

# NIEMAN REPORTS

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## Move Over, Washington Here Comes Metro News

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# Judge Thomas, Anita Hill and the Press

BY BILL KOVACH

The Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill confrontation before the Senate Judiciary Committee cut through so many layers of life in America that it has become one of those defining moments of the state of American society.

The record of those hearings will be studied for years for the insights they pro-

## Curator's Corner

vide into race and gender relations, regional and political polarization, moral and ethical values, mores of the workplace and the behavior of institutions ranging from the Senate to the mass media. On these subjects — and more — material for important books was compressed into three days of televised hearings.

Under such a weight of material early reactions are typically generalized, often emotional, complaints. That has been true of reaction to the press. The press is attacked both for forcing the issue before a reluctant audience and for being forced to cover an issue it otherwise ignores.

To learn from the experience it is important that journalists examine media performance in two key roles in the affair: publicly revealing an issue that otherwise would have gone unresolved and covering the resolution of that issue.

When reporters for Newsday and National Public Radio revealed the charges of sexual harassment against the Supreme Court nominee they discharged a basic press obligation to the public. Complaints of "press leaks" and "media feeding frenzies" by elected officials were merely efforts to deflect attention from the issue of their own performance. Political posturing aside, it was to stimulate the

press to monitor government behavior that the press was included in the First Amendment.

Once the explosive issue of mixing sex and race (which the Senators had privately agreed to avoid) became public they stumbled onto a strange stage with no script to follow. Alone in the glare of the spotlights, they fell back on their basic political instincts. Each Senator scrambled for safe ground: attack when you can; when you can't attack, hide. From the first hour of the hearings it was clear that the goal of the committee was less to judge the issue than to suffer as little political damage as possible from the process. And they designed the process with that need uppermost in their minds.

It was a process in which the public need for frames of reference, context and mitigating information could only be provided by journalists.

As if mesmerized by the spectacle of the committee's stumbling, the press failed to continue in the monitor's role. The national audience of the electronic coverage was trapped inside the committee room, as ignorant of what went on outside as the cameras and microphones themselves. The bulk of the print press, too, chose to devote most of its reporting and newsprint resources on what went on in the room.

Outside there were forces at work which might have helped the public better understand the drama on the screen. Consider only a few possibilities for stories of context on the process alone:

- Of all the possible hearing formats, why was the one we saw chosen?
- What factors entered into choosing the unusual rules of questioning by

"designated"?

- What was the role of the White House and the Republican National Committee and the Republican leadership in the Senate in the hearings?
- What was the degree of control by public relations firms on timing and content and presentation of testimony by Anita Hill?
- Who were the witnesses and why were these particular witnesses chosen to appear?
- Finally, why did the Senate allow political parties outside the committee and public relations firms decide to schedule or not to schedule witnesses who were under subpoena?

Pieces of some of these stories appeared here or there but none of them became consistent frames of reference for the continuing coverage. Their importance to the process and its outcome are still unknown weeks after the conclusion of the hearings. The list on process alone could fill a column. Expand the list to include the more complex issues of racism and sexism, of the conduct of the Office of Economic Opportunity and enforcement of the law and rules of the workplace and it is an almost endless list.

In a disturbing way these kinds of questions about the ability of the press to provide adequate context are too familiar. They occur regularly with a nationally televised story. They are the same questions which occurred during and after the war in Iraq.

These defining moments in the life of a nation are rare opportunities for journalists to make the case to the public of their value most forcefully. Imposing order on the haphazard way of life presents information and provides context that make the information useful and is the ultimate challenge of journalism.

We all know that the quality that frustrates the best journalism is its reactive nature. The question is whether there is enough information about this behavior and about the nature of transfixing stories available to consider creating planning departments in the newsroom to develop plans for reacting to these opportunities. Maybe this kind of planning could create ways to make the news report a vital part of the consumer's day and not simply another frantic player in the competition for their leisure time. □

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# Why They Don't Love Us Anymore

*Newspapers Should Take More Risks, Offer More Local News, Instead of Pulling in Journalistic Horns*

BY DAVID NYHAN

*Psst! Hear the latest? There's too much information going around. Pass it on.*

Of all the problems crunching the newspaper business, the info-glut is heaviest. Of the various rocks that pin the newspaper colossus to the turf, the undeniable infinitude of factual trivia is the baddest boulder of them all.

When newspapers meant most in this country, before phones, radio, TV and MTV, the papers were the nation's nervous system. No more. The blend of fact (news and advertising), service information and entertainment we collectively stumble through and around is a testament of faith.

It's like an aboriginal medicine man doing a full-feather tap-dance to guarantee the sun will come up tomorrow morning. It doesn't hurt, it feels good, it impresses the hell out of the audience, and, whaddya know, the sun does come up, more or less as predicted.

We were brought up as newspaper people to believe there is an ideal formula, and if we can just *find* it, we'll prosper off our maximized circulation base and live happily ever after.

We were also brought up to believe that the more information we gave the citizenry, the more informed they'd be and the better citizens they'd become. Guess what? The more information we give them, the more confused and dispirited they become. Don't take my word for it. Check the voter turnout trends. The more information we shovel onto the old conveyor belt, the more our audience turns off.

We keep it up, and we'll drive voter turnout below the 50-per-cent-plus-a-

smidgen of the last Presidential election, down into the 40's.

We fill our daily bin with rubble, big chunks on "important" stories, plenty of medium-sized bits for the in-between stories and lots of slivers, pebbles and dust for packaging purposes. Then we back 'er up and dump the load on the reader, convinced we've done our job. We are killing them with information, literally drowning readers with stuff they don't want. But our high-mindedness tells us the roughage we serve up would be *good* for them, if they'd just grin and swallow.

The children of the people who earn their living by creating America's newspapers. Those kids don't read the papers their parents put out, by and large. Not like readers used to read. But such warning signals do not discourage our devotion to finding the right formula. Careers are made and broken in the news biz off the facility, skill and pizzazz of the formula-fixers. What used to be a nice little line of work, telling a newspaper owner how to run the joint, is now very high-tech. Lots of mumbo-jumbo.

There's a whole generation of newspapers out there being run by someone who got the knack of latching onto a newspaper proprietor or heir and convincing what is ultimately an audience of one that *here* is where we start to drill for oil.

## Short-Lived Expectations

No amount of market research, focus group massaging or fiddling with reader surveys guarantees success. For every new layer of newspaper bureaucracy,

there is a fresh set of short-lived expectations:

- If only we design the paper better, more folks will buy it. This is like the anxious home-seller saying, "If I paint the place, maybe I can get my asking price."
- If we just make the stories shorter and snazzier, the young people will start reading us again. This is the "If you build it, he will come" approach.

*David Nyhan is a columnist for The Boston Globe. His column is syndicated nationally by Creators Syndicate. He has written on six Presidential elections, reported from every state*



*and a dozen other countries. Prior to joining The Globe he worked for the Associated Press and The Evening News in Salem, Mass. He is an associate editor of The Globe. At various times in 21 years at the paper, he has been state house bureau chief, labor reporter, Congressional correspondent and White House correspondent in the Washington bureau, assistant managing editor in charge of news, and directed the paper's political coverage. Married and father of three, Nyhan graduated from Harvard in 1962. He wishes it were otherwise, but he's never been a Nieman Fellow.*

- Once we get the thing printed two hours earlier, our home-delivery will skyrocket. Sure.
- As long as we cut our editorial policy to fit the local cloth, they'll stick with us. This is the bore-them-till-they-surrender approach.
- More pictures and lotsa graphics, that's the ticket. Let me put it this way: if you leave the TV on, in front of a pile of newspapers, the average 3-, 10-, 16- or 25-year old will go for the tube over print, nine times out of ten.

Our keepers are mesmerized by weighty discussions of how to devise newer, thinner, cleverer ways to slice the baloney. The fact that it's still baloney is lost in the shuffle.

As our industry became so profitable, we changed. We are bigger, yes. But flabbier, too. Fewer editorial chances are taken. We blushed at the brashness of newspaper verities from an earlier age, like the one about our mission being to "afflict the comfortable, and comfort the afflicted."

You couldn't repeat that with a straight face when the homeless clog the doorways and subways of Manhattan, when the afflicted spend so much of their time getting high and taking pot shots at the neighbors. The local news became so depressing, we began printing more foreign news, more national news. Tragedy in a tidal wave in Bangladesh is an easier story to tell than nine slain in 48 hours in the inner city right here at home.

As the cities become doughnuts, black holes surrounded by doughy white suburbs, the papers try to devise new ways to cover things, scratch the surface, reach some acceptable level of compromise and turn to the more tractable concerns of the affluent white suburbanites who patronize our most desirable advertisers. So let's build up the boutique section, living, or lifestyle, whatever, and get cracking on those stories my colleague Chris Reidy calls "the late-breaking recipes."

Local news, with neither money nor leadership from Washington, is sad news to sell.

## Newspapers Become Replications of TV

Newspapers have been fighting off the TV monster for so long, we've turned our newspapers into black-and-white-and-color replications of television — *in print*. And you will not be totally shocked to learn that TV-TV is intrinsically more enticing than newspaper-as-TV.

Our editors now think in terms of television. You can't really blame them. They watched this gunk seven hours a day, like most everyone else, and their brains were turned to jellied eel. To many newspaper editors, television actually represents the real world. Not the reel world. If you stop and think, it is astonishing how newspaper decisions are skewed by editors' not-very-penetrating guess-timates about how the folks who buy the paper relate to what's on the tube.

Walter Cronkite's speech at Harvard last November underlined the newspapers' problem with TV: "One of the major problems I think we have in communications in the country today is the fact that most newspapers are trying to compete with television in television's backyard. They are trying to compete with television with entertainment instead of competing with television with news. They can beat us with news if they would present more news and do it more thoroughly than they are doing it in many cities in the U.S., instead of filling their newspapers with feature material . . . I just wish that the newspapers would stick to giving us the news and [leave] the entertainment to the television networks."

Now it is the networks themselves that are shrinking their news staffs and budgets.

Hundreds of separate decisions are made every day in the newsrooms of America predicated upon what newspaper editors *think* their target audience is *thinking about* that's on TV.

## Short-Changing Close-To-Home News

A funny thing happened to newspapers on the way to the future. They fell into the habit of short-changing the news. Local news, state

news, the close-to-home news.

The bosses decided: gimme that Big Picture. The big-big-bigger the picture, the big-big-bigger we play it.

Ulan Bator, South Yemen, pick-any-province-east-of-the-Ukraine, you name it, and it's been on page one lately. When *The New York Times* of Oct. 18, 1991 hit the streets, the lead story was . . . (drum roll, please . . .) a water-main break at Grand Central Station the day before, which turned some midtown subways stops into mini-Venices, sans gondoliers. Unbelievable. The *Times*, leading the paper with a local story. Can anyone remember the time before that?

James Reston's memoir, "Deadline," summarized the formula that guided *The New York Times*: "We believed that if we gave all the varied constituencies of the New York community more news of their homelands and other special interests, we would attract enough readers to attract the advertisers . . . The *Times* prospered while skinnier and brighter papers expired."

I'm not picking on *The Times*; everyone knows they have a bigger role. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that on November 4 *The Times* slammed in its spiffy new Metro Section, with the aim of beefing up local coverage to fend off *Newsday's* encroachment. But doesn't it seem as if most of the nation's daily papers have gone nutty over foreign or national stories, to the detriment of state and local coverage?

Most news professionals listen to National Public Radio. But there are days when I call it International Public Radio.

My colleague David Greenway, whose life was that of the foreign correspondent till he beached in the *Globe's* newsroom as an editor, assures me my view is ass-backward. His actual words were: "What a ludicrous contention!"

"Too much foreign news in America's newspapers?" Not for my man Greenway. The implosion of communism, the breakup of the Soviet empire, the reunification of Germany, the reversal of the Bolshevik Revolution, "These are events of staggering importance to every American's life. Put on top of that the first major American war since Vietnam

... how can American readers make judgments about their own country if they are not informed about what's going on overseas?"

Exactly. And how can Americans make judgments about their state legislature and the city council, if they are not given a rich menu of local and state news? There have been a number of valiant internationalists, like my friend Greenway, who've spent their careers trying to pry open the eyes of first their bosses and then their readers as to what goes on on the rest of the planet. I mean no injury to them here.

But we've gone too far in the direction of foreign news, to the point where the rewards, the incentives and the play have been snatched away from close-to-home hard news. Greenway dismisses my notion. "Foreign news provides a convenient scapegoat for Know-Nothings," he thrusts. "Only a few metropolitan newspapers cover foreign news in any depth and television cannot handle the job."

### **Timid Executives Hunkering Down**

Greenway estimates the foreign news gets barely 10 per cent of the newshole. My beef is that, lately, that 10 per cent has been monopolizing front pages from Augusta to Anchorage. Editing boils down to the simple exercise of choice. And every page one story from the other end of the earth knocks off page one a story pegged to more proximate concerns. To what end?

Driving off readers? Chilling circulation? Making it safer for editors? Sheltering in the lee of editorial decisions made by network producers and local TV news directors? Homing in on the frequency of news magazines? What are we doing to our newspapers? Why are we doing it?

Dulling them down. Dumbing them down. "Safing" them down, by reducing friction with local advertisers, interest groups or loud-mouthed lobbies. Taking the easy way out. Newspaper proprietors, a notoriously timid bunch, weighed their various alternative strategies for the Nineties, and came to the near-unanimous conclusion: time to

hunker down. Boat-rocking is definitely out. Pulling in your journalistic horns is definitely in.

I admit I haven't read but a handful of the 1600-odd U.S. dailies to prepare this screed. Who does? Who'd *want* to, given the formulaic repetitiveness of our daily news journals? Are not our papers as homogenized, as bland, as predictable, as pre-packaged, as the stupid TV news? Can you tell one network from another, without the logos and the anchors' hairdos?

Does not every half-hour local news show follow the same lame formula? Logo up, cue the cha-cha-cha music, cut to the nick-name and the cheery grin at the anchor desk, rip-and-read the headlines, nod to the opposite-number, mention the goofy weatherguy by first name, tell us how Biff will be along with all the scores, and cap it all with a warm-and-wonderful or some video of a *kultcha* kind of event?

A no-brainer, right? But how difficult would it be to mock the construction, execution and flavor-quotient of the vast majority of American newspapers? Not very.

### **Newspapers Improve — Yes, But**

Newspapering has changed for the worse this past decade. Not in every way; in some ways papers are better, more professional, better-designed, more sensitive to race and gender and aesthetics, yes, all of that. Those outfits that can afford it have binged on technology: pagination, color printing, upscale design, all sorts of computery gizmos in the back shop that cost zillions and promise some kind of return.

But if demographers understand that people vote with their feet, newspaper people also must understand that readers exercise choice in measurable ways. And by any measure, we are not seizing and holding readers' attention. In a nation now 260 million strong, where 60 per cent of high school graduates supposedly go on to college, daily newspaper circulation got hung up around 64 million, and died. Why newspapers cannot get over the 64

million circulation hurdle is the 864 question.

Can there be a simple explanation?

Is it only that dull people produce dull newspapers? That dull owners hiring dull editors to supervise dull reporters cranking out dull prose is the only thing we have to fix?

Or is it more complicated than that? Isn't *everything* more complicated than that?

Newspaper owners deserve more credit than they get for generally holding to standards of decency and taste. They resist the tide pulling the media generally in the direction of tawdriness. Television more than fills the bill, but the papers in this country, unlike the popular dailies of, for example, Britain, generally eschew the titillation route. Our papers may be maudlin, but we generally pass on the kinky. We collectively turn a tin ear to the complaints of the exasperated moralists, the "why can't you print more good news?" crowd.

I spare you the wheezy arguments about how it's our duty to bring you the news of the bad things that happen to good people, tsk tsk. That's the 'good' bad news, as opposed to the 'bad' bad news. Into the 'bad-bad' garbage can I toss exploitation news, stuff that is titillating for its own sake, rank, creepy, vicious, underhanded, scatological, or otherwise impure under prevailing community standards, whatever they happen to be. This lowest-common-denominator journalism is no longer totally confined to freaky supermarket tabloids, or what used to be called "skin magazines." For competitive reasons (shorthand for: need to make money) we've seen crasser journalism seeping into the mainstream, like contaminants seeping into your well-water.

The bad stuff has achieved a secure foothold in some of our racier newspapers. There is a newspaper equivalent of Gresham's Law, which holds that bad money drives out good. In the new risqué journalism, a marginally-scrubbed-up version of the old exploitation journalism, bad newspapering seeks to drive out good. The polite newspapers by and large have held the

line against Gerardo journalism, schlock for schlock's sake.

### Madonna Option of New Costumes

Instead, we opted for Madonna journalism, dressing up old themes in provocative new costumes. We tolerate a push-the-edge-of-the-envelope approach that moves the boundaries of what used to be considered risqué. As common tastes have eroded, we have allowed our taste to become dulled. A lot of big-city papers will tolerate Madonna journalism, but draw the line at Roseanne Barr journalism.

This is the kind of baggy-pants, grab-your-crotch journalism catering to the taste for raunch. It is drop-your-trousers journalism, anything for a cheap thrill, even mugging up the Star Spangled Banner for bathos-drenched laughs. It is fancied by impulse-buy non-subscription rags whose bleating tabloid headlines literally scream from the box of the newsstand rack: "*Buy me! Buy me! Sex! Sex!*"

The polite newspapers try to find classier ways to do it. But there is always the potential for a steady seepage of raunch into mainstream journalism. The newspapers by and large have held the line against porn, exploitation and shock journalism. But the television networks' standards are softer. The network code word "jiggle," a sort of measure of cleavage allowable, has expanded to compensate for the titillation purveyed on cable and videos.

The newspaper business is losing ground for lots of reasons.

The economy slithered under recession's rock and stayed there, drying up advertising. Newspapers sold stock, and made tons of money for proprietors, because the market loves a monopoly, and most papers are in monopoly situations vis a vis other newspapers.

Belatedly we found that nature abhors not only vacuums, but monopoly newspaper situations. So that direct mail, cable network shopping, weeklies, shoppers and all manner of interlopers carrying advertising messages invaded the prior domain of daily newspapering. Who's that eating our lunch?

We survived radio, telephones, televi-

sion, cable. Direct mail may now be the newspapers' Public Enemy No. 1. I shuddered the day my Time magazine arrived with my name not only on the postal label, but in the box on the cover, where Time proved beyond a shadow of doubt, to me and four million fellow-subscribers, that, yes, David Nyhan, you too can have your name on the cover of Time. As a 9-year old of my acquaintance would say: awesome.

While the newspapers have still failed to figure out what TV would do to us, as we try to imitate TV and replicate it in print, direct mail methodically infiltrates our foundation, like termites in the timbers, munching away silently, inexorably.

Newspapers increasingly seem to function in the diminished space of the public's attention span. Cronkite called it an "intellectual crawl space" in his Kennedy School assessment of TV news:

"We have indeed raised the floor of understanding for people across the country, people who, very sadly, regrettably, almost criminally cannot read or will not read, which is even worse. We've raised the floor of their knowledge.

"Unfortunately, at the same time, I'm afraid, we've put something of a cap, a ceiling on the knowledge for the average person who just absorbs some part of television. That has left kind of a narrow intellectual crawl space between floor and ceiling, which has been television's role."

Into that crawl space, our newspapers are headed. Don't forget to duck.

### A Powerful Press Losing Its Nerve

I want to explore the case for this thesis: the Eighties were the decade in which America's important newspapers lost their nerve. The papers and the television news industry changed drastically between the Sixties and Seventies, on the one hand, and the Seventies and Eighties on the other.

In the era of civil rights, Vietnam, political assassinations, urban riots, Watergate, the women's uprising and the sexual revolution, the newspapers and

TV news challenged the official version of the status quo, usually from the liberal, or anti-authoritarian end.

A conservative reaction set in very quickly. There was too much change, too fast, for the men who ran America's institutions. Reporters, columnists, anchormen, were suddenly a threat to the status quo, to establishment views, to patterns of wealth. Media folk were promptly deemed to have too much power.

It wasn't just politicians who resented the new class of media upstart. The proprietors, owners and managements of television operations and a lot of newspapers decided it wouldn't do to have the inmates running the asylum.

Al Hunt, the Washington bureau chief of The Wall Street Journal, cracked, "At one time I teased my friend Fred Wertheimer of Common Cause saying that they represent the 'guilty rich.' And he responded, but you write for the 'guiltless rich.'"

The alarm went up from traditionalists during the Carter administration. The press had too much power, and was ruining the country, the anti-communism crusade, the morals of our young, the fabric of our community, etc. Once Richard Nixon was run out of town by the media posse, the power of the press became a big issue in the rise of the so-called New Right. This was the Old Right in double-knit suits, scrubbed squeaky-clean and guaranteed free of left-wing notions, marijuana smoke or sexual permissiveness.

With the help of oil money, gun lobby money, crush-a-commie-for-Christ money, the New Right crunched a platoon of liberals in the U.S. Senate in 1978's election and helped duop Jimmy Carter two years later. Hello, Reagan Revolution.

Suddenly it was a whole new day for conservative interests: defense contractors, oil companies, go-go bankers, developers of all stripes. Anyone who wanted to expand his commercial horizons, and dump on Federal regulation designed to try and wall off the greedy was welcome to lunge for the buck.

Leftists — environmentalists, regula-

tors, peaceniks, ban-the-bombers, scal-savers, tree-huggers — were in broad retreat.

Simultaneously, newspapers came into vogue as investments. The unbridled capitalists Reagan turned loose on Wall Street discovered that newspapers were monopolies, in many cases, and cash cows, in most cases. Assembling small family monopolies into extended chains of local media monopolies became the thing to do. Chaining of papers did to newspapering what the malling of America did to retail shopping. The chapter headings? Homogenization of product. Loss of idiosyncratic publishers. Decline of columnists.

### Cut Local Columnists To Save on Costs

Columnists are a vanishing breed, like gunslingers no longer needed to terrorize sod-busters after the range wars ebbed. We've gone to an era of comparison shopping by op-ed editors. Costs can be cut by eschewing local columnists, who demand not only salaries but raises, who develop followings and become ornery and often cantankerous prima donnas, pronouncing on this topic or that subject, stirring the pot, raising hackles, infuriating this interest or that sacred cow. So much easier to just rip a canned column off the wire, or out of the mail, slug it in there, write a head, send it down to be set and forget about it; who cares if the readers don't get a chance to develop a habit of *reading* this particular column?

Conservative think tanks sprouted in the Reagan era like mushrooms on a rainy lawn. They began providing free or cheap commentary for hundreds of papers that could plug empty holes on op-ed pages with stuff that was informed, opinionated (almost always with a conservative tilt) and often very crisp, readable and even persuasive.

Networks became pawns in the boom cycle. Tisch, Cap Cities, General Electric bought up the Big Three networks. Rupert Murdoch created one out of nothing. Ted Turner elbowed his way into a seat at the high stakes game. The late Robert Maxwell barged in from Europe, his "I Love New York" cap askew.

The Reagan era arrived on a tide of conservative discontent with the news media's performance during the Seventies. William F. Buckley closed out a triumphant anniversary dinner for his National Review crowd with a roll-up-the-shirtsleeves speech: "We've got a country to run." Yowza!

Backed by grumpy millionaire right-wingers, conservative alternative newspapers sprouted on campus, nurturing the careers of tyros aspiring to political careers in the Brave New World of Reagan-journalism. Since the average college newspaper is a sort of muddle-headed, spongy outfit manned by post-adolescent part-timers who also have to carry a full course load, the financial backing and big-brotherly encouragement from the conservative movement helped empower campus conservatives.

At about the same time the Reagan White House, under Mike Deaver, began its methodical revolution in the way a President can manipulate the nation's news agenda. Deaver's White House became a master propaganda nexus. Satellite transmissions gave local anchors access to the mighty. The network filter was no longer a prism controlled by spiritual heirs of Edward R. Murrow.

Perhaps the greatest single triumph of the Reagan propaganda apparatus was the channel-changing that accompanied the single most devastating foreign policy event of his reign. After more than 240 US Marines were blown up as they slept in a Beirut barracks, the nation was numbed. Within hours, before blame could congeal around the Reagan administration's no-bullets-in-our-guns-while-we-show-the-flag Mideast policy, the nation's attention was swiftly diverted with the let's-invade-Grenada mini-war, against a tiny force of Cuban bulldozer operators. That was one little war we *knew* we could win. Now it's right up there on the list of U.S. conquests, alongside WWII and now Iraq. Nobody in the newspaper business needs reminding of how gullibly we swallowed the Pentagon censorship of Operation Desert Storm, not the finest hour, or six weeks, of American journalism.

### News We Didn't Get Till Afterward

I've yet to read a plausible and convincing account of how the newspapers, never mind the rest of the media pack, missed so many of the big stories of the Eighties: Iran-contra; the looting of the S&Es; successive, you-name-'em Pentagon scandals; AIDS; congressional vote-buying via PAC money; CIA complicity in Noriega's drug-running; the coverup of the nuclear weapons manufacturing scandals; and a half-dozen others I forget for the moment. With something like 13,000 journalists in Washington, is it not mind-boggling that so many heavy-duty scandals went uncovered so long? Is there some kind of trend at work here?

Compared with prior generations of newspapers, today's lot seems excessively well-mannered. We are weighty, portentous, we cluster around very grave colloquia. Our leading lights take themselves with due seriousness on the few occasions when newspaper executives defend their stewardship in public.

If there is a standing headline for generic banalities uttered by timid news executives explaining their wares, it would be: "Don't ask." If there was a standing sub-head, it would be: "Trust us."

So shaken were newspaper proprietors by the cataclysms of the Sixties and the tumult of the Seventies, with two presidents unhorsed, a war lost, very real and very scary rioting in the cities, that our papers seemed relieved when things got back to "normal" under Reagan, normal meaning the rich running things pretty much their way, the way they did in the Fifties.

American newspapers had been outrageous, venomous, shrill, even hysterical in previous generations. During the Revolution, the westward expansion, the Civil War, Reconstruction, through the Roaring Twenties and Prohibition and into the Depression, newspapers were hip-deep in controversy, politics and strife.

Now? Now we're maybe ankle-deep, in something a lot less exciting. Rooted in market share, obsessed with not offending anyone who has any clout at

all, content to allow school systems to rot and infrastructure to decay, we publish house organs for the establishment, a slow-motion long-running holding action.

Hiding behind "balance," we tilted heavily back toward wealth, privilege, power, incumbency, status quo.

It is as if the major newspaper owners got together at one of those mountainous retreats, and decided: "Let there be less controversy." The replacement of a lot of big-city editors has resulted in or coincided with what seems to be a more subdued editorial approach.

A number of the most powerful papers have turned to new leadership. Gone from the battlefield of daily journalism are people like Bill Kovach, now of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard, formerly of The Atlanta Constitution; Jim Squires, late of the The Chicago Tribune; Gene Roberts, late of The Philadelphia Inquirer. A pair of editors whose clout exceeded their cities, Ben Bradlee Sr. of The Washington Post and Tom Winship of The Boston Globe, segued into retirement without controversy.

But all these men, hired to be top-gun editors at some of the nation's leading newspapers, left behind newspapers that find it necessary to redefine their roles.

## The Golden Age — Is It Gone?

Many older newspapermen think ill of the trendline. One outstanding trait of today's newspaper game is docility. The newspaper people who did battle against Nixon, who covered the battles of civil rights or Vietnam, feel downright glum about the business today. "It's over . . . we lived through the Golden Age . . . it's never going to be like it was" is a common theme of barroom bereavement talk among journalists who feel the rules changed while they were in mid-career.

Just when the news media had scored some major hits, after the strife of the Sixties and Seventies broke open the old monopolies of information and intelligence and funding that so empowered the other institutions — government, private, religious, commercial, non-profit — the newspapers began to

chicken out. Somewhere along the line, we seemed to lose our collective nerve. We became establishment, indistinguishable from the mandarins who run society.

Caution, prudence, timidity, mediocrity, half-a-loafism, became the modus operandi of the media as managed by the new media magnates. Oh, we got lip service at all the normal stops. You couldn't point to any particular speech or journalism convention or change in editorial direction and say, with conviction: "Aha! So *this* is where it turned around."

It wasn't as organized or as neat or as tidy as that. All of a sudden, the tide was going out, instead of coming in. And there was all this seaweed left on the beach.

By absorbing the assumptions of the lifestyle of the America's successful class, white-collar managers, the media by and large opted for the comfy lapdog approach.

We stopped sweating for stories and settled for access. Sweating was reserved for workouts in sanitized health clubs, no smoking please. Spritzers replaced highballs. Our livers got healthier, our cardiovascular ratings soared. But where we got weaker was in the vicinity of the heart.

Without even putting up much of a fight, the powerful newspapers and networks that had taken on the race issue in the Sixties and the war issue in the Seventies got fat, happy and cozy with the crowd that came to power with Ronald Reagan.

Purring contentedly for the eight years in which Reagan's policies rent the social fabric and cut broad holes in the safety net, tripled the national debt and gave us, for the first time since the Depression, an army of homeless, the press swallowed Reagan's agenda more or less in one big bite. Whole.

We bought it all: supply-side economic theories. The mindless selling of tax credits. The spare-no-expense gold-plating of the Pentagon budget. The ominous redistribution of wealth, from the bottom four-fifths to the top fifth. The teetering and collapse of big-city school systems. The use of race to

divide. The scapegoating of the newest bottom rung of the social ladder, the "unworthy" homeless. We covered it all, by more or less standing off to the side and taking notes.

In the Nineties we have been even more docile. The country swallowed virtually unchallenged the rationale for the gulf war. Fought to topple Saddam Hussein and rid Iraq of nuclear weapons, it did neither. But it was a huge political success. The news media was boxed by the White House's propaganda skill. It was no contest. Censorship carried the day. Pentagon-approved film at 11. And tomorrow's paper will recap last night's TV.

But for most newspapers in the Nineties, the problem was neither censorship nor principle. It was survival. The worst recession since the Depression threatened to collapse the advertising structure.

## Risk-Taking Falls As Profits Decline

"Newspaper profitability in the Eighties was going up as fast as the high-rises," begins Bill Ketter, editor of the Quincy, Mass.-based Patriot Ledger. Ketter is on the board of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and last year ran ASNE's readership research committee. Ketter knows what's happened to America's daily papers.

"Part of our dilemma now is that most American papers are owned today by groups, many of which are public corporations. In the Seventies and Eighties these stocks were the darlings of Wall Street. Now, with a recessionary economy, they've been knocked off the dance card. Profits are starting to go down. And there is a hell of a lot less risk-taking by newspaper owners. They are concerned about their profitability, which during the Eighties was at obscene levels, frankly.

"Newspapers were experiencing 25- to 35-per cent profit margins, way beyond the profit margins that most manufacturing businesses in this country experience. That was annual profit on investment. That was something the Wall Street boys found terrific. Typically, it was a near-monopoly arrangement, where you could just raise the ad rates.



"What happened? When times were good, the papers were also investing in journalism. But now, when times are tough, they've got to try to maintain profit margins to remain attractive to investors, and there is no money for the newsroom.

