition, the judgments of "middle distance" writers have a tendency to jell into fixed impressions that affect contemporary politics and early interpretations of history. Revisionism comes later, too late in most cases, to make much difference in what we call "real time."A genre brought to a high art by Theodore White in his volumes on the elections of the Sixties and Seventies, this kind of journalism has now evolved into books on sitting presidents written hurriedly while they are still in office and their complete record is far from finished. To achieve a dimension beyond daily news coverage, they rely heavily on anonymous sources, mostly active players in what has transpired, who are instinctively protective of their own roles and reputations.

Bob Woodward was first out of the post on the presidency of Bill Clinton with his book, "The Agenda," a detailed report on the battles that produced the economic policy of the current administration. It is a limited work, very much in the post-Watergate tradition of what New Yorker writer Adam Gopnik describes as "attack journalism." Behind it is a punishment-and-reward system in which "informed sources"—i.e., self-serving officials and consultants—earn an upbeat portrait if they talk and quite the reverse if they do not. According to Gopnik, Woodward arrives at his version of truth through "polite extortion."

Yet what is ironic about Woodward's work is that his excessive tapping of Clinton's political consultants—Paul Begala, Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Mandy Grunwald—fails in its attempt to print them as principled fellows trying to save the populist (and leftist) soul of the Clinton presidency. Those who emerge as far more helpful to Clinton are the centrist economic team of Lloyd Bentsen, Leon Panetta, Robert Rubin and Alice Rivlin.

Elizabeth Drew has attempted a more ambitious task: to portray the Clinton White House in all facets of its policy initiatives and personality conflicts. Like Woodward, she too relies on close-in sources with self-serving ambitions. But her net casts wider and she keeps a prudent distance, always wondering, in her own words, "Why is this person telling me this?" "The information was screened," she writes, "for, among other things, self-aggrandizement, rivalry (and even vendetta in some cases), and puffing of the boss." Inevitably, she only partly succeeds.

Elizabeth Drew

Aside from a slap-dash epilogue on the events of the first half of 1994, which should have been excised, the Drew book concentrates on a presidential first year that ended with Bill Clinton's approval rating at a healthy 60 percent. He had succeeded in pushing through Congress the most ambitious effort at deficit control in modern times and, against great odds, had even secured congressional approval of the

North America Free Trade Agreement. A number of other bills constituted a better than average record.

This would have been triumph enough for any first-year president. But Drew's characterization of the president, his wife and his staff is so devastating—so unrelentingly critical—that one can easily perceive why Clinton's second year was a constant misery that ended in Republican control of both houses of Coogress for the first time in 40 years. The First Couple are portrayed as so arrogant they thought they were smarter than anyone else and as so ill-prepared for governance in incestuous Washington that they were in trouble from Day One.

As in Bob Woodward's book, but this time deliberately, the political consultants emerge as destructive meddlers who conceive of the presidency as nothing but an on-going campaign whose sole objective is re-election in 1996. "The consultants," Drew writes, "were accountable to no one but the president. They could sashay into the White House, offer some advice and sashay out again, leaving the hard part to others. They didn't have to carry out their own proposals or live with the consequences."

This observation is worth quoting because the role of consultants in the Clinton White House is a new phenomenon, one no wise future president should ever repeat. Offering supposedly expert advice that in most instances was wrong, they compounded the problems of a White House whose lines of authority (in Drew's words) "weren't blurred; there simply weren't any." With multiple power centers—Al Gore's, Hillary's and the President's—it was no wonder that the young, inexperienced, parochial staff under poor Mack McLarty, the Arkansan pulled in to be the first chief of staff, was overwhelmed.

On foreign policy, a subject hardly mentioned in the Woodward book, Drew reveals dismaying friction between Secretary of State Warren Christopher and National Security Adviser Anthony Lake. This is nothing new, as witness the rivalry between Henry Kissinger and William Rogers in the Nixon administration. But at least Kissinger was the acknowledged foreign policy spokesman. Clinton had none. Christopher is pictured as a weak, malleable bureaucrat obsessed more with maintaining his position in the pecking order than with advancing consistent policy positions. Lake is no better as he maneuvers in White House intrigues. One comes away from Drew's book convinced Clinton needs a foreign policy shake-up commensurate with the elevation of Leon Panetta to chief of staff.

As interesting as all these supporting actors may be in the Clinton chronicle, the focus must remain on the president himself. He is portrayed as a man who cannot make up his mind because he does not know his own mind.

Listen to Drew's psychoanalysis: "There was in the [Clinton] temper a kind of petulance—a word used by an Arkansan who knew him well. There was in fact a kind of immaturity about Clinton. There seemed to be something unfinished about him. Compared to many men his age, or even younger, he didn't seem quite grown up. To what extent this was because he was his mother's beloved son, or because for all the rough-and-tumble of politics he hadn't lived in the real world very much and had so many of his needs, psychic and material, catered to, or it was some innate personality trait, was impossible to know. There was so much that was appealing about him—his brain, his zest, his resilience, his charm—but he didn't come across as a settled person, and the public seemed to sense that."

Such judgments, rendered between hard covers rather than on yellowing newsprint, are bound to influence general impressions of Clinton well beyond the readership of Elizabeth Drew's "On the Edge." It is a plodding book, with an addiction to chronology and detail. But even if its immediate audience is limited, what with the public's surfeit of an overexposed president, reporters and historians will be delving into its pages for years to come for the quick fill so often needed in their crafts.

As a superior example of "middle-distance journalism," "On the Edge" should prompt a close look at this kind of reporting and an assessment of its reliability. The reader is left with the nagging thought that because it is currently so fashionable to trash Bill and Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Drew has left a wide open field for revisionism. For this president, who is starting to take comfort in the achievements of one-term predecessors, reinterpretation cannot come soon enough. ■

Joseph R. L. Sterne is Editorial Page Editor of The Baltimore Sun.

The Way Science Should Be Written

The Hostage Brain

Bruce S. McEwen and Harold M. Schmeck, Jr.

The Rockefeller University Press. 324 Pages. $39.95 hc $19.95 pb.

One look at this handsome book should convince the ego-starved journalist to buy it for display in a conspicuous place as proof of his intellectual powers. A peek inside confirms the choice. The color illustrations of parts of the brain, by Lydia Kibiuk, are, to use the word advisedly, sensational. The artist shows, in color drawings that sometimes stretch across two pages, genes and hormones and other biological bits that the scientist sees only through a microscope.

As effective as "Hostage Brain" might be on the cocktail table, the journalist would achieve far more professionally if he would read Harry Schmeck's text. With skills developed in three decades on The New York Times, he has written an explanation of the brain and of what restricts it—diseases, like Alzheimer's, or abuse from drugs, for example—so lucid that even political reporters can understand it. Moreover, Schmeck, a 1954 Nieman Fellow, sprinkles the chapters with wry humor. ■

An Easy Switch From Columns to Fiction

One True Thing
Anna Quindlen
Random House. 289 Pages. $22.

BY ELIZABETH LELAND

When I heard that Anna Quindlen decided to write novels full-time, charging confidently into a new career that many journalists dare only dream about, my first thought was: can she pull this one off, too? If "One True Thing" is any indication, the answer is as clear as her writing style: "yes."

Yes, she switches from fact to fiction as easily as she switched from New York Times columnist to stay-at-home mom after the birth of her second son. Yes, she abandons the formula of journalism for descriptive, sometimes powerful, prose. And yes, she weaves a tale that's both captivating and convincing.

The publication of "One True Thing" coincided with Quindlen's much-talked-about decision to leave The Times. This time, for good. She won a Pulitzer and stood first in line for a top job at The Times. Why not try something different? She said she liked this second novel so much, she felt confident about her decision. And well she should.

Her narrator is twenty-four-year-old Ellen Gulden, who quits her job to care for her dying mother, and then is charged with mercy killing. But that's just the hook. "One True Thing" is a story about parent-child relations, about dying, about balancing family and work.

Ellen is smart, driven, self-confident to the point of arrogance. I didn't find her especially likable at first. She idolizes her father, the charming, yet shallow university professor who regularly cajoles his students into bed and teaches his daughter to prize people in novels over real people. Ellen graduates from Harvard and takes a job as editorial assistant and sometime reporter for a big New York City magazine. At last, she's away from the college town of Langhorne, where she grew up. She can live the way she wants, far from the kind of life her mother lived. She can get ahead.

She's never been close to her mother, never understood, much less appreciated what Kate Gulden does. Kate didn't go to college. She married, stayed home and took care of her husband and three children. She wallpapered their bedrooms and papered picture frames to match. She sewed Halloween costumes and helped fashion Christmas decorations for the trees at the end of Main Street. Everyone in town liked Kate.

"When I considered her dispassionately I knew that, as my friends said, I was lucky in my mother," Ellen says. "It was simply that I rarely considered her at all. My mother was like dinner: I needed her in order to live, but I did not pay much attention to what went into her."

