

NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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FIVE DOLLARS

Covering Health Issues



Reporters and Editors, Doctors and Nurses,
Educators and Activists, Offer Their Views

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journalism in the United States"*

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AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Covering Health Issues

We've Come a Long Way Since Blue Cross ...	Victor Cohn	3
Confessions of a First-Year Medical Writer ...	Sheryl Stolberg	6
Tsunami, Wavelets and Medical News	Bob Meyers	8
'Perky Cheerleaders'	John Crewdson	11
The Press's Portrayal of Mental Illness	Susan G. Lazar, Glen O. Gabbard and Elizabeth K. Hersh	17
View From the Nurses' Station	Bernice Buresh	23
Violence—Biggest Medical Problem	Margaret DiCanio	26
The 'War' on Drugs	Lloyd D. Johnston	29
Washington Hodgepodge	Dana Priest	32
State House Views	Mike Meyers, Tom Detzel, Jim Simon and Betsy Liley	34
Checking on the Players	Charles Lewis	37
Case for Reporting Medical Alternatives	Sid Kemp	40

Chill Wind From the Kremlin

Nicholas Daniloff 44

Beyond Objectivity	Jay Rosen	48
Public Journalism—An Early Attempt	Billy Winn	54
A Year Later, Campaign Continues	Robert D. Deutsch and Selden Biggs	57

WINTER READING

The Roar of the Crowd	Michael J. O'Neill	66
President Kennedy	Richard Reeves	67
Quality Time?	20th Century Fund	68
Listening to Prozac	Peter D. Kramer	69
Leaving Birmingham	Paul Hemphill	70
Fly Fishing Through the Mid-life Crisis	Howell Raines	72
Muddy Boots and Red Socks	Malcolm W. Browne	74
Nothin' but Good Times Ahead	Molly Ivins	75
An Autobiography	Richard Avedon	76
A Justice for All	Kim Isaac Eisler	77

CURATOR	2
OMBUDSMAN	78
RESPONSE	80
NIEMAN NOTES	82
1993 INDEX	88

The cover photo of a cancer patient in Los Angeles was taken by Stan Grossfeld.

'Truth Cannot Be Occupied'

BY BILL KOVACH

The journalists of Sarajevo reckon the beginning of the siege of their city from April 5, 1992, when a young girl was killed by a sniper. From that day to this the staff of the newspaper *Oslobodjenje* (Liberation) has endured the deadliest conditions ever faced by journalists.

One reporter was shot by Serbian killers while sitting at his typewriter and dragged into the street by his feet. A photographer taking pictures of a bread line died when shrapnel from a mortar struck and killed her. Snipers have wounded more than 20 others of the newspaper's staff. Yet a staff of 70, working seven-day shifts, has never missed an edition of their paper.

With justifiable pride the paper's 46-year-old editor-in-chief, Kemal Kurspahic, told a Nieman seminar how the staff of Bosnians, Serbs and Croatians found the will to continue working from the rubble of their building. Like thousands of others they could have abandoned their community and their newspaper to seek safety outside the war zone.

"We have never considered not doing what we are doing," he said. "It is a unique professional experience. Our paper is sometimes the only source of information for our readers. We have a duty to keep them informed."

What inspires them, he said, is the need to keep certain values alive in the midst of madness. One is that the "truth cannot be occupied" or crushed. Another is to "represent the idea of a culture of tolerance—which is exactly what the opposition wants to destroy."

And these journalists who put their lives at constant risk work virtually for free.

"We pretend to earn money as a paper and to be paid as journalists," is

the way Kemal puts it. "My monthly salary translated to hard currency wouldn't exceed \$10 a month. And we spend most of that and our own personal savings to buy newsprint or oil for generators."

The staff of *Oslobodjenje* learned how important their work was to their community on June 21 last year.

"It was when the whole building was under fire. No one would expect a paper to appear out of that flame the next morning. But our staff was preparing the paper while helping the firefighters. The fire was extinguished at 6 a.m. and our presses started five minutes later. When the paper hit the streets that morning, I believe that our readers and citizens of Sarajevo saw it as a sense of personal achievement, a personal victory. And I believe that is true. For putting out a paper each day in Sarajevo under these conditions serves as an encouragement to everyone. We are mutually encouraged—we by our readers and they by us."

Another member of the newspaper's staff, Zlatko Dizdarevi, recorded the following reaction of one reader:

"God, it's great to know they hate you so much that they're willing to use up all that ammunition, over so many days, just to hurt you. Imagine what you must have done to them, for them to consider you so important...."

Kemal Kurspahic came to Lippmann House to receive the 1993 Louis Lyons Award on behalf of himself and his staff. His seminar was more than ample evidence of the "courage and integrity" which the award was created to honor. The conversation with Kemal Kurspahic also justified the conclusion in the citation that, "The Nieman Fellows...honor the staff of *Oslobodjenje* for reminding us that journalism, in any situation,

should be a force for showing the common humanity amidst racial and ethnic diversity."

In the end the seminar and award ceremony became an object lesson for today's journalists frenetically searching for a short cut to a renewed sense of community need and purpose in journalism.

When a thing is reduced to its essence, as the survival of *Oslobodjenje* is, true values are revealed. Kemal Kurspahic, an unassuming man whose leg was shattered in an auto crash trying to avoid sniper bullets, reminds others more jaded and practical of those values:

- In what he and others are willing to pay to earn the right to freely publish the news and views of their community.
- In the strength his newspaper demonstrates of the power of simple words of truth.
- In the mutual and reinforcing commitment of him and his staff and the community to public interest journalism.

They are values which journalists in the United States today would do well to contemplate as public interest journalism has difficulty holding a place in the "practical" world of news-is-just-another-commodity.

As Kemal Kurspahic describes the mission of *Oslobodjenje*, it is driven by very practical considerations:

"Our paper is proof everyday that freedom of expression cannot be silenced by guns and cannons, and a multiethnic community cannot be killed by terror." ■

We've Come a Long Way Since Covering Blue Cross

*Despite Improvements in Coverage of Medical Economics
There's a Lot of Room for Better Articles*

BY VICTOR COHN

Health! Suddenly it's a Big Story. Not many years ago, as a national science and medical reporter on *The Washington Post*, I had to struggle to get a health care story on page one. Or page 31. Now, at least at this writing—journalism has a short attention span—health care reform is alive and yowling on the nation's front pages and the *Evening News*.

It's about time. I remember a conversation around 1975 with a *New York Times* medical writer who was deriding some hinterland writer: "He has to cover Blue Cross." As long ago as the late 1940's, when I got into the game, a few of us were covering Blue Cross and the economics of medicine as well as the atom and the scalpel, the "wonders" and "miracles" and "breakthroughs" of science and medicine. But—*mea culpa*—most of our reporting of the medical wonders indeed omitted their costs, or whether the nation might be better off vaccinating kids and treating the poor rather than developing multi-jillion-dollar wonders.

As recently as 1985 ethicist Arthur Caplan wrote that "sadly absent from the list of [medical] stories receiving extensive coverage are those examining the financial and organizational revolution sweeping through our health care system." In the fall of 1991 Newton Minow, director of Northwestern University's Annenberg Washington Program, and Fred Cates of Indiana University could still complain that, despite floods of words about health care problems and "cures," there was still too little deep and knowledgeable reporting. Asked in that year if he thought the

media were getting out the message of the tough choices and sacrifices needed—the fact that true health care reform must mean some pain, a fact politicians still shun—former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said, "I think they're carrying the message of the last person they talked to."

I think the situation is a bit better now than in Koop's assessment. But will the story, the true story, the truly deep examination, remain on page one or even page 31 a few years from now when some kind of reform has—probably—been enacted and there's only slow, and we hope steady, slogging toward access for all, cost control and quality care? This will be the test of future health coverage, whether by medical and science reporters or by the political writers, the current sometimes trenchant, sometimes wildly off base *Come Lately's* to the subject.

What of present coverage of the health care debate? Without question, a lot of it is first rate.

Most Americans still don't understand the Clinton proposal or its essential components: managed care, managed competition, health alliances. Not more than a fifth to a third of the public has "heard of" and "knows the meaning" of these terms, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation-Harvard study.

True, these concepts are complicated, and so is the Clinton reform. True, no large number of Americans can name their Senators or Representatives—there's always a great reservoir of public ignorance. True, print media in particular have used many charts and displays, many of them superb, to explain the health care proposals, and TV,

though handicapped here, has displayed simpler, often highly imaginative counterparts.

Just the same, half of the Kaiser-Harvard respondents said the media



Victor Cohn retired from The Washington Post October 1 after 25 years. In that quarter century he was science editor, then national medical reporter, then senior writer and columnist in The Post's weekly Health section. Currently he is a research fellow at Georgetown University, working on a book on medical care. His classic "NEWS & NUMBERS: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields" is in its fourth printing and widely used in journalism schools.

had done only a "fair" or "poor" job of explaining "what the different health care proposals mean" to them and their families; about a third called it "good;" only 10 percent called it "excellent." (Another survey of five major dailies found that over a four-month period only 12 percent of all stories dealt with the potential impact of reform on individuals and families.) The respondents gave the media better marks for reporting the politics of reform—the old ball game—than for telling them how the proposals may affect them. Obviously, TV in particular should try harder, since only 17 per cent of respondents called newspapers their "most important source of information on health care reform." Seven per cent named magazines. Thirty-five per cent named network television.

Obviously, there is still a job to be done. Obviously, information will have to be repeated and repeated if it is to sink in. There is still plenty of time. The debate will go on for months.

This said, I think there is a problem that is even more important.

Reporters are properly putting every claim of the Clintonites under the microscope and finding lots of flaws. This is what they should be doing. But the reports should also make it clear that the present system is an unsustainable failure, and that there can be no possible reform without flaws, whether à la Clinton, something more conservative or like plans in Canada, Britain, Germany or wherever. There is a grave danger that true reform will sink under the present fierce barrage of criticism, reportorial and otherwise.

What of the great bulk of today's medical and biomedical reporting, the non-economic reporting?

There are many pluses. Having entered journalism more than five decades ago and having written my first medical story more than four and a half decades ago, I can testify that American journalism, including science and medical journalism, is far better than ever, that the young people entering the field are far better educated, by and large, and that there are large amounts of fine reporting on papers large and small.

It's also getting hard to find a news

organization of any size that does not have a pretty much full time health and medical reporter, this in contrast to the day in 1947 when, a young reporter at The Minneapolis Tribune, I showed up at the American Medical Association's annual meeting to be greeted by reporters from New York, Chicago and the like saying, "You're from *Minneapolis*?"

Medical reporters are more conscious of the ethical and economic implications of their reporting. Reporters of technology, medical and otherwise, more often take account of any effect on the environment or individual health.

We may therefore pat each other on the back. Briefly. Back-patting does not lead to improvement, and there is plenty of room for improvement.

To wit:

There is still too much extolling of new medical miracles without a count of the money or other impact. And there's frequently a medical tear-jerker with no broader context.

Here's a bit I saw on Washington TV news (like many I've seen in print). A wan boy sucks a lollipop, and the anchorman says, "This little boy is waiting for a transplant that could help. But he's shut out from a government program. More at 11."

Dr. Jay Siwek, editor of the American Family Physician, has said: "When you report on kids who need transplants, and the fact that they've got to have \$50,000 or \$100,000 for the operation, does this kind of emphasis affect what happens in this country? Does the money we spend on transplants mean thousands of kids won't get immunized?"

Doctors complain that over-enthusiastic reporting raises patients' expectations beyond the possible. They're right.

Stories about new wonders too seldom include the possible side effects or other qualifications. Kidney and heart transplants, kidney dialysis, electronic pacemakers—all extend lives, all often fail. Even when "successful," all can be hard to live with. A Maryland woman once phoned me to say, 'My son had to have

his first heart pacemaker at age 25. Now he's wearing his fourth. They were infected! The miracles aren't always miracles."

Reporting hopeful news without raising false hopes is difficult and sometimes impossible. We can say loud and clear that the payoff may be years away or the wonder isn't a wonder for all, and the sick and suffering will still grasp at the straw. But we must at least say these things. High up, not in the umpteenth paragraph.

Part of the problem is over-hyped reporting of results in animals.

The late Nate Haseltine, a crack Washington Post medical writer into the 1960's, said "Mice are not men," and generally refused to report on animal research, since more often than not the animal breakthroughs lead to no human cures. Nate's caution has gone by the boards, partly because of today's huge new concerns—AIDS, Alzheimer's—with millions of persons eager to hear of any progress and with reporters, editors and news directors willing to exploit the "tantalizing" and "promising" results that "may" lead to cures. Sometimes.

Some years ago, tongue only partly in cheek, I said there are only two kinds of medical stories, New Hope and No Hope.

New Hope and No Hope get on page one or the Evening News. The in-betweens get buried or ignored. The main reason is obvious. News is about extremes.

But there are other reasons too. When it comes to running for page one or making the Six O'Clock News, the best among us, let us face it, sometimes overstate or understate. I was once asked by a Harvard researcher, "Does competition affect the way you present a story?" I had to answer, "we have to almost overstate, we have to come as close as we can within the boundaries of truth to a dramatic, compelling statement. A weak statement will go no place."

We thus tend to oversimplify. We may report, "A study *showed* that black is white" or "So-and-so *announced* that..." when a study merely suggested that there was some evidence that such might be the case. We may slight or omit the fact that a scientist calls a study "preliminary."

We tend to rely most on "authorities" who are either most quotable or quickly available or both, and these often tend to be those who get most carried away by their unconfirmed but "exciting" data—or have big axes to grind, however lofty their motives. The cautious person who says, "Our results are inconclusive... I don't know" tends to be omitted or buried someplace down in the story.

As a result, one can make a long list of sensations that have so far proved less than sensational.

In the 1970's, the potential anti-cancer drug interferon was hailed on front pages, TV news and gaudy newsmagazine covers. NBC's John Chancellor called it "possibly one of the miracles of the age." The upshot today: it helps in some cancers, it may still turn out to be important, but it is not yet a miracle.

The mid-1980's saw a flurry of implants of so-called "artificial hearts," dominating the medical news, though none could pump blood on its own like a genuine heart and all were connected to bulky external machinery. None worked, if the test of what works is life.

When National Cancer Institute doctors in 1985 treated their first patients with interleukin-2, a substance intended to turn white blood cells into anti-cancer agents, a typical headline said, "Killer Cells Highly Promising," giving the impression that a new era was nigh. "Promising" is still the best that can be said of this and many other compounds heralded with much fanfare.

Just weeks ago a front-page story in The New York Times reported, with rare candor, the fact that "Just a year ago taxol, a new cancer drug, was on the verge of approval...Expectations were running high...The drug was thought to offer salvation to desperate women with ovarian cancer, and possibly to patients with breast or lung cancer or

other tumors. The clamor for the drug began with exuberant comments by researchers...Their results were magnified in the news media... But as large studies scrutinize taxol's effects...the enthusiasm has tempered." Taxol does not yet extend or improve life.

Meanwhile, a wry note: The Wall Street Journal's Jerry Bishop has noted that "most of the efforts that win the Nobel prize for medicine are never reported in the media."

TV. With a modest number of exceptions, it is far behind the best print media in maturity, with most of its medical reports mere short bursts.

This is not to say that some brief paragraphs in print—a growing phenomenon—are any better, or that most print readers read more than a headline and the first few paragraphs, if that. Still, TV's 30-second to two-minute reports commonly lack context or caveats, though this would often require only an added phrase or sentence.

TV's truly excellent medical reporters—they definitely exist—are far outnumbered by the callow and inexperienced on a multitude of local stations. Take Washington's local TV staffs. They are probably among the nation's best, yet I recently listened to a panel of Washington medical reporters, two of them from leading TV stations. One had been on the medical beat for "less than a year," the other for 14 months.

Public television? A different animal. The TV magazine shows? Some are fair and thorough, some score highest in one-sided prosecutorial zeal, high hype and high ratings.

What about compassion?

Journalists—okay, not medical journalists—compelled tennis ace Arthur Ashe to reveal unwillingly that he had AIDS. We must report the illnesses of important office holders. The public has a right to know anything that affects official performance. But, as Ashe said, "I am not running for some office of public trust, nor do I have stockholders to account to. It is only that I fall under the dubious umbrella of 'public fig-

ure.'" And: "I [am not] comfortable with being sacrificed for the sake of the 'public's right to know.'"

Some years ago many of us knew that physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer was dying of cancer. No one reported it until his death. I am not sure that would happen today.

Nor am I sure that we always temper our medical reporting with understanding. In 1974 First Lady Betty Ford had breast surgery, widely reported during a period when there was a good deal of other news about breast cancer. It was all widely read, and at The Washington Post we received many laudatory letters. But one woman wrote: "Sometimes I think you do a great disservice to your readers. While you might be doing some good at her expense by blazoning Mrs. Ford's operation, do you ever consider the harmful effect? I am referring to the statistics where it was stated that 38 percent of women with cancer cells in the nodes did not live five years after surgery and 62 percent did not live for 10 years. I am a cancer patient under care at NIH. Until I read your paper I had thought my chances were very good of leading a normal life. Of the many doctors I have seen, none has ever thrown such a poor statistic at me. Thanks a lot!"

Certainly, we must report the facts and statistics, favorable or otherwise. But we can also report that length of survival is always a range, and averages don't apply to individuals. We can, without violating truth, try to give hope.

Enough. The coming years, the years of drastic and perhaps grueling changes in the delivery of health care, whether or not there is federally mandated reform, will require better medical reporters than ever, reporters asking and searching for the answer to the crucial question: are patients being well served? Back in 1985 ethicist Caplan, bemoaning the lack of coverage of the hard economic and social questions, said in despair, "If it's not buzzing, beeping or humming, no one's going to cover it."

Let that be history. ■

Confessions of a First-Year Medical Writer

BY SHERYL STOLBERG

To begin with, this was not a job I asked for. I was minding my own business, perfectly content with my lot in life when, one year ago, my editors at *The Los Angeles Times* asked me if I would take the medical beat. At the time, I was covering the county criminal courts, a job I had held for a bit less than a year. But my specialty, in truth, was in not having a specialty at all. In my nine years as a reporter, I had covered the usual fare: fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, riots (well, okay, riots aren't usual, even for reporters unless, of course, one reports in Los Angeles.) In this work I found variety, as well as tales replete with the triumphs

and trials of everyday living that, in their telling, make newspapers come alive.

A medical writer? I groaned. Why did they want me to become a medical writer? It will be a promotion, they assured me. A more prestigious job. A beat that is national, even international, in scope. You'll write mostly for the front page. You'll travel. All of this sounded vaguely as though my editors had a problem and I was their solution. But I don't know anything about medicine, I protested. My last scientific endeavor was dissecting a frog in high school biology. You're a good reporter, they countered. You'll learn.

Since then, I have written about AIDS, cancer, tuberculosis, smallpox, cystic fibrosis, polio, yellow fever, the flu. I have tackled violence as a public health issue, dipped into the abortion debate and dabbled in managed care. I have interviewed the dying, and those who have been spared death. I have watched doctors perform gene therapy on a three-day-old who was born with an immune system that did not work. I have spent long hours poring over biology texts, trying to comprehend cellular immunity and neurotransmitters and DNA. I have encountered doctors and medical researchers who were wonderfully patient with my sometimes simple questions, and others—including a (now former) ranking official at the National Institutes of Health—who became nasty, condescending and in one case furious when I revealed that my background was that of a reporter, and not a scientist.

I have learned. Oh, have I learned.

These, then, are my observations—I like to think of them as confessions—after 12 months on the job. They are disconnected at best, the thoughts of an outsider looking in. And so perhaps my first confession should be that, as I grow into this beat, I don't intend to relin-

quish the rule of the outsider. In fact, I rather relish it. I think it is what keeps me fresh.

Confession number two: I think it is weird that medical writers rely on other publications—medical journals—to get their news. Every beat has its infrastructure. In local government the City Council meets and makes decisions (or, in some cases, avoids making decisions). In the courts a prosecutor files charges. The biggest breaking developments in the quirky world of medicine are often contained in peer-reviewed academic journals, the most prestigious of these being *The Journal of the American Medical Assn.* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*. (I used to think that medical writers had an easy ride onto the front page, rewriting other people's work. In fact, deciphering these bloody articles is the toughest part of my job.) Each week, these journals arrive, several days in advance of their publication date, on the desks of news people across the country. And each week, the same ritual takes place: Reporters, seeking to understand these incredibly dense and complicated articles, look to doctors and scientists to make sense of them. The only trouble is, the people we call for comment don't get the journals in advance. This puts me in the uncomfortable position of having to fax the experts the articles I am asking them to evaluate, with the hope that they can read the study and digest its contents in time for me to make deadline. This is standard operating procedure in medical reporting. Everyone knows this is how things work. I've never had a scientist complain about it. But I don't think I'll ever get used to it.

Confession number three: I don't return phone calls from public relations people, even though my answering machine offers the standard line, "I'll get back to you as soon as I can." It's



*Sheryl Stolberg joined *The Los Angeles Times* in 1987, after four years as a reporter with *The Providence (R.I.) Journal-Bulletin*. She is a 1983 graduate of the University of Virginia. She lives in Hollywood Hills with her husband, photographer Scott Robinson.*

not that I have anything against PR people. It's just that there are too damn many of them. My predecessor, Robert Steinbrook, announced on his answering machine that he did not return PR phone calls. I thought that was tacky. But at least he was honest. I simply spend my days figuring out creative ways to hustle PR people off the phone as quickly as possible, or better yet, to avoid these phone calls altogether. Frankly, I am somewhat astounded at the sheer size of the medical public relations establishment. It seems that every doctor in the country, not to mention universities and corporations, must have his own PR person. On any given day, about two dozen faxes, all unsolicited, cross my desk. Enough mail arrives to fill a carton, much of it containing pitches for stories I will never write, such as the one offering an interview with a New York plastic surgeon who specializes in lengthening penises. ("Penile elongation surgery offers 70 percent increase in organ size, according to Dr. Ordon," the press release proudly proclaims.) Or the one touting a study being conducted at the University of Southern California on the health benefits of the Orbotron, a giant gyroscope-like contraption whose makers tout it as "an exhilarating ride for both amusement and fitness." And then there are the dreaded PR gimmicks. For example, four science and medical writers at the Times (and plenty more across the country, I am certain) received toy trains toting a package of beans and the latest antifatulent drug. Attached to the locomotive were the lyrics of a children's jingle: "Beans, beans the musical food, the more you eat the more you toot...." Need I say more?

Confession number four: It drives me nuts that I am setting the agenda for what our readers learn about medicine. There is so much to write in this field, so much to choose from, that it is impossible for any one person to cover it all. Of course, some stories are dictated by the developments of the day. But by and large, I write lengthy stories (generally mine run in the neighborhood of 60 to 70 column-inches, although a profile I wrote of Jonas Salk ran 160 inches, long even by Los Angeles Times stan-

dards) about whatever strikes my fancy. There is little rhyme or reason to what I pick, other than that I find the topics compelling and think they are important. "What qualifies me to make these determinations?" I exclaimed in frustration to a colleague early in my tenure. To which he replied: "Who better than you to make them?"

Confession number five: This summer, I became afflicted with medical

**"Just wait," they said,
when I took the beat.
"You're going to think
you have every disease
you write about." I
laughed at them. Not
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hypochondriac. Then
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interview with a
doctor for a lengthy
magazine story on
tuberculosis.**

writer's disease. Everybody said it would happen. "Just wait," they said, when I took the beat. "You're going to think you have every disease you write about." I laughed at them. Not me, I'm no hypochondriac. Then it hit, during an

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this beat. I have decided that, if I am to accomplish
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interview with a doctor for a lengthy magazine story on tuberculosis. His patient was hard to diagnose, he told me. She came in with just one symptom: night sweats. Night sweats! My mind began to race. I had awakened in a sweat the night before. (It couldn't possibly have been due to the hot sum-

mer weather.) And I had just come back from the International AIDS Conference in Berlin the month before. I spent 10 hours on a plane with a bunch of AIDS patients. Of course, they were all infected. The TB germs were winging their way around the plane. (Hadn't the Centers for Disease Control been investigating airplane outbreaks because of poor air circulation?) I knew I didn't have AIDS. But TB—there was a disease you could catch just by breathing! And not even know you had it! I stuck my head in the sand for a while and finally went to the doctor for a test. No, I don't have TB.

Confession number six: There really is a cure for cancer. As the crazies know, I'm just part of the conspiracy that refuses to report it. Also, AIDS is a government plot. Oh, you weren't aware of this? Just talk to my faithful readers; they'll explain it all.

Confession number seven: Speaking of conspiracy theories, I secretly suspect there is an unwritten agreement among scientists to say nice things about one another's work. Why is it that Dr. X is always so quick to say that Dr. Y's research, to be published soon in a journal of great prestige, is an "interesting, important, critical, exciting" (take your pick, any flattering adjective will do) development? Why do I get the feeling that, when X's work is published, Y will undoubtedly return the gracious compliment for the benefit of a reporter's eager ears?

Now, my final confession: I have a distinct, and very serious, philosophy

about this beat. I have decided that, if I am to accomplish only one thing as a medical writer, it will be to bring a human dimension to my stories. Too many medical stories are written for scientists only. Medicine, more than any other topic I can think of, touches

continued on page 39

Tsunami, Wavelets and Medical News

*Journalists and Experts, Riding in Different Boats,
Fail to Communicate With Each Other*

By BOB MEYERS

In 1984 I joined The San Diego Union as an assistant city editor in charge of among other things, its medical, science and AIDS coverage. Most of our reporting was on the breaking aspects of those critical issues, and we did a pretty good job of staying tightly wrapped to the curve of the news (reporters Rex Dalton, Warren Froelich and Cheryl Clark get much of the credit for that).

In 1987, seeking to broaden my own understanding of the issues and get ahead of that relentless curve, I accepted an academic-year fellowship at the Harvard School of Public Health (modeled, in fact, on the Nieman program). While studying in Boston I learned for the first time of the problems associated with the 37 million medically uninsured Americans—the financial impact on hospitals providing last-minute emergency room care, the drain on provider agencies, the risks in individuals in having nothing but a frayed safety net to rely on, etc. I learned also about the profile of the uninsured—that many of them are young, working in start-up businesses, in high tech industries, in areas where labor unions are weak, and that most of them are working people and their spouses and dependents.

All of this was news to me—I had never heard of this before. I'd gone to lunch with hospital administrators, p.r. types, business people, university people—and none of them had ever said to me, "hey, here's this issue that's about to wreck the system, you guys should do something about it."

When I returned to the paper in mid-

1988 I ran a computer search on stories about the medically uninsured in California and the southwest, and discovered that nothing more had been done about the story anywhere except for a brief or two about funding services for the uninsured, or a mention of legislative committee meeting looking at the subject. City Editor Rick Levinson got me the green light to dig into the story, and we produced a good-sized three-parter than ran each day on A1.

That was our first full-length crack at a topic the experts knew was dragging the health system down, and that today is the engine driving reform of it.

My concern is this—why were we (and others) so late in understanding this major issue, and why were the professional people who lived with this thing every day so unable or unwilling to move this knowledge along to us? Or were they aware that this was what we wanted?

There were roughly 37 million people without health insurance in the early 1980s, 37 million without it in 1988 when I wrote my series, and about the same number today ("Of the estimated 37 million uninsured Americans about 85 percent are already employed," reported Los Angeles Times recently.) Thus we as journalists have gone from total ignorance of it as a story to accurately citing it as a major factor in reforming health care.

What happened? The answers reflect I think on the nature of the news gathering and dissemination process as we practice them today, and foreshadow what we must do in the future. The lessons are not limited to health care

reporting.

By analogy, for the longest time we have been covering the fish in the sea, and ignoring the tsunami rolling under us on its towards the shore. Certainly, on health, that was the case when I was riding the desk in San Diego. We covered the hell out of every example of physician malfeasance, every mom with a handicapped baby, every new splice of the genetic code. But we were missing the bigger story underneath—that



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the hospitals where these folks got treated were going broke, that the nature of medicine was changing because of economic reorganization, that the "miracles" of modern medicine (how our secular age loves miracles!) were costly, not necessarily available to everyone, and maybe the benefit wasn't worth the risk.

Why were we (why was I?) missing the roll of the tsunami?

I think the answer may lie in a disconnect between people in two boat on top of the rolling tidal wave. In one boat (to

To come back to our topic of health reform—if 37 million medically uninsured people are such a big deal in the mid-1990's, how come we as general-interest journalists didn't know about them in the mid-1980's? Where were the academics and think tankers and deep thinkers who could have guided us? Were we asking the right questions? Were we hearing the right answers?

continue the analogy) are the number-crunchers, policy wonks, and scholarly researchers whose very job it is to monitor the big picture, chart its movement and recommend course changes and directions. They use technical language which is not journalist friendly—which is often regarded as OK in their field because they are wary of the press, concerned about having their data badly presented, annoyed at being asked to simplify it and not amused to be bad-

gered by reporters on deadline who want a 15-minute summary of work they've spent five years developing.

But in the other boat are the journalists who are genuinely trying to provide simple and concise answers to complex questions, who may have some training in the field but probably picked up most of their understanding from the act of covering the story itself, and who even when they can spend some time on a piece wish their sources would speak English. Need we mention the editors in the boat (this is a very big boat) who have a tough time getting away in order to ask sources a few independent questions of their own, who have five or six reporters to handle and as well as senior editors who like raising questions *ex cathedra* and who themselves have to consult with the front office types whose favorite wall decorations are pictures of something called the bottom line?

To come back to our topic of health reform—if 37 million medically uninsured people are such a big deal in the mid-1990's, how come we as general-interest journalists didn't know about them in the mid-1980's? Where were the academics and think tankers and deep thinkers who could have guided us? Were we asking the right questions? Were we hearing the right answers?

Today, of course, the combination of political strategy, health policy discussion and strong press coverage has introduced the concept of the uninsured Americans into the social vocabulary. The presence of 37 million uninsured people has been identified as a major factor in rising health care costs and as a major policy issue for the Clinton administration. The fear of losing health care coverage has been identified as an important reason voters with insurance are now concerned about voters without insurance. (However, many misperceptions still abound: According to a random sample survey of 1,200 people taken in October 1993 by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, only 14 percent of the respondents said that uninsured Americans were found in working families, whereas the reality is that 88 percent of them are).

Why does all this matter?

Because the news industry and information delivery systems are changing faster than you can say Internet and Interactive CD Rom. Forget about flat newspaper circulation, fragmenting network news viewership, or even 500 cable TV channels full of reruns of "I Love Lucy" and "Leave it to Beaver." The future that is not very far away is going to include some method of getting us "Bill & Hillary's Health Care Facts," "The New York Yankees/Brooklyn Dodgers World Series Games—As They Should Have Been Played," and the virtual-reality interactive CD Rom full color version of "Everything You Wanted to Know About Isotopes, Assembly Kit Included."

If we want to stay relevant as journalists, much less employed, we will need to provide something that can't be obtained through lists, assemblages and technology-driven what-if scenarios.

We will need to make that connection between the two boats, so we can report on the tsunami as well as the wavelets around us.

I sometimes think that one reason people don't like us very much is not that we are inaccurate (by and large we're not) or that we are slanted and biased and have our own private agenda (no and no and no again).

Rather, I think some people don't like us all that much because we're not relevant on the really big issues. Yes, we give them ball scores, whether of politics or field hockey, and we're doing a better job of covering high school sports and giving voice to those who have no other way of being heard; yes we hold the feet of politicians to the fire and gnash our teeth about how to get out of feeding frenzies and whether we obsess so much over a public figure's private life that we help keep qualified people from public office.

But the biggest gripe I've heard in this incarnation of my career is that we only fish an inch deep in a mile-wide lake. The information about the medically uninsured population was there five and 10 years before the subject became the centerpiece of an Administration's principle domestic policy—could we have provided it earlier? The consequences of the banking

code regulations that led to the S. & L. scandals—could that have been pushed earlier or more vigorously? I've been reading a lot lately about the claimed negative impact of illegal immigration, but I've seen only a few articles (like the one in *The New York Times*) about the

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ways illegal immigrant families tend to bring in all the kids and uncles and aunts and sisters to work in the family business, and when they buy a home in the inner city they use something called "family money," described as money collected in cash from family members, some of whom apparently are here illegally. Isn't that another way of saying illegal immigrants are stabilizing neighborhoods? If true, that's not a bad story.

None of this is easy, of course. We as an industry are diverse and independent and bottom-line conscious, and clearly blame cannot be assessed against the media when facts and circumstances are reported and don't sink in to the public consciousness.

Nor do the academic and researchers make it easy—or even possible. In 1988 I spent days on the phone trying to track down the actual source of that 37 million uninsured number—the re-

search journals all quoted each other or assumed the number as a given. Finally someone gave me the name of one researcher who had crunched the numbers in a federal office in Washington. She didn't return my calls for weeks on end and when I finally did reach her she gave me so many qualifications for the overall number that I finally had to say, in exasperation, "Couldn't we just say it's 37 million at any one time?" and she finally agreed that we could.

Nevertheless, we—as reporters, but especially as mid-level and senior editors—will need to spend a great deal more time thinking about the direction of the rolling tidal wave called news than is usually done now. We will need to establish, or enrich, our lines of communications to the universities and think tanks that can give us a big-picture, deadline-free perspective.

The medical and legal and other professions require their practitioners to take continuing education courses—to keep their skills sharp, to learn the latest thinking. Journalism should do the same. Long-term academic fellowships programs should be regarded as a

way to enhance the news organization, not feared as a platform from which the journalist will jump ship. Short-term professional development programs should be regarded as a way to hone in on a subject, enhancing the journalist's knowledge base and enriching—or confusing—knowledge as to what all the answers are.

You don't want a confused or indecisive reporter out there covering the fire, but I think it is wonderful when journalists come back from a conference suddenly uncertain that they have all the answers, because they have just been exposed to so many different well thought-out points of view.

The alternative to deeper fishing in the sea of knowledge is that more and more of us will become dissatisfied and leave the profession, more and more readers and viewers will turn to MTV-style news shows or computer data bases, and the wonderful and exciting and even rewarding job we have always loved—providing in small or awkward or even fitful ways the knowledge that people need to conduct the democracy—will be lost. ■

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*By Accepting Research Reports Without Adequate Checking
Science Writers Do a Diservice to the Public*

*Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring—
Alexander Pope*

BY JOHN CREWDSON

At the beginning of 1989, a venerable Philadelphia research organization, the Wistar Institute, reported that Multiple Sclerosis might be caused by a virus similar to the AIDS virus. The report made news across the country. Many papers used the Associated Press account, which quoted a Wistar scientist who said he had found signs of an AIDS-like virus in MS patients. Neither *Science* magazine, the American journal where the report appeared, nor any of the news stories it engendered, mentioned that Wistar, in collaboration with the world-famous AIDS researcher, Robert Gallo, had announced essentially the same "finding" four years earlier—in *Science's* principal competitor, the British journal *Nature*. Or that the *Nature* report had been disproved, in rather short order, by several other laboratories. The *Science* report fell just as flat—at last count more than 20 laboratories have been unable to find any trace of the suspected virus in patients with MS—but

Wistar was undeterred. A couple of years later the doughty institute was back in the news. This time it was a more fashionable complaint, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, that was associated with a mysterious AIDS-like virus. Although the Wistar scientists hadn't yet published their latest discovery—this breakthrough was reported in a news release—once again the story was a smash. Earlier this year, when those findings were shot down by the Centers for Disease Control, hardly anybody noticed.

What passes for news has changed dramatically over the past quarter-century. News in the 1950's was mostly what powerful white men said and did. In the 1960's the news envelope expanded to include the existence of what Scammon and Wattenberg called the unpowerful and unwhite. In the 1970's, thanks mainly to Watergate but with no small debt to David Wise's pioneering reporting on the CIA, news became not only what government said but how it really worked. All of this was undoubtedly to the good. Sometime in the early 1980's, however, journalism went too far. With the space program and the growing environmental consciousness came the recognition that science and technology, especially medicine and health, also were news. But the journalists who ventured into this realm found themselves deprived, for the first time, of the basic tools of reporting, their own eyes and ears. Unable to make their own judgments about such technical matters, they found themselves dependent on scientists to tell them what the story was. It was as though reporters could only cover a political

convention by interviewing delegates outside the hall, or write about poverty and racism by interviewing a sociologist who had visited the ghetto.

As the Wistar story suggests, scientists are particularly dependent on favorable publicity and they have become adept at manipulating the press. Scientists as a group are no more or less honest than politicians, and like politicians they have a compelling motive to shade the truth. Politicians exaggerate their accomplishments to get re-elected. Scientists exaggerate theirs to get re-funded. To go on doing whatever they do, scientists need more money every year. Whether it comes from the federal treasury or a private foundation, next year's money depends on this year's discoveries. Given the dismal state of biomedicine, chances are good that the average researcher hasn't discovered much of anything lately. The rent, however, must be paid, and so non-discoveries and marginal discoveries and problematic discoveries are spiffed up and published in journals like *Science* and *Nature*, which sell them to the mass media as energetically as any big-city tabloids competing for circulation. It is clearly a seller's market. The science writers who ignored Wistar's history of dubious discoveries also failed to notice that the institute's increasingly desperate publicity grabs paralleled both its worsening financial straits and the ultimately unsuccessful struggle of its septuagenarian director to keep his job.

Rather than scorn the science writer, we must pity him. His editors are probably former foreign and political correspondents who don't care much about science beyond the prospects for a bald-

John Crewdson is senior writer for The Chicago Tribune based in Washington. He served previously as a national correspondent for The Tribune and as the paper's National News Editor. Prior to joining The Tribune in 1982 he was a national correspondent for The New York Times and, before that, a reporter in that paper's Washington Bureau. Crewdson won a Pulitzer Prize in 1981 for a series on illegal immigration.

ness cure or a vaccine for AIDS. To get page one space on Sunday, the science writer must make his stories as simple and dramatic as the news from Mogadishu. "AIDS Death Toll Skyrockets" will do it every time. So will "Gene for Baldness Found" or "Vitamin E May Prevent Cancer." But not "Philadelphia Institute, Wrong Twice Before, Desperate For Funding, Claims Another Unproved Link Between Virus and Disease." Complexities get filtered out, and the headline becomes "HIV-Like Virus Tied to Fatigue Syndrome."

This owes less to malevolence than naiveté. Science writers may be the last innocents. Among journalists they are certainly the last optimists. Foreign correspondents know there will always be starving babies in Africa. Political writers know there will always be congressmen on the take. Science writers believe in science. They believe science can put men on Mars, can cure cancer and baldness, can feed those African babies. When Professor Schmidlapp says he's discovered something big, the science writers, their collective belief reaffirmed (and their own stature enhanced), don't draw their guns and make him put his cards on the table. They don't flyspeck his raw data, don't check his funding sources, don't scrutinize his previous articles for mistakes. They don't interview his enemies or call his lab technicians at home for an off-the-record assessment of the great man's work. They like science, they probably admire Schmidlapp and they're excited by the prospect that he's right. So they just ask him how to spell whatever it is and write it down.

Not only do science writers like science, they want their readers to like it too, or at least to understand how important science is. The best of them, Natalie Angier of *The New York Times*, understands this, and rightly identifies herself and her colleagues as "perky cheerleaders." The early NASA reporters were the precursors of her genre, which is why that agency's monumental problems remained a secret until the *Challenger* blew up. Equally perky were the medical writers who filed front-page reports in the early 1970's describing the dramatic hunt for non-existent

cancer-causing viruses. At the moment the cheerleading is reserved for stories about human gene research. Having uncovered a spate of putative genes ostensibly linked to various conditions and diseases, the geneticists are now closing in on the gene for breast cancer. The announcement of that discovery may be made before this article appears, and it promises to be a scientific Fourth of July. All but ignored are the warnings from Ruth Hubbard, the first female biologist to receive tenure at Harvard, and a few others that human genetics is not so simple. Someday these stories will evoke the same mirth as the tales of cancer-causing viruses.

Apart from making science look good, the science writer wants to look good himself. To do this he needs good sto-

tion in a first-rate journal is no guarantee of anything. The rule is now often ignored, a victim of the intense competition for science stories and the advent of science by press release.

Because scientists and science writers are so dependent on one another, most science writers are far closer than other journalists to the people they cover. Science writers moderate and take part in panel discussions at scientific meetings. They allow scientists about whose research they write to edit their articles before publication. They even belong to the same distinguished societies; several well-known medical journalists are members of the National Academy of Science's exclusive Institute of Medicine. Editors who would never allow a political reporter to serve

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ries, preferably before they hit the journals. But here, too, he is different than other reporters. For regular reporters the best stories are the ones the politicians and bureaucrats don't want them to have. But if Schmidlapp thinks he's found a cure for cancer he's hardly going to keep quiet about it. The only question is which reporter will get the first crack. The best stories a science reporter can get are the ones somebody wants to put out. To get there first he needs continuing access to the most important scientists—a need that increases in direct proportion to the insignificance of his organization. Most serious newspapers used to follow a rule that scientific and medical information couldn't be published until it had appeared in a reputable journal. If the *Wistar* story is any guide, even publica-

as a delegate to the Democratic convention don't seem to mind similar conflicts in their science departments, possibly because they don't consider science writers real journalists. And it's true that the modern science writer probably was trained not as a reporter but as a scientist or a doctor, something news organizations imagine lends credibility to their coverage of these topics but which also accounts for a remarkable willingness to take things on faith. Journalistic instincts are developed by daily contact with blowhards, poseurs, rogues and knaves, by covering the cops and the city council or working night rewrite. "If your mother says she loves you, check it out," isn't taught in graduate school.

In fairness to the science writers, nobody's really asking them to check it

out. The national editors and news editors who put the paper together don't know the right questions anyway, and it isn't so important that these kinds of stories actually be true as that they might as well be true. Do they look authoritative? Does everyone who is quoted have an M.D. or a Ph.D.? Are they associated with reputable (or reputable-sounding) institutions and organizations? Are both sides of the issue represented (assuming there is a second side)? Are the appropriate hedge words employed? Then the story is better than true. It's defensible. And if the prediction it's built around ("Doctors Think Artificial Heart Will Revolutionize Medicine") doesn't come to pass, how can the story itself have been wrong? When the departing Iraqis set fire to Kuwait's oil fields it was presented as a potential ecological disaster of the first magnitude. No doubt many readers remain under the impression that considerable damage was done to the earth and its atmosphere. They'd be happy to learn that an extensive marine survey found that petroleum residues in the Persian Gulf were lower than before the war—probably because of decreased tanker traffic during the fighting—and that the level of atmospheric hydrocarbons was no worse than on an average day in the northeastern United States. According to my videotext database, the only American paper to fully report this good piece of news was *The Wall Street Journal*, which also covers science more critically than any other American publication.

