

NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Vol. I No. 4 Winter 1996

FIVE DOLLARS

Reviving Environmental Coverage

Did Media
Kiss Off
the Election?

—Mark Jurkowitz

Philadelphia
Inquirer
Learns a
Lesson

—Gene Foreman



Violence Represented in Music and Art

*"...to promote and elevate the standards
of journalism"*

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

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The photograph on the cover, by Randy Pench of The Sacramento Bee, shows U.S. Forest Service hydrologist John Thorton walking down a popular hiking trail walled by devastated trees in Boise National Forest. Superhot fires destroy not only forests but also whole ecosystems.

Toothless Watchdogs?

The "creative destruction" of social and political systems brought about by the technological revolution has spawned two important trends—government deregulation and privatization—that present a serious challenge for American journalism.

A new world of private control of public interests is emerging as government services are privatized. But a press that sharpened its skills and access primarily in the public sector is ill equipped for a watchdog role in a world of private administration of public business.

Consider these few examples:

- The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press reports a private publisher for electronic housing of state laws in Mississippi has exclusive rights to distribute and sell the electronic version of the state's public laws and effectively denies public access to the electronic data base.

- The National Technical Information Service, a quasi-government organization, grants exclusive rights to private companies to sell once-public government data of the National Institutes of Health, the Social Security Administration and the Federal Communications Commission.

- Ameritech, the most lavish entertainer of delegates and journalists at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, is arranging for rights as the sole electronic source of even more government information.

- Reporters in Newton County Texas were barred from the jails by the private managers of the facilities who had instituted a policy of "no media contact with our prisoners."

Perhaps the greatest challenge to watchdog journalism is developing under welfare reform. A system is aborning in which not only government data and statistics can disappear into private data bases but also a veil of privacy can be drawn around the decision-making process for allocation of government money. The states not only buy services from private providers but also may now give them power to determine eligibility and benefits for welfare recipients. The states can keep federal dollars saved by eliminating people from welfare rolls, thus creating a strong incentive to find ways to reduce caseloads. There are few mandates in the law that require follow-up to determine how a recipient disappeared from the rolls. Any countervailing pressure will rely on press monitoring and disclosure. Since each state will be drafting its own regulations, the right of the press and the public to access these decisions depends on how each state law is written. The fact that state officials lobbied vigorously but unsuccessfully for non-disclosure clauses in federal reform suggests where they intend to take the issue in their own legislation.

If the privatization of jails and prisons serve as examples the press and public will be slowly blinded as state systems of

public assistance disappear behind corporate insistence on rights of privacy and libel.

A September 15 story in The New York Times makes it clear that corporate giants see a new profit center in this new welfare system. EDS, a \$12.4 billion information technology company, and Lockheed Martin, a \$30 billion weapons concern, are already bidding to take over Texas's \$563 million welfare program.

The American press reacted to a similar dislocation of economic and political power impacting on society at the turn of the last century by fighting for protection from restraints by libel and contempt by publication laws to pursue a watchdog role over government.

Most of 20th Century press history has seen a steady expansion of these legal rights as articulated by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Charles Evans Hughes in *Near v. Minnesota* in 1931 when he spoke of the public's "primary need of a vigilant and courageous press" to expose government "malfeasance and corruption."

But the industrial revolution, which has its roots in the same period of the 19th Century, has matured in the 20th Century and now poses the most important threat to the watchdog press in the public interest. Institutions of private economic power arguably exercise more control over the lives of the people than government. Their actions remain largely outside the reach or interest of the press.

The increasing corporatization of the press and its greater identification with other great institutions of private power raise even more troublesome questions. Few question the willingness and the ability of the press to fight for the public's right to government information. But how far will the corporate press go to challenge the power of corporate giants with whom it shares vital commercial and profit interests? As the government deregulates, the ability of the press to monitor private institutions even indirectly disappears like a Cheshire cat.

Even a press dedicated to continuing the watchdog role is discovering it lacks the tools. Corporate power, for example, is immune from Freedom of Information laws. It is also fully cloaked in individual privacy, and libel rights rival anything the government itself possessed in past centuries.

How the American press reacts to the challenge presented by the current wave of deregulation and privatization of public functions generally, and the emerging welfare system specifically, will determine whether a watchdog press survives or whether it, like the manual typewriter, becomes just another artifact of the 20th Century. ■

What They're Saying



Henry Louis Gates Jr. A Bilingual World

I have always been a journalist and I have always been an academic. They were born simultaneously. I started working in Time's London Bureau in June of 1973 and I went to Cambridge [University] in October. Except for that gap my universe was spinning in this bilingual way and I had to learn quickly how not to write like a Cantabrigian Ph.D. student at the magazine on New Bond Street in London and how not to write like a would-be Time correspondent at Clare College at the university in Cambridge. And that bilinguality was very very much a part of my maturation as a speaker and certainly as a writer.—*Henry Louis Gates Jr., W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities and Chair of the Afro-American Studies Department at Harvard at a Nieman Fellows seminar, September 18, 1996.*

Ann Landers Human Touch

You're going to get a much better story if . . . you respect the humanity of other people. I think that this is very important. You know this business of being a hard-nosed reporter. It's not all that terrific. Be human and you'll write a better story. . . . You can be factual, but you've got to put some humanity and some warmth in your writing.—*Ann Landers, syndicated columnist, at Nieman Foundation dinner, October 16, 1996.*

Lack of Time—Enemy of Ethics

Following are excerpts from comments by Ken Auletta, who writes for The New Yorker, and Bob Steele, Director of the Ethics Program at the Poynter Institute, in a discussion on National Public Radio, September 15, 1996.



Ken Auletta Speeding Up Cycle

The great enemy of ethics is lack of time to think and journalism is a business that doesn't have a lot of time. What has happened because of technology is that we've speeded up the news cycle. So you don't have one news cycle now; you have multiple news cycles every day. Someone tops a CNN, a web site. The editor of The New York Times or The Washington Post knows that when people pick up that newspaper in the morning they will know the outlines of the story from the previous night. So they've got to give them something new. It creates new news cycles all the time. And that compression of time inevitably allows you less time to reflect and therefore there will be more conflicts and more choices that are gray or ethically questionable.



Bob Steele Time No Excuse

Time is an enemy but it is not an excuse. We realize that time is the enemy of a surgeon in an operating room, and yet time is not an excuse if that surgeon does not perform to the best of her or his ability. And therefore news managers, editors, producers, news directors, must develop the skills in which they can make good ethical decisions, even when there is a great deal of gray area, even when the issues are very complex. They must have the ability to look at the complexity regarding abortion and immigration and race relations. They must have the capacity to understand the matters of physician-assisted suicide and educational reform and flat taxes and HMO's and UFO's in a way in which they can make good ethical decisions, recognizing the gray area will exist, recognizing that intense competitive and deadline pressures are there. Time is not an excuse.

Reviving Environmental Coverage



Steve Norrman



Steve Norrman

Chris Bowman of The Sacramento Bee did a major share of the editing of this series of articles on the environment as well as writing the lead story and co-authoring the one on Russia.

Needed: A Recommitment

*News Managers Should Give Ecology Reporters Time and Space
—Reporters Must Discard Old Approaches*

BY CHRIS BOWMAN

Thirty years ago, two young Chicago Tribune reporters set out on a national journey to document an alarming and largely unreported fallout of urbanized America: Lakes once teeming with aquatic life were becoming cesspools of household sewage and factory slop.

Casey Bukro and Bill Jones pondered their assignment at the first horror stop, the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal. How would they show how bad the water was? Words alone wouldn't suffice. Black-and-white pictures of the surface wouldn't pick up the hideous flotillas of oily scum merging at the entry to Lake Michigan. Jones scooped a handful for a closer look. Black slime and grime coated his flesh. Bukro instinctively grabbed the camera. Snap.

"And that became our test for clean water," Bukro recalled. "We traveled around the country doing that, to show what stuck to your hand."

If only pollution stories were so simple today.

Assaults that can be seen, smelled and tasted in the water and air are mostly history now. Environmental reporting is a much tougher job. The threats are more insidious and worrisome and the solutions more elusive.

What is needed is clear. Newspaper editors and television news directors should commit themselves to the environmental story. The public wants and deserves to know more than the media are providing. News managers should dedicate reporters full time to the beat and invest in their continual education. They should give them the space, time and latitude to sort through competing claims, bust myths and deliver stories that help people understand how the issues affect their health and their pocket-

books. Reporters, too, must reassess their attitudes and work habits, discarding knee-jerk approaches and discovering exciting new ways to cover a field that is constantly changing.

Many in the news business, however, have not met the challenge. They are still working off the good-versus-evil script, demanding scientific certainty when there is none and asking "who's right?," as if only one answer could be deemed correct.

"When I was at Love Canal people were literally asking me whether their children were going to die in 10 years," Burko said. "People and what these issues mean to them have always been the best part about this beat. Sometimes I think editors forget about that."

"Sure there are long-term questions or tough questions. But it's worth doing. No matter how hard it gets it's worth doing."

Because many environmental problems today do not fit the handy news molds, they get ignored, distorted or oversimplified. They are abstract, debatable, long-term, cumulative threats like hormone-disrupting chemicals, invisible air toxins, global climate change, pesticide residue, biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation.

They are stories easier to put aside because they don't "break." As Will Sutton, editor of *The Gary (Ind.) Post-Tribune*, put it recently in *The American Editor* magazine, "There's no one building to go to, no meeting to attend, no homicide of the day."

They are stories that don't come together easily. "It's tougher reporting than if you go cover a game or if you are covering City Hall," said Gregory Favre, Executive Editor of *The Sacramento Bee*, which has three reporters working the beat full time. "This stuff is not right

up there in front, and there are all different kinds of agendas at work and multiple facets of any one story."

They are stories that don't compete well with coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial. "For a year, TV cameras did not show up at our press conferences," said



Chris Bowman is a senior writer for The Sacramento Bee. He has written extensively on natural resources in California and the American West. His investigative stories have won awards at The Bee, The Hartford Courant and The Press-Enterprise in Riverside, Calif. He is a 1995 Environmental Nieman Fellow and a 1978 alumnus of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Chris and his wife, Linda, have two children, Casey and Emma, and assorted livestock, including Zephyr, the cat, and a Labrador named Agnes. Chris spends more than he can afford on trout fishing, coaches boys soccer and picks up after cub scouts for a team that includes his son. Chris can be reached at cbowman@ns.net.



Rescuer seeks to clean oil from shorebird at Tampa Bay, Florida.

Gail Ruderman Feuer, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Los Angeles.

The influential environmental group had a trial of its own going on simultaneously in downtown Los Angeles. A federal court order directed state transportation officials to reduce the amount of pollutants that wash into Santa Monica Bay from freeways. "We kidded during the time that we should tell the press we were finding dirty gloves in storm drains."

Environmental coverage also gets shortchanged by what might be called the Macho School of Journalism, which holds that any experienced reporter worth his or her salt can crank out a good yarn no matter the subject. Why invest in a specialist when any number of general assignment reporters would do?

This attitude helps explain why at least 50 percent of the newspapers and 75 percent of the television stations in the U.S. still do not have full-time environmental reporters.

"I find that's a shame, an absolute shame," Favre told the TJFR Environmental News Reporter, a business newsletter, in a recent interview. Of competitors who don't share his commitment to the beat, Favre is blunt: "If you live in the West and you don't have environmental reporting, you

ought to be kicked in the ass!"

The figures, from a 1993 survey for the independent Foundation for American Communications, appear to still hold. A recent Michigan State University survey found that news organizations' commitment to the beat about the same overall as it was five years ago.

"What came through is a sense of frustration among journalists, saying they would like to do these stories, they feel they think they are important, but they can't convince their editors, and news consultants are telling them it's not a sexy story anymore," said James Detjen, a pioneer of the beat who holds the Knight Chair of Environmental Journalism at the university.

The trend is perplexing given the high public interest in the environment, especially among the very people news organizations want most to attract— young adults. A national Roper-Starch poll for Times Mirror Corp. found last year that more than 6 out of 10 people aged 18 to 34 want more environmental coverage.

Much more than circulation and ratings are at stake. Government spending and policy on environmental protection are largely shaped in response to a public that gets most of its environmental information at the doorstep and in living rooms. Many economists, scientists and government officials indi-

rectly fault the press coverage of toxic waste dumps for the enactment of cleanup laws that have industry and taxpayers together spending billions of dollars annually on sites that pose little if any danger.

The blame is well deserved. In the 1980's (and today) many journalists mistakenly assumed harm simply from the presence of chemicals where they are not supposed to be. They report reputed health and ecological hazards but omit the scientific information people need for weighing the risks and judging the merits of costly cleanups or chemical bans.

Rather than investigate the exposure and risk assessments themselves, reporters typically rely on anecdotes from alleged victims and run with them unverified.

"The anecdote has become the weapon of choice in the campaign to rewrite the nation's environmental laws, and lazy journalists are allowing themselves to be used as unwitting accomplices," environmental reporters Kevin Carmody and Randy Lee Loftis recently wrote in the Society of Environmental Journalists quarterly newsletter.

Opponents of the Endangered Species Act got a lot of ink and air time with their claim that rules protecting the Stephens kangaroo rat led to the destruction of 29 houses in a Southern California wildfire. An interview with any knowledgeable fire official would have snuffed the story. Winds were so fierce in that 1993 fire that no amount of weed clearing in the mouse's habitat would have mattered.

Reporters also typically juxtapose conflicting opinions from industry and environmental experts in the pretense of detachment and balance. Such treatments confuse and polarize the public and provoke misguided reforms.

"It fits into the traditional model of how a news story is done, but it winds up confusing the readers," Detjen said. "Even after scientific consensus on global warming had been reached, reporters still went to one side and the other."

The media also tends to gloss over scientific information and leap over the issue of whether the parts per billion of a chemical in the groundwater really

endanger public health.

Chemical pollution is covered as a political story," said Michele Corash, former General Counsel of the Environmental Protection Agency who now defends industry. "The focus is on the adversarial relationships. I've been interviewed by these guys. What they want to hear is, who is the good guy, who is the bad guy. The issues should be black and white. They are not reported to educate so people can make a choice. And it has shaped the debate and the approach to environmental regulation."

Boston Globe writer Dianne Dumanoski, one of the three authors of a book on chemicals ("Our Stolen Future") that interfere with hormones, said she was fascinated to watch the press coverage on her work from "the other side of the notebook." As the controversy over the book escalated, she said, the coverage got "more cartoonish and surreal. It seems to bear less and less resemblance to what was actually said in the book." She was especially struck by the "mischaracterization of scientific support" for her book and the lack of disclosure about industry ties of her scientific critics. "In my future reporting," she said, "I am going to be much more zealous about asking people about their funding."

Environmental journalism doesn't have to be this way. News managers can make it a blockbuster beat by giving it the same status assigned to medical and science reporting. The beat is extraordinarily complex and requires sophisticated knowledge about science, law, politics, history, ethics, economics and international relations.

"Experienced and talented environmental writers didn't get that way just from doing stories," said Peter Bhatia, Managing Editor of Portland's *Oregonian*, which has seven environmental reporters. "They got that way from studying and reading and doing hours of interviews that yielded nothing in terms of product for the paper. Traditionally we are very tolerant of that in some of the established specialties like medical or science writing."

Environmental reporters should

strive to evaluate the arguments and data presented by various sides, not merely report them. To do that, they need to keep abreast of a wide range of national and international topics that touch their communities.

They need to read original scientific studies rather than rely on the word of scientists, advocates and government officials. They would benefit by computer training, not just for navigating the Internet, but for making use of the environment enforcement, budgeting and pollution monitoring records that are stored on disks and spools of electronic tape. They need to keep the focus on people without forsaking the science.

On covering the salmon industry, important to three Indian tribes in her area, reporter Carol Command of the *East Oregonian* in Pendleton, said, "I need to show them in their pocket-books what this means to them, then they'll read it."

Done correctly, today's environmental stories are more likely to be as complex and multi-dimensional as—not coincidentally—an ecosystem. Everything is connected to something else. Do we really want to pay the price of complete cleanup? How clean is clean? At what level do the chemicals really pose a risk to wildlife or public health? How high is the risk? Compared with what?

Burko and Jones never had to bother with these questions in *The Tribune's* 1967 series, "Save our Lakes," or with later stories on raw sewage fouling rivers and smokestacks spewing the soot of high-sulfur coal.

"I didn't have to conduct any scientific experiments to prove that the air was black and the water was filthy," said Burko, who has been on the environment beat probably as long as anyone else. "Our pictures showed it, and your own senses proved it. When I put my hand in the water now it comes out clean, and that's great. But for that reason, people think we did our job, and it's over. And, of course, some people don't even remember those days and wonder what all the fuss is about. Maybe that's the price of success."

More than two decades would pass,

though, before environmental stories became an easier sell. Burko and growing legions of environmental reporters would ride high on the crest of what seemed to have been an unbroken procession of disasters through the late 70's and 80's:

Love Canal (1978), the upstate New York suburb that forced the government to evacuate and cleanup their contaminated neighborhood; Three-Mile Island (1979), the nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania that suffered a loss-of-coolant failure; Times Beach (1983), the wholesale relocation of a small Missouri community exposed to high levels of dioxin; Bhopal (1984), the Union Carbide pesticide plant in India that accidentally released poisonous gases, killing more than 2,000 people; Alar (1989), the pesticide scare that prompted thousands to pour apple juice down their drains to avoid ingesting the fungicide, and Exxon Valdez (1989), the tanker that became synonymous with the largest oil spill in North American history.

The natural resources side of the environment beat also blossomed in the 1980's, beginning with the Reagan Administration. President Ronald Reagan and the rising New Right in American politics supported Western calls for greater public land development, in direct opposition to recent environmentalist gains in wilderness protection and restrictions on livestock grazing, logging and mining. A tight energy market fueled demands for more oil development, coal mining and dams. Interior Secretary James Watt announced plans to sell 35 million acres of federally owned wilderness to reduce the national debt and opened almost the entire continental shelf to offshore oil and gas leasing to "enhance national security."

Environment became the hot topic of the 1980's, epitomized by *Time* magazine's naming Earth its "Planet of the Year" in 1988. By then virtually all major media had at least one reporter assigned full time to the environment. Several also had established beats to rove the forest, range and deserts of the American West.

The Rocky Mountain bureau became the plum domestic post at large newspapers, a respite for reporters coming off presidential campaigns and war zones overseas. Mid-size papers like *The Bee* and *The San Jose Mercury News* ran frequent Sunday splashes on the battles in national parks, forests and wilderness areas. The *Denver Post* assigned Jim Carrier to ferret out "sense of place" stories under the rubric "Rocky Mountain Ranger." National Public Radio's Howard Berkes took his microphone beyond the myths of the West. And every sagebrush correspondent looked to Ed and Betsy Marston's bi-weekly *High Country News* in tiny Paonia, Colo. as their best environmental watch in the wide-open West.

The environment beat became legitimized in the eyes of the mainstream press. Scripps-Howard Newspapers established the Edward J. Meeman national award for environmental reporting. The National Press Foundation set up the Thomas Stokes Award for natural resources reporting. The *Seattle Times* won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting for its coverage of the Exxon Valdez spill, and *The Washington (N.C.) Daily News* took the Pulitzer for public service for its reporting on a local water contamination scandal. Two years later, *The Bee* won the Pulitzer's Public Service award for a series on the demise of the Sierra Nevada range.

In 1990, a group of 20 environmental journalists launched the Society of Environmental Journalists to improve the quality, accuracy and visibility of the beat. The organization, now 1,200 members strong, brings together reporters from all media in conferences and on the Internet for education, exchange and debate on issues.

For all its achievements and professional growth over the years, environmental reporting still gives a number of news managers the willies. A lot of controversy and uncertainty comes with the territory. Even the most experienced reporters on the beat are often buffeted by challenges to their knowledge, integrity and environmental opinions.

"Rarely is a government reporter

accused of bias in favor of a democratic society. School reporters are never accused for being pro-education, nor are police reporters criticized for being anti-crime. But environmental reporters are regularly scorned for being either pro-environment or anti-environment," Emilia Askari, SEJ president, noted in a recent article for *The American Editor*.

It's a question that keeps coming at them.

The University of Houston School of Communications asked environmental reporters to respond, true or false, to such statements as, "In my job, I act as an advocate for economic development," and "I have strong beliefs about the environment that affect the way I do my job."

Carrying "environmental writer" in the byline can be a conversation-stopper in some hinterlands. "I can't be called an environmental reporter or a natural resources reporter," said Carol Command, whose beat covers logging and Indian tribes for the *East Oregonian*. "I have to call myself a resource reporter. Otherwise I'm looked at as a tree-hugger, even though there are fewer and fewer trees on the east side."

Sometime journalists bring the bias charge on themselves.

"I'm very concerned about how environmental journalists are perceived," said Gary Polakovic, a veteran of the beat at *The Press-Enterprise* in Riverside, Calif. "We're not really diligent about integrity." He recalls with dismay incidents where working journalists at the SEJ conventions showed their approval of environmentalist causes. At the 1994 convention in Provo, Utah, an announcement that the California Desert Protection Act had just passed was greeted with heavy applause.

Most environmental reporters constantly struggle to keep their balance, and the press is getting better at moving beyond point-counterpoint reporting to more enlightened stories.

"The stories have moved beyond the battles to more sophisticated issues," said Jim Robbins, a freelance journalist in Helena, Mt. who covers resource issues for *The New York Times*.

"We do have loggers vs non-violent protestors in the woods. It always makes

good copy," Robbins said. "Now I do the biology on old-growth forests versus the industrial forest. The press is getting better at connecting the dots in an ecosystem." ■

José Luis Pardos Internet Used By Diplomat In Fishing Dispute

It's an old story now, but when Canada waged its "turbot war" against Spanish fishing vessels, I, as Ambassador, took the opportunity to use the Internet to combat in non-diplomatic language the well-planned eco-political campaign that had inflamed Canadian public opinion.

After Canada seized the *Estai* in March 1995 the majority of the Canadian media, following the government's one-sided version of the dispute, stirred public opinion against Spain. In addition to using regular media techniques, Canada had opened a page on the Internet on the issue. We decided to respond by opening a directory in our existing World Wide Web site to give our version of events. We called it "fisheries" in the "Si Spain" program. The directory was constantly updated. Each incident was reported in detail. To provide perspective, the early history of fishing in the North Atlantic, from the 12th Century to the 17th Century, was recounted.