Now Kate is dying of cancer. Ellen's father, George, orders her back home to take care of her mother. Ellen doesn't want to give up her New York City life. Why not a nurse, she demands? But she doesn't know how to refuse her father.

Returning home, Ellen comes to know her mother, and herself. She pushes Kate into town in a wheelchair, helps make Christmas ornaments, learns to cook. They form the Gulden Girls Book Club to read and discuss "Pride and Prejudice," "Great Expectations," "Anna Karenina." Ellen sees her mother as never before.

As Ellen changes, she discovers she has something of her mother in her after all. It's Thanksgiving. Kate is worse. Ellen's boyfriend returns home for the holiday, but he's more concerned about sex than Ellen's grief. Ellen retreats to the kitchen to cream onions, peel yams and make stuffing the way Kate instructed: "...I realized that I was doing it all for the sake of stability, to make it seem as though this Thanksgiving was no different from any other. I was maintaining, abetting, creating a kind of elaborate fiction, just as my mother had, with gravy and pumpkin pie and heavy cream. The fiction that everything was fine, that life was simple and secure, that husbands did not stray and children grow, that the body did not decay and finally fail, that the axis of the earth passed dead center through the kitchen and the living room and the world kept spinning, our family unchanging, safe and sound."

Ellen confronts a balancing act similar to one Quindlen faced: the life of the job versus the life of the home. And like Ellen, Quindlen lost her mother at a young age. To anyone who's watched someone waste away, skin slacken, skull protrude, its seems likely Quindlen drew her painful, yet powerful descriptions from experience.

But one thing about Ellen doesn't ring as true. Her transformation from hard-driven New York professional to sensitive caregiver is so swift and complete, it's a little unbelievable. One morning before Christmas, Ellen stands three hours on a ladder, hanging ornaments on a town spruce, readjusting balls and bows at her mother's whimsy. Where did Ellen—"the girl who would walk over her mother in golf shoes"—learn such patience?

Kate inevitably dies, and Ellen is charged with murder. Part Two of the novel deals with that. I won't give it away. Afterwards, Quindlen tidies everything up in an epilogue, a bit too nicely, but with a few interesting surprises. And I couldn't help but smile at her passing commentary on our business and why her narrator, Ellen, finally gave it up: "It was the idea of facing a future skimming the surface of life, winging my way in and out of other people's traumas, crises, confusions, and passages, engaging them enough to get the story but never enough to be indelibly touched by what I had seen or heard."

"One True Thing" leaves an indelible touch. ■

Elizabeth Leland, NF '92, recently returned from maternity leave to The Charlotte Observer, where she's working three hours a week (no, that's not a typo).

For Decades Mr. and Mrs. America's Favorite Columnist

Winchell: Gossip, Power and the Culture of Celebrity
Neal Gabler
Alfred A. Knopf. 553 Pages. $30.

By Brad Goldstein

> Flash! Good evening Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea. A birdie has informed me someone is attempting to do a job on this little newsboy. A hatchet job, no doubt.

That is probably how Walter Winchell would have opened his evening radio show, spitting the words out onto the airwaves in his trademark rat-a-tat fashion, if he were to read Neal Gabler's biography. Gabler, the author of a book about the birth of Hollywood, certainly knows a lot about the columnist. He spent hours reading Winchell's papers before they were sold at auction. He reviewed all of Winchell's newspaper columns, transcripts from his radio shows, personal letters and other letters.

Winchell viewed any criticism as an assault on his character. And he thought nothing about using his weekly radio show or his newspaper columns to exact revenge from his critics. He was the "enfant terrible" of modern American journalism, a vaudeville hoofer turned gossip columnist whose life would have been perfect fodder for his own columns.

He built his reputation by reporting on the mating and dating habits of New York swells, the vaudeville denizens and the gangsters who inhabited Damon Runyon's favorite stretch of asphalt called Broadway. Winchell did not invent gossip but he, better than anyone, recognized the public's appetite for reporting on the private lives of the rich and powerful. Winchell flourished at a time when tabloid newspapers ran composite pictures of celebrities on the front page and serialized any murder in their ongoing battle to grab readers from New York City's large immigrant enclaves.

While young reporters lament a business that no longer seems to know the difference between news and entertainment, older ones may be reminded of an earlier time when a nasally sounding columnist turned radio announcer was breaking all the journalistic rules.

Winchell's fedora, wisecracking voice, and insatiable thirst for gossip created an indelible image for the American public. Reporters were transformed into snoops, concerned only with getting a story and selling newspapers.

He was the model for the sinister columnist J.J. Hunsucker in the movie "That Sweet Smell of Success." He could be funny—he coined such phrases as "blessed event," "making whoopee" and "Adam and Eveing it." He could also be the common man's best friend when he reported on the foibles of government bureaucrats at the height of the Great Depression. But it is his darker side Gabler spends much of his time exploring, and in the process, turns his life into a morality play.

Born to Jacob and Jennie Winschel at the turn of the century, Winchell was raised in the American shtetl called the lower East Side. It was the same ghetto that produced Irving Berlin, the Marx brothers, Bernard Baruch and hundreds of others who would leave an imprint on 20th Century America. "From my childhood I knew what I didn't want," he would say. "I didn't want to be cold. I didn't want to be hungry, homeless or anonymous."

His desire to be noticed and the attention that came with letting the whole world in on a secret assuaged his fear of anonymity. But to keep up with

the public appetite for secrets, Winchell needed help. Press agents, politicians and gangsters all supplied information for his columns. He hired Herman Klurfield to write his gags and ghost write many of his columns. He paid reporters and press agents for interesting items to fill his column. "Cast your bread upon the waters, I once read, and sometimes you get back angel food cake," he once wrote. The more secrets he told, the more popularity he achieved, but the lonelier he became. He sought solace in frequent romances, lost his son to suicide and committed his daughter to a psychiatric ward to stop her from marrying a man he despised. In the end, he became a parody of the gossip he reported.

His journalistic career started with a column called Daily Newssense, a scandal sheet about the backstage happenings of his vaudeville troupe. He wrote in staccato fragments separated by el-

lipses. His columns were filled with slang and invented words that could bring home his punch line, and eventually led him to The Vaudeville News and then The New York Graphic before finally settling at William Randolph Hearst's Daily Mirror.

He made the gossip column a staple in most American newspapers. Decades after his death, New York Newsday has Liz Smith, The New York Post counters with Cindy Adams and The Boston Globe features John Robinson's columns on its lifestyle pages. Even the staid New York Times succumbed to a watered-down format, first when Charlotte Curtis quoted society types and more recently when the paper teamed theater critic Frank Rich with political reporter Maureen Dowd to cover the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

But Winchell would have a difficult time, if he were alive today, walking through the checkout line at any supermarket. The National Enquirer and Globe may have the same short punchy stories and pay for information like Winchell, but their focus is different. Winchell's world emanated from New York and the East Coast. He left Hollywood's secrets—the bulk of The National Enquirer's material— to West Coast gossip columnists Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. He wanted a bigger audience and liked being closer to the nation's powerful.

Tired of writing about New York society types, Winchell turned his attention to world affairs, reporting on the growing German war machine. When his radio program made Winchell a household name across America, the powerful courted him. It's no different than Bob Dole, the Senate Majority Leader, or President Bill Clinton calling in to Don Imus's syndicated radio show. But unlike Imus, who sees politicians as fodder for his comic opera, Winchell used them to push his own political agenda. He was an ardent interventionist and stridently anti-Nazi, calling anyone who opposed the war machine a Communist.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover constantly provided Winchell with information about Nazi spies and sympathizers. In return for scoops, Winchell trumpeted the New Deal and promoted the FBI as a state-of-the-art crime fighting agency. He never asked Roosevelt or Hoover a difficult question because he knew his access would disappear. He ignored Hoover's gambling; nor did he explore rumors of Roosevelt as a womanizer. Instead, Winchell excoriated bureaucrats and socially irresponsible snobs. "I'll bet that made Dillinger laugh out loud," he said of a New York judge who sentenced a mother to a day in jail for letting her child dig in Central Park. "Children, in New York parks, it appears, commit a crime when they damage the grass....But with my own eyes the other day—I saw a police car speed all over the lawn there to chase away other kids who were playing...and this is 1934 and we're supposed to be human beings."

This formula of focusing on the unfeeling magistrate or public employee has, as Gabler points out, a kernel of populism in it. After all, most people's contact with government is when they renew their driver's license, pay a trafffic ticket, or file their tax returns. Winchell's formula attracted the throngs struggling to survive the Great Depression to read his column and listen to his radio show. Albeit in a more responsible way, it still survives today. CBS's news show 60 Minutes is constantly exposing the petty criminal while avoiding larger, more complicated issues.

Conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who credits himself for the recent Republican victory, succeeds because, like Winchell, he taps into public fears. Winchell played on America's fear of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. He searched for Communists everywhere and when he ran out of them he called his critics Communists. He supported Eisenhower and Nixon. Some forty years later, Limbaugh can be heard on the radio playing on Americans' fear of economic uncertainty. He scapegoats. He blames Democrats for America's economic woes and trumpets a return to the policies of the Reagan years, berating President Clinton routinely. His language is sprinkled with phrases such as "feminazis," phrases that echo back to the age of Winchell.

It would seem only natural that Winchell, with his fervid anti-Communism, would gravitate toward Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. A populist needs an enemy, someone to blame for the winds of change. Winchell's broadcasts were losing ground to the Ed Sullivan television show. His questionable ethics and unsavory alliances with government officials and gangsters had become the subject of a twenty-four-part series in The New York Post. Gabler suggests that Winchell's red baiting was merely a means to settle scores and browbeat his critics into silence. But Winchell never understood that audiences do not like bullies, until he was stripped of his radio show and column and forced to take out an ad in Variety looking for work.

When Winchell died in 1972, former New York Post columnist Leonard Lyons credited him with changing journalism by realizing "people were interested in people." Other critics asserted that his passing closed a chapter in American journalism, pointing to the death of Broadway, vaudeville and the disappearance of the fedora-clad reporter. But Winchell's legacy can be heard in Rush Limbaugh' s booming voice and seen in the old-fashioned microphone sitting in front of CNN's Larry King. As Michael Herr wrote, "if people go around treating themselves like celebrities because not to be a celebrity is just too awful, we may have Walter Winchell to thank." ■

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A Plea to News Programs to Debate Alternative Agendas

By Invitation Only:
How the Media Limit Political Debate
David Croteau and William Hoynes
Common Courage Press. 218 Pages. $29.95 hc, $14.95 pb.

BY ROD DECKER

Croteau and Hoynes are politically progressive academics who want high-class TV talk shows to invite more activists advocating alternative agendas as guests. This book is a critique of journalistic practice, but also a plea for a larger progressive voice in public discussion. As a critique, it is a useful challenge to the prevailing view that establishment media are biased to the left. But the book proceeds from a limited picture of news, and its prescriptions seem futile.

"By Invitation Only" is built around the author's previously published studies of guest lists for Nightline and the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, the "preeminent daily news/public affairs" programs. The studies show that most of the guests are powerful, insider, white males, and that minorities, women and progressive activists are underrepresented. The authors judge the shows by the standard of "diversity," and find they don't include enough guests advocating "alternative agendas" for the nation.

The authors studied only Nightline and MacNeil/Lehrer, but without looking much further, they generalize and conclude that the news media, as a whole, limit political debate. In fact, of course, Nightline and MacNeil/Lehrer are only two shows in a vast array of print and electronic offerings, some of which are thoroughly progressive and all of which must compete for audience and support. Nightline and MacNeil/Lehrer compete successfully with similar formulas that offer mostly decision-makers and their close critics debating current events. In response to the authors' previous articles, both shows made minor changes. But the authors want larger changes: more guests who are not powerful, not experts, and who advocate fundamental changes for America. As an example, the book holds up The Kwitny Report, a program the authors praise as being more diverse than either Nightline or MacNeil/Lehrer. But The Kwitny Report survived only one year on public TV, and the book offers no reason to believe that if Nightline and MacNeil/Lehrer did become more like The Kwitny Report, they wouldn't share its fate.

The authors portray those who control Nightline and MacNeil Lehrer as powerful people inviting whomever they choose as guests and determining what America sees and hears on important issues. But producing a TV talk show doesn't make one feel powerful. It makes one feel anxious; one must struggle to find interesting topics and guests. Only rarely does a producer feel he or she can lead public attention. Mostly he must watch the direction in which the public is looking and try to leap nimbly into the public gaze.

Another reason to believe the authors don't understand the importance of drawing audience is that they have written such a dull book. They devote many pages to comparing the race, sex and occupation of Nightline guests in the mid 1980's, with MacNeil/Lehrer guests in the early 1990's. They dwell in fond detail on news clips reporting reactions to their earlier published studies. Scattered throughout their 195 pages is enough good material for a provocative and interesting paper of 10 to 20 pages or so. One fears the readership of this book will be mostly hapless undergraduates to whom it is assigned by progressive professors.

Even as Croteau and Hoynes wrote, their instructions were being fulfilled, though not as they might have wished. On talk radio, commentators from the right wing of American politics included the voices of those who aren't powerful and aren't experts. Talk show hosts offered alternative agendas. Like progressives, the right felt excluded by the "elite media." But unlike progressives, the right developed a popular message, attracted a national network of talk practitioners, drew an audience and built an economic base to disseminate conservative views. House Speaker Newt Gingrich says talk radio contributed to the electoral success of his party. For better or worse, the views of the right will count more in the next few years than they have in the past, partly because conservatives have found a successful way to conduct media politics.

At some universities, arguments similar to those made in this book have persuaded faculties to hire colleagues with alternative views, revise curricula and require students to study more diverse canons. The authors write as if prestige public affairs programs have a monopoly on public attention as a professor has over students in a classroom. They hope that by expropriating at least part of that monopoly, progressives can use establishment media to further their cause. But what worked on campus seems unlikely to succeed in media. Contemporary progressives have so far failed to devise a formula for effective media politics, and it's doubtful whether this book will help them. ■

Rod Decker, Nieman Fellow 1977, is a reporter and talk-show host for KUTV News in Salt Lake City. His novel, "An Environment for Murder," was published in December.

Of Clinton's Underwear and FDR's Polio

No Ordinary Time
Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II
Doris Kearns Goodwin
Simon & Schuster. 759 Pages. $30.

By Michael Riley

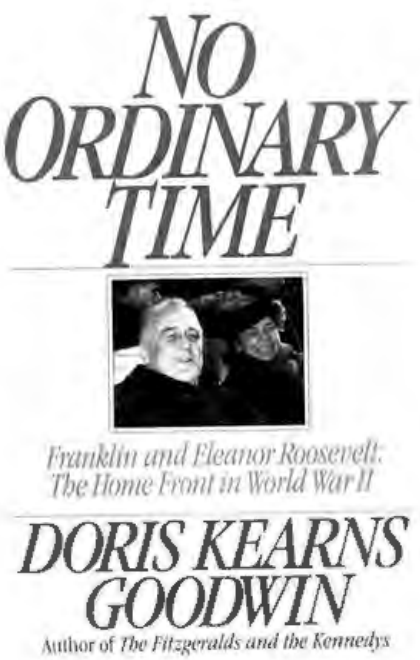
When she wrote "No Ordinary Time," a masterful account of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt on the American home front during World War II, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin must have thought, at least once, about Bill Clinton's underwear—in the symbolic sense, of course. And if she didn't think about it, then readers of her compelling book should, because the relationship between President Clinton's underwear and FDR's presidency is much closer than you might imagine.

Today, most Americans, if they care, know what type of underwear Clinton wears, thanks to his answer to a young woman's question on MTV. Such folly, namely the public exposure of the most private matters, seems to be part of being president these days. But it's a far cry from the Second World War, when much of the public, because of an unwritten code of secrecy among reporters, didn't realize that President Roosevelt was so severely handicapped that he was hardly able to use his polio-stricken legs. Back then, if a news photographer tried to shoot a picture that showed Roosevelt's disability, colleagues would subtly block his shot or gently knock his camera to the ground. The message was clear: the public did not need to know about the extent of the president's paralysis, and the press didn't need to tell people about it.

There was much more the press didn't tell the public, and that raises an intriguing question: what would happen if you could stuff today's ravenous Washington press corps in a time machine and transport it back to Roosevelt's presidency? Part of the answer is clear, thanks to Goodwin's thorough and engaging account of the wartime White House: the feeding frenzy would be bloody.

The press would endlessly scrutinize Franklin and Eleanor's fractured and incomplete marriage, ripped apart years earlier by his affair with Lucy Mercer. The president's close friendship with beautiful Crown Princess Martha of Norway, a frequent guest at the White House, would raise all manner of speculation. Reporters would delve into the nature of the intimate relationship between Eleanor and her close friend Lorena Hickok, prompting much comment about the First Lady's sexual preferences and the real nature of their bond. The press corps would ferret out details of Eleanor's relationship with young Joe Lash, a student activist whose friendship grew into a more profound intimacy. And reporters, no doubt, would have disclosed juicy details of Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd's clandestine visits to the White House during FDR's final year, as well as her presence in Warm Springs when Roosevelt died in 1945.

While such titillating details alone would make great headlines, they tell only a small part of the rich and complicated story of the Roosevelts during wartime. Only the embracing context of history is capable of conveying the complex ambiguities of that White House, a fact that the historian, who often takes decades to discover the truth, knows far better than the journalist. The historian sees more clearly the purpose of the thick walls that existed between a president's private life and a nation's public affairs. Some 50



years ago, these stolid walls were perhaps too impermeable, allowing presidents to conceal crucial facts, like health problems or ill-conceived personal entanglements, but in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, most of these walls have crumbled, turning the once-distinct lines between private and public matters into ghostly demarcations.