The science horror story of the moment, of course, is AIDS. Can it be a coincidence that nearly every article about AIDS overstates the magnitude of that horror, most often by confounding the number of living patients with the total number of cases ever reported? This happens not just at smaller papers and wire services but at *The Times* and the *Washington Post*. The cumulative effect is to magnify the AIDS epidemic beyond proportion. Some years ago, *The Times* began a program of what it called "precision journalism." This was in an era when opinion polls were proliferating, and the program consisted primarily of reporting the sample size

and margin of error along with the polling results. It was a start, but when it comes to AIDS *The Times* still has trouble with numbers. More than once during 1992 the paper told its readers the number of American women with AIDS was 24,323 (the real number at the end of that year was a little over 9,000 according to the CDC computer's AIDS data base). When *The Times* reported a few months later that some 300,000 Americans "had AIDS," the number of living AIDS patients was about 120,000. Last year *The Post* referred to "the country's 230,000 AIDS patients," when there were really 80,000. A few days later another *Post* reporter mentioned the "nearly 5,000 U.S. young children and teenagers who have AIDS" (the actual number was then fewer than 2,400).

No doubt such mistakes derive in

Can it be a coincidence that nearly every article about AIDS overstates the magnitude of that horror, most often by confounding the number of living patients with the total number of cases ever reported?

part from genuine confusion about epidemiology. But are *The Times* and *The Post* so easily confused about other stories? Every reporter knows there is an unwritten journalistic license to overstate the facts, or at least not to triple-check them, in the service of a noble cause. Without that license, the missing children hysteria of a few years back would never have occurred. Among journalists who write about AIDS, the prevailing notion seems to be that since AIDS is an immense human tragedy, it can't be too immense. But there's both

a real and a psychic difference between 5,000 children and 2,400. Such overstatements skew our ability to assign priorities according to relative risk, our biggest public policy failing. The danger is particularly acute where, as with AIDS, there is no competing constituency. Every story about children with AIDS includes such arresting pictures of those small, sad faces that no one can possibly be against AIDS babies. What other health-care problem, the faces seem to say, could possibly be as urgent? The answer is just about anything. Of all the things that kill America's children, AIDS is near the bottom of the list—during the last six months of last year, more children in Los Angeles died from ingesting iron supplements than from AIDS. Thanks mainly to attention from the media and Congress, pediatric AIDS gets the bulk of the research money. Last year AIDS killed about 400 children a year in this country, or one in 75,000. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome killed more than 5,000 infants, or better than one in 800. Last year's federal grants for research on pediatric AIDS totaled \$112 million. The total for SIDS was \$6 million.

By now most Americans know someone who has, or had, AIDS, so stories about AIDS have a substantial readership. Fewer readers pay close attention to reports on superconductors and supercolliders, or to the sort of gee-whiz science writing about tectonic plates and black holes that fills *Science Times*, *The New York Times*'s weekly science section. They care very much, however, about medicine and health. Most readers are keener to know whether Vitamin E prevents cancer than what's happening in Mogadishu, and it is in the realm of what matters most that journalism fails its readers most often. In October of 1993 the leading British medical journal, *The Lancet*, reported that fetuses which had been scanned frequently during pregnancy with ultrasound weighed less at birth than those which had been scanned only once. A typical account of this report appeared in a number of U.S. papers. "Overdoing it?" the item began. "Moms-to-be, Australian researchers have found that frequent ultrasound examinations may

restrict a baby's growth. In a report in the British medical journal the *Lancet*, John Newnham of King Edward Memorial Hospital in Perth, Western Australia, found that pregnant women who had five or more ultrasound scans were more likely to have small babies at birth."

Well, not exactly. What the Australians actually said was that while reduced birthweights in some of the frequently scanned babies might be the result of exposure to ultrasound, they might also be "a chance effect" unrelated to the sonograms. The doctors said they couldn't be sure because their study hadn't been intended to answer that question. The data had come as a surprise. There were other cautionary notes, but these were missing even from the stories published by most bigger papers. No article mentioned, for example, that a number of previous studies had found that scanned babies weighed more at birth than unscanned ones. Or that the smaller weight differentials weren't evenly distributed across the spectrum of birthweights—not what would be expected if ultrasound was at fault. Or that while ultrasound has been in general use for two decades, average birthweights have gotten progressively bigger, not smaller. Or that the Australian babies scanned only once had suffered three times as many fatal birth defects as the five-scan babies.

Only *Newsday* pointed out that the average difference in birthweights was less than an ounce, or took the trouble to interview Dr. Newnham, who mentioned himself that the tiny weight differences he observed might be due to chance. Only *The Wall Street Journal* took note of a National Institutes of Health study, published the month before, which concluded that ultrasound was harmless. Only the *Journal* mentioned that the *Lancet* editors had commissioned an editorial critical of the Australian study—an increasingly common dodge by publicity hungry journalists who want to avoid criticism for running controversial articles. Unfortunately, the *Journal* reporter got the point of the editorial wrong. She described it as agreeing with the Australians, whereas it was actually devoted to pointing out what the editorialist politely called "ma-

ior problems with the interpretation" of their findings.

So how should the science writers have handled the *Lancet* ultrasound story? By recognizing that it wasn't a story. Not only is the ultrasound question far from being settled, but the statistics from Australia also suggest it's not yet a valid question. For the reporters who wrote what looked like authoritative accounts of the *Lancet* article, it was another day's work. Had they been asked, the editors who printed those stories would no doubt have said they were serving their readers. But how were readers served by abbreviated, misleading and unnecessarily alarming reports of what the *Lancet*'s own editorial called "at most an interesting hypothesis for further study?" What service was performed for pregnant mothers who began to worry that they might have harmed their unborn children? Or for obstetricians who found their waiting rooms filled with patients needing reassurance?

When women read that mammograms before 50 are inconclusive and unnecessarily risky, they anguish over whether to have one. Men read the paper and worry that a vasectomy will increase their chance of prostate cancer. Is margarine really as bad for you as butter? Do high-fat diets really lead to breast cancer? What about heart attacks and pattern baldness? Does Kudzu extract really cure alcoholism? These stories, which are invariably presented to the reader as the Latest Medical Findings, can have a substantial impact. It was the LMF, as these things have become known, that virtually finished off Perrier in America, nearly put apple growers out of business and gave the oat bran, olive oil and broccoli industries a new lease on life. Except to broccoli growers and Chinese restaurants, whether eating broccoli helps prevent cancer is a trivial question, but stories that cause people to put off needed or useful medical procedures or to doubt their doctor's advice are not inconsequential matters. Jeff Harris is a physician who holds a Ph.D. in economics and joint appointments at Harvard Medical School and MIT. As one who divides his time between seeing

patients and his own biometric research, Harris may be uniquely qualified to assess the impact of questionable medical research on patients. "[T]he American psyche," he writes in his just-published book, "Deadly Choices," "is under siege by a well-equipped army of scientific experts, government officials, public health specialists, corporations, and journalists, whose heavy-duty arsenal consists simply of words." With each pronouncement, Harris writes, the public "grows increasingly hard-nosed and wary. My own patients have grown so skeptical that they reject the latest health pronouncements out of hand."

Readers shouldn't enter the examining room uninformed, but being armed with this week's LMF doesn't make them informed. Had the *Lancet* ultrasound story been done properly—had it included all the necessary caveats and background and pointed out all the holes and anomalies and contradictions—it simply wouldn't have been a story. It only passed the story threshold by leaving out the important parts. This is not to say there's not an ultrasound story to be done, only that this one wasn't it. Perhaps ultrasound is damaging unborn fetuses. Or perhaps it's a worthless and expensive procedure for women with low-risk pregnancies. Or, most likely, perhaps it's a useful tool for detecting ectopic pregnancies and chromosomal birth defects that also gives expectant parents a harmless (and rather amazing) first look at their unborn child. If the ultrasound story is worth doing, it's worth figuring out the answer yourself.

But how can journalists reach conclusions on medical questions? Reporters aren't scientists; even the few who hold medical degrees don't see any patients, and the news organizations they work for don't have laboratories or clinics. Even if they did, isn't it the journalists' credo that we just report the news? Yes, and it's precisely because of that credo that reporting on most complicated issues, not just in science, has been reduced to providing readers with a synopsis of positions staked out by competing groups. No matter what the topic, there is a government agency and at least one private

It's time for a new credo, one that permits the reporter to give his readers the benefit of somebody else's expertise—his own.

council, institute, academy or association that will be happy to provide the busy reporter with a digestible summary of the facts. Washington is so well-organized these days that finding someone who will take a countervailing position on anything usually requires a single phone call. Because the resulting stories present both sides, they look balanced. But since both sides are putting their own spin on the facts, they give the reader no help at all. Dr. Schmidlapp of the Ultrasound Institute says ultrasound is perfectly safe. Dr. Newnham down in Australia isn't so sure. The reader is welcome to choose between them.

No wonder people have stopped reading newspapers. As an antidote to the yellow journalism that characterized many newspapers early in the century, down-the-middle reporting has been a good and necessary thing. But the world has now grown so complicated that "On the other hand..." and "To be sure..." represent a disservice to the reader. No reader can hope to reach an informed opinion on complicated issues from stories that reduce complexity to an arm-wrestling match between Schmidlapp and Newnham. It's time for a new credo, one that permits the reporter to give his readers the benefit of somebody else's expertise—his own.

Reporters who don't know a quark from a quartz wristwatch are convinced that science is beyond their comprehension, but it's not. It's just that science is in serious need of demystification. Scientists never use words of one syllable when three or four will do (aliquot="part," neoplasm="growth," etc.). Once the

linguistic code is broken it becomes much easier to see what's going on, assuming one can also add and subtract and has some measure of common sense, curiosity and skepticism. Understanding statistics and the theory of risk is also helpful, but these are no more complicated than health care financing or the federal deficit or other things reporters write about every day. What's mostly needed, however, is a healthy infusion of what used to be called investigative reporting but which is probably better described as primary reporting. When I first came to Washington 20 years ago, reporters like Morton Mintz and Stan Penn had raised this kind of journalism to a high art. Returning after a 10-year absence I am struck by how little of it takes place here anymore, in any field. What official Washington most resembles now is a fine restaurant, where reporters are permitted to order anything on the menu but not to inspect the kitchen. They don't seem to mind, probably because it's nicer lunching with the assistant secretary while he lays out the facts than hanging out with the waiters and the cooks—even though it's the waiters and the cooks who know what's going into the food.

Developing the wherewithal to do the ultrasound story right will take some work. Start by reading everything in the literature and talking to every researcher who has published an article on the subject. Talk to lots of obstetricians, those who use ultrasound every day and those who don't use it at all. Learn how birthweights are measured, what a randomized trial is, what "p" values mean and how to formulate a null hypothesis. Already this puts you ahead of the game, since even some researchers don't understand the last three. Then do what they call a meta-analysis: get everybody else's data and analyze it yourself. The federal government collects data on everything, and by law must give you most of what it has. The National Center for Health Statistics has an amazing collection of data on babies, dead and alive. The CDC has extraordinarily detailed records on the incidence of birth defects, including Down's syndrome and other chromosomal anomalies that ultrasound is supposed to spot. The

FDA, which approves medical devices, has reams of information on the performance and characteristics of every brand of ultrasound machine (including those that were just recalled by a major manufacturer because of substandard quality).

It's the personal computer that does most to level the field. Until recently huge databases could only live inside mainframes. But computer technology is now so advanced that an astronomical number of numbers can fit in a regular desktop model. All data, and particularly government data, has traditionally been run through the policy carwash before it gets to reporters, by which time it has been scrubbed and shined beyond recognition. Now most reporters have the means at hand to interpret this data themselves. We're just beginning to tap the information potential of these machines, but it's already clear that the new precision journalism is computer journalism. No reporter who has the CDC's AIDS database on his screen could easily confuse the number of living AIDS patients with the number of reported cases.

There's more to the science story than science. But when we put science news in a box of its own called the science department, the ways in which science, medicine, health, technology and the environment—the technoplex—touch the rest of the world are obscured. For those of us under 50, the interface between business and the technoplex probably will become the most important story of the second half of our lives. Because science reporters don't understand business and most business reporters don't understand science, at the moment it goes virtually uncovered. The LMFs, for example, practically never mention that the research behind them is usually paid for by someone with a vested interest in the outcome. Nearly all studies showing that oat bran lowers cholesterol were paid for by Quaker Oats, the chief beneficiary of the ensuing oat bran hysteria. Oat bran, like broccoli, isn't a life or death matter. But the widely reported study touting tPA, a synthetic anticoagulant used to treat heart attacks, was paid for by Genentech, which makes

What official Washington most resembles now is a fine restaurant, where reporters are permitted to order anything on the menu but not to inspect the kitchen. They don't seem to mind, probably because it's nicer lunching with the assistant secretary while he lays out the facts than hanging out with the waiters and the cooks—even though it's the waiters and the cooks who know what's going into the food.

tPA. An earlier study showing that tPA's principal European competitor was just as good was financed by European interests. The ongoing battle in the medical literature between two of the principal drugs for hypertension is financed by their respective makers. Only recently have some journals begun requiring researchers to declare their sources of funding in print, but even when they do it's in a footnote or an endnote. All the stories I saw reporting that coffee doesn't cause bladder cancer neglected to mention that the authors of that study were paid by the National Coffee Association. Maybe coffee doesn't cause cancer. But it's curious that no LMF's ever seem to contradict the interests of the funding organization. Is this because, consciously or unconsciously, scientists meet the expectations of those who pay the bills? Or is it just a coincidence that the only major study showing that oat bran has no effect on cholesterol was financed by the NIH?

There are plenty of non-science reporters in Washington and elsewhere who recognize conflict and corruption when they see it. They know what a rat smells like, they know how to follow money, and they know where the Securities and Exchange Commission is. It's because they don't do science that hardly anyone has begun to comprehend the full impact of patents and the stock market on the course of scientific research. Among the many unreported aspects of the Wistar story was the fact that, a few days before the publication of the institute's first article, the NIH applied for a patent that would have

given it control over whatever commercial inventions might have derived from Wistar's "discovery." The continuing dispute between the NIH and the French, trivialized by the science writers into a contest between Gallo and Luc Montagnier for credit for the discovery of the AIDS virus, is really a struggle for the control of what will soon become a billion dollar patent on the AIDS blood test. Science stories almost never mention patents, although it is now a near-certainty that a patent application has not only preceded, but has helped determine the contents of, any "breakthrough" biomedical research paper. Despite the millions of words written about cold fusion, only Gary Taubes's recent book, "Bad Science," explains the degree to which that charade was driven by patents and lawyers.

The same visions of corporate wealth that kept cold fusion alive beyond its time are behind research on an AIDS vaccine and the human genome patent scandal yet to come. But look deeper. Which authors of the journal article that made this morning's front page own stock in the company that makes the new drug they praised? Or, to take it to a place the SEC's insider trading task force has not yet gone: which of the scientists to whom the journal sent the article for confidential pre-publication review is parking 10,000 shares in his sister-in-law's brokerage account? The question that must now be asked about every LMF is almost never asked: is this principally about making people well, or is it principally about making money?

Why should journalists, and particularly newspapers, be the one to ask

these questions? Because it's our readers whose lives are most affected by the answers, and because there isn't anyone else. Congress keeps the executive honest. The executive keeps big business honest. The courts keep journalists honest. Among the many fields of human endeavor, only science is virtually exempt from external oversight. There's no supreme court of science to punish researchers who embroider their data or the journals that hype their irresponsible articles. Science has no mechanism for alerting us when, as in the Wistar case, a widely reported piece of science turns out to be wrong. The mainstream science journals, which arguably ought to be leading the way, are little more than house organs. The principal American journal, *Science*, is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a lobbying organization to which most scientists belong and which makes its money from charging them to attend the meetings and symposia it puts on. The only publication that covers science critically is the *New Scientist*, a British magazine that is not much read in this country.

The failing of American journalism is about more than failing to have kept science honest. It's about failing to have become as sophisticated about what goes on inside the technoplex as about finance or politics or world affairs. Ultimately, the technoplex isn't about science anyway. It's about vital questions of public policy, about how enormous sums of public money are spent, about how lives are saved and lost and how those lives are lived. The technoplex is too important to be left to reporters who like science, reporters who are more interested in why volcanoes explode and how bumblebees mate. Would you make Tom Clancy your Pentagon correspondent? ■

The Press's Portrayal of Mental Illness

*Public Misconceptions Find Their Way Into the Media
— A Primer on Needs and Treatment*

BY SUSAN G. LAZAR,
GLEN O. GABBARD AND
ELIZABETH K. HERSH

In the days following Vincent Foster's suicide, reporters were filled with self-reproach. They wondered if they had been too harsh with him and had indirectly helped create a cruel political climate that caused the suicide of a dedicated, talented and sensitive man. This question was debated in endless articles, editorials and TV news pro-

grams. The press was relieved when hints of Foster's depression and personality quirks emerged.

They should not, however, feel sanguine because in the early days and weeks following Foster's death reporters missed an important opportunity to educate the public about the perils and prevalence of mental illness. In fact, the

public's low level of awareness of mental illness was mirrored in the reporters who, with only a few exceptions (such as Alison Bass of The Boston Globe), did not consider the presence of depression. More importantly, in their treatment of mental illness as a dirty secret, they subtly contributed to the sense of shame and stigma that makes it



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so difficult for a man of Foster's prestige and position to request psychiatric care.

A review of articles in *The New York Times* during the two months following Foster's death tells much about the attitudes of the press. In the initial reports written by seasoned journalists, shock, confusion and dismay abound. Colleagues, friends and experts were questioned. However, psychiatrists, who every day evaluate the suicide potential of their patients, were notably absent from the list of experts interviewed. Indeed, in the early weeks the question of mental health was not even seriously considered. The words depression, despondency and brooding appeared fleetingly, and then only to be denied.

Depression began to be seriously considered in *The New York Times* more than a week after Foster's death. Journalists behaved like heartbroken family members for whom the awareness of mental illness stirs guilt, denial and anxiety. In the end, however, readers were denied the chance to appreciate that the recognition of mental illness affords protection and the opportunity for treatment.

Furthermore, serious errors of treatment were reported without reflection. For example, it was repeatedly mentioned in front page news stories that antidepressant medication was prescribed long distance for Foster by a family doctor from Little Rock. Perhaps if journalists had not been paralyzed by their fear of mental illness, their innate curiosity would have stirred them to ask whether this was standard procedure. This question was addressed in *The New York Times* only two and a half weeks later in a letter to the editor in which a psychiatrist discussed this "dangerous but common practice." That it is indeed dangerous to treat someone suffering from depression without evaluating their suicide potential is obvious in the present context. It may also be dangerous to allow the reading public to believe that nothing more is gained from psychiatric consultation than a prescription. A therapeutic relationship often provides a lifeline to despondent people during the weeks or even months that it can take before antidepressant medication becomes effective.

Depression was finally discussed in depth in a front-page *New York Times* article fully three weeks after Foster's death following the revelation of his anguished notes, an op-ed piece on depression and an editorial detailing that eight out of ten suicides are driven by depression. It had taken three weeks

Misconceptions about mental illness and its treatment are sustained by widespread myths and prejudice, some of which find their way into the media.

to move the inquiry out of a cloud of ignorance and denial. Immediately thereafter, the story virtually disappeared except for a few letters to the editor, a well-buried but excellent piece on suicide, and an inquiry into Foster's state of mind.

The *New York Times* was not atypical. In one of the most thoughtful newspaper pieces on the subject, Tom Rosenstiel of *The Los Angeles Times* did a database search of the more than 100 articles written in the two weeks following Foster's suicide and found only 12 articles in newspapers and magazines that mentioned mental illness.

Both historically and more recently in the context of debate about national health care reform, the nature and magnitude of the nation's mental health needs have been grossly misunderstood by the general public. Misconceptions about mental illness and its treatment are sustained by widespread myths and prejudice, some of which find their way into the media. Drawing from a growing body of clinical and epidemiological studies, we offer a more factual picture of mental illness and its gross undertreatment, despite the efficacy and cost effectiveness of care.

45 Million Suffer Mental Illness Yearly

In an elegant 1993 epidemiological study, Darrel Regier from the Division of Epidemiology and Services Research and other colleagues at the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) in Bethesda, Maryland, determined that approximately 45 million adults in the United States suffer from a diagnosable psychiatric disorder each year.

In a given year, one in five adult Americans, or 35.1 million, have a mental disorder other than substance abuse. Ten percent of American adults abuse alcohol or drugs and one-third of these substance abusing patients also suffer from another mental disorder. Of the mental disorders, anxiety disorders, (such as phobias and panic disorders) are the most common, affecting 12.6 percent of the adult population. Depression affects 5 percent. Schizophrenia, probably the most severe form of mental illness, affects 1.1 percent, or 2 million people.

The effects of trauma in our society take a serious toll and have been found to lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociative disorders and borderline personality disorder. The statistics are sobering. Nearly one-third of all Vietnam veterans suffer from PTSD at some point. These veterans have at least twice as much divorce, homelessness and alcohol and drug abuse as those without PTSD. They have horrifyingly high rates of violent crime and almost half are arrested or in jail at least once. They are also five times as likely to be unemployed and over three times as likely to have multiple chronic health problems as veterans without PTSD.

Almost 40 percent of inner-city residents experience severe trauma in some form and nearly a quarter of those traumatized ultimately develop PTSD. One third of American females experience some form of sexual abuse such as incest, date rape or molestation by strangers. A history of childhood abuse is found in over half of prostitutes and male sexual offenders. Childhood trauma has also been found to be a significant factor in the development of both dissociative disorders and border-

line personality disorder which affect 5 percent and 3 percent of the population, respectively.

Children and adolescents also suffer from mood disorders. Three percent to 6 percent of the adolescent population have recurrent and severe mood disorders, and suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescent males. Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are also increasing in children and adolescents. Anorexia nervosa patients have a mortality rate between 5 and 20 percent. In addition, 9 percent of all children and adolescents have anxiety disorder.

The cost of mental illness and substance abuse is staggering. A study done at the University of California at San Francisco estimated that the cost of mental illness is \$273 billion per year. Based on projections of 1985 data into 1988, this figure includes \$129.3 billion for mental disorders, \$85.8 billion for alcohol abuse and \$ 58.3 billion for drug abuse. The costs include treatment, reduced productivity, mortality and law enforcement expenditures on crime. Because these data were gathered before the beginning of the crack epidemic, they are undoubtedly gross underestimations.

Treatment Needs In and Out of Hospitals

While much more of the psychiatric treatment of the most severe psychiatric illness was once based primarily in inpatient settings, the de-institutionalization movement in the 1950's and 1960's began emptying state mental hospitals and transferring treatment responsibility to community mental health centers. Nowadays, services range from inpatient units, partial hospital settings (such as day hospitals and half-way houses) to outpatient care.

Patients who require hospitalization include those who present a danger to themselves or others or who have serious symptoms that impair their functioning and are unresponsive to outpatient care. Alcohol and drug-abusing patients need inpatient care when they suffer life-threatening withdrawal syn-

dromes. Most substance abuse patients can be treated in intensive outpatient programs.

When hospitalized patients are stabilized in an inpatient setting, generally after a few days to a few weeks, they can be moved to partial hospital settings where treatment can be provided much more cost-effectively. A small subgroup of hospitalized patients, who are extremely suicidal and refractory to treatment, or who are unremittingly psychotic and impulsive, require more extended hospital stays.

Patients suffering from schizophrenia often require repeated hospitalizations during relapses. These patients also require regular outpatient appointments with a psychiatrist for medication management, as antipsychotic drugs are crucial in the prevention of relapse. Many of these patients also do much better if they receive ongoing psychotherapy.

Depressed patients have greater limitations of functioning than patients with arthritis, diabetes, hypertension and heart and lung disease. Indeed, they utilize general medical care three times more often than non-depressed patients. Sixty percent of patients with major depression have recurrences. These patients have a significant frequency of suicide attempts. Hospitalization is required when suicide is a significant risk. Both medication and psychotherapy are effective treatments, but for different symptoms of the illness. Medications work on the appetite, sleep and mood disturbances while psychotherapy helps with the interpersonal, social and work problems.

The decision to use medication vs. psychotherapy or a combination of both involves a clinical judgment. For example, since depression is more common in women, with the highest incidence during the childbearing years, and many antidepressants carry a risk to a fetus or nursing infant, psychotherapy is very important for pregnant or postpartum patients. There are also patients who cannot take medication due to medical conditions and many patients who simply do not respond to medication. Research demonstrates that psychotherapy alone can prevent recur-

rence of major depression for up to 82 weeks which is enough to carry a women through a period of pregnancy and nursing.

Borderline personality disorder is the most common of severe personality disorders. Many of these patients were abused as children. These patients often have suicidal depression, substance abuse, intense anxiety, chaotic personal relationships and difficulty maintaining consistent work. They may also have brief psychotic episodes. Controlled clinical trials have demonstrated that patients who receive at least one year, but preferably two and a half years, of intensive psychotherapy fare substantially better than patients who receive only the limited care proposed in the Clinton Administration's health plan.

Patients with borderline personality disorder have a 9 percent suicide rate. When they are treated with only 20 outpatient psychotherapy visits a year, they remain very disturbed, often suicidal, have difficulties functioning at work and make much more use of emergency room, medical and surgical care

72 percent of the persons suffering from substance abuse or psychiatric disorders receive no treatment for their illness.

and two and a half times as much inpatient psychiatric care as patients treated intensively and continuously in outpatient psychotherapy. Furthermore those patients who do receive at least two and a half years of intensive outpatient psychotherapy reach a much higher level of functioning, are in a better mood and are much less suicidal. They may continue to need psychotherapy intermittently even after the two and a half years.

Patients with PTSD or a history of severe trauma and abuse suffer from anxiety, depression, persistent night-

mares and terrifying flashbacks. They also have emotional numbing and alienation symptoms that only respond to outpatient psychotherapy which often needs to continue from six months to two and a half years. Studies have shown that the need for psychiatric hospitalization only declines after intensive outpatient care. Medical and surgical expenses for physical symptoms related to emotional distress also

Health maintenance organizations, which are the cornerstone of the Clinton plan, have historically limited psychiatric services and have not been "user friendly" to the poor and to those with severe mental illness.

decline only after an intensive course of psychotherapy. Medication has not been particularly effective for many of these patients.

Many emotionally ill children and adolescents need extended psychotherapy. Antidepressants are not effective in depressed adolescent males, making the availability of psychotherapy crucial. Intensive psychotherapy also leads to a fivefold decrease in mortality of anorexia nervosa patients. Without ongoing outpatient treatment, these patients require repeated and costly medical hospitalizations for tube feedings and for the physical sequelae of the illness. Medical care alone is not successful in reversing the illness, which then becomes chronic and entrenched. Anxiety disorders also require psychotherapy with psychotropic medication as an adjunct.

A comprehensive account of the mental health needs of the public must include psychiatric services for the medically ill in addition to those suffering from "pure" psychiatric disorders. De-

pression is three times as common among medical inpatients and twice as common among medical outpatients compared to the general population. Psychotherapy reduces anxiety and depression in medical patients and reduces pain by as much as 50 percent. In addition, a recent study demonstrated that depressed patients recovering from a myocardial infarction have a fivefold higher mortality rate compared to those without depression. An innovative program of diet, exercise, and a year of group psychotherapy has been demonstrated to reverse coronary artery disease more effectively and at a much lower cost than angioplasty (which costs \$10,000) or coronary artery bypass surgery (which costs \$40,000).

Half of all cancer patients have a psychiatric diagnosis, and psychiatric intervention with such patients may produce remarkable results. In one study of metastatic breast cancer patients, once a week group psychotherapy for a year actually doubles the long-term survival as compared to those patients who did not receive group therapy. Malignant melanoma patients who received group psychotherapy also had longer survival than those who did not.

Lack of Access To Treatment Alarming

One of the most alarming findings of the NIMH study by Regier and his colleagues was that 72 percent of the persons suffering from substance abuse or psychiatric disorders receive no treatment for their illnesses. Of the remaining 28 percent, only about 40 percent see a professional trained to deal with mental health problems, such as a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, or a psychiatric social worker. Forty-three percent take their problems to nonpsychiatric physicians, and another 15 percent join self-help groups or simply seek out advice from family members or friends.

Besides the tragedy of unnecessary human misery and suffering, another unfortunate result of untreated mental illness is higher medical costs. Patients

with untreated mental illness use medical and surgical resources, diagnostic studies, emergency rooms and office visits at higher rates than those without mental illness. Many persons with gastrointestinal problems or recurring headaches have underlying psychiatric symptoms that a nonpsychiatric physician may not detect. For example, in women with functional bowel disorders there is a 44 percent prevalence of a history of sexual or physical abuse. Over four-fifths of these patients have never confided this history to their physicians. A host of studies document that access to appropriate mental health treatment substantially reduces overall medical costs.

The fact that most insurance policies cover mental illness poorly is an important reason that the majority of mentally ill Americans remain untreated. Only 2 percent of insurance policies provide outpatient psychiatric coverage at the same level as outpatient medical services, and only 20 percent cover inpatient psychiatric services to the same degree as inpatient medical care. Much of this disparity is related to ongoing prejudices against the mentally ill that exist in our society. In a 1989 survey by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 58 percent of those surveyed believed that mental illness may be caused by lack of discipline.

Many benefits managers, insurance industry executives and nonpsychiatric physicians do not believe that psychiatric treatment is effective. This major misconception is an important source of inadequate insurance coverage. It is also not supported by the facts. A 1993 report by the National Advisory Mental Health Council in the National Institutes of Mental Health documents that the success rates for treatments of major psychiatric disorders are equal or superior to those for major medical illnesses.

Finally, one other reason for limited accessibility may be the method of mental health care delivery. While the Clinton Administration's health care reform plan has the laudable goal of universal coverage, experience has shown that universal coverage does not mean universal access. Health maintenance organiza-

tions, which are the cornerstone of the Clinton plan, have historically limited psychiatric services and have not been "user friendly" to the poor and to those with severe mental illness. A Rand Cor-

poration study demonstrated that the poorest and sickest depressed patients do much worse in prepaid health care plans such as health maintenance organizations compared to fee-for-service plans. In prepaid plans, they do not receive adequate care and actually become more impaired over time. Primary care physicians, who often function as "gatekeepers" to psychiatric services, frequently fail to diagnose and often underrefer and undertreat depression.

...even the Clinton plan limits the number of psychotherapy sessions for most patients to 30 per year and insists on 50 percent co-payment. To some extent, these limitations are due to a myth that psychotherapy is only used by the "worried well" and is a luxury that we cannot afford.

ally based mental illness should be treated by psychotherapy and biologically based mental illness should be treated with drugs. Such distinctions no longer hold up. In a recent study,

obsessive-compulsive patients successfully treated by either psychotherapy or medication showed the same improvements on a special kind of brain scan.

Psychotherapy Cuts Costs Dramatically

There is also a strong economic argument for providing generous outpatient benefits for psychotherapy coverage. A meta-analysis of 58 controlled studies demonstrated that psychotherapy resulted in a 10 to 33 percent decrease in utilization of medical services, with an average reduction of 1.5 days of inpatient care. In a study of patients with multiple physical symptoms, psychiatric consultation resulted in a 53 percent decline in health care charges. A compelling recent study of CHAMPUS, the insurance program for military dependents and retirees, demonstrates that the provision of readily accessible outpatient psychotherapy as medically indicated without artificial limits realizes dramatic cost savings in psychiatric inpatient costs. For every extra dollar spent in the expansion of outpatient psychotherapy, four dollars are saved in inpatient costs.

Despite these impressive cost-offset studies, coverage for outpatient psychotherapy remains limited in the vast majority of policies. Indeed, even the Clinton plan limits the number of psychotherapy sessions for most patients

to 30 per year and insists on 50 percent co-payment. To some extent, these limitations are due to a myth that psychotherapy is only used by the "worried well" and is a luxury that we cannot afford. The fear of overutilization is not supported by studies designed to investigate that concern. In a Rand Corporation study published in 1986, only 4 percent of an insured population given generous psychotherapy coverage actually utilized the services. Of those patients who received psychotherapy, the average length of the treatment was 11 sessions.

Despite widespread skepticism about the efficacy of psychotherapy, many studies have shown that the average patient treated with psychotherapy is better off than 80 percent of untreated patients. The efficacy of psychotherapy is comparable to that of psychiatric medications. Some of the illnesses that the Domenici plan would deliberately exclude as not "biologically based" are nonetheless very costly conditions. Borderline personality disorder can only be effectively treated by consistent psychotherapy over a period of 1 to 2 years. If psychotherapy is interrupted because of arbitrary insurance limits of 20 or 30 sessions per year, these patients will show up at emergency rooms with an overdose on medication and will end up in intensive care units, or require inpatient treatment, all of which are much more costly than psychotherapy. There are similar cost offsets from extended psychotherapy for a number of other diagnostic groups.

Some Reporters Singled Out for Praise

The coverage in *The New York Times* of Vincent Foster's suicide serves as a microcosm of the way many reporters deal with mental illness. However, a few reports in the nation's major newspapers and periodicals have clearly shown an impressive grasp of the complexities of psychiatric needs and the shortcomings in the delivery of mental health services.

Perhaps most notable among these reports are those by Alison Bass of *The Boston Globe*. In two articles on April 6

The age-old mind-body problem has created controversy within the field of psychiatry and thus has confused the general public. The mental health professions are divided in their attitudes toward proposals that would limit coverage to "severe" mental illness only, i.e., those thought to be brain-based or "biological" in origin. Senator Pete Domenici has introduced such a bill that has drawn support from some mental health groups, but opposition from others. The division of disorders into "biological" or "psychological" illnesses is, however, increasingly scientifically untenable. Most mental illnesses are caused by a confluence of biological and psychological factors. For example, studies of major depression show that genetics play a substantial but not overwhelming role in the development of this illness. Recent stressful events are in fact the most important trigger.

It was once thought that psychologi-

and on April 28, 1993, she delineated the serious effects on patients who cannot obtain adequate benefits. In the second article, Ms. Bass outlined the case of a victim of childhood sexual abuse who developed anorexia nervosa but was denied the longterm psychotherapy she needed. Ms. Bass went on to critique the common policy of most HMOs, which is to refuse to provide extended psychotherapy under any circumstances. She reported, "However, a growing body of research indicates that effective outpatient psychotherapy saves money by cutting down on costly hospitalizations and overuse of medical services, including, for example, doctor's visits for psychosomatic complaints. One large-scale study, for example, found that veterans with psychiatric problems who obtained psychotherapy were far less likely to use subsequent medical services than similarly troubled veterans who did not receive therapy."

Two Boston Globe editorials underscored Bass's presentation, and on March 17, 1993 one editorial said, "The mental health system appears weakest during pre-and post-hospitalization care and in outpatient service." On May 3, 1993 another Boston Globe editorial stated, "The folly of such limited coverage is obvious. For many patients the cutoff in treatment leads to worse psychological states and even physical problems requiring costly hospitalization."

Shari Roan in a September 30, 1993 Los Angeles Times report documented the reception by mental health advocates of the limited mental health benefits in the Administration's health care package. She presented the history of stigma and neglect of mental health needs and detailed how the benefits will care for different groups of psychiatric patients. She also noted that "Some consumers also fear that limits on outpatient services will leave them with inadequate care."

Other well-informed reporters include Sandra Boodman of The Washington Post who wrote a cover story for that newspaper's weekly health section on August 3, 1993 titled "The White House is Banking on HMOs as a Way to Reform Health Care—But Many HMOs Today Skimp on Mental Health Ben-

efits." This article reviewed Rand Corporation data as well as other psychotherapy research to criticize the inadequate mental health care of most

One widespread problem is the adoption of a sarcastic, trivializing or demeaning tone about mental health needs.

HMOs. A similarly sophisticated and wide-ranging piece appeared on May 24, 1993 in U.S. News & World Reports titled "Does Psychotherapy Work?" by Erica E. Goode and Betsy Wagner. Robert Pear of The New York Times has also reported knowledgeably in a series of articles on the range of mental health services needed and the supportive research findings, most notably on June 10, 1993. And, on July 4, 1993, The Washington Post published an insightful article by Dana Priest in which she discussed the expected limitation of mental health benefits in the Administration package, despite the documented success of several programs in containing and even saving costs while providing generous psychiatric services.

The plight of the homeless mentally ill who are given little or no services and who often end up in jail was documented by Ronald Taylor of The Los Angeles Times on September 10, 1992 and in The New York Times by Philip J. Hilt on September 10, 1992. Carole Feldman, also of The Los Angeles Times, wrote a July 4, 1993 piece documenting the serious difficulties other patients face with limited mental health services.

Unfortunately there are other times the media miss the mark. One widespread problem is the adoption of a sarcastic, trivializing or demeaning tone about mental health needs. One such example is a reference to mental health benefits that appeared in a Newsweek summary of the Administration plan: "Healthy Generation Xers will pick up

the tab for Prozac-popping boomers" (October 4, 1993). In the same issue, Eleanor Clift contributed an article entitled "The Gender Wars," which described the argument within the Administration about the extent of mental health benefits as a fight between "the girls' team" and "the boys' team." Clift concluded, "But on Capitol Hill, the boys are still in charge."

Another problem is a lack of depth and sophistication in reporting mental health issues such as a September 18, 1992 story by Judy Mann of The Washington Post. While this is a compelling account of a psychotic illness and its treatment needs, it also described schizophrenia as "a brain disease" and listed various physical and genetic causes, completely leaving aside the important emotional symptoms of the illness and contributing to a growing and inaccurate impression that psychoses are solely physical illnesses which need only physical treatments. This one-sided conclusion would then leave out the psychosocial treatments that have proven to enhance recovery in schizophrenic patients.

Perhaps the worst and most damaging coverage about mental health flows from the attitudes that mental health needs are neither serious nor important and that psychiatric care represents a middle or upper class self-indulgence. Such sentiments have been aired in Time magazine which called mental health care "another expensive subsidy for the middle class" on September 20, 1993 and in The New Republic which on April 26, 1993 said, "Hillary Clinton is...insisting that treatment for mental illness be guaranteed all Americans. This would create an endless stream of largely ineffectual spending unless 'mental illness' were defined with an austerity she seems unlikely to muster." Prejudiced and inaccurate statements such as these in the media destroy public support for care of the mentally ill, the most unrecognized, underserved and politically vulnerable group of American patients.

View From the Nurses' Station

Too Little Attention Is Paid to Care of Patients Compared With Medical Treatment

BY BERNICE BURESH

Last summer, when surgeons at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia decided to separate the Lakeberg "Siamese" twins, the event comprised the elements of a medical super bowl. Described as "surgical wizardry" by The New York Times, the operation by world-class doctors included the win-lose risks of all great cootests—only one conjoined twin, if lucky, would survive because there weren't the two hearts needed to support both lives.

Reporters covered the medical drama by rounding up experts for both pre- and post-event handicapping. Those who argued for no intervention were quickly superseded by surgeons who could give scalpel-by-scalpel details of the five-and-a-half-hour operation. Controversy also shaped the post-event analysis. Journalists sought out medical ethicists who questioned both the priorities of the game plan and its costs, especially at a time when the inequities of the medical system are being widely debated.

Of course family players were part of the event. Attention shifted from the mother, Reitha Lakeberg, who had pressed for a high-tech solution to the tragedy, to the father, Kenneth, who had gotten into trouble with the law. Follow-up articles reported the condition of Angela Lakeberg, who survived. Then the story passed from the scene, ready to be replayed in the event of the infant's death.

When a story with all the right dramatic elements comes along, no journalist even has to think twice about how to cover it. But suppose we do think

twice about this one, and decide to enlarge its frame from medical spectacle to real-life health care. The content, the types of news sources and the time period immediately expand.

In this health-care version, the reader and viewer are taken not only to the operating theater, but also to the pediatric intensive care unit, where Angela is cared for around the clock by critical-care nurses in the cardiothoracic wing. There, and in talks with nursing ethicists, the emphasis subtly shifts from prognosis about the duration of Angela's life, to the quality of her remaining life. The nursing sources explore what kind of disabilities the infant has and will continue to have if she survives, and the type, quantity and cost of the ongoing care that she will need, not just the price tag on the surgery. Some nursing ethicists also pointedly question whether the operation conferred greater benefits on the learning curve of surgeons than to the well-being of the patient. Nurses and social workers raise questions about what was done to support the Lakeberg family through this horror and their attempts to arrive at decisions at every stage. Expanding the frame on the story this way makes *care*, as well as *treatment*, visible. Not at all coincidentally, the roster of experts in this version now includes many women, instead of mostly men. The story is also more textured, real and continuing. In its more limited medical frame, the focus is on cleaving the twins, a frame shaped by the familiar and thrilling "fix-it," or "find-the-magic-bullet," motif. Now, with care being brought into balance with "cure," the story is more ongoing, and a lot more reflective of the



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real issues in health care.

As this story illustrates, journalists generally bring a bias to reporting of health care. They see medicine as synonymous with health-care. This bias is quite understandable in its origins. It is not just the marvels of modern medicine that have permitted physicians, who make up 10 percent of the health-care work force, to so thoroughly dominate health care discourse in the media. The depiction of doctors as the proprietors of the healing arts has depended just as much upon organized medicine's tough and uncompromising political campaign for dominance waged throughout most of this century.

The consequences, however, of journalists' refracting almost all health-care issues through the prism of medicine undermines the accuracy, balance and fairness of reporting on health care, and it limits the views, and ultimately the health-care choices, of readers and viewers. Now, while the whole economic and social contract regarding health care is under scrutiny, it is time for journalists to reform their attitudes and practices in reporting on this subject.

One way to start is to subject the Clinton health security plan, as well as rival plans, to analysis of how they will affect the entire scope of health care, not solely medical care. This means more reporting on the quantity and quality of care we can expect from the nation's largest health-care profession, which is, of course, *nursing*, not medicine. It also means more information on how reforms will affect the working conditions and livelihood of the 2.1 million registered nurses in this country, not only the nation's 600,000 physicians.

A fresh look means revealing one of the best-kept secrets of our time—the content of contemporary nursing. The research that my colleague, Suzanne Gordon, and I have done indicates that few journalists understand the critical role that nurses play in health care, nor are they aware of the advances in nursing practice, education and research within the last 20 years.