Some of the language I used in the directory was certainly not diplomatic. For example, I called Brian Tobin, then the Canadian Federal Fisheries Minister, "impertinent" and "tactless." I coined words like "Tobinescal" and "Showbin" to ridicule the Canadian publicity stunts.

No government agency ever commented officially regarding our description of the dispute or my characterization of Canadian officials. We do know that thousands of Canadian citizens visited our site. That fact, plus articles in *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Ottawa Citizen*, showed that our Internet diplomacy had been effective.—*José Luis Pardos is now Ambassador to Copenhagen.*

Suburban Sprawl

America's Most Important Environmental Issue

BY KEITH SCHNEIDER

Since Earth Day 1970, two ideas have served as the central organizing principles of American environmentalism. The first is the lesson from Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" that everything in nature is connected. Pesticides sprayed in Illinois bio-accumulated in Mississippi River fish, killing pelicans in Louisiana that ate them. Cutting the rain forest in Central America means that songbirds will not show up in New England. A coal-fired power plant in Nebraska releases mercury that contaminates lakes in Minnesota.

The second idea is that there are good guys and bad guys. Almost every great environmental battle of the last generation has been cast as a moral set piece, with environmental groups slugging it out against the forces of evil. Think Love Canal and the spotted owl.

Both of these messages became part of the civic and political conversation in every corner of the country because they have value and merit, and because they were embraced by the corps of reporters, producers and editors who covered the movement. There is evidence now, though, that these two central ideas are not reaching people as they once did.

There are good reasons why this is happening.

As environmentalism matures, the "Silent Spring" lesson has become more inclusive. In addition to the biological and ecological balance, the movement's concerns now encompass the full arena of human experience. A new environmentalism is evolving that recognizes the importance of economic, social and cultural connections: that is, humans need to be comfortable in their own niche and habitat.

These broader issues also mean that

the good guy-bad guy theme is becoming more complex, with more gray area to navigate in charting the right course. Groups and interests that in the past might have automatically been considered adversaries are often now effective partners. At the same time, there is a justifiable tension within the movement—combining the need to be proactive and to identify workable alternatives, while maintaining a high level of vigilance about being co-opted by polluters and scoundrels. What's needed is a new way to look at the story of the environment and a new approach to telling it that combines the sweep of the movement with the urgency that motivates people and the press.

Such a story is unfolding. It is the story of how communities are actively reshaping themselves to turn back the destructive effects of suburban sprawl. It is a story that encompasses the social, cultural, economic, civic and political life of the republic. Grass-roots advocates are recognizing in the sprawl story a paradigm shift, an opportunity to define a deeper environmental awareness and break out of the current polarized gridlock. Some of the large national groups are having a harder time being flexible enough to modify their course, although they are trying.

As an idea to define environmentalism and intrigue journalism, the story of America's junked up countryside couldn't come at a better time.

Evidence of the atrophy of 1970's-style protest environmentalism is everywhere. The national groups are having trouble recruiting new members. Arch conservatives have seized on environmental regulations as the most egregious examples of Big Government ex-

cess, with the accusations running from "stifling innovation" to superseding communism as the next Big Menace. In poll after poll, Americans express concern about the environment but find that more pressing issues like crime, education, job security and quality of life are taking precedence in their lives.

Part of the reason for the diminishing public interest in the national environmental movement is the considerable success of environmental initiatives in recent decades. Strengthened federal laws and standards have reduced air and water pollution, permanently protected tens of millions of acres of wilderness, and improved the waste disposal practices of industry. Environmental protection has become a core value of the American electorate. Few other social movements in this century have been more successful in transforming ideas into new attitudes that improved the human condition.

Even so, while some Americans may have grown complacent, there also is the problem of environmental fatigue. Among those who recognize that more needs to be done to protect the environment, there is a palpable despair.



Keith Schneider

When the Story Hits Home

The coldest winter in decades seized northern Michigan in 1994, and in February of that year a stranger came to the door of my cabin in Manistee County. He was dressed in heavy wool pants, carried a clipboard and introduced himself as a landman representing a natural gas company. He said the company was drilling test wells in the area, and it was interested in leasing the minerals that lie beneath my 90 acres of forest and meadows.

Just three months before, my wife and I had moved from Bethesda, Maryland, to begin what we hoped would be a less hectic, more genuine life in northwest Michigan. I was a national environmental correspondent for *The New York Times*, and the plan was to broaden my reporting, discover new issues and do it from a magnificent region in the nation's heartland. Part of the plan also included making time for gardening, hiking, canoeing and our new community. None of that was a staple of life during the previous eight years, when I was based in the paper's Washington bureau.

That February day, though, I recognized that our plans for a simpler life were on hold. The landman was saying that energy companies were setting their sights on turning our quiet corner of the world into a vast natural gas field. My head ached when he left.

For the next month, I used every moment between assignments for *The Times* researching the development. I learned that northern Michigan has been the most heavily drilled region in the United States since 1989. More than 5,500 wells have been installed here, with 800 to 1,000 added every year. The energy industry has invested \$1.4 billion in a labyrinth of roads, pipelines and processing stations. The federal and state governments have subsidized the de-

velopment with inane tax policies and production write-offs that have cost taxpayers more than \$500 million.

This enormous, subsidized industrial infrastructure has invaded the solitude of 600,000 acres of forest and ruined miles of trout streams. Narrow dirt trails, once navigable only on foot, have been turned into noisy, muddy highways. One of the nation's last intact forest ecosystems, half of it publicly owned, is being systematically carved up to produce a commodity that is in worldwide surplus. Yet this extraordinary story, the North Woods gas rush, was almost a non-issue in the environmental community and the state press.

How could that be so? Because the development was occurring beyond the geographical and political mainstream and because it did not yet fit on the segmented list of the environmental movement's top priorities in Michigan. The gas rush wasn't only a water quality issue, a habitat issue, an energy issue, a forest fragmentation issue, or a regulatory issue. Rather, it was all of these. Without question, natural gas drilling was causing more scarring of the land, and more nuisances for communities, than any single industry in the state. Yet recognizing the extent of the mess meant understanding the whole. In sum, the gas rush was a land use problem, and it could only be solved by unifying its various components.

And that's when it came to me. Almost every story I had ever covered as an environmental reporter had this common element—the use of land.

I moved to northwest Michigan unaware of the richness of the land use debate. It has now become the source of my career ambitions and a primary intellectual interest, so much so that in May 1995, after a 10-year

career, I resigned from *The Times* to take up a new role as an advocate.

Together with my wife and several other talented people who care deeply about this place, I helped organize a professionally staffed research and policy group known as the Michigan Land Use Institute. Our offices are located in the county's original one-room schoolhouse, which came very close to being demolished by the McDonald's Corporation.

The Institute is focused on improving land management practices, strengthening the rural economy and protecting our clean air and water. By broadening the definition of environmentalism to encompass the spectrum of land use issues, we are attracting diverse partners and building momentum for change.

Our project to gain greater oversight of natural gas drilling in the North Woods joins county and township governments with hunting groups and environmentalists. Some 20 member organizations, representing 200,000 state residents, are now part of our coalition. We also are part of a regional growth management project in nearby Traverse City, which links realtors and home builders with educators, business leaders, planners and conservationists.

Nothing is more exciting for those of us who write for a living than to discover and embrace new ideas that make such good sense. The land use debate is a fresh story. It affects all citizens. Advancing it takes careful investigative reporting, insightful policy analysis and a connection with trendsetters and visionary leaders. It's the richest realm I've ever explored, as it draws the environmental debate into the full story of American civilization. ■—Keith Schneider

How long can people receive shock treatments about toxic waste poisonings, loss of habitat, ozone depletion, global warming and suffering wildlife before they numb out?

In effect, the message has become a negative, overwhelming, and predict-

able monologue. The national environmental movement is losing ground, often reduced to collaborationist deal-making like the notorious Clinton Administration timber plan that is allowing logging of old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest. This formulaic and

misguided approach to social change is making editors and producers suspicious of environmental stories, which increasingly are taking up residence at the back of the book.

One of the truly promising trends about this new story is that it is revers-

ing the traditional relationship between environmentalists and journalists. On this story, the journalists are ahead and are pressing environmentalists to expand their vision.

The reporting on sprawl is bringing about an awareness that "the environment" is more than protecting natural resources and preventing pollution. It also encompasses the human habitat. The focus of this work is the alienation that Americans experience in the isolation of their subdivisions, cars, and stressed-out cities. People are translating their discomfort into a search for alternatives. So many people are involved, in fact, that they are providing the energy for a renewed and much broader environmental movement.

Journalists probing this story are finding that misguided tax policies, transportation subsidies and economic incentives that hollowed out the cities and paved over the suburbs have now become a principal challenge to protecting natural resources. Rural land is being taken over for Wal-Marts and McDonalds, which entice people to drive longer distances. Rivers are filling with eroded sand and the solvents and grease flowing from acres of new parking lots. The progress the country has made in improving air and water quality, and protecting biodiversity is now at risk.

The reporting has also gone further in arguing that sprawl is hampering the economy and interfering in the nation's sense of well-being. Sprawl is becoming the most graphic illustration of the power of technology, capital and public policy to utterly change the face of a community. As the land has become cluttered outside dying cities, a wave of social problems has swamped America: crime, declining education standards, the lack of confidence in government, harried lives and incivility. Sprawl has become the embodiment of what Pulitzer Prize winning historian Bruce Catton called the "fearful heritage" of the 20th Century.

Enough articles have been prepared on the subject by prominent news organizations that it is becoming one of the most hopeful trends in serious reporting. Newsweek took up the theme,



Drilling for natural gas in Montmorency County, Michigan.

in the cover article "Bye-Bye Suburban Dream," published in May 1995. The New York Times has given articles on urban planning and gated communities prominent display on its front page. The Wall Street Journal has decorated its front page in recent months with accounts of growth management in Oregon, new community designs, and transportation alternatives. The Washington Post has taken special interest in growth issues that are intruding on rural northern Virginia. The Chicago Tribune and The Kansas City Star both published series on sprawl in December 1995. CBS' "60 Minutes" explored a New England community's battle with Wal-Mart. And High Country News, one of the nation's best sources of environmental reporting, has published over a dozen lengthy articles in the last two years on how growth is upsetting the ecological and cultural face of the West.

The richness of the subject is reflected in the following trends:

- Discontent about uncivilized development in the Baltimore and Washington suburbs is causing Maryland to seriously debate a state-wide growth management plan. In at least 19 other

states, land use has become a major political issue. In fast-developing Colorado and Montana, land use is *the* major issue.

- Earl Blumenauer, the former Commissioner of Public Works in Portland, Oregon, was elected to Congress in May to fill Ron Wyden's seat. Blumenauer ran on a platform stressing environmental protection, curtailing sprawl, strengthening neighborhoods, and encouraging alternative forms of transportation. He thus became the first federal lawmaker to run and win on a land use platform. He is preparing the groundwork for a Congressional Caucus on Livable Communities.

- In September, New York City reached agreement with the state to maintain the purity of its drinking water by protecting a 2,000 square mile watershed, much of it in the Catskill Mountains. Under the plan, the city will spend \$275 million to buy thousands of acres of land and purchase development rights on other parcels, to serve as buffers around its reservoirs. It will spend \$1.2 billion more to repair leaky septic systems and build new sewage treatment plants near streams that feed the reservoirs. The city also committed nearly \$400 million to support economic development efforts in the small Catskill communities affected by the plan. The spending will curtail development around the reservoirs and eliminate the need to build a \$6 billion water treatment plant in New York City. All told, the agreement ranks as among the most innovative models ever tried in the United States for rethinking the uses of land in order to prevent a costly public works project and solve a long-standing environmental threat.

- Businesses in many parts of the country are joining the fray to stem sprawl. For example, when high tech manufacturers in California discovered that one in five young workers was actively seeking employment outside the Silicon Valley because of high housing costs and traffic congestion, the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group stepped forward with a plan. They formed a broad-based coalition in 1992 to work with local government in

building new light rail lines and to foster small lot development in order to reduce home prices.

- Farmland continues to be paved over for housing developments and parking lots at an astonishing rate. The American Farmland Trust estimates that 1.1 million acres of prime cropland are lost to sprawl every year in the United States. In California during the mid-1980's, 500,000 acres of Central Valley farmland, among the most productive on earth, were ruined by sprawl. In Michigan, 10 acres are lost each hour, or nearly 100,000 acres a year, according to a recent assessment by the state Department of Agriculture.

Stories like these are stimulating new thinking in cities and legislatures about how land is used. Sprawl and the issues attached to it are steadily making their way to the top echelons of the environmental and social policy debate. Moreover, the reporting on sprawl is pointing the way toward a new organic thesis to help political leaders and social theorists explain the world. The ideas have generated such interest that at the grass roots curbing sprawl is becoming a central organizing principle for addressing the vexing environmental and social problems that for too long have been regarded as unsolvable. It has the potential to reshape American environmentalism.

To understand just how deeply this sort of thinking is penetrating into communities, consider what is happening in Benzie County, Michigan. Located along the wooded northern coast of Lake Michigan, Benzie County is still a place far enough out of the mainstream that the sight of European visitors on the beach in Frankfort prompts page one treatment in the local weekly. The barber shop in downtown Beulah, the county seat and home to 400 people, is as reliable a source of community news as the local radio station. Here, the state's management of the lake trout fishery is more intensely discussed than almost anything coming out of Lansing or Washington.

Yet even in this region, so far apart, the very same convergence of economic, technological and demographic trends



A strip mall. One of the most important retail trends is building strip malls at the edge of central business cores. Critics call such malls architecturally ugly and complain that they encourage haphazard development.

that have ruined countless places in America before are now manhandling local leaders. Land is being divided at a dizzying pace. Property values are soaring. School enrollment is growing. Life in this once-slumbering corner of Michigan has the feel of a gathering storm.

The local conversation about how to respond has become quite sophisticated. For instance, residents are worried about water pollution in the sparkling inland lakes and rivers. The largest uncontrolled source of water pollution in the county comes from runoff. Solving the problem means improving farm practices, enlarging riparian habitat and wetlands, and slowing the spread of concrete and asphalt—all of which falls under the heading of land use.

Another concern is about increasing air pollution. There is almost no chance that the quality of the air will improve unless people drive less. That can not be done while the population of automobiles in northwest Michigan and in the United States is increasing twice as fast as the number of people, and when households generate an average of nine auto trips a day. Despite more stringent

limits on tailpipe emissions, the increase in automobile travel is expected to make air pollution worse in 2010 than it is today, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

So the solution for northwest Michigan will depend on generating the political will to end the building of more roads and highways, and invest in mass transit and other transportation alternatives. It also means creating communities where shopping, services and entertainment are within walking distance of homes. Again, the answer lies in redefining how land is used.

The discussion about growth also has centered on how to save the region's forests, world class orchards and small town life. Benzie County residents recognize that the root causes of the threat have to do with economic trends and public policies that affect the use of land at home and hundreds of miles away. In public meetings, residents grimly predict that growth will accelerate the pace of life, that crime will rise, that taxes will climb and that big box superstores will replace family-owned



Kentlands, a much-praised Maryland development between Washington and Baltimore.

businesses. They express their deepest fears about the very pattern of civilization that once was held up as the highest attainment of economic progress. In short, they are rejecting the conventional American dream.

Jim Sayer, Executive Director of the Greenbelt Alliance, a land use research group in San Francisco, says the dialogue undertaken in conservative Benzie County over the last year is not unusual. "As freeways and arterials have become our main source of transport, as warehouse-sized big box retailers have supplanted the local grocery and hardware and toy store and bakery and appliance store, as cul-de-sacs have widened and the garage entries have gone from two to three cars, as our hottest building sectors have become prisons and gated communities, we've been losing our venues for connecting as human beings. We've been losing a sense of where we are, why we belong in a place, who's around us, and why we should even care about where we hail from."

Although he published eight novels and once worked as an editor at *Rolling Stone*, James Howard Kunstler had, until very recently, attracted precious little literary attention. Then in 1993 he burst onto the national

scene with "The Geography of Nowhere," a splendidly conceived non-fiction account of the "trashy and preposterous human habitat" that America has built since World War II.

Henry Richmond, the founder of 1,000 Friends of Oregon and one of the nation's foremost land use authorities, has been studying land use and community activism since the early 1970's when he helped install and defend that state's model land use program. The outcome in Oregon, where leaders use "urban growth boundaries" to decide where development will go and where it will not, is a booming economy with a low crime rate and a magnificent environment, none of which is an accident.

Of all the men and women who have seized on land use as a cogent diagnosis of the nation's ills, perhaps none has done more to elevate the issues than Kunstler and Richmond. Kunstler's writing helped to initiate the wave of recent reporting on sprawl by describing the helplessness so many feel from living in America's soul-numbing nowheres, and suffering its dreadful consequences.

"Until he came along, there was this inability to describe what was happening and how people felt, because the problem was all around us. It was diffi-

cult to penetrate," said Peter Katz, an important writer on the subject in his own right and the Executive Director of the Congress for the New Urbanism in San Francisco. "Kunstler has helped define how the United States is beginning to move from a discredited model of growth—one that produces places that people hate—to something that will be better. Jim is basically saying that Americans have to decide to become more civilized. There are lots of organizations and people coming forward to promote the process."

Henry Richmond is among the select group of social theorists and policy makers who have devoted their working lives to helping Oregon put into place a growth management program fit for the 21st Century. Far from restricting growth, as its opponents asserted, the state land use plan preserved communities, protected the environment and helped Oregon earn international acclaim as a superb place to live and do business.

Though the two men have never met, their work is changing the country.

A century ago, Frederick Jackson Turner published a famous essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* that described the closing of the American frontier and the effect that idea was having on the national character. Turner succeeded in putting into words something the public already knew but until then had been unable to articulate. The result of the article, published in September 1896, helped to change how America thought about itself.

Exactly 100 years later, in September 1996, Kunstler debuted the central ideas of his newest book, "Home From Nowhere" in a cover essay in the same magazine. In it, the 47-year old author convincingly argues that subdivisions that have no center, schools that look like "fertilizer factories," town halls that resemble a "wholesale beverage warehouse," and libraries designed like "shipping containers" have produced a national "dis-ease." When nothing in the public realm "honors or embellishes it," he says, the result is "crippled civic life," and a loss of civility. It's no accident, he says, that America's

wrecked towns and empty cities produced guns in schools, eroded standards and a distrustful, even surly national mood.

The solution, says Kunstler, is a promising architectural and community design movement that has come to be known as the "New Urbanism." New Urbanists are building communities that focus on compact walkable neighborhoods, where bicycles and mass transit are regarded as essential means of transportation.

New Urbanist neighborhoods have homes built closer to the street, on much smaller lots. Streets are narrower and connect to each other, unlike the dead-end cul-de-sacs that proliferate in contemporary developments. Affordable housing is provided by a mix of home sizes and styles, and by apartments above stores and garages. These neighborhoods also include schools, churches, parks, stores, offices and small businesses.

In effect, New Urbanist neighborhoods are complete communities, like the traditional neighborhoods of Boston, Charleston, S.C., Chicago, and Philadelphia. They contain all the "civic equipment" necessary to make a place worth caring about. They also are the same sort of thriving places that were once the norm in the United States.

"This movement, in my view, is one of the most hopeful developments on the national scene," Kunstler writes. "I share the belief of its members that if we can repair the physical fabric of our everyday world, many of the damaged and abandoned institutions of our civic life may follow into restoration."

As chairman of the Portland-based National Growth Management Leadership Project, Henry Richmond does not consider himself an environmentalist, though he may be the most important environmental leader on the West Coast. In his view, sprawl has become public enemy number one. The key to addressing it, he says, is to define sprawl as an environmental issue *and* as a corrosive cultural problem that is undermining what he calls "national consensus goals."

One illustration of Richmond's thesis is how failed land use policies have

affected big city school systems and crime. Since 1966, when sprawl began to explode outside cities, average SAT scores started to fall. Investment on the urban fringe in roads, homes, schools, parks, sewers, libraries and the like was encouraged by direct subsidies and by tax codes that favored new and bigger homes over rehabilitating older ones. As jobs and middle class families followed the investment out of the city, the poor became marooned. Big city schools that once educated Nobel Prize winners began to suffer dropout rates of 50 percent. Joblessness led to hopelessness, drugs, and mounting crime rates, which only hastened middle class flight.

The same pattern now is occurring in older suburbs. As subsidies and tax incentives encourage the paving over of farms and forests even further out on the fringes of metropolitan regions, older suburbs and their school systems are beginning to fail. From 1970 to 1990 in Minneapolis/St. Paul, 162 schools were shut down in urban and central suburban areas, while 78 new schools were built in the outer suburb, at a cost exceeding \$200 million. New school construction occurred even as enrollment in the entire region declined by 77,000 students.

Richmond also notes that the territory gobbling character of American cities is not necessarily tied to expanding populations. From 1970 to 1990 the Chicago region's population grew by 4 percent. The land area covered by the city and its suburbs increased by 64 percent. Cleveland's population actually fell by 3 percent from 1970 to 1990, though its land area expanded by 30 percent.

What is happening is that people and all the businesses and civic equipment they support shifted, first from the urban to suburban realm, and now from suburbia to rural communities. Such shifts are enormously expensive—new highways, for instance, cost \$5 million to \$10 million a mile—and cause business and cultural dislocation. Money invested in new roads is money removed from other accounts for public services and maintenance. As civic infrastructure crumbles, housing val-

ues decline, businesses leave, joblessness sets in, and with it deteriorating behavior.

Richmond argues that, far from helping the nation, the pattern of subsidizing sprawl benefits a wealthy minority at the expense of almost everyone else. Some 80 percent of new road construction in Minneapolis/St. Paul from 1970 to 1990, for instance, took place in the wealthier suburbs where less than 25 percent of the people live.

In Chicago, most public and private investment has been focused on the northwest suburbs. The result, says Richmond, is that 80 percent of the metropolitan region's new jobs were situated in an area where just 18 percent of the population resides.

Such one-sided spending, with its attendant economic and social costs, is a national mistake. "Land use is the sort of mystery guest at the civic table," said Richmond in an interview. "There's only a small appreciation of the impact of land use patterns on national goals. As a people, as a Congress, we have established consensus goals through the political process. We want prosperity. We want equal opportunity, a clean environment, mobility, affordable housing, any number of things.