That's why it is critical for reporters today to reassess and redraw these boundaries, to make the critical common-sense judgments about what is truly important for the public to know in an era when juicy gossip and blind competition too often drive the news and warp public perceptions. Goodwin's book helps raise the essen-

tial question: how much did the nation need to know about FDR's personal life when judging his performance five decades ago? Reporters should ask a similar question today: how much does the public need to know about Clinton's private life to evaluate his presidency?

That question is not meant to be a call for censorship or secrecy or deception among journalists; rather, it's a desire for better, clearer judgments about what is worth reporting. Goodwin's exhaustive research demonstrates how a historian makes those judgments, and her work helps clarify a journalist's task. Quick and easy judgments about the true nature of the relationship between a president and spouse are just that, quick and easy, and often incorrect and incomplete. From the outside, Eleanor and Franklin's relationship looked odd, but it worked, and the nation benefited. Eleanor's activist role as First Lady, an abrupt departure from tradition, drew much public criticism, but her involvement proved crucial in winning the war and keeping the peace. And her indefatigable interest in the human side of public policies proved an invaluable balance to FDR's laser-like focus on winning the war.

But perhaps the book's most instructive lesson, worth remembering the next time one writes about the president's marriage, his personal life or even his underwear, comes straight from Eleanor. "All human beings have failings," she says, "all human beings have needs and temptations and stresses. Men and women who live together through long years get to know one another's failings; but they also come to know what is worthy of respect and admiration in those they live with and in themselves." ■

Michael Riley, a current Nieman Fellow, is the Southern Bureau Chief for Time, based in Atlanta.

Who's a Liberal? Who's a Conservative?

Brennan vs. Rehnquist
The Battle for the Constitution
Peter Irons
Knopf. 380 Pages. $27.50.

By Lorie Hearn

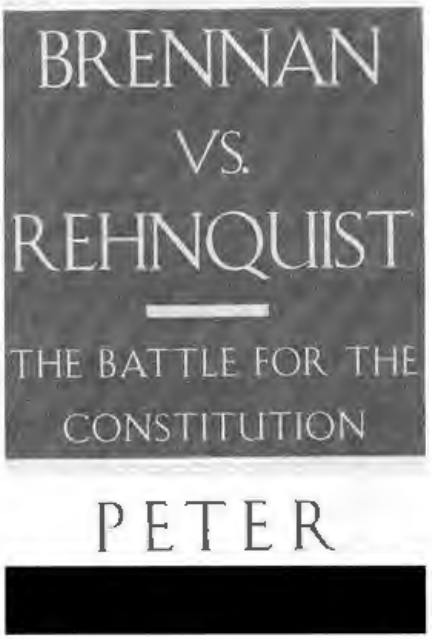
As the 20th Century wanes, crime and punishment again are the nation's obsession. There are frequent executions, persistent pushes for habeas corpus reform, a proliferation of "three strikes and you're out" laws, and yes, the country has minute-by-minute coverage of the O.J. Simpson saga.

All this is to say that legal reporting has come of a new age. With the click of a mouse, we can read the latest high-court opinions. With a flick of a TV remote, we can tune in to taped trial coverage in the middle of the night. And, increasingly, the pressure is on reporters to analyze complex legal phenomena and spew back the results in monosyllables under tighter deadlines.

As information gathers, storytellers and interpreters, journalists struggle to simplify matters for readers who we assume lack either the time or capacity to understand the complicated world around them. This drive to distill concepts often results in miscommunication and labeling.

In his book, "Brennan vs. Rehnquist: The Battle for the Constitution," political scientist Peter Irons takes a run at sorting through two of journalism's favorite legal labels: liberal and conservative. It is a dense tome—a textbook rather than a page-turner—with analysis of a dizzying number of U.S. Supreme Court cases in 338 pages.

Irons's book is not for the casual reader or for the reporter who needs a quick explanation of the Supreme Court's newest affirmative action ruling on daily deadline. However, it could be termed a reference work for journalists who seek a greater understanding of what it means to be a judicial conservative or liberal. The definitions, one can discern from the discussion, are not go-by-the-gut exercises.



Most journalists who spend even an afternoon with Irons's book will think twice about resorting to these easy labels when describing judges or their opinions in print or on-air.

As the title plainly declares, this work is an exhaustive discourse on the diametric positions of former Associate U.S. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr. and Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist from 1972 to 1990 when they served together on the nation's highest court. Irons covers all the famous cases, such as Roe vs. Wade, so in that sense the book proves a primer for journalists who are little versed in the law. But there are no surprises or revealing insights to give the black-and-white depiction much texture.

Irons notes that the two justices voted in 2,703 cases that were decided with full opinions in a time when students protested the Vietnam War, when showing the movie "Carnal Knowledge" was criminal and when pregnant women routinely lost their jobs without disability benefits. The author, who is a professor at the University of California at San Diego, dissects 100 cases in which the two justices wrote opinions on issues involving First Amendment freedoms and Fourteenth Amendment liberties. Of the cases he examines, Brennan and Rehnquist voted together—no surprise—in only two.

Irons at least is candid in the preface when he says the book is not an "objective" study. His allegiance—no, his passion—is with Brennan, who was appointed to the court in 1956 by President Eisenhower and who retired in 1990. Irons describes Brennan as a diminutive man with masterful consensus-building talents who viewed the Constitution as a living document that was meant to protect oppressed minorities from an oft-oppressive majority. His discussion of Rehnquist's staunch beliefs in majority rule, moral relevancy and states' rights is informative, predictable but colored with sarcasm. And the playing field is more than uneven in comparing Rehnquist with a justice who was 16 years his senior in experience on the court.

The book is rife with information, but there are so many facts packed into every page that it is difficult to get a full sense of any one issue, let alone one case. Scores of cases were decided on 5-4 votes, but there is no feeling of exhilaration that comes with debate. And although Irons says he focuses on real people and impacts of cases on their lives, the people are shadows, their lives ill-formed.

Despite its shortfalls, there is something to be learned here. You can't peruse this book, for example, without gleaning some understanding of "deference" in Constitutional philosophy or of what it means to be a judicial activist.

Irons talks about the backgrounds of each justice and about their personalities, but it is without depth or detail. He admits in the preface that he interviewed neither justices nor their clerks and has relied on texts of speeches, opinions, articles and other books about the court for his conclusions. It's a pity Irons didn't sacrifice volume for substance.

Irons is no stranger to the works of the Supreme Court, and his dealings with it put him in the unusual category of having been threatened with a lawsuit by the justices. The controversy a couple of years ago was over Irons's book and tapes set called "May It Please the Court," which was a narrated condensation of oral arguments. He obtained the tapes from the National Archives and despite his agreement not to use them for commercial purposes Irons did. The justices got upset but in the end, they loosened access to the tapes, which have proven to be a valuable educational tool.

If "Brennan vs. Rehnquist" had been more focused and written in a breezy, novelistic style, it may have been richer and had wider appeal. Although the Constitution is for the people, Irons demonstrates through the sheer density of his discussion that its evolution and interpretation are not easy matters. ■

Lorie Hearn is legal affairs reporter for The San Diego Union-Tribune and is in the current class of Nieman Fellows.

Tet Failure Haunts Media

Big Story
Peter Braestrup
Presidio Press. 632 Pages. $16.95 pb.

This fourth edition of "Big Story" includes some updating while retaining its central theme that the American media, print and broadcast, performed badly in covering the Communists' 1968 Tet offensive in the Vietnam War. In brief, Peter Braestrup, who was The Washington Post's Saigon Bureau chief at the time, concludes that the press described the battle as a military victory for the Communists when facts undisputed by the North Vietnamese prove that it was a costly defeat.

Braestrup, a 1960 Nieman Fellow, now Senior Editor and Director of Communications at the Library of Congress, offers a number of reasons for the media's failure at Tet. Two stand out. One is the reporters' myopic fixation with the action close at hand instead of seeing the broad national picture. Fighting was right down the street in Saigon. The American embassy grounds had been penetrated by North Vietnamese sappers. (Contrary to many reports, the enemy soldiers never entered the embassy building.) By the time that the Communists had been driven from Saigon most reporters were attracted to the next crisis, at Khe San. The result was that the public was left with the impression that the Vietcong had won at least a psychological victory, a view the anti-war activists fostered to great effect.

The second reason for the media's failure is the rarity with which the newspaper editor or broadcast news director questioned the reporter's alarming accounts. As Braestrup put it: "Whether or not he was an expert on the Vietnam war, he knew, or should have known from harsh experience, that in the first days of any battle, any crisis, no one (including his staffers in Saigon in this instance) has a clear picture; that most reactions at home will be partisan and off-the-cuff; that political Washington, like Wall Street, tends to overreact to big news, especially big bad news."