Nurses are not the handmaidens of physicians. Nursing is a profession dis-

tinct from medicine. Patricia Benner, Professor of Physiological Nursing at the University of California at San Francisco, who has articulated the skill and knowledge embedded in caregiving, puts it this way: "Physicians focus on disease—the manifestation of aberration at the cellular, tissue, or organ level—while nurses focus on illness—the human experience of loss or dys-

By the very nature of nursing, nurses spend far more time with patients than physicians do. However, the complex, multidimensional care they deliver to patients and to patients' families is rarely included as part of the reporting on health-care issues.

function."

By the very nature of nursing, nurses spend far more time with patients than physicians do. However, the complex, multidimensional care they deliver to patients and to patients' families is rarely included as part of the reporting on health-care issues.

For example, one of the tragedies of our time is that medicine has so little to offer people with AIDS. However, in the hospital, the clinic and at home, the work of AIDS nurses has a direct bearing on the longevity and level of health of patients. Advances brought by nursing research and technological development permit nurses to administer sophisticated therapies both inside and outside of the hospital, as well as to monitor for side effects and to help patients fight opportunistic infections.

Moreover nurses educate patients and their loved ones about the illness, medications, treatment programs, and

how to cope with the illness. They also help patients to deal with death and dying.

Despite nurses' central role in keeping people with AIDS alive and functioning, and despite the many nursing specialists in universities and other institutions working on primary care, infection control, community-based services for children with AIDS, and the efficacy of nursing care, to name just a few aspects, nurses are not among those routinely quoted as expert sources in AIDS coverage. We have seen occasional feature stories on AIDS nursing, but nursing specialists are not integrated into the day-to-day reporting on the biggest disease issue of our time.

If readers and viewers were to see health care depicted as more of a collaboration of cure and care, they might be in a better position to make choices about their own health-care needs. For example, people today live longer than ever before with complex problems for which there are no cures. But there have been remarkable advances in care. One of the most pressing questions of our time is how care—not just medical treatment—will be organized and provided.

Ever since the advent of the Diagnostic Related Groups a decade ago, financial pressure has been on medical institutions to shorten hospital stays, which in reality means curtailing the length of nursing care. Since most health-care journalists concentrate on medical treatment, this part of the story gets missed. Patients are being discharged "quicker and sicker," often without nursing provisions and with nursing needs beyond the ability of family caregivers to provide.

No wonder some see Dr. Jack Kevorkian as a savior. Although nursing researchers and clinical practitioners have made great advances in promoting healing, and providing comfort and pain management, for those living with cancer, Alzheimer's disease, AIDS and other chronic or terminal illnesses, these care developments don't often make the news. To learn about them, one has to speak systematically with nursing sources, not just medical sources, and read nursing journals, not just medical

publications.

Instead of journalists seriously exploring nursing and caregiving, we see too many instances of even our most respected reporters and news organizations obliterating or misconstruing nursing in the news through their own misconceptions about what goes on in health care.

A stunning example appeared in a health section story in *The Washington Post* two years ago on the revolutionary changes in how children's experiences of pain are understood and treated. "The revolution had an unlikely catalyst," the reporter wrote, and then described the path-breaking research by "a nurse at the University of Iowa Hospital," without ever naming her. The article did name and quote pediatricians and other specialists, however, and refer repeatedly to "doctors" researching, understanding, and treating pain.

The reporter clearly did not know that a nurse was a highly likely, rather than an unlikely, source of research and planning for children in pain. Nurses have been in the vanguard of developing scales to measure and assess pain, and to reduce pain through both drug and non-drug interventions. They are very involved in a current health-care concern—the routine *under-medication* of post-surgical patients, and the possible effect of pain delaying recovery.

In another example, reporters for *The New York Times*, in a four-part series on caring for the elderly, failed to quote a single nurse, and then construed nursing homes as places where one might expect "medical attention." People usually go to nursing homes, of course, because they have *nursing* needs.

Even the smartest people can get confused about what to expect from nurses. On national television we see Bill Moyers, in his highly regarded series, "Healing and the Mind," observing nurses at work in a special care nursery in Dallas's Parkland Hospital, and then, clearly impressed with their skill, exclaiming: "You're *more* than nurses, you're *more* than technicians." When the nurses try to explain to him what

they do, Moyers once again refuses to see the work as *nursing*. "That's what medicine's about today," he concludes.

For the last two decades, the canonical belief has been that when more women become journalists, more women will appear in the news. There is some indication that women journalists might more readily than men journalists interview women *physicians*. But in our research, with rare exceptions, we have not found that women journalists are more open to covering nursing—a profession that is 97 percent female—than men journalists. Women journalists, although more sensitive to issues that affect women, tend to define expertise in the same way that men journalists do.

This may help explain why the 1993 edition of the *Women, Men and Media* study at the University of Southern California and New York University still shows a vast disparity between the representation of men and women in the news. A study of the front pages of 20 newspapers indicates that 85 percent of the persons referred to or solicited for comment were men. The group's survey of national network news programs shows that 75 percent of the persons interviewed were men.

A reason for this lopsidedness is that journalists are defining women—particularly in health care, education, and social work, where they are the majority—out of the news by failing to treat their work as though it mattered. The way for women to get into the news is to be as closely identified with those positions and activities that journalists have already decided are newsworthy.

Indeed, the one way that nurses have been let into the news lately is as providers of the primary and preventive care that is so lacking in this country. The overspecialization of medicine in the United States is calling attention to the 25,000 to 30,000 nurse practitioners (as well as other advanced-practice nurses such as certified nurse-midwives and certified registered nurse anesthetists) who have all along been meeting health-care needs in those inner city and rural areas under served by physicians. A number of studies show that nurse practitioners can safely deliver

up to 90 percent of primary care needed by children, and 80 percent required by adults, and do it with equal or better quality than physicians and at less cost.

In some ways, nurse practitioners are closest on the health-care continuum to medicine. For the most part, the media discussion of the role of nurse practitioners under health reform deals with the degree to which these nurses mimic physicians, rather than with the approaches they might, because of their education and training, bring to primary and preventive care. Coverage of these nurses also does not reveal much about the vast majority of nurses whose work may differ significantly from that of physicians.

To be sure, nursing has not promoted itself adequately. While all the journalists I know complain about the slick packaging and spin doctoring that goes on, particularly within health care these days, those who do not compete adequately on the public relations front stand little chance of being discovered by intrepid reporters. And nursing has another problem. It is usually ignored or even undermined by the public relations staffs of medical centers and universities, who regard their own jobs as promoting medicine and medical schools, rather than nursing and nursing schools to the news media.

As a case in point, although nursing is crucial to the survival of the Lakeberg infant, there are no references to nurses or nursing in the news releases sent to me by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

In an attempt to redress this imbalance, the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication, Inc. gave our group a small grant to put out an interdisciplinary directory of nursing experts for health-care reporters. Since the advent of the current women's movement nearly 25 years ago, this kind of Rolodex project has proved to be a useful tool to women's groups trying to get a voice in the public discussion.

But as we all know, journalists can find sources when they are motivated to do so. What is required now is a willingness to cover the activities, advances, politics and even failures of a profession central to health care. ■

Violence—Biggest Health Problem

BY MARGARET DICANIO

The American media shares with adults in the United States a responsibility for ignoring the soaring toll of violence in the nation. Violence, a global public health problem, has been left to criminal justice systems to struggle with virtually alone.

In its special responsibility to support America's democratic way of life, media coverage of violence has been negligent. As fear of violence narrowed the scope of citizens' daily activities, the media failed to sound an alarm. Broken glass, dirty streets, burglar bars on windows, burglar alarms in homes and cars, and downtowns deserted after dark signaled the erosion of everyday freedoms. Yet like a happy frog in a pan of warming water, content to sit until it is cooked, the media too often treated violence as just another commonplace item to fill up column space or air time—not a problem to be debated and solved.

The media has ignored the threat violence makes to democracy in three ways: hackneyed daily coverage of crime; failure to dig beneath the surface in order to interpret events; and omission of stories that needed to be told.

Banal daily treatment of violence is evident in print headlines and in leads to broadcast news that treat vio-

lence like any other story. "The Dow Jones Average Rose Two Points. Father Bludgeons Family and Kills Self. The Sox Win in the Bottom of the Ninth." Limitations of time and space have been permitted to trivialize violence and make it appear normal.

Normalization of violence by both the media and the entertainment industry makes it an option to solve a problem. Where once a disagreement between family members, friends, or neighbors might end in a yelling match or, at worst, in a fist fight, now it ends with a permanent solution—one contestant dead, the other in prison. Daily box scores on victims and novel killing methods used move news ever closer to violent entertainment.

Media coverage of violence in the suburbs and in rural areas creates class divisions by ignoring the level of violence outside inner cities made evident by rape and domestic violence data. Typical stories imply that violence in such communities is a surprise. The community will "never be the same," and the violent person, after a lifetime of virtue, suddenly ran amok. Even a little digging is likely to find that the person, usually male since the majority of violence is committed by males, has

worked his way up through lesser commissions to the final big scene.

Under the guise of objectivity, coverage of the controversy about violence on TV and in movies and videos has been bland. Although numerous studies have confirmed a strong relationship between violence on the screen and subsequent behavior, the entertainment industry regularly emerges unscathed from encounters with those concerned with the fate of children.

Anyone who has ever been around children or young adults has seen them imitate behavior. Recent horror stories about imitation concern several youngsters who were injured or killed while lying down in busy highways, emulating a scene in the Touchstone movie "The Program." One 17-year-old survived being hit by a car, but according to his doctor, the accident "almost separated the upper half of his body from the lower trunk."

While media objectivity may mean presenting both sides, it should not mean giving both sides equal weight, when they are not equally weighted. The tired notion that curbing violence amounts to censorship ignores censorship that is already in place. Life is a constant selection process: to sleep or wake; to walk or drive; to marry or stay single; to have a cheeseburger or a salad. Editors, journalists, and producers now censor nonviolent fare because they contend that the public has an appetite for violence.

Violence imposes its own kind of censorship by curbing daily decisions. The householder stops walking the dog after dark. The woman college student never uses the library stacks when she is alone. The inner city parent does not let his or her child out to play. The tourist changes an intended destination or stays home. Using the specter of censorship to cut off criticism of violence as entertainment has resulted in a cumulative, national loss of freedom.



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When children have a greater chance of dying from a drive-by shooting than from plaque in their arteries, parents might as well let their kids eat greasy junk food—maybe even stay home from school. The nation's appetite for violence, like its appetite for fat, needs to be curbed to preserve the lives of its children and its future.

Failure to Interpret

Interpretive stories about violence are scarce. The daily look-alike headlines and look-alike stories have helped to perpetuate a sense of futility and doom. Progress toward a solution for the escalating epidemic is stalled by a notion that violence is inevitable, a notion that the media have seldom questioned. As long as a phenomenon is considered inevitable, not much progress can be made toward a solution.

Yet solutions have been found for other seemingly inevitable threats to human life. During the mid-19th Century, epidemics periodically killed thousands. But scientist John Snow, the father of epidemiology, didn't accept cholera as preordained. He suspected a connection with water. To confirm his suspicion, Snow collected information about the residence or workplace of identified cases within a high-incidence area of London. He plotted the data on a map and interviewed households where cholera had struck. He linked cases with a particular water pump.

Although the germ theory had not yet been confirmed, Snow's work revealed that the problem was not a fate that simply had to be endured. More importantly, he established that a phenomenon does not have to be fully understood to make effective behavioral changes.

Some observers believe that knowledge about violence has not moved much beyond the level of biological knowledge in Snow's era. That's an oversimplification. Knowledge about violence exists, but it is scattered in small studies that are not coordinated with one another into any kind of overarching theory. To create that kind of coordination, the nation needs a National Institute of Violence Research,

comparable to those for cancer, mental illness, circulatory disorders and other threats to life. The only national body charged with violence research is a little-known division of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Perhaps it is unfair to blame the media for a failure to notice the absence of a concentrated research effort into the nature of violence and its prevention when social scientists and politicians were not clamoring for attention to the issue. However, the media does deserve blame for their actions when CDC tried to mount a study into the biological basis of violence. Without looking any deeper, the media beat a drum about the possibility that the study might focus on minorities, thereby effectively killing the project.

Even a little introspection would have suggested that there was another side to the issue. While there are few adequate explanations for violence, there is no question that some violence is rooted in biology.

Anyone who has ever been close to a person subject to mood swings or who has ever been hung over can't help but recognize that body chemistry plays a role in behavior. The media's focus on the possibility that biological factors related to violence would be found only in minority communities ignored what is happening in suburbs and rural areas and ignored the history of white minorities in the United States.

Untold and Barely Told

Untold stories abound. Despite a lack of understanding about the root causes of violence, a great deal is known about the conditions that encourage it to flourish. Small underfunded programs to ameliorate such conditions struggle to survive all over the United States. A few hours spent at the library with "The Encyclopedia of Associations" reveal hundreds of them, but stories about them are scarce. It is easier to write another standard story about the latest atrocity and the mounting body count.

The Senate Judiciary Committee held hearings in 1990, shown on C-Span. Its chairman, Joseph Biden of Delaware, introduced a bill intended to address

the issue of violence against women. The bill died and was reintroduced several times. The hearings and the repeatedly killed bill received limited attention. The bill was resurrected and incorporated into the Violent Crime Bill and Enforcement Act of 1993, which Congress passed in November.

Based on his 1975 National Institutes of Health-sponsored research, the National Family Violence Study, Dr. Murray Straus, co-director of the University of New Hampshire's Family Research Laboratory, estimated that 1.6 million American women are seriously assaulted each year by a spouse or boyfriend. In 1985 he increased the estimate to 1.8 million. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, there were an estimated 102,560 reported forcible rapes in 1990. In 1979 sociologist David Finklehor, an expert on domestic violence, estimated that 25 percent to 33 percent of American women and 16 percent of American men had been victims of sexual abuse as children.

In some areas of the world, women are held in such low esteem that they never reach adulthood. Children do not fare much better than women in the world or in the media. Stories concentrate on violent youngsters being tried in adult courts and whether they should receive the death penalty. Overlooked is the sad state of juvenile courts and holding facilities.

Foster care in many states is in shambles, but the media does little to encourage middle-class parents to take enough children out of the system to give it breathing room. Some bureaucratic child welfare systems might not welcome the intrusion of middle-class parents, but their presence might do a lot to break the gridlock. Media stories about children are more likely to be about a shortage of babies for couples who want to adopt and about the wonders of in vitro fertilization.

Population density as a factor in violence has received almost no attention. The human population numbered approximately 5 million in 8000 B.C., 500 million in 1650 A.D., 1 billion in 1850, 2 billion in 1930, and passed 5.3 billion in 1990, increasing at an annual rate of 95 million a year.

Asking the Right Questions About Violence

The following is excerpted from remarks by Deborah Prothro-Stith, Assistant Dean for Government and Community Programs at the Harvard School of Public Health, at a seminar for Nieman Fellows on October 10, 1993:

If I were Commissioner of Public Health and I came to you, a group of journalists, and I said, "We're going to initiate a new campaign to reduce lung cancer. We're going to get rid of as much lung cancer as we can. And what we're going to do is send our thoracic surgeons to Germany to train and then to Switzerland and then they're going to have an intensive retreat in Utah. We're going to have the best surgeons in the world. And we're going to get color monitors in the operating rooms. And we're going to get platinum tip catheters. And we are going to make sure that our complication rate for lung surgery is the lowest possible in the world."

I would suspect that the [article] the next day would read something like, "Commissioner of Public Health out of touch. Plan to reduce lung cancer focuses entirely on treating lung cancer. Has no plans for reducing smoking, or keeping teenagers from beginning to smoke. And if she expects that we're going to spend a

million dollars on this proposal, we need to let her know that we won't let that happen."

Day after day there's a homicide and the response is we're going to get more police. We're going to lock this kid up maybe for two lifetimes. And you don't raise those questions. We treat that as if that's prevention.

I'm waiting on a crime prevention plan or bill or activity that focuses on responding to the needs of kids who are at risk. And focuses on some of the attitudes and behaviors. A little bit is happening across the country...with an Attorney General that's talking about prenatal care. And with other secretaries who are really kind of pulling this thing together. But I think that journalists have to raise some of the hard questions. Because we tend to think that if somebody is tough on crime, by raising the sentences, or having every juvenile tried as an adult, that that's going to do it. And that's a myth.

Not only does it not work in the public health model, but we had a decade of trying it. In 1980, in the United States, there were a half of million people in jails and prisons across the country. In 1990, there were a million. We doubled the number of people in jails and prisons in the decade from '80 to '90. And violent crime went up 12 percent in that decade.

Increases in population raise many questions. Is violence a result of closer proximity, which provides more occasions to come into conflict? Does violence appear more prevalent among the poor simply because there are more of them? If violence is more prevalent among the poor, are they now setting an example for the more affluent? Will the violent children of baby boomers, as predicted, burn out after age 24?

Given journalists' concern about the value of the First Amendment, a scarcity of stories about the many journalists around the world who have been tortured and/or killed because of their professions is surprising. Journalists in Colombia have been frequent targets of the Medellin drug cartel.

Corporate crime does not receive nearly enough attention. A decision to keep a faulty design in an automobile ultimately kills many more people than does a teenager with an assault rifle, but the teenager is an easier story to cover. Michael Milken left prison with his millions intact to teach university students. A teenager is discharged to hang out on the corner.

The economics of corrections needs emphasis. The construction costs for a prison bed range from \$50,000 to \$100,000. The cost of keeping a prisoner locked up is about \$25,000 per year, more than it takes to keep a kid in a reasonably good college. But there is not much to show for the money. Although many education and treatment programs are known to be effective, the typical prisoner returns to society illiterate and unable to hold a job, without his emotional problems having been treated.

By 1995 about 1.5 million people will be behind bars, with another 2.5 million on parole or probation. Despite the building boom of the 1980's, which made prison construction the fastest growing item in many state budgets, prisons continue to be badly overcrowded. Many potentially violent prisoners are turned loose to make room for nonviolent drug offenders sent to prison under mandatory sentencing laws.

A few journalists have pointed out that vast prison systems traditionally

characterize tyrannies. Yet, in the mid-1980's, the prison population of the United States, a democracy, surpassed those of South Africa and the Soviet Union.

The impact violence has on the economics of health care is seldom addressed. Accidents, suicide, and homicide are the leading causes of death among American teenagers. Intentional and unintentional (accidental) trauma is the leading cause of death among those under age 44, killing an average of 140,000 people a year, effectively curtailing decades of earnings. Emergency care costs for gunshot wounds are estimated at a billion a year and rising. A lifetime of rehabilitative care

following injuries adds to the bill for medical care and lost wages.

No one who experiences violence, whether living in the city, the suburbs, the country, or prison is ever the same. Posttraumatic stress syndrome is a widespread, costly affliction that affects not only victims and their families, but also health care workers, police, and corrections personnel who mop up in the aftermath of violence.

If they only would, the media could do much to change the violent climate of thought that is crippling the nation and the world. Continuing to normalize violence by presenting it as an option is like yelling fire in a crowded theater. Everyone's right is trampled. ■

The 'War' on Drugs

Media Pay Lopsided Attention to Cutting Supply, Too Little to Reducing Demand

BY LLOYD D. JOHNSTON

Since Richard Nixon first declared war on drugs in the early seventies, drug abuse in the United States has provided a rich bone for the media. That richness has derived in part from the multi-faceted nature of the drug abuse issue: political, moral, legal, sociological, psychological, philosophical, medical, and so on. Five presidents later, the nation continues its struggle with the issue, and the media continues to cover it, though somewhat more episodically in recent years.

Clearly an unusual thing occurred in the country over the last 25 years in that a significant proportion of the population came to use a wide variety of drugs, which had long been illegal and which in the mainstream of the population were considered immoral. This was an unparalleled epidemic in comparison

to virtually all other industrialized countries, and in comparison to previous drug epidemics in this country. It has been a phenomenon of great importance to government, and in many years has been cited by the citizenry as the most important domestic issue facing the nation. It also has been an extremely controversial national issue, dividing not only those of different ideologies but also those of different generations. It is little wonder, then, that the media has paid so much attention to the subject over the last quarter of a century.

Perhaps it is useful to note the underlying changes in the phenomenon of illicit drug use over the years before considering the role of the media in it. Of course, some illicit drug use is endemic. Heroin had been used by fringe groups in the population for decades before the great expansion of the drug epidemic into mainstream America in the late sixties, but most of the drugs to enter the scene—marijuana, LSD, amphetamines, and cocaine—were practically unknown to the generation of the silent fifties and early sixties. Then two things of great consequence happened during the sixties. First, a philosophy of inner-directedness began to catch on, and young people adopted drugs as useful vehicles to explore the inner self. Second, the Vietnam war expanded rapidly, and along with other historical events of the time like Watergate, gave rise to a great deal of youth alienation, which in turn gave rise to the counterculture movement. This youth alienation was a powerful catalyst to the drug epidemic. The movement adopted the use of marijuana, LSD and eventu-

ally other drugs in part for symbolic reasons, both as an act of defiance of the predominant societal norms and as a symbolic ritual of solidarity (most obviously embodied in the passing of the joint). Our own research and that of others has shown that the use of LSD and marijuana, in particular, was correlated with the other behaviors and attitudes comprising the counterculture orientation, including opposition to the war.

As the Vietnam era passed and the counterculture movement faded into history, the drug epidemic continued relatively unabated, as if out of sheer forward momentum. Today it primarily reflects hedonistic, not symbolic behavior. It also reflects a propensity to engage in deviant behavior, as it always has to some degree.

By the end of the seventies and into the eighties, major elements of the epidemic began to lose momentum. Among youth, marijuana use began to decline in 1979, amphetamine use in 1982, cocaine use in 1987.

The role that the media have played in the unfolding of this national drama is almost as complex as the problem of drug abuse itself. Recall that, for the most part, the silent-fifties generation was unfamiliar with many of these drugs and unaware of their psychoactive potential. When the epidemic began to gather steam in the late sixties, the media played an important role disseminating information to the public about these drugs and their alleged benefits. Timothy Leary and other proponents of drug use received maximum air time and the naiveté of a generation of young Americans was forever lost. In

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the intervening years other drugs have come along (e.g. crack, ice, ecstasy, PCP) and were similarly "advertised" to the population through rapid and extensive media coverage.

Because early coverage of the epidemic was so sensational and selective, I think the media inadvertently gave the impression that "everyone was doing it" among American young people, and thus helped to shift the perceived norms in the late sixties. For example, if a high school somewhere in the country conducted a drug survey and found 60 percent of its student body smoked pot, the story reached every paper in the country, but a school survey showing little or no use received virtually no coverage. In 1969, when my colleagues and I completed the first national survey of drug use among males in the senior class, we found that only 25 percent indicated any experience with marijuana or any other illicit drug. (Males, incidentally, have higher rates than females.) Drug use among American young people was clearly exaggerated in the early years.

During the mid- to late seventies, one got the impression from much media coverage that the drug problem was improving, perhaps because use was not as public and florid as it had been in the Vietnam years. According to survey data, however, use actually continued to climb steadily until 1979, when two-thirds of each graduating high school class admitted some experience with illicit drugs. (An interesting aside is that fully 80 percent of these graduating classes admitted illicit use by the time they reached their late twenties, including 40 percent who had tried cocaine. If past drug experience were to be used to disqualify people from high office, as some have suggested, there would be very few in this generation still eligible to serve.)

During the first half of the eighties cocaine prevalence among young Americans was fairly level, but the casualty indicators (use of drug hotlines, overdose emergencies, overdose deaths, demand for treatment) kept rising. This divergence came about because there is a natural lag of four to seven years between the initiation of cocaine use

and when people usually start to get into trouble with the drug. The survey data did not tell an alarming story, but the casualty statistics did. Reporters, of course, went for the latter, leaving the country with the mistaken impression that cocaine use was climbing rapidly in the early eighties when, in fact, prevalence rates were fairly flat.

Admittedly the underlying phenomenon was a complex one, and the long lag time between initiation and trouble fooled many academics, as well. As late as 1981, "experts" saying that cocaine was a clean drug were quoted in the national media: you could not die from an overdose; you could not become addicted to it.

The media's special attraction to the alarming announcements sometimes benefits society, of course. A new problem quickly gets both public and government attention. The media helps to set the agenda, and, of course, sometimes what is happening in reality really is alarming. When our research team reported in 1975 that 6 percent of high school seniors were daily marijuana smokers, both media coverage and public reaction were strong. When that prevalence rate nearly doubled in the following three years a sense of alarm set in. These reactions helped give rise to a number of activities which contributed to a rapid reversal of this trend: research on the effects of marijuana was rapidly expanded, television specials and special news segments about marijuana and its effects were initiated, and a grassroots parent movement began to grow.

Many times over the years the media spotlight has shifted across drugs. At different times, the preponderance of coverage has been on marijuana, LSD, speed or methamphetamine, cocaine, and crack. The spotlight shifts, of course, toward the emergence of new problems and away from the continuation or diminution of old ones.

Another vital role the media has played in relation to drugs has been in helping shape the nation's choice of a broad strategy for dealing with them. Perhaps Richard Nixon cast the die in using the metaphor of a war, which carries the connotations of winning or

If past drug experience were to be used to disqualify people from high office, as some have suggested, there would be very few in this generation still eligible to serve

losing; of easily discernible enemies and friends; of the appropriateness of a military or police response. The media were attracted to the drama implied by the metaphor and for decades have kept that conceptualization alive.

For a number of years, most experts in the drug field and many law enforcement people, including many police chiefs and FBI directors, have realized that the drug "war" could not be won on the battlefield of supply control; that was just a holding action. The real solution lays with reducing the demand for drugs. However, media emphasis on the two classes of activity—demand reduction and supply reduction—has been uneven and lopsided. War games, sinister cartel leaders, moguls like Manuel Noriega, cops and criminals on the streets of our cities—the exciting stuff dramatic stories are made of. Never mind that the real solution resides in the more mundane activities of education in the schools; education in the family; counseling of early users and treatment of advanced users; cooperation among parents; constructive use of the media, and in the social organization and mobilization of communities. I doubt that 2 percent of the total media coverage of America's struggle with drugs over the last 25 years dealt with these issues, even though a consensus emerged years ago among those in the know (both inside and outside of government) that it is in these domains that the true solutions lie. (Many electronic and print reporters and editors have known it, too.)

Television has played a particular role here with its desperate and endless

search for graphic drama in the news. How many times have you seen a raid on a crack house in some American city—any city? The plot is totally predictable, almost numbing: the battering ram, the noisy rush of police, the

role in bringing about this seriously flawed and distorted policy response through their increasingly desperate search for entertainment, rather than what is right or even accurate. A harsh assessment, but one which I firmly be-

The media has played a major role in bringing about this seriously flawed and distorted policy response through their increasingly desperate search for entertainment, rather than what is right or even accurate. A harsh assessment, but one which I firmly believe. When our news organizations become shallow, so eventually do our people, our politicians and our policies.

recovered drugs, the bundles of money, the weapons seized and the handcuffed suspects. Great entertainment, lousy policy. Those dealers are replaced by others before the videotape can be transmitted.

The print media have done their share, too. In the heyday of use, some national news magazines averaged at least two cover stories a year, and many feature articles about drugs. Those few articles, concluding that the supply reduction effort is probably futile, nevertheless spent nearly all their column inches reporting it. Acceptance of an outside editorial piece suggesting that our policy was on the wrong road was nearly impossible.

The approach of news as entertainment has, in my opinion, helped to distort the national response to a very serious problem. Even politicians who know that demand reduction was a better solution are deathly afraid of being called "soft" on drugs. The end result is that they keep favoring the cops-and-robbers supply reduction efforts predominantly featured in America's media. Recall that 70 percent of federal resources go for supply reduction, and only 30 percent for demand reduction, primarily treatment. That is the way it was under Reagan and Bush, that is the way it still is under Clinton. The media has played a major

lieve. When our news organizations become shallow, so eventually do our people, our politicians and our policies.

While the media may have given inadvertent emphasis to the supply-side strategy, let me add that they also have played, often unwittingly, an important and constructive role in the demand reduction effort. Those of us who do research on drug use have demonstrated that use goes down when the perceived dangers of a drug go up. In the early days of the epidemic, the dangers of many illegal drugs were unknown. As experience cumulated, many of the adverse consequences began to emerge, and the media heavily covered them. A great deal of media attention (as epitomized in the 1979 NBC one-hour television special, "Reading, Writing, and Reefer") was paid to the possible dangers of marijuana in the late seventies, and use fell substantially as young people began to understand that marijuana use, particularly heavy use, can be dangerous to the user. Similarly, as the potential dangers of overdose and addiction became clear for cocaine and crack in the mid-eighties, use declined. Peak media coverage of cocaine's effects occurred in 1986, when professional athletes Len Bias and Don Rogers died as a result of cocaine use, and

when contenders for Congressional seats were challenging each other to urinalysis in what became known as "jar wars." Following the intense coverage of these events, the dangers attributed to these drugs by young Americans soared, and their use plunged.

Social norms for use also shifted concurrently, probably as the result of the changes in perceived risk. Throughout the eighties marijuana use became less acceptable; cocaine use became less acceptable in the last half of the eighties. I believe the media, particularly through their news programs and news specials, contributed significantly to these constructive outcomes. Many of the changes in young people's attitudes and beliefs about drugs are really quite dramatic.

Recognizing the power of the media in general, and of advertising in particular, the media and national advertising agencies began working together in the late eighties to play an intentional and constructive role to reduce drug use. Through the Partnership for a Drug Free America they have collaborated to produce and deliver a sophisticated advertising campaign against drugs. Our research shows that young people are very aware of these ads, find them credible and report that they have made them less likely to use drugs.

Until 1992, it seemed that drug use was going in the right direction, thanks in part to these media efforts. However, in 1992, we saw the first evidence of a turnaround in use among eighth graders, that is, in the newest group entering adolescence. This change serves as a reminder of two things: first, our struggle with drugs is never over and second, each new generation of youngsters has to learn what earlier ones learned about drugs, or else they will get to learn the hard way, by experience. The media will continue to play an important role in this unending drama, whether by intention or not. I hope that in the future it is a role which is more self-aware and perhaps less self-indulgent. The stakes are too high for our media to opt for entertainment over good, insightful reporting in the news. ■

Washington Hodgepodge

*Administration Attempts to Control, Suppress, Put Spin
On Health Care News Lead to Chaos*

BY DANA PRIEST



Dana Priest has been a reporter at The Washington Post for eight years. She was an assistant editor on the foreign desk, then a beat and general assignment reporter on the Metropolitan staff. She has covered federal employee issues and general assignment for the National desk, where she currently writes about the national health care debate. Prior to joining The Post, Priest reported for The St. Petersburg Times, was a freelance journalist and was a market researcher for an international consulting firm. She is a graduate of the University of California at Santa Cruz.

It is 10 p.m. Saturday night and the Washington-based health care reporter has the White House's latest financing options and its calculations on private market savings spread out on the dining room table. Somewhere in the first appendix of the second document, somewhere around the section on "administrative loads," her mind wanders to a little lecture Representative Jim McDermott delivered the day before to Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala.

"We want you to take this message back," the Washington Democrat said at a Congressional hearing. "You have to be able to explain, easily" the cost to individuals, businesses and the government. "If you can't do that for us, then we can't do it for our constituents and we're not going to vote for something we can't explain."

Obviously reporters do not have constituents, but they have readers and editors who demand readable stories about health care reform and rightfully complain if they do not get it.

From the day President Clinton announced the creation of the Task Force on National Health Care Reform, until now, the White House health care team has made an inherently difficult task much harder. They have acted like the Keystone cops, trying to control, repress or spin the facts one day, handing out information the next, only to find they have misspoken and must spend the rest of the week clarifying.

Meanwhile, hundreds of skillful industry CEO's and Congressional aides, each pushing a particular view on health reform, go out of their way each day to supply reporters with "expert" studies,

public opinion polls or, in some cases, exhaustive and helpful information about some corner of this debate.

From the start, the White House built a figurative stone wall around the Old Executive Office Building, where more than 500 experts and Congressional aides toiled. Names were secret, they told us. Titles were secret. Jobs were secret. Salaries were secret. For the most part, the blockade was effective in making it more difficult to learn what the White House was up to.

But it was far from impossible.

Between January 25, 1993 and Nov. 1, 1993, for example, the principal health care reporters at The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times and USA Today wrote a total of 575 health care stories, according to a byline search. That does not count hundreds of other stories written by other reporters.

And with each new front-page revelation, top White House health advisers grew increasingly angry, sometimes belligerent, toward individual reporters. Some journalists were sternly lectured or yelled at after their stories appeared, others were insulted over the telephone. One recalls receiving a phone call from a White House aide that went something like this: "There's a mistake in your fourth paragraph, but I'm not going to tell you what it is."

Small papers found it nearly impossible to get their calls returned at all from the so-called "war room" in the bowels of the Old Executive Office Building.

Once the first news stories on the task force began to appear, the health team hid staff telephone directories—

presumably so they could not be given to reporters—locked their own working documents away in a reading room and made staff members copy by hand anything they wanted to retain. A few task force members left in disgust because they felt the treatment was childish.

Later, when both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* led their May 22 editions with different renditions of the first meeting in a round of high-level decision-making sessions led by President Clinton, the White House substantially reduced the number of invitees to future meetings, to the exclusion, some high-level aides said later, of people who really needed to be there.

At the same time, there was a sort of chaotic, "unmanaged competition" among newspapers that, taken together, produced a fairly confusing picture of what was new and what was important on any given day. It is probably a good thing that most of America reads only one newspaper.

"In terms of competitiveness, on a scale of one to 10, this was a 10," said *USA Today's* Judi Hasson.

One day a paper would lead the paper with something and several weeks later another paper would blast the same story on the front, written with the kind of freshness scoops often have. Sometimes, last paragraphs in one paper's story became the lead somewhere else the next day. Or micro-facts buried in a feature were rewritten as news by the paper down the block.

On October 22, for example, *The Wall Street Journal's* Hilary Stout, broke an important story on a decision by Clinton to limit government subsidies available to low-wage workers and small firms. But most other newspapers heralded the news five days later, based on Congressional sources who were briefed by the White House the day before Clinton presented his bill. The competition was a little unusual too.

While sometimes papers would do a second-day chase of a story someone else had broken, more often than not, they did not. Instead, said several reporters, there was just increased pressure to produce more stories. Since

there are literally hundreds of ways into the health care debate, it was not hard finding something new.

When a competitor broke a story, said Edwin Chen of *The Los Angeles Times*, "there was an odd kind of nonpressure. This story was so complicated, nobody could get it all. It was easy to say, 'well, that was one part of it, let's wait to get our own story.'"

The result was a hodgepodge of news before the preliminary draft was leaked, which mainly reflected the kind of information individual reporters could get their hands on.

Which brings me to my pet peeve: *The Trial Balloon*.

Contrary to the tired "conventional wisdom" that thrives in Washington, this has not been a story of trial balloons and purposeful leaks, with some exceptions. It has been, as far as I can tell, one that required a fair amount of basic journalist commodities: digging, persistence and relationship-building.

There was a perception (among editors and colleagues) that if you stood out at 17th and G," where the Old Executive Office Building sits, said Chen, "one of these task force people would come out and say, 'psst' and hand you a document. No one knows how hard we worked. It may sound self-serving, but it's true."

The presence of hundreds of interest groups, each with an axe to grind or an angle to push, sometimes made things easier. But, for the most part, especially in the beginning, most members of the health care task force believed they were on a mission and were petrified to talk about it.

I recall getting HHS health expert Judith Feder to come to the phone one day, early on. Her voice was so filled with panic that barely had I gotten out my first question, before she told me she was hanging up. Chen recalls his editors thinking he had it made when a group of California health experts arrived to work on the task force. To the contrary, none ever helped him out.

"I think they were really good soldiers," he said.

Some of my colleagues rolled their eyes April 15, the day all our papers ran front-page stories that the White House

was considering a value-added tax to fund the plan. This was no surprise to us, we had written previously that a VAT was one of several financing options, but never a heavy favorite. "A trial balloon," snickered editors and political reporters, who wrote that day's story from the White House news briefing.

Government obfuscation and secrecy is obviously nothing new, but on this story it has taken on an air of absurdity.

When the White House finally decided to begin substantive briefings, they were on background and they were ridiculously, maybe even dangerously, short, if accurate or explanatory reporting is what they were after. It was as if the briefers cracked a door, shouted out a partial sentence, slammed it shut and then left it to us to complete the sentence and its context.

One of the most bizarre scenes was a briefing held in the Old Executive Office Building amphitheater. More than 30 reporters spent an hour asking Ira Magaziner questions about subsidies, health alliances and how big business would fit into the new plan when, for no apparent reason, the chief White House health care spokesman, Robert Boorstin, cut the discussion off and tried to get Magaziner out the door. Magaziner was immediately surrounded by a dozen reporters wanting clarification on how an employer mandate would work and other technicalities. And as he struggled to answer the questions, which he clearly wanted to do, Boorstin yelled at the crowd to let him go. Magaziner was still talking as he was literally being pushed out the door.

At other times, the problem was simply, as McDermott pointed out, "You have to be able to explain, easily...If you can't do that for us, then we can't do it for our constituents..."

After many elements of the plan had been in print, the White House decided to hold its second substantive briefing. It was on a weekend day and lasted an unrushed two and a half hours. Twenty reporters sat around a conference table and asked anything they wanted of Magaziner, Feder and Princeton University professor Paul Starr.

The problem was that all three had a hard time explaining the most basic

State House Views

Battling Orthodoxy In Minnesota

BY MIKE MEYERS

concepts, like which firms, exactly, would qualify for government subsidies. When Starr tried to answer a question about how married couples working for separate employers would get coverage, his explanation was so incomprehensible that the room burst into laughter.

In the midst of attempts by Magaziner and Feder to explain the same, reporters formed clusters among themselves trying to decode and rephrase for one another what was being said. At the end of the briefing, five of us stood in the hallway exchanging telephone numbers in the event we got stuck translating the briefing.

"That's never happened before," laughed Chen.

My favorite example of how absurd the White House media non-strategy became was the fact that the first on-the-record briefing held—a hastily called event on a Sunday afternoon—was to respond to a series of critical stories about the plan that were based on a leaked preliminary draft. Here we had the White House refusing to go on the record about the actual plan, but willing to respond to an unofficial preliminary draft that they refused to acknowledge. It felt like chasing a ghost.

White House spokesman chastized us for pointing out how strange this seemed, another example of the inside-the-beltway cynicism, they said. But the American public apparently had doubts, too. In a Washington Post poll published Oct. 12, three weeks after Clinton addressed a Joint Session of Congress on health care reform, 8 out of 10 people questioned said they did not think Clinton had a plan.

Now that it has been released, the White House's inept handling of its own information has become the subject of front-page news. Shalala recently told a Congressional committee that 40 percent of Americans would pay more for health premiums under the plan; a dozen White House officials, from the President on down, spent 10 days trying to re-explain that bombshell.

The number is now 30 percent—and counting. ■

At a media briefing this summer, Senator Dave Durenberger waved a copy of *The Star Tribune* report on the problems with health care and asked if everyone in the room had read it. He wasn't trying to peddle the article. He wanted to pummel it.

Seems the authors—Washington Bureau Chief Tom Hamburger and I—had trampled over an orthodoxy in Minnesota: The notion that Minnesota health care is so efficient and cost-effective that it's a model for the nation. The article questioned that thesis and, in the process, suggested Canada's single-payer plan might be a better model for saving money and delivering better care.

Durenberger, who coincidentally is near the top of the list of recipients of political contributions from medical and insurance company PAC's, railed against the thesis of the article, the newspaper and the authors.

Therein lies a problem for Minnesota reporters writing about health care. From the Mayo Clinic and nationwide HMO's with headquarters in Minnesota to the Fortune 500 companies forming alliances and to the legislators in the St. Paul capital concocting their own health care system remedies, the state is packed with people with strong feelings about—and vested interests in—what happens next in health care. It seems as if everybody is calling with invitations to news briefings, luncheons, CEO interviews—or, in the case of Durenberger, an ambush—aimed at influencing the course of news coverage.

Getting the story straight, when so

many interests are building bends in the road, is a challenge.

A recent tussle with the Mayo Clinic is a case in point.

I asked a Mayo public relations staffer how many administrators worked at the clinic. The answer, which came a few days later, was a number that dazzled. By her count, Mayo had three administrators for every doctor.

The *Star Tribune* printed the number—only to have the Mayo call to demand a correction. Mayo doctors were angry. What do all those bureaucrats do? The doctors demanded an explanation from Mayo's top executives. They quickly got one. The figure, according to the person who supplied it, was a mistake—a number that included janitors, computer technicians or anyone at the Mayo who wasn't a doctor.

Okay, what is the correct count of the number of administrators on the Mayo payroll?

Not available, was Mayo's reply, along with assurances that the Mayo is not burdened with thick layers of bureaucracy. But a Mayo official undermined that argument by saying the clinic could not even provide an estimate of how many administrators are on the payroll.

Counting them, he said, would take too much time. ■

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In Oregon, More People Stories Needed

BY TOM DETZEL

At the Guard, we have a comfy package of medical, dental and vision benefits that costs reporters and editors about \$3 a week out of pocket—less than most of us spend on take-out coffee.

The benefits are nice, but they pose some un-comfy questions about our coverage of health care reform: Can we really relate to the day-to-day anxiety of a family that's lost their insurance? Of old people who can't pay for the drugs they need? Of single moms who sling beers for a few bucks an hour but can't get Medicaid because they earn too much?

Looking back, I'm not convinced that we've tried hard enough to get the story from perspectives outside our own, from the same kind of real-people view that's worked so well for us on health care stories outside the topic of reform.

Reform became news here in 1989, after the state decided not to fund a bone marrow transplant for a young Portland-area boy, Coby Howard. Legislators had quietly cut funding for some transplants, shifting the money into prenatal care for the poor. Health care rationing—healthy babies vs. costly experimental surgeries—was an immediate, sensational reality. Senate President John Kitzhaber, a doctor, decided to take the resulting debate about rationing a step further. Under his Oregon Health Plan, everyone under the poverty level would get Medicaid coverage, and businesses would cover the rest of the uninsured—about 15 percent of Oregonians.

The catch: Paying for the plan meant dropping Medicaid coverage for treatments with little benefit or extraordinary costs. This made rationing an explicit state policy and made Oregon the

focus of a national debate about health care ethics. From a reporting perspective, it also tended to frame the story as a political and government problem rather than an individual one.

How have we done? Our files are stuffed with pieces about a state commission that decided which medical procedures to jettison, about haggling with the government over a Medicaid waiver and about the political debate over funding and employer mandates in the Capitol. While these are all important stories, they reveal our institutional bias.

Missing were compelling portraits of the uninsured, the afflicted who might be cut out of the plan, the small business owners getting squeezed, the providers who will have to deal with an onslaught of new unhealthy patients.