"Most news organizations now are looking to reduce their costs, because they can't increase their revenues. The papers are trying to find a way to reduce the amount of money we spend on journalism. Obviously, in a recession, all your cost centers have to come down. There is a general retrenchment from profit margins of 25- to 35-per cent. We got ourselves into a situation where Wall Street expected those profit margins every year, or else they'd take your stock off [their buy list].

"What will come out of all this? A more realistic look at newspapers as an investment. You can't expect profits at that level. Newspaper owners have to recognize that papers are supposed to be in the business for noble purposes, informing public, serving as the watchdog. Yes, we have to make money to stay in business. But do we have to make money at that level?"

Ketter thinks the recession in the Northeast has another year or so to run. His peers tell him "Southern California is hurting, the Northwest is in pretty good shape, as are parts of the Midwest, but Florida is hurting."

He sees a different newspaper industry as a result of this recession.

"What's coming out of all of this tightening down is more focused newspapers, tending to be more market-oriented. Some traditional journalists see that as a negative, but we have to survive here.

"We need to know more about our market, and readers' expectations. Of our 64 million total circulation, the number of adults reading a paper every day is tumbling. It used to be a rule of thumb that for every paper sold, three people read it. Now that is maybe a one-to-one ratio. Young people, 18-34, are not reading newspapers to the degree they used to read newspapers.

"We used to have what we called the 'marriage and mortgage' formula. As

soon as they bought a house, they became loyal readers. That's not happening now. Many of them, even the affluent, are finding newspapers are not worth the price, cheap as it is. Why? Because it is not relevant to their interest.

"One of the problems traditional papers have is just getting the attention of young people, providing information in a form they find useful. Unlike our older, loyal readers, the young reader wants his information very fast, he or she tends to go for a quick read. It has something to do with the video generation. Now, 18-35 year-old people are totally raised on television. They are not as print oriented.

"What have the good papers done? Identified topics the young are interested in, that could bring them back. The challenge is how to execute those topics, in ways you don't turn off your loyal readers. Subjects such as parenting and personal concerns. And how many papers have sections for kids? There used to be a lot of newspaper-in-the-classroom programs, but now, with the retrenchment, most of these paper-in-the-classroom programs are being cut back.

"We're looking at advice on personal relationships, on household finance for the young-married-with-a-family. We need some restructuring, to get out of the rut we are in in some coverage, where interest is waning. The discovery of new young talent is important. Papers need an age and race mix.

"We are in the 'general information' business. We've got to have something in there for everyone. As far as design. I'm for relief for tired eyes, presenting it in a way that's exciting. We can't just expect people to read the newspaper just because we are a newspaper. We have to make the presentation of the information exciting.

"I don't think the advertising side can just raise rates at will anymore. They're finding that raising rates is not a right specified under the First Amendment."

That comes as a revoltin' development to those who only knew the largess of the go-go years of the Eighties. In May, The Washington Post took a

head count and discovered that papers like The San Francisco Chronicle, Philadelphia Daily News and the Austin, Tex., American-Statesman shut down their Washington bureaus. The Denver Post went from three reporters to one; the lights went out on the four-person staff of the Morris chain of Georgia. Costs were cited in every case.

Across the country, advertising revenue sank, and more and more reporters and editors were laid off. The business is in a contraction phase. Smaller may not be necessarily any better, but it sure as hell is cheaper. And lightening the sled, by reducing manning levels, offering early retirement incentives, curbing overtime, slashing stringer budgets, became the order of the day.

Every shift in editorial emphasis rubs somebody the wrong way. As in deciding which comic strip to drop, you can't please everyone. The newspaper is in part like a public utility, delivering the gas, or water, or electricity. In another sense, we are the print equivalent of a supermarket, thousands of items stocking our shelves, replaced daily with fresh produce, just push your cart through our front door and wheel away all the info you could ever want.

Along the way, some newspapers decided that big-picture people were more valuable than local news people.

## Lamentations Of A Cop-Caller

One of the top local reporters — he believes 'local' is pejorative — at The Boston Globe is Kevin Cullen, who defines his stereotype as: "Irish cop-caller." After 10 years on the job, most of that time with his "eyes trained at ground level," he urges editors to adapt for newspapers Tip O'Neill's famous maxim: "all politics is local."

Cullen's thesis: "local reporting — writing about the crime, the opinions and the concerns of neighborhoods, particularly urban ones — is not highly regarded in present-day journalism.

"Most of this type of reporting is left to the weekly circulars — which are not able or willing to do investigative or critical journalism — and columnists at

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# Ratcheting Up Profits

*Drive for Constant Rise in Newspaper Earnings Deplored,  
Along With Too Much Group Ownership*

*Following is the text of a speech given by Eugene Roberts, retired executive editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer and Nieman Fellow 1962, now a professor of journalism at the University of Maryland, to a meeting of Investigative Reporters & Editors, in San Francisco in October:*

Let me begin by confessing that I was not always a fan of the Investigative Reporters and Editors organization. I applauded when your founders investigated the murder of Don Bolles, but I thought they should act only in emergencies like the Bolles death. I doubted that journalism needed yet another organization. I was wrong, flat wrong. I now wonder how journalism ever managed without you.

You are providing training and instruction in reporting techniques and methodology that wouldn't exist if you didn't exist. You look for opportunities and avenues, for meaningful in-depth reporting and then prepare your members for the possibilities. Your meetings are models of professional responsibility. You preach accuracy, reliability, tenacity and patience. In short, you are taking the long view in journalism, a profession in which, increasingly, publishers and editors are having difficulty in seeing beyond the next quarterly earnings report.

This year, paper after paper — especially those owned by large corporations — decided that it couldn't afford to send its editors to the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Forget that the organization serves as a forum for ideas that sharpen and improve America's newspapers. Forget, too, that it is one of the few opportunities editors get in a year to brush shoulders with their peers and swap plans and programs. And forget,

as well, that, even in a recession, daily newspapers — in terms of profit margins — are among America's most profitable industries. Some papers protested that they couldn't afford to send the editors to a convention and that was that. ASNE's annual meeting was crippled by low attendance. And it is possible that ASNE, which depends upon its annual conventions for money and an infusion of energy, has suffered some long-term damage.

Yet here we are in the same year and the same recession, and here you are, more than 500 of you, with a solid turnout for your regional workshop. Newspaper budget problems aren't deterring you, because most of you are paying your own way. I'm well aware of the average salary levels on American newspapers and know that, for most of you, paying for the trip cannot be easy. But you want to get better at your jobs, and so here you are, ready and willing to pay the price for excellence.

I wish I could say the same for America's newspapers. But I know, and you know, alas, that it would not be the truth. A very significant part of our industry is not sufficiently investing in the quality and quantity of news and feature coverage that we need to guarantee the health and future of our newspapers.

I, of course, don't read all of the newspapers represented in this room, and I certainly don't have first-hand knowledge of your communities. But I would bet that not many of you feel comfortable with your newsholes or the staff levels of your newsrooms or feel that we are doing what we need to do to survive against the competition. Everywhere, virtually, the needs and interest of our readers are getting more diverse, and our communities — because of rural and urban sprawl — are

more difficult to cover.

I can't say it any better than it has been said by Seymour Topping, director of development on The New York Times regional dailies. So I will quote him:

"To hold the franchise we must go beyond the routine news coverage, the chicken dinner items, the news of records, which can be provided by cable, by local radio, weeklies and micro-zoned free publications. To be unique and indispensable, newspapers must grapple in their news columns and on their editorial pages with the central issues of their communities. They must publish in-depth local and regional enterprise stories that cannot be matched by other media. They must set the agenda for the communities and invite reader participation. All of this does not come cheap. Enterprise reporting calls for an investment in staff, tough in these days of stringent budgets. Consider the alternative."

I know, Topping knows, you know, that we've been talking about conserving full-time equivalents when we should have been talking about reaching out to readers with scope, with depth, with flair and with a very broad definition of news.

How did we, as an industry, get into our current mindset of short-term, short-sighted management? The answer is rooted in a trend of concentrated media ownership that seems to have begun in earnest in the 1950's and escalated steadily into the Eighties. When I entered journalism school at the University of North Carolina not a single daily newspaper in the state of North Carolina was owned by a chain or a group. Today, at least 31 of 51 North Carolina dailies are chain or group owned. And North Carolina, of course, is not alone. Many other states have an even higher percentage of group-owned

newspapers. And no state has been immune from the trend.

Many of us in this room are aware of what developed as newspaper ownership became steadily more concentrated. The price of newspaper properties soared as groups began bidding one against the other for almost any newspaper that came on the market. And as newspaper prices escalated, some groups — so that they could finance their purchases — went public and raised money through stock sales or increased their debt load — or both. This put pressure on the groups for steadily increasing profits. You had to pay your debt. Stock holders wanted better earnings so that the price of their stock would increase and competitiveness between the groups played a role. Gannett began a long, long string of profit increases that was broken only last year. Other companies felt they had to match Gannett's profit record. And Gannett's profit increases during economic downturns, recessions even, fueled the belief that with the right kind of profit-conscious management, you could wring the cyclical out of newspapers and increase profits every year — year after year — at say 15 per cent a year or more — even during economic downturns. And as newspaper groups grew, their executives began to worry that their companies were attractive targets for corporate take-overs. One way to guard against this was to ratchet up stock prices by ratcheting up profits. And so through the years the pressures mounted. So did the profits.

Operating profits of 20 per cent or more became commonplace. That is, many, many newspapers were holding on to 20 cents — before taxes — of every dollar that went into the cash register. A significant number of papers got their profits past the 30 per cent level. Some even passed the 40 per cent mark. We became — in operating profit terms — one of America's most profitable industries — perhaps, along with the other media, the most profitable. Basic industries such as autos and retailing, even in boom times, can only dream of profit margins newspapers rack up even during recessions.

Newspaper groups made high profit margins so commonplace that independent owners have become caught up in what is seen as a necessity to have margins on 20 per cent or more. It's an industry norm. It's also a norm to increase profits every year.

I have a lawyer friend who calls all of this a giant Ponzi scheme. You can't increase margins forever or someday 99 per cent of every dollar will go for profit and only one per cent for operational expenses. Sooner or later the bubble has to burst. For some, it already has in the current recession.

Now, I am not going into all of this to denigrate solid newspaper profits. Far from it. For three years in the Seventies I worked for an unprofitable newspaper — The Philadelphia Inquirer. I don't recommend it. Anxiety and angst are always with you. You cannot long be a good paper without also being a profitable one. No one was happier than I when The Inquirer turned the corner. And no one was happier as the profits climbed.

And I'm not going into all of this because I think independent ownership is inherently wonderful and group ownership is inherently bad. I spent some wonderfully productive years with a newspaper group — Knight Ridder. And I can name several towns and cities that are demonstrably better off under group ownership. I can also name several that aren't.

What then is the point I am making? That the *degree* to which ownership has become concentrated has made our corporate officials far too remote from our communities and our readers' needs. And the *degree* to which we feel we have to enhance profits has gone too far. We are failing our readers and our communities far too often. We have become too short-range in our thinking. We reel from one quarter's profit goals to another quarter's profit goals. Some of our newspapers are wired to monthly, even weekly, goals and indicators. It's a mistake. It may become a tragic mistake if we keep failing our readers and our communities. We will in the end fail our stockholders and ourselves.

The great growth era in newspaper profits has coincided with the rise of standard television and cable television as our industry's principal competitors and we did not, and are not doing enough to combat them, despite handsome profits year after year. And by steadily increasing ad rates we've actually created some of our competition — shoppers and free circulation neighborhood papers — by giving them plenty of room to slide under our rates. And then there are other problems. We insist that advertising is indispensable to our customers, but we seldom advertise ourselves. And the amount we as an industry spend on research is laughable.

But our big problem as journalists is to convince our owners that we must have coherent plans for meeting the needs of our communities and our readers. It will not be cheap. We cannot suspend our efforts at will. We must persist over the years.

We as a profession must not settle for short, superficial stories in situations which demand investigative take-outs. Color and charts and graphs have their place — an important one — in modern journalism, but they are not a substitute for in-depth reporting, and editors and publishers who think that color and graphics and one-to-five inch stories are all the ingredients you need for today's newspapers are approaching dementia. They are fiddling while Rome burns.

If we do what we know we ought to do in the newspaper business, we will not have to worry about our survival. You might even put it this way: If we nourish the needs of our readers and communities, they will continue to nourish us. And newspapers will survive and prosper. □



# TV Regaining the Local Touch

*Boston Station Turns From Global Merry-Go-Round  
To Focus on Hometown Events and People*

BY EMILY ROONEY

There were times not so long ago that the top trio of news managers at WCVB-TV in Boston would sit around for hours thinking about "where we should go" for the next ratings period. We would speculate about simmering hot spots and gamble that our selection would be the place to be when that sweep month hit. Maybe it would be Japan, maybe Eastern Europe or the Philippines. Our track record was pretty good, and so were the reports.

In hindsight, our global wanderings seem silly. We were obsessed with proving the notion that we were capable physically, financially and intellectually of producing reports comparable to anything done by one of the networks. We believed that if our viewers could get all of that and local news, too, from us, the network services would be redundant and eventually, obsolete.

We had, and still have, access to virtually every scheduled and breaking national and international story in the world through our affiliations with CNN, ABC and a handful of satellite clubs. That, combined with access to a world renowned academic community, provided us with everything we thought we wanted — good pictures, thoughtful reporters and experts. We proved we could do it, but I believe it cost us; and I'm talking about more than just the uplink fees.

While we were whirling our viewers around on a global merry-go-round, they were whipping out their zappers and beaming themselves to other worlds — cable, re-runs on independents and video stores. We started hearing things like "the news is irrelevant to me," or they "don't delve into issues I care about" or "they only do stories

about my town or neighborhood when something bad happens."

All of a sudden it seems we have more time and the patience to listen. The cost cutting and body trimming has meant turning our attention back home. And I think we're looking in the right direction. Several years ago I took great exception to NBC News President Michael Gartner's comments that our big-story chasing meant we were ignoring what was going on in our own backyards. And frankly, with 3½ hours of news programs a day versus a single daily network half hour, I'd still argue we have time for both. But, gag me on his bow tie, he was right about our disinterest in our own backyards. We lost touch with what people cared about, and we thought we could tell them what they should care about. It turns out our important news was largely irrelevant to our viewers.

So the good news, if it's to be found in this distressing era of news slashing, is that our focus has changed. We are looking to represent the thoughts and ideas of our local viewers, to ask the questions on their minds and to be an outlet for their opinions and voices. No one thinks a television station adequately understands "his" or "her" point of view. But we know that if we can just recapture that group who beamed themselves to other places and convince them that we are here to listen and to care and report on the things affecting people most and the things happening in their everyday lives, then I believe our viewers will start feeling better about what they see. For example, most people come to our 11 o'clock news already knowing the news of the day. We are trying to stop insulting them and instead concentrate on telling them things they don't know.

We spent weeks preparing a piece on a citizens group from the city of Lawrence that had come together for the purpose of restoring and reinstalling the city's 200-year-old tower clock and the pride that went with it. Two weeks before the State Department of Public Utilities approved telephone caller i.d., we did a piece on the pros and cons and let people know what they could do about it before it became law. We're spending as much time as possible in the communities most

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*Emily Rooney has been News Director at Boston's WCVB-TV since January 1990. She is the first woman to hold such a position in Boston television. Earlier this year*



*NewsCenter 5 was cited as the region's best news operation by the Associated Press and the Boston Press Photographers Association. Last year NewCenter 5 won United Press International top national awards for best newscast and best sports videography. Rooney heads a 100-person news staff. Before joining WCVB, Rooney was chief assignment editor at WFSB-TV in Hartford. While there she won an Emmy for an investigative story on child abuse. A 1972 graduate of American University, Rooney is married to WCVB political reporter Kirby Perkins. They live in the suburb of Newton with their daughter, Alexis. Rooney, a native of Connecticut, is the daughter of 60 Minutes commentator Andy Rooney.*

# More for Metro News

*Time Is Ripe, Says Oregon Editor, for Shifting  
Emphasis to Local and Regional Coverage*

BY WILLIAM HILLIARD

As the daily newspaper continues to see a decline in advertising revenue, and in some cases a drop in circulation, more and more editors are asking themselves just how they can best spend their dollars and still give a quality product to their readers.

In late October the economy showed little signs of improving, and a Federal Reserve survey painted a gloomy picture for the remainder of 1991. Economic activity continued to be weak or growing slowly at best.

Several newspapers in the industry, among them The New York Times, The Seattle Times, The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Boston Globe and The Los Angeles Times, have offered buyouts to their senior employees or announced economic cutbacks amounting to layoffs.

Not too long ago, some of the industry's large and mid-sized newspapers — newspapers in such cities as Portland (Oregon), Seattle, San Diego, San Jose, Des Moines, Minneapolis and Louisville — strove to be a "national" newspaper to their readers.

There was some justification for staffing the national story, especially with so much Federal money flowing into local communities. But beginning with the Reagan Administration and continuing with the Bush Administration, communities have seen Federal monies virtually disappear. State, county and city officials have had to grapple with financial situations not foreseen 20 years ago and with voters unwilling to dig deeper into their pockets to solve the dilemma — how to provide public services when voters are unwilling to be taxed for them.

A Federal government support system that probably reached its zenith under

the Johnson Administration's "Great Society" programs has virtually disappeared, and newspapers ought to take the lead in providing the kind of information, both in the news columns and on the editorial pages, that can lead to innovative solutions.

This could mean that more newspapers should spend more of their resources on coverage of their circulation area, with particular attention given to states and cities, and cut back on the money spent to maintain large bureaus in the nation's capital and abroad.

The nation's cities in particular have been hard hit by the loss of Federal dollars. Neighborhoods continue to decay, especially in the disadvantaged areas of the city.

A growing multi-cultural population has not been understood by a predominantly white middle class, and the result has been a worsening of cultural and race relationships in this country. Racial and cultural divisions are widening not only between whites and blacks, but between whites and Asians and blacks and Asians.

Unemployment continues to be a severe problem in most — if not all — sections of the country and racial and cultural differences become a scapegoat.

More and more women have entered the work force — many of them mothers. Estimates run as high as 70 per cent for the number of mothers in the work force. Who will take care of their children?

Schools in our large cities continue to lose ground as the tax dollar is stretched farther and farther. The nation's literacy rate is believed to be at a fourth-grade level.

Is America bent on becoming a third world country? Will the majority be a permanent underclass?

For those of us in the newspaper business, these are serious questions we ought to ask ourselves.

Most editors and reporters on the large daily newspapers in this country are either middle class or upper middle class. And in too many of our cities we don't see the real world around us unless we are assigned to cover it.

Our industry has given a lot of attention to the money base in Washington, D.C. We point with pride to our bureaus in Washington, and in some cases other large cities here and abroad.

The Oregonian has a daily circulation of 345,000 and a Sunday circulation of 450,000. It assigns two full-time writers to Washington. They are responsible for covering the Congressional delegations

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*William A. Hilliard is editor of The Oregonian in Portland. He has been with the newspaper since 1952. The Oregonian is the largest daily newspaper in the Pacific Northwest with a daily circulation of 350,000 and a Sunday circulation of 450,000. Hilliard is secretary of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, He has served as a member of the Nieman Selection Committee and as a Pulitzer Prize juror. He began his career at The Oregonian as a copy boy, later working in sports, then as a general assignment reporter and moving into management as city editor, assistant managing editor, executive editor and editor.*



# History Doubling Back

*After a Half Century of the Lure of Washington,  
States and Cities Compete for Reporters*

By NEAL R. PEIRCE

The incessant beat of attention on the Washington scene as the central arena, the focus of virtually everything critical in American society, reached a crescendo in the 1960's and 1970's.

The states were "out of it." The cities and counties were accidents of local administration. Why would a reporter who could muster a promotion want to be any place other than Washington, D.C.?

From the start of the New Deal onwards, the Federal role grew and grew and grew. Social Security and other economic acts of the 1930's seemed far beyond states' means (though a number of those laws, in fact, were modeled after state efforts). The great conflict fought in Europe and the Pacific from 1941 to 1945 was clearly leagues beyond the states' capacity. The Cold War demanded concerted Federal action. So did a host of domestic problems that the states seemed simply incapable of dealing with, or politically unwilling to face.

The complaint about the states' ineptitude was not limited to Democrats. It was a former Republican governor, Earl Warren, not long after his appointment as Chief Justice by a Republican President, Dwight Eisenhower, who mustered the 9-0 Supreme Court vote to rule segregated schools unconstitutional in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education case. In a little more than a decade the movement for equal rights for black Americans would steamroller over so-called states rights, subdue the "massive resistance" in such states as Virginia, and result in the great civil rights acts of the 20th Century.

President Eisenhower set up a special commission to reinvigorate the Federal

system, to reinvigorate the states. Yet in June of 1957 he lectured the National Governors' Conference:

"Opposed although I am to needless Federal expansion, since 1953 I have found it necessary to urge Federal action in some areas traditionally reserved to the states. In each case, state inaction, or inadequate action, coupled with undeniable need, has forced emergency Federal intervention."

Ike then reeled off the issues: the need to educate America's youth in the face of the apparently rising Soviet threat, slum clearance and urban renewal, problems caused by national disasters. "By inadequate action or failure to act," said Eisenhower, "the states can create new vacuums into which the Federal government will plunge ever more deeply."

Three months later, Eisenhower sent Federal troops to face down Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus's defiance of national authority in the Little Rock school desegregation dispute.

By 1962 the Warren Court sounded the death knell for the states' "rotten borough," malapportioned legislatures.

It was in those years that Everett McKinley Dirksen predicted on the Senate floor that the time was fast approaching when the only people interested in state lines would be Rand McNally.

With the War on Poverty and other Federal innovations of the Sixties lasting even into the Seventies, the Dirksen prediction seemed to be headed for fulfillment.

Even while this was going on, however, hundreds of state actions were setting the stage for a counter-movement. By then the stars of national reporting had taken off for Washington.

So little attention was paid to a vast number of states totally rewriting their constitutions. Legislatures got modernized, staffed, far more expert in analyzing trends and laws. Governors were given longer terms, enhanced powers, cabinets directly accountable to them. Antiquated court systems were reformed. Large, professional state bureaucracies began to take shape. Broad-scale taxes — on sales and incomes — spread rapidly.

Then in the late Seventies the Federal government began to experience fiscal and intellectual fatigue. Not only did Washington take on the bill for a massive military establishment, given a trillion-dollar boost under President

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*Most writers start at the local level, then graduate to the state house, and hope eventually to become a Washington correspondent. Neal Peirce, instead, started nationally as political editor*



*of Congressional Quarterly. He was a founder in 1969, and remains a contributing editor, of National Journal. But his interests turned to the cities and states of America. He wrote a series of books culminating in the "The Book of America: Inside 50 States Today," published in 1983. For 15 years, he has written the only nationally syndicated newspaper column on state and local government themes. It is syndicated by the Washington Post Writers Group and has appeared in over 150 newspapers nationwide.*

# Choice Assignment: State House

*The Budget Political Game Is More Exciting There,  
With Colorful Politicians and Dramatic Action*

By DALL W. FORSYTHE

**B**asketball aficionados sometimes argue about whether professional teams are more fun to watch than college teams. Indeed, New York City natives are likely to argue that the most electrifying games are found in the courts of city playgrounds.

Budget watchers — editors and reporters alike — can also argue about where the budget game is most exciting. For decades, the stakes have been highest in Washington, and that was the place to be. Recently, however, the players in Congress and the White House spend more time trying to keep the budget game from getting underway than they do actually playing it. In big cities, budgets can be cliffhangers, but most cities are so constrained by state statutes that the game has little variation. So those newspapers that want the best chance to find action-packed politics should focus their attention on state capitols.

Once in a while, a governor and a legislature manage to make it through a legislative session without a budget brawl, but that has been much less likely as Washington has cut back aid and the economy has sagged. New York, Connecticut and New Jersey have been battling budget problems for three years. Shortfalls in Massachusetts first emerged during the 1988 Presidential election. Governor Pete Wilson spent his first six months in Sacramento fighting the biggest deficit ever announced by any state. Across the country, from Florida to Maine, California to Virginia, governors and state legislators have been battling to get their budgets back in balance.

The causes are several. Obviously the most immediate source of fiscal stress is the national recession. If a rising tide lifts all boats, the current economic environment has left many state and

local governments beached. And every revision of economic data seems to bring worse news — a deeper recession than previous projections, and slower recovery, especially in the Northeast, where the economic damage has been heaviest.

Before the Reagan era, states and local governments could look to Washington for counter-cyclical help. In this downturn, President Bush has reiterated Reagan's approach, initially arguing that fiscal policy should not be used to combat the recession, because additional stimulus would worsen the deficit, and might come too late in the economic cycle to be of value. As we get closer to election day, we are likely to find out that those complaints apply only to spending proposals, not to tax cuts. Governors and mayors argue in response that the effect on the national deficit from a delayed economic recovery will be far greater than the impact of a modest counter-cyclical aid program for local governments. At this writing, however, the President has placed his bet on monetary policy, leaving the Federal Reserve as the sole engine of recovery.

On their own, state and local governments have neither the tools nor the financial flexibility for significant counter-cyclical action. In recessions, those governments typically find themselves cutting back spending, shrinking government employment, and increasing taxes to meet their own budget balancing requirements, which are much stricter than Washington's deficit-closing rules. The combined impact of the Federal passivity and state and local cutbacks and tax increases is probably a net economic negative from the blended fiscal policy of all three levels of governments. Although economists find it notoriously difficult to

calculate this "fiscal drag," one general conclusion is inescapable. In a recession, the more successfully state and local officials act to balance their budgets, the worse the damage to their own local economies. In the meantime, governors and mayors wait helplessly to see whether cuts in interest rates will offset their own unavoidably pro-cyclical actions and get the economy moving again.

*Dall W. Forsythe is a Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, teaching courses in budgeting and state and local public finance. Prior to his appointment at the Kennedy School in 1991, Dr. Forsythe was budget director of the State of New York. Named to that position in May 1988 by Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, Dr. Forsythe also served as the director of Governor Cuomo's Office of Management and Productivity. Before joining the Cuomo administration, Dr. Forsythe spent three years in the investment banking group of Shearson Lehman Brothers. Dr. Forsythe worked for five years as budget director of the New York City Board of Education and as fiscal advisor to the City Council President. He is the author of "Taxation and Political Change in the Young Nation." He has taught political science and finance at Columbia University, and worked as a staff assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy.*



If the national economic downturn is the proximate cause of budget problems for states and cities, other policy decisions from Washington over the last decade have exacerbated the fiscal squeeze. Most prominent, of course, have been the aid cutbacks and consolidations associated with the New Federalism. As the Eighties came to a close, experts on intergovernmental aid came up with much more pointed rubrics, ranging from "Competitive Federalism" to "Fend-for-Yourself Federalism." Whatever the title, the impact on the State and local level was clear: a sizable reduction in Federal aid as a share of local revenues; the elimination of several categories of aid, including General Revenue Sharing; and a shift in Federal dollars out of most categorical areas into Medicaid reimbursement.

At the same time that the Republicans in Washington were cutting back on intergovernmental aid, the Democrats were expanding Federal mandates, most importantly by requiring states to expand Medicaid eligibility for health care for the poor. While the programmatic value of expanded Medicaid eligibility for low-income women, children and seniors is indisputable, the result has been a classic fiscal squeeze. Federal aid as a whole is growing much more slowly than most categories of state and local spending, while governors and local officials find themselves with growth rates for Medicaid in double digits.

In a recent coda to this long and painful tale of intergovernmental aid, Richard Darman, the director of the Federal Office of Management and Budget, moved forcefully this year to reduce Federal reimbursement for Medicaid, eliminating several innovative approaches that states had used to draw down additional Federal funds for this exploding cost sector. These new regulations, issued in the middle of virtually every state's fiscal year, will guarantee budget deficits in many of the states most hard hit by the recession.

Budget problems have multiplied during the current economic downturn. Conversely, many state and local governments thrived during the 1980's. As

Mario Cuomo, Governor of New York, has stated, the period from 1983 to 1987 was a politician's paradise in most of the Northeast. State governments were able to increase spending, cut taxes and still balance their budgets. However, even that much-heralded period of national economic expansion masked several severe local and regional recessions during the decade. In turn, the Oil Patch, the Rust Belt and the farm states suffered through economic down-drafts, and those slowdowns hit state and local governments hard.

Shortly after the stock market crash of 1987, the first signs of slowdown in the Northeast appeared, reflected almost immediately in budget problems in states like Massachusetts and New York, and spreading quickly to New Jersey, Connecticut and the rest of New England. Now, as the Northeast awaits some convincing sign that its regional economy has bottomed out, another regional economic slide is gaining momentum in California, fueled by problems in real estate and construction. This year, Governor Wilson was forced to deal with a budget deficit that grew from \$7 billion to \$13 billion as the legislature was considering his budget proposal. Until the California economy picks up, his budget problems are likely to continue.

In Washington, when the national deficit grows, elected officials complain, but typically feel little obligation to take strong action. Deficits totaling 30 per cent of the national budget combined with Gramm-Rudman-Hollings constraints to create powerful incentives for clever fiscal minds to concoct new gimmicks. However, little substantive response was made to growing deficits throughout the decade of the Eighties. When it became clear in 1990 that the deficit would swamp the GRH limits, President Bush abandoned his no-new-taxes pledge and agreed with Congress on a modest package of taxes and spending cuts, together with a new set of rules for the future. But a year later, deficits have grown to record levels in the wake of recession and some re-estimates of Federal tax growth. It now seems clear that the new ground rules were prima-

rily designed to postpone further budget conflict until after the national election in 1992.

At the state and local level, budget problems cannot go unresolved for long. Deficits have consequences, and local borrowing cannot grow indefinitely like the Federal debt. When state and local budget problems mount, the rating agencies — Standard and Poor's, Moody's, and Fitch — respond, first with warnings, then with downgrades. The Federal government can sell more debt or increase the money supply to handle cash needs. In state and local governments, without the capacity to print money, budget deficits create cash problems, typically manifested by sharp increases in short-term debt. The combination of falling ratings and climbing debt will eventually lead to loss of market access, prohibitive interest rates and payless pay-days or threats of defaults on debt.

To ward off these unacceptable consequences, states and local governments must actually respond to budget shortfalls, and their choices are relatively limited. Cutting spending or raising taxes are the basic options. As elected officials mull over those painful choices, their fiscal experts typically patch together short-term solutions, based on one-time revenues, debt stretch-outs, and other actions typically described as gimmicks.

However, in the state and local government game, the rules against gimmicks are often much tougher than Washington rules. Many state and local governments have agreed to abide by generally accepted accounting principles, or GAAP, in the accountant's shorthand. Unlike Federal bookkeeping rules, GAAP accounting does not allow governments to reduce deficits simply by cash manipulations, such as changing payroll dates or delaying payments. Even GAAP-good gimmicks, used in excess, can result in additional rating damage if the raters believe that a government lacks the management capacity to fashion a lasting response to a long-term problem.