Braestrup concludes that the failure at Tet could be repeated in crises today. With competition fierce and communication swifter, reporters are still prone to respond quickly to the action near at hand and news managers, watching events on television, must discipline themselves to question first impressions. ■—rhp

Beware of 'Fact-Filled' Stories That Brighten Pages

Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America
Cynthia Crossen
Simon & Schuster. 272 Pages. $23.

By Marilyn Geewax

One morning, I think it was in 1981, newspaper editors in America woke up and said to themselves: "We're losing readers because we're turning out too many dull and irrelevant stories." Unfortunately, most did not run into their newsrooms that day and shout: "Our work isn't good ennugh. From now on, we're going tn write clearer stories, cover more important issues and wear out our shoes getting to know our communities."

No, to make newspapers more useful to readers, most editors increased the number of short, bright stories that could be packaged with colorful charts. The growing demand from editors for brief, "fact-filled" stories about health, the environment and personal investing spurred many reporters to become gullible consumers of highly questionable polls and studies.

In "Tainted Truth," author Cynthia Crossen provides numerous examples of how respectable news organizations cheerfully disseminated flawed statistics in the push to provide readers with "useful" information.

Consider the saga of the soggy oat. In 1986, the Quaker Oats Company helped pay for a study about the benefits of eating oats. The research showed that consuming a great deal of oat bran appeared to slightly lower cholesterol for people on low-fat diets. Quaker Oats jumped on the study to promote oat bran as a health food, not just a cheap breakfast. With the company's spokesmen pushing the "facts" about oats, the media happily swallowed the mush. Hundreds of stories were written about the beauty of bran.

"People bent on lowering their blood cholesterol levels should be feeling their oats—or at least eating them," The Dallas Morning News reported. By the late 1980's, oat bran had been added to more than 300 products, from potato chips to beer.

It was all very exciting news. Food sections of newspapers could print the latest oat-bran muffin recipes. Health pages could present more snappy charts about cholesterol. Business reporters could write about the growing shortages of oats.

The only problem was that the oat bran story was bunk. Further studies, funded by the federal government and American Heart Association, suggested that people eating five big, dense oat-bran muffins a day were indeed able to slightly lower their cholesterol count. But that happened only because the muffins were so filling they left the dieters too bloated to snack on other cholesterol-laden foods. When trying to reduce one's cholesterol count, it apparently doesn't matter whether muffins contain the bran of oats or wheat.

While the oat bran publicity in the late 1980's didn't do much to educate consumers, it did help teach corporations and public policy groups that many reporters will pass along questionable information, as long as it's served up with handy pie-shaped charts and snappy quotes from experts.

This growing willingness to serve up bunk comes at a time when corporations and lobbyists are getting better and better at churning out tainted data. More sophisticated computers and telephone equipment are making it easier and cheaper to conduct quick and dirty polls. At the same time, universities are more willing to accept corporate money to replace the receding government funds for research. While reporters have been skeptical of pronouncements by government officials, they have tended to be more accepting of "independent" research. Unfortunately, too few journalists seem to realize that "independent" work is often paid for by corporations seeking particular outcomes.

Crossen urges journalists to take much harder looks at the polls, surveys and studies that have become the cheap raw material of news. Editors should make certain reporters understand the fundamentals of gathering statistics. They should demand that all research submitted for publication be accompanied by a technical index and phone numbers so reporters can interview researchers outside of controlled news conferences.

Crossen makes a strong case that in the rush to enliven the daily news, journalists increasingly are allowing themselves to pass along half-truths and misleading data produced by corporations and lobbyists. Surveys, studies and polls, when done fairly and thoroughly, can provide important information about health, the economy and the environment. Journalists shouldn't shy away from using data that adds to our understanding of the world. But the lack of careful analysis of statistical information is turning good reporters into foolish flacks.

Before writing your next "we are eating more broccoli" story, take a hard look at "Tainted Truth."■

Marilyn Geewax of The Atlanta Constitution editorial board, is a 1995 Nieman Fellow.

Keeping the Pressure on the KGB

The State Within a State:
The KGB and Its Hold on Russia—
Past, Present and Future
Yevgenia Albats
Farrar, Stauss, Giroux. 401 pp. $25.

What, another book on the Committee on State Security (KGB)? Yes, another entry for that shelf that may never be filled.

Condescending Americans used to casually dismiss the KGB as the equivalent of a combined FBI, CIA and Secret Service. They were all alike; all countries had their secret police.

But, as Yevgenia Albats, a Nieman Fellow of 1993, so thoroughly describes, there has never been a Western equivalent of the KGB. Even the paranoid Adolf Hitler divided authority among different security agencies so that no single group could challenge his position.

The KGB had a history extending deep into Czarist days as the Okhrana. While its name changed (Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, MGB), the internal security agency was as much a part of Russian life as mud in spring and fall and snow in January.

Part of the secret was to make natives and foreigners alike believe that the "official organs" heard all, saw all and knew all. The KGB was effective to a large extent because there was no limit to what it could or would do "to protect the revolution," its overall franchise.

That provided the KGB with the excuse to monitor any connections between Soviet citizens and outside persons, objects or ideology. One of its favored charges was "anti-Soviet activities" that could cover nearly any activity from active spying to reading Playboy Magazine.

Ms. Albats is one of the many Russians who was disappointed to discover that perestroika—the reconstruction of the Soviet system—advanced without making fundamental changes in the internal security system. When she first started publishing her findings about the successors to the KGB in Moscow, she found herself and her friends harassed in the usual "Chekist" fashion.

"And why is it that in my country I can't simply gab on the phone as I could in Cambridge, Mass.?" she asks.

Ms. Albats has done important work in digging through the records to show that the present-day FSK has hardly changed its spots from its predecessors. She provides unique details of how the old boy network of former KGB operatives survived the Gorbachev era and continues to function under the administration of President Boris Yeltsin.

American readers are likely to be put off by the sharp, nearly hysterical voice that Ms. Albats uses through most of this book. That tone is common in Russian journalism, especially as reporters and editors there struggle for audiences to develop a tradition of free inquiry where there never has been one.

There is also a sense of frustration in these pages because the outrage that Ms. Albats articulates is not shared as widely as it should be. After all, spying on your neighbors and punishing nonconformity are much deeper traditions in Moscow than a free press or basic civil rights.

Russia is attempting a simultaneous three-ring development of political democracy, open markets and respect for civil liberties. If courageous journalists like Ms. Albats keep up the pressure, the old bear may yet learn all of these new tricks.■—MS

Reunion Reminder

Please place on your calendars the weekend of May 4-7 for the Nieman conference on communications technology and reunion of all alumnae/i. Nieman Fellows are invited to take part in both events. You are free to go to just one, or to both. The technology conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cambridge will run from Thursday mid-day through Friday afternoon. The reunion begins with a reception at the Walter Lippmann House late Friday afternoon and runs all day Saturday and Sunday morning at the Harvard Science Center, just a short hike from Lippmann House.

You should have received your initial mailing by now—please return the post card as soon as possible. More information is on the way. Feel free to fax us at 617-495-8976 if you have questions.

For U.S. alums: please return poll questionnaires to the Gallup organization ASAP!! The results will be discussed at the reunion.■

Nieman Foundation On World Wide Web

The Nieman Foundation now has a home page on the Internet. To access it type the **URL http://www.nieman.harvard.edu//nieman.html** on any WWW browser such as Mosaic, Netscape or Lynx. A directory of E-mail addresses for Nieman Fellows will be released during the May conference. Nieman Fellows are encouraged to send their E-mail addresses to **nreports@fas.harvard.edu**.

NIEMAN NOTES

COMPILED BY LOIS FIORE

When English Was More Fluent Than Spanish

BY DIANE SOLIS

As the peso crisis deepened, Mexicans woke up one day before Christmas to learn that the central bank would tighten credit. There was nothing else. Meantime, North Americans were told much more. American correspondents in Mexico City reported that the Mexican central bank would limit growth of 1995 credit to 12 billion new pesos for 1995, that the price of Mexican electricity, gasoline and other oil products would go up and that banks would be open to 100 percent foreign capital.

Always sensitive to unequal treatment when a gringo enters the picture, Mexicans complained bitterly that their government spoke English more fluently than Spanish. The authoritarian, paternalistic voice of the government had spoken to its Mexicans. Meanwhile, those outside its border were served up more details of Mexico's plan to heal itself. Reforma, a one-year-old Mexico City daily, was quick to report both versions of the story.

A government that speaks in multiple voices during a currency crisis can only heighten the panic and broaden the political and social repercussions. The devaluation has wiped out more than a third of the Mexican peso's value, will raise inflation and, possibly, cause a recession. Politically, it represents a dissolution of First World fantasies for Mexico. As a result, some here are asking tougher questions of themselves and the authoritarian political party that has ruled this country for more than 65 years.

Says Sergio Aguayo, a prominent political scientist, "The devaluation is a sad confirmation of what we already knew: we can not trust our officials. It confirms again that there is a systematic pattern of lies, deceptions, lack of respect for the common people and impunity."