"Now look at the 320 metropolitan regions of the country, where 80 percent of the people live. Look at the development patterns of the 20,000 municipalities. Have any of those places achieved any of these goals? Precious few. Almost every one of those governments is encouraging sprawl through disincentives to investing almost anywhere except the outer fringe."

In the last year, a new progressive movement has developed around land use in Washington, D.C., focusing its work on transportation alternatives, the environment and efforts to alter policies that encourage development of farm land and sensitive ecosystems.

Among the most effective groups:

- The Surface Transportation Policy Project, a national coalition to end America's 50-year-old program of building new roads. The coalition wants to focus resources on repairing old roads

and encouraging cheaper, less damaging alternatives, like rail.

- Taxpayers For Common Sense, which uncovers federal subsidies and pork barrel projects that not only waste billions of dollars, but disfigure neighborhoods and the land.

- The American Farm Land Trust, which has saved thousands of acres of prime cropland from being engulfed by suburban sprawl. AFT is the fastest growing national environmental group, doubling its membership in the past three years to 30,000.

Americans are coming to recognize and fear the distinctive community-killing symptoms of runaway development. Small business owners worry about the dislocating effects of national chains that set up shop on their community's fringe. Aided by property tax abatements and other incentives not available to existing businesses, the newcomers have a built-in advantage beyond their enormous size.

Farmers tremble at the subdivisions, convenience stores and parking lots closing in on their fields. Wood lot managers find it ever harder to maintain productive stands as acreage is fragmented by suburban sprawl. And families are spending more time and money than ever before to maintain and drive a fleet of vehicles, as crazy outdated zoning rules require schools, stores, factories and housing to be separated by miles of clogged roads. It is a story that is attracting considerable notice from the news media and merits much more diverse and insightful attention. ■

Florence Schneider edited and contributed to this article.

Activist's View: Media Lag

BY ARLIE SCHARDT

During the final months of this year's national elections, a new phenomenon emerged in media coverage of the issues—an unprecedented volume of stories about the environment. That could be said to be only logical, since for the first time ever the environment was a wedge issue in many Congressional races and, although to a lesser extent, even in the Presidential contest, where President Clinton and Vice President Gore invoked it repeatedly.

Indeed, as Los Angeles Times correspondent James Gerstenzang reported in an October 30 report on several Senate races where the environment was a key factor, "If it weren't for the environmental concerns raised by the most recent session of Congress, says Democratic pollster Celinda Lake, 'we wouldn't be in the running.'"

Lake would seem to have been right on the money. When 788 adult Americans were asked by ICR Survey Research just days before the election how important a Congressional candidate's positions on clean air, clean water and protecting the environment would be in determining their vote, 53 percent said Very Important and 32 percent said Somewhat Important. That combined total of 75 percent compared with a total of 58 percent for the same question in 1995, and only 30 percent in 1994.

And on the day after this fall's election, pollster Stan Greenberg reported that in exit polls in nine races surveyed by his firm, voters in six of them said they regarded environmental protection as more important than Medicare! Moreover in three of those districts, environment was rated as the single most important issue. More concretely, such findings appear to have been borne out by the actual results. At least six of the "Dirty Dozen" candidates targeted

by League of Conservation Voters were defeated: South Dakota Senator Larry Pressler, Iowa Senate candidate Rep. Jim Lightfoot, Maine Rep. Jim Longley, North Carolina Rep. Fred Heineman, Washington Rep. Randy Tate and Illinois Rep. Michael Flanagan.

Despite all this evidence, and despite many other polls that have shown for years that at least 75 percent of Americans regard themselves as environmentalists, press coverage of environmental issues was virtually invisible until the recent election surge. To say the media has been lagging behind the public is putting it kindly.

In the early 1990's, in fact, environmental coverage was ranging from rare to skeptical to downright negative. Perhaps influenced by the journalistically illiterate new breed of "news consultants" or "news advisers" who are so steadily dumbing down what passes for news, print editors and broadcast news producers were apparently persuaded that environmental stories are not good for ratings. Other gatekeepers simply didn't give a damn about the subject, or stuck it in a mental pigeonhole, unable to see the almost unlimited ramifications of environmental subjects, which after all are about how we live—our health, our economy, our recreational resources, our natural resources.

Before founding Environmental Media Services in 1993, Arlie Schardt served as national press secretary for Senator Al Gore's 1987-88 Presidential campaign, Executive Director of the Environmental Defense Fund, southern civil rights correspondent for Time magazine, News Media Editor at Newsweek, Associate Director of the ACLU, writer and later Chief of the News Service at Sports Illustrated magazine and Editor of Foundation News magazine at the Council on Foundations.

But editorial disinterest was (and is) only part of the problem. Another was the environmental movement itself. While groups representing chemical, mining, real estate, timber, coal, oil, gas and agricultural interests were spending millions of dollars on highly sophisticated, extremely effective PR and advertising campaigns, almost no priority was given to such work by the national environmental organizations.

Indeed it is unlikely that any of them devoted even 1 percent of their budgets to media work, which often consisted of little more than holding a press conference or releasing a report and then moving on to the next subject.

While good journalists don't like to think they are influenced by such campaigns, consider one example of an utterly false story the chemical industry has successfully perpetuated for over seven years—the constantly cited claim that the controversy over the pesticide Alar was nothing more than a typical environmentalist "scare tactic."

Despite a steady stream of fact sheets sent regularly to media all over the country to correct that erroneous assertion, the Alar myth remains alive, ubiquitous and well—appearing again only weeks ago in *The New York Times*.

Yet even before the Natural Resources Defense Council released its 1989 report on Alar, the Washington (State) Apple Commission had recommended that growers stop using it. And a 1987 EPA Carcinogen Assessment Group had already determined that Alar should be classified as a probable human carcinogen. Then, only months after EPA began procedures to remove Alar from the market, its manufacturer, Uniroyal, requested a voluntary cancellation of all food-use registrations for Alar based on its own and EPA's studies.

As if this weren't enough, a study by the National Academy of Sciences affirmed NRDC's premise that infants and young children are particularly susceptible to cancer-causing agents in food. Finally, a lawsuit heavily financed by the National Agricultural Chemicals Association was unanimously rejected by the Ninth Circuit Court, which concluded that "the growers have failed to raise a genuine issue of material fact."

The Supreme Court later turned down the appeal. For all that, and for all our efforts to supply detailed corrections again and again, we can count on seeing the Alar "scare story" appearing regularly as an example of environmental exaggeration.

Editors are right to challenge new claims, but they should also recognize that the environmental movement has become vastly more sophisticated than its sometime-stereotype deserves. It is now populated by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of first-class scientists, economists, attorneys and researchers. Healthy skepticism is always appropriate, but so is the recognition that these groups have much to offer. Many are pursuing cutting-edge issues that will have a powerful impact on life in the 21st Century.

Indeed, where greater skepticism is in order is in examining the size, skill and determination of anti-environmental campaigns driven by a combination of industry PR firms, front groups with environmentally benign names, and right-wing think tanks funded by wealthy conservative foundations.

These are the forces that launched an all-out Congressional assault on a bipartisan safety net of environmental laws that took over 25 years to construct. They were thwarted only because the consequences of their efforts were made clear to the American people through a series of sustained media education campaigns by newly created groups such as Environmental Media Services, Environmental Information Center, and the Environmental Working Group, all in concert with a reinvigorated cadre of national environmental organizations.

The result was the first successful counter-attack in a battle against disinformation that is certain to intensify in the years ahead. Meanwhile journalists would do well to examine what is the "special interest" in these disputes. A good rule of thumb is that old faithful, "follow the money." Find out who's making the big campaign contributions, who's bankrolling the commercials, and compare that with where

the environmental groups get their funds. That in turn might help get over the accuracy hurdle posed by editorial efforts to achieve "balance" in their coverage. In the most simplistic sense this finds a TV report giving equal minutes to both sides of an issue. At a more elevated, and all-too-common level, it consists of "balancing," say, highly qualified scientists by giving equal legitimacy to a few professional skeptics. This occurs regularly in coverage of such issues as toxic chemicals or global climate change.

The latter is personified by coverage of the recent series of reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in which the media persistently gave equal weight to the conclusions of over 2,000 scientists as against a handful who either deny that climate change is happening or, if it is, human activity is not a factor. Indeed a report on NBC Nightly News not only contained several inaccuracies on the science, it then gave over a full minute to skeptic Dr. Fred Singer, who recited his usual litany of denying the science—even though he has not published a peer-reviewed article on climate change since the early 1970's and was not a participant in the IPCC studies.

Such "balance" finally drove U.S. Undersecretary of State Tim Wirth to lament that "We often see this portrayed as a kind of ping-pong match. But you have 2,500 scientists—the world's leaders—on one side of the ping-pong table and seven scientists on the other side."

Besides addressing the problem of "balance," recent events raise the hope that media gatekeepers may now recognize the resonance of environmental and public health stories by ending what often seems to be a sort of "quota" system—i.e. frequently a reporter will tell us that his paper/network "just did a pesticides (or whatever) story last month," and therefore can't do another until some undefined interval has passed. On the other hand, it might be hoped that a permanent quota on environmental coverage, or commentary, might be self-imposed by *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page and ABC's John Stossel. Now that would be balance. ■

Needed: Long-Haul Commitment

BY MELANIE SILL

The best environmental story I ever worked on began with a tip that had nothing to do with the environment.

A friendly source called investigative reporter Pat Stith at The News & Observer and told him about a state veterinarian who seemed awfully chummy with the North Carolina pork producers he was supposed to be regulating. Stith was working with Joby Warrick, another reporter, on a couple of stories involving the state agriculture department, so they added this tip to the list they were scouting. I was their editor on the stories.

Eventually we found out more about the state vet, who was indeed taking favors, but the piece about his wrongdoing had to wait. Along the way, Stith and Warrick nosed out a much more important and compelling story: corporate hog production was expanding rapidly without oversight; the expansion was harming water and air quality and driving independent farmers out of business; and pork producers had won tax breaks and jimmed the laws and rules to disable the system that should have been regulating their industry.

The news hit the paper in February 1995 in the form of a five-part investigative report called "Boss Hog: N.C.'s Pork Revolution." The series and months of follow-up reporting awoke citizens and leaders to a host of concerns surrounding their new local industry, and eventually brought the state's first significant regulation of hog farms. Boss Hog also won a Pulitzer Prize for public service and other national awards including the John Oakes and Scripps Howard Meeman Award, both of which recognize environmental reporting.

Hogs were nobody's top agenda item in North Carolina, with the exception of a citizens' group concerned largely with odor from large hog farms. The N&O series changed that. But our motive for reporting was journalistic, not moral. Something was happening that people didn't understand. It was a story, not a cause. And while Boss Hog led to major reform, we embarked initially not on a crusade but on a hunting expedition.

On other occasions, I've worked with stories that fell into what I call referee journalism. One side says this, the other says that. There's a controversy; a vote by a state commission or a decision by county commissioners is at hand. The newspaper does a situation piece explaining the environmental issue or hazard, reflecting the differing opinions of what's happening, offering balance and exploring as much objective information as possible to determine what is factually provable. After some amount of fighting, lobbying, negotiating or back-room dealing, the decision is made. Reporters stick with the story until the controversy is over, then depart for the next ruckus.

Referee journalism is an essential part of daily journalism, and when done right it helps people understand more about critical decisions unfolding in their communities.

Sometimes, however, we can do stories that are even more valuable—stories that reveal new information and, at the same time, deepen people's understanding of the larger forces at play not just in one particular environmental dispute, but in a broader set of ongoing decisions. Boss Hog was such a story, and illustrates how powerful journal-

ism can be when it breaks new ground rather than simply summing up controversy or outrage.

The agenda for environmental action is set by any of a number of actors: advocates such as the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund or other groups, government regulators, community coalitions, industries looking for relief from rules they consider burdensome.

The agenda for environmental news coverage, however, ought to be set by news organizations. The most valuable environmental coverage is part of a



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long-haul commitment to journalism that exposes not just one disaster or scandal, but that explains fundamental decisions, large and small, on the way to or from such dramatic occurrences.

That kind of commitment supported us as we dug further into the doings of the pork industry. The topic was, let's face it, obscure. But we knew we had support to follow our instincts—and our instincts told us something wasn't right.

The tip about the North Carolina state veterinarian who might be taking gifts from hog farmers seemed like part of something bigger, and it didn't take long for Stith and Warrick to leave that trail for another. In looking through records, talking to people and discuss-

ing what the reporters were learning, the three of us quickly recognized the connections among hog barons, political chiefs and rural kingpins. We also decided that we would get little, if any, usable information from the anti-hog groups. They were part of the story, but they were not good sources of fundamental information. Neither were state environmental agencies, which had paid little regulatory attention to the pork industry, or environmental advocacy groups, which had other issues on their priority lists. Instead, Warrick and Stith built the story one bit at a time.

In the course of this reporting, we met weekly (all still busy with other assignments) in the newspaper snack bar to catch up. One afternoon, as

Warrick told Stith and me about the massive hog barns and waste-disposal systems, a logical question arose: What happens to the, well, the waste? And isn't it a problem in Eastern North Carolina, where the water table often is measured in inches, where creeks and streams crisscross vast stretches of bogs and wetlands?

A few researchers, both in and out of government, had been looking into these issues. But no one could say how much damage had been done, or might be done. The industry simply had grown too much, too quickly, for anyone to say. The payola story had turned into an environment story, and much more.

The rest of the picture came into focus as our reporting progressed and



June 22, 1995: The collapse of an earthen wall sent 25 million gallons of hog feces, urine and sludge from this waste lagoon at a farm in Onslow County, N.C., into the nearby New River, causing a massive fish kill and closing down marinas and commercial fishing operations downstream.

Jim Downs, The News & Observer

we began mapping out our stories. The reason it mattered that pork producers were running their own show in North Carolina was that they were gambling with the land, air and water of the state's coastal plain. Hog lagoons planted in sandy soil were leaking, according to a never-publicized study by a researcher at North Carolina State University, a land-grant institution where pork producers funded many studies. Warrick dug up that study and other fundamental research that had barely seen daylight. State regulators were almost ignorant of how the hog expansion—the number of pigs had doubled in four years to 7 million—had affected the environment. Moreover, they weren't particularly concerned.

I've always liked environmental stories, both as an editor and as a reader. I'm not surprised by polls that show support among Americans for laws and rules that protect the air, water and other natural resources. Our readership studies show the same strong interest in stories about the environment.

The referee stories that are fodder for the daily news report are valuable, because no news organization can keep track of every environmental issue, and lawsuits do get filed. Journalists do a great service by seeking out the reality behind rhetoric offered by companies and advocates. Readers need stories that analyze the situation that prompted a proposal for a new law. They need for their local newspaper or television station to keep up with various environmental organizations, regulators and industry groups and to report on what those players are doing and saying. Still, I think journalists and their communities profit greatly by portraying the advocates and activists as parts of stories rather than as their beginnings and endings.

In the case of Boss Hog, North Carolina's pork industry had grown so rapidly that no one—advocates, regulators, farmers, local leaders—seemed to possess an informed and detailed understanding of what had happened, why, and with what consequence. The N&O, the largest daily but not the home-

town paper for most of North Carolina's hog country, answered those questions in a way that showed the value of independent journalism for communities large and small. We had to do extensive original reporting to get the answers, because the picture offered by any of the interested parties was narrow and, given their interests, skewed. Stith had to spend hundreds of hours in the legislative library retracing the steps of Wendell Murphy, the nation's top hog producer, who had done his industry a number of good turns in legislation he sponsored or supported during 10 years in the state senate. None of those actions had spurred controversy; none of them drew reporters' attention, either. Backtracking showed us again how easy it is for journalists to miss stories when they don't generate conflict. But the legislative reporting showed political influence in action, and put it in context of the larger story of Boss Hog's expansion. The environmental damage could not be understood without an explanation of the regulations; the lax oversight made sense in light of Murphy's legislative record; the willingness of rural counties to accept big hog farms was easy to understand given the struggling economy of Eastern North Carolina. And the characters in this drama, from homespun millionaires like Murphy to hog-farm neighbors with contaminated drinking wells, made it a story about people rather than about bureaucracies and companies.

This is the kind of journalism I love best—stories that make connections for people.

A second drawback to referee journalism, I find, is that it sends reporters hopscotching from crisis to crisis, fight to fight, with little concern for long-term coverage. A "nimby" fight over a new subdivision near a creek might occupy a reporter's time for months; once the vote is made and the issue is settled, how often does that reporter return to determine the environmental outcome? Environmental reports that expose damage often lead to task forces, study commissions or new laws. Those actions, however, are beginnings rather than endings.

Some of The News & Observer's most valuable reporting came after the original stories were published. The governor and legislative bigwigs responded to the series by setting up a study commission and vowing to address the public's concerns. Legislators introduced bills to step up inspections and require new environmental safeguards on hog farms. But pork producers stalled or killed most of the initiatives. The N&O covered both the action and the stall—a process that required reporters to sit in long meetings of committees and commissions, and to keep in touch with a number of sources on a daily or weekly basis. Then one morning in June, a large hog lagoon burst, spilling 25 million gallons of feces and urine into a river, and killing thousands of fish. For once, we didn't have to follow a disaster by rushing to report the situation that allowed it to occur. Our readers knew exactly what had happened, and why.

A few months after the hog series, Warrick teamed up with environment reporter Stuart Leavenworth to dig into the story behind the decline of the Neuse River, which runs from Raleigh straight through the coastal plain to fish nurseries in the Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. A series of fish kills, algae blooms and other disasters had earned this river a place on an environmental group's list of the nation's 20 most endangered rivers. Communities along the Neuse had just endured their worst fish kill season in memory. The N&O also had reported on declining fisheries on the Atlantic Coast of North Carolina; pollution in rivers like the Neuse was one reason for that crisis.

We launched the Neuse series not just to say that there was an environmental problem, but to report why it persisted and what it meant in a larger context. That reporting involved political deal-making among powerful farm groups and state officials, including the government. Warrick and Leavenworth dug up and pored over extensive scientific studies that had been commissioned, carried out and left to gather dust. The reporters discovered that the

urban boom in the Raleigh-Durham area—a celebrated success story in North Carolina—explained part of the pollution that was killing fish downstream along the Neuse. Raleigh's sewage plants were pumping treated water with high levels of nitrogen into the river, and city leaders were balking at spending the money to reduce that level of pollution. Other pocketbook concerns were keeping key players—farmers, developers and marina owners—from admitting their part in the river's demise along its run to the coast. As our understanding of the larger picture came into focus, graphics and photographs helped explain the pollution. Stories explained the political decisions and human impact.

The Neuse series did not begin as a crusade to clean up the river. Instead, we wanted to provide a reality check for readers confused by rhetoric over the Neuse's travails. We had published dozens of stories in which the governor or state legislators vowed to clean up the river—and dozens of other stories reporting that the Neuse continued to decline in quality. Our series dug deeper to show the choices being made by people in power, and the effect of those decisions on the river. Readers could judge for themselves whether they agreed with the choices. Again, we used environmentalists, government regulators, scientists and farmers as sources, but not as starting points.

The Neuse series spurred plenty of government action and public discussion, as well as a flood of calls to key players (everyone from scientists to industry lobbyists) whose names we listed with the series. One letter I kept came from a legislator—a well-known conservative from a rural area—who said he never thought he'd call himself an environmentalist, but that our series had given him an understanding of what was happening to the natural resources of his home county, and what stakes were involved in some of the decisions he and his colleagues had to make.

The News & Observer clearly has an agenda for environmental reporting: we want to do it well. We devote report-



Waste from North Carolina hog farms is piped from barns into open-air pits, called lagoons.

ing and editing resources, and a good bit of newsprint, to environmental coverage. We make choices about what stories to explore in depth and which ones to skip, and our pages reflect those decisions. But our best environmental stories, like the best ones in print and on broadcast around the country, reflect an understanding that very few informed sources are also uninvolved. Experts often have personal interests on the line, or longstanding beliefs that color their appraisals. Thus journalism becomes even more valuable; we might not be purely objective, but we certainly can be detached. And rather than simply reporting accusations, claims and study results, we can take a more active role in helping readers and viewers understand environmental issues as part of broader social and governmental trends.

In recent months, readers who have called and written to me have expressed gratitude for the depth of The N&O's reporting both on the hog industry and on environmental hazards around the state. We take this as encouragement to

do more—not just about big environmental threats, but about the unsexy and ultimately crucial issues related to urban growth in formerly rural areas. Other journalists might not see fame and fortune in covering silt buildup in creeks, failures of municipal sewage plants or the politics of environmental impact statements, but I think the big stories down the road are lurking in the thousands of little questions we encounter every day about what happens when dramatic change is forced on land, water or air. Our lesson from Boss Hog is that sometimes the best stories literally are right under our noses.

By the way, Pat Stith did get to do his story on the wayward veterinarian. He had taken favors. Our story brought a mild reprimand from his bosses, and he kept his job. ■

The Challenge to TV

BY DAVID ROPEIK

There are a lot of different ways people can find out about the world. From books to periodicals to daily papers, from public radio and public television to network newscasts to local TV news to trashy radio gabmeisters, people have a rich choice if they want to find out what's going on beyond their own personal experience.

Books offer sharp focus and depth. Newspapers and news magazines offer a wide variety of topics covered, with varying degrees of detail, context and analysis. TV news uniquely offers video, and a timely update on whether anything important happened in the last few hours, whether the local team won or lost, and whether it's going to rain tomorrow. Don't look to TV for depth, though. It's just not the nature of the beast.

And therein lies the problem as television news covers environmental stories. Those stories often are not simple and neat and clean. They don't lend themselves as readily to Who What When Where and Why as a story about, say, a trial or a plane crash or a murder. Sure, the oil spill or overturned chemical truck is simple and neat and clean the way spot news can be. But because many environment stories aren't spot news, because they are often complex and more gray than black and white, because they often require some explanation of basic science, because they are often developing stories with no resolution and so require a brief "scene setting" recap to put them in context, it's tough to do them journalistic justice in the average minute and forty-five second television news report.

Example: Global Climate Change (formerly known as Global Warming).

Let's say the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a consortium of hundreds of scientists around the world studying the issue, releases a report that says, for the first time, "Yes, humans are changing the climate of the

earth. Global climate change isn't *going to* happen. It's *happening. Now.*" That is a major news story. But if it is to make sense to the average viewer, the report will have to:

- Explain what climate change is.
- Explain what the IPCC is and why what it says matters.
- Explain the history of the scientific debate to put in context why this new statement is so dramatic.
- Explain some of the basic scientific findings underpinning the new IPCC statement.
- Include balance on the scientific skepticism about the findings.