The combination of visible and

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# A Refocus on Washington

*In Midst of Recession, Newhouse Bureau Revises Beats; Includes One on 'America,' Adds Humorist*

By DEBORAH HOWELL

At the Newhouse Newspapers Washington bureau, we are trying to move away from breaking news to breaking news ground.

I am a relatively new bureau chief. I arrived in July 1990 to take over the bureau and to be editor of Newhouse News Service. After almost 30 years in journalism, most of it in the Twin Cities, I well knew the context of life in the newspaper business today — declining readership, declining revenue, heightened competition from everywhere.

I knew that to be a success, a Washington bureau and news service had to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. I knew we had to take new approaches, to cover new areas, to write about public policy issues and politics in a way to better reach readers.

The first thing I did was travel around the country and talk to Newhouse editors about what they wanted from their Washington bureau. Editors reinforced what I already believed — that the Newhouse bureau had to take a different tack.

It was silly for us to try to compete head-on with the Associated Press, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News service, the Knight-Ridder wire.

We needed to be more than a Washington bureau — we needed to be a national bureau based in Washington. We needed to do stories that affected people's lives, hit them in the guts, explained complex public policy, pointed them in new directions. We needed to illustrate our good stories with good photos and graphics.

While I know what the figures say about declining readership, I don't believe people, even young people, have given up reading newspapers. Like the

movie "Field of Dreams," I believe that if we build the right newspaper, people will read it.

As technology increasingly makes news available almost instantly, newspaper editors have to examine the way they use newshole, that precious commodity we never seem to have enough of. We need to save the valuable newshole to tell readers something they don't already know.

Where do newspaper journalists go when important news is breaking fast? We go to TV. Why do we expect our readers to be different?

I was glued to television during the Russian coup and the Clarence Thomas hearings. I just skimmed most of the main stories in The Washington Post and The New York Times. I only wanted to see what their emphasis was. I knew everything from public radio, network TV and CNN. I went straight to the dramatic sidebars and analysis.

I think we really have to move away from the only-the-facts news that is very, very old by the time it hits your readers' doorsteps. As we assign stories, I think as if I were the editor reading the budgets for the daily news meeting, competing with another newspaper and every TV and radio station in town — and with a tight newshole.

I think readers look to the newspaper to affirm, to verify what they saw on TV, but I also think readers hunger to connect to the news through people and to know what it means to them and their loved ones and their jobs and their neighborhoods.

(I think we also have to realize that TV now affirms what people read in the newspaper. It was only after people saw or heard law professor Anita Hill that she became real.)

Our goals at Newhouse are to:

- Do journalism that makes a difference, that makes readers want to read and to care about what they're reading about.
- Make sense out of a confusing world. Last year, we did our first project — "America in a New World" — trying to understand the U.S. role in a world where communism has failed, but Saddam Hussein is still going strong, where street crime is a bigger threat than nuclear weapons.
- Write about what people are worried about. There's an aborigine saying: "We must keep our ears to the

*Deborah Howell, 50, is a native Texan who grew up chasing fires with her newsman father in San Antonio before graduating from the University of Texas. After working for The*



*Corpus Christi Caller-Times, she went to Minnesota where she lived, worked and froze for the next 25 years. She worked on The Minneapolis Star as a reporter and city editor for almost 14 years. In 1979, she crossed the river and joined The St. Paul Pioneer Press and became executive editor in 1984. During that time, the newspaper won two Pulitzer Prizes and was a finalist six times. She is married to C. Peter Magrath, the new president of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. She has eight stepchildren and just became a grandmother for the sixth time.*

ground or we will lose our way.' That was the main reason we wrote a three-part series, "Rude Awakenings: The Endangered American Dream." We tried to come to grips with the dropping U.S. standard of living, with the downsizing of business and government and middle-class American expectations.

- Stay in touch with our readers. We keep our ears to the ground, not only in Washington, but also in the very real world outside the beltway. That's the reason our reporters are on the road much more than they've ever been. I want reporters and editors to leave Washington and to talk to real people in real places frequently.
- Yes, we certainly cover the White House, national defense, regulatory agencies. But we also have added new beats, beats I haven't found in any other Washington bureau — family, children and education; race relations; religion, ethics and morality; social trends. We have a humorist on the staff.
- Tell readers something they don't already know. I saw no other reporter writing about the subject of David Wood's series, "Called to Arms," about America's new volunteer military and how isolated its people are from civilian society.

We did a national search for the new people in the bureau who joined the valued veterans already there.

We ran this ad for two weeks in Editor & Publisher:

#### WE WANT THE BEST

Major newspaper group is looking for new national talent in its Washington bureau. Excellent opportunity for aggressive reporters with fresh perspective and good writing ability. You won't chase the wires. You'll be challenged to see beyond the rhetoric and the routine to the genuinely important stories, to frame them for maximum impact, to write them for maximum appeal, to make a difference. We're looking at several beats, from the White House and politics to the environment to children and family issues.

We got hundreds of responses, from people at the country's best papers, from Pulitzer winners, from people eager for new challenges. From this ad I hired five people to fill vacancies. I also hired a photography director and a fulltime graphic artist and bought the equipment they needed to do the job. I was told by every editor I talked to that the use of our stories would be limited without good art.

Our new beats in the bureau add diversity to our report.

**RELIGION, ETHICS, AND MORALITY** — National polls show that most people in this country say they are religious — or at least believe that some greater force is at work in the world — and that they are keenly interested in right and wrong.

Joan Connell, who covers this area for us, isn't doing stories just for religion pages. She is doing stories for Page 1, national pages, Sunday perspective pages. She had a field day analyzing the ethics of lying as it was done in the Clarence Thomas and Robert Gates hearings. Her lead on one story:

The words 'ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free' are inscribed in the lobby of the CIA.

But on Capitol Hill, learning the truth has been an exercise in futility for the past few weeks: Does Robert Gates have the necessary integrity to oversee the nation's intelligence community? Is Clarence Thomas honest enough about his own beliefs to sit in fair judgment on the Supreme Court?

The lack of candor that characterized much of Gates' and Thomas' testimony before Congress is having an impact, even in this city that accepts lying as a fact of political life.

**SOCIAL ISSUES AND TRENDS** — This beat concentrates on the people behind the statistics. Mary Kane, who covers this beat, was a major force on our "Rude Awakenings" projects.

What are Kane's kinds of stories? Mobile homes. The housing market may be in a slump, but they're selling like hotcakes. Why? Because they're all some folks can afford. And they now

come with hardwood floors and cathedral ceilings.

Another Kane special: There is a new class of migrant workers in this country — building trades workers. They are on the road more than ever before because work is harder to find than ever before.

**FAMILY, CHILDREN, AND EDUCATION** — Reporter Beth Frerking and her husband have a young son and she understands the strains and pains of family life and wanting to have the best education for your children.

As Congress was debating the issue, Frerking looked at the controversial subject of family leave with a new twist. She talked to people in several states that already have such a law, and she went to Connecticut to see how it's going. Contrary to what the Bush administration says, the laws have not led to the rack and ruin of business. Beth could find no significant impact anywhere. For one good reason: Few employees have taken advantage of the leave provisions because they can't afford unpaid leave. I haven't seen this story anywhere else.

**THE RULE MAKERS** — Joe Hallinan, our newest reporter on board, covers regulatory agencies. We looked at many agencies before we chose what we wanted to cover. We didn't want to do the ton of news-release stories from the myriad of Federal agencies.

We narrowed it to the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Trade Commission, and agencies that supervise national parks, forests and recreation areas. Hallinan won a Pulitzer in investigative reporting this year and, sorry, I'm not going to tell you what he's working on.

**RACE RELATIONS** — Jonathan Tilove is writing solely about race relations, which I find one of the most fascinating subjects in this country. He has written extensively about affirmative action, diversity training and many, many Clarence Thomas stories. Tilove writes both on and off the news. He has written some wonderful stuff off the Thomas hearings. I loved the lede on the first day of the hearings:

At his Senate confirmation hear-

ings, Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas is a black man in a very white world — facing the questions of white senators prepared by white aides, his answers recorded by a mostly white press corps in a building in which many blacks are relegated to the most menial roles. It is a stark image that may confound his opponents' effort to portray him, his dark skin and up-from-dirt background aside, as the candidate of white privilege.

Tilove is now at work on what has happened to integration in this country since the 1954 Supreme Court decision that racially separate schools are not equal. That decision ushered in an era of busing to achieve integration that, continuing to this day, represents one of the most wholesale and controversial social changes ever to sweep the country.

**LAUGHS** — We have a resident humorist, James Lileks. His new book, "Notes of a Nervous Man," has just been published to good reviews. Most of the pieces in the book came from work he did on The St. Paul Pioneer Press when I was there. He's a good example of multiple use — Ed/Op pages, news pages, feature pages.

We still cover a lot of traditional areas too — but not in a traditional way.

**NATIONAL SECURITY** — We didn't send reporter David Wood to the gulf war. With the censorship, I felt he could write better stories from here. Our national staff met every day during the war. We decided on what we would write by deciding what we wanted to know, not what we were being told. Wood went to the gulf as soon as the war ended, mainly to report for his series "Called to Arms."

Wood is concentrating on reporting about the new and smaller military for the next several months. One story, "The Department of Peace," was about the bare-knuckles squabbling that has broken out among the services to retain (or enlarge) their share of the dwindling budget pie. The Air Force, riding on its reputation as having "won" the Persian Gulf War, is trying to push the Navy out

of the picture, arguing that land-based air power is cheaper and more effective than aircraft carriers.

**WHITE HOUSE, CONGRESS AND POLITICS** — Mike Shanahan at the White House, Miles Benson in Congress and Tom Baden are our political team.

In many ways, Shanahan has the toughest beat, because the President is an expert news-handler. And the only way Bush likes his news is exactly the kind of story we don't want to do — the controlled story of the day. While Bush gives the impression of being an open President, he tightly controls the news. The day the President went to the Grand Canyon to tout his environmental record, Shanahan wrote that it wasn't so hot. Shanahan was the first reporter to say that Congress and the President are circling around each other trying to figure out a way to break the budget agreement they took months to put together.

Benson covers the Congress and the Democrats and their Presidential candidates. He did the best profile on Sen. Tom Harkin I've seen, examining his dark side as well as his prairie populist image.

Baden is covering politics from the standpoint of how money and power rule campaigns, how the decisions are made in Washington over what the folks will hear and see on the hustings. He also broke the story that Ed Rogers, the President's chief political director and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu's right-hand man, was going to work for one of the key Arab players in the BCCI banking scandal.

**JUSTICE** — Our reporter, Kathryn Kahler, has done a number of fine stories for us, but has been away from her beat much of this year for a good reason: she has spent most of my first year here being a fine president of the National Press Club. Kahler won an American Bar Association award for her reporting on the death penalty last year.

**AMERICA** — I don't know how to describe Jim Nesbitt except to say that he covers it all — the quick hit to the long haul. Just give him the topic and a bunch of white and Yellow Pages and he hits the phone running. He's the

foreman of the roundup. During the Clarence Thomas hearings, he did quick hits on the mainstreaming of pornography and the emergence of radio talk show hosts as political arbiters.

We don't just make sure our reporters have their cars to the ground. Our desk editors — and I — visit and read Newhouse newspapers constantly. Each of our desk editors is assigned a number of papers and is in charge of keeping track of them. It's another way to stay in touch with what's happening out there in America.

Another way we stay in touch is that our bureau has 15 regional correspondents from Newhouse papers from the East Coast, West Coast and the Midwest and South. Those correspondents are in daily touch with their papers and communities and we include them frequently in our national stories.

While we're trying our damndest to serve Newhouse papers and our other clients with fresh and meaningful stories our bureau of nearly 40 people faces some big challenges if we are to succeed.

I think we're doing well at projects and weekend stories, but we haven't consistently mastered producing daily, shorter pieces that are newsy or exclusive or both. We also haven't come up with the just the right way to cover Congress. And one of our biggest challenges will be covering the 1992 campaign and the political conventions.

My own frustrations are with getting our timing and topics right. I'm generally pleased with our angles, but I have not always been pleased with our timing. Naturally, I'd much rather be ahead of the story than behind it. I'd rather be firstest with the mostest or do the walk-up or the analysis. The bureau is just finishing our first full year under new management. We're running hard to produce the kind of stories that I think will make a difference in newspapers, that will serve and help retain readers. □



# The Washington Connection

## *Fresno Bee Finds D.C. Reporter a Vital Part Of Covering Central California News*

BY BEVERLY KEES

**A** testimony of horror from a Hmong woman, repatriated to her native Laos from Thailand, was offered in early October to the House immigration subcommittee dealing with the future of U.S. refugee policy.

Most Americans probably couldn't identify the Hmong, but Fresno County has the largest Hmong population in the United States — about 47,000. Stories about the highland Laos people have special resonance here, and Michael Doyle, Our Man in Washington, knows it.

The Fresno Bee's Washington reporter is a part of our Main Street coverage, or we wouldn't have much reason to have one. The nation would lose little if, say, only 200 reporters covered a presidential speech instead of 400. Local readers would lose a great deal if they didn't have someone looking out for their interests in the nation's capital.

Washington may have lost some of its glitz internationally, but it is still the seat of power in this country. When D.C. sneezes, we're popping cold pills in Fresno.

The Bee's Mike Doyle has worked since 1988 in the McClatchy Newspapers bureau, which includes national and regional reporters. In 1980 there were a bureau chief and a reporter. Now there are eight people, including a secretary.

Bureau Chief Leo Rennert and reporter Larry O'Rourke cover national stories. Muriel Dobbin, in a job newly created in 1990, does national features and some regional reporting for McClatchy's South Carolina papers. Laura McCoy, Les Blumenthal and David Whitney work for papers in California, Washington and Alaska. Their work also goes out over the McClatchy wire ser-

vice. Every editor uses the bureau a little differently. In Fresno, our two greatest interests are in the regional stories from Doyle and in the analysis and background stories uniquely provided by the national staff.

Doyle works for The Fresno Bee and The Modesto Bee and is considered part of our local staffs. He talks to an editor in Fresno daily about assignments, works often and closely with local reporters and visits Fresno annually.

Fresno County is the richest agricultural county in the United States. When agri-business reporter Lisa Crumrine began looking into the subject of Federal money being used to promote U.S. goods abroad, her obvious partner was Mike Doyle, who was able to check Federal reports on how the money was acquired and spent and whether it had much impact.

When the concessions company in Yosemite National Park was put up for sale, local reporter Gene Rose worked on the story with Doyle, who was in a better position to cover actions of the Department of the Interior.

When political reporter Jim Boren covers local Congressional campaigns, he is on the phone with Doyle, who provides the Washington side of the story.

Doyle checks U.S. district court every week and recently found a lawsuit filed by Fresno County farmers against the Department of Agriculture. It wasn't the kind of story that AP would have sent out on the national wire, but it had interest in Fresno.

Doyle follows Central California issues, reads The Bee faithfully and keeps in touch daily. He focuses on the unique local elements in court cases, administration decisions, Congressional hearings and Federal department actions.

His tailoring of news just for our circulation area is an important part of our plan to stomp faster and shallower broadcast news into obscurity.

We spend a lot of time at editor meetings pondering how to make readers cleave to newspapers in perpetuity and not waste their time with passing fads like television. (Old wishes die hard.) We talk about offering perspective and depth that television can't or won't. A Washington reporter — pulling out the threads of local relevance in national stories — seems one good way to make ourselves useful.

Doyle isn't surprised to see some disenchantment with Washington among editors. "Before Kuwait, there was a feeling of drift in Washington.

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*Beverly Kees has been executive editor of The Fresno Bee in Central California since 1988. Previously she was editor of The Gary (Ind.) Post-Tribune and the Grand Forks*



*Herald in North Dakota and assistant managing editor of The Minneapolis Tribune. She was a reporter and section editor for the Minneapolis Star. Kees is on the board of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, the Washington Journalism Center and the American committee of the International Press Institute. She has served on the Nieman Fellowship selection committee and as a Pulitzer Prize juror.*

# The Missing Questions

*Press, as Well as Senators, Failed to Explore Relevant Issues Raised in Hearings*

BY JAN COLLINS STUCKER

"You have such beautiful skin," said the elderly U.S. senator, stroking my bare arm from shoulder to wrist once, twice, three times.

This was not a cocktail party on Capitol Hill. This was a political convention about 15 years ago, and I was covering it for my newspaper. Note pad in hand and wearing a green sleeveless suit in the summer heat, I had walked into the hallway, along with five or six of my male colleagues, to question the Senator. Instead of getting my questions answered, I got pawed.

Frozen, unsure of what to do, I eased away, face flaming, questions unanswered. Several male colleagues, including one or two who weren't even at the convention, teased me for days about that encounter. "We heard about you and the Senator," they laughed. "He certainly likes you."

Well, you might ask, why didn't I brush the Senator's hand away, and tell him to get lost? With 15 years' hindsight, however, I would argue that this isn't the relevant question. The relevant question is: Why did that Senator feel free to do what he did?

In my view, the relevant questions didn't get asked during the recent Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, either. The members of the Senate Judiciary Committee certainly didn't ask them: the Republicans were too busy trashing Professor Hill, and the Democrats were too busy trying to be "fair." Nor did the press, by and large, ask the relevant questions.

The conventional questions were legion and understandable: "Why did Anita Hill wait so long to bring up these sexual harassment charges?" "Why did she follow Judge Thomas from one job to another?" "Why did she continue to

have cordial relations with him, telephoning him and leaving pleasant phone messages?"

But I kept waiting for someone — at the hearings, on television, in the newspapers, on a panel show, somewhere — to ask the kind of questions that could have illuminated the raucous debate and put the sexual harassment issue into some kind of context. These questions would have included, "Why would Anita Hill have even remotely considered filing sexual harassment charges 10 years ago?" (Answer: She wouldn't have. Clarence Thomas was her ticket to success, and whistleblowers don't make it to the top.) "Do the majority of women who are sexually harassed file complaints?" (Answer: No) "Why Not?" (Answer: They are afraid they'll lose their jobs, or be labelled troublemakers — or worse — if they complain.) "Is it important for women to keep on good terms with their bosses, even after they move to other jobs?" (Answer: Yup, especially if they hope for good professional recommendations.) "Are women continually told not to 'burn bridges'?" (Answer: Yes, that's the usual advice of 'networking experts'.) "Why did Anita Hill suddenly come forward and level her charges 10 years later?" (Answer: She didn't. The Judiciary Committee sought her out; she decided, she said, to answer their questions honestly.) "Did Judge Thomas continue his reported interest in pornography after he left law school?" (Answer: We don't know. Nobody asked him.)

The Judiciary Committee's decision not to call in expert witnesses to put the problem of sexual harassment into some perspective put an even greater burden on the press to ask the more pertinent questions. Cogent background opinion

and analysis were also needed. By and large, they weren't forthcoming. The senators were left to decide their votes in a vacuum, scratching their heads over why Anita Hill didn't report the alleged harassment 10 years ago. (Answer: Look what happened to her when she did report it.)

There was one exception, in my view, to the generally inadequate reporting, and that was Nina Totenberg's excellent coverage on National Public Radio. Perhaps the fact that she says she was once sexually harassed contributed to her insightful analysis on this issue.

My point here is not to argue who told the truth during these hearings, although my personal opinion is that Anita Hill did. My point is that in order to dig out as much of the truth as possible, questions that get at the heart of the matter must be asked, not just the usual ones.

My friend Claudia Smith Brinson, a South Carolina reporter, points out that asking the "right" questions means asking questions from all angles, not just the conventional ones. In addition to asking why New York editor Hedda Nesselbaum, for example, stayed in a

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# The Angela Wright Case

*Charlotte Observer's Barring of Outsiders from Newsroom  
Tests Paper's Professional Temperament*

BY SETH EFFRON

To many journalists, Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment against now Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas were the stuff that made for an electrifying story — nothing more, nothing less.

That was until Angela Wright, a 37-year-old assistant metro editor for The Charlotte Observer, spilled onto the scene in October 1991.

At that point several reporters and editors, whose jobs were to report the news, found themselves being news sources. It became for many — who so often depend on the good will of others to talk openly, completely and on the record — a tough, true-life lesson and test of their professional temperament.

Just days after the University of Oklahoma Law School professor's charges became public, Wright said that Thomas, when she was director of public affairs for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, had pressured her for dates, asked her breast size and showed up uninvited at her apartment.

Wright made her accusations public in an interview with The Charlotte Observer, after she was subpoenaed by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

As soon as Wright's involvement with Thomas became widely known, reporters started calling those in North Carolina who might know her — from her work at The Charlotte Observer (a Knight-Ridder newspaper); at the Winston-Salem Chronicle, a newspaper mainly serving that city's Afro-American community, and her days as a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

One was Allen Johnson, features editor of The Greensboro News & Record and a former managing editor of The Winston-Salem Chronicle.

Johnson knew Wright when the two were students at UNC. After losing touch for several years, they talked frequently after she followed him as managing editor at The Chronicle in 1988.

Johnson told reporters calling him that he was reluctant to discuss Wright. "The way I looked at it, if I had any information that was pertinent, I'd make my own newspaper privy to it," Johnson said in an interview for this article.

"There was not a whole lot I had to say," he said. He noted that just how little he knew about her became clear in the flow of wire-service reports he'd soon read.

He said he never knew she'd been fired from her job at the EEOC. He had always assumed she'd graduated from college in the middle 1970's when the two were students, though in fact Wright didn't get her degree until 1985.

"I did feel funny having people call me up," he said. "I felt I didn't have a whole lot to tell. I did give some of those who called the names of other people to call."

If Johnson was reluctant The Charlotte Observer was a stonewall.

The lack of cooperation from Wright's colleagues in Charlotte proved a deterrent to coverage in other North Carolina newspapers. The News & Observer of Raleigh and The Greensboro News & Record, the second and third largest papers in the state behind The Observer, both were left to using wire stories about Wright because their reporters weren't able to find out much.

On one hand The Observer had a fresh and hot angle on the biggest story in the nation. In the competitive tradition of newspapers it wanted to keep that exclusive story. But on the other

hand The Observer was Wright's employer and reacted like many other employers in similar situations. It was protective of its employee, stingy with information and banned all but the top newsroom editor, Rich Oppel, from discussing the case with other reporters.

Wright, interviewed for this article by telephone, was reluctant to talk. "It's difficult to do my job as an editor if I'm the focus of the news," she said. She said that she had made the decision to grant no interviews except to The Observer. She explained that she had agreed to The Observer interview because "I'm of course, competitive." The experience, she noted, had made her more aware of the responsibilities journalists have not just to the truth but also to privacy and keeping matters in context.

Oppel said soon after Wright's involvement in the Thomas confirmation process became public he sent a message through the newsroom's computer network that any calls about Wright must be forwarded to him and other Observer employees were not to discuss it with other news reporters.

It wasn't anything Oppel said he particularly enjoyed.

"I heard from a lot of friends I hadn't heard from in a while. I also had to catch a lot of bullets with a butterfly net," he said in an interview for this article. "Anybody who hasn't been in this position ought to go through it."

While The Observer had an obligation to report the news, as a business it had an obligation not to "violate our relationship with an employee," he said. He recognized that by offering "no comment" he was being viewed by some as failing to be responsive to colleagues around the nation and not prac-

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# Pro-Abortion Bias?

*After Wichita, a Reporter Notes Failure to Discuss Neutral Facts, Like Fetal Development*

BY EILEEN McNAMARA

**B**y the time the U.S. Supreme Court in July 1989 gave the states great latitude in regulating abortion, the accusation of media bias was just so much background noise.

Assigned fulltime with a Boston Globe colleague to cover the renewed national debate that year, my morning almost invariably began with the telephoned complaints of an activist from one side or the other: a polling question had an inherent bias, the size of a protest rally had been underestimated, the verboten phrases 'prolife' or 'prochoice' had slipped into a headline. (The Globe had settled on 'anti-abortion' and 'abortion rights' as the least judgmental ways to describe the two positions).

We are doing the best we can, I would say, noting that day's complaint and promising an inquiry. But, as I would set off to double check the disputed crowd estimate, I would steam at what struck me as a preoccupation with the minutia of coverage.

I was being defensive, of course. It was often my work that was being challenged and it is not always easy to accept the fact that reporters have to earn a reputation for fairness every time they file. As I look back, maybe we got off easy. While our critics were measuring the inches of type devoted to each side, they were missing what we weren't writing about at all. And, after Wichita, I have concluded that our real failure is less in what we write about abortion and more in what we fail to write.

Operation Rescue descended on Wichita, Kansas, last summer, thousands strong, turning that heartland city into the latest abortion battleground.

The antiabortion activists had chosen Wichita for a number of reasons. With

an antiabortion mayor in a state presided over by an antiabortion governor, it was friendlier turf than the big cities where Operation Rescue most often has staged its protests since bursting onto the scene at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta in 1988. Perhaps as important, the city is home to Women's Health Care Services, one of only seven clinics in the country where third trimester abortions are performed.

In the six weeks of demonstrations, often referred to by the national media as a "seige" of the city, there were more than 2600 arrests. Coverage focused on the demonstrators' tactic of blocking clinic entrances, the subsequent arrests and cost in police overtime and the role of Judge Patrick F. Kelly, who called out Federal marshals to haul away those blockading the clinic doors.

We covered Wichita as we might have covered a prize fight or a political campaign. We noted the size of competing rallies. We recorded the practiced and polarized rhetoric of the protesters and counter-protesters. For the most part, we stayed out of the clinic, lest our reporting lead us into murkier areas of morality and philosophy. It was safer to stick with the well-trod legal and political angles — even when the clinic director invited us in.

George Tiller is the physician who runs Women's Health Care Services. Approximately 2000 abortions are performed there annually. As is the case nationally, most of those are done in the first weeks of pregnancy. At the Wichita clinic, 35 per cent are performed in the second trimester and about a dozen are done in the last weeks of pregnancy, according to Tiller.

In an interview with The Wichita Eagle, Tiller said he does late term abor-

tions only when a woman's health is in danger or in cases of severe fetal abnormalities. He turns others seeking his service away, he said. He has asked state lawmakers to restrict late abortions. A five-paragraph summary of his remarks found its way onto page 16 of The Washington Post, but there was not much broader dissemination of them.

Tiller opened the door for a discussion of mid-term and late abortions but we did not choose to walk through, to leave the intellectual comfort zone of politics and the law for the less com-

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*Eileen McNamara has been a reporter for 12 years for The Boston Globe, covering everything from the night police beat to the United States Congress. In recent years, her report-*



*ing has focused on pressing social issues, from the abusive treatment of battered women by the Massachusetts courts to the racial disparity in the rate of infant mortality between black and white babies in Boston. In 1989, the year the U.S. Supreme Court in the Webster case gave the states greater latitude to restrict abortion, she travelled the country, examining how the divisive issue was unfolding in state legislatures, in abortion clinics and in the streets.*

*A graduate of Barnard College and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, she was a Nieman Fellow in the class of 1988.*

# Mass Media and Young People

*Increased Emphasis on Death and Violence is Related  
To Decline in Youths' Life Prospects*

BY PAUL CARTON

For the first time in American history, our youth are less healthy, less educated, and less able to take their place in society than were their parents. At the same time they are growing up in a mass media cultural environment bursting with violent audiovisual images and negative role models — an environment largely independent from the home, the school, the religion and even the community into which they were born.

Is there a relationship between the declining life prospects of our youth and the increased impact of today's mass media cultural environment?

Researchers have been trying to measure the impact of the media on young people for more than a half century. And while a large, if varied, body of evidence now exists on the subject, the findings are complex, the measurements imprecise and the results difficult to generalize. Nevertheless, most researchers agree that heavy television viewing impairs educational attainment and that it contributes to sex-role and ethnic stereotyping. They also agree that exposure to violent images — in the clinically controlled setting — heightens aggressive behavior among young people. There is far less agreement, however, on the impact of violent imagery outside the laboratory, primarily because of the great difficulty researchers have in measuring the connection between fantasy violence and real world violence.

While the debate over media effects continues, no one disputes the sheer pervasiveness of today's mass media culture. By the time they reach kindergarten, the average American child has seen between 6,000 and 8,000 hours of television — approximately

one-third of their total pre-school waking hours. By the age of 10, most children can name more brands of beer than Presidents. At maturity, they will have spent more time in front of a television than in any classroom. And television is just one — albeit integral — part of a massive infusion of colorful images into the daily lives of American youth; a broad cultural combination that now includes popular music, films, videos, magazines, supermarket tabloids, even video games and theme parks. By some estimates, more money is being spent on popular culture today than on the education of our young. Moreover, all this is occurring during the formative years when every aspect of a child's nature is developing and becoming habit.

## A Closer Look At Youth Transformation

According to the 1991 Adolescent Health report published by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, the adolescent and teen years are a period of profound biological, emotional, intellectual and social transformation. "The physical changes are dramatic. One sees not only changes in height, weight and head size, but also changes in facial structure and facial expression and the spectacular development of the reproductive system. There may be emotional upheavals . . ." Other recent studies on substance abuse have further pointed to a window of vulnerability during the teen years — a critical three-to-four year period when they are particularly vulnerable to outside influence, before their values and ideas have fully formed.

Given these factors — coupled with the all-encompassing nature of today's mass media cultural environment — one

can infer that there are elements in the media that are exacerbating youth vulnerabilities and that are playing an important role in the transformation of our young people. But what are some of the key aspects of that transformation?

Since 1955, about the time television became a mainstay in the lives of American youth, national scholastic test scores have been steadily declining while learning disabilities have become epidemic in our schools. Today, leading educators report that less than 6 per cent of high school seniors can write a good essay, read something with moderately complicated sentence structure, or solve a two-step math problem.

*Paul Carton wrote this article after several years of research and writing on youth/media issues. He is a policy analyst and writer living in Washington and a special assistant to*



*the president of the University of Puerto Rico on science and technology issues. From 1977 to 1984 he worked with Marttila and Kiley, the Boston political consulting firm. Among the campaigns he worked on were those for Senator Gary Hart for President, Rafael Hernández Colón for Governor of Puerto Rico, John Kerry for Senator from Massachusetts, Coleman Young for Mayor of Detroit and David Dinkins for Manhattan Borough President. He earned his Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo.*



In all other industrialized countries, 15 to 30 per cent of a comparable group of students are able to perform these feats. The decline in American academic achievement has occurred across virtually every demographic category and in every region of the country. Moreover, it has also occurred among America's brightest students, whose performance now drops sharply while advancing from elementary through high school. A recent report by Educational Testing Service showed that while 16 per cent of fourth graders are able to search for specific information, relate ideas and make generalizations based on the data, by twelfth grade only 5 per cent can perform at this level — an egregious descent. The same report found the drop in high-level math performance to be just as pronounced. "The proportion of students who are top performers peaks in fourth grade and then declines through twelfth grade," according to ETS President Gregory Anrig. "It should be the other way around."

Significantly, a state-by-state comparison of math achievement levels for 1990 found that the top 10 states in math proficiency were also the 10 states that had the *lowest* percentage of pupils watching TV six or more hours a day.