But when is there an elegant way to handle a devaluation for an overvalued currency? Difficult as Mexico's economic problems are, many believe better communications could have stemmed some of the financial hemorrhage, and the political fallout of what's been dubbed "the first crisis of the 21st Century" by the head of the International Monetary Fund.

The communications problems, for example, didn't begin and end with the Mexican press. Those in the U.S. were getting many mixed and muddled signals. Only days before the December 20 peso devaluation, Mexico's Finance Minister said the government would defend the peso against mounting pressures and that no devaluation was planned. Investors could rest assured.

When the devaluation hit, the markets reacted like jilted lovers. Mexican stocks and the Mexican peso were routed. Stock exchanges in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru tumbled. Slumps followed in currencies in countries as diverse and far-flung as Sweden and Hong Kong.

The need for quicker and clearer communications could not be more obvious now. Thousands of people will lose jobs because of the market overreaction and overcorrection. Many in the middle class—always precariously perched—could sink into the legions of Mexico's working poor. The credit crunch will halt economic growth.

With the rescue plan, Mexico has already begun to deliver on greater disclosure of financial information. On January 31, the central bank began disclosing its foreign currency reserves monthly; previously, it gave them only three times a year. The most recent disclosure shows that Mexico was probably weeks away from defaulting on its loans had President Clinton not stepped in.

The new monetary data illustrated how badly Mexico needed every dollar from commercial banks, the International Monetary Fund, the U.S., and other foreign official sources. With its markets still unstable and many investors still heading for the exits, Mexico could possibly run out of foreign reserves if it lacked ready access.■

Diane Solis is a correspondent for The Wall Street Journal based in Mexico City. She was a Nieman Fellow in the class of 1990.

1960

John G. (Jack) Samson's 20th book—his third biography—was published in March 1995 by Amato Press, Portland, Ore. The book, "Wulff," is about the long life of America's most famous fly fisherman and Atlantic salmon conservationist, the late Lee Wulff.

"There is not a fly fisherman alive who is not familiar with one of Lee's famous Wulff fly patterns," Samson said. His other two biographies are "The Worlds of Ernest Thompson Seton," the great naturalist, and "Chennault"—Gen. Claire Lee Chennault, founder of the legendary Flying Tigers of World War II.

Samson, who was Editor in Chief of the CBS magazine Field & Stream, the world's largest outdoor magazine, has written 17 other books—mostly all on outdoor subjects.

As an incentive to other geriatric-era journalists, Samson, 73 years old, also just finished another book by Amato Publishing Co. entitled "Sailfish & Marlin On The Fly," written by the first fly fisherman in the world to catch both Atlantic and Pacific sailfish and all five species of marlin on a fly.

1962

John Oliver Emmerich Jr., 65, who used his father's newspaper to build a chain of dailies and weeklies, died suddenly on February 25 at his home in Greenwood, Miss. He suffered an aneurysm after jogging. Known as "J. O." to his friends, Emmerich won his Nieman Fellowship in 1961 when he was working for The Minneapolis Tribune. He worked for The Baltimore Evening Sun and Houston Chronicle before returning to take command of The Macomb Enterprise Journal on the retirement of his father, J.O. Emmerich Sr.

John Emmerich created Emmerich Enterprises, Inc., owning The Clarksdale and Greenwood Commonwealth, dailies like The Enterprise Journal, as well as 10 weeklies in Mississippi and Louisiana. He served on the board of the Associated Press from 1981 to 1990 and was president of the Mississippi Press Association and the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press Managing Editors Association.

A graduate of the University of Mississippi, Emmerich studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and served as an Army lieutenant during the Korean War. He is survived by his wife, Celia, a son, Wyatt, and daughter, Melanie Stringfellow.

Within days after the death, John and Sara Mashek sent a contribution to Nieman Reports in memory of Emmerich.

John Hughes writes to say that "Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali has asked me to become Director of Communications at the United Nations so we're taking a year's leave of absence from Brigham Young University and going to New York from January through December 1995.

"I'll be back at BYU for a couple of days every five or six weeks to keep administering BYU's ongoing International Media Studies Program. But we'll be living in New York for the year and I can be reached at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations, New York, N.Y., 10017."

1967

Alvin Shuster, long-time Foreign News Editor for The Los Angeles Times, is now Senior Consulting Editor. In his new position Shuster, among other things, will undertake special projects for Times editor Shelby Coffey, represent the paper at international conferences, and serve as editor of a new magazine for the International Press Institute, the organization of publishers and editors working to protect the rights of journalists worldwide. (See his views of foreign correspondence on Page 3.)

1968

Ed Lambeth, former Washington correspondent and now professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, is a 1995 winner of the Thomas Jefferson Award. It is presented by the four-campus state system to a faculty member who "through personal influence and performance of duty in teaching, writing and scholarship...best exemplifies the principles and ideals of Thomas Jefferson." A $5,000 honorarium, a certificate and a Thomas Jefferson cup accompany the award.

1981

Don McNeill has had his first fiction published in "Coming Attractions—1994," by Oberon Press, an annual collection of stories by three new Canadian writers. McNeill also hopes to have a volume of stories ready this summer and is about to embark on a novel. He divides his time between teaching at Boston University and a farmhouse in Spain.

1983

"Except for getting fired, things are going great," says **Karl Idsvoog**, describing the circumstances of a controversial situation in which he and his partner, Corky Johnson, found themselves. Karl was special projects producer for an investigative team at WCPO in Cincinnati, working on a story about whether campaign contributions affect judicial decisions: "Is justice for sale in Ohio?" After extensive work on the investigation, Idsvoog was told the story had been killed. Idsvoog protested the killing of the story, saying the decision was "unethical" and "irresponsible." In response, Idsvoog said, WCPO fired him and Johnson. The station says that Idsvoog and Johnson quit.

Because of the controversial nature of the story Idsvoog was working on and the circumstances of his firing, Idsvoog expected some press interest. "Normally, firing the top investigative unit of a television station would be significant news. But not in Cincinnati....As of this writing, The Enquirer has run three short stories on the firing...." Idsvoog adds that the stories that did run did not contain

information on the investigation he was working on or the circumstances surrounding his firing.

Idsvoog, in an appeal to his fellow Niemans, says, "If any of you want the details, call us. It's a great story. We've got documents and a money trail leading all the way to the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio. But you may want to check with your editor first just to make sure it's O.K....."

1985

We asked **Bernard Edinger**, a correspondent with the Paris bureau of Reuters, to describe Le Monde's January, 1995 change in format:

> France's austere but prestigious afternoon daily, Le Monde, has given itself a facelift in a bid to halt dwindling readership and save its independence.
>
> The authoritative newspaper lost 100,000 paying readers in the last 15 years, sinking to a paid circulation of 351,000, including 43,000 abroad. Le Monde's total readership remains high at oearly 2.1 million. Studies show each copy is read by several people.
>
> Seen by many as a newspaper of record and the bible of thinking France, the center-left paper remains required reading in ministries, company boardrooms and universities alike. But in an age of all-pervasive television and dwindling attention spans, Le Monde was finding fewer readers for its long investigative reports and exhaustive foreign coverage. Many readers outside Paris began to prefer regional papers that gave scant attention to world news but provided blanket coverage of local events.
>
> With France facing an economic crunch, advertisers were concentrating their budgets on all-powerful television.
>
> Despite raising its price to seven francs ($1.30) a copy, the same as its main rival the right-wing Le Figaro, but twice as much as most tabloids, Le Monde lost close to the equivalent of $18 million in the last two years. In a bid for fresh funds, Le Monde, historically controlled by its founders and employees, last year raised the ceiling on the number of shares that outsiders can own from 20 percent to 48 percent.
>
> Le Monde's new Executive Editor, Jean-Marie Colombani, created a team headed by 33-year-old Nathalie Baylaucq, a graduate of New York's Parsons School of Design, to find a new layout to attract new readers without frightening away old ones.
>
> Although the newspaper now looks more airy with increased space between articles, the new Monde is far from revolutionary. The same Gothic title block remains and the general impression is still one of serious, solid grayness. The only major change to the eye is that dashes of color are now sometimes included in the front-page political cartoon. News pictures are still out, but there are more artists' sketches of personalities.
>
> Business coverage has been given even more space and sports, once treated condescendingly, now get a full page each day. The editorial, long a front-page feature, has moved to an inside comment page with a distinctly Anglo-Saxon layout.
>
> The newspaper says national sales soared by 44 percent in the first week of the facelift, and were 21 percent up in the second week after the January 9 launch. But the increase appeared to be tailing off, with Paris sales for the third week up just 11 percent. Nationwide figures are not yet available.
>
> One place where readership is not expected to rise is at the Elysee presidential palace. Infuriated late last year by what he felt was excessively inquisitorial coverage of his failing health and disputed war record, President Francois Mitterrand ordered his office's daily order slashed from 100 copies of Le Monde to 20.