All in 105 seconds!

No problem!

Not only is there scant time in which to tell the story, there is also, because of the challenges of television journalism, little time to gather the story to begin with. TV rarely assigns reporters to stories that don't air the same day. And unlike print or radio reporting, we can't sit at a phone and get our jobs done. We need pictures. Which means we have maybe six or seven hours to call a few sources to get the basic facts, then go out with a photographer to make some video and interview a couple of "experts," then come back to the station and order up appropriate graphics, screen the video and interviews so we know what the pieces of the puzzle are, then write a script and finally edit those pieces together. Imagine tackling the IPCC-climate change story under those limitations. It's not a type of journalism suited to stories requiring depth and thought.

Beat reporting of any kind is rare in television. The bodies cost too much and the commitment to in-depth coverage has never been there. Very few local stations, and only CNN and ABC among the networks, have reporters or producers assigned to the environment beat. Which means the people doing the climate change story won't have

much of a clue about what climate change *is* or who the experts are as they start out. So they face not only logistical limitations, but their own lack of basic knowledge. Which makes the time constraints all the more onerous.

Environmental coverage on TV also runs afoul of the power/peril of pictures. Television is far and away the most effective journalistic medium at giving news consumers a feeling of the reality of a story, through video and sound. The tear-streaked face of a grieving mother, the horror of an explosion, the visceral anger of a striking worker on a picket line, all communicate more



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powerfully through video and audio than even the most eloquently written words. But in the power of pictures lies a terrible temptation: to use the most dramatic footage you can get, and the facts be damned. Or, worse, to manipulate the pictures and sound, or even *create* them (NBC Dateline's use of bottle rockets to ignite truck explosions) to help visualize a story more dramatically.

Environment stories are frequently vulnerable to this temptation because they often involve visually ugly stuff. Belching smokestacks, piles of rusting barrels, a cormorant or seal struggling toward death coated in thick oil from a spill, all give TV stories drama and impact. But we'll use that one cormorant even if it was the only one affected by the spill and most other wildlife escaped unharmed. We'll use pictures of that one badly polluted spot on a river that for the remainder of its 66 miles is clean enough to swim in. We'll spend days (and tens of thousands of dollars) reporting on efforts to save whales stranded on the Arctic ice, even though they strand themselves all the time.

TV is too often seduced by the lure of the dramatic pictures that are frequently part of an environment story. (The reverse is also true. TV often passes on environment stories—climate change is one example—because there are no strong, readily available pictures, despite how good the story may be.) We frequently highlight the visual drama out of proportion with the facts or relevance of the story. The word is "sensationalism," and any thin-skinned TV news person who denies that this happens is either naive or lying.

And then there's the question of commitment. The public remains strongly interested in the environment. A recent national survey by Roper/Starch commissioned by The Society of Environmental Journalists found that 52 percent of the public wanted more coverage about environmental issues (19 percent wanted less; 28 percent said it was about right). But most people covering the environment for television report that things are going in just the opposite direction.

At the network level, ABC News had Barry Serafin and Ned Potter doing regular environmental pieces for their in-depth American Agenda segment. Erin Hayes also contributed environment stories. Potter's largely off the beat. Serafin is still on, but he too files more regularly on other issues. Hayes reports on the environment only when she's not chasing down the most recent breaking news. Bob Aglow is the network's environment producer, and regularly advocates for more coverage. But overall, ABC's attention to the environment is down.

Of course, it's still better than at most other networks. People assigned to the environment beat at NBC? Zero. CBS? Zero. The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer? Zero. Among the news networks, CNN maintains the strongest commitment to environmental coverage, with a staff of producers and reporters based in Atlanta, additional coverage of environmental issues from their bureaus, and a half hour program, "Earth Matters," that runs twice a week on both their national and international feeds. They recently added a correspondent to cover global environment issues. But do they have a principal environment correspondent, the way they do for the White House, or entertainment, or science? No.

A print colleague, Nick Tate, once noted that his job, environment beat reporter for a tabloid newspaper in Boston, "is kind of like being a photographer for The Wall Street Journal." After Nick moved on, The Boston Herald abandoned the environment as a beat. So have many local TV stations.

Seventy-five television journalists who specialize in environmental coverage recently responded to a poll conducted by Michigan State University's Environmental Journalism Program. Forty-four percent said they are covering the environment less now than they were a year ago. Thirteen percent said they were covering it more.

Some of the respondents sent in their views. "Polls continue to show that a majority cares about the environment. But editors and news managers tell reporters that those stories just don't sell anymore." Another said "It's

not the priority it once was with my managers." (Two stations that recently scaled back their environment beats, one in Boston and one in Raleigh-Durham, had just won DuPont Awards for environmental coverage.)

Scott Miller, the long-time and still full-time environment reporter for KING-TV in Seattle, says, "I don't think the environment beat was on very solid ground in TV anyway. It may be perceived as faddish. Newspapers and TV have covered the murder down the block for years. Politics the same. Whereas the environment is new."

Amid the Earth Day hype of 1990, NBC signed Miller to do two stories a week for their affiliate stations. Three years later when they dropped it, he was told "it's just not hot anymore."

The views of one prominent local television news director seem to bear out these comments. Gary Wordlaw is the Vice President for News at WJLA and a member of the Board of Directors of the national Radio and Television News Directors Association. Beginning around the Earth Day hype of 1990, Wordlaw's newsrooms in Baltimore, and then in Washington, had a reporter assigned to cover the environment. The stories ran in a promoted spot in the newscast that had its own sponsor. That spot is now gone. Wordlaw's station offers dramatically less environmental coverage. The reporter is on the city hall beat, though when big environmental news breaks he still covers it.

Wordlaw says "We are *commercial* [his emphasis] television and the only hard measurements we have to guide us are ratings and research. The environment doesn't show up as high as it used to in our research. It's not there. It's gone. People stopped buying the product." Wordlaw offers no explanation for the conflict between the research of TV news consultants and general public opinion polling that continues to show high public concern and interest about the environment.

One senior reporter at a major market station in the Southwest who used to do environmental pieces 90 percent of the time says, "Now it's maybe 60 percent, maybe less. It seems like I have a little more trouble selling an environ-

mental story at the story conference than I used to. It seems like there's less willingness to consider a story that's a "think piece" instead of a hard news piece. Let's face it. Unless some chemical spill kills somebody, environmental stories are not lead story material. They're still important and I think the audience still cares about them. But it won't lead the newscast because it doesn't bleed. There are things I used to do stories on a few years ago that I just won't even propose anymore. They'll get shot right down."

There are other pressures at work. Ten years ago, news consultants were advising TV news directors to hire specialists as a way to help sell the product. Now they are advising stations to concentrate on the pacing of their shows. Speed things up. The target demographic in the audience that advertisers are after used to be women between the ages of 18 and 49. (They make most of the spending decisions.) That target group is now women 18-35. Consultants are advising stations that the younger audience wants a faster paced newscast. All this comes as stations expand the amount of news they are doing. They are adding newscasts. But they are not adding commensurate staff.

The reporter in the Southwest says, "It relates to issues of staffing. Budget. Demands on our time. We have more newscasts with fewer people and more emphasis on pacing of newscasts. The decision-making has clearly moved from the reporting staff to producers, and it's their job to care more about how the shows look than what kind of information is in them.

"They want more stories a day, shorter stories. That's bad for any beat. My guess is this isn't just happening to the environment beat. It's just the way everybody is doing news now. There's far less time to do investigative reporting, or any kind of serious in-depth piece, especially if it's not going to air the same day."

Miller in Seattle wonders what the consultants and station managers and news directors around the country are missing, that the news bosses in Seattle seem to get. All three major stations have environment beat reporters. "If

Deborah Potter Not Even One Line?

There are environmental elements to a lot of daily news stories. And if we as daily news reporters think about those, we can add something to stories that other reporters might not. Let me give you a couple of examples. We can do cuddly animal stories really well. A lot of stations love to have cuddly animal stories. We do conflict stories really well. Jobs versus owls, right? But a story about a flood? There is an environmental angle to a lot of flood stories. Why is this flood here? Why is this flood here every year? What have human beings done to their environment to make it flood here? I went through a lot of coverage looking for general assignment stories on flooding to see, did they mention this? Well, they didn't. But an environmental reporter, someone with environmental sensibility, might add that to the story. A story about a bear in a residential area... or a moose. It has to do with habitat, right? I looked at three stories, count 'em. One was a moose, one was a bear and there was some



other wild animal—all from Western stations, obviously—and not one of them, not one of them, mentioned loss of habitat. It only takes a line. The truth is, they were great breaking news stories. Little kids were going "Ooh ooh, look at the bear." It doesn't mean you don't do that part of the story. It doesn't mean you have to go down this road over here and talk all about loss of habitat—but one line to even reflect that in a general news story?—*Deborah Potter of the Poynter Institute at the National Conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists, Oct. 19, 1996.*

they didn't think people were watching this I wouldn't be doing it," Miller says. "Our research indicates that people around here want to see the stuff. They think it's a way to make us stand out, to give viewers a reason to watch us instead of somebody else."

Seattle certainly is not unique in public interest about environmental issues. Poll after poll shows that concern for the environment is nationwide. Which means the market for news about the environment is there, contrary to what Wordlaw's research suggests. Yet Seattle and Salt Lake City are the only two major TV markets in the country where at least three major stations have someone assigned to environmental coverage.

The belching smokestacks and burning rivers are gone. There will always be environmental spot news like Bhopal and Chernobyl and the Exxon Valdez. But the easy targets, the easy picture stories, are giving way to issues like particulate air pollution, non-point

source water pollution, endocrine disruptors and climate change and biodiversity. No easy pictures there. No easy explanations. No clear good guys or bad guys. Still, these are issues that affect our health—even life on the planet as we know it. They demand more and better coverage than they are getting.

Television journalism is not covering the environment well. But as TV news viewership continues to decline, that could change. Maybe viewers aren't leaving for cable or videotape, or because they're too busy to watch, as the consultants argue. Maybe they're leaving because our shallowness is chasing them away. Perhaps they're leaving because spending time watching TV news is more and more a waste of time. People want interesting, relevant, valuable information, and we're not giving it to them. Maybe the owners and news managers will finally realize that quality journalism, about the environment or any other topic, is the way to get people to watch and to make a buck. ■

Competing Sources, Uncertain Facts

BY BRUCE V. LEWENSTEIN

“If your mother tells you she loves you, check it out,” growls the grizzly green-eye-shade editor of yore. The advice hardly seems appropriate to the carpeted, computerized and air-conditioned newsrooms of today, or to the complex scientific and technical topics that environmental journalists cover. Writing about dioxin or global warming isn't about checking anonymous sources and barroom tips.

But, of course, it is. Perhaps even more than writing obits and city hall stories, environmental journalism requires reporters to deal with competing sources, uncertain information, different perspectives (or, in academic jargon, “media frames”) on a story. Environmental stories don't deal just with “information.” They deal with the complex interplay of political realities, technical possibilities, cutting-edge science—and differing values about what's important in our society.

To deal with this complexity requires more checking, more sources, and more skepticism than virtually any other area of journalism.

So how should a reporter approach gathering information for an environmental story?

The first step is to assess the story. Is this a crisis story—a chemical spill, a fire in a toxic waste dump? If it is, then aspects of “risk communication” immediately come into play. A reporter needs to quickly find technical experts who can provide specific answers to specific questions about exposure levels, regulatory standards and preventive or alternative actions that people can take. These experts work for government environmental agencies, chemical industries, trade associations and the like.

If the story isn't a crisis, then a reporter has time to step back and look at the overall shape of the story. Does it involve political decisions? Specific industries or businesses? Specific chemicals or industrial processes? A reporter

needs to list out all these aspects and ensure that in the heat of following specific leads and sources, he or she doesn't forget to go back and get the multiple perspectives that will shed light on the story.

Most reporters are likely to have some sense of how to get information from politicians, government agencies and businesses. But getting information about technical subjects is much more difficult. Few reporters are trained in the sciences (indeed, in barroom talk many report proudly that they passed their college science courses only by the skin of their teeth). Even if they are, the specific chemistry or technical processes involved in a given story are probably substantially different from whatever the reporter studied in school.

This means reporters have to choose between learning the science themselves or asking experts to interpret it for them.

Learning the science is clearly an option, especially if the topic is one the reporter will be dealing with for an extended period. Data collected by Sharon Dunwoody and Byron Scott nearly 20 years ago suggests that more than 85 percent of scientists are willing to work with journalists to help them understand the technical issues behind a story, with only 10 percent of the scientists viewing such activities as a “necessary evil” rather than enthusiastically.

Moreover, with the rise of information access tools like on-line databases, the World Wide Web, and E-mail, journalists can get to the journals and the textbooks that provide basic introductions to nearly any technical subject. In a regular column in its newsletter, the Society of Environmental Journalists offers “tools” for reporters, such as guides to journals that any good environmental journalist should be using regularly. Even if the goal is simply to prepare questions for asking an expert,

getting scientific information is now easier than ever.

But, journalism being journalism, reporters need live sources. Real people, who will provide real quotes. And that leads reporters smack into two problems. First, finding the experts. And second, understanding why they never agree with each other.

The first problem is relatively easy to solve. Most universities today have public information offices with ready access to local researchers who can provide specific technical information, or references to colleagues with the nec-



Cornell University Photocopy; photo by Charles Hershovitz

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essary information. The public information officers or the local researchers can provide links to professional societies and other national groups that provide technical information.

Moreover, at least two nationwide referral services provide contacts. The Media Resource Service (1-800-223-1730), now run by the scientific honor society Sigma Xi, has a database of about 30,000 scientists who have said they'd be glad to help journalists working on stories. When a journalist calls, the MRS matches up the journalist's need with the available experts. They call the scientist to be sure he or she is available, then provide the phone number to the journalist.

ProfNet (1-800-PROFNET [1-800-776-3638] or 1-516-941-3736, fax 1-516-689-1425, E-mail profnet@vyne.com or 73163.1362@compuserve.com, www.vyne.com/profnet/) offers more people but less screening. Journalists send in their queries by phone, fax, or E-mail. Twice a day, ProfNet sends a list of new queries by E-mail to public information officers at hundreds of institutions around the country and the world. If the PIO's think they have an appropriate source, they contact the journalists directly.

The questions a reporter might ask a source will, of course, depend on the story. Many scientific stories involve numbers, and so environmental journalists need to be ready to deal with statistics, probabilities, quantities, and other quantitative data (see sidebar, "News and Numbers"). They also need to ask about who supports a scientist's work, where it has been published, who has reviewed it.

These are relatively straightforward questions. Getting the sources and getting them to provide basic information may not be the problem. But getting too much information may be, especially because scientific information doesn't come in neat little packages. Although the aura of science in our society is often that it provides "Truth," that truth often comes via a tortuous process of tentative conclusions, consensus judgments, limited contexts and other constraints that make scientists

News and Numbers

Any scientific or technical story will eventually deal with numbers, especially statistics and probabilities. In "News And Numbers" (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), veteran Washington Post science writer Victor Cohn takes reporters through the key questions they should ask, including:

- How do you know? Have you done a study? What is the evidence?
- What kind of study was it? Was there a systematic research plan or design? Was it an observational, experimental, or case study?
- What specific question or hypothesis did you set out to answer or test?
- Are you presenting preliminary data or something fairly conclusive? If the result is not conclusive, what kinds of further studies should be done?
- How many cases did you study? Were there enough to provide statistical power? What are the margins of error on your conclusions?
- How long of a period does your study cover? Why should we believe that period represents what happens in Nature?
- Are there other possible explanations for the data you're presenting?
- Has the data been peer reviewed? Has it appeared in the scientific literature? Where? If not, why not? ■

extraordinarily unwilling to make definite statements about what is or is not risky.

These scientists are not willfully trying to stymie the journalist's need for a dramatic quote that says, "Yes,

that's a problem!" But unlike lawyers, politicians and business people whose careers depend on the ability to make a public stand for a particular position or product, scientists are socialized into a system that rewards consensus judgments about what work is valuable, what conclusions are supported by the work of others, what degree of deference must be accorded to collaborators and even sometime competitors.

In addition, many environmental problems involve technical issues about which consensus hasn't been reached. Yes, it is true that a United Nations advisory body involving more than 1,000 scientists has concluded that global warming is a real problem. But it is equally true that the process of producing a consensus document from 1,000 people has left many individuals unhappy with particular pieces of it.

And most environmental problems—the dangers of specific chemicals, the environmental damage caused by specific industrial processes, the ecological precariousness of specific species—rely on far less systematic processes of attaining consensus. Scientific consensus often means that the people who have spent the most time on the problem have found that they agree on a model or a conclusion—but if someone who wasn't part of that community comes in and begins asking new questions from new perspectives, the consensus may fall apart with the arrival of new voices.

Perhaps the best example is the "environmental backlash" of the early 1990's, when Keith Schneider of The New York Times, Boyce Rensberger of The Washington Post and others began to write stories in which individual scientists questioned the prevailing wisdom about dioxins and global environmental change. While the specific details of some stories have been challenged, the underlying controversies developed because the scientific process includes opportunities for credible, informed voices to present new evidence and new interpretations.

Many times, however, the new voices are ill-informed or limited in their own perspectives. They aren't credible, at least not within the scientific commu-

nity. Now the conventions of journalism enter in. Journalists tell stories, and as any junior-high-school English teacher can tell you, stories require conflict. Journalism textbooks regularly list "conflict" as one definition of "the news." So having two opposing sources creates an instant story.

Unfortunately, the image of "opposing" camps, built into many political stories, is often a poor way of representing the more complex conflicts in scientific communities.

Nor can a journalist simply say, "Well, I'll take the more credible source." Credibility is often precisely the issue that scientists are arguing about, and the arguments are neither easy to balance nor easy to present in stories. Some issues may involve the source of new data, or the methodological techniques used to analyze the data. Other issues may involve the choices among parallel but not overlapping sets of data.

On global warming, for example, scientists use a variety of data sources. Some data sets go back more than 100 years; others are more recent and more precise. Different scientists, in the proper and appropriate exercise of their professional judgment, put different weights on the different data sets in shaping their opinions on whether recent changes in global climate have been caused by human actions.

In practice, scientists may challenge the credibility of the data, questioning how the data have been gathered. Or they may challenge the credibility of the researchers, questioning how the data have been presented.

All this argument does not mean that scientists don't ultimately discover the "truth," or at least reliable, robust knowledge on which we can take actions in a world governed by nature. But when journalists have to prepare stories on environmental issues, they are often dealing with areas of science where the knowledge isn't yet robust, and where reasonable people can disagree.

All this conflict leads to uncertainty for the journalist, who must convert these arguments into brief, clear, decisive statements—on deadline.

No one has found a magic bullet solution to this problem. But it leads me back to my lead: no matter how

Tools

No list of reference books, journals, or other sources will ever be complete or comprehensive. But Janet Raloff, environment and policy editor at *Science News*, gave a list of her favorite journals in the Summer 1995 issue of *SEJournal*, the newsletter of the Society of Environmental Journalists:

- *Ambio* offers review-ish reports on environmental issues of international concern, often with a developing-world emphasis—from deforestation and acid deposition, to heavy metal contamination of estuaries and effects of chemical contamination on wildlife communities. Published by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Box 50005, S-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden, ph (+46) 8-15-47-44, fax (+46) 8-16-62-51.
- The *American Journal of Epidemiology* regularly carries articles linking a host of diseases to occupational settings, indoor air contaminants, EMFs, and industrial air pollutants. Published by Johns Hopkins University, Candler Bldg. Ste. 840, 111 Market Pl., Baltimore, Md. 21202, ph (410) 223-1600, fax (410) 223-1620.
- *American Journal of Public Health* is especially good for covering effects of childhood lead exposures, smoking and environmental tobacco

smoke and pesticide exposures. Published by American Public Health Association, 1015 15th St., NW, Washington D.C. 20005, ph (202) 789-5600.

- *Environmental Health Perspectives* reports studies linking a truly diverse range of environmental contaminants to health. Published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, PO Box 12233, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709, ph (919) 541-3360, fax (919) 541-0273.

- *Environmental Science and Technology* offers not only peer-reviewed air and water pollution analyses, but also studies describing novel technologies to control pollution. Published by American Chemical Society, 1155 16th St., NW, Washington D.C. 20036, ph (202) 872-4451, fax (202) 872-4370.

- *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology* serves as the premier vehicle for new data on the health effects of dioxins, PCBs and a number of other toxic substances. Published by Academic Press, 6277 Sea Harbor Dr., Orlando, Fla. 32887-4900. Editorial office is 525 B St., Ste. 1900, San Diego, Calif. 92101-4495, ph (619) 699-6469, fax (619) 699-6859.

trustworthy the source, check it out! Reporters need to find as many sources as they can, in order to understand the sources of the conflict. They need to ask questions that will help them understand what is common knowledge, what is consensus judgment, what is agreed-on but controversial, and what is just one possible way of understanding the world around them.

Then, when writing their stories, journalists need to convey the complexity to their audience. Simple "he said, she said" stories rarely work for presenting complex information. Reporters need to say which scientists are perceived as more credible, and why. They need to explain why they have chosen to present information from sources that other sources call "crackpot," or "bad science." They need to tell the audience what the fault lines are in the story. Is it the science? Or the values that guide the scientific questions that different camps have asked? Or the values that politicians have imposed on technical issues on which scientists agreed? Or the alignment between some political perspectives and some scientific questions?

To put the answers to these questions in a story, journalists need a sense of judgment. They have to be willing to take a position that runs counter to a journalist's training as a mere "reporter" of what other people say. When two reputable politicians slug it out over a local tax structure or social policy, there likely isn't a "right" answer. In science, too, there may be no right answer. The responsible environmental writer has to be willing to take sides, to tell the reader explicitly: "Fred Mayer says that global warming isn't happening, but few scientists agree with him—and here's why. His data is selective, his interpretations wildly optimistic, his assumptions highly unlikely."

Now the journalist runs the risk of being identified as an "advocate," something even more anathema to most journalists than taking a side.