Because of delays won in the Legislature, reform is not yet a reality in Oregon, and it might end up being overtaken by a federal plan.

Our coverage plans have evolved, though. We've recently hired a new reporter experienced in medical writing and have made health care a full-time beat, significant for a paper our size. We intend to look critically at the local health care industry as the field of players girds for reform. And we plan to produce fewer stories about the process of reform and more stories about how reform will change people's lives.

■

Tom Detzel is Assistant City Editor for The Register-Guard in Eugene, Oregon.

In Washington State, Editors Are the Test

BY JIM SIMON

When it comes to covering health care reform, editors are a good test audience. On my paper, most are easily bored by legislative politics. They grow nearly comatose about anything lumped under the label "reforming the system."

The bill that passed the Washington Legislature last spring was one of those rare measures that nearly matched the spin doctors' hype. It capped premium prices, required all businesses to insure their workers and promised universal access by 1998. Initially though, we struggled to convince our desk that this really was significant stuff, that this legislation was for our readers just as important and more likely to become reality than what President Clinton was proposing in the other Washington.

A feature story I wrote about an obscure fundamentalist sect lobbying to be exempted from the law wound up on page one. A detailed question-and-answer piece explaining the new law and its winners and losers was buried inside.

In health care reform, to an extent unmatched by most issues I've covered, the details—even the deadly boring ones—make a difference. And so our attempts to simplify and humanize what the future might look like by focusing on one patient, a doctor or a hospital's bottom line almost inherently become misleading.

How do you explain how "health care purchasing cooperatives" for businesses or "practice parameters" for doctors will affect the majority of readers, who already have insurance coverage they're satisfied with? For that matter,

how do you explain reform of a fragmented system that no one can describe in the first place?

One of our shortcomings was the failure to better critique the highly speculative vision of how this "managed competition" system would work, particularly cost-saving figures that were being tossed out.

In the Legislature, there was remarkably little dissent from the new orthodoxy of managed competition—no matter the seeming incongruity of overhauling the system by leaving the privately insured, employer-based system in place. So stories about alternatives, such as a Canadian-based system, had little edge.

But I think our coverage improved as we felt our way through the issue. We talked about doing lengthy projects on where the health care dollar goes or long overviews about where reform might lead.

We opted instead, almost without planning, for more reporters doing more stories from more points of view. Eventually we stopped treating this as just a medical story or a political story that ended with the passage of a bill. We now have one reporter writing about ethical issues like rationing. For the first time, we cover health care as a business and economic story.

We have a long way to go, particularly in covering the insurance industry.

And instead of just running victim stories about families without insurance or cancer patients denied experimental treatment, we did slog through the details.

We bored some readers, but I think we underestimated others. Listen to talk radio or read letters to the editors. What's remarkable to me is how literate some of the public has become on health care reform in a short time. ■

Jim Simon is a reporter in The Seattle Times state capitol bureau. He has covered regional health care issues and the politics of medicine for the last five years.

Vermont Sources: Average Citizens

BY BETSY LILEY

Vermont is one state leading national health care reform. The governor, Howard Dean, is a physician and was an integral player in President Bill Clinton's health care reform efforts.

Health care reform in the Green Mountain State began in 1991, as grassroots groups organized strong support for a single-payer system. The 1992 Legislature created a three-member Health Care Authority charged with designing two systems: a single- and multiple-payer system.

Covering health care reform has been a challenge here because of the interest of our readers and their knowledge of the subject. Vermonters know their Quebec neighbors enjoy universal coverage and lower costs for prescription drugs and other medical expenses. But they also know Canadians shop in Vermont because of their own nation's high taxes.

I outlined two goals:

- Make sense of the jargon. Vermont, like Clinton, is building a new health care system around what the bureaucrats here labeled an Integrated System of Care. I've used that terminology only a handful of times. Instead, I have referred to networks of health care professionals including dietitians, chiropractors, doctors and hospitals.

The same was true for the word provider. The word doctor is not inclusive enough. Health care encompasses nursing, mental health, nutrition, exercise and so on. So, I began using the term professionals (even if some people might call their caregivers quacks).

- Get the reaction of average Vermonters who are the ones whose lives will be changed and who will pay to make change happen.

I culled a new Rolodex of sources from a variety of sources: letter writers, people at public hearings, people with expertise in other areas such as taxes. It would have been easy to just quote the usual suspects.

It's tough to quote average Joes and Janes. In general, Vermonters know what they want out of reform. Yes, they want to continue the high quality of care they have now. Sure, they want to eliminate unnecessary administrative expenses. But details—an employer mandate with subsidies that kick in when an employer has spent 12 percent of their payroll on health care—overwhelm the average guy. ■

Betsy Liley is based in the Montpelier Bureau of The Burlington Free Press, the largest Vermont newspaper. She has covered the State House for the last five years, including health care reform, which is expected to be the biggest legislative issue this year.

Checking on the Players

*Newspapers Trail National Journal and Legal Times
In Reports on Influence Peddling on Health Care*

BY CHARLES LEWIS

Presidents have unsuccessfully attempted to enact national health care insurance throughout this century. For decades immensely powerful, entrenched forces have been reaping billions of dollars annually from our seriously flawed system. Given all this, you would think that Washington journalists would be swarming all over the influence-peddling power dimension of the Clinton health care reform story.

Think again.

Most of the coverage has been largely stenographic, focusing on the latest presidential pronouncements and the ping-ponging Capitol Hill reaction by Republicans and Democrats alike. And column feet have been devoted to attempts to explain the exceedingly complicated plan and its ramifications to readers—admittedly a daunting task in this instance. Nonetheless, when the long-awaited Clinton plan was finally put forward in September, there seemed to be an unabashed journalistic competition for the most adulatory article possible about Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In the hundreds of stories published by major newspapers in recent months, of course there has been some impressive although infrequent coverage of the internecine lobbying warfare which is being waged over the Clinton reform proposal. The Wall Street Journal, for example, has touched on aspects of health care lobbying, but the two publications that have done the most in-depth reporting on the health care influence game are the National Journal, The Times-Mirror-owned weekly on

Washington politics and government, and Legal Times, another Washington weekly which most closely tracks inside lobbying issues. Unfortunately, these two publications are principally read inside the beltway, which means that most of America has no idea that yesterday's government officials are today reaping huge profits from their prior experience and connections as public servants. The revolving door assures that their special interest clients get a piece of the health care reform pie.

The news coverage of health care reform lobbying has operated on the unstated but implicit assumption that the efforts to tailor and shape the Clinton plan are just now beginning. However, from the insurance companies to the health maintenance organizations, from the doctors to the trial lawyers, from consumer groups to small business trade associations, the jockeying for influence and impact in Washington has been a mostly hidden, behind-the-scenes whirlwind at least since the weeks prior to Bill Clinton's inauguration.

Which brings us to a larger curiosity about the entire health care reform plan: the President himself. How and precisely when did Bill Clinton's thinking on the health care reform issue crystallize? No journalist has written the definitive story to date, and it is crucial to understanding the current legislation and the real underlying intentions. During the 1992 presidential campaign, the Democratic candidates with the most carefully developed health care reform positions were Paul Tsongas and Bob Kerrey—not Bill Clinton. Sometime from the primaries to the fall campaign,



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the Arkansas governor metamorphosed from a pay-or-play approach to the current concept of "managed competition." How? Why? Who "educated" him in that direction?

We've all been taught to follow the money, and over the years, long before Bill Clinton emerged in 1992, many journalists—namely Morton Mintz of *The Washington Post* and Viveca Novak and Vicki Kemper of *Common Cause Magazine*—exposed the huge sums of money being dumped in the Congress to thwart any attempts at serious health care reform. And when, sometime after his election as President, it became clear that health care reform would be one of the four most important agenda items during the Clinton presidency, reporters began to revisit the Federal Election Commission and the National Library on Money and Politics, for the latest financial data on the health care industry. The resulting stories, most extensively by *U.S. News and World Report* (May 24, 1993), have been useful and illuminating, but like most campaign finance data-driven stories, limited in scope and linear in nature.

There has been little attention paid to individual health care industry contributions and connections to the Clinton campaign and to the Democratic National Committee, including the Democratic National Convention and the inaugural gala events. Beyond the straight numbers, there doesn't seem to have been an in-the-trenches attempt by journalists to study the direct personal interactions between health care industry officials and their paid lobbyists with the Clinton powers-that-be, beginning during the campaign itself.

One of the most interesting elements in the White House lobbying strategy is the way in which the Clinton forces have attempted to fashion the coming debate as a dramatic David-and-Goliath struggle between a progressive, well-intentioned new President fresh from the heartland, Mr. Clinton Goes to Washington, pitted against multibillion dollar vested interests, led by the insurance industry. At his acceptance speech before the Democratic National Convention in New York, Bill Clinton said,

As regards the political process in Washington, it is generally unreported that the entire health care proposal has caused an extraordinary bonanza in which scores of legislative and executive branch officials to leave in droves for the private sector, doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling their salaries.

"Your government has the courage, finally, to take on the health care profiteers and make health care affordable for every family." Clinton also castigated then-President George Bush, "He won't take on the big insurance companies to lower costs and provide health care to all Americans. I will."

Actually, the largest insurance companies are generally supportive of the emerging Clinton health care reform plan. Indeed, they have formed a multimillion dollar lobbying effort on their behalf in Washington called, "The Alliance for Managed Competition." Some of Bill and Hillary Clinton's advice on health care reform has come from a private organization known as the Jackson Hole Group, substantially funded by such insurance companies as Prudential, Cigna, Aetna and Kaiser. It is likely that this "brain trust" group also receives funding from pharmaceutical companies and other health interests, but the donor list has been, to date, proprietary.

When Hillary Rodham Clinton blasted the insurance companies, namely the Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA), over their TV

commercials, most Americans assume the Clintons are taking on the entire giant industry. Most Americans, from the avalanche of attendant articles when the Clinton health plan was announced, do not know that the White House has directed the Democratic Party to mount a multimillion dollar National Health Care Campaign, funded by many of those same vested health care industry interests, including the largest insurance corporations. Dana Priest of *The Washington Post* first broke this story, but there has been little followup on the general subject of Clinton's use of the national political party apparatus.

The press has reported that one of the big "winners" of the Clinton proposal are the HMO's. But most Americans probably don't realize that in recent years, the seven largest insurance companies have been making serious acquisitions. In fact, they own about 45 percent of the nation's HMO's.

The point here is that there seems to be little rigorous analysis beyond consumer journalism replete with charts and graphs, all striving to be reader-friendly and responsive to the central question, "Here's how it will affect you." But in many ways, the most compelling broad issue surrounding the 1992 candidate of change and his historic proposal still remains largely unanswered: just who and what is being "reformed?"

As regards the political process in Washington, it is generally unreported that the entire health care proposal has caused an extraordinary bonanza in which scores of legislative and executive branch officials leave in droves for the private sector, doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling their salaries. How many Americans know that a sitting United States Congressman quit his job on Sunday, January 31, and went to work the very next day for health insurance interests? Willis Gradison resigned from the House of Representatives to lead the Health Insurance Association of America.

Which begs the question, who else has left, and what exactly are they doing? This is relatively virgin territory in terms of reporting and the examples are resplendent and metaphoric. They range from former Capitol Hill staffers

like Randy Cooper, who was a long-time administrative assistant to Senator Edward Kennedy and is presently representing the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association and Pfizer Inc., to former Representative Anthony Toby Moffett who has been hired by U.S. Healthcare. And let's not forget the Arkansas clan of lawyers who are cashing in on their state and their familiarity with the Clintons to peddle for health care, such as W. Jackson Williams, Jr., Bill Clinton's former law partner and close friend who now works for the Federation of American Health Systems. Or former Representative Beryl Anthony who now represents the American Hospital Association for Winston and Strawn.

Again, the fundamental issue is that this has been evolving now for two full years—the conceptualization and the planning, the tinkering and especially, the lobbying. Hundreds of specific changes in the Clinton plan were made in the first six months of the new Administration, away from public view and scrutiny. Why is there an innocent assumption by reporters that all of this was purely and pristinely intellectual in those early task force months? Most coverage emphasized how the vested interests were shut out, not included in the elaborate “tollgate” process implemented by White House adviser Ira Magaziner. The fact is, White House staffers met with scores of lobbyists or their clients, and specific changes did occur in the plan following those meetings.

The most formidable obstacle to journalists attempting to write insightful, incisive articles about this extraordinary Washington power story is the sorry state of available public records. Lobbying disclosure laws are notoriously weak and unenforced, especially when it comes to domestic lobbying by U.S. entities. Thus, the thousands of health care-related meetings around Washington between the lobbyists and the lobbied are virtually all non-disclosable. Getting to the bottom of what is really happening is necessarily an interview-driven exercise, in which the interviewees are not required to reveal much of anything.

It is a frightful notion to then imagine how John Q. Journalist is going to really get a bead on the machinations of a \$900 billion industry and its convergence with the well-heeled Washington lobbying community. Beyond that, we are talking about a policy plan so complicated its own authors and administration spokespeople don't seem to completely understand it—and that's without a copy deadline staring them in the face.

No one said it would be easy. Through persistence, perseverance, creativity and luck, a clearer picture of the health care plan, from its evolution to its real beneficiaries, can emerge. In Washington, most of the reporters working this story have had to put on heavy boots to wade through the mesmerizing muck so endemic to our nation's capital.

For example, just to satisfy our curi-

osity and perhaps our need for entertainment, we sent a tongue-in-cheek letter to 30 or so health care interests who most recently contributed money to the Democratic Party. We wrote “Because contributions play such an important role in political campaigns, we are interested in learning the reasons behind such a generous donation.”

We received just two responses. As John Carson, director of government affairs for the American Podiatric Medical Association political action committee, wrote: “The record will show that, in addition to [the \$15,000 contribution to the DNC, a comparable amount was donated to the Republicans. We strongly believe and support the political party process.”

Maybe in Washington the color of money is red, white and blue. ■

Confessions of a First-Year Medical Writer

continued from page 7

people's lives. The stories are inherently dramatic, and I believe fervently that we as reporters need to capitalize on that drama, to tell medical stories in a way that will grab the attention of busy readers. We need to be inclusive, not exclusive, in our writing. The best medical stories—like the best court stories, hurricane stories, riot stories, whatever—are stories that reveal the trials and triumphs of everyday living.

An example: I recently wrote a piece about how AIDS researchers are turning their attention to the healthy by investigating why some people have been able to live with the human immunodeficiency virus for as long as 15 years without developing symptoms, and without taking any anti-viral medications such as AZT. I tracked down one of these so-called “healthy positives”: a San Francisco artist named Rob Anderson who had participated in a hepatitis study during the late 1970's. The blood samples that he and others gave for that study were saved and, years later, tested for the presence of HIV. Anderson tested positive; he can thus trace his infection with the AIDS virus back to 1979, long before anyone knew of AIDS. He re-

mains perfectly healthy today, except for an occasional bout with the flu.

I chose to write his personal story against the backdrop of the research, interweaving the two themes but focusing heavily on the artist. I call this “spoon feeding the science.” A more conventional medical writer might recoil in horror. But I am convinced that I reached many more people than I would have had the story been more straightforward. Yes, a straight story might have afforded more space for the fascinating intricacies of the research, details that were lost because I devoted precious inches to what some might see as extraneous facts about Anderson's life. But I think those concessions were well worth it, especially in a story as technical as this one. It is of no use to write stories if people don't read them.

As I look forward to my second year as a medical writer, I am a bit more confident that my editors' instincts were sound, that a general assignment reporter can take on a specialty beat such as medicine and do well. I have plenty of ideas to keep me busy. And now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll get back to that biology text.... ■

The Case for Reporting On Medical Alternatives

"Now that the quality of health care is being debated on a grand scale, it is important to keep in mind what the best in medicine is all about."

—Peter Jennings, ABC News

BY SID KEMP

Peter Jennings's "Person of the Week" report on October 29 honored Dr. Holmes Morton, a research geneticist and pediatrician who has established a clinic to serve the Amish and Mennonite communities in rural Pennsylvania. Less than 100 miles away, in Philadelphia, this kind of medicine is mainstream. As a pediatric geneticist in the culture he is serving Dr. Morton is as much an alternative for Mennonites and Amish, who reject modern ways, as Albert Schweitzer was for Africans and an acupuncturist is for a middle-class American. As Jennings reported, it is Dr. Morton's personal qualities that make his alien methods acceptable.

Alternative is a relative term but "alternative medicine" is a culturally and economically biased term used by "mainstream" allopathic medicine to refer to everything else. If we define medicine as "the art and science of assisting people's bodies and minds in regaining health," then clearly all of what is called "mainstream medicine" and all of what is called "alternative medicine" are both part of medicine. One easy dividing line between mainstream and alternative systems is to designate all medical practitioners who can receive third-party (government and insurance) payments as mainstream and those who are ineli-

gible for such payments as alternative.

Thus work performed by medical doctors, osteopaths, dentists and licensed psychologists is mainstream. Chiropractic, healing massage, Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture are borderline. The alternatives include a vast array of traditional, shamanic and new forms of healing, from the miracles at Lourdes to psychic surgery, from dietary methods of healing, such as macrobiotics and juice fasting, to vibrational methods, from homeopathy and flower and herbal essences to color therapy—not to mention various newer forms of here-and-now psychotherapy.

There is a large, growing and unmeasured portion of the population who take care of their health largely outside the American mainstream. Individuals turn to alternative methods for many reasons:

- They find no mainstream remedy for a chronic condition, such as hay fever, or a fatal disease, such as AIDS or cancer.
- They cannot afford an allopathic doctor, often because they have lost their insurance.
- Alternative care is often less risky and less costly.
- Their values preclude some allopathic practices, such as its invasive quality.
- Their culture prefers other forms of healing. The new Cambodian communities, for example, turn to their traditional healers and priests.
- They look for a caring or spiritual component in healers that they do not find in allopathic medicine.
- People with incurable or fatal illnesses find that the pace of priorities of medical research prevents

them from receiving what they need in time. The movie "Lorenzo's Oil" and the TV-movie "Son-Rise" document true cases of parents creating alternatives for their incurable or dying children. The debate over accelerating approval of treatments for AIDS patients and the terminally ill and the issue of "orphaned" diseases are important examples of this situation.

Reporters often play into the existing power struggle by accepting the mainstream view of medical alternatives. The media has a responsibility not to become a vehicle for one view in a polar-



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ized situation because of their lack of understanding of the larger picture. As we enter the debate on national health care, we need incisive, balanced reporting on the complex changes that will occur. For example, what will happen to valid forms of psychotherapy that are not covered by insurance when other, perhaps less effective modalities, are available to many more people under third-party payment plans?

Opposing Sides, Different Languages

Within any living system (including societies, communities and individuals) polarizations occur. When these become extreme, imbalance results. Polarization occurs when two parts that are initially in balanced opposition move into more extreme positions. Each then denies the validity of the other and defines itself as holding the correct position. In fact, the system cannot survive without both sides, but no one within the system recognizes this. In societies, polarization develops over years, decades and centuries, whereas news is reported in days and weeks, with issues occasionally being covered with some continuity for months. As a result, news reporting occurs within the context of an unresolved polarized system.

One of the results of polarization is that "mainstream" and "alternative" are thought of as separate, independent entities with very little crossover.

In this situation, high quality, accurate reporting of the news is a Herculean task. News reporters are often on tight deadlines. Therefore, they seek expert opinion, and seek it quickly. In a polarized situation, this leads to difficulties:

1. There are no specialists who are unbiased. Anyone making a living in the field is on one side of the issue or the other, consciously or otherwise. The best that one can find is an individual who has respect for the opposing side. Anyone who actually has a deep understanding of both perspectives is likely to be excluded or denounced by both sides, since each side defines itself by saying that the other side is wrong, even harmful.

2. Experts on each side claim to be authorities. A reporter has difficulty in checking those claims because each authority is respected within his or her domain. If the polarity is not recognized, however, it is impossible to see that neither side has a correct view of the whole situation.

The polarization in 20th Century American medicine is particularly difficult because each side feels responsible for the lives and safety of the public, and may feel that the other side is dangerous, even murderous. Yet the polite language that one hears in the debates for the most part excludes the expression of the intensity of these feelings. As a result, a reporter often hears very reasoned arguments that indicate the other side is entirely misguided, perhaps evil-minded. In addition, many professionals have livelihoods (whether practices or research grants) that depend on their side being right, and so are under pressure not to develop an objective opinion regarding complex issues.

When the media do a poor job of reporting on alternative medicine, it is often due to a lack of recognition of this polarized, politicized situation within the health care professions. This lack of awareness leads to:

- Using mainstream medical specialists, the AMA, the FDA, and other official and governmental bodies as experts in areas where they have little expertise or are biased.
- Not looking closely enough at the motives that lie behind the experts' opinions.
- Reporting on new developments in medicine from the scientific establishment and those from alternative healers with significantly different slants.
- Failing to recognize when something that is now part of mainstream medicine was alternative medicine until only a few years ago.
- Falling into the medical/scientific error of classifying all events as either individual cases or proven scientific studies, and therefore not recognizing developing trends in medicine.

Two perspectives, a temporal one and a multicultural one, may help clarify the situation.

From Alternative To Mainstream

Yesterday's alternative is today's mainstream. Ten years ago the allopathic view of vitamins was only that the minimum daily requirement or recommended daily allowance of each vitamin was necessary to prevent such diseases as scurvy or rickets. The mainstream view now recognizes the role of Vitamin E in healing scar tissue. Vitamins C and E and beta carotene, a relative of Vitamin A, are antioxidants, factors which are now proven to have a role in preventing cancer and heart disease. Vitamins A and D also act against cancer. Dosages of these supplements, which were used by individuals without sanction of physicians for years, are now being recommended or prescribed.

Meditation has moved from the hippie movement to the cancer clinic and some think that marijuana should also, since it is the only drug found to reduce the nausea caused by some chemotherapy agents. The movement from the shelf of the health store to the doctor's prescription pad is not rare; in fact, it has been going on for centuries.

Homeopathy was the mainstream of American medicine in the late 1800's, and it wasn't until the development of antiseptics, anesthetic surgery, sulfa drugs and antibiotics over the course of 100 years that allopathic medicine gained ascendancy and came to be seen as mainstream. We begin to move into the realm where the patient's own ability to heal and the power of the mind become more significant, until we reach the outer edge of "alternative" medicine with channeled information and psychic surgery.

Many elements of mainstream medicine began as alternative medicine. The majority of the tested prescription pharmacopoeia is derived from the traditional herbal medicine of Europe. Unfortunately, the decision to market products in their natural or processed forms has much more to do with the economics of production and the poli-

tics of FDA approval than with an understanding of the medical benefits of the alternatives. Many people are aware that digitalis, a heart medication, comes from foxglove, and that Valium is an artificial form of the active ingredient of valerian root. Valerian root is in a bitter herb whose taste would prevent overuse of its mild relaxant, and is probably safer in its herbal form. The conceptual split between allopathic and alternative medicine keeps people from being aware of such options.

The movement from the shelf of the health store to the doctor's prescription pad is not rare; in fact, it has been going on for centuries.

Even with today's in-depth knowledge of human physiology and biochemistry, scientists are finding most new drugs by looking to native medicine men and women and the plants and animals they use.

Twenty years ago, the medical establishment denied any correlation between diet and the genesis or cure of either heart disease or cancer. Only alternative medicine, such as the groundbreaking work of Dr. Nathan Pritikin, offered access to wisdom that is now being presented as mainstream.

Following the same line of research, Dr. Dean Ornish of California has now proven, using traditional allopathic research methods, that occlusion of coronary arteries can be reversed using only methods that are non-invasive, non-allopathic and drug free, including diet, exercise and meditation. It is now reimbursable through some major insurance companies and provides a less expensive, safer alternative to bypass surgery. At the same time, it has been demonstrated that bypass surgery does not increase life span. Here is a case where the mainstream option of the last

20 years has been proven relatively ineffective, costs \$25,000-\$30,000 per patient and is extremely risky. The alternative is a lifestyle change that can actually save the patient money and is more effective.

Our society's bias toward high-tech medicine caused us to approve bypass surgery quickly, and wait decades before giving equal funding to less costly, safer alternatives. The media reports these developments pretty much along the lines the mainstream in the AMA would want. Just a few weeks ago New York Newsday reported on a study of the comparative benefits of angioplasty over bypass surgery without mentioning Dr. Ornish's alternative.

Reporters might find it helpful to keep this trend in mind:

- Ideas from alternative sources and traditional medicines of many cultures are used by those who do not find remedy from mainstream medicine.

- If these remedies are effective for the first experimenters, they get documented in alternative venues.

- People use them and demand grows.

- Practitioners and companies provide them as alternatives.

- These alternatives are tested by the medical community.

- What was originally a traditional or alternative idea is validated and becomes mainstream.

Of course, not all remedies survive this testing process. Some, such as laetrile, cannot be proved safe and effective. Others cannot be reproduced. Even if we could prove that psychic surgery is real, we would not know how to train psychic surgeons. Knowing this historical pattern, reporters could identify where a given remedy or procedure lies on this course (or off it), and predict the likely tests and trials that lie ahead. Careful reporting of this type could actually assist society in speeding up delivery of tested, reliable treatments. In addition, reporters can expose questionable treatments and fraud, not only in alternative medicine, but in allopathic medicine as well. Out and out fraud in medicine is rare. It is important to note

that the results of medical research from the scientific community passes through an analogous process, which is derived from alternative sources. The procedure is somewhat more formal, considerably more expensive, and carried out by biologists, chemists and medical doctors, but otherwise is very similar. In that case, are medical alternatives developed in the laboratory alternative medicine, or mainstream?

My Mainstream Is Your Alternative

Rather than allowing conventional medicine to define the terms reporters use, it would be good to see some stories on how Americans from different cultures choose medical care. These stories would be a good bridge between the "miracle cure" stories we get and articles about scientifically proven new treatments. How do doctors choose their doctors? How do alternative care providers choose theirs? What about Americans of various ethnicities and economic status?

International cost comparisons have become topical in the coverage of the Clinton health plan. But what about looking at quality of care? Mexico has a law that says that any medicine or medical practice which is approved in its native country is acceptable in Mexico. As a result, many clinics for cancer and other disorders that could not operate in the U.S. have opened across the border, often run by American doctors who could not offer the treatments that they found most effective. Reporting on these clinics and providing their side of the story and the AMA's view of them as two valid opposing views would be important steps in examining ways in which the FDA may be overregulating medicine to the detriment of our health.

What Can Be Done?

The media have an important role in the evolution of medical alternatives. They can assist in debunking fraud and exposing abuse of power, popularizing overlooked alternatives to increase the chance that they will receive research funding, and educating the public to

greater awareness of the existing and upcoming medical alternatives.

Stories abound of raids on offices of alternative medical practitioners by Federal agents, sometimes with guns. M.D.'s who include alternative modalities in their work seem targeted most often. Sometimes there are charges of malpractice, but there are also stories of the power of the IRS or FBI being misused to protect the interests of the FDA or the AMA. Are these more than urban folklore? I would like to see the mainstream press examine such stories and either debunk them or give them the status they deserve as examples of misuse of federal police power that violates fundamental American freedoms.

What is it like to be an alternative medical practitioner or therapist in America today? What is it like to be a medical doctor under the shadow of malpractice insurance costs? Stories that would bring the human element back into the debate on the future of American medicine could balance the more sensational reports of medical abuses and miracle cures.

The effort of humanity to heal our bodies and minds is one of the most remarkable stories of all times. Some things have not changed much at all: Acupuncture needles have been used since the Stone Age. Others have changed in utterly unpredictable ways: Modern medicine's single most powerful tool, antibiotics, was inconceivable 150 years ago, because no one knew that germs caused disease. What will medicine look like 100 years from now (if society and the economy survive to provide it)? The answers may not come from expensive, high-tech medical research, but from ancient theories combining with modern technology. One area of research is the effect of light and other vibrational energies on the body. There is some evidence that natural immune response, growth and healing respond to the presence of light and other energies in ways we do not clearly understand. There is a possibility for developing nontoxic, noninvasive therapies that could change the face of medicine.

I believe that the media can best serve the public by reporting on quality

Getting Health Facts From Internet

For a reporter facing a deadline, and desperate for information on a health-related issue, he or she couldn't ask for a better tool than the Internet.

A good place to start is Profnet. It's the brainchild of Dan Forbush, the Associate VP for University Affairs and Profnet systems operator at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. If you send a query to Profnet (PROFNET@MAIL.CC.SUNYSB.EDU), they will contact university public relations people all over North America for you. Although the service is uneven, it often turns up experts in places you would never have dreamed of looking, or had the time to look. Give Profnet about 24 hours to fulfill your request.

Gopher provides another valuable way to hunt people down. Gopher is an information shortcut to resources on the Internet. Once in Gopher, use Veronica to find health-related stories and contacts. Veronica is a tool designed to search all Gopher servers and tell you where you can find the information you want.

Newsgroups are another option. Newsgroups are similar to bulletin boards, where people leave messages for each other. There are several newsgroups devoted to specific health issues: 1) bit.listserv.mednews provides copies of the Health Info-Com Network newsletter, 2) sci.med is devoted to medicine and its related products, 3)

sci.med.aids is a moderated group devoted to the treatment, prevention and pathology/biology of AIDS. Just a few of many.

If you want more detailed discussion and some really good contacts, consider joining a listserv group through e-mail. Some listserv groups dedicated to medical issues include immune-request (contact Cyndi Norman [cnorman@ucsd.edu]) which deals with breakdowns of the immune-system, mhcare—managed health care (subscribe to Listserv@mizzou1.bitnet), or sportspysy—exercise and sports psychology (contact Michael Sachs [v5289e@templevm.bitnet]).

For a complete listing of all the health information on the Net, it's just an ftp request away. Lee Hancock, an education technologist at the University of Kansas Medical Center, has prepared a comprehensive list of health science resources available on the networks. The list includes Listserv groups, Usenet groups, Freenets, Data Archives, Electronic Publications & Health Science oriented databases, as well as anonymous ftp sites for software applications and several new Gopher sites, databases and libraries. Hancock's list is now available via ftp from FTP.SURA.NET, Directory: pub/nic FILE: MEDICAL.RESOURCES.6-1.

Feel free to drop me a line at tregan@fox.nstn.ns.ca. —Tom Regan

preventive care, integration of new, allopathic and traditional care to create holistic healing environments, and focusing on the healers in our society. The media has a responsibility to report on the alternatives, experiments and abuses in medicine today. A well-informed public will operate through natural processes inherent in society to select the best alternatives for shaping our future. The media has the responsi-

bility to recognize the limited understanding and prejudice of polarized individuals and report on them clearly to help America become aware of the complex truth of our present situation, which is the basis for our future. ■

Chill Wind From the Kremlin

Yeltsin Imposing His Will on Media With Campaign That Began Before October Rebellion

BY NICHOLAS DANILOFF

I'm dining in Moscow on Sunday evening, October 3, 1993. It's 8:30 p.m. The telephone rings. A frown forms on the face of my host, Yelena Markova. "Nyet, nyet...ne mozhet byt' (It can't be)," she mumbles into the phone, then slams down the receiver.

"Big trouble!" she announces. "The rebels have broken out of the Parliament building. They're attacking the television center at Ostankino. They may have seized control because television has stopped broadcasting. This has never happened before. This could be the start of civil war!"

We turn on the TV and surf through the channels. A test pattern flashes across Channel 1. A test pattern on Channel 2. We try some phone calls. The phone is dead.

I feel tension coursing through my arms into my forehead. I resist a wave of panic. This is the way revolutions start; the rebels go first for the communications centers.

Coming to Moscow was risky, I knew. President Yeltsin had dissolved the Russian Parliament September 21 quite unconstitutionally. The rebel legislators, heavily armed, holed up in the White House, the Russian Parliament building. On leaving Boston September 29, it looked as if I could get in and out in 10 days. Now I could be stuck in Moscow for weeks, maybe months, if this is going to be an all-engulfing civil war.

Within minutes journalistic habit takes over. Notes. Whatever happens, take notes. I pull out pen and pad. Channel 5, the St. Petersburg channel, is now on the screen and Mayor Anatolii Sobchak is speaking. Troops loyal to President Yeltsin have repulsed the at-

tackers at Moscow TV headquarters, he says. St. Petersburg is calm. Some people have precipitated a bloody conflict, Sobchak says. He implores the listening public: There must be no civil war. There must be elections.

Today, weeks later, I'm reviewing



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these dramatic events, assessing how Russia's independent press has survived the latest crisis. I am assessing which media showed vitality, which displayed weakness. Here are some excerpts from my red notebook following Sobchak's appearance:

11:10 p.m. Channel 1. Commentator Nikolai Shvanidze is now reading an appeal for calm from President Boris Yeltsin.

(I ask myself: Why isn't Yeltsin reading it? Where is Yeltsin? Has he dropped dead? Suffered a heart attack? Or are his advisors keeping him off the air because he is too frazzled? Or because he would not be able to calm the nation? No doubt they don't want invidious comparisons with the 1991 coup leader, Vice President Gennadi Yanaev, who trembled noticeably at his one and only press conference.)

Vice Premier Yegor Gaidar appears next. He looks calm. He calls on citizens to protect democracy by surrounding the Kremlin and the City Council building as unarmed human shields.

(Again, I wonder: why Gaidar and not Yeltsin? Rolly-polly Gaidar was once belittled by Parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Khazbulatov as "a little boy in pink shorts." Later Khazbulatov called him "a wormlet." Tonight Gaidar, for all his boyishness, is grace under pressure.)

11:50 p.m. Channel 2. A confused scene. A disheveled host has gathered a group of citizens before the camera. They're urging support for Yeltsin. They say the fate of Russia hangs in the balance.

00:15 a.m. Channel 2. Another group of citizens calling for calm. Among them: the popular television interviewer Alexander Liubimov of the Red Quadrant program, who predicts everything will be all right. "We will speak the truth on the air," he says. "But right now is a time for calm. We're all going home to bed. You do the same. Good night comrades."

(Calming words. But how does that square with Gaidar's call for a citizens' defense of key buildings? Nothing much for me to do, so I'll follow Liubimov's example.)

Early morning. Sounds of gunfire in the streets. It's not safe to go out. I spend the night on a couch, listening anxiously.

7:15 a.m. Crackle of gunfire suggests that fighting is sweeping up our street, Mozhaiskii Val, from the Kiev railroad station.

8:00 a.m. I call Lisa Schillinger, director of the Russian-American Press and Information Center, to put off an appointment. "We've been surrounded by gunfire all night," she says. "I was frantic. My daughter didn't get in until 9 p.m. I suppose we will be evacuated in the next 48 hours. I'm not sure I'll go though."

9:00 a.m. A haggard Yeltsin appears on Channel 1. He is reading painfully, has trouble controlling himself. It's been a bad night. He announces "decisive measures" to end the crisis.

(Any government, as any citizen, has the right to self-defense. But "decisive measures" means blood will be shed, doesn't it?)

11:10 a.m. Television is now giving a summary of last night's turmoil. The mayor's office was attacked by armed rebels. The broadcast here scoops up live segments from a CNN broadcast. My old Moscow colleague Steve Hurst, on the roof of the CNN bureau building at 7/4 Kutuzovskii Prospekt, is commenting.

(Imagine that: Ostankino television picking up CNN! They're not using their own stuff. Don't they have their own crews out on the street? What's going on?)

Between commentaries, Steve gives directions over the Atlanta-bound satellite feed which is going out live over Moscow air, thanks to Ostankino TV. His voice is professionally cool. "I sure could use a cup of coffee," he begs. Ten minutes later: "I know you're all busy down there, but I could sure still use that coffee!"

11:55 a.m. Yeltsin's tanks fire 125 millimeter rounds into the top floors of the Parliament building. All Moscow seems to shake, and reverberate. Flames begin licking out of the building; the white facing stone turns sooty black. Yeltsin's assault troops seize the bottom four floors of the White House. Eight to 12 soldiers killed. At least 105 casualties. One U.S. Marine guard at the American Embassy nearby reported wounded by stray bullet. Rebel Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and Parliamentary Speaker Khazbulatov reject conditions for talks.

12:15 p.m. Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin calls for unconditional surrender of the rebels.

1:00 p.m. Channel 1 shows film clip from Sunday afternoon: Rutskoi inciting the crowd to attack television center.

(So Russian TV was out on the streets Sunday gathering the news. Why didn't they show this clip before? Censorship? Wanted to avoid fanning the flames? Or simply disorganization?)

2:00 p.m. I can't stand being inside any longer. Fighting is localized at the White House, while most of Moscow is going about its usual business. I call Dean Zassurski at Moscow University Journalism Department to put off our 3 p.m. meeting. He says he is at work and willing to meet tomorrow. I high-tail it over to the CNN bureau and by lift and ladder make it to the roof.

2:30 p.m. Claire Shipman is taking over from Steve Hurst who looks exhausted. He has been at the microphone for nearly 48 hours. I lie down on the black tar roof, gaze over the parapet, straight down Kutuzovskii Prospekt to the White House. Four T-80 tanks on the bridge adjust their cannons; six others are deployed in front of the Ukraine Hotel. Trigger-happy snipers, located in the tall buildings along

Kalinin Prospekt, fire intermittently.

On the roof it's like being at the opera. Great spectacle. Empty Lowenbrau and Fanta cans litter the roof. To my right, a military attaché with powerful field glasses calls out: "Black Zil approaching the bridge.... A three-star gets out.... Marshal Grachev [defense minister] heading out onto the bridge.... Apparently for talks with a deputation of rebel Parliamentarians. Group of Hare Krishnas trying to approach the limousine...."

3:35 p.m. Radio announces Yeltsin has imposed a curfew on Moscow. Public meetings banned. Press censorship. Rebel Vice President Rutskoi expelled from the military by presidential decree.

5 p.m. Pow! Ka-pumpf! Pow! Ka-pumpf! More tank rounds. I'm now in the apartment of Jim Gallagher, bureau chief of The Chicago Tribune. Same building as the CNN bureau. The whole building shakes. Pow Ka-pumpf! We see it all on television in the comfort of the living room.

6:30 p.m. Rutskoi and Khazbulatov give up, and are whisked away to Lefortovo Prison. In The Chicago Tribune bureau I pen a commentary on the day's events, and fax it to Boston for The Northeastern News. I note that this time, contrary to the 1991 coup attempt, citizens did not try to persuade the tank crews to hold their fire. In fact, the people applaud each artillery round—a measure of the popular disgust with the Parliament.

(What irony: in front of this building Yeltsin mounted a tank in 1991 to defend Russia's new-born democracy. Today, his tanks have bludgeoned to death the Parliament's house in the name of democracy. We learn later that four journalists, two Western, were killed and seven wounded.)

8:05 p.m. I make my way across town to a dinner in my honor. As I leave Kutuzovskii Prospekt, I glance at the Parliament building which is burning like a giant, white candle in the night. Life is already returning to normal, although several sections of the Circle Line are not working. I arrive an hour and a half late, and the guests are al-

ready leaving. They are anxious to get home before curfew.

The Law on Emergency Rule, signed by President Boris Yeltsin well before the 1991 coup attempt, provides for restrictions on the press as well as curfew. The new constitution which the President and his advisors have been working up guarantees a free press and bans censorship. But it also clearly authorizes restraints on the press under conditions which are left vague. You can have your cake and eat it too in Russia. This is definitely not a First Amendment society.

Censorship becomes obvious on Tuesday, October 5, when several newspapers, including *Segodnya* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, appear with blank spots where articles have been removed. Demand for information runs high: *Nezavisimaya*, which normally sells for 30 rubles, is being hawked at 300 a copy on the streets.

Boris Yeltsin has banned a number of opposition newspapers and political parties. Among the banned are *Pravda*, *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, *Rabochaya Tribuna*, *Den'*, *Russkii Vestnik*, *Russkoye Voskresenya*, *Glasnost*. Predictably, editors of these newspapers are howling. But they show less vitality than liberal editors did in 1991 when their publications were banned. In that crisis, the liberal editors defied the ban to put out an emergency sheet called *The Common Paper* protesting the coup attempt.

Vladimir Chikin, editor of the nationalist *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, protests in interviews that his newspaper never promoted violence and should not be shut down. Viktor Linnik, a former Washington correspondent and deputy editor of the Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*, says there can be no free elections if political views are suppressed. Later, *Pravda*, *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, and *Glasnost* learn they are not exactly banned, only suspended. Their journalists may resume work if the newspapers change names, change editors, and re-register.

How was Yeltsin able to impose censorship with such speed?

To close down opposition papers, the Kremlin sent armed troops to news-

paper offices. They met no resistance. For the others, censors were dispatched to the publishing houses where the newspapers are printed. These censors were recruited from the military and from the Inspectorate for the Defense of the Free Press, a section of the Ministry of Information which, oddly enough, is staffed in part by officials from the disbanded censorship agency, Glavlit.

In Moscow's world of antiquated journalism, while most newspaper articles and headlines are written on computers in editorial offices, the page dummies are rushed to the presses at *Izvestia* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Operators, using hot-lead linotypes, produce type. On the night of October 4, government censors appeared in the composing rooms, to read copy at the stone.

Vitalii Tretyakov, editor of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, explains further: "I got a call from this censor. Bit of a shock it was after the freedom we've enjoyed."

Dressed in a tweed jacket, Tretyakov is sitting at a desk in his cavernous office a few days later. He looks disconsolate. "The censor said, 'I'm taking out two articles. What do you want to put in their place?'"

"Nothing!" I replied. That gave the censor pause."

Tretyakov, puffing on a cigarette with an air of resignation, says the censor told him he would call the Ministry of Information to see if leaving a blank space was permissible. After a few minutes, the censor reported back: "The blank space is your problem."

The second night the same thing happened. But this time, the censor insisted that the blank space be filled. The chief editor says he decided to insert some graphics which would serve as an advertisement for the newspaper in a space which would remain mostly blank.

"If they had continued to press to fill up those spaces, I would have developed some nonsense articles to alert the readers that we were being censored. I couldn't go along with censorship, not when it was being imposed in a haphazard manner. Some newspapers like *Izvestia* were allowed to print material which we were denied. The

censor, Vladimir Solodin, said he was basically taking out articles he felt were inflammatory or embarrassing to Yeltsin. An arbitrary approach."

The Yeltsin administration lifted censorship October 7, two days later, possibly under pressure from the Clinton administration.