Along with the unprecedented decline in academic achievement, there has been a huge increase in violent and antisocial behavior among our nation's youth. Back in 1950, the arrest rate for youths 14-17 was just 4 per 1,000; by 1985, the arrest rate had leaped to 118 per 1,000 — a 30-fold increase. The enormous jump in the rate of juvenile crime — including murder — has meant that young Americans are now much more likely to become victims. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, between 1984 and 1988 gun homicides for youths 15-19 rose by more than 60 per cent. Across the nation young people are becoming involved with gangs at earlier and earlier ages and inner-city minority communities have been disproportionately affected; the homicide rate for young black males 15-19 is now more than 11 times that of their white counterparts. At present, 135,000

students bring guns to school every day and reports from our urban battlefields are of a street ethic that at times seems to require young men to commit murder to prove their manhood. So fierce has been the fighting that in Brooklyn 60 innocent children were hit by random, stray bullets — and 15 of them subsequently died — during the first five months of 1991 alone.

Our nation's young people are also engaging in risky health behaviors at earlier and earlier ages — right when they are least able to cope with their actions. In 1965, there were roughly four cases of gonorrhea and syphilis for every 1,000 adolescents. By 1985, there were approximately 12 reported cases per 1,000 — a three-fold increase. Furthermore, every year nearly one American teenage girl in 10 gets pregnant, a rate more than twice that of any other industrialized country.

Of course, mass media culture — in and of itself — is not wholly responsible for decreasing educational attainment or for the astonishing increase in violent and risky behaviors. The American youth transformation is partially due to a whole host of other factors — including an enormous increase in drug and alcohol abuse, illegal weaponry, joblessness and the continued breakup of the family — that have acted in combination with one another to help produce the current social breakdown. These factors notwithstanding, it is argued here that our nation's mass media, largely owned and dominated by American corporations, has played a key role in the breakdown. Examples: By the age of 16 the average American child today has witnessed an estimated 200,000 acts of media violence, including 33,000 murders; popular teen movies routinely feature role models engaged in the most criminally indulgent, morally ambiguous and self-destructive forms of behavior; studies of alcohol usage on TV reveal that — despite more than 20,000 deaths annually from drunken driving — a youngster, too young to drink, will be exposed to 10 drinking acts on TV in a day's viewing and to more than 3,000 during a year. The examples are endless

and mind-numbing and have led critics to charge that it is within the sphere of children's broadcasting that the forces of market commercialism have proven most blatant. "Children . . . [are] considered just another ordinary segment of the overall audience," writes an alarmed New York Times critic, John J. O'Connor. "Fair game for the standard servings of sex and violence, not to mention the heavy barrage of commercials, often for products virtually guaranteed to rot teeth or reinforce objectionable stereotypes."

But what are some of the market forces shaping today's mass media cultural environment? Why the seemingly endless fixation on death, violence and sexual imagery in youth-oriented entertainment?

### **TV and the Changing American Marketplace**

Looking back, the 1980's were a difficult time for network television in general and the worst in terms of bottom line profit that had ever been seen. There is no great mystery about why. The share of households watching network TV declined steadily throughout the decade — from more than 90 per cent to the mid-sixties. The explosive combination of cable television, videocassette recorders and a growing number of independents was responsible for much of the erosion; cost overruns, union disputes, and some old-fashioned low quality programming also contributed.

Network executives were well aware of the problem by the mid-1980's, when plunging profits and rising Hollywood production costs forced a series of initial measures. Hollywood studios — who for years had gotten top dollar to produce network programming — were first to feel the crunch; workforce layoffs and wage cutbacks quickly followed suit. None of it proved enough. Increasingly the fundamental network objective — to garner the largest possible audience for their advertisers — was met by producing a racier, high stimulus, thrills brand of programming. The growth of syndication and national cable networks only enhanced

this transformation. By the late 1980's, a trip around the dial in prime time was likely to reveal a brawling run amuck of violence, laughter and nonstop titillation, a wild and wacky world of pimps and prostitutes, stranglers and child molesters, semi-disassociated comedians and manufactured sexual superstars. While there were still quality exceptions to such sensationalism-for-profit fare — in particular sports, news and some of the older entertainment shows — the styles and genres that were becoming known as trash television, with their fixation on death, glamorized action and overt sexuality, had become a prominent fixture of the screen.

### **The American Fixation On Death and Violence**

At present, the moderate viewer of prime time witnesses an average of 150 acts of violence and 15 murders each week, not counting cartoons and the news. Those who watch more than three hours a day — better than half of all Americans — absorb much more. The frequency of violent death witnessed on television bears almost no relationship to its occurrence in real life. To get to the origins of how this came about, one has to go back to the early 1970's, when the TV and film industry was just beginning to treat death as though it were an American obsession. Not that the subject hadn't always maintained a preeminence in human entertainment — throughout history it has been one of the dominant themes in world literature and the performing arts, and through much of the Twentieth Century in films and television. Up till the 1970's, however, death had been only one facet of the average entertainment fare — dying lovers bidding farewell, Indians being shot from their horses, enemy soldiers being blown to bits in the jungle; the concentration was still on the story line and not on the act itself. All this began to change, however, as producers began realizing that explicit showings of death and violence were often their most marketable commodity, that spicing up a movie or TV production with superbly realistic horror could have a remarkable effect on its chances of success.

Of course, too much death and violence could be a turnoff, just like too much sugar in the coffee. However, over the last two decades, as the public grew more and more used to it, there occurred a gradual but fundamental shift in the balance — bigger and bigger 'fixes' kept getting added to the average entertainment fare. There was also a radical transformation in the type of victim. In the period before 1970, the vast majority of television and movie violence was directed at men — the gunslinger, the enemy soldier, the mobster, the Army GI; but in ensuing years women increasingly became the focus of violence on the screen. During the 1980's, for example, it is arguable that more women were raped, stomped, beaten, and murdered in American entertainment than in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies combined. The 1980's also saw the killing genre branch into teen movies in a major way. An onslaught of films featuring mad killers clawing and gnawing teens into component parts became enormously successful in all parts of the country.

Today the U.S. is in the midst of a horror boom. But as opposed to the early horror and mystery broadcasts of such luminaries as Serling and Hitchcock, which generally retained connections with everyday reality, today's horror revels in sickening brutalization and gore — women sprawled in basements blanketed in blood, horrid dismemberments, women being eaten live — all enormously enhanced through the increased usage of special effects imagery.

The 1980's was a decade of rapid acceleration for the image technologies. Talking computer heads, sexy robots and all sorts of inanimate objects suddenly came to life. By the end of the decade entire universes of computer animated images had come on the air. But while some industry technicians were learning to apply computer graphics to the selling of cars and soda and the like, others were perfecting a new area of expertise — computerized violent images. It had never been a secret that the same technology used to sell high-tech appliances could be used

to scare the daylight out of people. The American entertainment industry, however, was mastering the genre. Today, computer-enhanced imagery is routinely used to heighten the splattering of blood, perform chain saw executions, pull the skin off victims and carry our electric drill murders. Yet beyond the sharpened technical expertise, top producers and directors have also learned how to set up their deaths, how to draw in the audience by tugging on our emotional heartstrings, by heightening our anticipation and dread and, perhaps most importantly, by getting us to identify with the characters in the final moments before dispatch.

### **The New Frontier: Baby Murder**

While violent death and negative imagery have become a staple of American entertainment, it wasn't until the end of the 1980's that the industry felt ready to take on what had heretofore been considered the biggest taboo: baby murder.

Until recently most TV and film observers had mistakenly believed fictionalized baby killing was beyond the realms of permissible exploit. No more. The movie *Dead Calm*, released in 1989, relies on dead babies and murdered dogs for effect. In one scene, a bright-eyed two-year-old boy grasping his teddy bear smashes headfirst through a car windshield. What is particularly noteworthy is that the killing was added solely for shock value — it had almost no relevance to the story line and wasn't even in the novel upon which the film was based. Still another example: the movie *Obsessed*, a 1990 release about a vengeful mother who tracks down her son's killer, contains an extended bloody scene of the child being struck and dragged to death underneath a car, along with still bloodier scenes of doctors attempting to resuscitate the mangled youth.

Future historians may well characterize the 1990's as the decade when the last vestiges of restraint were being removed from American film entertainment. Clearly the day isn't far off when child atrocities the American theatergoer has rarely witnessed before will be

commonplace — fetuses ripped apart like wishbones, infant head pulverizations, the sight of a dozen tiny creatures being tortured at once. And — given the increasingly bloodthirsty broadcast climate — it isn't so farfetched to imagine that future audiences reared on such imagery may not only grow accustomed to it, but will clamor for more.

Such a scenario is not that farfetched, given that today's story lines are often becoming mere excuses for broadcasting acts of violence interspersed with people doing bad things to one another. Of course there is the occasional positive film or television series — "My Left Foot", "Driving Miss Daisy," "Cosby" and "Sesame Street" and the like — which pursues worthy social objectives, but clearly an increasing number of negative and violent images are hitting Americans relative to positive ones. And these trends aren't limited solely to films and television. Even children's comic books have been affected. Many of today's popular comics pump out an endless supply of superstars who never experience any piece of mind, are likely as not to believe in the primacy of evil and in recent years have begun committing suicide on a regular basis. Violence and sado-masochistic sex are in. Super Girl was fatally wounded a while back. Issues of Green Arrow have depicted crucified strippers and a woman whose eyes were gouged out by vultures. Other publications routinely feature children being hacked to death and their pieces fed to animals.

But beyond films, television and comics — of all the forces helping to transform American youth culture perhaps none is as all-pervasive as popular music and music videos in particular.

### **Popular Music and Youth Culture**

Whether or not they grew up in the Fifties and Sixties, most Americans have seen old footage of young people attending Elvis concerts or listening to the Beatles and other rock groups. We remember the reactions — the expressions on their faces, the near-hysterical adulation they bestowed on their

favorite rock heroes. More than a quarter-century later it appears this was no accident. Many of us didn't grasp it then, but it seems clear now that a new cultural force had arrived, a force that still hasn't been fully reckoned with or understood. Turn to any of the 24-hour music channels and you can witness a seemingly similar dynamic occurring with today's youth. They are receiving a new type of message, whole sets of messages actually, that are exciting them in ways that we still haven't fully grasped — except that it's somehow related to the combined impact of music and words.

It need hardly be said that the mind has an extraordinary ability to remember melodies, yet little is known about what happens when you combine melodies with words. The accepted wisdom, among researchers who study the effects of rock lyrics on teenagers, is that young people don't care much about the lyrics to songs; few teenagers listen closely to lyrics, fewer remember them, and fewer still understand them. These findings notwithstanding, the fact remains that many of us — if we were to grab a pencil and paper right now — could easily write down a dozen stanzas from a dozen different tunes (test yourself if you have doubts). Obviously, melodies and words undergo some form of linking-together process in our memories. Our increased ability to absorb words and messages when they are combined with certain harmonics could be related to music's rhythmic appeal. The beginnings of language in babies are always rhythmic musical vocalizations (the prime example: "Mama! Mama!"). Regardless of underlying cause, the Fifties and Sixties saw various pop groups become extraordinarily proficient at creating rhythmic musical messages — and the power of these messages was far greater than the innocuous advertising jingles of the past. Take the Beatles. No one would deny that they tapped deeply into people. Opinion samplings of their fans from the Sixties showed large numbers reporting aroused states of consciousness upon hearing them; not only such emotions as increased longing for loved

ones and a greater tenderness toward friends and acquaintances, but also an enhanced sense of oneness toward all of mankind. Moreover, the average young person was listening to their hits five to 10 times a day. Millions were being deluged with "All You Need Is Love" and a cacophony of anti-materialist messages — and not just from the Beatles. A whole host of pop groups, in combination, were reinforcing a set of values far removed from that decade's economic and cultural mainstream.

Of course, over the next quarter-century the corporate equilibrium reasserted itself. Pop music metamorphosed from the defining pulse of a generation into a mass-marketed, consumerist commodity. Today the music industry is employing the most advanced techniques of audio and visual stimulation known to science, in conjunction with highly sophisticated marketing programs that can guarantee the proper amount of mind-numbing repetition — to help shape the moods, thoughts and emotions of each new generation of American youth. Moreover, the youth transformation is being spearheaded by both a new popular music and a new set of popular music heroes; ones who no longer represent the love and flowery images that once so inspired the young, but rather, represent an entirely different set of qualities: super-hip yet wildly immoral, talented yet cynically self-indulgent. A new generation of qualities — tinged with undercurrents of violence — that have permeated the society at large and helped develop the kinds of youth culture and patterns of behavior that inhabit the world of today.

The new popular music heroes are rarely social instigators, they are entertainers. Outwardly they retain some of the rebel mannerisms of the Sixties — the non-conformity of dress and that peculiar breed of anti-establishment existentialism which is such a hit with the youth of today — but internally they retain little of the anti-materialist values or symbols of past icons. Instead, the new heroes have become absolute masters of the art of manipulating their own image. No one, especially their

fans, often has any idea of who they really are — what they think, what they feel, whether they vote left, right, up or down; only that they appear as angry and rebellious as the fans feel themselves. And even that is a masquerade. For the new heroes symbolize anti-socialism not because their own values are that way (politically a great number stand for almost next to nothing; their lives dedicated mostly to the trappings of celebrityhood — fancy cars, fancy homes, unbelievable riches, all of that nonstop glamour and excitement), they do so simply because they have become masters at doing whatever is needed to retain their own stardom. Yes, the new heroes have learned that essential trick of being admired not for what they say or think, in many cases not even for how they perform, but rather, for the artificial image that they have created for themselves.

The music and performances of the new heroes often strive to emulate the most distraught forms of dementia that can be found in our society. Of course, there are exceptions — there will always be exceptions. But violent, hedonistic images diametrically opposed to those of previous eras have become the symbols of the day. Skulls, sickles and swastikas, women chained to the dungeons, men on the way to the gallows — market research helps determine the mix. While some heroes become famous for their brutalities on stage, and others for complete male effeminacy, a frightening number strive to project the angry looks and queerness of manner that one normally finds only among the most severely disturbed in our society. We're talking about schizophrenia impersonators, actually. Heroes capable of pumping self-doubt, hostility, depression and anger into the far corners of the youth environment. Each exposure having only a fraction of an effect, of course, but over time the fractions adding up. And as successive generations of youth grow to love their new heroes the question we may soon be asking is: Are we shifting their consciousness toward the youth culture of a world gone mad?

Parents, for the most part, remain

unconcerned about the music their kids are listening to, doing homework to, falling asleep to. And in fact, it's impossible for anyone these days to point a finger solely at popular music. For today the new heroes are everywhere — in the movies, on your TV screens, leaping out of the tabloids. The 10 most admired people of the day are rock stars, film stars, movie directors, football quarterbacks, television stars. Indeed, today's mass media culture has put forth the largest, most talented group of manufactured celebrities the world has ever seen. Men and women who have no problem standing up for the values that have made this country great, happy heroes ready to promote beer, perfume, life insurance, soda — anything and everything if the price is right. So long as the superstars preach living in the material world, you know the kids will follow. But in the process something else has been occurring. To ever larger numbers of youths, heroes who were once considered highly for preaching greater social and personal responsibility are today simply thought of as dead.

### **Determining Cultural Patterns**

It has been argued that a corporate-owned-and-dominated American mass media is largely determining the cultural patterns of today's youth. From early childhood on their mental processes are being shaped by a virtually seamless, total cultural package that includes TV, music, films, magazines and videos that — in combination — are exerting tremendous influence over their lives. There is no great mystery about why this corporate focus. Every year there is an enormous killing to be made off the youth market and it makes little economic sense to leave youthful buying habits and social attitudes to chance. People don't pick just their baseball and basketball teams when they are young, they also make lifelong choices of soda brands, favorite foods, rock stars, movie stars. Billions of dollars worth of brand name decisions are being made before the age of 10. This may well be the most cost-effective time to influence people's attitudes and opinions, their perceptions

of themselves and the world, their social roles — even their inner natures. We are talking about the most important years of our lives.

Given this perspective, it follows that corporate penetration of youth markets is at least partially dependent on one overriding principle: *If you can alter their self-image, all else will follow.* That is, it isn't simply a matter of transforming youth culture, or even replacing it, but of continually molding the consciousness of each new generation of youth. Ultimately, every thought, every idea, every feeling, every emotional characteristic, all goodness, all self-worth, all self-command, all honor can — indeed will — be radically transformed in such a totalizing cultural environment. And the corporate focus on youth buying patterns and opinions, it is magnifying negative youth vulnerabilities as well.

Yet this opens the door to a question that until now has not been confronted. That is: which parts of the youth makeup have been most affected by the mass media cultural bombardment? Out of the universe of inherent youth vulnerabilities which ones have undergone the most devastating transformation?

### **Adolescent and Teenage Vulnerabilities**

A growing body of evidence suggests that media portrayals of sexual violence may be causing more damage to young people's views of themselves than anything else. One need only think back to the high school years to remember how delicate a teenager's conception of his or her own sexuality can be. It's vulnerable during normal times. In the current climate of increased sexual violence between men and women in the media, we are at risk of conditioning entire segments of our youth into believing abnormal sexual practice is the norm.

The 1970 U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography sponsored much of the early studies on the effects of pornography. Although the Commission found that viewing pornography

had no marked impact on lab volunteers, the early research used only sexually explicit materials and did not use materials that combined sex with violence. More recent studies have pointed to pornography with *violent* content, rather than all pornography, as being associated with rape. And in 1986, then U.S. Surgeon General Koop issued a report summarizing current research in the field, which concluded that prolonged exposure to violent pornography increased male acceptance of coercion in sexual relations and — in the lab at least — punitive behavior toward women.

Few would dispute that over the past two decades the American media has become extraordinarily proficient at exploiting violent sexual fantasy images. Yet it should be emphasized that the focus on sexual fantasy, in and of itself, isn't necessarily harmful. In so far as 90 per cent of the human sexual response mechanism is within the mind, mental imaging has always played a big role in arousal and enjoyment. Among sexually active women, for example, two out of three report frequent fantasies during intercourse. While fantasies can act as a form of mental aphrodisiac, nonetheless, many involve situations that would be judged improper in real life, such as group sex, sado-masochism, voyeurism and rape. As the level of violent sexual fantasy images in the media increases, it is legitimate to question whether we are bringing these fantasies to the frontal centers of consciousness in some youths, where they can impinge on behavior and — in some cases — become the behavior.

Surveys of men under 30 have found a third admitting there was at least some likelihood they would rape a woman if they were assured no one would know and they wouldn't be caught. When the word force was substituted for the word rape, 50 per cent of respondents said there was some chance they would force a woman to have sex with them under those circumstances. In other surveys more than half of high school-aged males have stated that if a girl "leads a boy on" raping her is at least somewhat justifiable. It is obvious that a significant percentage of young adult males have at

least some tendencies toward sexual violence — albeit largely contained. But as we increase the levels of violent sexually explicit images in youth-oriented entertainment, and as the media becomes ever more proficient at mixing music and words with these images, the survey numbers suggest that it could have extraordinary impact. That given enough time we could erase the line between thinking and doing among some youths, help turn their wildest fantasy images into reality; but perhaps even more importantly, that we can help create a flourishing subculture in which the taking of sexual advantage becomes commonplace. Youths cut off from the unconscious feelings of turmoil and guilt that historically have helped control promiscuous behavior.

Guilt, the sense of anguish we have when we fall short of our own standards, has long been recognized as a prime influence on people to serve the social good. It is one of the adhesives that binds us together. The current mass media cultural environment — with its mix of sexual violence, nonstop glamour, sensational action and instant results — appears to be helping neutralize the warning functions of conscience in some of our youth; ridding them of that peculiar inner pressure that normally results when we betray our own internalized models of behavior. In so doing, it is helping to reinforce the ugliest of social mentalities — one rooted in self-gratification and the accumulation of power and wealth to the exclusion of everything else. It is a mentality that too often grabs hold of our youth in their formative years and keeps their lives revolving around the satisfaction of individual consumption from that point on. One might call it selfishness elevated to the realm of ideology. The evolution of a new world inhabited by people who no longer act in accordance with what is or isn't socially "right," but in ways that are convenient, economically self-indulgent, or otherwise self-serving. A world inhabited by millions who have been stripped of their social conscience.

The rise of a corporate dominated, mass media cultural environment and the continued decline in the life pros-

pects of American youth are not separate and disconnected phenomena. Moreover, nationally there is growing recognition that we face an unprecedented youth health, values and education crisis — one that has serious repercussions for our economy and our social well-being.

While historically a majority of Americans have tended to ignore mass media issues, recent polling data confirms important attitudinal shifts. Today most people believe that televised violence and programs depicting nudity and sex are encouraging immorality and violence in real life. Teens and children are felt to be particularly at risk. The majority of Americans, however, oppose governmental efforts to regulate programming.

While a majority say banning or censoring programs is not the answer, mounting concern about media effects is spawning a variety of new approaches to the problem. Media awareness and teen violence programs that deal with popular culture issues have sprung up around the country, though so far with limited results. In San Francisco, a local PBS station actually broadcast a program that encouraged young viewers to turn off their sets. The station formed a link with city libraries and encouraged kids to go there and read. "It's the most effective program we have ever seen," says Niel Parikh, Coordinator of Children's Services for the San Francisco Library. "It's bringing in children we have never seen before who are staying to participate in our summer reading program."

Admirable, but much more powerful and comprehensive solutions will be needed if America ever hopes to deal effectively with the youth crisis at hand.

### **A Call for a Cultural Environment Movement**

In his modest, book-filled office, on the third floor of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School, George Gerbner is dead-set on organizing the nucleus of a massive, citizens-based, cultural environment movement. In his view, the historic necessity for such a movement has been evident for some time.

According to Professor Gerbner, a 70-year-old internationally recognized scholar on mass media and culture, the world as we know it — the symbolic environment in which we live — has been transformed. Media are no longer separately owned and operated channels of communication. Unbeknown to most Americans, they have merged into a highly centralized and monopolistic global system. "Most of the stories being told to our children," says Gerbner, "are being transmitted not by parents, teachers, clergy, or members of the community, but by distant transnational corporations with something to sell. With hardly any debate, the process of growing up and learning about the world — even about life itself — has become largely a byproduct of marketing."

This astonishing development, according to Gerbner, now frames much of what we think and do. It cultivates our perceptions of reality. It guides the shaping of public policy. For many of us it acts to define life's choices. And yet, Gerbner finds, "...the manufactured perspectives of our mass media cultural environment go virtually unchallenged — as if beyond the reach of the democratic policymaking process."

Possibly, no longer.

Since December 1990, he has been gathering small groups of people together in borrowed conference rooms in Washington and Philadelphia to develop blueprints for a national, citizens-based movement concerned with the mass media cultural environment. The organization now has approximately 150 members representing a wide range of groups including the American Medical Association, various PTAs, local media councils, mental health organizations, minority, religious and children's groups, and faculty and students from across the United States. The challenge, Gerbner keeps reiterating, is to build a new coalition and a broad constituency to work for democratic media reform, to support media education, and to develop ways for citizen participation in national media policymaking. A national conference to

place cultural/media issues on the American political agenda is planned for Washington in 1992.

"It hasn't been easy," says Gerbner, "since we are organizing people with an extraordinary variety of perspectives, yet with the same shared interest in keeping the nation free from centralized dictation — whether by public or private entities."

No one should doubt Gerbner's commitment to the principles of free expression. A Hungarian emigré, he arrived in the U.S. virtually penniless back in the 1930's, yet went on to become Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication — a post he held for 25 years. Gerbner's own story is one of the triumph of freedom and of individual initiative, and today he takes great pains to explain that people can — indeed, have the duty to — speak out against corporate and governmental media excess, even as they strongly support our constitutional right to unlimited free expression. "The movement strongly opposes any form of media or journalistic censorship," he emphasizes, "but we are just as committed to fostering greater diversity and accountability on the part of the powerful corporate and government forces that today dominate our cultural environment."

Whether this kind of fledgling movement can succeed is far from certain, however. Currently, there are almost no counterbalancing forces in American life to insure that corporate media conglomerates serve the public interest. The nation has historically relied on Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to provide oversight to the industry. Yet for more than two decades congressional lawmakers have allowed the media to ignore most of their public interest obligations — and according to Ralph Nader the FCC has done much worse. "The FCC has a dismal record of serving consumers," he said at an April 24, 1991 press conference. "It has repeatedly enacted policies that serve the interests of the media industries, at the expense of the public interest. It hasn't ever provided a horizon of excellence for its regulatees to aspire toward in the new information society

of the 1990's . . . The FCC is the prototype indentured servant of the industry it is supposed to regulate under its statutes."

Prophetically, just four weeks after Nader's press conference Time Warner Inc. announced it was hiring the former Chairman of the FCC, Dennis R. Patrick, and three other high-level former FCC officials, to head their newest telecommunications subsidiary in Washington. While Time Warner officials pointed out that Patrick would not be used to lobby the FCC, they admitted that his knowledge of the agency would be helpful as they seek to develop new businesses.

In a subsequent story on the hiring, The Washington Post reported that all of the businesses that Time Warner is currently seeking to enter are regulated by the FCC.

## Remaking American Society

More and more the cultural patterns of today are being determined in the suites and boardrooms of corporate America. From early childhood on they are influencing the mental processes of our youths even more so than the parents themselves. They have the power to remake our society, and they are using that power.

Today hundreds of thousands of American youths are experiencing school failure, displaying serious health problems, and turning to lives of crime, drugs, unemployment and welfare. At the same time, 87 per cent of the public believes that the mass media cultural environment is far more violent and sexually explicit today than it was even 10 years ago and most Americans believe the media has helped lock the morality of the country into a downward spiral.

Except for a few, frightfully underfunded attempts by a handful of Americans, we aren't doing much of anything as a nation about it. And all of us share some responsibility for having so underestimated the danger here. We risk becoming a society frightened of death of the youth that have sprung from our own loins. □

# Soviet Coup; Romanian Rampage

## Moscow

BY VLADIMIR VESSINSKI

**V**alentina and I are O.K. after the putsch. In fact, as a person I was never in any danger except for two days, the 19th and 20th of August. As a journalist it was bad from the very beginning for many of us. The junta closed my newspaper (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*) and 30 other newspapers and magazines. So we lost our jobs immediately.

They sent two tanks and 20 soldiers armed with assault rifles to our printing house so were unable to print. We refused, however, to leave our offices and we went on working on the edition hoping we might sneak it out of the house and publish two or three thousand copies somehow and distribute them among the people who had gathered to defend the White House.

It was interesting how quickly the name of the building of the Russian Republic Parliament, which is made of white stone, became known to everyone as "The White House." The radio reports, for example, announced: "Citizens of Moscow. The danger of an attack is not over. The government of Russia asks you all to go to the square

of the White House."

As a result every minute of every day and night under constant rain there were no less than 20,000 people in the square. At that moment people seemed to feel a spiritual connection between the Russian White House and the White House in Washington.

In the end we were not able to publish our edition and we all felt frustrated as it was our job to inform the world and our people of the events and give them their proper name: The Defense of Constitutional Government By the People. The Nieman Program and my Nieman colleagues had helped me learn what a journalist should do and how to do it but in this critical moment I was unable to do my job.

And then the Nieman network came to my rescue. If I could not tell the people in Moscow I could tell the people of Portugal. The Nieman Foundation put Rui [Araujo of RTP Television in Lisbon and NF '91] in touch with me and I was able to report the story through Portuguese television. The next night Kathy Skiba (NF '91 of The Milwaukee Journal) called and con-

ducted an interview of over a half hour for her paper. Then Fernando Cano (NF '91) called for *El Espectador* in Bogota, Colombia. As you can see the Nieman network gave me back my voice.

Our editor-in-chief, Fedor Burlatski, was on vacation at the Black Sea and he did not return when he learned of the putsch. Instead he wrote a letter to the readers which sounded to us like a compromise with the junta. As a result the staff held a meeting and voted him out. It is a difficult time for us at the newspaper. Prices for everything are up but even worse a good half of the staff accepted the putsch because a good relationship with the government might save their jobs. Their political position is so clearly selfish that we began a reorganization of the staff and the leadership. We will elect a new leadership.

Thanks for your willingness to help. But the very thought that I can rely on Neiman and my marvelous Fellows makes me more optimistic.

*Vladimir Vessinski was a 1991 Nieman Fellow.*

## Leningrad

BY ELENA ZELINSKAYA

**I**want to tell you about the three days of the coup. You can see how it was through my eyes.

At first it was great horror. Those of us on duty in the North-West Information Agency in Leningrad the morning of August 19 were calling colleagues in other cities and papers in hopes that what we were hearing was all a dream. State television kept reiterating orders of eight imposters accompanied with, from time to time, scenes of eight swans

from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake ballet. Four large swans and four small swans raising their legs in unison.

We gradually pieced together the fact there was resistance: Yeltsin had appealed to the Russian people; barricades were erected in Moscow; meetings were being held in Leningrad. By 1 p.m. it was clear that the Russian people did not intend to give up the democracy movement without a fight. The horror disappeared. Now it was

time simply to work.

We didn't yet know that we were operating the only information agency in the city with international and trunk communications. Local supporters of the coup had disabled the telephone net, faxes and computers by broadcasting a strong electromagnetic pulse. Because our equipment had been turned off at the time it was saved from destruction. We were able to receive messages from other cities, from Lenin-

grad and the Moscow city councils. Even so, because of military censorship, we were at first unable to communicate what we knew. All editors refused to publish censored material. *Vecherni Leningrad* (Evening Leningrad) was issued with blank spots on page one. Leningrad radio was silent. Television ran only central programs like a metronome.

In the afternoon Anatoly Sobchak, Leningrad mayor, and Vyacheslav Shcherbakov, vice-mayor, and several deputies declared on Leningrad TV that the city did not recognize the self-appointed government in the Kremlin. They labeled them coup leaders, putschers and criminals and pledged themselves ready to defend the constitution and democracy to the end.

The next day, August 20, the independent radio stations Radio Baltica and *Otkryti gorod* (Open City) began broadcasting on a medium-wave transmitter located somewhere outside the city. For two days and nights we and the radio journalists did not leave our posts. Our agency was, in fact, the only source of information for them.

The North-West Information Agency journalists were shouting through defective lines to get bulletins from Leningrad and Moscow city councils, the building of the Russian Supreme Council (the White House), and from the square in front of Marinsky Palace. These bulletins were broadcast over loudspeakers in city squares.

At 5 a.m., August 21, the Russian Information Agency announced the storming of the White House. Our fax machine delivered a hastily handwritten message: "According to Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (Russian Republic) the erection of barricades has begun near White House. The first line of the barricades has been overcome there and [on our phone lines] we can hear the first shots and bursts of machine-gun fire. The storming of the White House begins." Suddenly there was a thunderous noise. We were certain the tanks had opened fire. Then a heavy rain poured down. We had heard a thunderstorm.

We learned from our correspondent that experts had fortified the city council and were planning fortifications for Marinsky Palace. Barricades were rising around the palace and people were moving toward St. Isaac Square. All approaches to the Palace were guarded by Afghan veterans and OMON (Interior Department troops). Our own building was guarded by six Afghan veterans. Remembering the events in Vilnius, Leningraders erected barricades around the TV center as well. But all was quiet. Alexander Belyaev, chairman of the city council, called upon citizens to defend the Marinsky Palace. What for? It was already surrounded by citizens ready to defend it.