In the end, gathering the information for environmental stories may be a lot of work. It may also be substantially easier than presenting that information in coherent, responsible ways to the public. ■

Why Important Stories Are Underreported

BY JOHN D. GRAHAM
AND PAMELA R. DZIUBAN

It is no secret that some environmental risks receive more ink than others. No one can dispute the necessity to set priorities in covering environmental problems. If the most serious environmental risks also had the most "story potential," then elected officials and policymakers might be well served by setting priorities based on the weight of the headlines. Yet there is a growing body of evidence that environmental reporting does not target the most serious risks, which may be a factor contributing to a misallocation of resources in the field of environmental protection.

In recent years a variety of speculative (or even dubious) risk claims have garnered widespread publicity: the possibility that children can develop leukemia from living near electric power lines, the possibility that women can develop breast cancer from ingesting minute quantities of pesticide residues on food, and the possibility that the rise of testicular cancer (and the supposed fall in sperm counts) is attributable to the growing use of estrogenic chemicals. The explosion of stories about these matters has arguably distracted public attention from a much more subtle, yet important, development: an emerging scientific consensus that human activities are inducing changes in global climate patterns.

Although a 1994-1996 NEXIS search reveals that global climate change received slightly more news coverage than several of these speculative risks, it is the authors' opinion that the quantity and quality of coverage of global climate change remain disproportionately relative to the risk that it poses. Why should reporters provide substantial coverage of, and have a sustained interest in, such a long-term issue?

Global climate change (e.g., global warming) results from certain atmospheric gases that absorb energy reflected off the earth's surface, thereby trapping heat and insulating the earth like a blanket. The most common greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides, and CFCs. Although most of these gases are emitted from natural sources, human activity such as fossil fuel combustion and deforestation has greatly increased their levels in the environment. Scientists estimate that if emissions of these gases continue at their historic rates, the global average temperature will increase by 2-5 °C. Such temperature increases could lead to additional large-scale changes, such as a rise in sea level,

changes in precipitation patterns, and alterations in agricultural production and forestry.

Although we do not know with any precision what the long-term consequences of global climate change will be, it is suspected that the speed of climate change will influence the success (and cost) of human adaptation. Natural climate fluctuations tend to occur very slowly over time, and even the rising rates of climate change observed in past decades are not enough to illustrate noticeable effects. Uncertainty about the timing and consequences of climate change has led many scientists to rank global warming as one of the most serious environmental problems facing the world today.



HMS MEDIA SERVICES; PHOTO BY LIZA GREEN

John D. Graham is Professor of Policy and Decision Sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health, where he teaches the methods of risk analysis and benefit-cost analysis. Professor Graham's primary research objective is to distinguish public policies that can save lives and reduce injury or chronic disease at a reasonable cost. As a scholar, he is perhaps best known for Harvard's "Lifesaving Priorities Project," which produced a computerized database on the relative costs and effectiveness of 500 lifesaving policies in medicine, injury prevention and toxin control.



HMS MEDIA SERVICES PHOTO BY FRANK D'AGLIANO

Pamela R. Dziuban is a doctoral candidate in the department of Environmental Health, program in Environmental Science and Risk Management, at the Harvard School of Public Health. She has past experience as a research associate conducting socioeconomic impact assessments of a high-level nuclear waste repository, and as an environmental health educator regarding Superfund sites and hazardous substances. Her personal interests include reading, scuba diving, kayaking, and hiking.

So why do the priorities of environmental reporters seem to differ from the priorities of risk analysts?

One theory is that reporters simply do not understand the science behind environmental risks. Although more scientifically literate reporters would certainly be helpful, it would not necessarily solve the story-selection problem. In fact, our experience with environmental reporters is that once they focus on an issue, they are quite effective at cutting through technical complexities and striking at the heart of the matter.

Another theory is that the behavior of reporters is governed by the never-ending drive to expose something new and unique. This implies that a "risk-of-the-month" approach to reporting is more successful than a sustained approach to covering complicated issues, such as global climate change. While there may be some merit to this theory, it is also obvious that sustained reporting does occur on some environmental risks. The Natural Resources Defense Council, for example, has been incredibly successful at focusing the attention of reporters on certain hazards, such as eating pesticide residues on foods, even though the associated risks with these hazards are small and speculative.

This suggests another theory, one held by many paranoid industrialists. Aren't environmental reporters "captured" by organized environmentalists? This conspiratorial notion simply does not comport with our experience teaching journalists about risk. Environmental reporters are an intensely competitive and independent lot, a group that has developed a healthy dose of skepticism about advocacy since the Alar and dioxin scares of the 1980's. Besides, many organized environmentalists are deeply concerned about global warming, but have not yet succeeded in capturing the imagination of the public on this issue.

Still another theory is that environmental reporters *reflect* public sentiments about risk, more than they inform or shape them. Risk-perception specialists will tell you that people often respond to risk information based on "outrage factors," not the probabil-

ity or severity of danger. Involuntary risks of a dreadful disease such as cancer, particularly when children or other "vulnerable" groups are at stake, tends to trigger public concern and perhaps the attention of reporters. While there is something to this theory, individual behaviors such as smoking and having breast implants have also been high-profile topics in the media.

In order to better understand why some serious environmental risks don't make it "big" in the media, it is instructive to consider global climate change. Here is a risk issue with substantial scientific backing, potentially profound ramifications for the future of mankind, and a prominent cheerleader in the vice presidency of the United States. Yet surveys indicate that the American people feel no sense of urgency about this matter and do not understand the difference between global warming and other hazards, such as stratospheric ozone depletion. In addition, many environmental reporters seem to cover this topic in a dutiful fashion only.

The lesson here perhaps is that some environmental risks require more creativity and persistence on the part of reporters than do others. This is particularly true if the public is to understand these risks and take them seriously, that is, with an appropriate sense of urgency.

Why is this extra effort required? Again, consider the case of global warming. If it does occur, temperature changes will come about very slowly, with few visible signs that can be readily attributed to specific human activities. Moreover, people are more in tune with their community than with the planet, which means that reporters have a formidable translation problem. This issue has few villains (or everyone's a villain), and it is difficult to see any cheap and easy solutions. We live in a world that is deeply dependent on low-cost fossil fuels for things like electricity use, and no one is eager to tinker with the lifestyles that we have all come to appreciate.

On a more optimistic note, reporters can take some pragmatic steps toward combating the tendency to mirror or shape the public syndrome of paranoia and neglect about risk. Keeping a

personal tab on what risks have been covered recently, and comparing this to what risks are the most serious, is a useful form of discipline. Stories about the obstacles scientists face (and sometimes overcome) can also be made more interesting if the human side of scientific inquiry is expressed. For important risks that are hard to cover effectively, such as global climate change, reporters need a gentle, yet firm, reminder to make the extra effort. The tendency to concentrate on what people want to hear (or fear), rather than on what they *need* to hear, is one trait of politicians that reporters should avoid emulating.



Michael Gullone

Richard Manning Archer-Daniels-Midland

We have this idea of the American farmer, the stout yeoman out there doing good things. Well, the fact of the matter is that growing corn is one of the worst things we do in this country. It is probably more damaging to the environment than logging ever thought of being. It certainly destroyed more native ecosystems. Archer-Daniels-Midland makes its money by figuring out new ways to use corn to hide a corn surplus and it buys off our politicians in the process. And in the process of buying off our politicians—and this is almost literally true—it buys off things like National Public Radio and like McNeil/Lehrer and most of the Sunday morning talk shows. And no one really questions what goes with that process.—Richard Manning, author of "Grassland," on the Alex Jones radio show "On the Media," August 25, 1996.

Hispanic Media Neglect

BY ANGELA SWAFFORD

Look at the contrast between the Hispanic media in Latin America and in Florida when it comes to the environment:

When a rare disease began killing the eucalyptuses around Bogota's residential neighborhoods, *El Tiempo*, Colombia's largest daily newspaper, launched a massive information campaign about the causes and effects of the die-off. Not content with front-page color photos and voluminous technical information, it followed the stories up with a special Sunday magazine on urban vegetation and its importance ecologically, economically and socially. And finally, with an editorial questioning the city's ability to channel the money to do something about the problem.

Each year, when the entire population of Atlantic humpback whales migrates from its northern home to the banks of Navidad and La Plata off Samaná, Dominican Republic, the local press goes over the rituals of educating people about their national living treasure. Working in conjunction with local scientists and guests from the International Wildlife Coalition, a New England-based organization, many networks and radio stations spread the word that whales were to be left alone.

And when Bolivian journalists became concerned in January that their general inexperience in environmental writing would limit their ability to cover the important December 1996 Summit of Sustainable Development in Santa Cruz, they asked the United States Information Agency for an expert to give them some training. In September I was offered the job and discovered reporters willing to take on the challenge of learning, editors ready to devote extra column inches to local issues, and producers accepting the thought of al-

lowing people to specialize in environmental journalism.

Now look at Miami's Hispanic media performance during the Summit of the Americas in Miami, in 1994. News editors at *El Nuevo Herald*, *The Miami Herald's* Spanish supplement with a 130,000 Sunday circulation—the largest Spanish-language daily in the United States—systematically refused to allow me or anyone else to cover the array of environmental issues that were discussed by the leaders of the Americas. In their opinion, that was not the real focus of the summit. As the paper's self-appointed environmental writer and columnist, I had to dig into my bag of tricks to convince them that treaties such as GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur) were directly linked to the environment and therefore merited coverage. In the end I managed to get 25 inches on page 10A.

Months later, when the sea started swallowing the best beaches of Miami due to poor beach management, Hispanic news media in the city turned their back on the story—even though the erosion was occurring in neighborhoods of wealthy Hispanics. *El Nuevo* did not devote an inch to the problem. Univision and Telemundo (the two largest Spanish television networks, which air nationally and throughout Latin America) failed to air even a minute to this problem, which could affect not just tourism but also directly touches the interests of the powerful Latin Builders Association. Yet the story was superbly treated in *The Miami Times*, a provocative weekly tabloid, which is picking up where both *The Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald* are lagging in terms of investigative, tough environmental journalism.

I could go on. The list of failures in the country where environmental reporting was born is long.

Hispanic media in this city, and I would dare say in the whole country, give priority to practically every other issue. Besides an occasional story or TV special on some topic that truly falls from its own weight, Miami's Hispanic community—specifically those individuals who do not speak English—live in an information desert with respect to the environmental problems that affect their neighborhoods, a community of more than one million.

Nine years after trying to make up for this need by stealing time from my former features beat, which most certainly did not include environment, I became the sole green voice of Florida's



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Hispanic community. (I no longer work for El Nuevo.)

What is wrong with the Hispanic environmental journalism in the United States? Why are media in Latin countries doing a better job than we are here? Don't we have all the resources that we need and more, compared to nations where even an extra photocopy is a forbidden luxury?

I think the answer is very simple. The press is just reflecting what is going on in our society as a whole: in the United States, green has a whiter shade. From the corporate to the governmental to the not-for-profit sectors, no other arena so relevant to the entire human population is less ethnically diverse than our environmental movement. And nowhere is this collective complexion more pallid than in Dade County, Florida.

Most of our activists, members of the Everglades Coalition, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Miami Clean Water Action, are Anglos. Very few are Hispanics. And practically zero are black. This in a county that is 49 percent Hispanic and 20 percent black.

One would think that environment is a primary concern in minority communities, which are the eternal victims of soil, water and air degradation and the targeted recipients of toxic wastes. Why, then, is there such an indifference?

In part, the answer lies in the communities themselves.

They are worried about a lot of other things. Such as education and civil rights. They simply look upon the environment as a luxury. An added bonus. First comes making it: surviving economically. Getting a home. Learning the language. Growing roots.

Yet many Miami Hispanics—at least most Cubans and Colombians—have already moved beyond economic hardship. They are second generations who have progressed to the point where they can be concerned with other things.

Then what's stopping them? Two words: exile politics.

Exile politics has distracted Hispanics from the environment as well as from many other social causes. This

worrying about Fidel Castro, in the case of the Cubans, reflects a lack of commitment to Miami as a city. Many Hispanics feel that they are here as guests, as transients, as observers and not participants. They don't feel that Miami is theirs. This is just a second home, and as such is not a home of their first choice. Even though many of them (especially Cubans) have become American citizens and have gained political clout in Washington.

Second, culture: though educated Latinos are fully aware of environmental issues, this isn't to say that Latin American immigrants have a tradition of ecological consciousness in their homelands. Just as it took the United States a century of hammering these values into people's minds, the institutionalized lack of concern in Latin America has filtered down into society.

Now if minority communities have been slow to respond to environmental issues, environmentalists and the media have done little to increase what interest there is.

People who fish for shrimp from the bridges and piers of Biscayne Bay, for example, are mostly Cubans. These people are relating to the bounty of the bay directly, much more than members of the Audubon Society will ever be. And yet, they are less aware of the bay's problems than other Miamians. Since they do not speak English, the meager coverage in *The Herald* cannot benefit them. They can keep on fishing in ignorance, because they certainly won't get their information in Spanish, either.

As more and more people come to live in South Florida, the protection of the environment has become an issue of urban quality of life. And the definition of the environment becomes the environment of our neighborhoods and urban landscapes.

Ninety seven percent of editors and producers I talk with fail to realize that environment is not just alligators in the Everglades. I get tired of explaining that substandard housing, asbestos, lead in the water and skin cancer are environmental issues. The environment deals not just with egrets but also with our cities and our garbage bills.

One of my latest tricks was not to

mention the dread word "environment" at all when selling a story. I had to disguise it in several ways. One of my successes was a story on the average amount of rainfall over the very Hispanic city of Hialeah. For certain atmospheric reasons, it simply rains more in Hialeah than in Miami. And for geological and political reasons, the city floods every time it rains.

A very interesting phenomenon I experienced with this and other stories was the editor's fear with respect to the technical language. Sentences such as "the absorption capacity of the soil," made her fingers freeze over the keyboard and want to change the whole story.

If Hispanic news media hardly cover the environmental news, they care even less about features. Not one single show in radio or TV is devoted, even in part, to environmental affairs. As far as *El Nuevo*, they had me. I used to write monthly long features and still write bi-weekly opinion-page columns. But other media have turned me and other columnists who are not journalists down because of "economic pressures."

The bottom line for Hispanic media is that, like all media, they are out to make money. If their audiences prefer to read, watch or listen to stories about Castro or narcotraffickers or Hialeah's mayor, this is what they will get.

"You can forget about a weekly page devoted to the environment," answered Alberto Ibarguen, *El Nuevo's* publisher, to my pleas. In the meantime, local reporters have to write two stories a day on certain Miami neighborhoods where *El Nuevo* needs penetration. And these stories must go on page 1A, even if they do not merit it, just because readers must get the message that their paper is trying to reach them. You want to take a week to research a story? You must be out of your mind, or too daring a reporter to even try.

Other media, such as Radio Caracol, one of the most respected stations, owned by Colombians, shows a certain interest, and has even agreed to a weekly small program—"ad honorem," of course. And Channel 23, Univision's

network local station, has decided that what Hispanics want are soap operas.

Yet for all the despair, there are newcomers, like the budding CBS TeleNoticias, a 24-hour news channel in Spanish, aired all over the United States, Spain and Latin America. Recently purchased by CBS, the network has announced plans to include features and interviews. Will producers have the clarity of mind to see that environmental coverage is not just a sound practice but economically viable, too?

Nine years after carving a niche for myself, I can say that people here associate me with the environment, even if they do not know what the word means. During my last two years at El Nuevo I could already feel a stir of curiosity and mild preoccupation about environmental issues in this community: people began writing letters. They liked the opinion columns and wanted to learn more. "My kid just emptied his aquarium into our backyard canal. Is this bad?" Or, "Why are the palm trees on my block dying and not those three blocks down the road?"

I know the greatest hope for wider environmental coverage and participation in the Hispanic communities of the United States rests with the youngest generations. Not just at university levels, but high schools and grade schools as well. I have seen inner city kids who have never been out of their neighborhoods marvel at nature's wonders during occasional field trips.

If we don't make them aware, we can't hope to make them care. These same kids might be tomorrow's city editors or producers. And while this challenge is there for the taking, working journalists must also think of educating their parents.

In order to achieve a darker shade of green. ■

Slow Move to Internet World

By RUSSELL CLEMINGS

When John McQuaid, Mark Schleifstein and Bob Marshall of The New Orleans Times-Picayune tackled an ambitious project last year on the startling decline of the world's fisheries, they were determined to take a high-tech approach. It wasn't easy.

In a world where even the lowliest office clerks have personal computers at their desks, Schleifstein, the newspaper's environmental writer, had only the usual antiquated text-editing terminal. To use the Internet or analyze data in a spreadsheet, he had to trudge down the hall to another room, sit in front of one of a half-dozen stand-alone computers, print out his results, then carry a stack of paper back to the newsroom. By the time the project was over, his desk was a fire hazard.

McQuaid meanwhile ran up huge shipping bills sending documents by the boxful from Washington, where he was based, to New Orleans, where the project was managed, written, edited and packaged. Scanning those documents into a computer and then shipping them on a disk or over the Internet wasn't an option for him.

It's a sad state of affairs, but sadder still is that reporters at The Times-Picayune are better equipped and trained to use computers and related technology than peers elsewhere. Almost a decade after computer-assisted stories first swept the major journalism awards, the state of the digital art in many newsrooms still falls short of the average insurance office. For a variety of reasons, many newsroom managers have been slow to grasp the potential rewards of applying computers to every beat in the newsroom, choosing instead to make it the exclusive domain of a handful of experts.

Few beats suffer more as a result than the environment. After 25 years,

the Environmental Protection Agency has a mixed record of protecting the environment but a very strong one at producing data. The same is true of local, state and federal environmental agencies. But with a few notable exceptions, such as EPA's Toxic Release Inventory of chemical emissions, little of this data gets serious treatment from the news media, largely because few environmental reporters are equipped, in hardware or by training, to use it.

It's time for change. While it once made sense to relegate computers to the specialists, that's not the case any



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more. Five years ago, navigating the Internet meant mastering an abbreviated, cryptic language full of confusing terms like "mget" and "ls." Now, with the advent of the World Wide Web and sophisticated desktop programs for E-mail and file transfers, using the Internet is mostly a point-and-click affair. Where data analysis once involved wrestling with reels of nine-track tape, now much of the same data is available on CD-ROM or via the Web. The Census Bureau says it won't even be selling tapes next time around; it will just put all of its data up on the Web with an interface to allow users to extract whatever they need.

As mysterious and magical as the computer once may have seemed, today it should be seen for what it really is. Like the telephone, tape recorder and fax machine before it, the computer is simply a tool that brings greater efficiency to the same work that reporters have always done—the hunting, gathering, digestion and interpretation of information and its presentation in understandable form.

Computers excel at the one task that distinguishes journalism from other pursuits—connecting the dots, or finding previously unrecognized patterns in information already gathered by somebody else, often a bureaucracy. Where the best reporters once closeted themselves with boxes of musty documents to ferret out the truth from a sea of biases, their successors now hunch over keyboards and coax secrets out of masses of ones and zeros. The reasons have less to do with journalism than with the way society in general now manages information, relying overwhelmingly on computers instead of paper. When asked why reporters should use computers, Elliott Jaspin, who founded what has now evolved into the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, used to paraphrase Willie Sutton: "Because that's where the information is."

But on the environment beat especially, computers are as much an opportunity as a necessity. By applying technology to time-tested journalistic techniques, a handful of environmental reporters has been able to produce

dramatic stories that uncovered new threats, shed fresh light on old problems, and sometimes turned conventional wisdom upside down.

In Cleveland, Plain Dealer reporter Dave Davis used a simple dial-up connection to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to download thousands of records, then teased them into showing that sewage treatment plants across the country were routinely accepting dangerous amounts of radioactive waste from universities, hospitals and other businesses. "The environment is one of the best beats for this kind of stuff," Davis says, "because [environmental regulators] track everything by computer."

When the issue of environmental racism was just starting to get attention, The National Law Journal helped separate fact from myth by merging EPA enforcement records with census data. The analysis showed that, in fact, polluters in minority communities typically faced lower fines and more lenient cleanup requirements than their counterparts in white-majority areas.

Here in California, three of us who work for McClatchy's Bee newspapers analyzed several million pesticide use reports and other data. When we were done, we had demonstrated that the greatest potential health threat from the use of those chemicals was on the densely populated east side of the Central Valley, not the near-vacant west side, as most Californians had previously been assured.

Had Schleifstein and McQuaid used traditional approaches for their eight-day fisheries series, they might have canvassed universities, regulatory agencies and advocacy groups for experts who could talk intelligently about the issues. But Schleifstein chose a more efficient method. He began by monitoring more than a dozen Internet E-mail discussion groups, or "lists," as they are commonly called. Subscribers on these lists send messages among themselves; each message is broadcast to every subscriber, which makes it easy for outsiders or "lurkers" to follow the discussion.

Schleifstein found a couple of lists

that seemed to be promising: one on marine biology, another on aquaculture. For a few weeks, he simply read the messages that flew back and forth among the scientists on each list. Eventually, he started posting questions of his own, always taking care to explain that he was a reporter working on a story. He was astounded at the responses he received; the scientists he reached seemed grateful for the chance to assist him. "It was amazing," he said. "Not only were they eager to help, but they bent over backward to get things to us."

That wasn't the only use for computers that The Times-Picayune team found on its project. Instead of traveling to a research library and spending hours rifling through the pages of scientific journals, the reporters went onto the Web or used the Nexis service to retrieve the same papers in digital form. Instead of relying on an economist to provide them with an analysis of world fish prices, Schleifstein and McQuaid produced their own on a personal computer running the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program.

In the end, what they turned out was anything but a simple "look what we did with a computer" series. In fact, unless you saw the accompanying editor's note, you would never even know that the reporters used a computer. But their use of the technology, while subtle, still had an important effect on their work: it gave them a firmer factual foundation to work from, and helped them focus their subsequent shoe-leather reporting on the most promising and relevant leads. It also put a wealth of significant detail at their fingertips—detail that sometimes buttressed their conclusions and, at other times, simply improved their writing.

Once, Schleifstein was struggling to polish some paragraphs about a Norwegian fishing village, a place that he had never visited but nevertheless wanted his readers to visualize. In another era, he might have gone to the library and looked for a photo in a book, or he might have interviewed someone who had been to the village. Most likely, he would have just written

around it and felt unsatisfied with the result. But this time, Schleifstein went onto the World Wide Web and linked to a Norwegian government tourism site, where he found full-color pictures that allowed him to write convincingly about the village's deep fjords and rocky sea cliffs.