At that point, the West breathed a sigh of relief. But the Yeltsin administration expanded the ban on "disruptive" newspapers. On October 14, the Ministry of Information announced that more newspapers would be prevented from publishing: *Narodnaya Pravda*, *Russkoye Delo*, *Russkiye Vedomosti*, *Russkiyi Puls*, *Russkii Poryadok*, *Za Rus*, *Nash Marsh*, *Natsionalist*, *Russkoye Slovo*, *Moskovskii Traktir*, *Russkii Soyuz*, *K Toporu*. This action was taken, Soviet-style, in violation of the Law on the Press, which requires a court hearing before a newspaper can be shut down. Criminal proceedings will be instituted for unspecified violations of the Law on the Press, according to ministry officials.

The Yeltsin administration is now succeeding in creating "censorship by chill." In St. Petersburg, Alexander Nevzorov, the virulent anti-Yeltsinite commentator, and his program, "600 Seconds" were taken off the air on orders from the Ministry. In Moscow, Liubimov, the liberal commentator, was dismissed by the chief of Ostankino TV, Vyacheslav Bragin, who broke a contract with the Vid TV Production Company for which Liubimov works. Liubimov fell from grace for urging citizens to go home to bed. Disloyalty.

Rumors circulate that the authorities are trying to dismiss Tretyakov as editor of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, which has been critical of Yeltsin. About a year ago, Yeltsin forced liberal editor Yegor Yakovlev out of the directorship of Ostankino TV. Program director Igor Malashenko resigned, complaining of political pressure from the President's office.

Articles have begun appearing in the press commenting on current pressures for self-censorship. Moscow News described the lack of respect for journalists during the crisis and the brief im-

prisonment of several reporters, including one from CNN. Presidential spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov has been quite direct in calling for self-censorship. He says that too many analyses have been "provocational."

All governments know that radio and TV are key to communicating with the people and this is as true in Russia as anywhere else. Over 90 percent of the former Soviet population has access to television. Well before this latest crisis, Yeltsin struggled with the Parliament for control of television and largely succeeded in imposing his fiat. Yeltsin created a special mechanism, the Federal Information Service, which supplied presidential guidance to television program managers. The Russian Constitutional Court ruled this agency unconstitutional earlier this year, but Yeltsin refused to disband it.

In March 1993, Parliament voted to create "oversight councils" to try to correct what it saw as the Yeltsin tilt of TV programs. The political opposition did not achieve much impact, and this failure enraged Parliamentary Speaker Khazbulatov even more. Khazbulatov persuaded the Parliament to adopt a restrictive Law on Television. Press Minister Mikhail Fedotov resigned in disgust in September, saying the clock of press freedom had been turned back several decades.

During the October crisis, television did not distinguish itself by its bravery or resourcefulness. The greatest criticism has been directed against the Ostankino television center, which went off the air entirely for the first time in its history.

Then, as now, Ted Turner's CNN played an important role in Russian politics, providing an alternate source of information directly from the streets. With far less equipment and personnel, CNN stationed teams at key places during the October crisis and provided continuing coverage to the world. I have since spoken to many in the United States who turned on their sets and stayed glued throughout the whole night of October 3-4. CNN's greatest triumph, of course, came when Ostankino television decided to pick up their feeds to Atlanta and ran them for the Russian

audience.

Since then, the Russian press has been debating why Russian television managers were so gutless. TV chief Vyacheslav Bragin says he was concerned for the safety of women employees and sent them home when the attack began at 4 p.m. Sunday. But he has no clear answer for the criticism that Ostankino TV could have switched to reserve stations around Moscow but did not. An outsider concludes that Russian television is directed at the top by Yeltsin loyalists, not journalists who have an unquenchable "fire in the belly."

These days Moscow television is loyally promoting Yeltsin's constitution and the elections which have been called for December 12. Yeltsin has put a strong hand on television programming and will not soon release his grip. That is causing dissatisfaction among TV journalists. Firings and resignations will likely follow.

Russian radio, on the other hand, performed more freely than TV during the October crisis. The independent station Echo of Moscow repeated its sterling performance of the 1991 crisis when it reported troop movements block by block, minute by minute. On October 5, Echo of Moscow wangled an interview with Mikhail Poltaranin, who had just resigned as Minister of Press and Information, with critical words for the censorship regime. Echo stayed on the air throughout the crisis, as did Mayak and Russian Radio.

Important too was the role played by foreign radio stations, particularly the BBC, Radio Liberty, and the Voice of America. Overseas short-wave insured that the Russian public would get some truthful reporting no matter how hard the Yeltsin spin doctors tried to suppress or manipulate the news.

One example is a censored article by Sergei Parkhomenko of Segodnya, who witnessed the chaos in the Kremlin when the crisis broke. A friend had helped him get into the corridors of power. Yeltsin arrived at his office only at 6:15 p.m. Sunday evening as his civilian aides shouted helplessly, and the military wavered. Parkhomenko painted a grim picture of impotence, adding:

"The commanders were waiting to

see how the slaughter at Ostankino would end. They were afraid to make a mistake.

"And as soon as things get tense, they will halt in midstep, thinking, should we really run to meet the unknown?"

"Now who wants to say that it's all over?"

Parkhomenko's article was excised from Segodnya because any censor could see it could undercut Yeltsin's authority. But Parkhomenko phoned it to Radio Liberty, which was pleased to broadcast it, and The Moscow Times, the new English language daily, picked it up in full the next day. All this is an argument in favor of continued funding for Radio Liberty which the Clinton administration is cutting back.

Russia likes "a strong hand," and Boris Yeltsin has emerged from the October crisis as Russia's strongman. Russians today are calling his administration "the system of personal rule." A less polite term used by some is dictatorship: Yeltsin dissolved the Parliament in violation of the constitution, disbanded the constitutional court, and rules by decree. True, he has rescinded emergency censorship and has called for Parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum. And he hopes for President Clinton's benediction when he visits Moscow in early January.

Boris Yeltsin triumphed in August 1991, and again in October 1993. He is the best hope for democracy in Russia, Americans say. But the irony is that the Russian newspapers and TV are facing a chill wind from the Kremlin. The media are in greater danger of losing freedom today than at any time since Mikhail Gorbachev pried open Soviet society with glasnost. If James Madison was right in saying that free debate and a free press are the guarantees of democracy, will Russian democracy be still-born once again? ■

Beyond Objectivity

It Is a Myth, an Important One, but Often Crippling and It Needs to Be Replaced With a More Inspiring Concept

The following article was adapted from a talk by Jay Rosen to the Nieman Fellows at Harvard University April 15, 1993.

BY JAY ROSEN

Objectivity is one of the identifying features of journalism in the United States and perhaps the major contribution American journalism has made to the rest of the world. Anybody who tries to think about our way of doing journalism must grapple with this concept, which is essential to understanding the way the American press sees itself and the way America sees the press.

Now is also a good time to examine the subject because in a lot of different ways objectivity is breaking down. It's a mechanism that's not operating the way it used to. There's a good deal of anxiety and confusion about the term among journalists themselves. Almost every time somebody in journalism uses the word objectivity they usually follow with something like: "whatever that means," indicating that there is a conceptual problem percolating upward.

I'd like to present five ways of understanding what objectivity is. This is important because objectivity has a lot of different dimensions. I'll talk about the five and then discuss some of the problems that have arisen around objectivity and some of the challenges to it. At the end, I'll propose a stronger public philosophy for journalists—one that would engage the press in the task of making democracy work.

One of the simplest ways of understanding objectivity is simply to say that it is a contract between journalists on the one hand and their employers on the other. The contract says this: publishers, you give us the right to report the news independently and leave us alone and in exchange we won't make too much trouble for you by introducing our politics into the news pages. So objectivity is a kind of contract between this group of professionals we call journalists and the people who provide the plant and equipment for them to do their jobs. This contract arose in the 1920's and 1930's as the ownership base of journalism was transformed. Editor/proprietors were out and corporations were in. So there arose a negotiated peace between journalists and their corporate employers. The name of that negotiated peace is objectivity. But today increasingly the bosses, the employers, are not keeping their side of the bargain. They're not allowing journalists to go out and report the news independently because they're much more interested in cutting the cost of newsgathering and in transforming news into a marketing vehicle of one kind or another. You see this in both print and broadcast.

An expression of the breakdown of this contract, a very poignant, direct expression, occurred around St. Patrick's Day this year at WNBC in New York. A group of editors and technicians and camera people at WNBC, the local NBC television affiliate in New York, went on a one-day strike to protest the sensationalizing of the local news. They said that all they were allowed to do was the Amy Fisher story and the like. It was a very interesting



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event. There was no practical effect, but they did go on strike. David Diaz, a fairly well known New York reporter, had quit earlier over this issue. The situation was a little bit ambiguous because there was also a contract dispute between these people and the company at the time they went on strike.

I've said that objectivity is a contract, but to phrase this contract slightly differently, it's also an exchange. Journalists gain their independence and in exchange they give up their voice. That leads to the conclusion that if the independence gets taken away, then the voice ought to return. That is basically what happened at WNBC. So the journalists there began to speak out for the right to cover serious public affairs, rather than simply reproducing stories about Amy Fisher. This very interesting event went almost unnoticed in journalism.

A second way of understanding objectivity is as a theory of how to get at the truth. We might call it the epistemology of American journalists. Some would even say an ideology. As a theory of how to pursue the truth, I would describe objectivity as a separation theory. It states that if you separate facts from values, or information from opinion, or news from views, this will permit you to know the truth. These separations are central to American journalism's image of itself.

The usefulness of this theory depends not only on an individual journalist's ability to separate those things—which can be doubted—but

also on the original logical validity of those distinctions. That is, we must consider the intellectual problem of distinguishing something called information from something called opinion, of distinguishing facts from values. Almost the entire history of 20th Century thought in the human sciences has tended to work against these separations. In fact, it's not an exaggeration to say that journalism is the last refuge of objectivity as an epistemology. Nobody else takes this notion seriously anymore. Not even in the hard sciences do they really see the pursuit of truth this way. Certainly almost every important development in the human and social sciences over the last 20 to 30 years has worn away at the intellectual validity of the journalist's theory of truth. Yet, it is in journalism that this concept remains.

Even journalists are beginning to lose their faith in their own epistemology, and I base this on things I constantly hear journalists say. In fact if there's one sentence that I've heard literally hundreds of times from journalists it's this: "Of course, no one can be really objective. But we try to be fair."

We try to be fair. This is a very genuine and a very important statement. But if you look at what that statement says, it is in fact exchanging the pursuit of facts for a value. What it says is: maybe we can't just present the facts, but what we can do is pursue this very important value of fairness. That statement—objectivity no, fairness yes—is the journalists' way of coming to grips with the fact that the intellectual validity of objectiv-

ity as an epistemology has been worn away. Objectivity as fairness is a kind of accommodation to the intellectual disintegration of objectivity as an epistemology. Of course it's also connected to our notions of justice. So in a positive sense we can see that objectivity, un-

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derstood as fairness, is the journalist's way of pursuing justice.

A third way to understand objectivity is as a set of professional routines and procedures—that is, a set of things journalists habitually do when they go out to report the news. Reliance on official sources, because they seem to be more credible or objective, is an example of a routine. Objectivity can be described as a set of these routines. A very common one would be quoting both sides in a political dispute. One of the ways that objectivity gets translated into a routine is through the ritual of balance and the notion of both sides having their say in the news columns.

The weakness of balance has been noted many, many times: On the one hand the Tobacco Institute says smoking is fine and actually improves your health, but on the other hand the American Cancer Society says smoking will kill you. There you have it. That's an extreme case, of course, but the problem of on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand journalism shows us that often balance is a flight from truth rather than

The Project on Public Life and the Press is operated by the Kettering Foundation in collaboration with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and New York University. Financed by a \$513,000 grant from the Knight Foundation, the Project will push the concept that the press should play a more active role in the revival of civic life and the improvement of public discourse. Over the next two years workshops will be held for journalists who are or want to be engaged in relevant experiments. Two summer institutes are planned for those who want to deepen the theory and advance the practice. These events will be hosted by the American Press Institute. Professor Jay Rosen welcomes suggestions and questions. Write to him at the Department of Journalism, New York University, 10 Washington Place, New York, NY 10003.

an avenue into truth. It's a way of disavowing your responsibility for the whole problem of truth. This is why some scholars see objectivity not as a declaration of responsibility but as a way for journalists to escape responsibility for the truthfulness of their accounts.

Objectivity as balance has another interesting purpose to it that is little noticed. When you go out and wade into the political realm in pursuit of

this morning. This is part of what we might call the cunning of objectivity.

You can look at objectivity, then, as a device, not only for devaluing criticism, which it does, but even more ingeniously for *producing* a form of criticism that is easily devalued. Objectivity gets everybody to argue about bias in the news columns. It causes everybody to say, "You're not objective. You're biased," which immediately causes a journalist to regard that critic as biased,

Objectivity gets everybody to argue about bias in the news columns. It causes everybody to say, "You're not objective. You're biased," which immediately causes a journalist to regard that critic as biased, therefore to discount what he or she is saying. This is probably the most nefarious, insidious effect of objectivity. It produces a kind of criticism that is in fact easily and regularly discounted by journalists themselves, which is a way of living without criticism.

balance, you tend to see the world a certain way. You tend to see it in terms of polarized extremes. You listen for—and hear—the people on this side saying one thing and the people on the other side saying the opposite. The easiest way to produce the impression of balance is to take those two extremes and run them together. Part of the advantage of doing that is that you claim to be in the middle. So objectivity understood as balance helps journalists claim the authoritative middle ground between extremes. And we can also say that it causes them to look for those extremes. Furthermore—you know, the more I've thought about it the more ingenious I think it is—objectivity has this cunning ability to devalue and deflect all criticism. Here's how it works: "Well people on the right say we're too liberal, and people on the left say we're in league with the status quo, which probably means we're right where we should be, right in the middle." I just heard Sam Donaldson say this on NPR

therefore to discount what he or she is saying. This is probably the most nefarious, insidious effect of objectivity. It produces a kind of criticism that is in fact easily and regularly discounted by journalists themselves, which is a way of living without criticism. That's the point of Sam Donaldson's saying the people on the left say this, the people on the right say that. This allows him *carte blanche* to disregard what everybody says. That to me is where objectivity becomes extremely damaging to the credibility of the journalist because it eliminates the possibility of learning from criticism.

I'll give you a serious example. James Kinsella, a former fellow at the Gannett Center, wrote a book on the coverage of the AIDS epidemic. In this book he showed how the gay community in New York was trying to tell The New York Times that it was missing the story. Because this advice came from gays, it was in a subtle sense discounted because they had the most investment in

the story. The discounting of the advice hurt The Times, which was for a time underplaying the story. Needless to say, it was also an important factor in those years when many people were becoming infected without knowing about the virus, which is a public tragedy. The Times was hurt because it couldn't hear its own environment talking to it due to this subtle way of devaluing criticism. This is a serious problem for society, too.

The fourth way of understanding objectivity—and this is perhaps the most unusual way of thinking about it—is to say that objectivity is a technique of persuasion, a rhetorical strategy. If I want you to accept my account of the way things are, there are a lot of choices I have. I can try, for example, to impress you with my passion and conviction. That's one way of getting you to accept my account. I can try to speak from a common tradition, a set of values that I know you share, which is another way to get you to accept my account. I can try to engage your emotions in such a powerful way that you can't think of any alternative to my account. That's called demagoguery. I can assemble a theory of the way things are that is so powerful and illuminating and clarifies so much that you will accept my account because the theory is so effective. And I can get you to accept my account by claiming to speak the word of God. Now objectivity is a way of getting you to accept my account by saying, "Look, I don't have any passions. I don't have any convictions. I don't have the word of God. I don't have any theory. I'm just telling you the way it is, you see, so accept it because this is the way it is." It's a technique of persuasion which we can place alongside a lot of other techniques. All these techniques have their advantages and their disadvantages, but the journalist's preferred technique of persuasion is to say, I'm just handing you the facts. I don't have any investment in the facts. I don't care necessarily about the facts. It's not my problem. I'm just saying this is the way it is. This is also, by the way, a technique of deflecting criticism because the way you experience any criticism of news is that people are blaming the messenger, and so on.

Another way to put this is to say that objectivity is a way of generating authority in the culture. By authority I mean the right to be heard, the right to be taken seriously, the ability to be persuasive in your account of things. There are a lot of ways of generating authority. Journalists do it through this means of persuasion called objectivity. We tend to think of persuasion as something that belongs on the editorial page. But persuasion is constantly being enacted through all the devices of journalism. Consider something as simple as

Washington, April 15—

the dateline that appears in dispatches to The New York Times from the capital. In the newspaper published April 16, they'll say Washington, April 15. The Times I think is the only major newspaper left that does this, but why does it bother? It's a little technique of persuasion. The dateline says: the reporter was there. He was there on that date and he's sending us an account from this place. That's why you should trust it. Washington, April 15. It's a little device of persuasion. The news is rife with persuasive techniques of this type and you can call the set of those techniques objectivity.

Finally, a fifth way to understand objectivity is as the expression of a very noble and necessary ideal in a democracy. That is the notion of a disinterested—not an objective, but a disinterested—truth. That is, it expresses the hope that a political community might agree on some facts so that it can disagree productively about others. Objectivity is one of the culture's ways of expressing this hope that the political community will be presented with a common object, so that members of the community can take different views of that object and be able to disagree productively about it. The common object is important because we know if people disagree about everything, about their definition of the situation, about what they regard as a fact, about what's happening at the most basic level outside their windows, if they disagree about all of that, they're not going to be inclined to argue with each other. They're going to be inclined to kill each other. So

objectivity is an expression of this very noble, but very necessary, hope that a political community might proceed down the path of reason when it disagrees rather than through the more common route of violence. That's why you can't trash objectivity, as some people—particularly some academics—

who believes in it and for good reason, because everything we've learned about the pursuit of truth tells us that in one way or another the knower is incorporated into the known. Objectivity has the further unfortunate effect of alienating the American journalist from intellectual debate and intellectual con-

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are inclined to do. The pursuit of a disinterested truth is vitally important to any democratic political community. This is why objectivity is important. It encourages us to agree on some things so that we can disagree productively on other things.

So those are five ways of understanding objectivity. What are some of the problems? Well we've already talked about some of them.

First of all, as a contract, the employers aren't holding up their end of the bargain. That means there's now a question out there, and this is going to be a crucial question in American journalism in the next five years. What are journalists going to do in response to the withdrawal of this contract? One thing they can do is turn into adjuncts of the marketing industry. That's one option. The other option is for journalists to try to reclaim some kind of public support for doing what only they can do. That is, they have to get the public on their side, and objectivity is a very poor philosophy for doing that. It's an extremely weak way of persuading the public that journalism deserves a place in the culture that might otherwise be eclipsed by the entertainment machine. In any event, objectivity as a contract is breaking down. That raises the question what's going to replace it.

Secondly, objectivity as a theory of how to arrive at the truth is bankrupt intellectually. There isn't anybody else

who believes in it and for good reason, because everything we've learned about the pursuit of truth tells us that in one way or another the knower is incorporated into the known. Objectivity has the further unfortunate effect of alienating the American journalist from intellectual debate and intellectual conversation, which is a very dangerous thing. In fact, in other political cultures, the separations between intellectual life and journalistic culture are not as great, but in America the divide can be a large one. Part of the reason is that intellectuals familiar with the currents in 20th Century thought just can't deal with some of the things that come out of journalists' mouths. (Of course the reverse is also true, but that's another talk.) I know it sounds condescending to say but some people in academic life think it's useless to try to talk with journalists because of this stumbling block of objectivity—also known as naive empiricism. This is unfortunate because the two groups not only have a lot to say to one another but they're also kind of in a similar position. Neither of them can prosper if the values of a commercial culture are the only values that matter in this society. The two groups—journalists and intellectuals—need to support each other.

Another reason objectivity is breaking down is that it conflicts with certain other deeply held values in journalism. And it conflicts dramatically. Take, for example, the notion of journalist as watchdog, which is very heavily ingrained, especially in the elite press. It just doesn't fit well with notions of objectivity because a watchdog is far more assertive than objective. It also conflicts with the most basic thing about journalism as an activity, which is

storytelling. Imagine saying about a famous storyteller in, say, a traditional village, that what made him so wonderful was that he was always completely objective. It is simply not a characteristic of a skilled storyteller that he or she is objective. Yet journalists will simultaneously assert these two things about their work. They're objective and they tell us stories. The two values are in conflict. We see this especially in television where there is such heavy emphasis on drama that routines and rituals of objectivity just go by the wayside. "60 Minutes" is sometimes an example of that.

Still another reason that objectivity is breaking down is that television places heavy pressure on the journalist to exhibit a compelling personality. When a person shows up on our screens to tell us about the world, we want to know about him or her. That's not true in print. We want to know something about that person, about our relationship to him or her. We want to know what they care about. The people who are most successful on television are not the people who strike the audience as objective. They're successful because somehow they engage the audience, present a persona that is attractive, credible, elusive, entertaining, whatever. Look at somebody like Bill Moyers and his effectiveness on television. Conservatives can wail all they want about his liberal bias, but there's a reason why he is so popular. The reason is that he's a very American character and his success is due to his ability to project that character. One can say the same about Mike Wallace or even Ted Koppel. What's effective about Koppel is that he seems to be prosecuting a discussion based on a certain conviction about the way discussions should go. And people, if they trust him, trust him because they know he cares about having that discussion, not about putting people on the spot for its own sake. It's a very different kind of style from Sam Donaldson. I think that's why even people who have a lot to lose by going on the air, will go on the air with Koppel when they would never go on the air with Sam Donaldson. The point is that objectivity is undermined by television's emphasis on the journal-

In fact, Maureen Dowd's heat, which is whatever Maureen's thinking, is the route by which objectivity is breaking down in the very citadel of objective journalism, The New York Times. Right at the center, it's coming apart.

ist as a person, or persona.

In print, also, objectivity is breaking down for a lot of reasons. The primary one is that print journalism needs to add value in a world where information circulates almost by osmosis. People already know about the news. They get the news through their skin. They get it through CNN. They get it through 24-hour radio. So what do print journalists do? They used to just give them a summary. What do they give them now? Well increasingly it's things like context and perspective and interpretation. As soon as you say that what you're giving people is context, perspective, analysis, interpretation, you're out of the realm of objectivity, and you're into a territory where the intellectual weaknesses of journalism become very important. There is no such thing as context with a capital C. There's no such thing as interpretation with a capital I. You can't supply these things in some simple, straightforward way. You can only supply them from a certain perspective. You need a view of the world. That's your added value.

I would estimate that 50 percent, possibly more, of The New York Times 1992 election year coverage went under the banner of news analysis, campaign memo, reporter's notebook, or some other "sig" that identifies it as something other than straight reporting. You cannot explain the presence of somebody like Maureen Dowd in The New York Times in any of the inherited

languages of The Times. She's doing something that's completely different from what Times reporters have traditionally done. The way The Times explains this to itself is to say, well, we like Maureen's voice. We're getting her voice into the paper. That's okay. But what it means is that what's valuable about Maureen Dowd is not the facts she assembles but in a way, who she is. She's valuable as a person to The Times. In fact, Maureen Dowd's beat, which is whatever Maureen's thinking, is the route by which objectivity is breaking down in the very citadel of objective journalism, The New York Times. Right at the center, it's coming apart.

That whole problem, voice, raises that very profound issue of what *ought* to be the voice of the journalist. What should that voice be like? What is that voice? If it's just a collection of prejudices and random fluctuations of the events of that person's life or their personality, who cares about that? If journalism is supposed to have a voice, what does this voice sound like? How is this voice cultivated? Where should it be heard? How should it be heard? Those are some very profound questions, and you can't answer any of those questions through the rhetoric of objectivity.

Finally, objectivity is most valuable, most indispensable when people need a fair description of what's going on in order to engage in a purposeful activity. They need to know what's happening in order to take action, make a move, protect their interests. When business people have investments in, say, Thailand, they need to know what business conditions are like in Thailand. And they'll usually want "objective" reports. That's been one of the traditional demand factors in journalism—information upon which you can act. But what happens if people stop acting? Stop caring? This is a serious problem in the political sphere, especially in the United States. As people become disengaged from politics, an objective treatment of politics begins to lose its point because you're not addressing anybody anymore. They've fled the scene. They're turning off and going in the opposite direction. They're heading toward pri-

vate life, which is more engaging, more important to them. So this has led to the argument—and I've argued it in many forums, before many different kinds of journalists—that journalism should be involved in re-engaging people in public life. Objectivity is a very bad, unworkable philosophy for that task of re-engaging citizens in politics and public life. That to me is one of the big challenges facing journalists right now.

The success that the various news organizations have had in sponsoring this re-engagement came because they consented to question objectivity. They are in effect developing a new theory of credibility. The new definition is coming out of the experiments we are seeing in the newspaper world in Charlotte, Wichita, and Columbus, Georgia. In the old theory, credibility follows from detachment and distance. You're credible because you're not involved. You're not interested, you have no stake. Under the new theory of credibility, credibility follows because you're concerned, because you care, because it matters to you what happens in the community. And you gain credibility in the community because you demonstrate that you do have a stake in whether, for instance, the community faces its problems or runs and hides.

I was watching Gabe Pressman with William F. Buckley on a Sunday interview show. Pressman is a longtime local reporter on WNBC and Buckley had just written a 20,000-word article on whether Pat Buchanan was an anti-Semite. He concluded that Buchanan sort of was anti-Semitic but sort of wasn't, either. Pressman is trying to understand what Buckley is saying and Buckley is giving him these convoluted answers. Pressman finally says, "Listen Mr. Buckley, as a Jew should I consider Pat Buchanan my enemy?" Normally one would think that if a journalist says, "as a Jew," this undermines his credibility. Brit Hume doesn't say, "as a Republican, I can tell you today that President Bush..." because he assumes that the admission would destroy his credibility. But the interesting thing is that in this case, it *improved* Pressman's credibility, because he cared about the answer to this question. This was some-

thing that mattered to him. He said, "Look, Mr. Buckley I care about this. Now tell me, as a Jew..." This hints at what I'm calling the new theory of credibility. You demonstrate your credibility because you're concerned, you care, you're invested. Therefore what you do

be on their way to a new approach. I call it "public journalism," a theory and a practice that recognizes the overriding importance of improving public life. In the next few years, it will be critical for people in journalism to declare an end to their neutrality on certain questions.

... the solution to the puzzle lies with another important term—democracy. As long as journalists assume that democracy is what we have, they'll continue to rely on objectivity, and suffer from its weaknesses. But if they can find a way of seeing democracy as something we do, or better yet, as something we must create, re-invent, re-imagine, then they'll be on their way to a new approach. I call it "public journalism," a theory and a practice that recognizes the overriding importance of improving public life.

as a journalist matters.

Perhaps the deepest puzzle about objectivity is what should replace it. With all its flaws it still expresses certain deeply held and legitimate values: the notion of a disinterested truth, the wish to separate doing journalism from doing politics, the principled attempt to restrain your own biases, looking at things from the other person's perspective. These are important values for all of us, and particularly for journalists. You can't just wave them away by saying "objectivity is a myth." Still, it *is* a myth, in some ways a dangerous and distorting one. So what might be a better myth? Or, to put it another way, what would be a stronger public philosophy for journalists?

I'm more confident about the importance of the question than I am about my own answer, but I would say that the solution to the puzzle lies with another important term—democracy. As long as journalists assume that democracy is what we have, they'll continue to rely on objectivity, and suffer from its weaknesses. But if they can find a way of seeing democracy as something we do, or better yet, as something we must create, re-invent, re-imagine, then they'll

For example, whether people participate or not, whether we have genuine debate in this country, whether the political system works, whether public life draws the attention of citizens, whether political leaders earn our respect. As they begin to realize that they cannot afford to be neutral on these questions, they will perhaps struggle toward their own philosophy, one that can replace objectivity with something stronger, and, if I can put it this way, more inspiring.

I'm not sure it's inspiring, but I like to tell my students that journalists are people who make things. This always confuses them at first, because everything they've been told states that journalists are people who *find* things—stories, facts, news. If journalists do, in fact, make things, then their field is an art, not a science. We might say that journalism is one of the more important arts of democracy, and its ultimate purpose is not to make news, or reputations, or headlines, but simply to make democracy work. With that as the journalist's declared objective, "objectivity" may lose some of its prestige. It's not a loss we should mourn. ■

Public Journalism—an Early Attempt

BY BILLY WINN

Columbus Beyond 2000 was one of the more interesting—and controversial—community journalism projects of the 1980's. It was undertaken by The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, a Knight-Ridder newspaper with a daily circulation of around 60,000, most of it in Columbus, Georgia and Muscogee County, a rather isolated community located on the Chattahoochee River in the west-central part of the state on the Alabama border.

Columbus is a cotton mill and military base town—Fort Benning is a few miles south of the city—of 180,000, 35 percent of whom are black and a significant portion Hispanic and Asian-American, mainly wives and offspring of military personnel. It's a town whose Old South atmosphere lingers despite determined efforts by boosters to change the city's image to Sun Belt South.

The idea of Columbus Beyond 2000

originated in 1987 with Tom Kunkel, then the paper's young editor. At the outset, Kunkel, an Indiana native who came to The Ledger-Enquirer via Knight-Ridder in Miami, simply wished to find out what the residents of Columbus wanted the town to be like at the turn of the century. Certainly he wanted The Ledger-Enquirer to play a constructive role in bringing about much-needed changes in Columbus, which was troubled by geographic isolation, slow economic growth, near zero population growth—the young were fleeing to Atlanta and other large cities—low wages, and a functional illiteracy rate approaching 40 percent. But the initial purpose of the project was simply to find out what the people wanted their town to be like at the turn of the century.

To get the project started, Kunkel invited several dozen local residents

and community leaders to a symposium on the city's future. The symposium, which was well-attended, was held at the Columbus Iron Works Convention & Trade Center on June 9, 1987. Ideas generated in this symposium were used to formulate questions for an independent survey or poll conducted by KPC Research of Charlotte, NC, a subsidiary of K-R.

The Ledger-Enquirer forked over \$5,000 for the survey, really a random telephone sampling of 411 households in Muscogee County. Each respondent was asked 20 questions, ranging from "Do you think that Columbus as a place to raise a family is getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same?" to "Do you think blacks have the same chance to get ahead economically as whites in Columbus?"

A second and more subjective survey was prepared by this writer, a native of Columbus, who was senior writer for the Beyond 2000 project. I asked reporters and editors in the newsroom for ideas, and, drawing on my own knowledge of the city, put together a questionnaire. It was circulated to community leaders selected from a mailing list supplied by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. I also personally took the questionnaire to ministers, including black ministers, political leaders and people locally prominent in the arts. Among the questions posed on this questionnaire: "What is the worst feature of life in Columbus?" "Do you want Columbus to become larger and more populous or to remain as it is?"

While the surveys were being completed, a team of reporters was formed under the direction of city editor Jeff Davison. Their assignment was to pre-



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pare a special section dealing with the city's problems and prospects. Hundreds of citizens of Columbus were interviewed by the reporters, who ultimately worked with a thorough knowledge of the findings of both surveys. This gave a depth to the interviews that otherwise would not have been possible. We knew, for example, that people considered the number one problem in the city to be low wages and lack of job opportunities. They were also concerned over lack of leadership, racial and sexual inequalities, education, the condition of the roads and the lack of adequate recreational opportunities and facilities. They also clung to an old belief that five or six prominent families, usually identified as owners of the local cotton mills, really ran the city and made all the key decisions that affected its people. We also knew that the people who responded to the surveys said they were most proud of Columbus's friendly people, small-town atmosphere and the quality of life the city afforded.

While the special section was in preparation, Tom Kunkel suddenly announced his resignation to go into business for himself, and Jack Swift, *The Ledger-Enquirer's* managing editor, was selected to be his successor. Kunkel had been so closely identified with the origin and preparation of the project that some of us wondered if it might not be abandoned altogether after he left.

At first, Swift did regard the *Beyond 2000* project with suspicion. And although in time he was to become its most enthusiastic supporter, he was initially very concerned that some of the articles were not comprehensive enough. The result was that Swift required additional research and considerable rewriting of the material. What had been envisioned as a fairly straightforward project of a few months gradually stretched into six months then nine months and then a year. By the time the special section was published May 29-June 5, 1988, 13 months of research and writing and hundreds of hours of reporters' time were involved.

We called the final product "*Columbus Beyond 2000: Agenda for Progress.*" In it, we recommended a number of much-needed civic improvements and

tried to offer an agenda based on what we had learned from our research and from the people of Columbus. For example, we recommended greater diversification of Columbus's economic base, more emphasis on road development, better daycare facilities for working mothers, construction of a new civic center and public library, greater involvement of minorities in all aspects of city life, more support of the arts by government and business and aggressive protection of the local environment.

When it was finally published, some business leaders said it was too negative. Others questioned some of the conclusions, particularly those relating to low wages, race relations (which we said, accurately, were very poor) and lack of leadership. But most people thought the section was good journalism and said so. As it turned out, the solid, objective research represented by the surveys was an important element in ultimately establishing the credibility of the package.

Although some of us were concerned about the inclusion of an agenda in the section—to me it represented a subtle but significant change in the project's intent—we still felt we were within the bounds of traditional journalism. This changed for many reporters however, when it became clear that the paper was not going to just publish "*Columbus Beyond 2000: Agenda for Progress,*" but that Swift, prodded by community leaders, was leading us deeper and deeper into an activist role in the city.

At first, the reporters merely sensed the change, but soon it was announced that a *Beyond 2000* Task Force was going to be formed, with a steering committee, to help implement the *Beyond 2000* agenda in the community. Swift assumed a leading role in the formation of the Task Force and the selection of its members, and he was on the steering committee, as was this reporter.

The pace really picked up when the Kettering Foundation of Washington was asked by Swift to apply its expertise in community organization to the *Beyond 2000* project. Several of their people came to Columbus to offer ad-

vice and guidance. In cooperation with other organizations, and with Kettering assistance, the newspaper began to sponsor a number of town hall meetings on such subjects as education, teen problems and the like.

Swift, who is perceived in Columbus and by some executives in Knight-Ridder as both the originator and chief spokesman of the United *Beyond 2000* idea (the Task Force changed its name in 1990), began to have a series of "backyard barbecues" that drew people from all races and walks of life. Several participants said it was the first time black and white leaders had ever met in the city in a social setting.

Meanwhile, Swift also gave *Ledger-Enquirer* reporters numerous assignments on topics suggested by the original *Beyond 2000* research. These assignments appeared as one-shots or as long series. They ranged from studies of the economic impact of the military at Fort Benning to a four-part series on what other river communities were doing to develop their river fronts. A special *Beyond 2000* logo appeared with each article.

Soon the paper's overworked reporters began to feel as if their entire professional careers had been taken over by *Beyond 2000*. Certainly I felt that way. An attitude survey taken of the newspaper employees at that time revealed tremendous hostility toward the project and, say some who saw the report, toward Swift.

In November of 1990, Jack Swift shot himself. So closely had Swift been identified with *Beyond 2000* by the paper's management that, following his death, *The Ledger-Enquirer* abandoned the project. No newspaper news personnel remained on the task force steering committee and the paper ceased sponsoring town hall meetings and the sort of backyard parties Swift had favored. To date, no more *Beyond 2000* stories have appeared in *The Ledger-Enquirer*. However, *United Beyond 2000*, the task force, remains active in the community, although in a greatly modified form with a much lower profile.

Whereas some journalists, including some editors within Knight-Ridder, felt *The Ledger-Enquirer* should never have

attempted a project of the nature of Beyond 2000, far more people in Columbus are disturbed with the newspaper for having begun something it did not finish. Others simply wonder why we dropped a project that seemed to be having such a positive effect on the town.

Over the past 24 months I have received numerous inquiries about Beyond 2000 from journalists around the country. Most want to know the answer to three questions: Was anything accomplished by Beyond 2000? What did we learn as a result of the experience? And where, if anywhere, did we go wrong?

The answer to the first question, in my opinion, is that a great deal was accomplished:

- The original newspaper project was solid work which has proved its value to the community many times over. So substantial was that work that the city government used many of the paper's original findings in planning its own agenda for Columbus.
- The current mayor, Frank Martin, ran on what could be called the Beyond 2000 platform. Although Martin is an inexperienced politician, he is a determined, progressive leader who has worked hard to bring blacks and whites together and to move the city forward economically and socially.
- This year, Columbus voters approved a 1 cent sales tax increase that will finance more than \$170 million in civic improvements, including a new civic center, \$30 million in new parks and recreational facilities, and a new police and fire building. A beautiful new Riverwalk now meanders along the banks of the Chattahoochee in the city's downtown, and a variety of river front development projects are on the planning board, including a riverboat museum, shops, hiking trails, a public marina and an 18-hole golf course.
- The sales tax money for recre-

ation was a key element in Columbus's getting the 1996 Olympic women's fast-pitch softball competition, a tremendous coup for the city.

- Racial dialogue was reopened in the city and friendships were formed between blacks and whites that promise a new day in race relations. The significance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated in Columbus, a city with an active NAACP desegregation suit against its school system and a truly violent racial history.
- A new class of leaders has emerged from the Beyond 2000 Task Force. Many of these new leaders are from the city's growing but heretofore silent middle class. Many are black or female. Undoubtedly, the Beyond 2000 project played a significant role in giving these new leaders a voice.
- It's a subjective judgment on my part, but the city does seem to have a new sense of its destiny and a more realistic view of itself as a result of information developed in the original Beyond 2000 project, i.e., there is no substitute for hard data and good reporting.

What did we learn and what would we do differently?

We probably should not have become so deeply involved in the formation of the task force or taken such an active role in the steering committee, although, at the time, none of us saw how we could have avoided doing either. We were directly asked by many townspeople to take the lead. If we declined or tried to get someone else to do the job, whatever Beyond 2000 project we were working on at that moment usually faltered. The choice seemed to be lead or abandon Beyond 2000. We decided to lead.

The message is you can't be half-pregnant and you can't be half-committed to the type of community journalism represented by Beyond 2000.

More attention should have been paid to the feelings and perceptions of

reporters, including those not directly involved in the project. Once resentment to Beyond 2000 had developed in the newsroom it tended to mushroom into criticism of even of the most valid aspects of the project. It would have been a simple matter to explain to the news staff exactly what the purpose of Beyond 2000 was and why the editors felt it was worthwhile. But the fact is this was never done.

It can't be emphasized enough, however, that whereas some reporters said we went much too far in our involvement in the community, residents of Columbus criticized us for not having gone far enough. The bottom line is that people who subscribed to and read the newspaper liked Columbus Beyond 2000. Even today, I rarely go anywhere in the community that someone doesn't ask me why we are no longer sponsoring the project. Recently, we have had several groups of community leaders come speak to us about what they think the paper should be doing. Re-start Beyond 2000, many of the leaders pleaded.

Projects such as Beyond 2000 tend to snowball, and what starts as an ambitious but still quite manageable enterprise can turn into a monster that threatens to consume an entire news operation. For this reason, it is important to limit the amount of resources placed at the disposal of such projects. Certainly, daily journalistic responsibilities should never be sacrificed in favor of special projects.

Finally, it could be argued that our greatest failing was in not learning to say no when community leaders asked us to help them with a project. When we said yes it inevitably expanded our activist role. As already stated, we were aware of this and yet we seemed powerless to stop ourselves. Once you admit that you are part of a community, saying no to that community is like saying no to yourself. ■

A Year Later, Campaign Continues

*Lessons of 1992 Race Go Unheeded by the Media
And Clinton—Neither Faring Well With Public*

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BY ROBERT D. DEUTSCH
AND SELDEN BIGGS

More than a year has passed since the end of the 1992 Presidential campaign and neither the President nor the media seems willing or able to let go of the campaign experience. This nostalgia is understandable but unproductive when the future of the nation is at stake and not just the name of the Oval Office's occupant. Despite a characteristic fit of Monday-morning quarterbacking after the November election, the Clinton Administration's abortive honeymoon and friction between the White House and the White House press corps combined to put retrospection on the back burner. Both the President and the press prefer to deal with each other in campaign mode. And both want desperately to believe with Marshall McLuhan

that the "medium is the message." But neither is faring particularly well in the eyes of the public and both rightly suspect that the landscape of American politics has shifted beneath their feet.

Marshall McLuhan was half right. The medium has changed the message but it has also transformed the audience. Despite—or actually, because of—the proliferation of media channels and presentation formats, the public is savvier than ever about the differences between form and content, between performance and reality. The audience has become more sophisticated than either the nation's leaders or their counterparts in the mass media. The problem for the President is not the mechanics of media presentation and the issue for the Fourth Estate is not pack jour-

nalism or tabloid news or better ethical standards. The real dilemma is institutional in nature and technological in origin. The 1992 Presidential campaign marked the beginning of an era where the audience calls the shots in the three-cornered conversation between politicians, press and public. When combined with the oddsmaker's mentality, saturation coverage of Presidential elections turns the media into voyeurs, campaigns into caricatures and government into gridlock. The media cannot fruitfully reflect on its own behavior and prepare for the future without first understanding the changing environment of Presidential campaigning in particular and American politics in general.

Preview

Reporters would like to believe that everything is contingent—that any event can change the course of history and that every action can be accounted for. Fate hinges on the tiniest of details, the most improbable of accidents and the most ephemeral of motives. It is the reporter's calling to be there when it happens, to bear witness to those unforeseeable moments when history is made by individuals both famous and humble. In a contingent universe every story must be covered as if Deep Throat were on call waiting and Lee Harvey Oswald were lurking in the shadows. If it didn't matter, the reporters wouldn't be there.

Commentators, in contrast, keep score. They give their audiences the line-up, second-guess the managers and analyze the instant replays. While reporters act as if there were no tomorrow, the future is what makes commentators tick. They are always recapping the past and anticipating the future. Scorekeeping assumes beginnings and endings, starting gates and finish lines and the ability to track progress in between. The commentators' universe is causal and linear. Yesterday's results determine the morning scratch sheet and today's stumble will affect tomorrow's outcome. The commentator takes the reporter's scoop and turns it into useful intelligence.

Presidential elections are the Promised Land of American journalism. From the reporter's perspective, contingency is ever present—a tearful press conference, an incriminating photograph, or a well-aimed bullet can turn the world on its head. Commentators are also in their element because the stakes are high, the players are known, the finish line never moves and only the outcome is in doubt. The quadrennial race for the White House is a national ritual, not a national emergency. The issues are predetermined and commentators need only dope out the results. They may guess wrong, they may behave irresponsibly, they may even rattle the players, but they cannot change the rules of the game. Most importantly, they will be listened to, if not by the public at large,

then surely by the candidates. For both reporters and commentators, Presidential campaigns can be the time of their lives.