We worked straight through, relieving one another. Inhabitants of nearby houses visited us and brought food and coffee. At that time tanks were 70

kilometers from the city but we did not fear those tanks. What we feared most of all was that our only computer would burn out. Our old fax machine was heating up dangerously. Our paper supply was running desperately low.

At 2 a.m. Vice-Mayor Shcherbakov and Fleet Commander Counter-Admiral Chernavin declared that the Baltic Fleet supported our government. At that moment a fax arrived from the Moscow City Council. Handwritten in capital letters it said: "There appeared to have been killed and wounded people in Moscow." Later we learned that three men had been killed. At that time we did not know their names.

In the morning, after 72 hours of terror and darkness, we overcame and for the first time in 74 years it was clear we had won. Wednesday, August 21, was a day of summing up. Time for collecting stones for the martyrs' monuments and for collecting our papers for the historical archives and museums of the early days of the new democracy. □

*Elena Zelinskaya visited Lippmann House last year and talked about the North-West Information Agency, the independent news service that she created and set up in Leningrad.*

## Bucharest

BY CHRIS RIBACK

Twice within the month and a half that saw summer turn into fall, Romanian journalists had the opportunity to redefine the way they do their work. It began with the apparently successful then ultimately failed Soviet coup in late August and finished with an embarrassing and violent September rampage through Bucharest by Romanian coal miners that ended with the government fallen.

Taken separately, the two events seem

unrelated. One occurred in the Soviet Union, the flagship of communism; the other took place in Romania, a former satellite that, with mixed success, has dabbled in democracy since the overthrow of despised dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989. One was organized within the ruling government; the other (discounting unsubstantiated conspiracy theories) seemingly grew from popular revolt. One didn't achieve any of its goals; the other

achieved some goals, including the prime minister's resignation and a raise in wages.

But taken together, similarities emerge. Both events represented attacks by conservatives against reform. Both were born, at least partially, from the economic hardships each country's people face. And both, because of the wide exposure of Western reports and first-hand accounts, gave Romanian journalists the chance to shed the cloak



of opinion and rhetoric that has covered most of their work since the Revolution.

The question is, how did they do?

By most accounts, not very well. In telephone interviews, reporters, academics and politicians describe a situation in that country where hyperbole became accented, facts became hidden and the momentum for journalistic reform became hindered.

"These types of events simply create a more opinionated press," said Mihai Coman, journalism dean at Bucharest University. "If we have a period of more quiet, normal, democratic politics, then journalism here has a chance to become more objective."

Indeed, Coman argued that "hot events," such as coups and rampages, cause journalists to retreat toward the comfort of "polemics" and away from the envisioned goal of objectivity.

Said Richard Virden, Consul for press and cultural affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest: "[Romanian journalists] feel they have to be partisan to compensate for the failure of government. They cannot afford to be neutral observers. The time is not right for it. There is so much distrust of the government, they must tell the other side."

Coman and Virden's views were supported by Romanian coverage of the two events. During the coup attempt, instead of reporting the events from Moscow (some newspapers had a correspondent there; television did not), most news outlets used their space to bemoan the evils of socialism, with the evolving putsch as an example. The separation between opinion pieces and "straight" reporting was rarely marked.

"When you have a very clever thief, you have trouble proving he's a thief in court," said Sorin Mugur Dumitrescu, a reporter for the opposition newspaper Romania Libera, explaining how reporting becomes opinionated. "However, when he makes a mistake, it's easier to prove he's a thief. The coup was a visible mistake for the masses."

Coverage didn't improve during the miners' rampage, when newspapers were seen as taking sides, and the President, Ion Iliescu, began a feud with Romania Libera over what he called

"lies."

Adding to the confusion, papers that had condemned the miners' last visit to Bucharest — a brutal June 1990 fiasco where the government called in "all democratic forces" to put down a 53-day protest — suddenly found themselves siding with violence now that the miners were against the ruling power.

"There is no fundamental change," said Associated Press Bucharest Correspondent Dan Petreanu, assessing the Bucharest journalists' actions. "They're doing exactly what we would expect them to do — publish primarily poorly substantiated commentary and badly argued analysis.

"They see themselves as crusaders for a cause, and that cause is almost never objective, unbiased journalism," said Petreanu, adding that Romanians shouldn't get all of the blame "because this is the case in the entire region."

In nearly every Romanian crisis, though, the focus falls on television. Silviu Brucan, a political analyst who was a member of the caretaker government that followed Ceausescu's execution and preceded elections, calls the 1989 revolution a "TV revolution." Few forget the scenes of Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, executed, still bleeding from the head, or of the nascent National Salvation Front seemingly forming a government on live television.

The August 1991 coup and the miners' visit in September only increased the pressure on the state-controlled Romanian television.

Little occurred with television during the Soviet coup. One night Romanians had President Iliescu announcing he had spoken with hero-of-the-day Boris Yeltsin, and some time later, in an unrelated event, a former broadcasters' union boss, Paul Soloc, was named news director. It is unclear how much influence he had during the coverage of the miners' outburst.

Otherwise, coverage was extraordinary only in its quantity, which like Western coverage was impressive, and in the obvious fact that nothing like it had before been seen in Romania.

But the miners' rampage offered a test

of television's journalistic credentials.

The miners and television have a special relationship. In June 1990, many workers said they came to the capital because of the rioting that they saw on the tube. They saw Bucharest under attack. Those who didn't arrive because of the pictures came because of Iliescu's plea for help, broadcast on television, or because they had heard about the pictures from others. In the end, television was criticized heavily for showing little of the damage miners were causing. It was seen as unquestioning support of the government, and its favored treatment of the miners brought much disrespect.

### **TV Unable To Hide Damage**

This time, television couldn't help but show the miners' actions, because this time the miners came directly to the television building.

Cristian Constantinescu, a deputy editor-in-chief was reached by telephone in the television building during that attack. He described the grounds as "under siege," as protestors were throwing Molotov cocktails, setting the area afire and trying to break through the gate with tractors. One Romanian journalist from Associated Press called it "a small war."

And television showed it all.

"You had a pitched battle on TV," said Virden. "It was lurid. Bombs. The tractor at the gate trying to knock it down. During the evening broadcast, they were filming and immediately reporting. It could not have been more vividly illustrated."

Said Brucan: "Television is not only an objective bringer of the news. It's a major actor on the political scene. This is where the action was. They didn't even show 'Dallas.'"

But was television "an objective bringer of the news?" The government has since complained that TV was too critical during the miners' foray and should have shown more support for the elected officials. Opposition party members complained that, once again, government dominated the coverage and they didn't get enough air time.

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# History Doubling Back

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Ronald Reagan in the Eighties. It had also assumed responsibility for America's first true welfare state, embracing multi-billion dollar obligations ranging from Social Security and food stamps to Medicare and Medicaid. A hyperactive Congress had thrust Washington into such wildly disparate and appropriately local issues as rural fire protection and jellyfish protection in the Chesapeake Bay. It became increasingly questionable whether literally hundreds of separate Federal programs — however noble their intentions — could apply well in tens of thousands of communities of a continent-sized, highly variegated nation.

All these doubts were arising *before* the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Federal aid to the states and localities actually hit its peak in 1978. The stage was set for the phenomenal rise of the states in the 1980's, as they recovered from the recession of the first years of the decade, picked up a good chunk of the slack caused by Federal program withdrawal, and showed their stuff as the principal innovators and powerful fiscal work horses of the Federal system.

Over the course of the Eighties the cumulative budgets and payrolls of the states roughly doubled. Their activity and frequent innovation ranged from economic development campaigns to sweeping, if uneven, efforts to reform schools, from consumer protection (some of the attorneys general became virtual regulatory Rambos) to foreign trade promotion. The scope of activity was as amazing as it would have been unpredictable a decade or two before, when political scientists were prone to write off the states as the "weak sisters," the "fallen arches" of the Federal system.

Even if the 1980's represented the 20th Century's golden decade of state governance, there's no assurance the

1990's will be nearly as kind. Not only has the decade begun with a bitter, extended recession. There's also some thought that many states face "structural deficits" — accumulated burdens of spiraling health costs and swollen prisons, combined with costs of fast-growing immigrant populations — that will put them in the red even in recovery years. Infrastructure maintenance and replacement has lagged seriously. A whole new era of school reform is critical to meet ambitious national education goals and prepare a workforce up to the dramatically increased demands of the fiercely competitive new international economy.

What's more, many states have tried to ignore the mounting problems of their older cities. Many cities have lost jobs and economic activity to their suburban hinterlands at an alarming rate, becoming — in the process — catch basins of poverty, especially for Americans of color, new and immigrant. The economic stability, the peace and safety of states can be imperiled by accelerating social deterioration in the cities.

It's arguable that state and local governments — struggling with overflowing prisons, lagging K-12 education, malfunctioning social services, inadequate health care, the infrastructure costs of sprawling suburban development — will have to undertake rather radical *system redesign* in the 1990's. States and localities may well be forced through the wringer of fearsome "restructuring," staff cutbacks, acquisitions, mergers and bankruptcies, just as big chunks of corporate and financial America were in the late Eighties.

By and large, state and local America will have to manage all this on their own. The Federal government is laboring under trillions of dollars of debt. Congress seems mired in indecision,

incapable of policy innovation. Each time President Bush suggests any kind of domestic policy change — drug control, school reform, highway building — his central message is "let the states pay for it."

Macro-economic policy, Federal budgets, Federal regulations, Federal policy mandates will of course remain massive forces in our national life. But the end of the Cold War may make foreign policy adventures — Washington's perennial monopoly — less important than ever.

Increasingly, what the states and localities do and don't do will make up the aggregate domestic performance of the United States. And the country's cumulative domestic strength will determine its capacity to compete in a new international game in which the stakes are far less military, dramatically more economic.

The bottom line, for journalism, is clear enough: the big reporting opportunities that went to Washington a half century ago have come back home. □



# The Bill of Rights in Pictures

BY NIEMAN PHOTOGRAPHERS



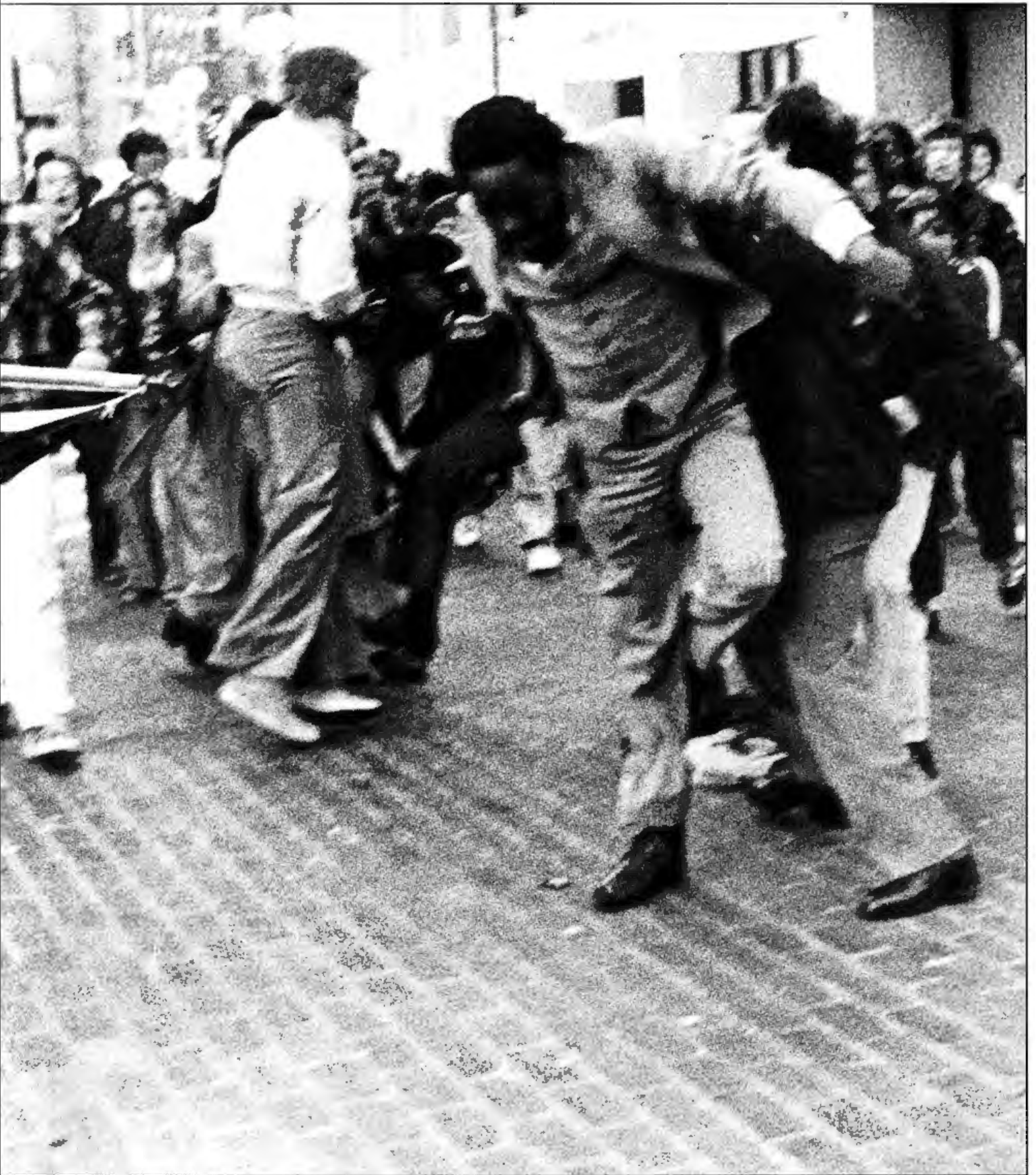
"Scab," screams a relative of a striking miner at men who drove coal trucks across picket lines in May, 1989 at Carbo, Virginia. Photo by Michele McDonald, a 1988 Nieman Fellow, for *The Boston Globe*.

This year the United States has been observing the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. While these rights, incorporated in the first 10

Amendments to the Constitution in 1791, provide many basic freedoms — notably freedom of speech and the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, the right to petition government for the redress of grievances and the right to a fair and speedy trial — other liberties have subsequently been brought under Constitutional protection, especially racial and sexual equality. With a keen sense that the Constitutional protections for life, liberty and pursuit of happiness sometimes fail, Nieman photographers offer the following pictures in celebration of all forms of individual freedom symbolized in the Bill of Rights.



*Theodore Landsmark, a black Boston attorney, was beaten and then struck in the face with a steel-shafted flag pole by a gang of white youths protesting integration.*



*of Boston schools in 1976. Photo by 1980 Nieman Fellow Stanley Forman, for The Boston Herald American.*



*Appalachian woman invokes right to bear arms as she stands in defense of her home. Photo by Stan Grossfeld, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, for The Boston Globe.*



*Everett Hillsman, 2½, who has cerebral palsy, working with his therapist at the Crippled Children's Society center in Inglewood, CA. Photo by Lester Sloan of Newsweek, a 1976 Nieman Fellow.*



*Mary Farrell, a waitress for 17 years at the Chief's Club at the Norfolk (VA) Naval Air Station, shows the new uniform miniskirt that she thinks cost her her job. A new manager at the club replaced two older waitresses with younger women who could dress more skimpily. Mary Farrell filed an age discrimination suit, which she eventually lost. Photo by Michele McDonald for The Boston Globe.*





*Indians, during march on Washington in 1972, speaking at Bureau of Indian Affairs, which they took over briefly. Photo by Steve Nortbup, Nieman Fellow 1974, of The Santa Fe New Mexican.*



*Anti-discrimination marchers in Forsyth County, GA. after a resurgence of Ku Klux Klan activity in 1976. Photo by 1983 Nieman Fellow Eli Reed for Magnum.*





*Graffiti on tunnel wall in San Francisco in 1976. Photo by 1986 Nieman Fellow Micha Bar-Am for Magnum.*

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# Why They Don't Love Us Anymore

*continued from page 9*

larger newspapers."

Leaving the crime-and-the-underclass beat in the hands of a local columnist, who may wring it for pathos, bathos or sensationalism, "is especially cynical. If there is one glib or insightful person commenting on the plight of the underclass, the bigshots in the nice offices think the paper is doing its job in the 'inner city.'"

Cullen defines local reporting as "something as routine as covering a big fire, or a murder, or why a particular neighborhood thinks like it does. One of the reasons local reporting is so poorly done and so poorly thought-of is because so few editors have any considerable experience in doing it."

"I don't think every editor, or even every good editor, has to have a good deal of street or local reporting experience. But I think too few of them do. The bottom line is that not much status is attached to local reporting, and as a self-fulfilling prophecy, very few reporters stay at it very long."

"Why should they? In my experience, reporters who do not aspire to covering apartheid in South Africa, self-determination struggles in Central America, or the machinations of Washington are generally considered uninspired hacks by their superiors."

"This is no knock on foreign correspondents. The ones I've known at The Globe, people like Colin Nickerson and Mary Curtius, are among the best reporters I've ever met. But there is clearly a hierarchy in reporting circles, and I've never heard a good local reporter placed in that hierarchy by bosses, or other reporters, for that matter."

"No reporter from a big newspaper gets Pulitzers for doing good local reporting. Columnists do. Jimmy Breslin is one example. Let's face it, this is an ego-driven business peopled by those

who seek professional status. Status is interviewing Boris Yeltsin in Moscow, not Boris, a Russian immigrant I know who drives a cab in Dorchester, and who, for reasons I have yet to determine, drinks in some of the Irish pubs I frequent.

"I don't see anything changing in the future. The split between management and reporters, in breadth of experience, seems more pronounced than ever . . . When I was entering journalism, the term 'city editor' still conveyed a sense of respect, a sense that, 'Hey, this guy, or this woman, must have been around the block a few times.' Now, if they've been around the block, often it's been in a cab."

It's not just Cullen, and it's not just me. There is a growing sense of unease among many journalists I know, broadcast as well as print, that our livelihood is somehow less than it used to be. We make a lot more money, but we don't have as much fun. Our technology is vastly improved, but for some reason that's hard to pin down, our sights are not as high. There is a dearth of don't-mess-with-me editors.

Discipline, standards, training are lax. No one gets bawled out for screwing up anymore, in this age of hushed newsrooms, nose-to-grindstone computer keyboards, and New Age personnel policies designed to minimize friction and eliminate newsroom beefs. Packaging counts for more than it should. The bean-counters are in the saddle, and the outlook is for a long, dull ride.

Without question, the recession and slumping advertising and circulation make it harder to put out good newspapers. But how can that excuse dullness? It doesn't cost more to hire a talented young writer. It takes better judgment by those doing the hiring. It doesn't have to cost any more to do aggressive local reporting. Look what

we pay for travel, hotels meals and transmission costs for sports writers. You can pay for a lot of Xeroxing at City Hall for what a day on the road soaks up.

I introduced Jimmy Breslin to a Boston Public Library audience recently, and he inveighed against bad newspaper writing. Most of America's newspapers, he swore, actively encourage bad writing. "They want people who sit there like this," he mimicked, folding his arms and sneering at his imaginary keyboard. "They don't understand that words are a product of nervous energy."

Another newspaper stylist of note, Molly Ivins, wrote: "Would you like to know why people don't read newspapers anymore? Because newspapers are boring. Dull. Tedious. Unreadable. No fun." That was 18 years ago.

All politics is local, goes Tip O'Neill's famous axiom. And local (and state) is where the newspapers have to dig in and start the hard business of getting better.

In "The Reckoning," David Halberstam chronicled how America's automobile executives became insulated from the manufacturing realities of building cars. Today's newspaper editors seem bent on replicating the dismal performance of Detroit's managerial class. And the ownerships seem powerless to stop them.

"By making local reporting the minor leagues of journalism," Cullen concluded, "We are courting mediocrity in the newsroom."

No longer courting mediocrity. The newspapers have gone all the way. We married it. □



## Metro News

*continued from page 13*

from five Western states with an emphasis, of course, on the Oregon senators and representatives.

The newspaper also has a full-time correspondent in Tokyo charged with coverage of the Pacific Rim.

At home, The Oregonian has one person covering state government full-time, two assigned to city government fulltime and one covering county government on a full-time basis.

With today's economic and social environment what it is, the time is ripe to take another look at what we cover and how we cover if solutions are to be found to the country's problems.

Most staffers, including those at The Oregonian, are concerned with what their peers think of them. A newspaper's coverage of the Persian Gulf War is immeasurably better in the eyes of staff if that newspaper sent its own reporters and photographers to the Persian Gulf.

Perhaps the money would have been better spent at home for in-depth looks at the problems faced by citizens, while relying on the Associated Press and the news services of The New York Times, The Washington Post-Los Angeles Times News Service and other large news agencies and services to cover the war.

Institutions and forces such as the family, the church and the schools have been pillars of our society for decades, shaping our values and setting our standards. Are we assigning enough writers to cover them?

Money for maintenance of our roads, streets and highways is needed on a continuing basis. Is there a way to finance such a maintenance program without going to the taxpayer on a regular basis?

What of the social disorder in our cities? Are we headed toward a division of races in this country that could lead to a destruction of our democracy?

The time is ripe for the newspapers

in our cities to spend more of their budgets on local and regional coverage.

We need to throw more of our resources into staffing not only the governments of our states, counties and cities, but also the private sector. If we are going to survive as a nation, both the private sector and local and state government must play larger roles in financing the solutions to our problems.

Newspapers must see that they do.

News columns must reflect the actions of the private sector and government, noting accurately and responsibly their reactions. Editorial pages must not only be critical, they must also offer their own solutions to the financial crisis that grips their communities.

Only recently, Oregon voters approved a property tax limitation measure that cut property taxes for local government services to \$10 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The measure phases in a cut in taxes for schools, starting with \$15 per

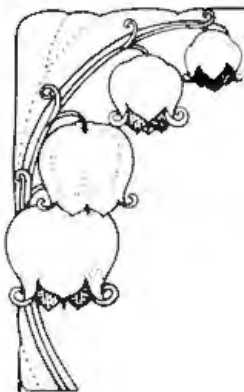
\$1,000 and decreasing to \$5 per \$1,000 by 1995-96. The entire state education system will be in jeopardy by the end of this century if money is not found elsewhere to support it at a level demanded by citizens.

Would the state's daily newspapers be better off spending more money on covering the financing of the state's educational programs and cutting back on what they spend to cover the national and international scene?

The Federal government's drastic cut-backs within the last 11 years have been blamed by some for setting up a series of centrifugal forces that are tearing the nation apart.

There are innovative ways to get funds for public transportation, schools, day care and police protection while at the same time providing relief for those of us who cannot afford to give up any more of our income to taxes or who feel "over taxed."

Let America's newspapers take the lead in bringing all of us together. There are answers to our nation's problems, including the financial crisis faced by state and local governments. □



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# Choice Assignment: State House

*continued from page 16*

politically damaging consequences, with responses constrained by standardized accounting practices, forces state and local governments to take real and consequential action to deal with their budget problems. Spending growth in these situations is typically insufficient to maintain current service levels, requiring hiring freezes or layoffs, program cutbacks, and reductions in local aid. At the same time, tax increases are often required to support even declining levels of service. If the 1980's were a politician's paradise in many states, recent squeezes necessitating tax increases and program cutbacks constitute budget hell for elected officials. In the face of those unappetizing choices, many legislative bodies have suffered at least temporary paralysis, chalking up record delays in budget passage in many states around the country.

Eventually, however painful the choices and however clumsy the process, state and local officials do act. Most states do not have mechanisms like the continuing resolutions of Congress. When they consider adopting that approach at the state level, they typically find that a continuation of current services and aid levels without increased taxes leaves unbalanced budgets, making it extremely difficult for states to borrow to handle their cash needs. While Congress can shrug off deficits and keep government running, state legislatures must eventually adopt budgets which at least try to close deficits. Indeed, in tough fiscal years, budget passage is sometimes the only significant legislative action taken during a session, as the budget battle crowds out substantive legislation.

If politicians in the statehouse cannot ignore fiscal problems for long, the conflict created by budget battles has elements of drama often absent from political disputes in Washington. First, blandness seems to be the best charac-

terization of the current political leadership in Congress and the White House. Gone are the out-sized personalities — Lyndon Johnson, Tip O'Neill, Everett Dirksen, or even the Hollywood glitter of Ronald Reagan, replaced by the corporate personas of Bush, Mitchell and Foley. This blandness may result from the homogenizing effects of national media, or it may be simply an accident of political history.

In contrast, statehouses and city halls seem much more likely to be populated by flesh and blood figures, accessible to the public and press, and less distant than the demi-gods of the national arena. Some of those officials demonstrate the larger-than-life personalities now missing in Washington — examples include Mario Cuomo, Lowell Weicker, and any politician in Louisiana. And, as the Louisiana example points out, state and local officials sometimes run afoul of the law, and have to deal with indictments while they try to manage their government tasks.

The accessibility of state officials, coupled with the requirement to take real budget balancing action, also creates dramatic settings for citizen protest. Tax increases and service cuts by state and local governments are very visible to interested citizens, and they can easily act to make their concerns understood. In the space of one year in Albany, gay activists chained themselves to the desks of budget officials, students protesting tuition increases hurled furniture through the glass doors leading into the Governor's office, and union members tried to climb over the fence surrounding the Governor's residence. In Washington, protestors are typically much more reserved, maintaining decorum during infrequent marches. Federal security personnel also seem better able to avoid the direct confrontation that characterizes budget battles in states and cities.

As suggested earlier, big city budgets provoke equally sharp conflicts. However, most cities cannot raise sales taxes or corporate or personal income taxes, and the revenue battles are therefore limited primarily to the property tax. Moreover, most cities must go to state legislatures to authorize many of the solutions to the spending problems.

For reporters in search of budget conflict, then, the statehouse is the location of choice. Until the economy regains a more typical level of growth, state governments and their local colleagues will be under continuing budget pressure. Indeed, even after the national economy is growing again, some states and cities will continue to suffer. In the face of economic slowdown, the President has adopted a hands-off approach to fiscal policy, and his budget director is cutting back on Federal reimbursement for mandated spending for Medicaid. State and local officials cannot adopt the Washington approach to budget problems and simply ignore them without grave damage to their credit ratings and their cash positions. So they must act, and those actions eventually lead to service cutbacks, tax increases or, more frequently, both. The result is continuing political melodrama, played out by politicians who are typically less aloof and less bland than their Washington counterparts, in a local arena where citizen protest is more frequent and dramatic. □



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# Washington

*continued from page 20*

There was a gridlock in policies. Nothing got passed in Congress. It was like a mid-life crisis. All that got recharged with the war, but it's returning to drift."

Editors may be less excited by Washington, but reporters aren't. Royal Calkins, who has produced a number of page one local investigative projects for The Bee, said: "Washington is still the plum, despite the change. A good reporter still wants to go. There's nothing else that competes."

George Baker, The Bee's managing editor and a former Washington reporter for McClatchy, noted that there seems to be less interest in politics among readers and staff members. "It's reflected especially in the state bureau. Twenty or 30 years ago, people were knocking the doors down to go there. Now there's less interest in going."

Baker's suggestion for Washington coverage is "to get away from set pieces. Eighty per cent of the reporters are covering 20 per cent of the stories. A lot of it is done for prestige, but our readers don't know if a story comes from us or The New York Times or the AP.

"We should be getting stories nobody else has. They don't hold press conferences and issue news releases on those things."

If all that editors get from their Washington correspondents are the same stories provided by major wire services, it would make economic sense to bring those folks home. There is also a danger that reporters far from home will start writing for their news sources rather than the readers, but goading reporters onto the paths of righteousness is what editors are for.

Good capital correspondents are strong links between Washington and the readers, and provide information readers will never get from their congressional delegations.

We think Mike Doyle gives us an edge over broadcast news, over smaller local

papers and over larger national papers that offer no local news. I'd rather give up my parking space than give up Mike Doyle — and this from the car-mad state of California. □

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# TV

*continued from page 12*

affected by violent crime and looking for stories that have nothing to do with that subject — like the one on a weekly kids newspaper that was about to hit the streets. We're focusing on phenomenons and trends and making observations about this area — everything from organ transplants to smoking and betting habits. We know who is watching and who is not, and we think we know why.

That's the up side of this downsizing. Here's the down. A lot of news organizations simply won't be able to do enough of the right kind of newsgathering given the limitations of budgets, decreased staffs, overlapping jobs and the tantalizing and increasingly insidious nature of the freebie satellite feed. Already we are seeing news organizations ceding territory to non-news operations. Stations are downlinking video news releases and airing them unedited and unlabeled. They are accepting free interviews and trips from Disney World and self-serving special interest groups. They've agreed to allow Court-TV, that " 'Hard Copy' in hiding" version of truth, justice and the American way, to run their courtroom pools because it saves them time, money and distribution hassles.

The downside also means we will see less of the good things that the global scope brought to the mix. Presidential campaigns are being won and lost on local TV stations around the country, and it is only those with a carefully orchestrated coverage plan and a budget in place that will be able to cover the candidates and develop the issues in the proper way.

The most troubling aspect of all of this is that no one dares criticize what's happening. The only ones saying anything at all are people who have nothing to lose. Jim Snyder, the outgoing Vice

President for Broadcast News for the Post-Newsweek stations, was recently quoted in a Broadcasting Magazine article condemning the shortsighted cost-cutting moves at local TV stations. He chastised the powers-that-be and reminded them that if they let news do its job correctly, it will make money for a station. News is the only thing that makes a station distinctive, he says, and it is those stations that have created a loyal audience for themselves that will survive.

No one is going to argue against that point, but then again there's absolutely no one on the inside who wants to keep a job willing to fight the tide either. Who ever would have thought that news organizations would be in need of an independent voice to fight off the infiltrators and the hatchet men? But that's where we are. It seems most local news directors these days are toeing the company line because they are more interested in advancing their own careers than they are in protecting the integrity of their news organizations. Our profession has a long history of fighting the fights no one else will fight and of giving a voice to those who have no other voice. Economic tough times test all of our convictions, but news cannot afford to forget that we must do what we believe is right, not what we believe is popular.

There's been a lot of talk about the demise of the networks over the last few years and how they've become the dinosaurs of the broadcast industry. I am one who hopes the networks survive. I like the security of knowing they have access unparalleled by any other news organizations in the world, and I believe we need them. Local television stations will never be able to cover the world, and they should stop trying. As for the cutbacks at the networks, we hear an awful lot about it, but we sure don't see it. Their commitment to important news coverage seems stronger than ever — the Persian Gulf, the Thomas hearings to name a few. I suspect a lot of good people at the networks know their companies waste money, and that's why there is not a total resistance to the cuts. And the same could be said at the local level. There was some fat. That's "was." □



# The Angela Wright Case

continued from page 22

ting what journalists often preach.

Oppel said he discouraged Observer staffers, including those who might know Wright well and add important information to stories about her, from talking to reporters.

He said it was for good reason. "We report the news and don't make it. If we were to be commenting on a news figure, it would be inappropriate for reporters and editors whose jobs are to fairly and accurately report the news," Oppel said.