Schleifstein looks forward to next spring, when *The Times-Picayune* plans

to replace its ancient mainframe text-editing system with a PC-based publishing system. After that is done, reporters there will be able to use the Internet or run basic desktop computer programs without taking a walk down the hall. But at many other news organizations, that is not the case. They remain mired in the technology of a generation ago, showing little interest in taking advan-

tage of the efficiencies that desktop computers can bring their reporters.

This reluctance may be rooted less in money—at a few thousand dollars apiece, PCs are almost trivial expenses in newsrooms that pay their workers 30 or 50 or 70 thousand dollars per year and spend millions on presses, ink and paper—than in the fact that what computers bring to the reporting process is often not obvious or easy to measure, and may not be visible at all unless you know what to look for. Hence the widespread and unfortunate tendency to devote computers solely to big splashy projects, where their impact is easier to see, instead of using them routinely in all kinds of stories.

Moreover, some managers seem to believe that computer-assisted reporting is actually a distraction from shoe-leather reporting; that, given a chance, many reporters would prefer to hide behind their cathode-ray tubes all day instead of going out to the street where the “real” stories are. Some reporters, especially those who have only just discovered computers, play into that trap by forgetting the cardinal rule of computer-assisted reporting: that the computer itself is not the story, but merely a tool for finding and reporting the story. But after the novelty wears off, the computer becomes less obvious and more ubiquitous in the reporter's work. And at that point, the computer begins to fulfill its promise.

As routinely as reporters of another generation shuffled through envelopes full of yellowed clippings as part of their standard routine, so soon will reporters of this generation spend a few minutes at the keyboard as they plunge into a new story. For environmental reporters, this may mark the beginning of a golden age. By applying technology to the complex subjects they cover, they can break free of the dueling-quotes style of reporting that has made the beat so susceptible to accusations of bias in the past. Readers will be better served when environmental reporters can stop writing stories that focus on the conflict and start writing stories based on facts they developed independently—with the help of their computers. ■



Laguna Beach fire, which began in a dry canyon, burned quickly toward expensive Emerald Bay homes in 1994.

David Green/Russell/Bettc. Outlines

How to Search the Web for Information

The Society of Environmental Journalists, which I serve as a board member and Web page coordinator, is trying to infuse its membership with computer skills, recognizing as we do that of all reporting specialties, environmental writing is uniquely positioned to benefit from the new technology.

For the past four years, at our annual national conferences and occasional regional workshops, we've been striving to bring our members—many of whom have backgrounds in feature writing rather than hard news reporting—up to speed on computers and how they can improve environmental reporting. We've provided training in Internet use and other computer-assisted reporting skills, with technical help from the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting and financial support from many generous donors. To cite one example, our one-day regional workshop September 7 at Stanford University, co-sponsored by the Northern California Science Writers Association, attracted 80 people for lectures and hands-on training in database, spreadsheet and Internet use.

Our Web page contains a steadily growing collection of links to useful, authoritative sites on the Web. One challenge every new environmental reporter faces, for example, involves learning about a stupefying number of chemicals and their effects on human and ecological health. The SEJ Web site <<http://www.sej.org>> contains links to several sources of toxicological information, including one site <<http://ace.ace.orst.edu/info/extoxnet>> with more than 100 chemical briefing papers that have undergone a peer review process involving four major universities.

Similarly, by following a link to the new National Library for the Environment Web site <<http://www.cnie.org/>

<<http://www.eis.gov/>>, an environmental writer grappling with an unfamiliar issue can look up a Congressional Research Service report on the subject. The site contains more than 100 such reports on the environment, agriculture and natural resources. Eventually, it is supposed to include two other on-line components: "An Encyclopedia of the Environment," and "In Depth Issues in the Environment."

SEJ is generating similar content of its own, including the quarterly SEJournal, which is on line back to the Spring 1995 issue, and the TipSheet, a guide to upcoming environmental news, produced in cooperation with the National Safety Council's Environmental Health Center and the Radio and Television News Directors Association. The Environmental Health Center's own Web site <<http://www.caish.com/nsc/ehc/ehc.html>> is another excellent source of background information; besides copies of TipSheet it also includes the Environment Writer newsletter and a series of "chemical backgrounders."

Among other sites that can be reached through the SEJ server are several U.S. government sites that contain useful data: The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry <<http://atsdr1.atsdr.cdc.gov:8080/atsdrhome.html>> includes HazDat (a database of contaminants found at Superfund sites, searchable by geographical area), plus toxicological profiles of hazardous substances, public health statements concerning hazardous substances, and Frequently Asked Questions about chemicals and pesticides. The National Toxicology Program <<http://ntp-server.niehs.nih.gov/>> includes searchable lists of known and anticipated carcinogens and processes and other health and safety data on chemicals.

The Environmental Protection

Agency <<http://www.epa.gov/>>, while disorganized, still contains useful links to the catalog for EPA's internal library system, the full text of the agency information guide "Access EPA," and other useful resources, including Envirofacts, an effort to put five major EPA databases, including the Toxic Release Inventory, on line in searchable form. Much of the same data is on line in somewhat friendlier form at RTK-Net <[telnet://rtk.net](mailto:rtknet@rtk.net)>, run by an environmental group.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Web site <<http://www.nrc.gov/>> includes data on U.S. commercial nuclear power plants, including basic details about each plant and its design, SALP (Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance) reports, and the commission's "watch list" of troubled plants. Another NRC database, NUDOCS, contains even more detail, including indexes to the regulatory dockets for every U.S. commercial nuclear power plant. Access to NUDOCS can be arranged through NRC's public information office.

The Consortium for International Earth Science Information Network <<http://www.ciesin.org/>> is a non-profit established in 1989 by universities and other research organizations in response to a directive by Congress. Its site includes thematic guides to key environmental issues (including agriculture, human health, land use, and ozone depletion) and the full text of more than 140 international environmental agreements, plus a searchable catalog of other Internet environmental data. Envirolink <<http://envirolink.org/orgs/>>, another site sponsored by an environment group, is useful for its hundreds of links to sites operated by other environmental groups and its collection of environmental news briefs.—Russell Clemings.

Confabs at High Noon

The West You Haven't Heard About

BY HOWARD BERKES

Like many flatlanders, I grew up with romantic visions of the American West. My dreams transported me from the darkened bedroom of a Levittown, Pa. tract home to emerald forests and jagged mountains. Classmates uttered the name "Colorado" in reverent tones.

I once dated a girl from Colorado mostly because she was from Colorado. She was exotic and mysterious, like the West I longed to see.

Moving west in 1977, driving west and slowly skyward out of Nebraska, I encountered my first reality check—the steep highway outside Cheyenne, Wyoming. The climb to Laramie was too much for my Opel Manta. It coughed and sputtered and slowed to a creep.

For two days, I checked the car into and out of Cheyenne repair shops, then tried the steep highway again. The car strained in vain even though the gas pedal was flat to the floor. "Nope," the mechanic said, "nothin' wrong the car." He eyed me, though, as if I needed a tune-up. "You got to downshift," he

said. "Use that climbing gear. That itty-bitty car of yours does fine on those hills you got back East. But our hills are bigger. Get used to it."

It took me a while to learn the lesson. I had to leave my expectations behind and accept my new home on its terms. I wasn't in Kansas (my home once) anymore. I had a new place to learn and new people to learn from. Lots of journalists have not learned that lesson.

Seems simple enough. But the contemporary West is filled and filling with people trying to re-make the region in the images of the places they left behind. They plant bluegrass in Arizona and literally flood their lawns with water so the desert will seem more like "home." They build trophy homes in rural Colorado (or Idaho or Utah or New Mexico or Montana) as big as department stores, then either ignore their neighbors as they did in the city, or lecture them about zoning, grazing or other aspects of local life.

This is the one constant I've heard

over and over again in 15 years of reporting in the American West. "They don't listen," a retired miner and highway worker in Utah once told me. "They just talk, if they talk to us at all. They don't care about our way of life. How we've done things. What we've learned and think. And you reporters are the worst," he added.

Many reporters drop into the region for quick reporting trips, armed usually with clippings detailing the region's theme of the moment. Some of these "parachute reporters" seem armed with the romantic notions that filled my childhood nights. (I remember sitting in the office of an impatient and misty eyed colleague in Washington trying to convey what he wanted to do to mark the centennial of several Western states. "I want to say something about the land," he cried. "And the people. It's the people and the land!").

Some too easily accept the conventional wisdom they've read elsewhere. Two cases in point:

Much of the early reporting of the



NPR's Howard Berkes (r) with sea cucumber boatman Bill Sabin on Puget Sound near Port Townsend, Washington.

Howard Berkes has covered the interior west for National Public Radio since 1981. His work has garnered national awards for economic, spot news, feature and science reporting, including a 1986 investigative story (reported with NPR's Daniel Zwerdling) that provided the first detailed account of the attempt by Morton Thiokol engineers to block the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Born in Philadelphia, Berkes has lived in the Western U.S. for 20 years and is now based in Salt Lake City. He has trained reporters in more than a dozen workshops from Alaska to Florida and has been a guest faculty member at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies.

rise of the so-called wise-use movement in the West focused on a conservative fund-raiser in Washington state named Ron Arnold. Arnold had organized some regional gatherings of like-minded souls and he clearly articulated the frustrations and philosophies of those who believed environmentalists were strangling the economies of the rural West. Stories portrayed him as the wise-use guru spreading a new brand of anti-environmental fundamentalism throughout the region. Reporters sought conspiracy in his work, looking for funding from mining, ranching and timber companies and groups. (Some even established a tenuous link with the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. An associate of Ron Arnold, it turned out, had worked for a conservative organization funded by Moon.)

This reporting often dismissed the growing wise-use fervor as the product of Moonie and industry funding. Rural Westerners organizing rallies, lobbying Congress or simply crying out in anger and frustration in their living rooms, were merely dupes of greedy corporations. I joined the pack reporting on this, duly depicting Ron Arnold as the intellectual force behind the wise-use movement. But those of us who left the pack and explored this phenomenon on the lonely highways and dusty roads of the rural West, found something else as well. Few people had even heard of Ron Arnold. The term "wise use" was foreign (Ron Arnold says he made it up). Grassroots groups had been organizing on their own, driven by genuine fear and anger. We also found industry influence ("Thank god," I've been told over and over again, "we've got the industry money to help us. We're not ashamed of it. We welcome it."). But readers and listeners and viewers (not to mention environmental groups and government officials) couldn't begin to understand the true depth of this movement if they could simply dismiss it as a conspiracy.

Second case in point:

When Dick Carver appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, the nation was given a new image of the West. Angry. Defiant. "Welcome to Nevada's Nye County," the inside subhead went,

"whose angry residents are spearheading the region's charge against Washington."

Dick Carver is the rancher and county commissioner who fired up a bulldozer, aimed it at a U.S. Forest Service agent trying to stop him, and illegally cut a swath of new road in a Nevada canyon. This was clearly an act of defiance in a growing struggle for control of public lands in the West—a second "sagebrush rebellion" many call it. Carver was regularly portrayed as the symbolic, if not actual, leader of this rebellion.

This surprised sagebrush rebels in the rest of the West. Dick Carver, many felt, was leading their movement to ruin. He was taking a legal position that directly contradicted the arguments made by others in the movement. He was disowned by fellow Nevadans, including some of the leaders of the original sagebrush rebellion, who considered his actions and beliefs extreme. And he was a little loopy, displaying for CBS news cameras the threadlike transmitter in a \$100 bill, that he said allowed the feds to track his moves. He was even dismissed on the streets of Tonopah, the Nye County seat, by most of the people approached in my random, unscientific sampling of opinion.

Again, the focus on Carver leads to the dismissal and demonizing of a movement that is broader and more thoughtful than Dick Carver conveys. That appears to be the reason the Justice Department went after Carver and Nye County. They were easy targets for a winning lawsuit that gave the government more legal authority for its ownership and management of public lands.

Dick Carver and Ron Arnold and their actions and beliefs clearly warrant news coverage. But the focus on them and the extremism of their movements offer a skewed vision of the contemporary West. It must appear to outsiders as an angry and violent place filled with loopy rebels they'd best avoid.

Another colleague in Washington revealed this view in an on-air interview during the Freeman standoff and the arrest of the Unabomber suspect in Montana this Spring. "What's going on out there?" he asked me. The implication was clear: "Why are there so many

nuts out there?" I described the tolerant nature of rural Westerners. I should have also noted that I felt safer on any street or ranch road in the rural West than on the crime-prone streets outside the NPR studios in Washington, D.C., where guards escort NPR employees to the subway at night.

This isn't just an outside view. I told a reporter friend in Colorado once about a story in New Mexico. It involved the bitter atmosphere in Catron County, where real threats have chilled public land managers and environmentalists. But the reputation got a little carried away. "Isn't that where that environmentalist had her windows shot out?" my friend asked. He had just been told that by one of the state's leading environmental activists. "Her windows are boarded up now," he said. I called the target in question. She laughed. The windows were not boarded up. There hadn't been any gunfire. There had been a telephone threat, she said, though it didn't alarm her.

I wonder if the effectiveness of the Colorado activist (and others ready to accept such stories) is affected by the belief that some of the people he's dealing with are angry enough to shoot. Is the reporter's ability to be fair affected by this atmospheric baggage?

The focus on rancor distorts in other ways. Reporters traveling with presidential candidates during the 1992 elections portrayed the West as a region obsessed with environmental issues, especially grazing fees, mining law reform and logging of old-growth forests. The campaign trail in Colorado and New Mexico was littered with references to these issues. It appeared that that's what Western voters cared about.

But pollsters in the region reported something else entirely. Environment was not a big election issue for most Westerners. They cared about the same things everybody else cared about, crime and jobs. They didn't choose their presidential candidates (or most other candidates) based on environmental issues. In fact, pollsters say, while Westerners generally favor environmental protection, they don't like to see rural Westerners and towns suffer.

This is easily explained. Most West-



The Sacramento Bee/Jay Marnon

Bulldozers often damage areas of the Sierra when trees are dragged during logging season.

erners are urban creatures living in cities and towns with the same problems found everywhere else. They have the same concerns as other urban Americans. They may be more sensitive to environmental issues, given the vast magnificent landscapes around them, but that hasn't played much of a role in presidential politics. And there aren't enough rural Westerners, whose survival often depends on these issues, to make much of a political difference.

Yes, environmental issues trigger plenty of anger, occasional threats and rare acts of violence in the rural West (and the targets aren't always green). But is it all out war in America's outback?

In fact, peace is breaking out all over. A lot of the people who are supposed to be mortal enemies are actually talking to each other, sitting down over coffee, seeking common ground and searching for solutions. There's a whole lot of meeting going on in the West. Confabs at high noon. I know it sounds warm and fuzzy, but this is a good story, too.

Here are some examples:

- Ranchers and environmentalists in Gunnison County, Colorado, write their own proposal for grazing reform and spend weeks meeting with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. They have one goal overall. Encourage environmentally sound grazing without forcing ranchers out of business. Both groups cheer a float in the Fourth of July parade, which carries a banner exclaiming, "COWS NOT CONDOS."

- Ranchers in Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Utah and elsewhere begin to ask biologists, local business people, wildlife experts and even environmentalists to

help them manage their ranches. They set environmental and economic goals for the ranches, giving high priority to wildlife and water quality.

- County Commissioners and wilderness advocates in Utah abandon the entrenched positions of their colleagues and meet quietly, over tables covered with maps. They agree that some spectacular places need protection and that local people need jobs. They try to draw wilderness boundaries that address both needs.

- Loggers and sawmill operators in Utah form an association, with the help of environmentalists, in an attempt to develop markets for finished wood products. The effort is aimed at getting more value out of logs so fewer trees will be cut.

- Dozens of workshops across the West bring common enemies together and establish common ground. There's so much of this going on that professional facilitation is now a cottage industry.

- New alliances are springing up, bringing together business people, government officials, environmentalists, ranchers, miners, loggers—anybody with an interest in the land- and people-scape of the West. The Colorado-based Center for the New West counts two dozen such groups, from the Rockies to the Sierras to the Cascades.

- Timber companies, cranberry growers, tree-huggers, farmers, biologists and fishermen in Washington state are trying to cooperatively manage an entire watershed. They've organized a rural development bank to provide seed money for businesses that exploit the region's resources in environmentally sensitive ways.

- Students and teachers at a rural high school in Utah ignore the rhetoric of the present and look to the future by developing promising new businesses. Their success begins to shake some of the entrenched thinking in their town and neighboring communities.

Some of this friendliness hasn't worked. Some values can't be compromised. But Westerners are coming together more and more, despite the conventional wisdom about their threatening demeanor.

These are more complicated stories than the seductively simple tales of anger and defiance. It's harder to distinguish the victims from the oppressors, the good guys from the bad guys, the posey sniffers from the land rapers. It's no longer neat and tidy—the forces of greed vs. the forces of virtue. Nobody clearly owns the high moral ground.

That may make for more difficult story-telling, but that's what makes these stories great. They challenge the thinking of our listeners, readers and viewers. They shake their beliefs. They counter comfortable notions. They shed more light than heat.

These unexpected tales, combined with legitimate stories about discord and defiance, paint a truer picture of the American West, where black and white dissolves into shades of gray. And where no heroes or villains clearly ride off into the journalistic sunset. It just isn't that simple. For them or us. ■

Needed: More Sophisticated Legal Coverage

BY TOM TURNER

There is no environmental dispute so small, so large, so arcane, or so abstract that it won't eventually wind up in court, or so it seems. Not only are environmental organizations trooping to the courthouse in record numbers, but also property-rights defenders, more-access-to-the-wilderness groups, ranchers, oil interests, and timber companies are taking their gripes to the judiciary. This mixture of litigants puts a heavy responsibility on the news media, which must report, interpret and analyze these stories for their readers, listeners and viewers.

To begin with, who covers these stories? Sometimes the assignment will go to the environmental writer, sometimes the legal affairs correspondent, the business reporter, the science writer, or the political reporter. The way the stories turn out varies considerably, depending on which reporters are assigned to cover them.

Last August, for example, a story that ran in nearly every paper and on nearly every broadcast concerned a deal struck between Noranda, the Canada-based gold mining company; the Department of the Interior, and a group of environmental organizations. Noranda had agreed to abandon plans to reopen an old gold and silver mine just outside the boundary of Yellowstone National Park, which many feared would lead to pollution of streams that flow into the park, as an old, abandoned mine at the site has done for many decades.

Under the agreement, Noranda would receive \$65 million in federal property elsewhere and spend a third of it to clean up existing pollution at the site. The threat of further pollution of Yellowstone and vicinity would be eliminated. Everyone would come out ahead.

The reporters who covered the story were mainly the reporters who cover the president, who announced the deal in person, a campaign photo op inside the park.

The stories—most noticeably the ones that ran in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—omitted one important fact, however: the negotiations that led to the deal were the result of a Clean Water Act lawsuit brought by a dozen environmental organizations. A federal judge had found Noranda liable for thousands of violations of the law for past and continuing pollution at the old mine site. Penalties could have run as high as \$135 million. The company decided it would rather deal than fight.

The omission of any mention of the lawsuit was not unusual. No press account can hope to report all the details of a particular story. Yet the consensus of a random, unscientific survey taken for this article suggests that no one is altogether satisfied with the job the press does reporting on environmental law and environmental lawsuits. The reasons vary considerably.

"What I have to say after 26 years in Washington is that coverage [of environmental litigation] is very sparse nationally," said Philip Shabecoff, who wrote for *The New York Times* for more than 30 years, the last 14 as environmental correspondent. "When a case makes it to the Supreme Court the national press will notice, but then there's one story and a kiss goodbye. No follow-up. It dies after that. It's too bad—some of these cases are very important."

Others voice a more general and widespread observation that applies well beyond litigation. "It's the televisionization of the media," said

Dennis Pfaff, environmental correspondent for San Francisco's *Daily Journal*, a legal paper. "Legal is boring, government is boring, both are too complicated. The same is true of environmental stories: write a lead, quote one side, quote the other side, you've got your story."

This view of the press as battlefield for warring factions—as opposed to vehicle for information—is echoed by



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Legal Battles Shaping Up

Here are some of the environmental issues likely to make news in court over the next year or two:

Takings—The Fifth Amendment prohibits the taking of private property for public purposes without compensation. A rising tide of cases is testing whether environmental regulations that limit a landowner's ability to do virtually anything he wants with his property are unconstitutional.

Water Quality—The Clean Water Act orders all states to assess the quality of their lakes, streams and estuaries and to establish the total maximum daily loads of various pollutants the waterbodies can tolerate and still be fishable, swimmable, and usable for domestic and commercial purposes. Most states have ignored this provision of the law because the sources of contamination are so diverse and difficult to control. A dozen or more citizen suits have been filed to force the Environmental Protection Agency to make the states do their jobs.

Salmon—There are at least two dozen suits pending that attempt to force various agencies to take actions to protect and restore the runs of various species of salmon up and down the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California, virtually all of

which are in deep trouble. The outcome of those cases could have an impact on logging, grazing, mining and the cost of electricity.

Public Trust—New suits in Washington, Florida and elsewhere are citing this old doctrine that invests government with responsibility for protecting public resources. These cases involve water rights and could make significant new law.

Endangered Species—Depending on what, if anything, Congress does to the Endangered Species Act, there is likely to be a steady flow of cases presented to federal courts across the country.

Civil Rights and the Environment—An emerging field of law, these cases combine the two areas of law to protect poor and minority people from bearing an unfair portion of society's waste dumps, incinerators and other noxious installations. This is a legal field in its infancy.

International Trade—GATT and NAFTA were attacked as environmental disasters, also defended as environmental pluses. Early litigation has been largely rebuffed by the organizations set up to monitor compliance with the environmental side agreements. More will follow.—*Tom Turner*

Roger Beers, a private attorney who began his career on the staff of the Natural Resources Defense Council and now represents small towns, counties, park districts and private interests in environmental litigation. "Newspapers cover environmental lawsuits by quoting spokesmen for two opposing viewpoints. There's very little analysis, just dueling quotes, often from news releases. In fact, these are probably the least reliable sources, since they have an ax to grind."

He added, candidly, "When reporters call me, they usually don't know anything much about the situation. Do I try to explain it to them neutrally? No. I try to make my client's argument, to improve the public climate and help our chance of winning."