The Hidden Logic Of Presidential Campaigns

The outcome of American Presidential campaigns is determined by the interaction of three factors: context, institutions and persona. Although the media serves as the synapses through which these three elements interact, the What and—to a large extent—the How of media coverage are governed by the context of public opinion, the institutions of Presidential campaigns and the public persona of the candidates. Media impact on the course of American Presidential elections is less than either voters or candidates fear and far less than members of the media imagine.

In the first instance, every quadrennial Presidential election takes place in a *context* or climate of public opinion. The longer the campaign season, the greater the impact of such external factors as the state of the economy and the state of world. Conversely, the longer the campaign, the less the impact of the media in general and media stories in particular. Where political elections are foreshortened, as in Britain, local events or even clever campaign tactics can temporarily surmount even the worst

Media impact on the course of American Presidential elections is less than either voters or candidates fear and far less than members of the media imagine.

of economic or social conditions. If the 1992 Presidential campaign had been only three weeks long, H. Ross Perot would be in the White House now.

Second, Presidential elections are governed by an ever-changing set of *institutions* that bias the process in favor of certain types of candidates and certain kinds of campaign strategies. By frontloading the primary season and putting a premium on early fund-raising, the electoral reforms of the 1970's and 1980's have effectively excluded members of Congress from the pursuit of the Presidency and have tilted the system in favor of least-common-denominator candidates adept at personal and financial networking. Rules matter. Bill Clinton is President today because the Democratic primary season handicapped the Washington favorites, discouraged the ideologues, and shortened the half-life of the Gennifer Flowers story. Journalists do not make the rules, but the rules of the game determine the role of journalism at each stage of the campaign.

Finally, personality or *persona* has become the focus of both primary and general election campaigning in the era of TV narrowcasting. With the omnipresent camera pursuing the candidate into the deepest recesses of his personal life, the key issue is voter comfort with the two-dimensional image that inhabits the television screen. It is easy to forget that Bill Clinton was once the faceless governor of a small state before Gennifer Flowers, the New York primary, the draft and marijuana issues, and a gig with a saxophone turned a boyish-looking hopeful into "The Man from Hope." Public persona is a jigsaw puzzle whose overall impact is beyond any individual's control. Journalists, like the candidate and his handlers, define the pieces, but it is the public that interprets the bigger picture.

In the following pages we explore the impact of context, institutions, persona, and finally the media itself upon American Presidential elections. It is these elements and their interaction that determine the outcome of the election season and the impact—if any—of journalists' behavior and editorial decision-making. The technology may be different and the role of the Establishment Press may be much diminished, but the situations and choices facing today's reporters have changed little

since the days of Ben Hecht, "The Front Page," and "His Girl Friday." All the media debates about presentation formats, information-gathering techniques, and journalistic restraint will make no difference whatsoever without a deeper understanding of the forces shaping the actions of candidates, voters, and media alike. The media, too, is a player in this drama and needs to understand its part.

Context

The context determines public receptivity to media reporting of the campaign. In 1992 the voting public was unhappy about the economy and even unhappier about Bush's apparent passivity. No monthly statistics, apologies, or trips to J. C. Penny would change their collective mind. It is no accident that the prospect of Bush's departure from the White House and the upturn in consumer confidence occurred simultaneously even before the November election. The economy was the issue and George Bush was the scapegoat. At one level, 1992 was as simple as that.

Elections turn on the voters' sense of mastery over their fate. Elections are the rituals by which voters cede a measure of control over their lives to their leaders. To fulfill this bargain, leaders—especially symbolic leaders like the American President—must exercise that control or fail in their ritual obligations. Voters tolerate wrong decisions but they do not accept indecision. Presidents who tell the voters that events are beyond their control are doomed. By blaming Congress and the global recession, George Bush only highlighted his failure to keep his ritual bargain with the voters. When the public demands action, no half-measures or cosmetic surgery will do. Voters hope for success, accept failure, but need to feel that someone is in charge. When times are good, their leaders need do little. When times are bad, voters look to their leaders for direction.

The fundamental perception of political control rarely hinges on any single event or story. The climate of public opinion moves at a glacial pace that overwhelms discordant events and

countervailing reporting. No single journalist or pack of journalists can change the underlying realities of context. Media feeding frenzies may be ugly to watch, but they rarely have lasting impact. In retrospect, the Gennifer Flowers affair mattered little to a public more concerned with the economy than

No single journalist or pack of journalists can change the underlying realities of context. Media feeding frenzies may be ugly to watch, but they rarely have lasting impact.

with personal peccadilloes. 1992 was not 1988 and neither the tabloid exposés nor the editorial sophistry of The New York Times made any difference.

The national agenda is increasingly impervious to both the moral crusades and the scandal-mongering of the media. The days of Lincoln Steffens, Henry Luce, and William Randolph Hearst are past. With hundreds of cable channels and outlets competing for attention, no media baron or commentator can manufacture a Wendell Willkie, disassemble a Joe McCarthy, or sabotage an Edward Muskie. In an era of narrowcasting, stories may capture the public imagination, but no single storyteller can set the national agenda.

Institutions

The context determines the fundamental expectations that voters bring to the election process. These expectations may evolve over the entire course of the election season, but rarely change precipitously.

However, the formal rules and ritual institutions of American politics also matter. Despite quadrennial rewrites and a changing cast of characters, the plot remains basically the same. American Presidential campaigns are melo-

dramas in three acts. Each act has its own script and each act concludes with the thrill of survival and the agony of defeat. Journalists are paid to report on the action and comment on the storyline, but they are also key players in the production. Despite media awareness of their dual status, both reporters and commentators are inevitably captured by the contingencies of the moment and lose sight of the bigger picture. They turn Presidential campaigns into political techno-thrillers and become obsessed with the mechanics of the candidates' and their own performances. During the heat of the election season, adrenaline triumphs over understanding. Journalists are campaign junkies. They continue to inject campaign sensationalism into the endless muddle of national policy-making. It is time to go cold turkey and revisit the plotting of national elections.

Act 1: Prologue

The first act of the Presidential campaign precedes the party primaries and takes place outside the glare of public attention. At this time, Presidential wannabes court disciples and financial patrons willing to gamble on a longshot and able to go the distance. The currency of the pre-primary season is neither dollars nor fame, but rather trust. Trust based on personal relationships is the glue that holds a campaign together and motivates the commitment of lives and fortunes to a Presidential hopeful. In the development of these intimate, *unmediated* relationships, the media, by definition, can play no part.

Indeed, media attention during pre-primary maneuvering is more a curse than a blessing. Name recognition and a national reputation often create expectations that cannot be met, foster illusions that cloud candidate judgment, and attract support that will not last. Visibility in Washington and schmoozing with the Beltway media has little to do with Presidential campaigning. If it did, Bob Dole would be President by acclamation. As Richard Nixon demonstrated from 1962 to 1968, obscurity has its advantages.

Hence, media focus on the pre-pri-

mary courtship between candidates and backers poses serious risks to the candidates. The superstars, like Ted Kennedy or Mario Cuomo, are inevitably revealed to have clay feet and doomed to disappointment. Whether manhandled or coddled, they invariably lose stature.

However, media coverage is also a mixed blessing for the rookies. Reporters assigned to Presidential spring training are bound to look for local color or eccentricity. Candidates deemed minor league material can only survive as curiosities or tokens for key constituencies. Tsongas caught media attention in 1991 precisely because of the futility of his quest and the oddities of his public performances. Pierre Du Pont, in contrast, was merely obscure and not interesting enough to get his fifteen minutes in the spotlight. Just like fame, notoriety is a double-edged sword. During the pre-primary season it almost always cuts Presidential hopefuls the wrong way.

During the prologue to the campaign season, media reporting undermines the famous, marginalizes the curious, and leaves the merely bland unscathed. During the 1992 pre-primary season Cuomo was made to look ridiculous, Tsongas was cast as Don Quixote, and a pre-Gennifer Clinton was dismissed as just another smiling face in the crowd. Fortunately for the Arkansas Governor, *The Star* saved him from overdosing on policy papers and propelled him on his way to the Presidency.

Act 2: The Primary Season

It is during the primary season that the media plays its most important role. The candidates use the media to sell their wares to a discriminating voting public. Candidates have a spiel to give and the media provides both the forum and the amplification. Primaries are like Middle Eastern bazaars. The customers are there to buy, the only issue is from whom. Hence, the shameless pandering that characterizes primary contests. Successful primary candidates are vendors, not leaders. Primaries are retail politics in the fullest sense of the word.

Therefore, the unholy alliance be-

tween the candidates and the boys on the bus is never more intimate and problematic than during the frenzied days and nights on the primary trail. Stakes are high, time is short, story cycles are rapid, and the impact of negative stories is incalculable. Campaign reporters and commentators are in nirvana—they are wooed by the candidates and heeded by the public at large. The action is furious and the exhilaration of exhaustion sets in. This is when the performance takes hold and the bigger picture inevitably disappears from view. Understanding may be easy

voters, media pundits and invisible money men. When this oblique method of candidate attrition is combined with the frontloading of the primary season, the resulting process appears as arbitrary and senseless as a drive-by shooting. Hence, the Beauty Pageant phase of the primary season ends quickly. Within two weeks of the 1992 New Hampshire primary only Clinton and Tsongas were still judged viable by the media and financial handicappers. As usual, the Beauty Pageant was over before most of the contenders had time to strut their stuff.

The national agenda is increasingly impervious to both the moral crusades and the scandal-mongering of the media. The days of Lincoln Steffens, Henry Luce, and William Randolph Hearst are past.

in retrospect, but it is in short supply during the Presidential primaries.

Journalists already know the basic story line of the quadrennial primary ritual. They often write about it but rarely heed their own words. Like most dramatic genres, primaries naturally divide into a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Since 1972 these three phases have gradually crystallized into the Beauty Pageant, the Duel to the Death, and the Final Ordeal.

In the beginning, every primary with three or more genuine candidates is a Beauty Pageant. In beauty contests the object is to get noticed, to stand out from the crowd. Since voters at this stage are expressing their desires and not their fears, positive vibes are a must and trashing one's opponents rarely works. Candidates must sell themselves when voters have many to choose from. Making Miss Massachusetts look bad pays few dividends to Miss Arkansas. As long as several candidates are still in the running, the incentives for civility and decorum remain strong.

Unfortunately, scoring for the presidential primary beauty contests is not as scientific as that for the Miss Universe Pageant. Primary contestants are winnowed out in ad hoc fashion by finicky

The Florida primary marked the beginning of the second set piece—the Duel to the Death. In a duel, the whole logic of the contest changes, and so too must the contestants. The object is survival, not excellence. Looking bad matters little as long as your adversary looks worse. In 1992 the winner of the New Hampshire beauty contest was ill-prepared to make the transition to street fighter. Thus, the position papers and apocalyptic vision that made Tsongas an early favorite proved fatal in the arenas of Florida, Michigan and Illinois. Pandering may be the name of the game in the primary season, but primary duels demand pander bears with brass knuckles.

When Tsongas's campaign contributors threw in the towel, the 1992 primary melodrama suddenly lurched into its third and final phase—the Final Ordeal. The American presidential primary season is rigged to leave most party activists and voters feeling powerless. By frontloading the campaign season, the Democratic Party has disenfranchised the millions of Democratic Party faithful voting during the latter half of the primary calendar. By mid-March, the duel was over and Clinton was the only viable candidate remain-

ing on his feet even though two-thirds of the primary season was still to come. The bazaar had been shut down long before most shoppers had their chance to buy.

The result of this tinkering with the primary schedule is the ad hoc, voter-scripted ritual of the Final Ordeal. In 1992, as in 1988, the Democratic Party faithful rebelled. Primary voters simply refused to cooperate with their own disenfranchisement. Beginning with Connecticut, many just stayed at home in protest. The remainder, however, collectively decided to subject the presumptive nominee to a final trial by fire, with the voters of New York gleefully agreeing to serve as judge and jury. Clinton rallied under fire, and the minute the pollsters and the media took Jerry Brown seriously, the Democratic faithful returned to the voting booth to endorse—however reluctantly—a chastened Democratic nominee. Part melodrama, part slapstick, and wholly scripted, the New York Democratic Presidential Primary was an ordeal imposed on Clinton by voters denied a genuine choice. Using talk shows, media pundits and professional pollsters as sounding boards for their discontent, the New York voters created their own ritual of democracy and rite of passage for the Democratic nominee. Once again, the public manipulated the media to send a message to the politicians.

What is the role of the media in this three-stage primary spectacle? From the voters' perspective, there is little difference between campaign correspondents and campaign financiers. Both behave like bookies. Both make odds on the outcome of the elections and both seem to care more about the horse race than the horses. However, horses don't respond to the daily line, candidates do. Like traders in a futures market, commentators and contributors set expectations that the candidates strive to meet. From the viewers' vantage point, the media is just another special interest group with which candidates must curry favor.

Moreover, commentators and contributors share a common interest in predicting winners and beating the

spread. Losers who consistently defy the odds receive more media attention and more campaign dollars than winners who fail to cover their points. Clinton lost the New Hampshire primary to Tsongas but won the game of expectations. In retrospect, the votes counted less than the odds and the voters were less important than the oddsmakers. In the game of primary

for good government. Fortunately, the public at large is wise to this game and prepared to exact its revenge. For the time being there is only H. Ross Perot, but 1994 is already on the horizon.

Act 3: The Rest of the Story

Once the primary bazaar is over, the media's role in the electoral process inexorably wanes. The party activists

Visibility in Washington and schmoozing with the Beltway media has little to do with Presidential campaigning. If it did, Bob Dole would be President by acclamation.

politics, the voters' preferences are merely part of the action. As Tsongas complained repeatedly, the media and financial handicappers had the final say. The primary campaign took on the appearance of a roller coaster driven by a predatory media, speculative contributors and a Democratic Party leadership anxious to get it all over with quickly. It took the Democratic voters of New York to reassert their control and bring this roller-coaster ride to a safe stop.

The real problem with media handicapping of primary elections is that both reporters and commentators have come to view primary campaign coverage as the paradigm for political journalism as a whole. Media distortion of Presidential primary contests is bad enough, but primaries are—after all—contests with contestants capable of learning from the past and outsmarting the media the next time around. Witness Nixon in 1968 and Clinton in 1992.

Treating the work of Congress and the Presidency as an endless series of daily or weekly contests may improve the Nielsens and raise circulation, but it only contributes to gridlock. The denizens of Crossfire and the McLaughlin Group have more in common with the setting of "Guys and Dolls" than with the commentaries of Eric Severeid and David Broder. They are candidates for Gamblers Anonymous, not Pulitzers. Politicians who tune in or play along cannot help but mistake good ratings

and news junkies have had their day. The nominees' attention turns to the partisans of Oprah, Arsenio, Regis and Kathie Lee. Character is the issue and position papers turn into unwanted baggage. The object is to gloss over details, to equivocate on commitments and to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Facts, issues and even candidate behavior must be pasteurized and homogenized. The point is to merge the identity of the nominee with the hopes and fears of the nation.

From the media's point of view, the end of the primary season means a reduction in uncertainty, a decline in public readership, and a loss of power. With its passion for minutiae, its concern for issues and its appetite for eccentricity and error, the media are now the candidate's enemy.

Media discontent with general elections and general election coverage is both inevitable and irremediable. To the extent that candidates succeed in getting their image across, journalists believe they fail in their duty to inform. Election coverage becomes the dogged pursuit of gaffes and inconsistencies, of failures to live up to the public image. Media complaints about the uniformity and slickness of the Clinton campaign during its final weeks were indisputable evidence of the cohesiveness, efficiency and simplicity of the candidate's performance. And media focus on the

shifting stratagems and stumbles of the Bush campaign was proof positive of its failures. Media peace of mind is just one of the casualties of a well-run Presidential campaign.

Finally, if necessity is the mother of invention, then irrelevance is the godfather of ethics. During the latter part of the election season the media grows increasingly irritable at being ignored by both candidates and voters and is unlikely to be seduced by last minute dirty tricks. Media reluctance to hype "The Man from Moscow" story during the final weeks of the 1992 campaign was entirely predictable. Journalists upset with the disappearance of issues and the cultivation of images are unlikely to collaborate in last-minute personal attacks. It is easy for the media to behave responsibly when no one is really listening and the candidates are surrounded by walls of handlers and Secret Service types. The Colsons and Sassos of politics do their best work during the primary season and Willie Hortons cannot be pulled out of a hat at the last minute. By Labor Day or soon thereafter, the media is alienated and savvy. Desperate candidates must turn to the State Department for dirt.

Persona

The context establishes the framework for the American Presidential campaign season and institutions determine the structure and sequencing of the events that lead up to the November election. If Presidential elections were a work of fiction, then the context would define the genre—mystery, tragedy, melodrama or romance—and the institutions would characterize the plots and subplots that carry the story through from beginning to end. Both context and institutions evolve relatively slowly and bring stable expectations to readers, viewers and voters. Despite all the hoopla about H. Ross Perot and new media venues, the 1992 Presidential campaign season followed the standard script pretty closely. That's how Clinton got to be President. Carville and Co. understood the context, mastered the institutions and persevered through November to capture the White House.

Accident, genius or serendipity had little to do with it. Good analysis did.

Persona, however, is another matter entirely. In a novel, the genre is obvious from the beginning and the mechanics of plot development are understood, but the character of the principals is where uncertainty intrudes. When the six-pack of unknown Democratic Presidential hopefuls first squared off before a television camera in January 1992, the

Journalists already know the basic story line of the quadrennial primary ritual. They often write about it but rarely heed their own words.

plot was preordained; only the identity and ultimate fate of the survivor was in question. Which one had the right stuff to make it to New York and would he really have the legs to make it to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue? Even—or especially—Carville and Co. could not know the answers to these questions at that time.

In most novels and all modern American Presidential elections, character is the main issue. Elsewhere plot is supreme, but only in the United States can an Abraham Lincoln, a Harry Truman or a saxophone-toting governor from Little Rock ascend to the highest office in the nation.

The media does not create and cannot change the plot, but it does coauthor the candidate's persona. It records candidates huffing and puffing down Main Street in jogging shorts and talks to high school sweethearts and white-haired elementary school teachers. It interviews aging chanteuses in Little Rock nightclubs and turns Checkers, Millie and Socks into celebrities. Persona is the name of the game in Presidential campaigns and the media pursues the contenders with a zeal unknown outside of Hollywood.

The deeper issue is how all this attention serves—or disserves—the candidates, the public, and indeed the media itself. Looking back on the 1992 campaign season, media attacks on the candidates generally backfired. The political climate had changed and the public had learned the lessons of 1988. Both Clinton and Perot turned the establishment media into the villain and made personal foibles and flawed biographies into familiar personas. The "draft dodging, womanizing, pot-smoking, gay-loving" candidate became Commander-in-Chief while the media's influence and reputation plummeted. What has happened to the descendants of William Allen White and Edward R. Murrow?

Persona is a composite of personality, biography and challenge. It combines the raw material of individual temperament with the formative experiences of the past and the demands of the moment. In theory, the three dimensions of persona are inextricably linked. Character should be "caused" or explained by history and illuminated by challenge. In practice, however, the connections between behavior, biography and calling are looser. Heroes, method actors and great leaders may require a detailed psychohistory, but most performers and ordinary politicians can muddle through without good reasons or certain motives. In reality, Presidential aspirants resemble Willy Loman more than King Lear. Not every behavioral trait or action need be explained or motivated.

Personality

The Who of American Presidents and Presidential hopefuls is as diverse as the nation they represent. While Italian Prime Ministers and German Presidents all appear to be cut from the same cloth, the portrait gallery of American Presidents is filled with an amazingly colorful cast of characters. Personal eccentricities are actually expected and cultivated, because the American public—just like the American media—sees personality as the driving force of history. Presidents make history, they do not obey it. Hence, the idiosyncrasies of the occupant of the Oval Office are

celebrated and nurtured as symbols of American identity and motivations for national policy. The identity of the nation becomes embodied in the character of the President.

This public expectation places a heavy burden on Presidential hopefuls. A weighty resumé and demonstrated competency count for little. Experience and success in government are neither sufficient nor necessary qualifications for the Presidency. The President must have,

From the voters' perspective, there is little difference between campaign correspondents and campaign financiers. Both behave like bookies. Both make odds on the outcome of the elections and both seem to care more about the horse race than the horses.

or seem to have, a persona distinctive enough to be immediately recognizable and capacious enough to reflect the diversity and contradictions of the nation as a whole. Presidential wannabes must be seen as capable of filling these very large shoes.

In 1988 George Bush was perceived as the wimp with a resumé until he duked it out with Dan Rather live and trashed Bob Dole in New Hampshire. The genius of Roger Ailes and Lee Atwater was to cast the consummate Yankee civil servant as Dirty Harry on the campaign trail.

In 1992 Bill Clinton faced a similar problem. Before *The Star* printed allegations of marital infidelity made by Gennifer Flowers, Clinton was doing an excellent job of molding himself into the faceless, unnamed Democrat who consistently beat George Bush in the

polls. The Gennifer Flowers affair transformed the candidate and the campaign. The aura of scandal invigorated his campaign by suspending a Sword of Damocles over every appearance. On the other hand, Clinton's dogged persistence in fending off reporters' queries and continuing the campaign displayed the determination and boldness of a genuine leader. When Hillary and Bill Clinton rolled the dice on 60 Minutes they displayed an audacity unseen since the heyday of Richard Nixon. Clinton's performance in the two months following *The Star's* revelations began the metamorphosis that would transform the Governor of Arkansas into the forty-second President of the United States.

Biography

Biography also matters, but primarily as a backdrop to personality. With the exception of victorious generals like Dwight Eisenhower, candidates who attempt to run on their past are doomed. Richard Nixon succeeded in his obsessive pursuit of the Oval Office precisely by downplaying his past and by playing the born again Nixon on *Laugh-In* and *The Tonight Show*.

However, biography becomes critical when personality is insufficient to carry the symbolic burden of national identity. When public image is formless, biography can pick up some of the slack. Hence the origins of the "Man from Hope" legend on the eve of the 1992 Democratic convention. Clinton needed a saga and a collection of anecdotes to explain his motivation and justify his behavior. Clinton's handlers, in collaboration with the media, offered his troubled childhood as the reason for his compulsion to please and the unerring self-control of his campaign appearances. When Clinton's opponents dredged up the draft issue and his adventures in Oxford and Moscow, they were actually adding to the stereotypical saga of the overachieving baby-boomer from Arkansas. In the end, both the voluntary and involuntary revelations about Clinton's past served to enhance his reputation while demeaning that of his detractors. Like

Washington's cherry tree, Truman's haberdashery, and Nixon's farewell press conference, the flaws made Clinton a true representation of the national mythology. Whatever their intent, campaign journalists became active collaborators in this creative process.

Challenge

The pursuit of the Presidency is the ultimate challenge in American mythology. To be considered Presidential material is the ultimate accolade in American politics. Some, like Mario Cuomo, seek nothing more than the label "oughtabe" President.

Campaigning for the Presidency, however, is another matter entirely. The campaign season is a prolonged ordeal with endurance and versatility as the primary requisites for success. Each of the three acts of the campaign season requires the candidate to play a different role before the omnipresent eye of the television camera. The challenge is to play each part well, to make costume changes quickly and invisibly, to improve one's performances over time, and finally to establish a core identity that makes one instantly familiar to an ever-growing audience.

Success in Presidential politics rarely goes to those who excel in any single setting or environment. Candidates have to schmooze with campaign contributors, pose with fidgety children, expose themselves to Barbara Walters, hold hands with adoring spouses and look good without a tie. Nobody can do it all well. The point is not to look too bad too often and to look better at the end than at the beginning.

Bill Clinton is President because he met the challenge of endurance, versatility and growth. While Mario Cuomo could spellbind with the legends of the past and turn George Will and Sam Donaldson into lapdogs on Sunday mornings, Clinton was without peer in relating to real people on sound stages and street corners. The film clips of an overweight Clinton loping down *Mainstreet U.S.A.* and the forays into McDonald's instantly turned the Yale-educated policy wonk into the viewer's

next-door neighbor. In primary debates Clinton stayed cool and let the other contenders throw the spears. On the talk show circuit, he preferred interviews before live audiences that could be enlisted against intrusive questions and hostile questioners. He preferred Donahue to Larry King and David Frost to David Brinkley. On the stump, Clinton was long-winded, always earnest, manifestly sincere and never histrionic. He knew that real people don't mind being bored, but never forgive being manipulated. All in all, Clinton was a McLuhanesque populist for the cool medium of television. He was Johnny Carson minus the naughtiness.

Moreover, during the darkest days of the primary campaign Clinton never lost sight of who his real audience was. When accosted by reporters, Clinton simply marched forward until even the media got tired of asking the same old questions. Throughout, Clinton sent the same message, both verbally and nonverbally, to the viewing audience: "The voters are my judge and jury, not the reporters." He understood then, as he does now, that media should not get in the way of his message. Clinton made the transition from Little Rock to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue because he surmounted all the challenges that voters and media put before him. It was not a pretty sight and there were many pratfalls along the way, but the fast-talking Governor of Arkansas actually looked more presidential than George Bush by the first week in November. Both his persona and his waistline had grown since New Hampshire.

Persona and the Media

The media's role as coauthor of Clinton's Presidential persona is the subject of much retrospective soul-searching. Was the press unfair in February, too enthusiastic in July, and too forgiving in October? Did they take Gennifer Flowers too seriously, hype "The Comeback Kid" too naively and downplay "The Oxford Peacenik" merely to compensate for the desperation of the Bush campaign? All of these issues are interesting from the perspective of the participants, but they overlook the changing mode of presen-

tation and meaning of Presidential persona in American society. The 1992 campaign revolutionized both the How and What of Presidential persona. The continuing debates over Clinton's performance and Perot's intrusive acrobatics are legacies of this subtle sea change in American politics.

In the first place, the media's role in

Throughout, Clinton sent the same message, both verbally and nonverbally, to the viewing audience: "The voters are my judge and jury, not the reporters." He understood then, as he does now, that media should not get in the way of his message.

creating a Presidential persona is slowly, but inexorably, diminishing. Print and broadcast exposés are diluted by the number and diversity of media channels. The press may be coauthors of the candidate's persona, but they must now share credit with Larry, Phil, town meeting moderators, and radio talk show hosts all across the country. Roger Mudd may have crippled Ted Kennedy's campaign on the launching pad, but that era is past. Today it is an appearance on the Arsenio show that gets front-page play. As Clinton proved, you can circumvent the Fourth Estate and still become President.

More importantly, television is not only changing the way we view Presidential candidates, it is transforming our expectations of *what* a President is or should be. "Character"—or the consistency and unity of action over a lifetime—is becoming increasingly irrelevant both in our personal lives and in the public arena. As impressions of leaders become more and more fragmented,

expectations of coherence between behavior and biography become less and less relevant to voter decisions. Television, with its dawn-to-dusk coverage of public and private lives and its illusion of immediacy, encourages viewers to regard candidates as they would their next-door neighbor. Inconsistencies, eccentricities, insecurities, and character flaws are tolerated and even expected. Smoothness breeds suspicion and proficiency is labeled as "slickness." Integrity is no longer the main issue. The President may remain a symbolic leader but what he symbolizes are the contradictions of the nation.

Reporters dig for those character-forming incidents or episodes that explain a Presidential candidate's behavior. Commentators, in contrast, look for core beliefs and consistency over time. Both quests are elusive. Revelations are swiftly buried under a multimedia avalanche of competing stories while the querulous pursuit of petty inconsistencies alienates the public. The reporter's contribution is diminished while the commentator's pontification seems irrelevant. The resulting frustration inevitably leads to the horse-race mentality. Disenchanted by a public that discounts their stories, suspects their motives and celebrates the very contradictions they abhor, the descendants of William Allen White and Edward R. Murrow now make book on the

Disenchanted by a public that discounts their stories, suspects their motives and celebrates the very contradictions they abhor, the descendants of William Allen White and Edward R. Murrow now make book on the candidate's—and the President's—fate.

candidate's—and the President's—fate. After all, the public still wants to know the score.

Media

The 1992 campaign changed both the How and What of American presidential elections. Narrowcasting and the proliferation of presentation formats have diminished the role of the Fourth Estate and altered the ways in which candidates communicate with their audiences. Clinton and Perot used—and continue to use—the Establishment Press as a foil in a televised dialogue with the American public. The well publicized discontents of the White House press corps are but a by-product of the diminished clout of the traditional media.

More important but less obvious, however, are the changing expectations which American voters bring to Presidential campaigns and candidates. Around-the-clock, televised coverage makes Presidential candidates seem as familiar—warts and all—as any personal acquaintance. Polished presentations with Armani suits, \$200 haircuts and studied grammar evoke distrust, not admiration. The people are looking for authenticity, not perfection.

In contrast, journalists comfortable with the tightly scripted, wholesale politics of the Reagan era look askance at the seeming chaos of the new retail politics. They view contradiction as the product of duplicity and inconsistency as the result of incompetence. What are

All-out coverage of Presidential elections, when combined with the oddsmaker's mentality, transforms the media into voyeurs, campaigns into caricatures and government into gridlock.

virtues to the public at large are seen as vices by the establishment media. They have lost touch with their audience and lost influence with the politicians.

The problem is that for the first time, the contingent universe of the reporter is seemingly within reach. Video technology encourages the illusion that everything can be seen and nothing missed. Every comment, every action,

What are virtues to the public at large are seen as vices by the establishment media. They have lost touch with their audience and lost influence with the politicians.

indeed every misstep can now be accounted for. Nothing can escape the reporter's gaze. What the public accepts as brute reality, the media sees as grist for its mills.

Where does this mismatch between the media and the public lead?

Politics is the art of reconciling the unreconcilable. Good politicians are like magicians—their best work is performed with sleight of hand. All-out coverage of Presidential elections, when combined with the oddsmaker's mentality, transforms the media into voyeurs, campaigns into caricatures and government into gridlock. Exposing the magician's craft benefits neither the candidate nor the audience in the long run. The ultimate victim of this compulsive and microscopic handicapping of events is the political process itself.

Eventually this mentality will disappear. The law of supply and demand will prevail. The era of media barons and staged network extravaganzas is over. The networks are reluctant to broadcast Presidential press conferences yet photos of the President frolicking in the surf make the front page of The New York Times. Like computers

and junk mail, media are becoming personalized. Every family will have a camcorder, every child will become a performer and every household will become a media outlet. Political performances will be mediated but the media will become transparent. Everyone will become his own Paul Harvey or Andy Rooney. Print and broadcast journalists will no longer be needed to explain the politicians to the public. In this mediated universe of demythologized politicians and media-savvy voters, the politicians will be the last true innocents. They will be the last believers in doing good and not just looking good. They will be the "last action heroes." Nevertheless, these heroes will still need media commentators to decipher the moods and motives of a discriminating and manipulative public.

The future is now. The mere mortals in Washington are grappling with the destiny of the nation in full view of a suspicious but hopeful public and a cynical press. Both the politicians and the press would prefer to be on a bus campaigning, but the former, at least, are condemned to try to get things done.

For now, the bookmaking continues and the line on 1996 changes weekly, but the bookies are losing both credibility and audiences. Neither the politicians nor the public is being well served. Maybe the Fourth Estate should learn from the tabloid media and not just condemn it. Maybe the stars of the Establishment Media would be more credible if they spent less time sparring with each other and with colluding politicians on nightly television. Maybe they should relearn the lesson of Joseph Pulitzer and Maury Povich and just tell interesting stories about quasi-fictional people and leave the rest up to the audience. ■

WINTER READING

Which Way the New World?

The Roar of the Crowd:

How Television and People Power are Changing the World

Michael J. O'Neill

Times Books. 228 pages. \$21.

BY SAM HURST

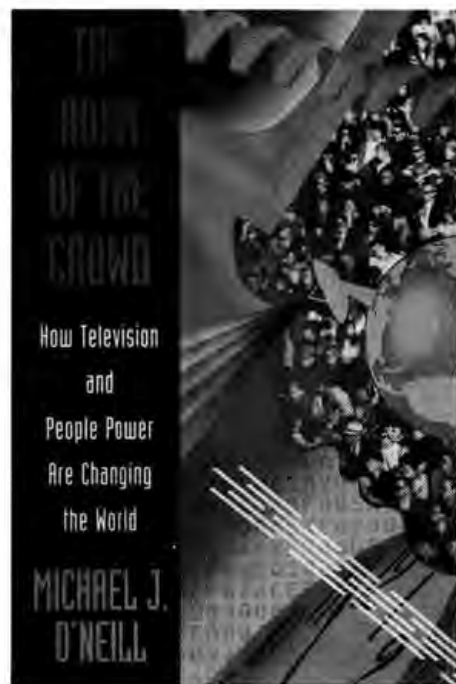
Michael O'Neill's new book, "The Roar of the Crowd," races across the landscape of contemporary events like a freight train, moving gracefully from Boris Yeltsin's rise to power to television coverage of the Persian Gulf War, from Japan's trade policies to India's emerging television market, all in an effort to weave the rise of democratic movements and the global communications revolution together into a description of modern life and a foreshadowing of the future. It's a daunting effort, which is utterly confusing—not because it is poorly written or poorly thought out, but because the swirl of events and trends is itself so stunningly confusing.

I staggered along myself until I was relieved to read O'Neill's own admission in the closing pages that "...the beginning of wisdom is to recognize that for many problems there are no solutions...In the case of the electronic age, complexity challenges understanding and deep contradictory forces challenge solutions. One is more awed by limitation than by possibility."

Those words are the great truth of this book. O'Neill tries nobly, but I think in vain to pull widely disparate and powerful trends together. The book opens with a review of the democratic impulse in Russia on whose shoulders Boris Yeltsin resisted the 1991 coup

against Mikhail Gorbachev, and eventually rose to power himself. It's a scene of new-styled Russian journalists working fax machines, hidden computer e-mail networks and pirate radio transmitters late into the night. It's a portrait of new-styled politicians playing to television moments like the famous video snapshot of Yeltsin standing on a tank in Red Square rallying the forces of democratic resistance, broadcast around the world LIVE, shaping global diplomacy with the flip of a video switch. And it's a portrait of old-style Communist politicians, like the nervous, fumbling Gennedy Yanayev, unable to make the transition to the new electronic age where leaders live or die by their ability to appear cool and self-confident in the heat of a television close-up.

O'Neill's conclusion, and the underlying theme of the book: "The role of the media was critical because, like the tree falling in an empty forest, Yeltsin's resistance *did not exist until it was seen and heard* [My emphasis]. It became real only when it became news and when millions of people were connected to the White House (Russian) by the shared knowledge of move and countermove in an epochal encounter." In a similar vein O'Neill argues that "...extensive reporting about young soldiers and officers being unwilling to attack civilians made the coup leaders



increasingly doubtful about their ability to use military force."

He gives television (and the high-tech communications revolution that it embraces) too much credit. And he underestimates the power of long-term trends. The collapse of the Soviet Union erupted from a steady process of decline that anyone who worked or visited in Russia throughout the 70's and 80's could see for themselves. The root of the collapse was economic stagnation, the repression of human rights, and a belief among reform members of the Communist Party that the world was technologically remaking itself and leaving Russia out. Resistance to the coup leaders, and old guard Communist doctrine was real, shown not just in the courage of activists, but in the apathy of the man on the street. It was not a figment of television imagination. It was finally grasped by television, but it

continued on page 73

The Days When Kennedy Charmed the Press

President Kennedy:

Profile of Power

Richard Reeves

Simon & Schuster. 798 pages. \$30.

BY MURRAY SEEGER

Sure, I remember where I was when John F. Kennedy was murdered 30 years ago. And I know where I was the night he made Nikita Khrushchev blink and take back the missiles Moscow was sending to Cuba.

But, for a reporter working in Ohio, many other details of the 1,000-day Kennedy Presidency are jumbled in the memory bank. "Ich bin ein Berliner," Laos, Vietnam, Bay of Pigs; Ross Barnett, George in-the-doorway Wallace, the March on Washington; they all pile together.

After the early supportive memoirs of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Theodore Sorensen, recollections of President Kennedy have been dominated by the often ridiculous debates over the assassination and the Warren Commission Report, compulsive promiscuity, mob connections and other peripheral questions.

It is certainly timely, therefore, to have this new book by the veteran political writer Richard Reeves that focuses strictly on JFK's days in office. In diary form, Reeves examines Jack Kennedy at work and play from January 19, 1961, in Washington, until November 22, 1963, in Dallas.

Since Reeves starts with the day before inauguration, he offers little about the dramatic 1960 election that saw Kennedy elected by a whisker after eight years of the Eisenhower-Nixon Administration.

The book ends abruptly with the briefest possible note about the assassination that changed forever the direction of U.S. history. There is little analysis or soul-searching, and no wild speculation in this book.

Instead, incident and event are lined up in factual order leading to more than 100 pages of footnotes, bibliography, acknowledgments and a background essay by Peter J. Keating, Reeves' chief researcher, who is given deserved, generous praise.

For those still blinded by the Kennedy charm, there are the scenes of Jack Kennedy the tough guy and cheap lothario. The Bobby Kennedy fans may be disturbed to see their hero as the immature, nasty character with whom some other members of the Administration refused to deal.

The Bill Clinton crowd will take heart because the early weeks of confusion in his White House suggest that the President was simply following the helter-

skelter example set by his idol 30 years ago.

"We do have a problem of management; centrally, it is a problem of your use of time," McGeorge Bundy, his national security advisor, wrote Kennedy in May 1961. "We can't get you to sit still..."

In most ways, however, the Clinton presidency is not like Kennedy's. JFK devoted much of his time to the international crises of the day—the missile standoff and security of Berlin; the collapse of Laos and expanding, fateful, U.S. participation in Vietnam; Cuba and the aftermath of the disaster at the Bay of Pigs.

Clinton has been pushed into foreign affairs after dedicating his early energies to domestic business. Substitute Bosnia for Laos, Somalia for Cuba and Haiti for Vietnam and you get a crude parallel.

On the home front, the Kennedys were very cautious in responding to the demands of the civil rights movement, avoiding association with Martin Luther King, Jr., as a serious risk to re-election in 1964. They preferred dealing with Roy Wilkins and A. Philip Randolph, the doyens of the movement about whom J. Edgar Hoover could supply no dirty tape recordings.

Kennedy won credit for an historic change in economic policy by deliberating an increase in the federal deficit to stimulate a weak economy, but he resisted until early 1963 that advice given by Walter Heller and the other Keynesian economists around him.

"Kennedy was more comfortable with the politics of the tax cuts than the economics," the author observes.

The economic numbers reported here suggest how much the U.S. has changed in the 30 years since Kennedy was taken from us. The budget deficits he faced were \$9 to 11 billion. The trade deficit with Japan was 500 million dollars.

Reeves describes in deadpan style a collaborative journalistic-political culture that has disappeared from Washington. Kennedy charmed much of the press, as he did people around the

PRESIDENT KENNEDY



PROFILE OF POWER

RICHARD REEVES

continued on page 71

Who Should Fund Public Broadcasting?

Quality Time?

The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Public Television with background paper
by Richard Somerset-Ward
The Twentieth Century Fund Press
188 Pages. \$9.95 pb.

By EDWARD M. FOUHY

The Twentieth Century Fund has done us all a great favor. It has reduced to a slim, paperbound volume one of the enduring public debates that has confounded policy makers who dwell in an important corner of the public policy community for 25 years. How do we, as a nation, finance our public television system, guarantee that it is available to all, encourage it to be innovative, probing, serious and substantive and still maintain its independence? How does a nation whose journalistic touchstone is the First Amendment, keep meddling politicians' hands off the public television network?

It's a question you may be too annoyed to ponder as you look up from a quiet hour with the cast of the "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" to find someone in a Big Bird costume asking you for money to run your local station. There hasn't been a satisfactory answer to the question since the Carnegie Commission wrote the rules that put the federal government in the television business back in 1967.

You need not look for the answer from this high-powered Task Force report, only for a continuation of the argument with each side presenting its case in civilized tones befitting PBS.

In shorthand, the debate comes down to this: Even though it provides only 16 percent of public television's total budget, Congress, through its appropriation power, exerts enormous influence over the programs millions see on the air. "Nova," "Frontline," "Sesame Street," get at least some of their funding from the government. That system seems not

to trouble the majority of the Task Force members. In fact, they would like to see more of the government's money going into national programming instead of into the operation of the several hundred public stations around the country that carry PBS programs. More on that later.

The dissenters, primarily Lloyd N. Morrisett of the Markle Foundation and David W. Burke, former president of CBS News, find the basic system flawed. Morrisett argues that either Congress should pay for all of PBS's programming and be held accountable by the public for their choices, or public television should declare its financial independence from Washington, "marshal its own resources and achieve operational efficiencies." In return, he says, it would get the editorial freedom it now lacks. The implication is that if public television earns respect, support from the public would flow in sufficient volume to pay the "Washington Week" regulars and keep "Barney and Friends," the hugely popular children's program, and all the other PBS shows, on the air.

Burke, a veteran both of Washington policy battles and network news executive suites, has seen the corrosive effect of self-censorship. He correctly argues that it is impossible to know the extent to which editorial freedom has been sacrificed in exchange for Congress's largesse and that "federal funds by their very nature carry a silent but perverse form of censorship."

The central recommendation the Task Force, chaired by Brown University president Vartan Gregorian, makes

is that the federal subsidy for local station operations should be eliminated. Local broadcasters should be supported by their local communities, they say.

They are right, of course. The present fragmented system was set up out of a romantic and thoroughly mistaken idea that there should be a weak central governing authority for public television while the real power resided with the stations. Localism, it was called, and it justified the Nixon administration's successful effort to emasculate an early attempt at a public television news production center.

Beyond the vulnerability of a system built on localism, the idea that creativity would flourish at hundreds of local stations went against the laws of broadcasting, and particularly it went against the laws of news broadcasting.

As the Task Force report points out, there must be a central programming organization with the funds and the staff to commission programs, develop them (a more difficult task than might be imagined), fund the worthy ones and ruthlessly kill off the weak ones, all the while imposing rigorous editorial standards on the ones that do reach the public.

The report says under the present system local stations get the major share of federal largesse and spend it on overhead—station staffs, cameras, studios and the like. Just three public stations—WGBH Boston, WNET New York and WETA Washington—produce the bulk of PBS's national programs; 300 stations produce no programs at all for national distribution, yet federal dollars continue to pour in to these stations whose main local production may be their fund-raising weeks. The average public station produces just 2 percent of its own programs.

The central programming authority, PBS, is underfunded, poorly staffed and lacking either the will or the ability to enforce its editorial standards, even though a recent reform created a Chief Program Executive in whose hands responsibility for programming has been concentrated.