1986

Mary Lou Finlay writes:

> As of September 1994, I'm hosting a new programme (not a typo, that's how we spell it up here) about media—new and old; print, radio, TV, digital; stories about journalism, convergence, the "net," and all that. "Now the Details" airs Sunday evenings on the CBC radio network in Canada. There's lots to talk about, natch, and never enough time to cover everything. But we tape the show on Friday so I get weekends off for the first time in six years—what a treat!
>
> I'm also keeping my hand in television, doing a little work with the Discovery Channel in Canada (son of Discovery U.S.), which started up in January.
>
> Son David—six feet tall with hair almost as long—has become the world's most dedicated rock climber and something of an eco-fascist and, if things go as planned, will graduate from high school this year with flying colours (also not a typo). He's also very funny—great to have around.

Richard Steyn has resigned as Editor-in-Chief of the Argus-owned Johannesburg Star, South Africa's leading daily, following a change in ownership and a group restructure which, in his view, elevated commercial above editorial considerations. Instead of being responsible to the chairman and board of directors, Argus editors now report to regional managing directors. Steyn found this unacceptable and resigned effective January 31, 1995.

1988

Agnes Bragadottir writes about a new job:

As from lst of April, I shall be the Cultural Editor of Morgunbladid. I am happy about the promotion, excited about covering a new field, fed up with politicians and business people, and a little bit nervous about how I and "the Cultural Mafia" of Iceland are going to get along! What makes me even happier, the one and only Icelandic Nieman Fellow so far, is the fact that I am also the first woman in the almost 83 years history of Morgunbladid to be promoted! How do you like that?!

Miami Herald reporter **Elinor J. Brecher's** book, "Schindler's Legacy: True Stories of the List Survivors," was published by Dutton/Plume in 1994. She tells why she wrote it:

In an emotional scene near the end of "Schindler's List," the Steven Spielberg film about 1,100 Polish Jews saved from Nazi death camps by German war profiteer Oskar Schindler, the actors playing those Jews are transformed into the actual survivors.

The saga of the righteous Gentile, Schindler, was indeed intriguing, but I felt that the stories of the Jews who endured the unspeakable brutality of the Nazis should not be relegated to a "supporting cast" role. I felt compelled to find out who these people are now, what their lives had been like before the Holocaust, and how they felt about Schindler.

In less than six months, I interviewed nearly 50 "Schindlerjuden" in the United States, and collected over 100 archival and contemporary photographs of the survivors and Schindler, to illustrate their stories.

I was honored when Thomas Keneally, who wrote "Schindler's List," the book that inspired the movie, contributed the forward to "Schindler's Legacy." As he accurately notes, the Holocaust, however formative, was but one phase in the lives of the "Schindlerjuden." Their lives before and after deserve equal note. In "Schindler's Legacy" I tried to preserve their pre-war culture and honor their post-war accomplishments.

Michele McDonald quit The Boston Globe on January 21 and is setting up an office at her home, from which she will operate as a freelance photographer.

1989

Rick Tulsky has had a job change:

I was hired in early February by The Los Angeles Times as a projects reporter, working out of San Francisco.

The hiring came after editor Shelby Coffey 3d expressed to me how important he considers investigative reporting, and how hard he is working to develop pockets of such reporting throughout the newspaper.

It was inspiring and exciting. It also was timely, coming weeks after I abruptly departed the Center for Investigative Reporting.

I handed in my resignation as Executive Director of CIR in December, after discovering at a board meeting that I did not enjoy the support of the board for what I was trying to do.

It was a painful discovery. I had joined the Center in July 1993, and been Executive Director just six months. I had been driven by the conviction that there is a need for a nonprofit Center that would pursue the stories that commercial media either cannot or will not take on.

I admit that I arrived at the Center with a somewhat naive view of things, believing that a nonprofit Center was somehow free from the financial pressures that plague so many media organizations these days.

Reality arrived quickly. Soon after I arrived, CIR co-hosted a journalism conference at which Michael Gartner, the former boss at NBC News and The Des Moines Register, made a comment that rang loudly: "You can't be journalistically vigorous unless you are financially strong. And you can't be journalistically independent unless you are financially strong."

That poses the dilemma: how can an organization succeed by setting as its mission the development of journalism projects that news organizations are unwilling to spend their own money to undertake? Equally difficult: how does an organization remain true to that mission and prosper? And, finally: how does such an organization undertake the projects that it wants to do, as opposed to projects that outlets and potential funders would like to see?

I have no doubt that the concept of the Center remains important: an independent voice, setting a standard for serious, investigative projects at a time when so many news organizations are afraid to take risks. The need becomes particularly striking, as the explosion of new, electronic forms of communication threatens to overwhelm the concept of public interest journalism.

In the end, the problem facing CIR is the problem we all face as journalists: how do we engage in courageous journalism—speaking for the powerless, exposing actions that are contrary to the public interest, and informing the public of societal wrongs—at a time when it becomes easier and easier for the public to turn the channel to the sensational or the more entertaining?

Some members of the class of 1989 met in New Orleans for a reunion. Here is an account of the event by **Jim Tharpe**:

It was a weekend of beignets and walks in the Garden District.

Six Niemans, three with spouses in tow, made their way to New Orleans for a late January weekend to welcome **Cecilia Alvear** back to good health.

Attending and overeating were Ms. Alvear, **Norman** "Mr. New Orleans" **Robinson**, Jim Tharpe, **Connie Casey** and husband Harold Varmus, **Dorothy Wickenden** and husband Ben Weiser, and **Mike** and Barbara **Connor**.

Highlights of the weekend: happening upon author Ann Rice's Garden District house, hors d'oeuvres at Mr. Robinson's home, dinner at the Court of Two Sisters and for those late departures, a tour of the Monet exhibit.

1991

Tim Giago, Publisher of Indian Country Today, was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in a ceremony on October 1, 1994.

1993

Dieudonne Pigui is working as a consultant to the World Bank on a media project on population and development, to make the policies of the World Bank better known and understood to Third World countries. Here is his description of the project:

In June 1994 I wrote a letter to the head of the Occidental and Central Africa Department of the World Bank to propose to him new ways to communicate Bank policies in the region countries.

As an African journalist, I know the absence of communication and the inability to reach local communities which have until now led to the failure of most economic aid programs in the continent.

My goal is to help both the World Bank and the people in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the Francophone countries, to better know and understand each other. People cannot cooperate without real talk, and the Bank, despite its huge financial power, cannot impose any policy with success on parts of the world with deep non-monetarist value systems.

Until now the World Bank has made its policies known through the publication of annual reports, monthly bulletins and conference proceedings. This choice limits its audience to people who both have access to the publications and who have a good background in economics so that they can read and understand the material.

That's an elitist step which chooses to ignore the mass of people who should be the prime target and the main factor in economic development.

My purpose as a consultant is to build a media project using mainly radio and television. Starting in the West African country of The Ivory Coast, I would like through radio programs and TV magazines to create a debate and a triangular dialogue between the Bank staff, the Ivoirian government and the real country people.

For this, I will try to mobilize the energy of the Ivoirian journalists on the economic issues. I shall recall here that in all emerging democracies in Africa the democratic process is in jeopardy when the countries' economies collapse. Social instability due to economic burden is always a pretext for governments and militaries to close the door on civil liberties and human rights.

In a world of sharp financial analysts and cold-minded economists, journalists are felt as intruders, but I hope to make a difference.

In December 1994, **Joe Hall**, editor of The Toronto Star's Saturday edition, became editor of The Sunday Star as well. In a press account of the appointment, Managing Editor Lou Clancy said "Joe has done a terrific job with the Saturday paper and is ideally qualified to take on this new, demanding role. He understands the distinct characters of the two papers and what needs to be done to maintain them. We are simply delighted." Hall said, "It's a fantastic opportunity. I'm going to have fun with this job. My goal will be to make both newspapers essential reading."

Arben Kallamata brings us up to date on what he's been doing since his Nieman year and what brings him back to Boston:

When I was back in Albania from my Nieman year, I worked as Assistant Director of Radio Tirana, but I also taught news reporting and writing at the Faculty of Journalism of Tirana University. Last year I also got a Ph.D. on "Interrelations Between Media and National Culture," at the Academy of Arts of Albania. The present project is a continuation of my first work, on the relations between media and politics, mainly concentrating on government-press interactions, propaganda and different forms of press manipulation. I am on a Fulbright Grant and I work with Professor Lawrence Martin-Bittman of the Department of Disinformation at the College of Communication at Boston University.

I will be here for a period of six months, starting from January 17, 1995. I have my wife, Mimoza, and my kids here with me.

Gregory Roberts writes with two pieces of news, "one personal, one professional, both of them good:"

First, the personal. Raina Marie Roberts joined the extended Nieman family Dec. 12, weighing in at 7 lbs. 12 oz. She is doing fine, as are Gina, Dad and big sister Allegra, an official Nieman Kid (with a baseball cap to prove it!).