Kevin Kirchner, a lawyer and policy specialist for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, agreed that coverage is sometimes shallow. "With the mainstream press, there's very little coverage of environmental litigation other than in the context of particular lawsuits. We sue to stop a timber sale. The press will report the outcome. There's very little analysis of the role of litigation in the overall environmental struggle. You see plenty of analysis of the role of lobbying, the role of money, in influencing government, but very little about the role of litigation. I'm not sure whether that's good or bad," he conceded, "given the public's attitude toward lawyers."

For the part of the nonprofit bar that represents business interests and private-property concerns, a different frustration is evident. Rob Rivett of the Pacific Legal Foundation said, "For the most part, journalists are inclined to start out with a viewpoint that the environmental community is on the right side of the issue. That makes it difficult to get the story out."

Furthermore, reporters tend to make the participants the story rather than the issues they have brought to court, according to Rivett. "Often, the reporter will focus on PLF as representing conservative and business interests without focusing on the underlying issues. This has been a pretty common problem with reporting on the cases we've

been involved in." His clients, he explains—small landowners and businesses—are fighting government agencies like the California Coastal Commission for the right to use their property as they wish. The litigation offers an opportunity to explore important issues in a public forum, but reporters often prefer to write about PLF and its clients. "The public would be well served by a full examination of the issues," Rivett said.

Chris West of the Northwest Forestry Association, a timber industry trade group, says there's a small number of

reporters who exhibit outright bias in their coverage. "There are some reporters that get into environmental journalism because of strong personal feelings about the issues. As a person who deals with the media and the litigation side for a portion of the forest products industry, it doesn't take long to figure out the reporters who report the facts versus the ones who are trying to promote an agenda. I still talk to them, but I know their stories will be biased."

Some stories suffer from an understandable impulse to inject drama. Beers tells of filing suit in northern California

to force an environmental study before offshore drilling was undertaken. "We got together in the judge's chambers. The oil company lawyers agreed to hold off drilling until the lawsuit could be hashed out. We put the agreement down on paper and the judge signed it so it would be binding, but the agreement was voluntary. Reporters got wind of the agreement and began calling. I stressed as firmly as I could that the agreement was voluntary, yet the story in the paper the next day read 'Judge Orders Delay in Drilling.' I was scared the judge would think we had told the story that way to show off and that he'd be angry with us. We could have been badly burned."

Emphasis on sensation has played a major part in coverage of the battles over logging in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, and there absolutely no one is totally happy with the press.

It all began with a petition from environmental groups in the mid-1980's to the federal Fish and Wildlife Service asking that the northern spotted owl be added to the list of threatened and endangered species. The agency refused, and the environmentalists sued, citing recommendations from FWS scientists that listing was warranted. The timber wars began in earnest.

"The only questions we got asked at first were in the nature of 'why are you trying to close the public schools?'" says Vic Sher, now President of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, who brought many of the cases when he worked in Seattle. "The story, in the minds of the reporters, was a battle between environuts and spotted owls on one side and starving loggers and mill hands on the other. That was never what was going on."

Little investigation went into the circumstances that led up to the litigation: a history of over-cutting and a too-friendly relationship between the Forest Service and timber industry. In fact, two young reporters for *The Portland Oregonian*, Kathy Durbin and Paul Koberstein, who did write stories that questioned the long-standing allegiance of the Northwest to King Timber—were forced out of their jobs within two years.



ERINSON E. MOORE/THE SEACOURT FILE

This sea lion is slowly strangling on a piece of mono filament netting in Mexico's Sea of Cortez.

Eventually William Dwyer, a federal district court judge in Seattle, enjoined all logging in spotted owl habitat in the national forests in Washington and Oregon. This led *The Washington Post* to do a most unusual and public-spirited thing: it devoted two thirds of its op-ed page to extracts from Judge Dwyer's opinion, which was unusually blunt. The judge found that the government had indulged in many years worth of "deliberate and systematic refusal to obey the laws protecting wildlife."

When the Sweet Home case (brought by a pro-logging group in Oregon) reached the Supreme Court, the attention of the national press was turned on the struggle over logging and the Endangered Species Act. Environmentalists held a briefing for reporters on the eve of oral argument. "We had reporters for general circulation papers, for TV and for legal papers," Kevin Kirchner said. "The questions were altogether different from the legal reporters and the others. It was almost as if there were a wall between the two groups."

When the stories appeared, the discrepancy was marked. Supreme Court reporters explained the legal impact of the ruling (which affirmed the government's reading of the law: that it forbids destruction of endangered spe-

cies habitat on private land). Political reporters speculated on the political backlash the ruling might provoke. You had to read several papers to get the whole story.

And even then it might be incomplete. Rob Rivett called the coverage "pretty one-sided and oversimplified." Chris West said that in fact there was some good news in the ruling for private owners of forested lands: "We felt that the timber industry got a lot out of Sweet Home but the news reports totally missed that point."

Modern environmental litigation dates to a petition filed in 1965 by a New

York group called the Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference, which asked the Federal Power Commission for permission to participate in a proceeding to decide whether to permit construction of a power plant at Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River. The Sierra Club took a similar request to federal court in 1969, and citizen-driven environmental litigation has been a fact of life since then.

At first, the cases were new, therefore newsworthy. They also tended to involve big questions, so there was plenty to write about. As the two disciplines—environmental law and environmental journalism—have grown, side by side, they have both become more specialized and more complex. Lawsuits concentrate on smaller and smaller questions of law, and the environmental stories spill over into economics, philosophy, religion, ethics: the works.

The challenge to reporters—and to their papers, stations and networks—assigned to cover environmental lawsuits is enormous. They must understand law, politics, science and many other fields. Perhaps team reporting is called for. The environment is going to be with us as a story as long as there are newspapers and radio and television outlets to report it. The public deserves the most thorough and thoughtful reporting the press can muster. ■

Advocacy, the Uncomfortable Issue

BY PHILLIP J. TICHENOR
AND MARK NEUZIL

Get a group of environmental writers together, in a conference room or on the Internet, and odds are they will raise the old quandary: Are they advocates for environmental causes, or are they objective journalists simply reporting the issues?

A quick answer is that any media reporting of an environmental issue is advocacy, in the sense that media coverage draws attention to that issue. Airing a crisis that pits loggers against spotted owls lends the issue a measure of legitimacy.

The deeper question, though, is whether the growing media attention to environmental issues is, or is not, advocacy for the specific ends of environmentalists as opposed to economic, political or other interests. The question isn't easy to resolve. As Everette Dennis puts it, the environment has "never been a comfortable arena of coverage for the media to handle."

To better understand this uncomfortable arena, we need to step back for a broader look at how media fit into that flow of events, human mobilization and political response that we call the "environmental movement."

Newspapers, television, broadcasters, magazines and all other media are creatures of their social surroundings. Pittsburgh media are, intentionally or not, advocates for the good of Pittsburgh against all else in the universe, however subtle this advocacy may be. The same may be said for media in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Atlanta, New York, Houston or any other city.

The "good" that these media support through their reporting is not necessarily the good of all groups in their communities. Media report primarily the perspectives of dominant leader-

ship. This includes reporting clashes between leadership groups when their worldviews don't quite jibe. Broiling controversy is the stuff of much news.

But not of all news. When we look at the daily newspaper as a whole, we see much reporting that shows relatively little controversy. The entertainment, travel, gardening and business sections of newspapers have relatively little conflict of high intensity. Sports is by and large ritual competition. Securities investigations and lawsuits that pepper the business sections have a rather routine character, not the explosiveness that comes with, say, a protest orga-



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nized to shut down an abortion clinic. Or a court order that prevents 180 loggers in a town of 4,500 from working because of a regulation that protects spotted owls.

By and large, the sharp conflicts of any age are the ones inflamed by organized passions, especially in social movements that question the legitimacy of the existing order—either on a few specifics or, as in a revolution, the order of the entire system. Social movements force a question of social control, often taking their protests outside the established ways of settling differences. In the most intense movements,



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legitimacy of even the police and courts may be challenged. Violence is often one result.

Such challenges are flash points in the history of movements in industrial unions, anticommunism crusades, civil rights, women's rights and the environment. These are the fountains of our defining national conflicts and, therefore, the issues that both excite and bewilder journalists.

The environmental movement, like all other modern movements, is historically replete with media coverage that advocates the causes of indignant partisans. This coverage is not anti-élite; it is, rather, for the views of certain élites and against others. As Donohue, Tichenor and Olien have stated in recent research literature, media behave not as watchdogs for all of society, but as guard dogs that support élite consensus, when such consensus occurs. Where there is disagreement, the reporting of that disagreement is nevertheless protective of the élites as a community. It airs their differences while giving short shrift to less powerful groups outside this network. Even among the groups covered, a substantial amount of reporting allows various sides to let off steam. Such reporting, in effect, serves to cool things down.

When business groups accuse the Sierra Club or other ecological groups of being, say "élite self-interest groups," they are technically quite accurate. They are unlikely to add that the accusing business groups themselves are élites with their self interests to protect.

These disputes between élites are based on contests between values, even though values on both sides may be widely held. The problem is that not all values are compatible. We can see this in the history of the environmental movement.

"Environmentalism" is a modern expression of such values as "conservation," "preservation" and "heritage." Most cultures treasure their physical surroundings, their cultural artifacts, or both. Tourism in most if not all lands is dominated by visits to museums, millennium-old castles and religious edifices and scenic wonders preserved, usually, by élites. In fact, the writing of

history, in past years, was an occupation performed largely by those in ruling groups.

Such groups as the Audubon Society, the Boone and Crockett Club and the American Ornithological Union were well-organized shortly after the Civil War, dedicated to preserving and managing wildlife. As early as 1870, wildlife management was so energized that lakes around the nation were stocked with numerous species of fish, in some cases previously foreign to the locales. The American bison was saved, and the passenger pigeon was martyred in elementary school texts of the early 20th Century.

Powerful groups often formed coalitions for mutual benefit from saving a species or establishing a park. The Yellowstone Park Act of 1872, signed by President Ulysses S. Grant, was promoted with the often covert help of the railroads and accepted with enthusiasm by populist politicians who otherwise excoriated the railroads as corrupt and parasitic.

These coalitions did not master all the environmental issues. The infamous and rancorous debate over the Hetch Hetchy dam in California during the early 20th Century signaled a fracture between powerful interests in business, government and ecology. Protectionist views of John Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson collided with the pragmatism of Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt. San Francisco leaders were determined to find a dependable water supply for a growing population in a city ravaged in 1906 by earthquakes and fires. The earlier combination of business and government agencies, that earlier led to Yosemite and Yellowstone Parks, fell apart in this crisis.

Journalists today often look back wistfully to the muckraking era of the turn of the century, as a period when journalists probed the underside of corporate society with idealistic fervor. In that era of progressivism, populist politicians with muckraker media support led sustained attacks on railroads, Eastern banks and "trusts," the milling industry and a market system thought to be exploiting farmers, miners and laborers in factories and forests. It was

an era of challenge to the new combinations of industrial and political forces.

It might be thought, from a cursory look at its history, that muckraking reflected a rising up of exploited masses against economic and political élites. While the interests of mass populations, especially immigrants, were often cited, as in Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," the muckraking journalists themselves were highly educated and represented élite interests—but opposed to the other élites who happened to be in charge. Condemned as he was in business (and publishing) circles, Sinclair was himself a politician with considerable influence, especially in the Depression years. Ida Tarbell's reports exposed Standard Oil, but easy to overlook is that her family had itself been in the oil business and had suffered from what it saw as corruptive cornering of the oil market by the Rockefellers.

Subsequent, although rather isolated, environmental issues of the early 20th Century involved more confrontations between powerful interests. Walter Lippmann, himself closely tied to the political establishment, wrote columns on behalf of the "Radium Girls," women factory workers who suffered massive physical deterioration after years of painting glowing radium powder on dials of watches. William Kovarik has studied the 1920's controversy over harmful effects of tetraethyl lead in gasoline. This conflict pitted science and some medical groups against industrial companies who believed they had the technical solution to the bothersome "knocking" in gasoline engines.

During the 1930's and 1940's, the Depression and the clamor of World War II tended to keep environmental issues below the surface. A national consensus had developed around "conservation," a word embodied in names of agencies and various land "stewardship" groups. There were squabbles over specific regulations but at a relatively routine and quiescent level. Whether deer hunters should be allowed to shoot does and spike bucks might have made news, but not headlines like those about unemployment, war, or the McCarthyite hunt for inter-

nal subversives. "Environmentalism" as a term hardly existed in those days. That was to change shortly after 1960.

What brought a redefinition to the conservation/preservation movement, and eventually powerful new mobilization, was a newly emerging elite, the scientific community. Not particularly effective in such earlier disputes as the one over leaded gasoline, scientists in a variety of fields, especially biology, banded together in the 1950's. Their purpose was to raise public concerns about the impact of industrial chemicals and pesticides on the air, water and wildlife. It was not unusual for a group of research biologists to meet with editors to urge, often successfully, employment of scientifically trained writers for the outdoor pages.

While there are varying reports of how the Rachel Carson series in *The New Yorker* was initiated, her elite interests were quite clear. Carson was an expert marine biologist with a gift for popularizing ecological topics, as in "The Sea Around Us" and "Under the Sea Wind." Her celebrated "Silent Spring" in 1962 gave scientific legitimization to concerns about the ecological outcome of the agribusiness industry. Farm and outdoor writers, who had previously given extensive coverage to the benefits of parathion for killing crop insects and DDT for making tent camping humanly possible in mosquito-infested northern forests, were initially nonplused.

The reaction of industrial forces, often with the support of agricultural colleges—although not from all their faculties—was immediate and vehement. In St. Paul in 1963, a conference sponsored by these groups featured an English industrial chemist named Robert White Stevens, who attempted to stand Carson's "Silent Spring" on its head. That is, without modern chemicals, springtime would eventually be silent because crops would be ravaged by insect plagues, human populations would starve, and the earth would become silent for that reason. This reaction, however, was short-lived. Agricultural college faculties soon saw the merit in recognizing and studying ecological problems.

*Texas Blind Salamander — *Typhlomolge rathbuni**

At birth she could see light bend the horizon. She clung to the visible, then crawled into the sensuous musk of a cave. Now she can't see herself—heart showing darkly through skin, eyeballs sunk through flesh into useless dots. In the rough escarpment of Purgatory Creek she lives her life in limestone, earth between her toes. Whatever turns her flat face from one side to the other, tracking the flesh she feeds on, turns it upward, as if there were someplace else to go.

—Barbara Helfgott Hyett



ROBERT W. TILGNER

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During the turbulent 1960's, newly mobilized "environmentalism" shared the headlines with the Vietnam War, student protests, the Civil Rights movement and affirmative action. This period was marked by growth in academic institutions generally and rising journalism school enrollments, which increased at an even more rapid rate after the Watergate period of 1972-1974. Part of this increase was undoubtedly among young people seeking media careers that would further their interests in social causes, the environment being one of them. This attracting power of social movements, more often than not in concert with the political left, may help explain why various surveys in the past 30 years show journalists to be more politically liberal than the rest of the population. A small but noticeable chunk of this growth in journalism education was made up of young writers with an environmental bent. It was a rare course in reporting or interpretive writing in the 1970's that wouldn't require a few major assignments about ecological issues in the community.

While recent trends in environmental reporting in the United States are yet to be documented, it is apparent that after the first Earth Day of 1970, a certain routinization appeared in media reports about the movement. It was a bureaucratic routinization, fearing the Environmental Protection Agency nationally and pollution control agencies at state and, often, municipal levels.

Safety in the workplace was a related issue, and OSHA regulations made regular news but mostly at a rather routine level. Some groups such as Mobil Oil Company counterattacked with powerful advertisements, raising questions of media bias and proliferating governmental regulations that were allegedly stifling business initiative and the whole economy.

Much of the Reagan era talk about "getting government off the backs of people" was a counterattack of this sort, against OSHA and environmental regulations. The specifics of these regulations and the budgets of agencies changed now and then under political pressure, but by and large the basic legislation for environmental protection has remained intact.

This extensive regulatory atmosphere provided the arena for the numerous and explosive confrontations between contending groups in the past two decades. Love Canal was the classic case of allegations of massive industrial and governmental indifference to pollution, endangering whole communities. The snail darter and spotted owl controversies turned the Endangered Species Act into a weapon for well-organized groups—again those with extensive professional and scientific expertise in their membership—to challenge the construction of a dam or deforestation of a mountain range.

The old undercurrent of suspicion

about industrial dangers resurfaced with the Three Mile Island incident in 1979 and was stirred again in 1986 by the Chernobyl tragedy. Radiation danger, first from weapons and later from nuclear power, became an issue in construction of new power plants, construction of high-voltage lines and storage of nuclear wastes. A state legislature would find itself embroiled for months or years in a single issue of this type. Politically powerful environmental groups, academic researchers and professional community organizations often seemed to bring city councils and even legislatures to their knees by blocking construction of heating plants and waste disposal systems.

Repeated occurrence of these issues has led hundreds if not thousands of media outlets to employ environmental specialists, often people with extensive training in the physical sciences and sometimes with political expertise as well. Jim Detjen and Fred Fico at Michigan State University have found that environmental reporting is a well-established specialty in print media, although perhaps less so in broadcasting. These specialists are so numerous they now have their own national association, the Society of Environmental Journalists.

For reasons indicated earlier, these journalists will be, intentionally or not, advocates for the prevailing powers in environmental struggles. So are they advocates for environmentalists most of the time? It depends on who is winning those struggles.

A quick—and admittedly crude—look at coverage of the spotted owl controversy gives some insight into how this works. On September 26, 1996, the DataTimes media database carried abstracts of 84 news and opinion items identified by the keyword "spotted owl." Thirty of the 84 abstracts were from news stories that could be classified as "balanced" or "neutral" reporting, with or without dealing with a specific environmental controversy. Six items defied classification.

Among the other 48 items were 17 opinion pieces or letters, divided 10 to 7, pro-environmentalist over anti-environmentalist views. That leaves 31 news

items that appeared to lean one way or the other (judging from the limited abstract or lead). Of these, 20 leaned toward an environmentalist position and 11 leaned the other way. When we say "leaned" we mean, primarily, reporting of outcomes that favored one side or the other. We should add, quickly, that the same national news story could be reported differently, with a pro-environmentalist lead in one newspaper and a neutral or oppositional lead in another. The President's signing of the bill for a Utah "national monument" is a case in point.

We mention this snapshot of coverage not as a definitive finding, but as suggestive of some needed, carefully done, research on environmental reporting. We would expect, from the view stated here, that the more powerful the environmental groups involved in an issue, the more pro-environmentalist the reporting will be. This might seem circular, since favorable media reporting is itself an ingredient of power. The notion can be tested, however, with rigorous measures of organizational strength that existed before media coverage of those groups appeared. These would be measures of the organizational nature of environmental and other groups, of the type employed by Julia Corbett, now at the University of Utah, in her research on media and environmental protest. Such new research might be buttressed by parallel investigation of the perceived credibility of the media and journalists involved.

This is a call for systematic study of advocacy in environmental journalism. In addition to assessing the impact of organizational strength on how reporting is done, research can also help determine whether the waxing and waning of environmental emphasis in media is tied to popular and legislative crises over ecological issues. Such study will not tell us whether environmental writers should be advocates; that is a question to be answered according to professional criteria. It might very well, however, provide a better understanding of what is actually happening, an understanding vital to those engaging in the advocacy debate. ■



MIRIAM AVANAD © 1995

Jerry Mander Globalization Tied To Ecology Crises

...it's worth mentioning first of all that it's a failure of our media that a book such as this is even necessary. Our society has been massively launched onto a path to we-know-not-where, and the people who are supposed to shed light on events that affect us have neglected to do so.

From time to time, the mass media do report on some major problem of globalization, but the reporting rarely conveys the connections between the specific crises they describe and the root causes in globalization itself. In the area of environment, for example, we read of changes in global climate and occasionally of their long-term consequences, such as the melting polar ice caps (the *real* rising tide), the expected staggering impacts to agriculture and food supply, or the destruction of habitat. We read too of the ozone layer depletion, the pollution of the oceans, or the wars over resources such as oil and, perhaps soon, water. But few of these matters are linked directly to the imperatives of global economic expansion, the increase of global transport, the overuse of raw materials, or the commodity-intensive life-style that corporations are selling worldwide via the culturally homogenizing technology of television and its parent, advertising. Obfuscation is the net result.—*Jerry Mander, Senior Fellow at the Public Media Center, an activist environmental support group, and Program Director of The Foundation for Deep Ecology, in "The Case Against the Global Economy," Sierra Club Books, 1996.*

Overseas Activists Create Own Media

By JIM DETJEN

In the mid-1980's the Hungarian government was preparing to construct a giant dam on the Danube River in Hungary. The project was widely opposed by Hungarian scientists, intellectuals and environmental activists because it would destroy pristine natural areas, flood valuable cropland and endanger fisheries.

The problem was that the Hungarian government, which supported the project, strictly controlled the nation's media. Activists had no communication channels to register their protests or air their complaints.

So they did what activists have always done: they created their own news media.

The activists founded an organization called the Danube Circle and published a newsletter that opposed the massive Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam. This newsletter carried out the information function that in Western countries would have been fulfilled by the mainstream news media. Confidential government reports critical of the project were published in it. The newsletter quoted the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as describing the dam project as "a nightmare."

The newsletter informed the public of the opposition to the project and forged connections to environmental activists in Austria and Western Europe. Radio Free Europe broadcast information about the opposition back to millions of Hungarian listeners. More radical newsletters were circulated in Hungary urging political protests. Artists published essays in a journal called *The Danube* and a film was produced called *Danasaurus*, which criticized the "tyrannosaurus of the Danube."

As a result of the stinging criticism in these newly-created media outlets,

more than 40,000 people demonstrated in front of the Hungarian Parliament building in the spring of 1988. Faced with the largest protests since the 1956 uprisings, Parliament reversed itself and unanimously opposed the dam. The project was finally killed when free elections in 1990 brought to power new national leaders.

"It has become clear to all that no government can control all channels of communication indefinitely," said Judit Vesarhelyi, a writer with the Independent Ecological Center in Hungary. "Even if the official media are strictly controlled, where the opposition is great enough, unofficial channels will be created."

The role that unofficial news organizations played in the successful defeat of the Danube Dam project in Hungary is illustrative of the power of dedicated environmental activists and journalists. In many nations mainstream news media pay little attention to environmental issues. But ecological activists have been successful in creating their own newspapers, magazines, newsletters, documentary films and radio and television broadcasts in countries where the traditional media ignores these subjects.