"MacNeil/Lehrer" exists in a world apart. Its standards are high, its edito-

continued on page 71

Looking at Prozac Journalistically

Listening to Prozac

Peter D. Kramer

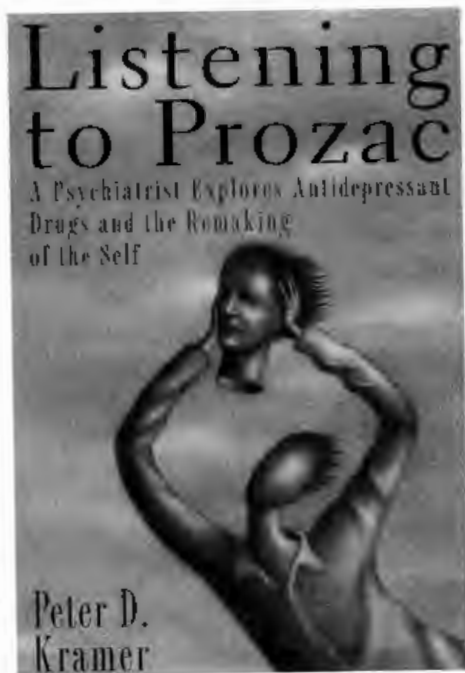
Viking, 409 pages, \$23.

BY MARIA KARAGIANIS

“Newsweek,” psychiatrist Peter Kramer points out, “made Prozac a star.” The green-and-white capsule, first introduced in 1987, had, within three years, appeared on the covers of both Newsweek and New York Magazine, as well as been featured in an article in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine. Although pharmaceutical companies had been making antidepressants for 40 years, it was only Prozac that became an icon. And, in that familiar journalistic syndrome of celebrity creation, then destruction, Prozac’s renown was followed by “rumors, notoriety, scandal and lawsuits.”

The media built up the god, Prozac, then proceeded to tear it down—in a process not dissimilar to reportage during national political campaigns. In a secular age still hungry for miracles, Prozac—a sleek, designed, high-tech drug—promised not only transformation, but transcendence. Prozac was on “Nightline” and on “The Today Show.” It promised salvation, out there in mass media-land, on television when anxious Americans went to bed and when they woke up.

According to Kramer, Prozac enjoyed the fastest acceptance of any psychotherapeutic medicine ever—650,000 prescriptions per month by the time the Newsweek cover appeared, just over two years after Prozac was introduced. By the time Kramer was writing his paean to Prozac, 8 million people—including four million Americans—had taken this particular mood-altering drug for such diverse symptoms as social inhibition, eating disorders, poor self-image, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and, even, obses-



sive hair-pulling. Powerful in ameliorating a wide array of symptoms, Prozac—and this is the author’s main theme and fascination—not only has the power to heal. It possesses an even more impressive power—the ability to alter human personality.

Kramer expresses faint moral queasiness about playing God by tinkering with the human psyche as, for example, when he reluctantly prescribes mood brighteners for people whom he can’t diagnose as sick. In fact, moral questions seem to have motivated him, in part, to write this book. He writes, for example, of “The Thanatos Syndrome,” the novel by Walker Percy, the Southern writer and doctor who converted to Catholicism, and whose dark vision was of a world in which plotters had introduced an insidious drug into the water supply, which makes the shy bold. This is a nightmare world where people are “not hurting, they are not worrying...but

there is something missing.” What is missing is their humanity, an awareness of themselves as vulnerable beings who must suffer, grow and die. Kramer does raise the issue of “cosmetic psychopharmacology,” musing, for example, about the ethical dilemmas of a day when normal, but shy and inhibited people, may feel compelled to take Prozac to have the peppy, aggressive personality necessary for success in late-stage capitalism.

Yet, despite his moral qualms, he is clearly a convert who disapproves of the media hysteria when Geraldo, Donahue, Larry King, “Eye on America,” “Prime Time Live” and Time magazine, “eager,” as he writes, “to see bad where Newsweek had seen good” started publicizing reports of depressed patients becoming suicidal on Prozac. And then Newsweek, “not contrite,” came back “just reporting the trends” with a cover on violence in America which included, in that issue, a story called “Backlash Against Prozac.” And then Time jumped in, with “a backlash to the backlash” with a cover exposé of the Scientologists, “who were shown to be fomenting much of the anti-Prozac hysteria.”

So it goes. As his own contribution to truth, Kramer has written fluently an interesting 300-page defense of Prozac and of the psychiatric profession, relegating any discussion of side effects, possible long-term consequences of taking Prozac and the above-mentioned charges that the drug may induce suicidal or homicidal impulses in some disturbed patients, to a 12-page appendix at the back of the book.

Although he raises the specter of America becoming a nation of blissed-out zombies, he draws on case histories from his own psychiatric practice, animal studies, the history of antidepressants in general and Prozac in particular, and clinical reports to ascertain that biology need not be destiny, and that, as he writes in the last chapter, bad or good, Prozac is here to stay. ■

Maria Karagianis earned a master's degree this past June at the Harvard Divinity School. She is a former staff writer for The Boston Globe Magazine.

What Do You Do When Your Father Is a Racist?

Leaving Birmingham:
Notes of a Native Son
Paul Hemphill
Viking, 351 Pages. \$23.50.

BY PAUL DELANEY

When my appointment as Chairman of the University of Alabama's Journalism Department was announced last year, I was struck not only by the volume of the reaction, but also by the type and tone. Telephone calls of congratulations jammed my voice mail, many of them from people I had not heard from in decades. Others were from strangers, some of them Alabama graduates from as far back as the forties.

Then the letters began arriving, mostly from whites who had lived in Birmingham or who had moved away. In almost every instance, they expressed regrets that they had turned their backs and not done more during the city's turbulent years, the 1960's, a period that to this day defines Birmingham to the rest of the world.

My family was part of the great exodus of blacks who abandoned the South in the 1950's. The letter writers were also sad that I was barred from studying journalism at the school where I would become chairman in 1992. But more poignantly, they felt very guilty about their own abandonment of decency and fairness in the saga of Birmingham.

Paul Hemphill essentially did the same thing. While blacks, in effect, were pushed out, the Paul Hemphills left of their own accord. But his family stayed, maintaining their staunch racism that became Birmingham's legacy.

In his book, Hemphill explains how and why he left. It was for more personal reasons—terrible relations with his father, Paul, Sr., the dad the son loved dearly. Paul, Jr. evolved into a man who became alienated from what his father, neighbors and fellow whites stood for.

Hemphill also went on to pursue his career in journalism. He elected to leave Birmingham because he did not want to waste away in the sports department of the local papers. Paul Hemphill, Jr., did not fare too badly, and in that, his story and his life are in stark contrast to those blacks left to suffer. The moral is simple: leave or stay, the Hemphills of Birmingham will end up okay.

The book is an excellent account of Hemphill's personal and professional dilemmas. He was not destined to become the baseball great he dreamed of, despite all the summer camps, training and trips to baseball parks. His success as a writer was undermined, in his mind, by the fact that his father did not consider that much of a career at all. Baseball did provide a strong bond between father and son, marred again by the race

issue—when blacks entered the major leagues, an event that upset Paul, Sr.

But it is Hemphill's observations of the Birmingham he left, but kept going back to, that is important. White native sons do not usually lay open their lives the way he does—it's the kind of stuff a man usually tells his shrink rather than his publisher. Neither his family nor the city comes out looking too good, then or now.

Hemphill's is an insider's view, a ringside seat to the mind, action and reaction of a typical Birmingham white racist, his father, who was part of the city's worst elements and who supported like-minded officials to run the town. Hemphill's training, albeit as a sports writer on some real rags until he got to *The Atlanta Journal*, provided him with the basics that would enhance his development and success as a columnist and writer of several books and eventually as a Nieman Fellow.

Appropriately and, perhaps, predictably, the year at Nieman, Harvard, Cambridge and Boston was his debutante ball, his coming out party. Fellows included Tony Lukas, Jonathan Yardley and Henry Bradsher, and among the people he met was Jerry Rubin, unofficially and secretly brought in by Lukas. Hemphill would be exposed to the Eastern Intellectual Establishment.

The place, the people, the experience impressed Hemphill immensely. He grew as a journalist and writer. He had the blessings of Ralph McGill, his hero, and Dan Wakefield, who suggested Hemphill try for the Nieman. But the approval he did not receive was that of his parents.

"Maybe now, I thought, my parents will be impressed," he writes. "That seemed odd, that a 32-year-old man would need some sort of affirmation from his parents; but it had been a rocky road."

He later lamented:

"Not once in their lives would my parents ever ask me what it was like to spend a year at Harvard—leading me to assume that they were not pleased, they were embarrassed."

All the analyses and digs at Birmingham were underscored by this feeling of rejection. But it does not skew his



observations.

Like most whites in Birmingham, Hemphill, Sr. was no bomb thrower. But, his attitude about "the niggers" was an obsession, and his support of Bull Conner and hardline racists was total and unyielding. This was an incendiary combination that gave comfort to the bomb throwers and allowed the Conners to thrive, thereby denying the city the kind of progress found in other Southern cities, such as New Orleans, Charlotte and, in particular, Atlanta, Birmingham's arch-rival.

Hemphill saw the light long before he departed Birmingham. The boy who rode with his truck-driving daddy grew weary of the racist harangues of his increasingly bitter father, a racism understood only by history: whites traditionally hated blacks. He saw the different treatment of blacks, beginning with Louvenia, the maid.

Those differences are highlighted in kind of asides, other voices, interviews with the Rev. John Porter, pastor of Birmingham's biggest black congregation, and Mimi Tynes, a white socialite from "over the mountain" suburban enclaves. This inclusion provides point-counterpoint confirmation of Hemphill's account as well as verbal evidence of the huge gap between black and white perception and reality in Birmingham.

The author was off—but not far off—in his conclusion that the city has not changed much. Racism is still rampant and pretty obvious, but there has been significant change from the old days.

But his is a journalist's account, a columnist's view of his upbringing, relations with his family, his hometown, friends, acquaintances. The warts are there, so are the positives. The writing could have been better, so could the editing. But in true journalism fashion, it is a good read on Birmingham, until something better comes along. ■

Before becoming Chairman of the Journalism Department at the University of Alabama Paul Delaney was a National Reporter, Foreign Correspondent, Deputy National Editor and senior editor at The New York Times.

Kennedy

continued from page 67

world, and he had several very influential personal friends within the press corps. His complaints about stories he did not like and leaks he could not control could have come from Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon. But the press in the 1960's had a different view of its role than it does in the 1990's.

Not only did reporters cover up the President's misbehavior, but some acted as intermediaries between Soviet intelligence agents and the Administration. These days statesmen send international messages via CNN; in 1961, Moscow used agents disguised as journalists and U.S. reporters played along.

Oddly in a book written by a journalist, these associations are minimized. They were explored more fully in "The Crisis Years" by Michael R. Beschloss, the most detailed published account of the missile crisis.

For all of the praise of his researchers, Reeves has permitted some niggling errors to escape final editing. Khrushchev is referred to as "premier" of the Soviet Union, which means prime minister, a title not used in Moscow. As Beschloss recorded, the proper title for Mr. K was Chairman (of the Council of Ministers).

In one chapter Reeves refers to the "Chicago Daily Tribune" and in the next, properly, "The Chicago Tribune." There is also the "Walter Reed Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD," a combination of the Reed Army Hospital in the District of Columbia and the Bethesda Naval Hospital. ■

Murray Seeger covered economics in Washington, Europe and Asia. A 1962 Nieman Fellow, he is special advisor on external relations for the International Monetary Fund.

Who Should Fund?

continued from page 68

rial integrity unquestioned, but the documentary and news specials that appear on PBS vary widely in quality.

Many are excellent, like this season's compelling series on the Great Depression produced by Henry Hampton. Others are flawed, like last season's "American Experience" documentary that asserted a unit of black American troops liberated Dachau and Buchenwald when the historical record showed clearly they did not. Or consider the case of the 90-minute attack on General Motors that led off the "Frontline" season this fall. It was editorially demolished by The Washington Post for flawed and dishonest reporting. The present system of editorial quality control is too weak to head off such embarrassments.

As troubling as the questioning of funding is, the Task Force report also ponders an even more basic question, whether there is a need for a public broadcasting system at all now that cable has filled the niches public TV once reserved to itself. If there is a cable channel called "Discovery," for example, that broadcasts documentaries every evening and another called "Bravo" that specializes in quality drama, who needs PBS? The answer is children, who have never been well served by commercial television. Schools and colleges need the educational programming only PBS provides and the viewers in the 40 percent of America's TV homes who cannot or do not subscribe to cable need it. In short the nation needs it.

Nothing has been analyzed and dissected more than public television. It's been tinkered with, reorganized, criticized and debated. But if war is too important to be left to the generals, then television is certainly too important to be left to television people. The Twentieth Century Report is useful for reminding us of that basic truth once again. ■

Edward M. Fouhy is president of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism in Washington. He was a reporter, producer and news executive during a 23-year career that included stints at all three television network news divisions.

How an Editor Found a Profound Secret In a Cher Movie

Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis

Howell Raines
William Morrow
343 Pages. \$22.

BY JIM THARPE

About halfway through Howell Raines's meandering tale of friendship, loss, midlife crisis and reawakening, fly fishing guru Dick Blalock—overweight heart patient, calorie-flaunting cook and possible CIA operative—sums things up in a single sentence. "If you're going to keep score, you might as well be on a golf course," scowls the pontificating Blalock.

What Blalock is talking about, of course, is fishing, and according to "Blalock's Way," fishing in general, and fly fishing in particular, has nothing to do with how many fish you catch; in fact, it might not have much to do with fish at all. Blalock spends the better portion of this book convincing Raines that his life-long obsession with rod and reel should be a contemplative pursuit approaching religion, not a competitive sport barnacled with fish counters, weigh-ins and the other modern flot-sam associated with the sport.

Raines's book is a thought-provoking jaunt across The New York Times Editorial Page Editor's 50 years of rivers and streams, bayous and bays, a tale told by a man entering the choppy, uncertain waters of midlife with the wise but unsaintly Blalock as his fishing and spiritual guide.

"He was the sort of fellow who would use Sweet'n Low and then plan his itinerary so that it would take him by the place that had particularly good coconut cream pies," Raines writes of his rotund friend.

As the book's title suggests, Raines spends a good deal of time discussing his descent into and climb out of his own midlife crisis—that time between 40 and 50 when, as Raines notes, mild

twinges of dread, disappointment and restlessness can overwhelm a man and cause him to buy expensive sports cars, land in Montana or gifts for women he barely knows.

Raines was in The New York Times Washington Bureau when the "black dog" began to chase him in earnest. "I assigned stories to reporters and edited what they had written, and at the end of the day, I had produced nothing that would last," he writes. "I also knew that like millions of American men my age, I was a hamster who would not be allowed to step off the wheel. Too many mortgages, bank notes and college tuitions for sums not yet imaginable depended on my diligently bartering my days for dollars."

When not engaged in that grim transaction, Raines spends most of his time either reminiscing about fishing, planning fishing trips or rising before dawn and throwing open his wallet to make those daydreams a reality.

Raines's love of the sport began with his childhood in North Alabama surrounded by the earthy men and women who would whet his lifelong appetite for angling. These early trips were his introduction into what he calls the "Redneck Way," expeditions with his colorful hillbilly kin that weren't considered successful unless they ended in large numbers of dead fish.

On his 40th birthday, Raines's wife presents him with a chronological photo album of his life as a fisherman. "As you flipped through the pages, the fish grew larger and I grew older," he writes. He adds: "I had spent countless hours at fishing of all kinds, but was truly expert at none."

Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis



Howell Raines

With guidance from the affable Dick Blalock, Raines sets out to resolve that deficiency by becoming an expert fly fisherman—to move from the "Redneck Way" to "Blalock's Way."

Along that rocky road, Raines throws in some observations about being a son and a father, takes a few shots at any Republican whose path he crosses and offers a few more details than the average reader can digest about the intricacies of fly fishing. Raines also finds it necessary at several points in the book to throw in fish-related recipes, a technique that worked well in John Hersey's book, "Blues," but seems out of place here.

Raines is at his best in this book when writing about his relationships, especially when delving into his hereditary soup with his carefully drawn portraits of Uncle Erskine and Uncle Erskine's son, David Ralph, whom the family called Daveydrif. Daveydrif, Raines writes, was the only boy he ever knew to be expelled from Ensley High School, which was quite a feat since some of its students went from high school straight to prison. When Raines writes of his family's Alabama fishing expeditions,

you can almost hear the old tin washtub filled with cracked ice and bottled Coca-Colas jangling in back of the car bloated with fishing gear as it dashes down some dusty backwoods Southern road.

Readers searching for a personal glimpse into the private life of the man who occupies one of the most powerful seats of American journalism will be disappointed by the book. At the end of one chapter, Raines writes sparingly of his divorce from his wife, Susan, whom he met, courted and married in Alabama. "The winding down of any long marriage is a complicated story and a sad one, too, if the marriage has been a good one for a very long time. I am not going to tell the entire history of that marriage, because the story does not belong to me alone." Two paragraphs later the marriage is ended, leaving the reader grasping for what went wrong. A few chapters later Raines talks about being on vacation with a "voluptuous young woman," who remains unnamed, and yes, even on this trip he is dreaming of fish.

Raines writes lovingly of his two sons, of watching them grow from clumsy youths to accomplished young men who can turn a long cast from a limber fly rod into ballet. One of the charms of this tale is Raines's ability to blend the profound with the, well, not so profound. He quotes from William Faulkner with the same ease as he remembers that his negotiation of the final stage of his mid-life crisis began in a London theater while he was watching the movie "Moonstruck." In the film, Olympia Dukakis asks a bewildered Danny Aiello why men—especially married ones like her movie husband—chase other women. Maybe, Aiello observes, it's because they fear death.

"Goofy male behavior is often seen as a case of a 'middle-aged crazy' trying to prolong youth," Raines writes. "But another, darker way of describing that same behavior is that men act wild because they are trying to run away from death." After making that discovery, Raines admits: "I remember feeling sheepish about finding a pearl of wisdom in a movie that was being promoted as an opportunity to regard Cber as a serious actress."

Raines's book seems like a quick read, even though it's 300-plus pages. He accomplishes this deceptive brevity by breaking his tale into 38 chapters with titles like "Fathers and Sons, Nerds, Dweebs and Wonks", "Amare o Pescare: An Essay", and "Spies, Flies and the Mystery of the Blalocks."

One of the things that Raines frequently wrestles with in the book is the reason people like himself spend a lot of time and large sums of money pursuing fish. Early in the book, he writes: "In my view, the people who fish do so because it seems like magic to them, and it is hard to find things in life that seem magical."

It's hard to find books that fall into that category as well, but when Raines is at his best in this book it's a word that comes to mind. ■

A lifelong bait and lure fisherman, Jim Tharpe, Nieman 1989, on occasion has flirted with fly fishing. Tharpe, who will turn 40 in February, spends his days as Managing Editor of The Montgomery Advertiser when not fishing or planning his approaching mid-life crisis.

Which Way?

continued from page 66

was not created by television. Likewise, it wasn't the *report* of soldiers refusing to attack civilians that made coup leaders take notice, but the *actual fact* of their refusal. This is an age-old debate about technology and communications. Television does magnify events, telescope time, create instantaneous celebrity. But it is dangerous to underestimate the importance of real world economic and political events that are often the result of deep historical trends.

If O'Neill exaggerates on the details, he is certainly not wrong on the big picture. Television, computers, fiber optics, satellites are all contributing to a new world order whose outlines we can only barely see today. But there are several other equally powerful trends. The global population explosion threatens to catapult today's 5.6 billion into

10 or 12 billion in just 50 years. That's a trend which will put enormous, perhaps unmanageable pressure on global resources and traditional economic and political institutions whether television reports it or not. For much of his book O'Neill seems to think that cellular phones and satellite television hooked up to computer data banks in every Bangladeshi village will herald a new age of grass roots democracy, what he calls "people's power." But so far that vision of a new world order links only the wealthy, the educated and the technologically literate in different countries. Ninety percent of the 95 million people born into the world each year are poor. And the cruel irony of the electronic revolution is that while the flow of information and technology creates enormous wealth it does not create jobs. In fact, it eliminates jobs and streamlines labor. By the end of the book O'Neill acknowledges that it is just as possible, perhaps more likely, that the new world order will leave out the poor, creating a standard of living gap not from one nation to another, but from class to class within and between nations.

Bringing one view to the table in the beginning of the book and another, apparently contradictory view in the next chapter is not the result of fuzzy headedness on O'Neill's part. He has made a valuable contribution by trying to wrap his arms around the powerful themes that are re-shaping the world so quickly we can barely grasp them as they flash by. The difficult reality of the next decade is that there are many forces at work, all powerful, all poorly understood, and often contradictory. We may not understand the future until it is history, and a new future is bearing down on us. ■

Sam Hurst, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance television producer in Rapid City, SD.

From Tank Crewman To Foreign Correspondent

Muddy Boots and Red Socks

A Reporter's Life

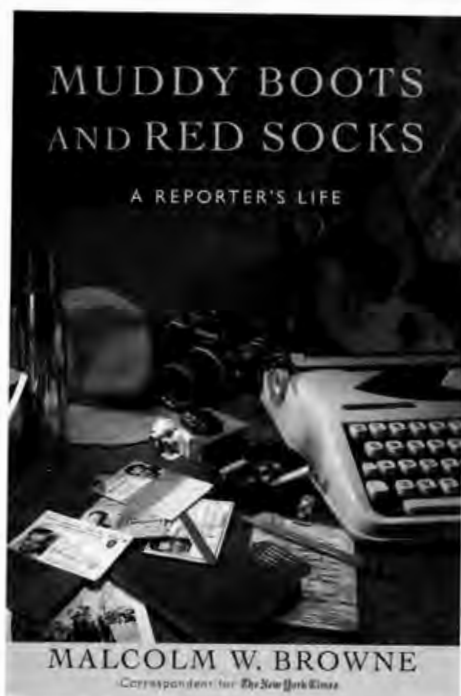
Malcolm W. Browne

Random House. 352 Pages. \$23.

By JACK FOISIE

Books by foreign correspondents usually consist of "amid shot and shell" story-telling, a stringing together of their best clips, or a lofty appraisal of historical events they have witnessed and headline personages they have known. Mal Browne's memoirs (although he is not yet retired from *The New York Times* where he now reports on science) doesn't exactly fit any of those categories.

He does recount graphically the horror and heroics of combat which he first witnessed as an Associated Press reporter in Vietnam. But his strength is political reporting, also initially in Vietnam and, after joining *The New York Times*, on assignments in South America and Eastern Europe and back to Asia again.



He was greatly aided by his ability to learn languages quickly and well. The book is salted with his pithy translations of local names and expressions. Who would have thought, for example, that the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, with its history of pleasure, intrigue and violence, simply means "Mrs. Penh," Browne reports.

Perhaps in modesty he seldom quotes from his own dispatches and this is regrettable. Often an inspired piece of reporting/writing on an event at the time it is happening can years later add to a reader's understanding of the situation.

For all his talent, Browne's account of his journalistic career occasionally reads professorial in tone, his opinions are laced with smugness and he is downright catty about female correspondents. For example, he writes, a female reporter who goes the route of extremely favorable assessment of world leaders "may win riches with a best-selling kiss-and-tell hook, or perhaps with a brilliant marriage."

The print media is noted for its individualists, and Browne lives up to the quixotic tradition. He and his third wife, Le Lieu, and their dog Nif-Naf, are inseparable in their travels, defying red tape, death threats and border guards, even during the most difficult assignments. His dogmatic determination to wear red socks every day is another eccentricity.

Browne happened into journalism accidentally. A combat-trained tank crewman in post-war Korea, he wandered into an army press relations office when there was need for a GI who

could type and write.

Despite its unevenness, "Muddy Boots and Red Socks" is worthwhile reading. Browne was among the earliest reporters to settle in Saigon when the American presence was minimal and President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother and his brother's wife, the notorious "dragon lady" Madam Nhu, were at their scheming best. Browne's account of those days is fascinating.

His reporting for *The Times* in South America turned out to be a three-year assignment, which seems to have been his longest uninterrupted stay in any part of the world. It was during the days of the first democratically elected Marxist government anywhere in the world, in Chile. With his linguistic ability he was soon on familiar terms with many of the key players. He writes revealing appraisals of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and other Castroite socialists.

The nickname "Che" is an Argentine slang word meaning something like "Mack" or "Hey you." It's another of Browne's droll translations.

Browne is in some respects like the well-regarded *New York Times* man before him, Herbert Matthews, who reported favorably on Castro when he was still a revolutionary in the Cuban highlands. Browne also developed a reputation for reporting liberal causes more sympathetically than was in vogue generally at the time. As a result his relations with the American establishment was often flinty.

It was Admiral Harry Felt, commander-in-chief of U.S. Pacific forces during the Vietnam war who testily replied to a Browne question: "Why can't you get on the team?"

In American-style democracy, however, an adversarial relationship between press and officialdom is not necessarily disturbing, if it doesn't degenerate into feuding.

Browne was peripatetic in his later overseas years for *The Times*, returning to Saigon twice and being among the last reporters to leave when the curtain was falling. In his sixties he volunteered to help report the Persian Gulf war. His conclusions are hard-boiled and, I think,

continued on page 76

Laughing Along the Way With Molly

Nothin' but Good Times Ahead

Molly Ivins

Random House, 255 pages, \$23.

BY DICK J. REAVIS

“Nothin' but Good Times Ahead” is a collection of columns by nationally syndicated Texas political columnist Molly Ivins. The compilation includes items originally published at the now-defunct Dallas Times-Herald, by her present anchor publication, The Fort Worth Star Telegram, and by venerable liberal organs such as Mother Jones and The Progressive.

“Nothin' but” gives us her predictably liberal take on subjects like Bill Clinton, David Koresh, George Bush, the Gulf War and gun control. But she rises to populism when, for example, in feinting an apology for having called the White House press corps “a bunch of trained seals sitting around waiting for their four o'clock feeding”—she additionally accuses them of “having blown every big story of the eighties.”

The book is part serious, part jive, a mixture of liberal punditry with regional humor, always with a dash of hyperbole. Its formula is a proven commercial success; sales of “Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?”, her previous book, achieved best-seller status and “Nothin' but” is already at the top of Texas lists.

But deciding why Ivins's humor is popular, or what to think of it, is like opening one of those gilded wooden eggs that tourists bring back from Russia: inside every egg, there's another one.

A good deal of Ivins's humor is mined from the double layers of an angst unknown in New York or Boston, the angst of being an American in Texas, and that of being a Texan in America. This malady is a variety of the much

older, equally thorny problem, that of being a Southerner, and is distinguishable from it only by the presence of something that Texana specialists call the New York-Texas axis. But all of these maladies occur widely in different strains elsewhere in America, where they are usually passed off under the category of “not fitting in”.

Both Ivins's Texan angst and its accompanying liberalism are evident in “Nothin' but” lines like this: “I can only hope that this modest oeuvre—as we often say in Amarillo—will remind you that we need to stop and laugh along the way.” A few pages later, she writes, “The noise is about her oeuvre, as we always say in Lubbock”. Similarly, “Au contraire, as we always say in Amarillo...”

Lines like these don't have universal, or fill-in-the-blank referents. They depend upon something that doesn't fit—in a particular way. “The noise is about her oeuvre as we always say in Sacramento” makes no sense, but might be funny if Memphis or Moscow were the cities it chose, because it relies on the reader's belief that there's a hierarchy of cities on a scale of cosmopolitanism. And of course, among her liberal readership, there is.

Not many conservatives get the joke, because among conservatives, cities are matrices of numbers, not cultural qualities. Numbers about production, numbers about markets, numbers about profit margins, those are what distinguish cities in their books. The values at the center of liberal life, and the culturally—and politically—sensitive humor that's permitted—or prohibited—in lib-

Molly Ivins

Author of *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?*



eral circles is a only a mystery to them. On the other hand, a joke whose punchline was “but Mr. Collor, you can't do that and hold inflation to 1250 percent!” might gets roars in the boardroom.

The Amarillo/Lubbock routine posits not only a hierarchy of cities, but a hierarchy of languages as well. “The noise is about her work, as we always say in London” would get no laughs, and the translation of “oeuvre” to Polish, with Chicago as a city of reference, wouldn't win many chuckles, either, in part because readers wouldn't recognize the Polish word for work. If Ivins's lines read, “The noise was about her obra, as lots of people say in Lubbock”, or “al contrario, as lot of people say in Amarillo”, they'd be factual references, not quips, just as if Port au Prince were the setting for her citations from French.

The joke turns on a perceived incongruity in speaking the supposedly high-brow language of France, and living in Texas agribusiness towns like Lubbock and Amarillo. Conservatives don't find humor in this side of the joke because for them, knowing eight foreign languages is a business skill; one either has the skill, or doesn't. For them, knowing French is not a feather in a bonnet of

erudition—and it's never a pretension, either.

Like most jokes, the Lubbock/Amarillo joke has a winner and a loser, and the losers aren't the conservatives who miss the point. The winner is he who recognizes the word *oeuvre*, thinks that French is a distinguished language—and doesn't live in Lubbock or Amarillo. Its loser is whoever lives there, regardless of his place on liberal/conservative value scales.

A related joke, also typical of Ivins—and also made twice—is “I had always envisioned the literary life, or as we used to say in East Texas, ‘being an arthur, as involving a lot of hanging out at Elaine’s in New York City.’” Quoting Texas politicians, Ivins writes that they say things like, “Ah cain’t tell yew how happy yew are to be here,” and “We’re gonna have us some ree-form around here.” In Ivins’s columns and those of the similarly syndicated, but really surreal Texas movie reviewer, John Bloom, aka Joe Bob Briggs, Texans speak in dialect.

Everybody eats watermelon, but only blacks stereotypically do, and everybody speaks in dialect—President Kennedy invaded “Cubar” not Cuba—but Texans stereotypically do. The Ivins/Bloom act is unquestionably based on a regional stereotype.

In Critical Theory, I’m told, their use of dialect would be tagged as “internalized colonial discourse.” Or to put it more simply, Ivins and Bloom are actors in the Texas version of “Amos and Andy.” They’re funny because they lampoon an us that’s somewhat and somehow dubiously regarded by the much-vaunted mainstream. Stereotypes do get internalized. “Amos and Andy” attracted a black as well as a white audience; Ivins and Bloom have fans in Texas as well as elsewhere.

These clowning Texans are fortunate that one great difference separates their *oeuvres* from those of the creators of “Amos and Andy”: nothing in the regional heritage of self-stereotyped Texans compares with the oppression of Africans in America, and indeed, Texanhood, as the stereotype presents it, is a status open only to whites.

I am reminded of something that happened when I was a little boy. A driver ran over Michael Tennis Shoes’ dog. Michael came running, scooped-up the dog and began bawling, while the driver stood by, trying to console him. The car had merely passed over the animal, knocking him flat, but causing no injury, the driver pointed out. “I didn’t really hurt your dog,” he told the crowd of us boys. But Michael wasn’t buying it. He stared up and blurted, “Yeah, but you didn’t help him one damn bit, either!”

Ivins is the driver, parading through the neighborhood at the wheel of a bestseller book. White Texans are Michael; the dog is our pride. Some of us are running to salute Ivins as she goes by, but the rest of us, our dogs under leash, are keeping away from the street—and hoping that rich man or lawyer jokes will come back into vogue.

Dick J. Reavis, Nieman 1990, is currently writing a book for Simon & Schuster about events in Waco last spring.

284 Photographs and No Text

It is fitting that there is no text in “An Autobiography” by Richard Avedon (Random House, \$100). There needn’t be. The 284 photographs speak volumes about the nearly half century that the master photographer documents. In crisp black-and-white prints in this elephant-size folio he captures both the powerful and the powerless. As far as fashion photographers go, Avedon has no peer and the images taken from his Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue days are the epitome of style. But sometimes his studio portraits of the famous fail miserably. His 1976 series on the power brokers of America, including President Gerald Ford, Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Edmund Muskie, Eugene McCarthy, and Rose Mary Woods, are dull and unimaginative. Conversely, his photographs of the real and surreal people entitled “In the American West” are hip and honest. His jaunts as a photojournalist are equally effective and moving. If the book shows an imperfect world, so too is this an imperfect book. Many of the photographs are personal. His father, for example, is in the book 10 times while conspicuously absent are Avedon’s famous photos of the Beatles. ■

—Stan Grossfeld

From Tank Crew

continued from page 74

in some ways erroneous.

“The Gulf War was dominated by American technology and our side won,” he writes. “Sophisticated American military technology could, after all, crush peasant armies, not withstanding our defeat in Vietnam.”

Hardly apt, comparing the highly motivated Hanoi-directed forces in Vietnam with the cowed forces of Saddam Hussein and his intimidated generals in Iraq.

Browne concludes: “...honest reporting is the last thing most people want when the subject is war. In the eyes of millions of enthusiasts, there may never have been a bad war. War is thundering good theater, in which cheering the home team is half the fun.” ■

Jack Foisie, a 1947 Nieman Fellow, opened the Saigon Bureau of The Los Angeles Times in 1964 and later covered Southeast Asia from Bangkok. Retired, he occasionally muddies his boots in Monmouth, Oregon.



Richard Avedon self-portrait

A Good Read, but Only a Clip Job of Justice Brennan

A Justice for All:

William J. Brennan, Jr., and the Decisions That Transformed America

Kim Isaac Eisler

Simon & Schuster. 303 Pages. \$22.

BY JOEL KAPLAN

More than 30 years ago, a decision that transformed American journalism was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court. In *New York Times v. Sullivan*, Justice William J. Brennan was able to craft an opinion that has protected the media in this country from assault by public officials who did not like any criticism of the way they did business. By creating an "actual malice" standard, Justice Brennan allowed journalists to do their jobs without fear that an innocent or even stupid mistake would bankrupt their news organization.

Brennan's decision gave investigative reporters the right to dig up scandals like Watergate, Iraqgate and the Iran-Contra affair. It gave editorial writers the right to call for the impeachment of a president and the resignation of a couple of others. It even ultimately gave the tabloids the right to write about an alleged affair between a candidate for president and the state employee whose job he procured.

The brilliance of *New York Times v. Sullivan* is not so much that it has stood the test of time—it certainly is still good law today—but that Justice Brennan was able to secure a unanimous decision of the nine-member court. That was no easy task, given that some members of the court believed firmly that the words of the First Amendment prohibited a public official from ever winning a libel suit while others believed that libel was the province of state legislatures and wanted the case narrowly decided.

The intricacies of how that decision came down has been told expertly in Anthony Lewis's "Make No Law. The

Sullivan Case and the First Amendment." But little has been written about the man who made it happen: William J. Brennan Jr. In "A Justice For All," journalist Kim Isaac Eisler attempts to paint the first definitive portrait of Brennan since his retirement in 1990 after 34 years on the bench.

In this biography, Eisler takes the reader through Brennan's early years in Newark, NJ as the son of a politically powerful union leader, through his days as a successful corporate lawyer and state judge. The bulk of the book focuses on Brennan's most famous cases, from the Roth obscenity decision of the 1950's to the symbolic speech flag-burning case of the late 1980's. He even devotes a half dozen pages to Sullivan.

But unfortunately, Eisler's attempt to describe and define Brennan is fatally flawed. It's not so much that neither Brennan nor his family cooperated with the author. The problem is primarily that the rendition is superficial and unrevealing. As Eisler himself conceded in the acknowledgments that follow the book: "This work does not attempt to be a definitive statement on Justice Brennan's judicial career...Brennan's judicial writings are so vast that it would be impossible to deal with the ramifications of all of them in a liftable volume....Rather than a final statement, this book stands as an important first step in a process of consideration that will doubtless go on for decades."

Nevertheless, the 303-page book is a good read, well-written and not bogged down by what many writers would do—simply excerpt highlights of Brennan's opinions. If anything, Eisler goes out of his way not to quote too much from

those opinions and so the reader never really gets a sense of the incisiveness of Brennan's legal thinking.

The result is that the book is simply a clip job of Brennan's life and hence, not a serious piece of biography.

For example, there are no notes of any kind, nor any elaboration of the source of many of the author's assertions and opinions. All Eisler gives the reader is a four-page bibliography and a statement that most of the material in the book came from the papers of seven former justices.

"His fight with Frankfurter had marked Brennan's only failure of personality," the author writes at one point. "He had been close with Frankfurter's ideological twin, John Marshall Harlan. He had also maintained close friendships with Marshall, Stewart, White and Powell. And he won the grudging respect of the Court's most difficult member, Douglas. Privately, Brennan felt that Douglas could be a 'horse's ass.' But that wasn't saying much. Around the Court that was considered more fact than opinion."

Where does this information come from? Another book? Papers of a justice? Since the reader has no way of knowing where Eisler gets his information, there is no way to judge the credibility of his conclusions.

William J. Brennan Jr. should be the subject of a terrific biography one day, of interest to journalists, scholars and the general public. Unfortunately, this is not it. ■

Joel Kaplan, Nieman Fellow 1985, is an Assistant Professor of Newspaper at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

OMBUDSMAN

How Columnists Can Stay Out of Trouble

By JOANN BYRD

Columnists are troublemakers. They harp on other people's flawed thinking and the way things are going and systems that don't work. They locate holes in the conventional wisdom and challenge our quite comfortable assumptions.

Some columnists specialize in finding new things for us to worry about, or even more examples of what already had us feeling pretty bad. Columnists force us to think when we thought we'd already done enough of that.

All of that is the kind of trouble the world needs.

But what is awful to watch—or experience—is a columnist making trouble for herself.

Let me say that it doesn't count as

trouble if people disagree with a columnist's opinion. If the voicemail gets jammed, or the mailbox, so what? This is why they put all that space in voicemail and mailboxes. If readers wear out the fax machine to tell a columnist he's wrong, then columnists don't do monologues, but conversations.

Forget bigots and partisans who are constitutionally unable to entertain any point of view not their own. They favor the ad hominem attack, and there's nothing anybody can do about it.

Trouble is when a columnist undermines his own credibility or the power of his arguments. Trouble is when a columnist's readers aren't so sure they're going to keep considering his views.

People who call this ombudsman to complain about a columnist as often as not identify themselves as part of the columnist's flock. And they always begin by recognizing one truth: "A columnist is entitled to her opinion."

What readers say after that has begun to collect in consistent patterns I should tell you about. ("You" being a columnist, or someone who wants to know just how much the world demands of people in exchange for guaranteed space and so much license.)

Anyway, the message I bring from the ombudsman's own voicemail and mailbox is this: A columnist can avoid 93.7 percent of the trouble she brings on herself simply by doing what she

Joann Byrd has been ombudsman at The Washington Post since June 1992. Before that, she was Executive Editor, Managing Editor and City Editor of The Herald in Everett, Washington, and Assistant City Editor and general assignment reporter at The Spokane Daily Chronicle. She got her first news job at age 13. As a 1989 Fellow at the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University, she began developing a procedure for making ethics decisions in newsrooms. She has an M.A. in philosophy, with an emphasis on ethics.



knows she has to do. Every time.

For convenience, we will call these collected lessons from the ombudsman's phone Caution One, Caution Two, Caution Three and Caution Four.

Caution One: Do your reporting. (The way readers say this is something like, "So-and-So wouldn't think that if she knew anything about history (my town, the law, this disease, the intent of this, the fine print, et al.)." Or: "Tell So-and-So to get his facts straight next time. That isn't the way this happened." Even if it's not a reporting column, readers trust a columnist's perspective on some topic only when the column matches up to the whole of the story. For any conclusion based on what might be called facts, make the trip, do the interview, read one more report.

Caution Two: Do your reporting first. (Reader to ombudsman: "So-and-So made up his mind in his ivory tower down there and then talked only to both of the people who agreed with him.") Most of us have to overcome the brain's ability to overlook or dismiss what doesn't support what we think. But if one contrary fact is going to sink your ship, it's better to know about it before you leave the dock. (T-shirts, \$22 plus shipping and handling.)

Caution Three: Make it a *see-through case*. ("Where is this guy coming from?" Or "His thesis may be fine—though I doubt it. I hear he plays tennis with a lobbyist for the insurance industry.") Even if yours is an established voice and a reliable perspective, that doesn't tell readers how you got to this particular finale. A transparent path to your (undoubtedly correct) conclusion is also the recommended way to bring your readers to the same place.

Caution Four: Give an *inch to the opposition*. ("Here's why she's wrong about this. Did she ever consider...?") And a *little respect*. ("Listen: So-And-So thinks we don't deserve a place at the table because we don't agree with him?") Demonstrate that you know yours is one of the available opinions and artfully explain why the other views don't cut it for you. Readers want to see that you've weighed everything. Then they can agree with you without doing more

homework, I think.

Anyone who's written a column for more than a week could tell you all of that. And readers with the credibility to be heard on this subject intuit the rules.

This trouble happens because the columnist, sitting beneath a ticking clock or coming up dry or distracted by problems at home, just doesn't do it this time.

It's capital-T Trouble when you have to explain that you didn't do what everyone knows to be the ABC's.

These burdens do not fall so heavily

on other journalists. A columnist is inviting strangers to see the inner workings of her brain. A reporter (whose thinking may be revealed by what's in or not in a story) at least has the facts of the matter and the traditional formulations of a news story for fig leaves.

But a columnist is exposed like no one else at a newspaper. And a pretty constant target. And expected to be wise and insightful week after week after week.

More trouble you do not need. ■

Nieman Reports And Writer Win ASCAP Award

An article in Nieman Reports was one of the winners of the 26th Annual ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards for outstanding print and media coverage of music in 1992. The American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers has announced.

"Popular Music—Political and Social Realities Can Be Discovered in Serious Criticism of the Medium," by Anthony DeCurtis appeared in the Fall 1992 "Critics & The Arts" issue. DeCurtis, a senior features editor of Rolling Stone, was also cited for two articles in that magazine.

In all, eight writers of journal, magazine and newspaper articles and their respective publishers, and the authors and publishers of eight books were honored at a ceremony on December 7, 1993 at the Society's New York headquarters. ASCAP President Morton Gould was scheduled to present the awards, which included \$6,000 to be distributed in cash prizes to the winning authors and writers.

The ASCAP-Deems Taylor Broadcast Award in television was awarded to NBC's "Saturday Night Live" for "its singular role in providing cutting-edge popular music...for 18 years." The Broadcast Award in radio will be presented to the host and producer of American Public Radio's "Schickele Mix" for "an educational and entertaining radio program that showcases the un-

Recycled Computers Support Free Press

Oslobodjenje, the Sarajevo newspaper that won the Nieman Foundation's Louis Lyons Award this year, and other struggling newspapers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, are using cast-off computers that have been donated by American newspapers and other businesses.

The computers are recycled by the nonprofit East-West Education Development Foundation of Boston.