"I didn't think there was any question that the appropriate behavior is to stay out of the news."

How he was viewed by fellow journalists wasn't a top concern. "My chief concern is not how I look to other reporters or editors around the nation. It is how I look to our readers who need to see us as fair and professional," he said. "If we jumped into the center ring there was no way not to look involved in the hearings."

As a matter of fact, The Observer wasn't covering the hearings. Until Wright's involvement became known, The Observer hadn't done any reporting on the hearings or the confirmation. Coverage of that was left to wire services, including the Knight-Ridder Washington Bureau. While The Observer has a reporter in that bureau, that reporter doesn't regularly cover the Supreme Court and was assigned elsewhere at the time.

Besides the no-comment policy, Oppel also barred other journalists from The Observer's newsroom. One who did make it to the newsroom, Peter Applebaum of The New York Times Atlanta bureau, was asked to leave.

Applebaum says he doesn't feel any particular disappointment with the way he and other journalists were treated by Oppel and The Observer. He says when dealing with journalists on a story, he

knows he's dealing with people who understand the business and particularly its shortcomings.

"No one is more thin-skinned than journalists," said Applebaum. He notes that shortly after he filed an article on Angela Wright from Charlotte, it moved on The Times News Service wire. A few minutes later he was answering a series of questions from his editors based on a call from Oppel after he'd seen the piece — which still hadn't been published in any paper.

Journalists aren't any different than anybody else, Applebaum says, at wanting to keep their own dirty laundry to themselves. At the same time, he says, "you know how journalists gossip."

While careful to say he wasn't specifically talking about The Charlotte Observer, he did say "it's hypocritical for those of us screaming about the public's right to know . . . to then draw up the bridge over the moat. I'm amused by it, but not outraged."

Oppel says he wasn't trying to make reporters' work more difficult, just making sure there weren't any disruptions in the newsroom by packs of reporters and TV cameras trooping through while reporters and editors were doing their jobs. On other occasions, including election nights when deadlines are pressed to their limits, The Observer has allowed reporters and television crews in the newsroom.

Stephen Smith, news editor in Knight-Ridder's Washington Bureau, was in a particularly tough situation. On the one hand he had to try to report a story and on the other, he had to deal with one of his company's publications.

When the story first broke, the Washington bureau, which also handles much of the Knight-Ridder wire copy, agreed not to move The Charlotte Observer's story on Wright until after 10:30 p.m. to protect the Observer's

exclusive within North Carolina.

In the meantime, other news organizations were also getting wind of the story. He said he was concerned that agreements with Charlotte might end up keeping his bureau behind a breaking story instead of in front of it.

He said it was then decided the story and the people in Charlotte would be treated as if they were any other news source. He says the bureau covered the story well — despite having one of its reporters refused admission to The Observer newsroom — but it did have its "family affair" discomforts.

As a matter of personal opinion, Smith said, he strongly believes that news people, when caught up in the news, should make it a point to respond on the record. "We spend endless columns talking about the public's right to know, criticizing not-for-attribution quotes," he said. For news people not to answer questions is "a terrible way to do business."

"We're always better off to respond to a reporter as we'd want others to respond to us," he said.

But, he also stressed news people need to understand fully what it is like for those on the other side of the notebook, camera or microphone, particularly in stressful times such as the Thomas hearings.

"Things are less clear-cut when someone you know and respect gets caught up in the maelstrom of what you know is a very ugly story," he said. □

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# Pro-Abortion Bias?

*continued from page 23*

fortable physical realities on the other side of the door.

Late-term abortions, proponents of abortion rights argue, are "statistically insignificant" because they account for so few of the 1.5 million abortions done in this country every year. But short of an outright repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, this debate is likely to be played out at the edges. The issue of time limits is the one most likely to be seized upon by lawmakers if policy-making on abortion reverts to the state legislatures.

In the 18 years since *Roe* established broad protection for the abortion option through the first six months of pregnancy and more limited access through the third trimester, science has pushed the age of fetal viability back from 28 weeks to 24 weeks. There have been rare cases of survival at 22 weeks, though researchers contend that 24 weeks is the "outer limit" of viability because fetal lungs cannot develop any sooner.

Those medical advances have prompted Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to describe *Roe* as "on a collision course with itself." As early as next year, the Supreme Court could rule on a Pennsylvania law that would ban abortion after 24 weeks.

This would seem to be fertile ground for journalistic inquiry. But, aside from a 1989 magazine piece by Karen Tumulty for *The Los Angeles Times*, late stage abortions have received little press attention. Tumulty's piece — which described how the procedure is done, the stage of fetal development and the inherent conflict for doctors who, on one day might be fighting to save the life of a premature "baby" and on the next might be aborting a "fetus" of the same gestational age — was disquieting, but informative, journalism.

She was criticized by abortion rights advocates for focusing on "statistically insignificant" abortions.

Ethan Bronner, my partner in abortion coverage at *The Globe*, had a similar experience when he described a second trimester abortion as "bone-crushing." A copy editor objected not that the phrase was inaccurate but that it was too precise.

If we treat neutral facts such as fetal development and the abortion procedure itself as off limits, aren't we choosing sides?

"These are scary people," Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League said of the Wichita protesters in *The New York Times*. "This is bleary-eyed zealotry. It's hard to believe we're living in the United States of America. These women are being subjected to tyranny and terrorism."

It's a good quote. But where's the objective observer to provide some perspective? One person's moral conviction could surely be another's bleary-eyed zealotry. But scary? Tyranny and terrorism? What's scary is that there is terrorism out there — dozens of abortion clinics have been firebombed in the last 10 years. But is there evidence linking Operation Rescue with those bombings? And if we let a quote like that stand unchallenged, aren't we letting the reader make a connection that has not been proven to exist?

Providing context is part of our job, but not in Wichita. When Lynn Paltrow, a senior ACLU attorney, tells *The Washington Post* that "civil disobedience has a history of touching the heart, not threatening with rowdiness," we don't ask her if she was around during the anti-war movement. When passions run high, on any issue, there is pushing and name-calling. It must be frightening to be intercepted en route to

a medical appointment with shouts of "murderer." But is it not frightening to be fingering rosary beads outside the Wichita clinic and hear a counter-demonstrator shout to police: "Get out your batons; they need a thumping for Jesus." (as quoted in *The Washington Post*).

Democracy is a messy business. And, like it or not, civil disobedience is not the exclusive property of the Left. One would not know that, however, reading press accounts of the antiabortion movement. One *Washington Post* story, noting that Operation Rescue employs "militant action which it describes as civil disobedience," is typical of how the press discounts the movement's claim that it is acting in the tradition of civil rights and antiwar protesters.

Abortion rights proponents contend that while civil rights activists were trying to secure constitutional rights for black people, antiabortion activists are denying women their constitutional right to abortion. But isn't their aim, like that of the demonstrators before them, to disrupt a legally sanctioned activity that it finds morally repugnant? In their view, the fetus is a human life and in order to protect that life, they are compelled to disrupt the legal act of abortion.

The most emotionally charged stories demand the most of reporters. In Wichita, too often, we forgot about fairness. Think about the paragraph in *The Washington Post* that began: "Randall Terry, the former car salesman who launched this most virulent faction of the United States antiabortion movement . . ." Does the word "virulent," which my dictionary defines as "full of poison," really belong in a news story? □

# Bucharest

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Perhaps, in fact, television is starting to get it right.

"The fact that everybody now is critical of television shows that they are more objective," said Brucan.

However, one television insider felt the station remained too close to the official line. And Foreign News Director Victor Ionescu hopes that with a new government, the time for change may come.

"It's a chance for television to separate from the government and establish our own journalistic principles," Ionescu said, adding that without a progressive audiovisual law — which is being delayed and perhaps superseded by a more stringent version — television's role is largely undefined.

"We are nobody's children right now," he said.

## Print Journalists No Better Off

Much the same could be said for print journalists, too. The two events of August and September seem to have done little for their credibility.

People have seen the coverage as largely biased, which may be just what the people want. After years of a bland press that toed the party line, readers appear comfortable picking up their preferred daily and seeing what they want to read.

The downside is feelings run deep in a country where emotions frequently get out of control, and one Romanian's New York Times is another Romanian's National Enquirer. Consensus on what is good journalism does not seem near.

"The real problem of the journalism in Romania is it is not believed," said Dumitrescu. "And people don't get punished for lying."

Indeed, journalists run little chance of penalty for printing falsities. The most prominent example is Corneliu Vadim Tudor, editor of the anti-Semitic

and nationalistic Romania Mare. He has nearly 100 libel suits pending against him and has paid no damages. His weekly is also said to be the largest selling in the country.

Still, not everyone believes the current state of affairs is hopeless. Sergiu Andon, editor of Adeverul (The Truth), has seen his paper make something of a comeback. It was commonly viewed as an unobjective — though popular — mouthpiece for the government following the revolution. But since making some editorial changes in April, Westerners in Bucharest say they have noticed improvements.

"Of course there are difficulties among journalists because political passions are alive," said Andon. "But the difficulties are smaller than last year. I believe the objectivity has grown."

If two events of such defining nature as a coup d'etat and the rampage of conservative forces were not enough to encourage a wide-ranging journalistic transition, when will the changes come?

Coman, the journalism dean, feels there are two levels. The first consists of two main factors: 1) Better economic management 2) Better distribution of papers so journalists are responsible to more readers.

The second level is what Coman terms "intellectual." He says that journalists must change the way they think of themselves, moving from interpreters of information to carriers of information.

"This will take a long time," said Coman. "If we have more a more stable political situation, the media will change. But if we continue to have these events (like the coup and the miners), we will not have objective conditions for change."

Said Virden: "You can't separate the state of the press from the state of political development. The political system is so weak that the government

fell apart when the miners came. We are sitting in an ivory tower talking about (the need for) a detached press, because for the people living it, it's not what the situation calls for." □

*Chris Riback lectured on journalism in Romania in 1990 and returned last summer as a reporter for the Associated Press. He currently studies International Affairs at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.*

## Questions

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dreadfully abusive relationship and allowed her long-time lover to beat their adopted daughter to death, ask why Joel Steinberg felt he could do what he did? Why did most of the neighbors ignore what was happening in that dark, filthy apartment? Why did the couple's friends, and Lisa Steinberg's teachers, turn a blind eye to the child's bruises and say nothing as she became steadily quieter and paler? Why? Why? Why?

I tried to ask some of the "right" questions in the mid-1970's when a female acquaintance came to me with stories of being sexually harassed by her boss, the head of a powerful state agency. My newspaper wouldn't allow me to pursue the story. "It's her word against his," the editors said.

It is my hope that the Hill-Thomas hearings, and the consciousness-raising that has followed, will put an end to that kind of response. And I hope that more reporters will begin asking the "right" questions.

It's the only way we can hope to ferret out the truth — or as much of the truth as we mortals are allowed to see. □

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# BOOKS

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## Libel, Free Speech and the Supreme Court

### Make No Law

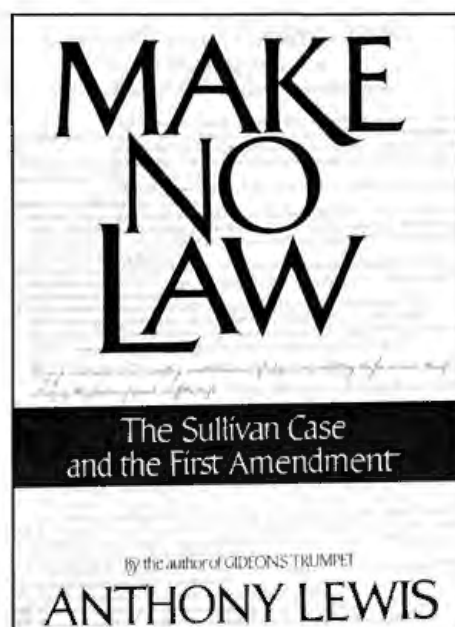
Anthony Lewis  
Random House, 1991, \$25

by William L. Dwyer

*Good name in man and woman,  
dear my Lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:  
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis  
something, nothing;  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been  
slave to thousands;  
But he that filches from me my  
good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches  
him,  
And makes me poor indeed.*

This famous speech is a godsend to plaintiffs' lawyers in libel cases. Quoted in final argument, it rings a bell for honor and reputation, reminds the jury that these values have been cherished through the ages, and subtly brushes off any concerns about the defendant's solvency. The plaintiff's good name, now tarnished, was an "immediate jewel." A purse — the defendant's for example, which may be emptied to pay damages — is "trash." The implications for the verdict need not be elaborated.

What the plaintiff's lawyer doesn't mention — and the defense counsel should — is that Shakespeare placed these words in the mouth of a villain. Iago is ruffling up Othello's jealousy to attain a murderous goal. He succeeds. In the end Othello is dead. So is poor



Desdemona.

In this country the value of reputation, protected by law, has never been misused on a grander scale than in *Sullivan v. New York Times*, a libel case tried in Alabama thirty years ago. If the plaintiff's trial court victory had stood up, the press could have been silenced in the movement for racial equality in the South. The United States Supreme Court refused to let this happen. On one of its greatest days, the Court saved the media from intimidation and explained for the first time the "central meaning" of constitutional freedom of speech and press.

Anthony Lewis tells the story in his lapidary new book, "Make No Law." In doing so he gives short histories of racial

segregation, of the rocky but upward course of free speech in America, and of the Supreme Court's role as guarantor of the liberties promised by the Bill of Rights. His title comes from the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

The *Sullivan* case began with a routine event: a newspaper's acceptance of a paid advertisement. The civil rights movement was meeting massive and often violent resistance. It needed funds and it was totally reliant on a free flow of public information. On March 29, 1960, The New York Times published a full-page appeal placed by an organization called the Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South. "Heed Their Rising Voices," said the advertisement, and it read in part:

In Montgomery, Alabama, after students sang "My Country 'Tis of thee" on the State Capitol steps, their leaders were expelled from school, and truckloads of police armed with shotguns and tear-gas ringed the Alabama State College Campus. When the entire student body protested to state authorities by refusing to re-register, their dining hall was padlocked in an attempt to starve them into submission.

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Again and again the Southern violators have answered Dr. King's peaceful protests with intima-

tion and violence. They have bombed his home almost killing his wife and child. They have assaulted his person. They have arrested him seven times — for "speeding," "loitering" and similar "offenses." And now they have charged him with "perjury" — a *felony* under which they could imprison him for *ten years* . . .

The advertisement was signed by Eleanor Roosevelt, Jackie Robinson, Marlon Brando, and other famous people. The text contained errors. The police had not "ringed" the campus but had only been deployed near it; nine students had been expelled not for leading a demonstration but for demanding service at a lunch counter in the courthouse; other students protested not by refusing to register but by boycotting classes on a single day; the campus dining hall had not been padlocked; Dr. King had been arrested only four times, not seven.

L. B. Sullivan was one of three Montgomery city commissioners. His duties included supervising the police department. Neither he nor any other official was mentioned in *The Times* advertisement. Nonetheless Sullivan sued the newspaper for libel. His theory was that the advertisement falsely accused the local police of misconduct, which necessarily defamed him as the official in charge of the department — that he must be one of the "Southern violators."

Alabama allowed punitive damages — a kind of pseudo-fine — in libel suits. Sullivan's case was tried in Montgomery, to an all-white jury, in a segregated courtroom. The judge instructed the jurors in a way that left little room for a defense verdict. The advertisement, he said, was defamatory as to anyone it referred to, and, since it admittedly contained errors, was false. If the jurors found that it was published "of and concerning" the plaintiff they could award both general damages for harm to reputation and punitive damages "as a kind of punishment to a defendant with a view of preventing similar

wrongs in the future." No evidence suggested Sullivan's reputation had really been harmed, and only 394 copies of *The Times* had been circulated in all of Alabama. Yet the jurors brought in a verdict for the full amount claimed, half a million dollars. Four black clergymen, co-defendants with *The Times*, who had been listed as "warmly endorsing" the appeal, were held liable in the same amount although the proof showed they had neither seen the text nor authorized the use of their names. Their lawyer's droll argument — "How could these individual defendants retract something — if you'll pardon the expression — they didn't tract?" — was unavailing.

By wielding the law of libel in this way a state could force anyone to cease publishing criticism of local officials, and could ruin those who transgressed. The idea caught on. By 1964 *The Times* had suffered a second \$500,000 verdict based on the same advertisement, and numerous libel suits arising from the racial integration struggle, seeking hundreds of millions in damages against print and broadcast media, were pending in Southern courts.

The United States Supreme Court accepts for review only a tiny fraction of the state court cases offered to it. It agreed to hear the *Sullivan* case.

The Court clearly had to do *something*. It could not stand by and see a free press throttled by libel judgments. But at the time — given the law as it stood three decades ago — what could it do?

"Reputation," as Mr. Lewis writes, "is an aspect of our sense of self; to injure it is almost to violate one's physical integrity." Libel suits were sanctioned by centuries of use to remedy false attacks on reputation. They also served to replace duels and fights in a society aiming to get rid of private violence. Alabama, on the surface, had simply followed traditional state-law libel rules. The Supreme Court does not interfere with a state's application of its own laws simply because it thinks the outcome was wrong. To justify Federal intervention, there must have been a violation of Federal law.

The Federal law invoked by *The Times* was the Constitution itself — the First Amendment. By 1964 it was clear, after 173 years of often slumberous history, that the free speech and press guarantee applied to state as well as Federal governments and that it forbade both "prior restraints" and after-the-fact punishment of speech. But there was a catch. Speech categorized as "libelous" had always been ruled outside the First Amendment's protection. The Alabama Supreme Court had said simply: "The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not protect libelous publications." As Mr. Lewis notes, "As far as any court had held up to that point, the statement was correct."

The case was argued and submitted. Much of the Supreme Court's work is done in the privacy of chambers. Over a period of weeks, Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., assigned by Chief Justice Warren to write the opinion, did a masterful job of persuading his colleagues. On March 9, 1964, speaking for a majority of six, he read his opinion from the bench.

The country's history, said Justice Brennan, reflects

a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials.

The First Amendment guaranteed everyone the right to speak freely about, and against, the government. The nation long ago abolished the crime of "seditious libel" which had permitted rulers in earlier times to silence their critics. To award damages to Sullivan, who had not even been mentioned in *The Times* advertisement, would be to revive seditious libel in the guise of a civil lawsuit. The law of defamation "may not constitutionally be utilized to establish that an otherwise impersonal attack on governmental operations was a libel of an official responsible for those operations."

This alone would have disposed of the case, but the Court went further. The common law had made the defamer's good intentions no defense for libelous misstatements of fact; the fair comment privilege protected only opinion. But errors of all kinds, the Court said, are unavoidable in free and open debate. The traditional law was designed to protect reputations by holding responsible those who spread false and defamatory assertions of fact, regardless of the libeler's state of mind. But as applied to cases like *Sullivan's* that rule would dampen free speech by levying damages on honest debate of public issues: "[T]he pall of fear and timidity imposed upon those who would give voice to public criticism is an atmosphere in which the First Amendment freedoms cannot survive."

To surmount this danger the Court laid down a new rule: where the plaintiff is a public official or candidate for office a false but honest attack relating to his public life cannot entitle him to a libel verdict. A libel claimant in that category could no longer win "unless he proves that the statement was made with 'actual malice' — that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not."

*Sullivan's* verdict failed the new test. Nothing proved *The Times* had published the advertisement with "reckless disregard" of the truth.

Three of the nine justices would have gone even further. Justice Black, noting that *Sullivan's* social standing "has likely been enhanced" rather than damaged by the advertisement, urged the complete abolition of libel laws in realms of public discussion. Justices Douglas and Goldberg largely agreed.

*The Times* and the First Amendment had won. The Court's opinion, marshaling the history of free speech, and recognizing fully for the first time the role of citizen-critics in a democracy, was described by the political philosopher Alexander Meiklejohn as "an occasion for dancing in the streets."

But there is always a sequel. Constitutional doctrine does not simply get

married and live happily ever after. In the generation since *Sullivan* appeared, the courts have grappled with one complication after another: What "public figures" other than officials and candidates are covered by the rule? What kind of proof will permit a jury to infer "actual malice"? What standard should apply to "private" libel suits? How, if at all, can punitive damages against speech co-exist with a free press?

Life under the *Sullivan* rule is far better than it would have been without it. Many vexatious cases are dismissed early by judges; many more are not filed in the first place. But there are problems. In some cases millions have been spent in bootless litigation over a publisher's state of mind — whether it acted with or without "malice" — when the main issue, the only one vital to the plaintiff and the public, was whether the offending statement was true or false. A defamed public figure may want only to clear her name, but be unable to do so because the falsehood was published without malice.

Yet a plaintiff who does crack through the *Sullivan* barrier may find a bonanza. In 1989 and 1990, according to the Libel Defense Resource Center, news organizations lost two-thirds of the defamation suits against them that went to trial, and the average verdict was just under \$4.5 million. Even though nine out of ten libel cases against the press are dismissed or settled without trial, fear of huge damage awards, and of burdensome defense costs, can have a chilling effect on free expression.

Some imaginative remedies have been proposed: Let the plaintiff opt to forgo damages, seek only a judgment that he was libeled, and thus escape the "malice" requirement; give the publisher the alternative of printing or airing a retraction or a reply, and thus escape suit; eliminate punitive damages; limit damages in libel cases involving public affairs to out-of-pocket losses, ruling out compensation for harm to feelings or reputation. To adopt constitutional rules limiting damages, Mr. Lewis writes, "is the unfinished business

of libel reform, the last necessary step to make libel law conform to the First Amendment." So far, it is a step the Supreme Court has failed to take.

Notwithstanding the unfinished business, the *Sullivan* case is more than a landmark of history. It is still the cornerstone of law on libel and free speech. Its analysis of liberty continues to inform a wide variety of First Amendment decisions, even under a drastically changed Supreme Court. It remains, on the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights, a cause for celebration.

There are many heroes in this book, among them James Madison, who wrote and sponsored the First Amendment; Learned Hand, who as a Federal district judge wrote a pioneering decision on what free speech should mean; Justices Holmes and Brandeis, whose near-poetic dissents following World War I eventually became law; Herbert Wechsler, who briefed and argued the case for *The Times* in the Supreme Court; William J. Brennan, Jr., who will surely be remembered as one of the greatest justices; and the countless Americans, black and white, who have struggled for civil rights.

Anthony Lewis has the gift of seeing at a glance, as if from a hilltop, a vast field of battle, and of summing it up in a phrase. His first book, "Gideon's Trumpet," telling how an impoverished prisoner in Florida persuaded the Supreme Court to require the states to provide counsel for indigent defendants, is still in print and not to be missed. "Make No Law" is better yet. This book will endure as a gem of legal and political history. □

*William L. Dwyer is a United States District Judge for the Western District of Washington. His book "The Goldmark Case: An American Libel Trial," written while he was still a practicing lawyer, won an American Bar Association Gavel Award in 1985.*

# A Pen Funnier Than a Sword

## In Your Face: A Cartoonist at Work

Doug Marlette  
Houghton-Mifflin Co. 1991, \$12.95

by Mike Peters, with Additional  
Material from Marian Peters and  
Chris Browne

**M**others, don't let your babies grow up to be cartoonists! Cartoonists have traditionally held the same position and low-level respect as court jesters. They are viewed as an irritation — or necessary evil at best. Of late, cartoonists have taken on the aura of a hired killer who comes into town in a black hat, with black gloves, and a Windsor-Newton Brush in each holster, to shake up the local yokels. The populous is fascinated and the politicians (and business types) are horrified.

Doug Marlette's new book "In Your Face," gives an insight into the life of one of the nation's top cartoonists and certainly one of the most effective. It proves beyond a doubt that cartoonists are born — not made. They come into this world bent, from cradle to grave, to point out that the emperor has no clothes and no morals as well.

This book is incredibly rich . . . full of "stuff" . . . behind-the-scenes stuff, neat drawings, previously unpublished stuff . . . what's wonderful is that Doug lets us in. As soon as most celebrities attain their celebrity, the wall goes up around them. Sometimes the wall is impenetrable, like Warren Beatty's wall. Sometimes it's just daunting, like Cher's. Doug Marlette blows a hole in his wall and invites the world in to see how it's done and how it really is.

Cartoonists are very misunderstood, like Pandas and Klingons. Right off, most people don't know how hard being a cartoonist is; (notice we didn't say how hard cartooning is — that's comparatively easy).

Secondly, most people don't really believe in their gut that cartooning is a



real job. That's because cartoonists have a different set of criteria with which to view the world. This is due to the fact that what is good for their country is bad for their profession. For instance, the Nixon years were viewed as a disaster for the country but represented Camelot for cartoonists.

Doug's personal Camelot was otherwise known as "The Baker Years." Believe it or not, cartoonists do like to get things done. We all pay lip service to the statement that "all a cartoonist can do is make people think." We are all resigned to being nothing more than a burr under the saddle most of the time. But in those rare, magical occasions like a special alignment of planets, a cartoonist will be presented with a situation he or she can change. What Thomas Nast was to Tammany Hall,

Doug was to Jim and Tammy.

Doug's written the book that every cartoonist wishes he'd written (and that some have tried to), not a how to book, but a broader, more human exploration of the Capra-esque trials and triumphs of a unique American, as he plies his trade in a uniquely American art form.

Doug Marlette's pen is a might funnier than a sword. And his wit is quicker than a roomful of White House staffers doing damage control. Praise the Lord and pass the Higgin's Ink! □

*Mike Peters is a political cartoonist and creator of the comic strip "Mother Goose and Grimm;" Marian Peters is his wife; Chris Browne is creator of the strip "Hagar the Horrible."*

# The Scandal of the Financial Markets

## Eagle on the Street

David A. Wise and Steve Coll  
Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, \$24.95

by Wallace Turner

Wall Street soon began to look like a sharks' feeding frenzy after Ronald Reagan as President began to make good on his promise to "get the government off the back of American business."

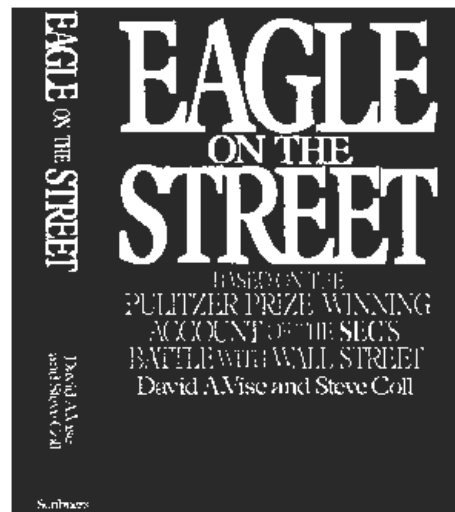
First they lured Enforcement Chief Stanley Sporkin away from the Security and Exchange Commission, enticing him with the job as chief counsel to his friend William Casey at the Central Intelligence Agency. That ended 20 years when Stan Sporkin was chief goblin in nightmares of Wall Street crooks.

Then they installed John Shad, vice chairman of E.F. Hutton, as SEC chairman. Not that Shad is a crook; he is a highly moral man who was disabled by believing a lot of that University of Chicago School of Economics jargon about a free and unfettered market place being the best way to solve all riddles that involved money.

Then there came the astounding sequence in August, 1982, wherein William Agee failed as he tried to use Bendix Corp. to take over the many times larger Martin Marietta Corp. Historically, this would turn out to be much more than just a mistaken judgment. The authors of "Eagle on the Street" point out the larger significance:

Investment bankers picked up \$18 million in fees without any risk — "there was no capital invested, nothing at risk, only millions of dollars in quick advisory fees."

All at once most investment banking houses were looking for clients who wanted to mount hostile takeover attempts. This trend created a trove, a mother-lode of secrets worth millions



of dollars. The takeover participants would get rapped for doing it, but if you, an outsider, knew in advance you could buy or sell short and make a mint. Sure, the people you did business with were being cheated by precisely the amount you profited; so what?

Under John Shad, the SEC focused on trying to stop the insider trading, but ignored the larger issue. The agency seemed to be unfeeling as to whether these takeovers were beneficial to everyone involved — established managers, shareholders, company employees, customers, suppliers, communities where plants were located and so forth. Shad, in fact, defended the concept of hostile takeovers as good for the stockholders in that it pushed up their stock values.

Social values were ignored, a perilous course for a regulatory agency. The SEC stood aside while the nation watched companies being ripped off for millions in fees to investment bankers, frantic repurchasing of shares to fend off raiders, and wild gyrations in stock prices.

When a takeover specialist decided that a company should be "put into play", a repugnant term given the realities of what it meant, that company

would be certain to undergo huge capital losses, no matter whether its management survived or succumbed to the raider. If it survived, there would be tremendous fees to investment bankers, lawyers and perhaps a "greenmail" shakedown. If the raid succeeded, the accepted practice was to pick the company down to its bones and then rattle those off to some corporate knacker. It was as bad as meeting a mugger in an alley.

All you need to do to get the drift of what happened after the Reagan Administration took control of the SEC is to remember the stories behind a few names that became notorious a few years later.

There was Dennis Levine, the bright young man at Drexel Burnham Lambert who stole \$12 million through insider trading in mergers he learned about in his job and then ratted on everyone else after he was trapped; and Martin Siegel, handsome, witty, a sure winner at Kidder Peabody & Co., who took a briefcase full of money for passing on confidential information to corporate raiders.

There were lesser fish, interesting because their early netting led to the bigger sharks, most notably Ivan Boesky who had made a fortune extorting money from corporate managers. Someone invented the polite name "greenmail" for these shakedowns where Boesky, for agreeing to go away, sold his holdings to his target at a premium price.

Remember it was Boesky who many financial writers in the 1980s told us seemed to have an uncanny way of knowing in advance about corporate mergers. After all, they would tell us, Boesky was an arbitrageur specializing in quick dealings of stocks made volatile by approaching changes in company control, so it was only natural that he developed these talents. He was widely admired and envied. Actually, he was bribing such people as Levine and Siegel for the information that he could use to cheat traders and investors.

You want chutzpah? While he was bribing investment bankers to get secrets, Boesky told a college audience



that greed was an admirable trait because it moved the commercial world its wonders to perform.

There was Michael Milken, operating from his office in Beverly Hills, a manipulator of such magnitude and success that the SEC staff seemed unable to believe that it could catch him.

Twice in the years when Milken was perfecting his junk bond operations that would leave deep scars in the U.S. credit markets, low-level SEC lawyers began investigations, but both were turned off at the top of the agency on the grounds that insufficient evidence had been gathered to justify going after Milken. There was no suggestion that the Fix was in; it would be wasteful to continue pursuing him, it was decided.

During those years, Milken pumped out the junk bonds that choked many savings and loans, at least one big insurance company and now has some banks gasping for air.

But because Ivan Boesky accurately read the avarice in the hearts of many of us, Milken probably will be best remembered years from now because in one year his employers, Drexel Burnham Lambert, paid him \$550 million dollars. This huge sum was only a small corner, a salesman's commission, of the value of the junk bonds that Milken's operation pumped into the economy.

His adventures led to Drexel's bankruptcy. And it is fine irony that after John Shad left government service, he became the head of Drexel, to try to save it, but at the end presided over its closure.