Now, the professional. In October last year, I was named the restaurant critic and columnist for The Times-Picayune here in New Orleans, after a grueling tryout period that required me to eat many lavish meals at company expense. The actual job is more of the same—plus, of course, writing about the experience. It's a full-time staff position, and I write a review and a news column each week, in addition to occasional cover stories for the weekend entertainment section. I basically work at home, filing my stories by modem (and caring for Raina while Mom teaches school). I can say, in all honesty, that I have had worse jobs.

Olive Talley of The Dallas Morning News has won a George Polk Award for education reporting. She reported that Texas A&M officials falsified records and ignored competitive bidding requirements on a contract that was given to an associate of a university regent. Her reports led to the resignation of the chancellor and the chairman of the Board of Regents.

1994

Katherine King tells about an unusual weekend in Denver, Colorado:

Melanie "Slim" **Sill** was the first to ride into town. By the time **Maria Henson**, **Terry Gilbert** and Danica Kombol swooped down past the snow-capped Rocky Mountains and rolled into Katie King's hacienda for a long weekend, it was clear this front-range city would never be the same.

It was early December, six months since the Nieman '94 Class was dragged kicking and screaming from its Cambridge nest. A few of us could stand it no longer and decided we needed a Nieman hit—in person. So Melanie, Maria, Terry and Danica made the trek to my house for a renewed bonding "women's weekend."

We missed those who couldn't be there. But we watched the Nieman '94 video (shedding a few tears amid the laughter) and poured over the '94 yearbook.

We toasted all our fellow fellows—and Bill and Lynne [Kovach]—with champagne. We spent Saturday morning sitting on my bed in our pajamas (no pictures, thank you) drinking coffee and placing long-distance phone calls to all our far-flung fellows. We went cross-country skiing, ate sushi and drank red wine.

We resolutely fended off a handsome but intellectually challenged male-stripper for hire who called us to get directions to my house to surprise us (??!!). This gentleman was contracted by two NF '94 members who shall remain nameless though their work for CNN and The Boston Globe is well known.

Lorie Conway left the commercial world for the currently harassed public broadcast world of television as an independent producer at WGBH in Boston. She has worked on a variety of programs, including a period piece about Boston in the 1940's called "Boston the Way It Was," and a piece for the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, which will be sold independently by the school. WGBH showed "Boston the Way it Was" in March. She is also working on a proposal for a national response to a P.O.V. documentary about abortion.

Conway was for 11 years a field producer for a nightly news magazine in Boston covering a variety of social and public interest issues.

So far, Conway finds her foray into the PBS world stimulating and fulfilling, instead of what she thought could have been a place besieged and grappling with its identity.

Larry Tye brings us up-to-date on a reunion of sorts:

The "boys" of the class of '94 staged their own get-together this month in Phoenix at **Jerry Kammer's** place.

Actually, it seemed more like a continuous poker game, complete with too much beer, too much high-cholesterol food, too many cigars and too little recollection of which hand tops which. The only breaks were for a climb in the magnificent hills, a touch football game that one observer said looked like exercise time at a nursing home, and calls to Niemans in places like Hanoi, Belgrade and Nashville.

Attending were **Carlos Pauletti** from Uruguay, **Alan Ota** from Tokyo, **David Lewis** from Atlanta, Henry Stevens from Calgary, **Dan Stets** from Philadelphia and Larry Tye from Boston. Dan's wife, Milica, was the only woman–and the only one with any civility–there.

1995

Lisa Getter and Lizette Alvarez of The Miami Herald won the $25,000 Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting for "Lost in America: Our Failed Immigration Policy." The seven-part series, which ran in December 1993, was cited as "particularly noteworthy in combining the exposure of questionable practices with a broader and informative portrayal of a larger system."

The Goldsmith Prize is given to honor "enterprising or crusading journalism which promotes more effective and ethical conduct of government, the making of public policy, or the practice of politics by disclosing excessive secrecy, impropriety and mismanagement or instances of particularly commendable government performance." The award, funded by the estate of Berda M. Goldsmith and given by the Joan Shorenstein Center of the Press, Politics and Public Policy, was presented March 9.■

On Heroes, Feet of Clay and J.W. Fulbright

By James C. Thomson Jr.

I am in my early sixties and have not wept about the death of anyone a lot older since my parents slipped away in their eighties two decades ago. But that Thursday as I heard the news of Senator J. William Fulbright's death on my car radio, I dissolved into sobbing, extended sobbing.

Why on earth such a reaction? I have been searching for answers, and those answers seem to be about heroes.

As a boy who adored Franklin Roosevelt (and cried at age 13 when he died), I adopted a few contemporary Americans as my political heroes. At the top of the list, once I was at college in the 1950's, were Dean Acheson and Adlai Stevenson. One might rightly deduce that I was an incurable liberal Democrat.

The problem about heroes is that their clay feet eventually show and even predominate. Acheson became much too arrogantly rigid; Stevenson became a Hamlet-type softy. Even my longest and closest boss in Connecticut and Washington politics, Chester Bowles, had what one might call a clay tongue — an inability to participate in combative political discourse (taking refuge instead in wise but unread long memorandums).

But this man Senator Bill Fulbright! I had heard about him, of course, because of his sponsoring of probably the most important program ever to create international understanding, what became the Fulbright fellowships and professorships.

I also knew of him as the powerful and articulate Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—a former Rhodes Scholar and university president—once I went to work in the Kennedy Administration's State Department in January 1961.

But most of all, I knew of him as the leading contender to be Kennedy's Secretary of State. I was aware that his negative voting record on civil rights legislation—a prerequisite to keeping his Arkansas Senate seat in those years—was a big problem for JFK.

I also learned at that time of transition, that the American Israeli lobby had gone to work massively and successfully to block Senator Fulbright's appointment because of his allegedly pro-Arab or (even more suspect) "even-handed" approach to the Middle East.

As a result of Fulbright's removal from President Kennedy's final list, our nation and two presidents had to endure the stolidly rigid eight-year tenure of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, a man who seems in retrospect to have been traumatized by "Asian Communism" during his earlier bureaucratic service as the Korean War exploded. We are told that JFK had wanted to offload Rusk; but also that LBJ felt too insecure in foreign affairs to let him go. In any event, Rusk stayed on, never apparently doubting our Vietnam folly.

What a difference for American history, at home and abroad, if Bill Fulbright had become Kennedy's Secretary of State—and Johnson's holdover mentor in that job! So much needless killing might have been averted.

It was, of course, Chairman Fulbright who pushed through the Senate's Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964, giving LBJ a virtual free hand to wage war in Southeast Asia. But it was also Chairman Fulbright who soon felt deceived about the Tonkin Gulf "incidents" and developed deep doubts about Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam war in 1965. In 1966, and again in 1967, Fulbright held extended televised hearings on the war, giving the protesters outside government some sense of legitimacy. The chairman's dual purpose was to de-escalate that war, and also to get the U.S. back into communication with our principal Asian adversary, Communist China.

I was on the National Security Council Staff at the White House during the first year of those famous Fulbright hearings. And I would do my utmost in summary memos to my bosses to emphasize that the man LBJ called "Senator Halfbright" (as had Joe McCarthy) was not trying to do us harm. I'm not sure my point got across.

It was after I returned to teach at Harvard in the fall of 1966 that I not only publicly applauded this brave man but also got to know him a bit. Before long, as the Vietnam bombing intensified under Nixon, I was twice called down to testify before his formidable committee.

Actually, the experience was rather like having to perform in a graduate seminar at a good university. The chairman, a short, walnut-brown, benign, balding fellow, would let you read your opening statement. He would then ask you (his eyes peering over Ben Franklin glasses from the Committee's elevated perch) to elucidate certain points; his approach was courtly, but his questions were never soft. When he finished, he would pass the asking to some person from the Republican side.

Once, in April 1972, I found myself seated next to this Great Man at an annual Oxford-Cambridge dinner in Washington where we were both to be speakers. Did we talk about the past, and what might have been different if he had been Secretary of State? You bet we did. We didn't spend time on bitterness, just sadness that presidents could go so wrong.

A few years later, when I was Curator of the Nieman Fellowships, I persuaded the Senator (now out of office) to come and meet with us, informally and off the record. That afternoon and evening Fulbright had to undergo an intensive grilling from a black Nieman Fellow, a very bright graduate of Swarthmore College on leave from Time magazine. Why had our visitor voted the way he had on civil rights issues during his decades as a Senator? And why, I added, half-heartedly joking, had this great internationalist always voted to keep very high the tariffs on French poultry that might threaten Arkansas? Our guest kept his cool throughout, gave us explications without guilt; and quite soon even our Swarthmore friend was mollified.

After all that, we had a great evening with a marvelously wise man who might have had just a bit of clay in a toe or two—but would admit it with a chuckle.

What a gift Bill Fulbright's life has been for all of us who still yearn for heroes. And what a sadness that he has gone. That, it seems, is why I cried.■

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