For newspapers struggling to prosper in the new climate of freedom the computers, although not the latest, can be a definite improvement in technology. For the donating companies the gift is a tax break.

The East-West Foundation also accepts computer donations from individuals.

A contributor can designate a specific purpose or country as recipients for its computers.

Inquiries about the program should be addressed to the East-West Educational Development Foundation, 49 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111. ■

derlying and surprising connections among musical genres of every kind..." And a special citation will be presented to the editor of "Opera News".

The Awards are given in honor of Deems Taylor, who was the composer, music critic and editor. He served as President of ASCAP from 1942-1948. ■

RESPONSE

'Debacle at Waco' Disputed

Waco, TX

Those of us who know the truth from the inside and who have read "Debacle at Waco" by Wendell Rawls Jr. in the Summer 1993 issue of Nieman Reports shudder to think that his work meets the standards of this esteemed quarterly published at Harvard University.

The article misrepresented our dealings with the Branch Davidians and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms that sought to suppress our series about the now-famous Davidian religious compound near Waco.

The piece contained two important errors:

1. It erroneously and without any substantiation stated that five calls from Tribune-Herald telephones were placed to the compound in the hour before the ATF raid the morning of Feb. 28, implying that someone at the newspaper alerted the Davidians that the ATF was coming.

There was no attribution and the Tribune-Herald was offered no chance to deny or disprove this allegation.

No one on the Tribune-Herald staff made any calls into the compound the morning of the raid. We examined with the help of expert counsel the movements that weekend of every staffer connected to our coverage of the raid. We gave our cellular phone records to authorities conducting an investigation of the tragedy.

The newspaper's actions have been examined by Texas Rangers, investigators from the U.S. Treasury Department, a task force of the Society of Professional Journalists and the American press itself. There were no phone calls.

2. The article attributed to me the statement that the ATF requested more

than once that we hold off printing our series and that I agreed each time. It said that we held the series for about a month at the request of the ATF, then "suddenly and inexplicably" decided we could wait no longer.

I told Mr. Rawls the same thing I publicly stated in an open letter in our newspapers the day after the failed raid and have told numerous other reporters who interviewed me:

"We told the agents that we appreciated their position but couldn't make a commitment not to publish."

When the ATF approached us we considered its concerns as any responsible newspaper would. But we made clear that we would not commit to delaying publication. We heard nothing from the ATF to persuade us to hold our series.

Our series included details of a 1987 shootout among cult rivals and the presence of a stockpile of assault weapons at the compound. David Koresh's adherents were armed, committed in the extreme to their beliefs, and had a history of weapons use against foes. It was only prudent that we take steps to protect our employees, customers and property if we were to risk incurring their wrath. Once we had in place a program upgrading security the decision to print was made. There was nothing "sudden" or "inexplicable" about what we did.

The article implies that we acted out of a desire to maximize the series' exposure to win a Pulitzer Prize. Nothing could be further from the truth. I don't believe in assigning stories or making decisions for the sake of winning prizes. I deeply resent any such implications.

Bob Lott, Editor
Waco Tribune-Herald

Publisher's Note—Nieman Reports regrets any errors in the article "Debacle at Waco" which led readers to the conclusion that the Waco Tribune-Herald broke commitments made to the ATF or made phone calls into the Branch Davidian compound on the morning of the February 28 raid. Although such information contained in the original article was obtained from local and federal officials, subsequent investigations by state and federal authorities provided no evidence to support their allegations.

Editor's Note—Wendell Rawls's article said that The New York Times was one of the newspapers that reported that Sharon Wheeler had alerted the press in advance of the raid. While noting that Wheeler had called various news outlets, Rawls said The Times and others had not asked the editors and television news directors what she had actually told them. If they would have checked, Rawls wrote, they would have discovered that Wheeler had told them nothing. Rawls based his criticism on a version of a New York Times article that appeared in The Houston Chronicle. The version of the same article that appeared in The Times said that Ms. Wheeler did not provide details of the raid and actually quoted television news directors describing what she had told them.

Nashville

As a regular reader of Nieman Reports, I commend you for soliciting and publishing Wendell Rawls's critical piece on the journalistic performance during the Davidian Compound Crisis.

It reminded me that not since A. J. Liebling's "Wayward Press" pieces in the old New Yorker have we had the sort of tough-minded news media criticisms that are needed to keep a "way-

ward press" from straying—or to expose the press when it strays.

I well remember during my Nieman year, Liebling's evening with us and his candid assertion that "newspapermen and clergymen who spend their lives exposing the flaws of others have the thinnest skins when their own flaws are exposed." That still is true.

We badly need a regular, caustic, satirical published critique of a press that continues to be wayward.

I hope that Nieman Reports will continue to publish occasional pieces by journalists or ex-journalists with Rawls's insight, integrity and courage.

John Seigenthaler
Chairman, The Freedom Forum
First Amendment Center

Bosnia Reporting

New York

Sylvia Poggioli's critique of reporting in the Balkans (Scouts Without Compasses, Fall 1993) failed to acknowledge Roy Gutman of Newsday, whose courage, independence and tenacity in exposing "ethnic cleansing" and the concentration camps of Bosnia did, indeed, represent one of journalism's finest hours.

In June and July 1992, when the international press corps was focused on the siege of Sarajevo, Gutman did the first in-depth reporting on "ethnic cleansing," from deportations by sealed cattle car to the murder of the Bosnian Muslim elite. On August 2, in a story headlined "Death Camps," he detailed eyewitness accounts of killings at Brcko and Omarska, camps where only one out of 10 inmates survived. That piece finally broke through public apathy.

On August 23, 1992, in "Rape by Order," datelined Tuzla, Gutman documented the systematic rape of 40 young Muslim women by Serb forces who had captured their town in Northern Bosnia, and the pattern of similar rapes as war tactic.

I happened to be in the Belgrade office of The Associated Press the night Gutman's articles moved. A local desk man showed me the copy, topped by an FYI memo from an editor saying the story had not been internationally dis-

tributed because he thought Newsday was "Serb-bashing." Such is the desire to disbelieve.

Months later, The New York Times reported the Muslim-led government's claim that 50,000 Muslim women had been raped by Serbs in Bosnia. Suddenly rape became a major story—but reported in a propaganda context that made it easy to doubt.

Well, casting doubt is easy. The hard part is "finding things out," in Harrison Salisbury's phrase. That's what Gutman did, and he was honored for it with virtually every award journalism has to offer, including a Pulitzer for international reporting.

Nina Bernstein
Nieman Fellow 1984

Prague

I believe Nina Bernstein may have missed somewhat the point of my article.

It was not my intention to single out any one journalist either for blame or praise. A number of fine journalists have won awards for coverage of the wars in former Yugoslavia, Roy Gutman included.

I attempted, however, to point out the quagmire of disorder, disinformation and danger posed by these wars. It was—and is—an unprecedented situation in post-World War II Europe.

I was stressing the new realities of the post-Cold War world which are posing new challenges not only for journalists but also for policy-makers, as we also can see now in the crises in Somalia, Haiti and the former Soviet Union.

Moreover, the situation I was describing was one in which not only American, but also British, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Canadian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Slovenian and other journalists from around the world had to operate.

Many of us, in that summer of 1992, had "to find things out" to report the atrocities of "ethnic cleansing," but I believe few of us today can feel our pieces "broke through public apathy." As Susan Sontag wrote in The New York Review of Books (October 21, 1993),

many reporters felt that with such vast media coverage the world would "do something" to end the carnage. However, she added, "The coverage of the genocide in Bosnia has ended that illusion."

Sylvia Poggioli

Two Parties in Japan

Tokyo

T.R. Reid's observation in "Japan's Feisty Press" (Fall 1993) to the effect that Japan's newspapers, magazines and TV have abandoned their passive role to attack the corrupt "system," is certainly valid insofar as it goes, but it fails to note the underlying political situation in which the sustained rule by the Liberal-Democratic Party appeared shifting toward its eventual replacement by a competition between two rival parties similar to that in the United States and Britain.

The Liberal-Democratic predominance in Japanese politics is usually referred to as the "1955 system," which was adopted as preferable to a stalemate open to the threat of leftist/Communist infiltration.

Many Japanese, including myself, feel that Japan can now afford to return to the system of two-party competition.

Relative to the term "system" quoted by Reid from van Wolferen, the 1955 system is only a subsystem; that's the reason why Japanese media felt free to criticize it. T.R. Reid is perfectly right in saying, in regard to "bad guys," "there was a clear tendency to pile on once a politician was caught in the sights."

An adequate perspective is needed in reporting on a Japanese regime that is somewhat like a medieval Christian regime or a Sunni Islam regime where a considerable degree of authoritarianism serves to protect values consistent with human dignity. I have limited myself to Sunni Islam just on account of the very unfortunate Salman Rushdie affair in which an unidentified assassin or assassins killed a Rushdie translator in Japan. That was not so long ago.

Joe Kazuo Kunoda
Nieman Fellow, 1956-57

NIEMAN NOTES

COMPILED BY LOIS FIORE

Will Nat Nakasa Ever Go Home?

BY LEWIS C. CLAPP

Nestled among the rolling hills of Westchester County between New York City and Connecticut, Ferncliff Cemetery is known as the final resting place of many famous people, including actress Judy Garland, composers Bela Bartok and Jerome Kern, writer James Baldwin and black activist Malcolm X. There, too, but in an unmarked grave, lies Nathaniel Nakasa, a 1965 Nieman Fellow from South Africa.

For nearly three decades Nakasa's body lay forgotten until early this year when Dana Snyman, a young South African journalist, wrote a feature story about finding the grave for the Afrikaans daily *Beeld*. Tim du Plessis, Nieman Fellow, 1993, translated the article into English and sent it to Bill Kovach, the Nieman curator. After an investigation, Kovach ordered a marker placed on the grave.

As a poor child in Durbin, Nat worked to help his family. Even though he would be up at 4 in the morning to sell newspapers, he managed to get enough schooling to obtain a junior certificate. In spite of his meager education, he became a reporter and editor of a new literary quarterly called *The Classic*. Painfully aware of his limitations, Nakasa established an advisory committee. Nadine Gordimer, a 1991 Nobel Laureate in literature, was his literary conscience. He saw Harvard as the place where he could acquire knowledge and develop skills he lacked. According to

Gordimer, "He felt strongly that he needed a wider intellectual context."

Nakasa pursued his application to the Nieman Foundation by obtaining letters of recommendation from two personalities who were well known to the Harvard community, Helen Suzman, the white member of the South African Parliament (who actively opposed the doctrine of apartheid), and from his literary mentor, author Nadine Gordimer. Suzman was particularly impressed by Nakasa's spirit of equality. "It is rare indeed," she wrote, "to find an African who has managed, despite all the difficulties, to throw off any racial resentments as has done Mr. Nakasa."

Gordimer echoed the thought in her letter as she described Nakasa's role in helping to start the magazine. A group of African writers including Nakasa had wanted to start a literary magazine, but they had trouble finding money for the project. Eventually a small grant was obtained from the Farfield Foundation in New York, but by that time the original writers had dispersed and only Nakasa was left to continue the effort. He threw himself into the project blindly ignoring obstacles, such as how they would obtain a white printer for a black-run magazine. Not knowing how best to edit or administer a literary magazine, Nakasa formed a multi-racial Board of Trustees and editorial advisors to oversee the publication. He was determined that the endeavor would be non-political, purely literary and open to all

writers and artists from South African society irrespective of their color or origin.

John Thompson, Executive Director of the Farfield Foundation in New York, who had given financial support to start *The Classic*, agreed to pay Nakasa's Harvard expenses. Nakasa's only remaining hurdle was to obtain a travel visa from the South African government. On the day before his classes were to start at Harvard, Nakasa was finally refused a passport to travel to America.

Nakasa, who had believed a statement by the Minister of Justice that no action would be taken against people who opposed apartheid, was bewildered. He said, "I have never been a member of a political party nor have I been actively connected with politics." The only path open to Nakasa if he wished to go to Harvard was to obtain an exit permit, which would seal forever any hope of returning to his native country. After receiving travel documents from Tanganyika, he left for the United States.

Nakasa was perplexed by what he saw of New York City, "a great modern slum" where "countless blocks of flats are without paint on the outside and corridors are in a state of perpetual semi-darkness." He felt better about Cambridge and Boston where he enjoyed the charming neighborhoods with old wooden homes, but he was not at ease in the academic surroundings of Harvard which seemed atypical of the American way of life. "I could probably

spend a year without knowing the full meaning of being black in the United States," he lamented.

Nakasa attempted to deal with his inner feelings at first by assuming an air of indifference and detachment about his situation and events in South Africa. His associates at the Nieman Foundation wondered how anyone growing up under the oppression of apartheid could maintain such a casual objectivity. On one occasion, however, Nakasa's indifferent facade disintegrated. At a seminar where Tom Pettigrew, a young social psychologist, was talking about race relations, Nakasa, who had been drinking a good deal of beer, began with a small challenge, but soon lost total control. As Ray Jenkins, a classmate, described the two hours, Nat shouted incoherent statements about drinking blood, about who is to judge civilization and about how the white man can never really understand what goes on inside a black man. The next day Nakasa made a round of apologies. There are no reports of further eruptions for the rest of the year; but he did drop out of sight for periods of time. When he surfaced he would attend seminars or go to lectures, remaining quiet for the most part. His conversations with friends were frequently inscrutable and he accepted occasional offers to travel and speak about conditions in South Africa.

The New York Times published a piece he wrote about his impressions of Harlem, comparing it to the life and sights of the South Africa. He was fascinated that such opposites as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X could emerge as leaders. The Times asked him to write his impressions of the South. When he returned he seemed disillusioned by what he perceived to be the real tragedy of the black American. He told his friend Kathleen Conwell, "When I was there, there were moments when I wanted to bow to a tenant farmer in Alabama because I understood the miracle of his survival. They took away his identity and yet he has survived. In South Africa we have a culture that has lasted for generations; we have a language; we are a people; we are grounded in something solid. But

they took everything away from you, everything, and yet that tenant farmer still gets up in the morning, the black man in Harlem still rides the subway."

When the Nieman year ended, Nakasa moved to New York, writing occasional free-lance assignments for The New York Times and Esquire magazine. He took part in a television program about South Africa and he began work on a biography of his friend Miriam Mkeba, the South African folk singer. But his real goal was to get back to Africa, possibly Tanganyika, where he could work on a magazine that might be smuggled into South Africa. He dreamed that he might even be allowed to return to his native homeland.

The Fairfield Foundation's Thompson, who had supported him so often in the past, continued to help. Hearing that Nat had become despondent, he went to Harlem one day in July, found Nat and took him back to his home overlooking Central Park. Thompson thought that if Nakasa would stay with him and his family for a few days he would get over his loneliness and sad feelings. They had dinner and talked into the night. According to Thompson, Nakasa's spirits seemed to be buoyed up and he talked about his plans. But Nat also expressed concern about finances and his mother in a South African mental hospital. He also talked about his own sadness and wondered aloud if he too was going mad. When Thompson reassured his friend that in time everything was going to be OK, Nakasa seemed to perk up. They said good night and went to bed. In the morning, Thompson found the window open. Nakasa's body was lying on the ground several stories below. He was just 28 years old.

About eighty mourners, many exiled South Africans, attended the funeral and heard Miriam Mkeba sing a Zulu chant. There was some thought that the body might be sent to Africa. But it soon became evident that even in death Nathaniel Nakasa could not return to his native country. The next day his body was taken to Ferncliff Cemetery and buried a few feet from Malcolm X's grave, in what some call the "black" section.

In South Africa some of Nakasa's friends pulled together a collection of Nakasa's writings and along with a eulogy by Nadine Gordimer published "The World of Nat Nakasa." After that Nakasa was largely forgotten until Dana Snyman found his unmarked grave.

Thompson, who had helped make the funeral arrangements, said "We just assumed" the funeral home would take care of the grave marker.

The Nieman Foundation has now done that. The bronze marker installed on his grave reads:

Nathaniel Nakasa
May 12, 1937 - July 14, 1964
Journalist, Nieman Fellow,
South African

1951

Elaine (Cass) Sargent, wife of former Nieman curator Dwight Sargent, died in her home in Pelham Manor, NY September 8. Mrs. Sargent was a nurse and an accomplished singer who was chair of the musical committee at Wellesley Hills Congregational Church. Sargent, now retired, was national editorial writer for the Hearst newspapers and curator of the Nieman Foundation from 1964 to 1972.

1953

Kenneth E. Wilson died of cancer on September 20. He was 71 years old.

Wilson was born in San Francisco and grew up in Santa Rosa. He began his journalism career writing sports articles for The Press Democrat in Santa Rosa while he was still in high school. He went to the University of California, Berkeley, and joined The Press Democrat as a copy editor after his graduation in 1948. He was appointed managing editor of the morning edition in 1950.

After Wilson's Nieman year, he began working at The San Francisco Chronicle as assistant news editor and was later promoted to news editor. Wilson eventually took charge of The Chronicle's transition to computers. When he retired in 1988 his title was assistant to the publisher for systems.

"Ken was born to work on papers," his Chronicle obituary said. "He once told Rodney Jones, who knew him for years, that as a kid he'd gotten dummy pads somewhere and would lay out pages of imaginary newspapers."

After Wilson was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year, Chronicle humor columnist Arthur Hoppe said that Wilson was a "solid man with an innate dignity, a fine mind, a refreshing modesty, a strong sense of justice and self-deprecating sense of humor...I'm proud that he's my best friend."

Ken Wilson leaves his wife of 44 years, Verna Lee, sons Matt, also a journalist at The Chronicle, and Dan, two sisters and two granddaughters.

Memorial contributions may be made to the John G. Trezevant Fund at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Journalism, 121 North Gate Hall, University of California, Berkeley, 94720.

1955

Robert Drew has been named by the International Documentary Association to receive its 1993 Career Achievement Award in Los Angeles on November 5 in honor of a lifetime of award-winning, pioneering film achievements.

In 1960 Drew's film "Primary," an account of the Kennedy/Humphrey race in Wisconsin, was the first film shot entirely in sync sound with hand-held cameras moving freely, using portable equipment that Drew and his colleagues engineered. A statement announcing the award says that with this film, "American 'cinema verité' was born, creating a whole new world of film journalism, in which the camera became very nearly a human observer, watching as real life stories were allowed to unfold naturally." According to Drew, film and television journalism was

to be no less than "a theater without actors, plays without playwrights, and reporting without summary or opinion."

1957

Harold Liston, 72, died on May 29 in his hometown of Normal, IL, after a five-month illness following heart surgery and a stroke. He retired at the end of 1982 after 15 years as editor of The Pantagraph in Bloomington, IL. At the time of his Nieman year he was city editor of that paper, and over the years became assistant to the editor and then editor.

Liston leaves his wife, Phyllis, three sons, Geoffrey, Jonathan and Christopher, and a granddaughter.

1966

Robert Maynard died on August 17. His daughter, **Dori Maynard**, a '93 Nieman Fellow, wrote for the magazine Outlook the following column about her father:

The day I graduated from college, my father reminded me that far from over, my education was only beginning. That was my Dad. He was a father who felt one of his first duties as a parent was to protect his children from complacency. No matter how great our conquest, he was quick to note, more was yet to be done.

Growing up, I did not always find that one of my father's more endearing traits. I would come home aglow over some accomplishment, only to have Dad remind me of the goals yet to be

achieved. It seemed as if he just liked hursting our bubble. Behind our back, he bragged about his three children so much a co-worker recently said she was sick of us before she even met us.

But Daddy shielded us from too much parental pride until he deemed us old enough to handle it. To us children, it felt as if nothing came easy in our household. A walk home was never just a way to get to the house. It could be a seminar on urban affairs or a lecture on architecture, but it was always more than just a walk home. Pop took us to see presidents, and he talked with us about politics. Then he expected us to be able to join him in a discussion of why third-party candidacies have yet to work in this nation.

Other people's parents took them to the circus for their birthday. My father took me to watch Walter Cronkite taping the CBS Evening News. Then we spent some time talking about what was behind the urban unrest reported on the Cronkite show. I was 9 years old. With Daddy, there was always another point, always something more to do, discuss or think about.

Years later, I discovered that my father was not a man with a mean streak. He was a doting Dad who wanted his children to look beyond the borders and beneath the surface of life's issues.

By that time, I had joined him in journalism and had graduated from watching the taping of a news show to helping him prepare for his appearances on "This Week With David Brinkley."

I had also learned that those childhood lessons actually came in handy, now that I was covering the complexities of a mayoral campaign or urban affairs. My father was not one for saying "I told you so." Instead, he would nod his head slightly and say, "How about that. Something I taught you turned out to be useful." Then he would laugh his big laugh.

I've had several reasons to remember those lessons in the weeks since his death. The first time it happened was downright eerie. I went out to buy the week's newsmagazines, another habit ingrained in childhood, and almost fled without one of them. There on the cover was a poignant picture of an African-American child, under the headline "A World Without Fathers." It was not a subject I was ready to think about that day, the day of my father's memorial service. Then I heard Dad's voice



Robert Drew

chiding me for allowing sentimental rubbish to override intellectual exploration.

I thought the magazine. Nestled inside was a story celebrating my father's life. "Give Me a Chance to Try," was the headline on that story.

His life was proof of what properly prepared people can do with a chance. He parlayed an appointment to edit The Oakland Tribune into an opportunity to buy the newspaper. "The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do," he would often say. Then he was quick to quote Disraeli and add that "the secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his opportunity when it comes."

His life's work was to make sure others also had the benefits of preparation and opportunity. He truly believed no one could prosper unless we are all prosperous. Even when he became bedridden, he always had the energy to help friends and young journalists with letters of recommendation or words of advice.

Many people have written to remind me that Dad's work is his living legacy. I agree. However, looking at the solemn boy with the big eyes on the cover of a national magazine, I hear my father's voice again. He is asking me to assess that child's and other children's chances for either preparation or opportunity. Then he gently reminds me that while he accomplished a fair amount, there is still much more yet to be done.

1970

Louis Banks, a former managing editor of Fortune magazine and former editorial director of Time Inc., died of congestive heart failure in Naples, FL, on Sunday, November 7.

Banks began at Time in 1945 as a correspondent in the Los Angeles bureau. He was chief editor of Fortune from 1965-70 and was editorial director from 1970-73, the second highest editorial position at Time Inc.

The account of his death in The New York Times said: "He helped launch a number of new ventures, most notably Money magazine. He retired as a member of the corporate board in 1987 when he reached the age of 70."

He was born in Pittsburgh and raised in Southern California. He graduated in economics from UCLA and served as a

Navy pilot in the Pacific during World War II.

After his Nieman year, he returned to Time Inc. as editorial director. In 1973 he became a visiting professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Business Administration.

Banks is survived by his wife, Mary Campbell Banks, four sons, a daughter, and eight grandchildren.

Free-lance writer **Barlow Herget** ran for Mayor of Raleigh, NC this fall and although he ran a strong campaign, the race "didn't come out on my side." Herget has been a City Council member since 1989. As a journalist in the 70's he worked for The Arkansas Democrat, The Detroit Free Press, and wrote editorials for The News & Observer in Raleigh.

1975

Gene Pell, president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for eight years, has resigned. The new president, William Marsh, previously served as executive vice-president of the stations.

1977

Photojournalist **Robert Azzi**, who spent several years in war-torn Beirut, organized a project whereby eight teenagers from Bosnia-Herzegovina will spend the academic year studying in Exeter, NH, living with host families. Azzi, in an account in The Boston Globe of the mid-November arrival of the students, said "I wanted to make a contribution rather than take the pictures. I wanted to participate." Azzi received help from Timberland Co., which provided boots and clothing for the students; Virgin Airlines, which provided air transportation from London; and the Business Corporation, which provided air travel from Logan Airport in Boston to New Hampshire.

1981

Daniel Samper, in a postcard from Spain, where he has lived for eight years, tells us: "I'm now the international editor of 'Cambio 16' and, in spite of it, it is still the most prestigious Spanish newsmagazine." Daniel's wife, Pilar, is the correspondent in Spain for a TV news program in Colombia. Daniel's youngest daughter has just married and lives and studies in Boston and his oldest "has

recently made me the youngest and most handsome grandfather in South America."

1984

Nancy Webb writes to say that she and her husband, Dick Shafer, have moved to Mill Valley, CA, "a Golden Gate Bridge away from San Francisco," where Dick works. They have two children, Ariel, in kindergarten, and Cameron, who is almost 4 years old. As a local alumnae Nancy is invited to the annual Nieman Orientation Week cocktail party, held each September in the Fellows' garden at Lippmann House. This year, Nancy's invitation was forwarded to her at her new address. Too far away now to attend, she continues in her letter to say "The white picket fence [around Lippmann House] and the utopia it contains, plus familiar aspects of annual receptions—J.K.G.'s [John Kenneth Galbraith] towering presence, Bobbie Norfleet's excitement about something new and good, Tony Oettinger's thoughtful voice, a fresh batch of Niemaners jumping for joy, heels sinking into the soft, moist green—I've brought with me all the way to the West Coast."

1986

Barry Shlachter returned to reporting in August, covering Texas and the Southwest for The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, after a year editing specialist writers. Last year he spent a month in Nigeria conducting reporting seminars on behalf of the Center for Foreign Journalists and two weeks on a similar chore in Uganda on a Fulbright/Hays grant. Barry's wife, Amrita, completed a year-long study for UNICEF on India's urban children and traveled through Africa to do a series on how Africans themselves perceive the AIDS crisis.

1987

Marites Vitug's first book, "Power From The Forest: The Politics of Logging" was published this summer. It describes the evolution of the country's logging industry and the relationships of the loggers to the politicians and, according to reviewer Philip Bowring in The International Herald Tribune, "says volumes about money and power in the Philippines and, by implication, why its economy has stagnated while those of its neighbors in East Asia have boomed." He goes on to

say that Marites was threatened and faced libel suits during her years investigating the loggers.

Vitug sits as a member of the board of editors of the Center for Investigative Journalism, and also writes for Newsweek from Manila.

1988

For a few days this fall, there seemed to be hope for a measure of peace in Ireland. We asked **Emily O'Reilly**, political correspondent with the Irish Press in Dublin, to put the reports of peace—followed quickly by yet more violence—into perspective:

The world's media have been revisiting Northern Ireland during the worst period of violence in over a decade. In one week in October alone, 23 people were killed, nine by an IRA bomb, 13 by Loyalist hit squads and one, an IRA terrorist, by his own bomb.

The killings occurred in the midst of frenzied political activity sparked off by a joint peace initiative by the two nationalist leaders—John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) and Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein—the political wing of the IRA.

The two leaders claim to have mapped out a process which could lead to a cessation of all violence, but to date the British and Irish governments have been reluctant to take on board anything with Sinn Fein/IRA origins.

Both Hume and Adams claim that there has been a major sea change in the thinking of Irish republicans—those people who want a United Ireland. They claim that Republicans now realize that they cannot coerce the one million Unionists in the North into accepting a United Ireland deal.

The problem for British Prime Minister John Major is that his slim Commons majority is being propped up with the support of Unionist MP's and he is unwilling to do anything that would jeopardize that.

Personally, Emily reports that Daniel James O'Reilly Ryan was born on June 15, joining big sister Jessica who is now three and a half. Emily's husband, Stephen Ryan, went to Dallas in September to collect eight design awards at the Society of Newspaper Design conference. Along with her work with the Irish Press, Emily last year published her second non-fiction book, this time on the pro-life movement in Ireland.

Mitsuko Shimomura stopped in Cambridge this fall during a two month visit to the United States. She spent 10 days traveling to various cities on behalf of the Japan Society, lecturing on the dramatic political and social changes going on in Japan. Now Mitzi is doing research for a series she is writing on corporate responsibility, interviewing the heads of corporations who have a reputation for being "good corporate citizens"—companies trying to develop a philosophical and moral standard, rather than just trying to make as much money as possible regardless of the consequences. Shimomura is senior staff writer for Asahi Shimbun.

1990

John Harwood and his wife, Frankie, announce the birth of Leigh Blackburn Harwood, born August 21. John and Frankie have another daughter, Mary Jeanne, who was born in Cambridge during John's Nieman year.

Ann Marie Lipinski and Steve Kagan also announce the birth of a daughter, Caroline Ann, November 1. Born in Chicago, Caroline is their first child.

Paolo Valentino, based in Moscow for the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, had an eyewitness account of the events in the Russian White House during the attempted takeover in October. In a phone call to curator Bill Kovach, Valentino described his experience:

A colleague from *La Repubblica* and I had worked our way up to within 10 meters of the White House during the shooting. We were hiding with some other civilians behind a small wall. For a while the shooting stopped except on the upper floors where the paratroopers were still clearing the building. A woman came out and asked if there were any correspondents. We went with her into the completely dark and burned corridors.

We got our interviews with Rutskoi. We were the last journalists to talk with him before he was arrested. He asked that we relay the message that they were asking for guarantees from Western ambassadors for their safety and they would surrender. When we left I took the message to the Italian ambassador who brokered the surrender deal.

I must say it was something close to madness. But what can you do? It is where the story was. I can't tell you what I thought, Bill, but I can tell you I was scared.

Vladimir Voina is back in Boston, this time as editor-in-chief of *The Boston Courier*, a new Russian language weekly published for the 35,000 members of greater Boston's Russian community. Vladimir says,

At this stage of our existence life is hard: we need ads and financial support, good writers and young reporters who can cover city life. Sometimes I fill a good half of our eight-page newspaper with my own stuff, signed or unsigned, or signed by an invented name. This is not good, but I am the only professional among a tiny group of part-timers, all great enthusiasts, who work for our newspaper free of charge. After two journeys in August to Moscow and Kiev, and one to Tallinn, Estonia, I am full of impressions: in many respects it is another country, and I cover it with enthusiasm, even when it seems morbid. I am still writing my weekly column for *Creators Syndicate* in Los Angeles. My stories are translated and published in Japan and Korea but they need additional subscribers in this country to keep their author afloat.

Vladimir is now married to Jane Knox Voina, a Russian professor at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME, and a research fellow at the Russian Research Center at Harvard University.

1992

Deborah Amos, London-based correspondent for National Public Radio for 10 years, has joined ABC News as a correspondent for its newsmagazine-in-development, "Turning Point." Amos and her husband, NBC journalist Rick Davis, will be based in New York.

Isaac Bantu, still in the Boston area, writes to say that The Press Union of Liberia (PUL) was "at daggers drawn" with the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). According to the Executive Committee of PUL, it has ordered its members to disobey directives by the Interim President, Dr. Amos C. Sawyer, who is said to have begun a clamp-down on the press for publication of war-related stories. Isaac continues: "At a press conference on behalf of the president in

Monrovia, the Minister of Information said that the press was free to report any other stories including those on corruption, political issues or otherwise." However, Bantu says that the PUL, after deliberation, issued a statement, saying that it viewed with "serious concern and trepidation" the government's action, which the PUL sees as aimed at curtailing press freedom as provided for by the Liberian Constitution..."

Charles Onyango-Obbo updates us from Kampala, Uganda, about his newspaper, *The Monitor*:

The government ban on its departments and state-owned businesses advertising with private newspapers was lifted—for all newspapers except *The Monitor*. It was the private pro-government newspapers with low circulations that were hurting. With our numbers, we don't really need government adverts to survive.

Only politicians wouldn't know it: such repressive actions only help the credibility of newspapers. Hence circulation has gone up considerably since the ban. Private business people, seeing this, rushed in to book space.

This puts us beyond the point where the government can pressure us—the very opposite of what they intended. I have fears that they will try something worse. The problem as I see it is not that the government does not want an independent press as such; what they do not want is one which is economically successful enough to function independently of all political patronage.

This is what explains why they will let a hostile newspaper belonging to an opposition group (which invariably has poor circulation and credibility) benefit from government advertising, and not allow an independent, relatively viable paper owned by journalists to do so.

There is a press bill which is coming before Parliament. It is worse than anything that ever came from behind the Iron Curtain. It requires that all journalists be registered by the government. The government committee appointed to do this can refuse to license a journalist, without explaining the reason for the refusal. Even after a journalist is registered, the committee can cancel his license at will. There is no appeal procedure. This committee will also determine whether one is qualified to be a journalist. What it takes to be qualified is not spelled out.

We will need a lot of international support, if not to fight the bill, then at least some of its Draconian provisions.

1993

Nguyen Quang Dy is back in Hanoi, and after shopping around for a new job has decided to join *World Affairs Review* as an editor and to become director of a new Media Development Center.

Olive Talley was among several fellows who took part in a computer-assisted reporting conference sponsored by Investigative Reporters & Editors and *The News & Observer* in Raleigh in late October. She sent us this report:

The conference inspired me about the future of journalism, rekindling optimism that seemed to vanish as soon as I returned to the newsroom at the end of my Nieman year.

Hearing re-entry stories from other fellows consoled me.

But equally rewarding was the inspiration of witnessing the huge amount of learning that took place. Nearly 600 journalists from 42 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, Canada and Mexico, came together to share new ways of using computer technology to improve reporting.

We heard lectures on software, hardware, statistics and math. We learned the difference between a database and a spreadsheet; where to find databases and how to negotiate for them; and how to use computers to improve coverage of beats and politics. We sailed the Internet and navigated government bulletin boards.

Speakers included several Niemans. **Phil Meyer**, whose first computer encounter was with Harvard's IBM mainframe during his 1967 Nieman year, urged reporters to view Hypertext as a new way of thinking about and organizing their stories. (By the way, **Francis Pisani** uses graphics and a script about the Class of '93 as demonstration material for his Hypertext program.)

Melanie Sill, a current fellow, spoke on using Hypertext for organizing huge amounts of interview notes and other material on long-term projects.

I presented "60 Ideas in 60 Minutes," a whirlwind slide show of quick hits, features, and long-term investigative pieces using computer-assisted reporting and a brief explanation of how the stories were done.

Seth Effron ('92), **Tom Regan** ('92), **Tom Witosky** ('92), and **Katherine Fulton** ('93) rounded out the Nieman contingency. Katherine is enjoying teaching about the new technology at Duke University in a course entitled "2001: A Media Odyssey."

In addition to the scope of topics presented, what made the Raleigh conference unique was the fact that reporters had access to over 100 IBM computers for hands-on training. With the help of dozens of volunteer instructors from around the country, reporters practiced using spreadsheets and crunching data.

While the last five Pulitzer Prizes in investigative reporting utilized some aspect of computer-assisted reporting, folks at this conference learned that its uses are not limited to serious take-outs.

The Miami Herald, for example, analyzed vehicle registration records to profile the 250 Broward County residents who drive Rolls Royces.

The Raleigh IRE meeting was the most ambitious, most comprehensive conference on computer-assisted reporting ever offered. It will not be the last.

With the help of a \$221,000 grant from the Freedom Forum, IRE plans to offer a similar conference in San Jose next fall and a series of newsroom seminars and training sessions between now and then.

As keynote speaker Frank Daniels III pointed out, computer-assisted reporting is not about computers. It's about using computers as tools for better reporting and ultimately, for developing a self-sufficient newsroom.

Newspapers' survival, he said, will depend on their ability to sell news—not ads. And it's the new technology that will enable us to provide more meaningful and relevant news that will be the salvation of newspapers.

"We must use these new tools and skills as a catalyst to reforge the credibility of our newsrooms with our readers, our community and our publishers," said Daniels, the executive editor of *The News & Observer* in Raleigh.

The top reporters who already use this stuff on a regular basis get teased a lot about being nerds.

At this point, I'd rather be a nerd than a dinosaur. ■

1993 Index

Articles

African Media Seminar...Fa30
 Alsop, Joseph...Defense of...Sp84
 Amundson, Dan...Children...Sp7
 Apple, R.W.Jr...Morris Lecture...Su66
 Araújo, Rui...East Timor...Fa20
 Banks, Adelle...Religion...Su36
 Balk, Alfred...Economics...Su72
 Bernhard, Nancy...Religion...Su16
 Biggs, Selden...Election...Wi57
 Black Columnists Seminar...Sp38
 Bosnia Reporting...Fa16, Wi81
 Branch Davidians...Su12
 Buresh, Bernice...Health...Wi23
 Byrd, Joann...Columnists...Wi78
 Carroll, James...Religion...Su27
 Casey, Shaun...Religion...Su32
 Children...Sp4
 CIA...Sp46
 Clapp, Lewis...Nakasa...Wi82
 Clark, Mike...Gays...Fa85
 Cohn, Victor...Health...Wi3
 Cotter, William R...Hate speech...Fa23
 Cox, Harvey...Religion...Su6
 Crewdson, John...Health...Wi11
 Daniloff, Nicholas...Soviet Press...Wi44
 Deaths:
 ...Banks, Louis...Wi85
 ...Liston, Harold...Wi84
 ...Maynard, Robert...Fa89/Wi84
 ...Miller, Edward M...Sp92
 ...Paxton, Edwin...Su86
 ...Torrey, Volta...Sp92
 ...Wilson, Kenneth E...Wi83
 Detzel, Thomas...Health...Wi35
 Deutsch, Robert...Election...Wi57
 DiCanio...Health...Wi26
 Driscoll, John S...Religion...Su21
 East Timor...Fa20
 Eck, Diana...Religion...Su9
 Fiquette, Larry...Gays...Fa84
 Freed, Kenneth...Off-Record...Sp57
 Freehoff, William...Religion...Su5
 Gabbard, Glenn...Health...Wi17
 Gay News...Fa80
 Gelfand, Louis I...Gays...Fa82
 Glaser, Lynne Enders...Labels...Su69/
 Fa88
 Goldberg, Jeffrey...Religion...Su30/Fa88
 Hanley, Barbara...Religion...Su42
 Harwood, Richard...Liberalism...Sp82
 Health...Wi3
 Hehir, J. Bryan...Religion...Su39
 Hersh, Elizabeth K...Health...Wi17
 Hoover, Stewart...Religion...Su42
 IRE seminar...Sp50/Wi87
 Johnston, Lloyd D...Health...Wi29
 Karabell, Zachary...CIA...Sp46
 Kemp, Sid...Health...Wi40
 Kovach, Bill...Children...Sp3

Kovach, Bill...Hungarian press...Su2
 Kovach, Bill...Salisbury...Fa2
 Kovach, Bill...Lyons Award...Wi3
 Kreck, Carol...Children...Sp10
 Kurtz, Howard...Book Excerpts...Su66
 Lazar, Susan G...Health...Wi17
 Lewis, Charles...Health...Wi27
 Liley, Betsy...Health...Wi36
 Loftus, Joseph...PR...Su84
 Louv, Richard...Children...Sp25
 Lubrano, Gina...Gays...Fa86
 Ludtke, Melissa...Children...Sp4
 Lyons Award...Su84/Wi3
 Manning, Robert...Memoirs...Sp59
 McNulty, Henry...Gays...Fa80
 Meyers, Bob...Health...Wi8
 Meyers, Mike...Health...Wi34
 Mezzacappa, Dale...Children...Sp12
 Morgan, Gillis...Editor looks back...Sp85
 Morris, Joel Alex Jr. Lecture...Su66
 Niebuhr, Gustav...Religion...Su28
 Nieman Fellows Selected...Su84
 Objectivity...Wi48
 Poggioli, Sylvia...Bosnia...Fa16/Wi81
 Priest, Dana...Health...Wi32
 Racial Tensions in Press...Su56
 Radelfinger, Martin...Religion...Su42
 Rawls, Wendell...Religion...Su12/Wi80
 Regan, Tom...Internet...Fa26
 Regan, Tom...Internet health...Wi43
 Regan, Tom...Children...Sp28
 Reid, T.R...Japan's Press...Fa14/Wi81
 Religion...Su3
 Rosen, Jay...Objectivity...Wi48
 Salisbury, Harrison...Memorial...Fa3
 Shaw, Russell...Religion...Su24
 Simon, Jim...Health...Wi35
 Steinfels, Peter...Religion...Su3
 Stepp, Laura Sessions...Children...Sp15
 Stolberg, Sheryl...Health...Wi6
 Stoll, Ira...Children...Sp30
 Third World Press...Sp35
 Wasserman, William Jr...3d world
 press...Sp35
 Wexler, Richard...Children...Sp18
 Winn, Billy...Public Interest Journal-
 ism...Wi54

Legend

Fa - Fall
 Sp - Spring
 Su - Summer
 Wi - Winter

Book Reviews

A Justice for All...Kim Isaac Eisler...Wi77
 A Sense of Place...David Lamb...Fa72
 American Ground Zero...Carole
 Gallagher...Su79
 At The Hinge of History...Joseph C.
 Harsch...Su75
 Autobiography...Richard Avedon...Wi76
 Even White Boys Get the Blues...Doug
 Marlette...Sp74
 Extreme Conditions...John
 Strohmeyer...Fa70
 Five Myths of Television Power...Douglas
 Davis...Su76
 Fly Fishing Through Mid-life
 Crisis...Howell Raines...Wi72
 Hodding Carter...Ann Waldron...Fa68
 Leaving Birmingham...Paul
 Hemphill...Wi70
 Lenin's Tomb...David Remnick...Fa65
 Listening to Prozac...Peter D.
 Kramer...Wi69
 Lord Beaverbrook...Anne Chisholm &
 Michael Davie...Sp72
 Mad As Hell...Jack W. Germond & Jules
 Witcover...Fa63
 Media Circus...Howard Kurtz...Sp68
 Muddy Boots and Red Socks...Malcolm W.
 Browne...Wi74
 Murdoch...William Shawcross...Sp71
 Newspapers' Upheaval...Stephan Russ-
 Mohl...Sp73
 Nothin' but Good Times Ahead...Molly
 Ivins...Wi75
 Paper Soldiers...Clarence Wyatt...Fa71
 Preparing for the 21st Century...Paul
 Kennedy...Su78
 President Kennedy...Richard
 Reeves...Wi67
 Quality Time...20th Century Fund...Wi68
 Read All About It...James D.
 Squires...Su77
 Roar of the Crowd...Michael J.
 O'Neill...Wi66
 States of Mind...Jonathan Yardley...Su81
 Strange Bedfellows...Tom
 Rosenstiel...Fa63
 Strom Thurmond...Nadine
 Cohodas...Fa69
 Taming the Storm...Jack Bass...Sp76
 Terror in the Night...Jack Nelson...Sp75
 The Fifties...David Halberstam...Fa66
 The Hard Way...Alexander B.
 Brook...Fa74
 The Shadow of Death...Philip E.
 Ginsburg...Sp78
 Thinking Out Loud...Anna
 Quindlen...Su80
 Today Is Not Like Yesterday...Ted & Nyna
 Brael Polumbaum...Sp80
 Volunteer Slavery...Jill Nelson...Fa73



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