David A. Vise and Steve Coll have produced a valuable book with this extension into book form of reports they wrote for The Washington Post. Vise is now The Post's deputy financial editor and Coll is New Delhi bureau chief. They won a Pulitzer prize for their work.

Vise and Coll hold to a moderate tone, avoiding shrill populist raving and ranting about the money changers. They are masters of easily understood explanation, a talent that makes their low key approach so effective as a devastating report on the Reagan Administration's record of financial markets regulation.

They are also masters of their material in a way that journalists dealing with scandal must be if their report is to succeed in its larger purpose of informing the lay public. We can be sure that the financial community does not need this book to know what happened in the 1980's. Their book's impact will be among that amorphous mass of concerned members of American society, a community that includes law makers, writers, social scientists and many others.

People in this audience, sophisticated as they are, can't begin to absorb and understand what the trade press tells them in matters as complex as this story. This is where a general circulation paper such as The Post performs one of its highest functions.

I confess that the phrase "investigative reporting" grates on my sensibilities. Yet it serves to designate, in a small way, what is praiseworthy here, where this excellent book originated in expensive research financed by a newspaper which then printed what suited its needs from the mass of material its reporters gathered. Readers of The Post will know a lot of what's here; the rest of us will not.

Our society needs a lot more of that kind of reporting. Who among us on the outside really understands what has gone on between the politicians, the loggers, the cattle and sheep ranchers, and the U.S. Forest Service? Where do the rest of us stand now in our sometimes sad dealings with those remaining American Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos who want to continue to live somewhat as their ancestors did and avoid the horrors that could await them in our mainline society?

Who can tell me why we continue to pour millions into highways that are quickly clogged and beaten to pieces by trucks hauling big cargo boxes that could be carried more economically by the railroads that we seem to be determined shall disappear? Where is the newspaper whose reporters will do for the effects of airline deregulation what Vise and Coll did as to the effect of Reaganism on the financial markets?

There are public policy questions

scattered all over the place, mostly ignored except for piecemeal attacks conceived and carried out, it seems, in two days. We could do with less of this posturing that leads to publication of half-finished work.

There has been a lot of blathering by publishers in the last few years about loss of readers. Folks just won't buy their papers.

Those who raise the questions seem to shrink from the simple explanation: Readers are refusing to accept the same old claptrap, the lowest common denominator stuff that bores them. Publishers rig budgets to starve newsrooms and force editors to fill columns at the least possible expense.

About 20 years ago Gene Roberts became editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, which then was as sad an example of a big city newspaper as one can imagine. Disregarded in its market as unreliable and shabby, even as dishonest, The Inquirer lagged far behind the rival Bulletin.

Roberts began to assign reporters to look deeply into public policy issues in Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania and in the United States. He printed what they produced, and urged them to bring in more. In ten years The Inquirer owned its market; The Bulletin was dead.

I must add that in eight more years the owners decided that The Inquirer under Roberts burned up too much money. He left. Two years earlier the paper had returned more profit in 12 months than its purchase price had been. That was not enough.

Then there was Bill Kovach's experience in Atlanta where a rejuvenated reporting staff offended some of the major power centers, who complained to the owners who tried to rein in Kovach. He left. His successors were pleased to accept the Pulitzer Prize won for work done under his administration.

Did anyone ever go broke in a newspaper by giving people information they wanted and needed? How do you explain that a paper edited in Wall Street and aimed at financial markets sells more copies across the United States than any other paper in the country? I

say it's because The Wall Street Journal leaves no stone unturned to provide straightforward stories full of information its readers want. □

*Wallace Turner, NF '59, was a national correspondent for The New York Times from 1962 until his retirement in 1988. He lives in Seattle.*

## Wall Street Journal Feud — What Set It Off

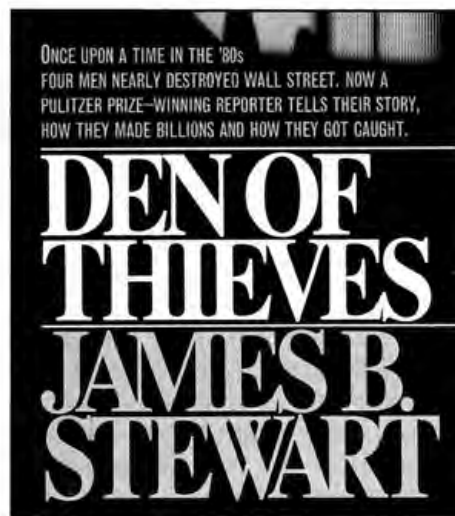
### Den of Thieves

James B. Stewart  
Simon & Schuster, New York, 1991, \$25

by David Warsh

This isn't a book, it's an occasion for a call-in talk show. Did four men nearly destroy Wall Street in the 1980's, as James B. Stewart contends? Or did three of them misbehave and the fourth singlehandedly build much of a durable new wing of the financial markets — and, incidentally, more or less routinely break the law through his determination to make these markets work? Did. Did not. Did. Did not.

There's something about a \$25 book that's supposed to be the last word on a subject — at least for a while. Instead, "Den of Thieves" has arrived contested. Though its account of the relationship among Ivan Boesky, Martin Siegel, Dennis Levine and Michael Milken was scooped by The Wall Street Journal and fawned upon by a very friendly reviewer at The New York Times, it was equally quickly challenged by Milken's lawyer, Alan Dershowitz, over matters large, small and scurrilous. Meanwhile, a significantly better-framed book by Washington Post reporters David Vise and Steve Coll largely has been ignored in New York. And now Dershowitz has dared Stewart to a debate. "Mr. Stewart might as well take up this challenge, because over the next weeks and months I intend to release detailed and documented evidence proving his book to be a fraud." And as if Alan Dershowitz weren't enough, waiting in line to tackle him are Jude Wanniski, George



Gilder, Edward Jay Epstein, Milken's mother and Milken's wife.

The problem here stems from Stewart's quadruple identity. First, he is the reporter who with Daniel Hertzberg covered much of the insider trading scandal for The Journal from the time that it broke in 1986. They won a well-deserved Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for their coverage of the 1987 crash, and for a series of stories combining what appeared to be a series of leaks from the office of prosecutor Rudolph Guliani with a good deal of imaginative independent reporting. These had much to do with putting Mr. Milken and several others in the dock — especially the story that revealed that Drexel Burnham Lambert had paid Milken \$550 million for one especially good year's work. Milken eventually pled guilty to six felony counts and was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Second, Stewart is the author of a book that attempts to show how "an era that purported to glorify free market

capitalism" was "in fact corrupted from within and subverted for criminal purpose."

Third, Stewart now serves as Page One Editor of The Wall Street Journal, charged with overseeing the impartial coverage for which The Journal is justly famous. He signed off on its Salomon Brothers scoops, for example, and supervised its pathbreaking investigation of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Finally, Stewart is a lawyer, locked in bitter ideological battle with another editor of his own newspaper over the interpretation that is the fundamental framework of his book, the "decade of greed" construction. The remarkable group of analysts at the editorial page of The Wall Street Journal, led by Robert Bartley, has been at pains for years to show how the 1980's was not a decade characterized predominantly by crime, but rather a period of great fecundity and restructuring that, however painful, was for the most part worthwhile. Bartley's page has argued that Milken was very nearly a saint of capitalism, that government sought to repress the forces of entrepreneurship in the Southern District of New York, and that lawyers in general are the scourge of American productivity. Instead of bringing its usual jaunty narrative to bear on the burgeoning controversy over the book, The Journal's editorial page has confined itself to running narrow thrusts and counter-thrusts by Dershowitz and Stewart.

Now the spectacle of the top editors of a great newspaper going to battle (or rather failing to go to battle) with each other for the greater profit glory of the Simon & Schuster unit of entertainment conglomerate Paramount Communications Inc. is really a fairly dismal one. In fact, Stewart's version of the insider trading scandals is a narrow and legalistic account. It might be subtitled, "What the Prosecutor Saw," much as the account of Coll and Vise is "What The Regulators Saw." But it is scarcely the last word on the subject, nor even a very compelling one, at this late date.

The rub is that the book is essentially a clip job — a riveting one, but a story

whose subjective spark is extinguished with the pronouncement of the word "guilty" by the judge and the prosecutors' dinner at Harvey's Chelsea Restaurant that night. To be sure, Stewart is the man who wrote the stories. Their accuracy stands up admirably over time. It was a great yarn, and you can understand The Journal's pride at have printed it: the paper beat The New York Times hands down. Times reporters' James Sterngold's "Burning Down The House," about the fall of E.F. Hutton, and Sarah Bartlett's "The Money Machine" about Kohlberg Kravis Roberts Inc., are both solid productions, but neither has the centrality of Stewart's story, nor are they as powerfully told.

But not all the storytelling gift in the world can make up for the lack of distance. The most serious failing is that Stewart creates a dense thicket of relationships where only a few weak strands seem actually to have existed. Arguing that Milken, Boesky, Levine and Siegel conspired to nearly destroy capitalism is like asserting that the secretary of the Navy, an airborne colonel with a battalion in Kansas and a couple of ambitious lieutenants in New Jersey tried to make a White House coup: it demonstrates a very poor grasp of the larger institutional setting and the forces at work therein. Stewart confines to a single footnote the unusual arguments and counter-arguments that were heard by the judge before Milken was sentenced in November 1990. He prefers Boesky's account over Milken's at every turn. Counter-arguments are

given short shrift: everybody who doesn't agree with Stewart is a paid Milken flak. Serious readers in 1991 deserve something more from the author of a book about Wall Street in the 1980's than reverse-engineering from an Oliver Stone movie.

(Nor does Stewart finesse satisfactorily the problem of anti-semitism, whose resurgence is inherent in any attempt to write about Wall Street in the 1980's. Drexel Burnham Lambert and Milken decisively intruded on the old WASP preserves of investment banking and law on Wall Street, and many of the raiders they financed were Jewish. From the very title of his book — it is taken from the New Testament passage in which Jesus drives the Jewish money lenders from the temple — Stewart is coy about the issue: he never tackles the seething religious and cultural antagonisms straight on.)

Indeed, the publication of this book creates a problem for The Wall Street Journal, at least to this reviewer's mind. It is simply that the person who oversees the selection and treatment of news for Page One should be an impartial arbiter among those who are certain that they know the Right Answers, determined to remain somehow above the fray. The Journal is aware of this need to maintain the critical distance of its news columns when it comes to dealing with enthusiasms of its editorial page. These have bordered on quackery from time to time. Both its own peculiar version of supply side economics and the conviction that "Yellow Rain"

represented a form of Soviet-backed biological warfare in Southeast Asia have been covered dispassionately (if sparingly) in the news columns by reporters who gave good accounts of the isolation of the editorial page editors' views.

But what to do when the enthusiasms belong to the editor who is director of the front page? When the paper excerpted the Stewart book, it illustrated it with a highly incendiary drawing of Milken conflated with a fingerprint. This is taking sides unnecessarily. Nor will it do to say that Stewart can rescue himself narrowly from stories where his mind is already made up. One's interpretation of the Milken story must affect one's opinion of much else: the rise of Chicago's risk markets, the possibilities for regulation, the incidence and significance of fraud. Page One is the one place where the reader wants intellectual firewalls between him and her and the ideologue.

Better minds than mine will resolve these matters in time. My hunch is that Stewart will wind up an independent producer of ideas, like Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward and Jude Wanniski. Meanwhile, a serious newspaper needs to step in to report and referee the controversy over the ethical tone of the markets in general and the story of the rise of junk in particular. How? Through routine dispassionate newspaper coverage of events, of course. □

*David Warsh is the economics columnist of The Boston Globe*

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## The Power of Statistics, Updated

### The New Precision Journalism

Philip Meyer

Indiana University Press, 1991, \$36 cloth, \$12.95 paper

by Cleve Mathews

More than anyone else, Philip Meyer has sought to show practicing journalists how to improve their work by

using scientific techniques. His 1973 book, "Precision Journalism," was the first to come from someone identified more as a reporter than a professor and that gave it credibility with the non-academics.

Meyer is now the William Rand Kenan Jr. Professor of Journalism at the University of North Carolina. Since his first book, he has used precision techni-

ques as a reporter for the Knight newspapers, as a participant in various surveys and election projects and in his classrooms at Chapel Hill. Somewhere along the way he got into media ethics and produced books and other writings in that field.

Meyer titled his new book "The New Precision Journalism," because it is more than a new edition. He says technology

has changed so much that a mere updating would be insufficient. But I would guess that Meyer has also learned a good deal since 1973 about coping with what he terms "the twin traditions of journalistic passivity and journalistic innocence" that cause journalists to resist any threats to their journalistic "objectivity."

Even so, I'm not sure Meyer succeeds in getting across to the non-mathematical some of the intricacies of harnessing the power of statistics. For some reason he feels it necessary to touch on such sticky procedures as stem-and-leaf charts and to tell "too much but not enough to understand" about how to call an analysis program to a computer.

But these are quibbles, because Meyer's good sense causes him to emphasize the readily understandable main processes that help journalists and their readers focus on the relevant. His italic guidelines throughout the book serve as a code of intelligent practice, for academics as well as practicing journalists. Examples: "No percentage makes sense unless you know its base" and its followup, "When you compare percentages, you need to make certain that they have the same base," and "Never treat what the computer tells you as gospel. Always go behind the data base to the paper documents or the human data gatherers to check." Next time, I suggest that Meyer collect these together in an appendix.

The new book does a better job than the first one in showing practitioners how to use precision techniques in their job, and, for many journalists, that is the reason for paying attention. Meyer offers these techniques as a "statistical analog of reporter's leg-work." There can be little doubt that the serious journalist ought to be informed of these methods.

Meyer's urging of journalists to use such computer application programs as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) and his advice for using them make this book worth its cost. But his material on using databases

amassed by the government and others is what really differentiates this book from his 1973 volume.

He shows that gathering information in a systematic way from Census Bureau databases can generate good stories. He points out that more and more Pulitzer Prizes are being won by analyzing massive data files in the public record, files that previously were too large to contend with. Meyer gives appropriate credit to journalists like Eliot Jaspin, now running a data-base research and service operation at the University of Missouri, for developing software and using it to uncover stories.

This book is especially good on the first two of the journalist's tasks — gathering information and analyzing it. Meyer deals briefly with the third task — communicating the findings — but devotes little space to it, probably because it would take too much space. The ease with which a multiplicity of charts and tables can be exploited on a Macintosh computer has expanded the ways to present data and some of those ways serve Meyer's goal of "a better solution" for conveying complexity than such approaches as "New Journalism." But that is for another book.

Meyer continues to offer good advice on polling, basic to anyone conducting a survey, but it is also valuable to anyone writing about polls. In particular, he notes that journalists' low tolerance for ambiguity can lead them into discounting middle-ground "don't know" answers even when such responses may be important. One might wish that Meyer would warn more strenuously, however, against accepting poll results just because they come with figures for margins of error and confidence levels. If the original questions are nonsense, then the results can be validated nonsense.

Meyer's ventures into media ethics no doubt sensitized him to the morality of exploiting scientifically gathered information. His final chapter on "The Politics of Precision Journalism" calls on journalists to recognize their duty to use their enlarged informational power responsibly. But Meyer also raises ques-

tions about the traditional journalistic stance of detachment that makes journalists recoil from participation. Publishing and conducting polls is a kind of participation. Yet they serve democracy. As journalistic ethicist Michael Kirkhorn puts it, journalists should help people live up to their responsibility to be good citizens.

Furthermore, the methodology of precision journalism leaves a trail whereby error can be detected and truth verified, something not always possible with traditional journalistic practices.

Implicit in Meyer's writing is a vision of a journalism that goes beyond the immediate focus imposed on the world's problems by news criteria. With the media taking over a bigger role in informing and educating the public, the world becomes increasingly one of conflict, wrong-doing and gossip. Such institutions as family, school, church and party can't compete with the growing power of the media to shape the picture in people's heads. So the media have to expand the dimensions of their content to provide more understanding. Precision journalism is one way to help people understand their world by providing meaning through a longer, validated view.

For most kinds of precision research by journalists, Meyer's new book is the starting point. He refers readers to many other sources for the detailed information they might need to carry out a project, but his book serves as an introduction to make those works more accessible. □

*Cleve Mathews retired last spring as professor of journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication at Syracuse University. Before becoming a teacher, he spent 25 years as a practitioner with The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The New York Times and National Public Radio.*



# When Seeing Is Not Believing

## Desert Mirage: The True Story of the Gulf War

Martin Yant

Prometheus Books, 1991, \$19.95

### by Deborah Amos

If you were a hawk or a dove during the gulf war and have an uneasy feeling that all the television coverage disproved the adage that seeing is believing then Martin Yant's "Desert Mirage" is the book for you.

Yant purports to tell "the true story of the gulf war." As every reader knows, truth is the first casualty of war. In this case truth was more than a casualty. Truth was hit over the head, dragged into a closet and held hostage to the public relations needs of the United States military. Yant sets out some of the truths that were bruised during the conflict.

Yant was not in the gulf, not even in the Middle East, but in middle America reading all the coverage and digging deep into available material. Yant's skill comes from his years at the Columbus Dispatch where he was a member of the editorial board, and an editor of the Op-Ed page. He is a self-styled investigative reporter and his "deep throat" is an index of the information in the public record. He writes from a sense of indignation that the decision to go to war in the gulf was based on deceit. Sometimes that indignation clouds his analysis of the unfolding drama, events and policies that led to President Bush's "line in the sand," but more on that later.

There is no doubt that the gulf war was the most watched war in American history. CNN's continuous coverage changed the way that Americans react to events and changed the way that politicians react to their reactions. The fact that the war was in the national living room, restaurants and bars altered the way that the military presented the account of the war. Yant accurately

describes the media pool system.

"Reporters and photographers were barred from Dover Air Force Base, where the remains of dead servicemen and service women arrived.

"Battlefield photographers of American casualties were virtually nonexistent. Photos of dead Iraqis were also tightly controlled by the U.S. military — so much so that a photographer who tried to take one without permission was clubbed with a rifle by a soldier. Reporters were denied access to prisoner-of-war camps, B-52 pilots, AWACS planes, battleships, hospitals, and even chaplains — who had to be called 'moral officers' in deference to their Muslim 'hosts.' There were also no estimates of enemy casualties.

"As for the press pool system, it worked beautifully — for the Pentagon."

The gulf war appeared as clean as a television commercial. However, in the months since the cease-fire there have been a number of important revelations that underscore Yant's criticism. We now know, for example, that more than half of the tonnage of bombs dropped on Iraq missed their targets. We now know that one out of six American deaths during Desert Storm was the result of "friendly fire." The information is there, but the timing of the revelations has some bearing on public perceptions. Would America's collective memory of victory been altered if CNN had broadcast the images of body bags at Dover? How would we have felt about the air war if the true figures of accuracy had been revealed?

Yant's reporting of American policy toward Iraq in the past 10 years should be required reading. It is a sordid story of secret arms deals with Iran and not so secret arms deals with Iraq. By 1985 the Reagan administration approved billions of dollars of agricultural sales to Iraq. A House Government Operations Committee revealed this year that the U.S. government approved 771 sales that

included "advanced computers, radio equipment, graphics terminals that could be used to design rockets." The sales were made to government ministries, the Atomic Energy Commission, to universities and scientific institutions that were bombed during the gulf war for being part of Iraq's poison gas and nuclear weapons establishment. That is only part of the inconsistencies.

Saddam Hussein's human rights record was well known during this period. It was only after his army marched into Kuwait that the Bush administration trumpeted its disgust with Saddam's record. The turnaround so distressed the U.S. head of Amnesty International that he issued a press release after the President used an Amnesty report as a basis for a column placed in college newspapers. Yant includes the press release in his chapter called "A War of Words."

"There was no presidential indignation . . . in 1989, when Amnesty released its findings about the torture of Iraq children. And just a few weeks before the invasion of Kuwait, the Bush administration refused to conclude that Iraq had engaged in a consistent pattern of gross human-rights violation."

Yant's indignation serves him well in weaving a picture of U.S. political expediency in the years and days leading to the gulf war. However, his analysis of the Middle East players suffers in his quest to document the desert mirage. In finding fault with almost every aspect of the Bush policy, Yant is overly generous to Saddam Hussein. Yant argues that the Bush administration was hell bent for war and ignored all Iraqi concessions. He cites as one example the Iraqi parliament's decision to release the foreign hostages held in Baghdad and at military installations.

" . . . the Iraqi parliament overwhelmingly approved Hussein's recommendation (not that it had any choice) and endorsed its leader's decision to free Western hostages. U.S. officials had

nary a kind word in response." The release of the Western hostages was hardly a concession. Saddam is an astute political creature. His calculations were that holding the hostages was no longer to his advantage.

We may never know all the factors that contributed to Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait. It was the personal calculation of an absolute and brutal dictator. Yant offers some suggestions to explain the decision and the details are worth consideration. Yant suggests that U.S. policy acted as an encouragement for the invasion. Yant suggests that Saudi Arabia used Saddam as a big stick to force higher oil prices and that relationship led Saddam to his land grab in Kuwait.

There is no doubt that the decision to invade was a miscalculation. What Yant doesn't explain is why Saddam engaged in five months of miscalculation that led to his sacrifice of his nuclear weapons program. It was a program that was more dear to him than his population and his army.

The United Nations teams working in Iraq today are finding a cache of arms beyond the intelligence assessments before the war. We know that the bomb was within Saddam's grasp. The U.S. may have unwittingly helped Saddam build that arsenal but what use would the Butcher of Baghdad have made of a super gun, and atom bomb? Why did he invade Kuwait before the arsenal was complete?

Nevertheless, Yant raises fundamental questions about the media coverage and public perceptions. He uses an editorial in the magazine *The Nation* to make his point. "Self-censorship, self-deception, unexamined bias and just plain cowardice subverted the facts, obscured history and occluded criticism better than any imposed regime could have done." The statement could apply to much of the coverage before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, August 2, 1990. □

*Deborah Amos, foreign correspondent for National Public Radio, covered the gulf war as a member of The Department of Defense Media pool. She is a 1992 Nieman Fellow.*

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## Rise and Fall of Network News

### Out of Thin Air: The Brief Wonderful Life of Network News

Reuven Frank

Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1991, \$24.95

by James Hoge

Reuven Frank is deservedly considered one of the creators of network news. In a 38-year career as news writer, producer, and top manager at NBC, Frank invented many of the forms and methods of nightly news, documentaries, and convention coverage. He was also an expert practitioner, winning a dozen major awards for the quality of his regular news shows and his specials.

So it is apt that his memoir is trumpeted on the book jacket as the history of network news by the "ultimate insider." It is Frank's contention (and he is not alone) that network news lifespan is over — at least as we have known it.

This story, then, has a beginning, a middle and an end, the narrative formula he championed for virtually all TV news. Frank was an ardent proponent

of structuring the words of news around the pictures his cameramen took of events as they happened. It was the pictures that made television news different and powerful and they lent themselves to storytelling.

This was a strength of television but also a key weakness in the eyes of critics, who counseled that not all important news lent itself to pictures or could be accurately told in the narrative form of a story. It is a point that Frank acknowledges, but grudgingly. To him, giving more weight to words than pictures on some stories became an unwanted responsibility of television once it achieved dominance as the public's source of news.

As he relates, network news began at the 1948 conventions, both held in Philadelphia because it was on the coaxial cable that connected only nine American cities for potential viewers.

Radio was the dominant broadcast medium with profitable programs that left it little interested in gavel-to-gavel coverage. The infant television networks, with lots of time to fill and TV sets to sell, jumped at the opportunity. TV used unknown, insecure radio newsmen who

couldn't say no like their better known radio colleagues.

From this start, almost as a novelty, network news made giant strides in the next four years before the 1952 conventions. By trial and error, ways were devised for presenting news and using pictures. The results were getting to an ever-expanding audience as TV stations and home receivers multiplied.

In the middle of this period of rapid, pioneering development, Frank switched from newspapers (*The Newark Evening News*) to television (NBC). He contends he got his newswriting job because nobody in radio who was "worth a damn" thought TV was going to last. The professionals "hated it" and "the management of NBC was barely committed to television and even less to news," he writes.

The 1952 political conventions changed all that. Network coverage captured a large fascinated audience. It created star anchors and gave the networks momentum for their standard news shows. However, the 1952 conventions were also the time when the savviest of politicians realized the conventions could no longer be used for public

battles over candidates or issues.

Col. Jacob Arvey, then the Democratic political boss of Chicago, was dismayed that more than 50 million Americans had witnessed a floor battle over a loyalty oath plank for the party platform. "We can't do this anymore. It's not good for politicians to be seen fighting," said Arvey.

Succeeding conventions were gradually transformed from being the final selection process for candidates and issues to being the opening, orchestrated pageant of the general elections. As the convention's news value declined, so did the size of the viewing audience and the interest of networks in spending the vast sums necessary for gavel-to-gavel coverage.

The rollback was a long time coming, even though the declining news value of conventions was recognized by professionals like Frank as early as 1960.

Higher network executives had other reasons to continue the all-out attention every four years to the political conventions. Coverage had become a battle for prestige, a showcase for anchors and reporting stars and a sop to the politicians who oversaw the regulators of the television business.

The middle part of Frank's story begins with the 1956 convention, which saw the debut of joint anchoring by Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. The pairing, suggested by Frank, was a smash success and led to a decade of unparalleled dominance of network news by NBC.

The 1968 conventions with their attendant anti-Vietnam demonstrations brought a heap of criticism against television, particularly from Republican political leaders. Frank and other senior television executives found much of their time devoured by arduous defenses of their practices before regulators, the public and their own affiliate station owners. Some reactions, such as CBS's ban on "instant news analysis," dismayed Frank who believed the messenger was not at fault.

By 1984, network coverage of political conventions was reduced to three hours a night. Floor reporting was no longer the near-exclusive domain of

the four correspondents from each network. Also present were some 70 reporters from local television stations. The presence of the local broadcast reporters dramatized a major change in television news, one which Frank believes to be a chief cause of network news erosion.

Because of technology — videotape, satellite transmission, and cable — the networks lost their monopoly on world news to local stations and to new cable competitors, like CNN and C-Span.

A second cause of erosion, according to Frank, was the emergence of million-dollar anchormen, who are sent to wherever the news is. Instead of live cameras providing the *pictures* of news, anchormen increasingly substitute the *words* of news. To Frank, photo-journalism became a lost art on television, which increasingly relied on archival videotapes of events, scenes, and things to illustrate the words of an anchorman or star reporter.

During the mid-1980's, Frank returned to the presidency of NBC News after a nine-year interval as a producer of specials and documentaries. "What I found," he writes, "was the localization of network news and the morningization of evening news. It was not heartening."

Before declaiming the end of "the brief, wonderful life of network news,"

Frank covers a lot of ground. He shows how the cold war shaped television news and vice versa (a particularly compelling episode was the award-winning documentary on the construction of an escape tunnel under the Berlin Wall). He relates how television learned to cover the space program and how it grandly responded to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. He captures the on-going tension between news and entertainment managers at the networks and he shows that budget battles and struggles for on-air time were endemic and not just a latter-day phenomena.

Frank is a knowledgeable chronicler, and a witty, at times acerbic, writer. His well-told tale has a rather dour ending and perhaps as antidote, one could consider these words from a recent newspaper article by Brian Lamb, chairman of C-Span:

"It is time for us gray-hairs to look at television with fresh eyes and abandon our nostalgia. Diversity of choice is fundamentally American. Rather than looking tearily backward, we should learn to use the wide variety of information we now have." □

*James Hoge, a former newspaper editor and publisher, is a Fellow at the Institute of Politics in the John F. Kennedy School of Government.*

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## Blacks and the Press — a Re-run?

### Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas

Clint C. Wilson II  
Greenwood Press Inc., \$39.95

by Carmen Fields

When it comes to the notion of history repeating itself, the saga of African Americans and their participation in the press probably fits the bill. In the early 1800's in America the slave population was not covered by the

majority press of the day — even though the anti-slavery sentiment was becoming a global issue of the day. Blacks were invisible — at least on newspaper pages or in newsrooms — long before Ralph Ellison would coin the phenomenon in his landmark novel "Invisible Man."

But in 1831 the slave rebellion of Nat Turner and his followers became a big story in the white press. The reporting of it led to a rush of legislation by nervous slaveholders to keep blacks illiterate. They surmised that "excluding

African Americans from the press would make the issues they represented disappear . . ." Wilson notes.

Fast forward the video tape to the turbulent 1960's — when black communities en masse protested racism, discrimination and exclusion by white society. "White media had not learned the lesson of exclusion. Not only had they generally failed to include African Americans on their news staffs, but they failed to cover a story of long-standing social inequities . . . The urban uprising caught them flat-footed and ill prepared to explain to a (once again) anxious white citizenry what had caused these eruptions," writes Wilson.

History did, it seems, repeat itself. But, the added power of the indictment of the press by the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders (March 1968) forced introspection, and buttressed an atmosphere for change.

Black journalists came to white-owned media in the greatest numbers ever. The exodus is blamed in part for the diminishing role of the once vibrant and crusading black press. The African American community — its citizens, its problems, its accomplishments — enjoys a wider expression than ever on the pages of mainstream newspapers. (Although many argue that the emphasis is still too often on problems or misdeeds of the residents.) But a paradox emerged for black journalists, one that Wilson, who is Associate Dean of Howard University's School of Communications, fingers adroitly. The paradox is delineated best in his chapter, "The Illusion of Inclusion."

Its observations ring true for any post-Kerner Commission black journalist — the majority of whom work exclusively for white-owned news and media outlets. It's an A to Z description of how difficult the professional row we who work in white media must hoe. From the assumption of incompetence, to professional isolation, from imposition of separate standards to the obligation to challenge the status quo.

But Wilson unravels an even more powerful paradox — one that not only faces black journalists into the 21st Century, but also the entire industry. In spite

of increased numbers of black journalists, history may still be primed to repeat itself. But Wilson asserts it is likely to be a more complex, albeit still perplexing, re-run.

It is intertwined with the demographics we face — white people in America are now well on their way to becoming a minority group. That fact further complicates and threatens the concept of African Americans' favored minority status. Add to that the shifting focus of the black agenda, and the competition with other issues that now occupy media attention.

It will boil down to the age-old struggle for power in society. That struggle is as firmly entrenched in the media as in all institutions.

Will such a story be ignored? If the story is told, by whom? Will a Eurocentric or Afrocentric value or interpreta-

tion frame the revelations? These are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves now.

How inevitable is a 1860's or 1960's-like confrontation? How close are we to it? Has media as an institution learned enough from history not to repeat it? Or are we capable of participating in a notion of progress that educator-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead advanced — the words of which preface the book: "The art of progress is to preserve order amidst change and to preserve change amidst order."

In addition to enunciating the paradoxes black journalists face today, Wilson chronicles the founding and development of the black press from John B. Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, which boldly proclaimed, "We wish to plead our own cause . . ." to

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## RESPONSE

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### Women Writers, Where Are They?

What is happening to the female presence in *Nieman Reports*? I have noticed, with increasing dismay, the apparent trend toward mostly (and sometimes all) male writers in the magazine. In the Fall 1991 issue that I received yesterday, all 12 of the main articles were written by men. So were all seven book reviews — including, ironically, the review of a book by Liz Trotta called "Overcoming Male Bias." In the Winter 1990 issue, there was only one piece written by a woman and that was a book review. In the Spring 1991 issue, there were three main articles written by women, but that's still less than one-third of the total articles appearing.

I seem to remember having the same impression of the Summer 1991 issue, but I can't put my hands on that to get a count.

More than half of the practitioners of journalism today are female. The Nieman Foundation has done a good job in the past 10 or 15 years recognizing these numbers by choosing more and more female Fellows. It would be a shame if the face we show to the world, via *Nieman Reports*, continues to be so overwhelmingly male.

JAN COLLINS STUCKER  
NF' 80



today's network of small weeklies, as well as national efforts like Ebony and Black Enterprise.

The book also includes profiles of many of the pioneers of the black press. Many of the names will be familiar to students of this aspect of American history. Thankfully, also included are new hitherto forgotten heroes and she-roes of the past and present whose experiences are lessons for us all. □

*Carmen Fields, Nieman class of 1986, is currently at work on a documentary on segregation for the PBS series "The American Experience." The program is slated to air during the 1992-93 season.*

## About Journalism

**American Journalist**, David H. Weaver with G. Cleveland Wilhoit, 2d edition, Indiana University Press, \$35 cloth, \$12.95 pb. How newscpeople work in television, radio and on newspapers.

**Managing Communications Processes**, E.W. Brody, Praeger, \$45 cloth, \$17.95 pb. How public relations works in emergency situations.

**Media Show**, Edwin Diamond. The MIT Press, \$19.95. Changes in network news since the second Reagan administration.

**Nature of Copyright**, L. Ray Patterson and Stanley W. Lindberg, University of Georgia Press, \$30 cloth, \$12.95 pb. A user's guide.

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# NIEMAN NOTES

Carroll M. Williams, the Bussey Professor of Biology Emeritus at Harvard and long a supporter of the Nieman Foundation, died of lymphoma on October 11 at a nursing home. He was 74.



A memorial service was held at the Harvard Science Center on October 19. Bill Kovach, the Nieman curator, was one of the ushers. Williams served for many years on the Nieman advisory committee and was remembered by Nieman Fellows for his dedication to the program.

Williams, in a distinguished career spanning more than four decades, brought insect physiology into the mainstream of modern biology. His seminal studies on insect endocrinology have been called by fellow scientists as "landmarks in biological thought." He made original contributions to understanding the development and growth of insects that have provided insight into how hormones and the nervous system work together. From this work came a new approach to the safe control of insect pests.

John Kimball, who taught with Williams in the Department of Cellular and Developmental Biology, said, "He was the most inspirational teacher I've ever had. I studied physiology with him as an undergraduate. He was enormously helpful to me in my career and a good friend."

Williams received his B.S. (1937) at the University of Richmond and his M.A. (1938), Ph.D. (1941), and M.D. (1946) from Harvard, where he remained as a member of the faculty. He was chairman of the Department of Biology from 1959 to 1962 and of the Science Center beginning in 1975. In 1965 he became the first Benjamin Bussey Professor at Harvard.

In 1967 Harvard awarded him the George Ledlie Prize, given every two years to the member of the faculty who has made "the most valuable contribution to science or in any way for the benefit of mankind."

He published more than 200 papers in the area of development biology with special reference to the endocrine control of insect growth and metamorphosis.

He is survived by his wife, Muriel Voter Williams, and two sons, Wesley C. and Roger L. Williams.

— 1939 —

FRANK SNOWDEN HOPKINS has some advice for Niemans on the "biggest story there is" — what's going to happen to our civilization through the lifetimes of all persons now alive. As a help to younger journalists he sent the Nieman Foundation a 4,500 word essay that he prepared for world future conferences last year. Hopkins has been active in the World Future Society since he retired from the State Department in 1968.

Noting that he has spent his life largely as a journalist, Hopkins wrote in his essay:

Journalists seek to communicate and therefore like to simplify complex subjects and make them understandable. I have therefore developed a very simplified concept of the way in which the history of the world has evolved. And I have found a single word which to me explains what has happened in the past, what is going on in today's world, and what will happen in the future.

That word is convergence. It means everything is growing closer together.

From that starting point Hopkins sees convergence forcing many changes:

Governments will try their best to manage the planet in constructive ways, cooperating with one another to reduce population densities and increase the supply of goods as well as to protect the environment. I look to see an increasing number of international conferences and arrangements to improve prospects for the world future. I also expect to see many problems growing worse, and also some additional outbreaks of violence arising out of conflicts and frustrations arising from nationalities seeking to increase their share of a limited supply of the world's space, power and wealth.

In his optimistic moments Hopkins says he can imagine ways in which the world can overcome its problems and produce a world society which is equitable, peaceful and efficiently managed.

In a letter with the report Hopkins expresses optimism about himself, too:

On March 26, 1991 I was found to have cancer of the thyroid gland. If it had proved fatal, that would have been a news item for Nieman Reports. However, I have recovered after six months of treatment — via surgery, radioactive iodine and synthetic thyroid pills daily. So no story for now. At 83 this member of the first Nieman group is good for a while longer.

— 1949 —

GRADY CLAY is presenting a weekly commentary titled "Crossing the American Grain" on FM radio station WFPL in Louisville. Clay's comments are pungent, pithy views of fast-changing places across North America, places like Wreck Site, The Kudzu, Party Street and The Dark, as well as that stretch along streets known as curbside. The one-time urban affairs editor for The Courier-Journal and for 25 years the editor of Landscape Architecture magazine has written a number of books, including "Closeup: How to Read the American City."

Clay writes a column in Planning magazine, the journal of the American Planning Association, and is working on a guidebook to the generic man-made landscape. In this encyclopedia he will define and discuss certain terms having to do with landscape, such as "boondocks" and "back 40." He has been called "truly one of the last of the Renaissance Men" by Chris Vernon, assistant professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois in Urbana.

For two years Vernon has taken a class of landscape students to Clay's home in an old section of Louisville to see how Clay and his wife, Judith McCandless, an architect and city planner, have been renovating the property. They have been working on the renovations since they purchased it in 1976, two years after a tornado swept through the district.

The area is in a continuous state of evolution, Clay told The New Voice, with changes made as aims and goals change. The property, he told the paper, will never be complete because "completion is a form of death."

— 1951 —

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was one of those I-remember-exactly-what-I-was-doing-when events. But few people not in Hawaii have as much cause to remember the announcement as ANGUS MACLEAN THUERMER who writes:

"I was a staffer in the Berlin bureau of the AP at the time. I suspect I am the only man around whose recollections of that day are connected with the appearance of a man at my door at midnight who said, "Herr Theurmer? *Geheime Staatspolizei*. Come mit uns!" That led to five months internment."

— 1961 —

JOHN and MARGARET POMFRET, after testing and enjoying Seattle for months, have made the move permanent. They have bought and renovated a big 30-year-old house four blocks from WALLY and PEARL TURNER (NF '59) in a "determined middle class district" and moved into it. Asked in a telephone conversation if he missed New York, John, who retired from The New York Times after a career as a labor and White House correspondent and then as a top executive on the business side, replied, "I don't."

The music in Seattle is "very good," John said, "the theatre marvelous, and the ballet first rate." One of the reasons the Pomfrets left New York was to find a more temperate climate. The climate in Seattle is "perfect," John said. The new house has a studio for Margaret, so she can resume her painting.

— 1964 —

MORTON MINTZ writes that he missed in the fall 1991 edition of Nieman Reports a mention, which he had typed on his title page, of the fact that the article, Pro-Corporate Tilt, was an expanded version of a speech he made at the University of Arkansas. "As published, of course, the piece was much different as well as longer than the talk," he writes. "But if the omission was inadvertent, and if it wouldn't be a problem, could mention be made of it?" So, here is the mention.

— 1966 —

ROBERT C. MAYNARD was awarded the Elijah P. Lovejoy medal and an honorary doctorate of laws November 8 in a ceremony at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. The award, for journalistic courage, is named for the publisher whose crusade for the abolition of slavery led to repeated destruction

of his presses and eventually to his death at the hands of a mob in Alton, Ill., in 1837.

In accepting the award, Maynard, the owner and publisher of The Oakland Tribune, expressed sadness that while Lovejoy set "such an example of enduring and unshakeable faith . . . our times are all but bereft of such figures of courage. We are all imprisoned by that which we see when we look at each other across the chasms of race."

To a hushed audience in the Colby chapel, Maynard asked, "what is it in America that makes it so difficult for Americans to learn to be one people; to view each other mutually a prism of dignity?"

— 1968 —

H. BRANDT AYERS, editor and publisher of The Anniston Star in Alabama, now has a foreign correspondent, George Tanher, whose columns are being distributed by Universal Press Syndicate. Ayers tells how it works:

I know it sounds crazy for a junior daily to have a foreign correspondent hut, actually, it's a good deal for us. George does general assignment coverage for us for six weeks, writing beautiful copy, and Universal Press subsidizes his six weeks of international travel.

Of course we also get his column — free. It's unique; he covers the world like Charles Kurault covered America. His perspective is also shaped by living and working in small town and rural America. The combination is personal, and personable.

But Ayers says that what's really interesting about George's column is its popularity with teachers. Last summer 175 geography and social studies teachers from 10 states reviewed the column, "Crossroads," and 86 per cent said they would like to use it as a classroom supplement.

— 1979 —

SABAM SIAGIAN, the first Indonesian Nieman Fellow, is now the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia.

Sabam left his job as the editor of The Jakarta Post this year. He plans to go back to journalism in Indonesia eventually.

— 1980 —

MICHAEL KIRK of the Kirk Documentary Group in Newton, MA, co-produced "The Oregon Experiment," a television program exploring a plan in that state to reduce

medical costs by setting up priorities in the payment for treatment. The documentary, aired over most PBS stations, was shown on "The Health Quarterly" with Roger Mudd.

BILL and ELLEN GRANT and son Mitchell announce the arrival of Rees on August 12. He weighed 9 pounds 8 ounces.

— 1981 —

DON MCNEILL, correspondent, and his wife, Sandra Allik, producer, each won a 1990 Emmy Award for Outstanding Achievement in Information, Cultural or Historical Programming at the 1990 News and Documentary Awards dinner in New York on September 11. The award was for a series aired in 26 segments in July, August and September, 1990, on World Monitor. The Christian Science Monitor television news program seen five nights a week on The Discovery Channel.

Don and Sandra lived and worked in the Soviet Union for CBS News during the era of stagnation from 1981-84. They decided to go back to see how the nation had changed under Gorbachev and traveled from the Baltics to Siberia. As a follow-up to the series they also produced a documentary on "The Gorbachev Era" which aired last Spring in the United States and Europe. The documentary predicted the coup, if not its outcome.

Don has taken the year off from his teaching at Boston University. He and Sandra will be working again for World Monitor in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

— 1983 —

BRUCE STANNARD has been appointed editor of Australian Business Monthly, a new magazine which will be launched as a national monthly beginning November 1. Bruce writes that "ABM will look and read and feel a lot like Fortune and Forbes. Although it will concentrate on business information it will also seek to stimulate and challenge people in the business community through words and pictures presented by people outside the corporate mainstream."

For any Nieman Fellow traveling to Sydney, Bruce encourages them to call him "and I will do my best to make sure they are properly looked after."

Bruce's 14th book, a biography of Australian marine artist Jack Earl, was published in that country in mid-November.

ANDRZEJ KRZYSZTOF WROBLEWSKI participated in a July conference in Spain on the direction of changes in Eastern Europe. He was seated between General Wojciech

Jaruzelski, who tried in vain, through martial law, to keep the Communist party in control of Poland, and Adam Michnik, who was expelled from the party for revisionism, spent seven years in jail, became a close associate of Lech Waleza, broke with him and is now the editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Here are excerpts from Wroblewski's article "Flamenco With the General," which appeared in *Gazeta Bankowa*:

If one can't envision such a meeting in today's Poland it is a sad proof that a Pole can easier talk with a Pole when a Spaniard looks at them. Perhaps the Spaniards wanted to see whether East Europeans can, as they could, pass over old divisions. We were feeling that not only our words, but our gestures, mutual relations, attitude — everything was watched and noticed. Why is what is a virtue in Spain may be perceived as treason in Poland? In his lecture the general said, half-jokingly, that he once thought of the opponents of the system, including Michnik, as having horns, cloven hoofs and a tail. One of the Spaniards responded that they imagined the general the same way. It is interesting to what degree personal acquaintance can alter stereotypes, that a real dialogue can lead to rapprochement. If it is really that way, even our talk could be perceived as a treason — and so it was during Stalin's era, and later, too. The talk, let alone pictures!

I personally fought the general (or the system he embodied) as long as he had teeth and nails. And I am not going to rehabilitate him, although I can agree that the introduction of martial law was necessary after all that communism had done to our country and after the intervention of the Red Army in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But to rehabilitate martial law would mean the acceptance of violence as a tool of the political game. Now I saw in front of me not the chairman of the National Salvation Military Council, but the man 10 years older, who had the courage to publicly say — "I still remember the words of late Cardinal Wyszynski — whoever hates is defeated; we hated and were defeated."

Michnik in turn said that while in jail he read the book of a Spanish writer, Jose Semprun, who was also a prisoner of totalitarianism — he promised himself never to be driven by the hatred of the people, only of the system. Does it mean he won?

Before democracy in Spain began to prove to the nation that it was not

only entertainment for the elite, but also the road to wealth, unemployment had reached 24 per cent. In spite of that nobody dared to attempt to exploit the frustration to act against the constitution. King Juan Carlos was an additional stabilizing factor. With us it is the "lay left," which is driven by Christian love, rather than political parties stemming from Christian roots. In Spain you sit at the dinner table for several hours and sip wine poured by eager waiters. Thanks to that ambience words were heard that in the cold northern Polish climate that might never have been spoken. The last night in Madrid a relaxed General Jaruzelski said: who knows, if the party had reformed itself at the right time, if people like Michnik, Kuron, Geremek had taken the lead, perhaps socialism and Poland would look much better today.

The general seemed not to have noticed that from the illusions on "socialism with a human face" 20 years have passed and during those 20 years of disappointment those three and those like them changed toward reforms that would alter socialism completely into something opposite, with a multiparty system, free elections, a market economy and full sovereignty.

The daydreamer came out of the general like a cat out of a bag. The same Communist party, which he could not tackle (at least the conservative wing), would have to become similar to the one of Gonzales in Spain to lead Poland toward socialism in name and capitalism in reality (as it is in France, where you can learn of the socialist persuasion of the president from the encyclopedia, but not from the style of governance).

All who do not evade serious talk by saying in critical moments of conversation "I am not an economist but . . ." agree that Poland must concentrate all its strength to break the stagnation, that she cannot afford free medicine, culture centers, affluent pensions, opulent child allowances, subsidized housing. No, we cannot dream of any socialism in the economy before at least one generation passes.

So where could it be, this socialism? In non-material areas: tolerance, rights of minorities, rights of individuals and lay public life. Spain is rightist economically (like the entire European Economic Community) and leftist socially. Who said such a cocktail is impossible?

— 1984 —

D'VERA COHN married Stephen G. Hyslop, an editor at Time-Life Books, on May 10. They had intended to elope, but relented at the last minute and invited her mother to be their witness and take pictures. Dee has added another beat at *The Washington Post*; in addition to local environmental reporting, she has taken on coverage of the 1990 Census and related demography issues.

— 1985 —

MIKE PRIDE, editor of *The Concord (N.H.) Monitor*, anticipating the horde of news people who will descend on his state in a few weeks, wrote a column on the subject and adapted it for fellow Niemanns:

One of the joys of being the editor of a small newspaper with a big window on Presidential politics is experiencing the human side of the campaign. This seldom shows itself in the front-runners' camps or during the final days of the race. But before the media horde arrives, and from the camps of those who have little hope of winning — the Bruce Babbitts and Alexander Haigs — journalists in New Hampshire have a marvelous view of the contortions to which Presidential fever subjects its victims.

This year's campaign is barely under way as I write. It is my fourth in New Hampshire, and I'm sure it will pale before the 1988 primary, a two-party affair with a cast of 13 candidates and the longest script of any Presidential race in history.

One trait that marks Presidential candidates is the courage of their convictions. This past summer I had a visit from one Eugene Smith, whose chief qualification for the Presidency seemed to be that he once sang with the Boston Pops. And yet he was convinced that there was a single, difficult path between the voice of the people and the north portico of the White House, and that he alone was on that path.

In the 1988 New Hampshire primary, no one beat former Delaware governor Pete du Pont for having the courage of his convictions. He showed up early (July 1986) and maintained his dignity throughout a campaign in which he had the worst combination of experiences: He worked very hard, and he earned little support.

George Bush called du Pont "Pierre" and called his ideas dumb. Du Pont himself floated one of his ideas — privatizing the post office — to a bowling league, and it turned out to

be the postal workers' bowling league. When he came to The Monitor for an editorial board meeting a few days later, I complimented him on his courage. "Oh," he said, "I didn't know they were postal workers."

Du Pont also left me with the one story I'm sure I'll tell my grandchildren one day.

It was late December 1987, six weeks before the vote, and Bush's campaign had announced that the Vice President would be attending Concord's First Night celebration on New Year's Eve. The plan was for Bush to receive the public at a pricey downtown clothing store.

Intoxicated with the spirit of the holiday season, we at The Monitor decided that Bush's appearance among the tweeds and tuxes called for an editorial. The editorial would place each candidate at an equally appropriate downtown spot on New Year's Eve.

The editorial — all in fun, mind you — had Gary Hart panting on the front window of a lingerie shop. It had Alexander Haig taking charge at the Army-Navy store and Pat Robertson standing at the creche in front of the State House diverting snowstorms. And it had Pete du Pont at a local delicatessen, between the nut-rolls and the fruitcakes. Well, the day the editorial was to run, who walked into The Monitor newsroom five minutes before presstime but Pete du Pont. He had come by with his wife Elise to wish us all a Happy New Year. Ralph Jimenez, who had written the editorial, was in my office at the time. He gave me a look that said, "We gotta get this guy outta here before the press rolls."

So we sidled across the room to where the du Ponts were chatting with staff members. I butted into the conversation and deftly maneuvered the du Ponts toward the door. We were almost there when . . .

Along came John Fensterwald, the managing editor. "Hey, governor," he said to du Pont, "why don't you hang around a couple of minutes? The press is about to start, and we'll give you a paper hot off the presses."

Fensterwald headed out to get a paper, and Jimenez slinked away, leaving me alone with Pete du Pont. I fessed up. "Governor," I said, "we've got a tongue-in-cheek editorial in today's paper, and I hope you'll take it in the spirit in which it's intended."

He read it right before my eyes as others in the newsroom, alerted to my

travails (good news travels fast), receded into the walls and glanced furtively from behind poles to see what would happen.

Pete du Pont, though a little red-faced, took it in stride. He made a gracious remark and shook my hand before walking out the door.

And I wondered how many other editors had ever twiddled their thumbs while the victims of their high jinks read the biting words at such close range. Only in the New Hampshire primary, I said to myself.

#### — 1986 —

CARMEN FIELDS has taken on new duties at Boston public television station WGBH since the station canceled the Ten O'Clock News, of which she was co-anchor. She is working on documentaries and does the news breaks on an unusual talk show — it has no host. Instead, a cross-section of people discuss current topics, not necessarily the top stories of the day. One night it might be teachers discussing educational problems, another night it might be business executives talking about the recession. As the program begins, the conversation is already in progress. At the end of the show Fields provides 60-to-90-second updates of the day's top stories.

#### — 1988 —

ANTHONY HEARD, who was dismissed from the editorship of The Cape Times in Durban, South Africa, is now a syndicated columnist, based in Cape Town. His work appears in about 20 newspapers in the United States, including The Los Angeles Times. He feels that what is happening in South Africa vindicates his controversial editorship of The Cape Times.

#### — 1989 —

JIM THARPE has been named Managing Editor of The Montgomery Advertiser and The Alabama Journal. Staffs at the two newspapers were recently merged.

The 37-year old Tharpe, who was Managing Editor of the afternoon Alabama Journal, will oversee more than 90 editors and reporters in his new job.

Tharpe's appointment was announced October 15.

#### — 1990 —

VLADIMIR VOINA, the first Nieman Fellow from the Soviet Union, is now a syndicated columnist in the United States. He is also journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for American Communications in Los Angeles. Here is one of his columns, which are distributed by Creators Syndicate, Inc.:

An American friend visiting me in Moscow introduced me to a very close Russian friend who was working for the Soviet state broadcasting company. We spent a day together. When parting, this popular TV personality said casually, in Russian, which our American friend did not know, "Isn't it boring — after each happy day with our mutual friend we have to write a report on our guest." I was shocked by this sudden revelation. My colleague in journalism was apparently reporting directly to the KGB! This Soviet journalist just assumed we were working under the same rules.

Numerous KGB operatives could be found in every newsroom in the USSR. I know one correspondent for the newspaper Izvestia who spent five years in Berlin and only wrote one five-line story. What do you think his real job was?

After the abortive coup, Yegor Yakoviev was appointed the new chief of Gostelradio, the state committee on TV and radio. In a television interview, he said that upon promotion to this post he discovered one-third of his employees were KGB operatives and that they would be fired the same day.

Most of those journalists were not professional agents, but amateur reporters on their colleagues. They had to follow their party duty (a non-party journalist was a rare exception) to cooperate with the KGB in certain delicate spheres: like reporting on foreign correspondents and supplying the KGB with the knowledge on how one could be harassed, possibly corrupted and used for espionage purposes. What are this individual's political views and attitudes? Is this person soft on communism? What about his or her family life and possible sexual deviations, etc.?

All that created a tough choice for Americans, here and in Moscow. Who is this journalist willing to meet you? A man of courage, risking his job and possibly his freedom? Or is he a provocateur, a KGB officer? Or a "nearly innocent", a small amateur spy, in other respects a nice guy? The reputations of journalists had to be tested all the time. Maybe in my case the reason

for trust was my friendship with people from the dissident movement and emigres.

After a good three years of perestroika, my boss, an 88-year-old editor and one of Stalin's favorite political commentators, died. Would I, a non-party member, be promoted? Would the KGB allow it? Having better credentials for the job than any living soul, and thanks to Gorbachev, I succeeded. In my case, the party rule permitting only members to be promoted was overcome at last. But then came the question: Would I be allowed to travel abroad?

I applied to the Soviet Peace Committee to cover the coast-to-coast American-Soviet Peace Walk in 1988. To my surprise, I was included in the group of 220 Soviet "people's diplomats." But several hours before the plane left for America, I was kicked off. I was refused my passport and American visa.

Some time after that dramatic night, I received a letter from an American political scientist telling me how much he enjoyed meeting me in Philadelphia. There was one problem. I had never been in Philadelphia! To this day I still wonder who used my name and what he did in your country under the cover of being a Soviet journalist.

I didn't have to wait long for another opportunity to visit the United States. I was awarded a prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University. But again I had only one concern: Would KGB let me out this time?

Day after day, all the Nieman's gathered in Cambridge. Only I, "the first one from the USSR," was missing. The KGB Foreign Office was trying to deny me once again the opportunity to go to America. I was told, "the Americans wouldn't give you the visa." I said I knew the truth and warned them that by detaining me, a Nieman Fellow, in the USSR, the KGB was creating an international scandal. "Are you threatening us? the KGB man asked. "No, just warning you of what will follow."

Two weeks after the scheduled date, September 14, 1989, I celebrated my victory — in Boston. After a life of crushed hopes, as a captive in my own country for long decades of despair, the two-week delay had still been a torture.

This was not just my personal hell. All Soviet people experienced spying and terror for three quarters of a century. I got off easy. I wasn't shipped to Siberia to die an early death. For-

tunately, it appears that future generations will not face this horror, but we must maintain our vigilance to be sure it will never happen again.

GOENAWAN MOHAMAD dropped in to Lippmann House after taking part in a U.S.-Indonesian conference in Leesburg, Virginia, September 26-28. The conference was organized by The Asia Foundation and the Center for Pacific Studies. Goenawan gave a talk on the issue of human rights.

He is still writing for Jakarta's Tempo news magazine and is its editor. Next year he will be a visiting fellow teaching journalism at the Melbourne Royal Institute of Technology in Australia.

— 1991 —

TONY ELUEMUNOR has been assigned by Timesweek of Nigeria as American correspondent. His editor first suggested it toward the end of his Nieman year, but Tony refused. Now he has accepted but he would still prefer to be back in Nigeria during the transition to civil rule. For Nigerian publishing houses a London correspondent has been a long standing source of pride. Timesweek now has an American correspondent.

TIM GIAGO's vision of building The Lakota Times into a national voice for Native Americans was fueled with a partnership agreement between the Times and former USA Today publisher and founder Allen Neuharth.

The first Native American newspaper to meet the needs of 1.5 million Native Americans in the United States will be launched with a \$100,000 loan from the Freedom Forum, formerly the Gannett Foundation, which Neuharth heads.

"It has been said that freedom of the press belongs only to those who own one," said Giago, editor-in chief and publisher of The Lakota Times. He said the Times intends to exercise that freedom in much broader terms in coming months.

The newspaper's first step will be to establish a news bureau with a full-time correspondent in Washington.

Giago said it would be the first time in the history of this country an American Indian would sit in on presidential press conferences and ask questions of the President of the United States on issues as they pertain to Native Americans.

The next effort will be to open a bureau in Pierre and produce a section of the paper to serve the four tribes on the river. The section would be inserted into the front section of The Lakota Times.

Giago added that The Times will take on

more of a national focus and eventually the front section would contain all national Indian news. Special sections will follow to cover every area of Indian country with possible news bureaus in the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, and Oklahoma.

RAJ CHENGAPPA was pleasantly surprised when he returned to New Delhi to find that "I had been kicked upstairs — I have been promoted to associate editor, a job that involves developing, coordinating and anchoring features for the magazine," India Today. "We are also busy searching for a house and that's driving us around the bend. Since the country is broke (apart from us) inflation has been riding high and rents have soared. And Usha and I are also getting used to water and electricity shortages. Aditi is going to a pre-school."

JOHN CARLSON of The Des Moines Register reports on his latest assignment:

We were just back from a trip to see Tim Giago in South Dakota. Jane and Rebecca cruised the Black Hills, Rushmore, etc., seeing the sights, having fun with the Giago kids. I worked, beginning interviews for an American Indian series I had hoped would begin about Dec. 1. Events in Moscow changed my plans.

I had been to the Soviet Union twice before for The Register, in 1987 and 1989. Much of my Nieman year was spent at the Russian Research Center, Soviet related classes and in seminars at Coolidge Hall so I thought (and my bosses agreed) it would be worthwhile for me to make a post-putsch trip to the Soviet Union. The Ukraine seemed the most logical place to travel for me since every reporter in the world seemed to be Yeltsin- and Gorbachev-watching in Moscow and because the Ukraine is the republic most relevant to Iowa and the Midwest.

In any case, I set out on Oct. 8 for the Ukraine, returning two weeks later with a stack of filled notebooks, editors eager for a six-part series to be written in as many days, and some impressions that probably won't see print. So what follows is a quick list (it has to be quick because part 4 is due in two hours) of notebook leftovers.

This is the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, tens of thousands of acres of wheat fields here, yet there are hour-long lines to buy a loaf of bread on Saturday morning in Kiev. Saturday evening at 6 p.m., a 2-block long line of cars waits at a gasoline station. The drivers will sleep in the cars, waiting

for the station to open the following morning, my driver explains. Both the bread and gasoline lines are relatively new here. The people say it is a sign they will be both hungry and cold this winter.

Sunday night television from Moscow and Walt Disney is showing Donald Duck. Later, are two hours of church services. Monday morning, squeezed in between the flashy commercials for stock brokers and home computers is "Adam Smith's Money World". Maybe there is hope after all, I think.

Then, another Chernobyl explosion — literally. The official government word is that there's nothing to worry about but the people don't believe it. A journalist friend tells me of a scene at the Kiev train station. Some 8,000 Kiev residents, hearing of the fire, are jamming trains trying to flee the city. The following morning people are crying in the streets. They don't

believe their government's assurances, probably with good reason. I interview firemen who went to Chernobyl and learn there are fears of radiation leaks. Crews begin scrubbing streets after dark, a bad sign.

I want to get the story but the official word is it takes a week to reserve a phone line. Rukh, the left-wing political movement heading the move for a free Ukraine, wants the story to get to the West and calls one of their people at the telephone exchange. Magically, at 9 p.m. (2 p.m. in Iowa) I get my phone line. Rukh has arranged for a half-hour window of time and I dictate the story to my desk.

In my time in the Ukraine I met with the president, the chief economics minister, the defense minister and the interior minister. I visited the home of a man who was held 12 years as a political prisoner for speaking out for Ukrainian indepen-

dence. I met with pig farmers, businessmen and old ladies who think they are going to starve to death this winter.

By the time I returned home Oct. 22 I realized I had visited a country with true potential. It has the size and population of France, some of the best agricultural land in the world, tremendous natural resources, a passable transportation system — and its leaders haven't a clue how to make it a world economic power. Its people are excited and hopeful and fearful. I met old men who danced with joy, waving their Ukrainian flags in the Square of Independence (formerly the Great October Revolution Square). And I met young people who see only bad times ahead. "We're doomed," said one young man.

I hope not. But I wouldn't bet against it.

## Lyons Award Winners Praise Each Other

The two 1991 winners of the Lyons Award for conscience and integrity in journalism paid tribute to each other and to their staffs in ceremonies at Lippmann House in September.

Gitobu Imanyara, editor of the Nairobi Law Monthly in Kenya and Max du Preez, editor of Vrye Weekblad of South Africa, accepted the award, made by the 1991 Class of Nieman Fellows, on behalf of their co-workers.

Imanyara, released from his third imprisonment but still barred by the government from leaving Kenya because of his publication's stand for democracy, sent a message saying:

"You are honoring the young men and women who have at great personal risk taken part in the production, distribution and reading of the Nairobi Law Monthly. It is these young men and women of Kenya whom I represent and for whom I accept this award."

Du Preez, accepting the award in person, expressed similar sentiments. "This Louis Lyons Award is a tribute not to me, but to the small independent press in South Africa and more specifically the dedicated band of reporters on Vrye Weekblad.

"For three years they have risked their financial security and personal safety and were ostracized from their families and their community to bring what we believe is honest, balanced and truthful information and analysis of our divided and repressed society.

"What made it more risky was that we did it in Afrikaans, the so-called Language of the Oppressor. To say something critical in Afrikaans to the Afrikaner nationalist ruling class always seemed to anger them more than to say the same thing in English."

Imanyara's statement, read by Mrs. Martha Koome, pointed out that by selecting du Preez and himself, "you have recognized the universality of the values that bind human endeavor." In his speech, du Preez said, "journalists in my country are proud of what our colleagues at the Nairobi Law Monthly are doing and we salute Gitobu Imanyara.

The Lyons Award, for conscience and integrity in journalism, is named for Louis Lyons, the long-time Nieman Foundation curator.

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