These nontraditional media often play a vital role in persuading mainstream media of the importance of these subjects and in convincing them to cover environmental issues more closely.

The number of environmental journalists worldwide is difficult to estimate because no organization has made a serious effort to compile these figures. In 1993 environmental journalists from 26 nations met in Dresden, Germany and created an umbrella organization known as the International

Federation of Environmental Journalists (IFEJ). This organization has created an informal link to more than 50 national and regional environmental journalists' organizations and has compiled the names and addresses of environmental journalists in more than 100 countries.

IFEJ estimates that there are between 3,000 and 5,000 journalists worldwide



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who regularly write about environmental issues. They work at news organizations ranging in size from the BBC in England and The New York Times in the United States to tiny newsletters in Nepal and Zambia.

It is hard to make generalizations about any group of journalists internationally. The languages, cultures and traditions of the news media vary so greatly worldwide.

But I will offer some of my own personal observations, based upon contacts I have had with environmental journalists around the world. During the last three years I have met with many environmental journalists in Europe, Africa, the former Soviet Union, Asia and North America at IFEJ conferences and educational workshops.

I believe that the number of environmental journalists and the coverage of environmental issues is growing in many nations. The end of the Cold War has led to a growth of new media in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and other regions of the world. In the last seven years the news media in many of these regions have begun to examine severe environmental degradation that had been hidden from public view for many decades.

The growth of the environmental news media in Hungary is paralleled in other nations. In Tbilisi, Georgia, an energetic young woman, Manana Jakhua, has helped set up a radio station known as Radio Green Wave. Using grants from the Soros Foundation, the station's journalists produce 12 hours of environmental programming a day.

Often, the growth of environmental coverage stems from ecological disasters or the discovery of severe environmental degradation. Smruti Koppikar, a correspondent with India Today in Bombay, said that the industrial accident in Bhopal, India in 1984, which killed 3,800 people and injured more than 200,000, galvanized the nation's news media to dramatically increase the amount of environmental reporting.

"It's now de rigueur to open a mainstream newspaper in India and find at least three or four stories or news items related to the environment or ecol-



Mark Saruna, 3, works on his father's shrimp farm near the coastal town of Talumphok in southern Thailand. Children follow shrimp harvesters who drag nets through draining ponds. Wallowing in the black sludge of shrimp feces, molted shells and decaying prawns, the children pounce on the few valuable prawns that escape the nets. Pumped out of the ponds, the sludge ravages the ecology.

ogy," she said. "This increased prominence reflects society's growing concern for environmental issues."

But environmental coverage is often spotty, inconsistent and sometimes one-sided. Roberto Villar, an environmental reporter at Gaucha Radio in southern Brazil, notes that the Brazilian news media dramatically increased its coverage of environmental issues in the two years leading up to the Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. But once the summit was over, a "great silence" blanketed the nation's news media, he said.

"Nowadays, environmental reports are rare. The reporters who still cover ecology for the big Brazilian newspapers are few," he said. "New radio programs [on the environment] disappeared. TV Globo, the most important TV Brazilian network, now has just a light weekend program on ecology. The environmental crews were broken up. The international show was over."

The amount of environmental reporting being done varies greatly around the world. In the United States, Western Europe and in pockets of Asia

environmental news is frequently reported. In the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe the amount of environmental coverage is small but appears to be growing. In many parts of Africa and South America environmental news coverage is tiny and very erratic.

The environmental subjects covered by the news media also vary significantly from region to region.

In May 1996 Robert Worcester, director of MORI, a research and polling organization in London, interviewed by telephone and in person 86 well-known environmental journalists around the world. His survey found that pollution of the air, marine waters and drinking water are viewed by journalists as the most serious environmental issues, while deforestation is predicted to grow in importance in the next three to four years.

But the survey also found that interests vary greatly by region.

For example, African journalists believe that population issues are far more important than international journalists do overall (29 percent versus 12 percent). African journalists are less

interested in pollution issues (29 percent versus 70 percent overall) but more interested in health (29 percent versus 8 percent) and biodiversity (43 percent versus 15 percent).

Latin American journalists emphasize habitat loss (36 percent versus 30 percent overall) and pollution of drinking water (64 percent versus 23 percent). In Europe, pollution from cars and factories are issues of particular interest.

In the United States, environmental journalists have complained in recent years that their editors have lost interest in environmental stories and that the amount of space and resources devoted to environmental stories is shrinking. A survey of 496 environmental reporters in the United States that I conducted with Fred Fico and Xigen Li of Michigan State University earlier this year found that one-fifth or more of the United States's environmental writers said these were "major" problems.

While these complaints may be valid, they pale in comparison to the problems that many environmental journalists face internationally:

- In Armenia, environmental filmmaker Vartan Hochannisyian can count on only about one hour of electricity a day because of his country's ongoing war with Azerbaijan. He struggles to document the impact of land mines on people and his country's environment with little money and inadequate telephone and electrical systems.

- In Albania, television correspondent Xhemal Mato has been threatened by gangsters with arson and kidnapping as a result of stories he has done about private businesses damaging national parks and habitats. After he broadcast a story about the destruction of exotic plants in a botanical garden in Tirana, he received anonymous letters telling him that his house would burn down if he continued to broadcast "lies" on television. Despite the threats, Mato continued to report about the story and ultimately police chased away the people who were damaging the endangered plants.

- In Ghana, Ben Ephson, an environmental reporter for *Business in Ghana* magazine, was imprisoned for

six months as a result of stories he wrote.

- In Peru, environmental journalist Barbara D'Achille was killed by Shining Path guerrillas while she was on her way to write about a rural development project for her newspaper, *El Comercio*, one of Lima's major newspapers.

- And in Algeria, M'hamed Rebah works to document environmental concerns in a nation where Islamic fundamentalists have murdered more than 50 journalists since 1993. Despite these threats, M'hamed continues because of his belief in the duty of journalists "to tell the truth."

While not all journalists in developing nations face hardships this severe, many struggle to obtain and confirm information in countries where the communications infrastructure is primitive and the access to information is severely restricted.

"American journalists talk a lot about the importance of using the Internet," said Linnette Smit, the chief television reporter for the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation in southern Africa. "But you have to realize that many journalists here are still struggling to get manual typewriters."

Because of the lack of communications infrastructure, radio plays a critical role in reaching the public in many developing countries. In Nepal, the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists publishes wall newspapers containing environmental news.

Increasingly, E-mail is playing an important role. In the former Soviet Union, which spans 6,000 miles and 10 time zones, mail and telephone systems are often unreliable. Bill Pfeiffer, a computer-savvy environmental activist from Petersham, Massachusetts, has helped create an E-mail network for environmental organizations throughout the former Soviet Union. In parts of the area where telephone lines are limited, the E-mail messages are transmitted via satellite.

Access to information is also a serious problem for many environmental journalists in developing countries. Many journalists have received little or no training to report about complicated scientific and environmental issues. Most lack the financial resources

to travel to interview scientific or governmental experts. Many also have difficulty getting access to scientific reports, satellite photos and government documents.

"There is a dearth of information on environmental projects and problems, and whatever has been generated is not freely accessible but in the hands of government or government-controlled agencies," said Aditia Man Shetha, a veteran Nepalese environmental journalist who lives in Katmandu.

He noted, for example, that he was able to obtain a copy of an environmental impact report on a massive hydroelectric dam project only in Washington, D.C.—not Katmandu.

"On global environmental issues, particularly—the greenhouse effect, ozone depletion and the acid rain phenomenon, for instance—the West has an absolute monopoly on information," he said. "All major research efforts are taking place in the West, and all research findings are published there."

Koppikar, of *India Today*, added, "The right to information is still not a constitutional right in India like it is in most developed nations. Information and access to information can be denied under any pretext—most often India's archaic Official Secrets Act."

In fact, very few nations have laws giving journalists broad access to government documents, such as have been enacted in the United States and several Scandinavian countries. Even England has not yet enacted a Freedom of Information Act although the Labor Party has promised to do so if they gain control of Parliament in 1997.

"It is very difficult to gain access to government files on controversial health and environmental issues, such as the endemic of Mad Cow Disease," said Geoffrey Lean, the environmental writer for *The Independent* on Sunday. "In many ways Britain is a very secretive society. It is very difficult to look at files until 30 years after a controversial event."

In an effort to deal with these problems, environmental journalists in many countries have banded together to create national and regional environmental journalist organizations. These or-

Poland: Struggling

BY BARBARA CIESZEWSKA

ganizations vary greatly in the way they are funded and organized, but most work to improve education and access to information for environmental journalists.

Among the best known organizations are the United States Society of Environmental Journalists, the Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists (AFEJ), the Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists and Journalisten-Aktion Umwelt in Germany.

The AFEJ has organized programs to help train environmental journalists in Asian nations, to help organize university courses and to offer fellowships for independent study.

Similarly, the International Federation of Environmental Journalists has held conferences in Dresden, Paris, Boston and Cebu City, Philippines to exchange information and to educate journalists. IFEJ publishes a newsletter, operates a computer list-serv to exchange information via E-mail and supports environmental journalists who have been imprisoned or threatened.

In the coming years, I'd like to see these journalistic organizations strengthened so they can expand the educational and training programs they offer to environmental journalists. I'd like to see universities provide more educational opportunities for environmental reporters.

I'd also like to see the reduction in censorship and the enactment of more national laws giving the media access to environmental information so that they can more easily serve as watchdogs in their nations.

I also support the further development of E-mail, the Internet and the World Wide Web as valuable tools to assist environmental journalists internationally.

Will these changes occur any time soon?

Not without difficulty and a lot of hard work.

But I believe that if environmental journalists continue to work together internationally—many of these goals will eventually be achieved. ■

Here in Upper Silesia, a small patch of soil (2 percent of Poland's area, 22 percent of its population), 20 smelting works, 62 coal mines and the largest and the oldest chemical plants belch suffocating smog and treacherous smoke. Under Communist rule the press had to padlock its mouth about the environmental hazard of polluted air. Production was everything.

Now, only six short years since Solidarity took over the government, the press is free. However, journalists still run a risk in warning about environmental degradation, but only because of readers' view of "scare stories." Economic expansion is a much greater priority. But I believe that within a couple of years we will be able to raise questions about how irregularities could have occurred.

Undoubtedly we had to tolerate them under the Communists. But we certainly tried to smuggle something out in our stories even though vigilant censorship kept turning down even the slightest hints. For example, the writer would try in vain to compare in Socialist new baffle gab "our dynamically expanding industry" with something detrimental to the people and environment.

In those days I didn't deal with environmental issues; I considered the task as "fighting windmills." However, at that time, in the second half of the seventies, armed with a degree in economics, I thought it possible to sneak some healthy non-socialist elements into a story about the economy. But the editor dropped my controversial story, filled with some unfamiliar words, such as "profit," into the waste basket. The ideological impediments were too great. All that was important was fulfilling the production plan. We had to acquire skill at dodging certain issues and writ-

ing around them. Eventually, however, we realized that Polish readers possessed a splendid ability to read between the lines for exactly what we wanted to let them know.

I well remember the rejoicing when my colleague, Eugenia Ligeza, outsmarted the section boss and then the censor. Reporting on the upper respiratory diseases of Silesian children, she described their homes in Chorzów, between an old smelting works and chemical plants. Eugenia believed that the readers would show enough intelligence to associate those facts. She was certainly right.

But all this was art for arts sake only. For all the years of Communist rule,



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nothing was done to rescue the population and its surroundings. Production was still No. 1 on the agenda. We all had similar problems, but Eugenia, a pre-war lady coming from a home of deep traditions, was the most frustrated person on our staff. She was aware of what was going on. She saw Bytom's center, once a beautiful town, collapsing as result of merciless mining of coal under its beautiful medieval architecture. She was familiar with Silesia, where infant mortality was 50 for every 1000 births, compared with the Polish average of 20. (In Sweden the average is 5). Unfortunately, she couldn't reveal those facts directly. Allusions had to be enough.

The Solidarity movement began its rise to prominence in 1980. Stories were still subject to the censorship though the latter's activities simmered down a bit. Yet some boldness was still needed to blame socialism as the main culprit whose 45 years of rule caused damage that would be felt for the next 145 years.

I watched with bated breath as my colleague Krystyna Szubowa hammered out some lines on Silesian children suffering from a lead poisoning disease called plumbism. In Szopienice, Katowice's old section, near the local lead-processing works, Krystyna came across dramatic cases of irreversible damage. She found a physician, Jolanta Król, who had discovered children in the worst phase of plumbism. Aware of the risk, she arranged medical examinations for the children, although such activities were not only off limits but also subject to penalties. Fortunately people appeared who convinced the authorities of the children's need for medical treatment. Those children were secretly transferred to sanitariums.

Krystyna was inquisitive but not belligerent. Having produced her dramatic story, she suffered from depression. Fortunately her story was published before imposition of martial law and she was awarded a prize in the all-Polish Press Coverage Competition.

We all feared that martial law would usher in another period of journalistic

repression. We knew, however, one truth. There would be no repetition of pre-Solidarity years. Once publicly revealed, new ideas cannot be repressed and allusions are not enough. Indeed, for many of us, allusions didn't work anymore. Of the country's 9,000 journalists, the Communists fired more than 2,000—all who were not approved by authorities or didn't accept martial law. Those were tough times, but magnificent, too, because Solidarity brought to life its underground press. Everything was written about, in full voice, including the polluted environment.

Then, perhaps, we erred. We terrified our countrymen with stories about the devastation of their surroundings. For the first time people realized the deadly contents of the air they kept breathing in Upper Silesia and Cracow. They had become used to their environment. Suddenly journalists were bombarding them with dreadful numbers on the content of coal-oxide and sulfur and cancer-producing hydrocarbons.

In those days the Communists withdrew many books from the market. Among them was one that I called my most valuable trophy, for it reported results of scientific research showing that people's health was jeopardized by poisons in polluted air. Candidly, although we wanted to inform our country, our paramount aim was to portray the Communists as the main perpetrators of environmental damage.

During the first years of democratic rule we kept scaring the people. There was no way to avoid it. Obviously we had first to denounce the Communists as the guilty parties before discussing calmly ways to repair the damage. Today, our newspapers, including my *Rzeczpospolita*, carry almost daily reports of new waste water purification plants, ecological dumping sites, coal refineries, desulfurizing devices in power-stations and electrofilters in chimneys that absorb 90 percent of contaminants.

Again there is a surfeit of similar stories and that bothers me. Something is lacking. Yes, journalists must inform. Above all, their duty is to report everything that contributes to the protection

of the environment and much has been done here in this regard, though it seems to me that the steps are transitory.

This view springs from my year as a Nieman Fellow. At Harvard I learned about the relationship of the environment to the economy and to management. For the time being, we in Poland are focusing on what we're going to repair. Unfortunately, there are no comments in the press or even in the increasing number of ecological periodicals, about an economic approach toward environmental problems. I do recommend in my articles that all costs of damages caused by mining be calculated. I caution against extending mines under towns, urging investors to analyze whether there is a need for such undertakings as they forecast their economic justification.

These suggestions have to take into account Poland's huge coal surplus and its need to increase exports. Also, we must not ignore the mine lobby's approach toward any layoffs of miners. Journalists who push environmental protection to the point of causing layoffs of workers would run the risk of being called "the people's enemies."

In interviews I am impressed by the increasing number of people familiar with ecological innovations, such as the American idea of tradable permits, which allow some companies to exceed pollution limits if other companies in the same area are far below those limits.

I cannot resist the assumption that we are nearing another stage of writing, not just on new ecological installations but also on how effective the existing ones are. There is also an urgent need to prevent the industry from simulating activity. Poland's journalists who were so watchful of Communists now face new challenges that make for an exciting future. ■

Russia at the Crossroads

BY OLEG STAKHANOV
AND CHRIS BOWMAN

Environmental catastrophes don't get much nastier or newswier than the one that stained the pristine tundra in Russia's northwestern Republic of Komi around two years ago.

On the edge of the Arctic Circle, in a semi-frozen land where birch trees take 40 years to grow 10 feet, a leaky oil pipeline hemorrhaged as new wells were pressed into production. The line's owner, Komineft, diked the releases while repairing the line, but said nothing to the outside world. It was late August 1994.

Then came a big storm. On Oct. 1 heavy rain collapsed a 25-foot-high earthen dam, releasing a sea of crude across the vulnerable marshland. Still, government officials remained silent. They saw the problem as too routine to bother with. Big spills are not unusual because Russia's oil industry does not adequately protect its pipelines from corrosion.

The oil ran amok for three weeks before American petroleum businesses finally blew the whistle. By then, the lubricant had soaked more than 400 acres of permafrost and greased 60 miles of streams. Bogs and creeks choked with the coagulated chocolate-brown fudge, waist high in some places. It wasn't long before fishermen were netting gobs of black goo in the Pechora river.

All told, by reliable non-Russian estimates, the 2 1/2 miles of fissured pipe spewed 100,000 to 300,000 tons of oil. That's three to nine times the volume that escaped from the Exxon Valdez when the tanker ran aground off Alaska in 1989—the biggest oil spill in North American history.

To the amazement of the West, news of the pipeline breaches didn't appear in the central Russian press or on all-Russia television until two months after

the ruptures, when a U.S. Department of Energy official told The New York Times about it. The problem wasn't censorship. Accounts of the leakage ran in Komi region newspapers weeks before The Times story. Rather, the disaster simply was not seen to have more than local importance.

When the national press jumped on the story, it didn't stray far from newsrooms. Reporters stuck mainly to government and industry sources in describing the disaster. They focused on the conflicting estimates on the size of the spill and dueling responses from Komineft, the Ministry of Environment, the State Parliament and environmentalists. But there was scarcely any on-the-spot reporting or an analytical or investigative piece on why the tragedy happened and what the long-term consequences might be. Moreover, the stories stopped almost as abruptly as they started when Russia plunged into another disaster—war in Chechnya. No in-depth stories, no follow-up.

Russian coverage of the Komi oil disaster tells much about the state of environmental journalism and environmental awareness in the country today. On one level, Russian reporters are where their U.S. counterparts were 20 years ago—ringing environmentalist alarms and focusing on surface events. But on the broader planes of journalistic competence and influence, there's no comparison. Russian reporters are generally ill-equipped and poorly trained for general assignment work, let alone a complex beat like the environment. There is no tradition of environmental reporting in Russia. Moreover, appropriate schooling for environmental journalists is virtually non-existent.

Russians have not exactly demanded more and better coverage, then or now.

Though "the environment" crops up among the public's top concerns in Russia, it seems most people have little idea what the word means. A survey last year found that even students at Moscow State University Journalism School know little about the subject beyond it having something to do with Greenpeace, the international environmental organization that has staged many protests in Russia.

The paradox today is that Russian journalists give much attention to envi-



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ronmentalism—the protests and conflict—yet, at the same time, environmental issues are substantially uncovered. This cannot be understood without knowing Russian media and the changing political, economic and social spheres of Russian life.

It would be an exaggeration to say Russia had no environmental reporting in its communist past. Some media such as *Nauka i Zhizn* (Science and Life) magazine and *Ochevidnoe-Neveryatnoe* (The Real Fantasy) television show periodically reported in-depth on the global environmental issues like ozone depletion and global warming. But this work remained very limited. It seems that radical changes in the country, the influence of the market economy and the media's consequent focus on entertainment and sensation uprooted what could have been the beginning of serious environmental journalism.

Today, more than ever, the strength and quality of environmental coverage varies greatly by region, depending on the political and economic powers that dominate the area.

In regions with a strong military-industrial complex, environmental coverage has been practically non-existent. It was not until two years ago that the first stories emerged about the heavy air and water pollution that everyone sees and smells in the steel town of Cherepovets, north of Moscow. And local media in the central Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk simply don't report critically on its chief industry, nuclear power.

The story is much different in more economically diverse and financially vibrant cities like Rostov-on-Don, Nizhny Novgorod and Vladivostok, the major port in Russia's Far East. The media in those transportation hubs reflect the diversity and are relatively progressive. Nizhny Novgorod, a city of 1.4 million at the confluence of the Volga and Oka rivers, probably has the nation's most extensive environmental coverage outside Moscow because the city's ecology groups have strong political support in the region.

Awareness of the country's multiple environmental hazards surged after

Mikhail Gorbachev's selection as Communist Party chief in April 1985. Under the policy of glasnost, grass-roots groups sprung up all over the country along with activist publications—the "green media." Greenpeace opened an office in Moscow. And the first Ministry responsible for environmental protection was established.

On the flip side, perestroika opened up more of the country's vast timberlands and mineral wealth to industrial exploitation, giving rise to more activism and news stories. (It might sound strange to those who grew up in the West that Russian environmentalists recall the Communist past with a note of nostalgia. For in those times many territories were at least kept off-limits to business.)

The first mass environmental protest came in 1986 as a Soviet "project of the century" was near completion. The public outcry forced the central government to cancel construction on the last leg of an aqueduct that would divert and reverse the flow of two Siberian Rivers. One of the first to speak out was Sergei Zalygin, an irrigation specialist turned writer who that year became the first noncommunist editor of the influential *Novyi Mir* (New World) literary journal. Zalygin exposed the environmental consequences of the water project and desert agriculture's on-going devastation of the Aral Sea. In one of the worst ecological disasters of the 20th Century, the Aral had lost more than 60 percent of its volume and most of its fish as a result of its feeder rivers being siphoned for cotton production in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Then came Chernobyl, the 1986 nuclear plant explosion that exposed tens of thousands of people to radiation. Shaken by the catastrophe, a mistrustful public rose up against nuclear power stations and other industrial monuments of central planning. The actions became a test of wills between republic nationalists and Moscow.

In 1988, several thousand residents in the Lithuanian city of Ignalina encircled a Chernobyl-style reactor in Lithuania to protest the plant's poor safety record. Public protest in

Krasnodar, a southern Russian city, forced authorities to stop building a nuclear power plant near the Black Sea. And residents in Chapayevsk protested en masse when they discovered that a secret military plant to destroy chemical weapons had been built in their midst near the Volga River. They prevailed over the Kremlin. The plant was mothballed in 1989.

The unrest generated abundant hard news stories but virtually no true environmental reporting that attempted to educate the public about the public health risks and ecosystems at stake in the disputes. Coverage did not go beyond the spot news event.

After the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, the media, concerned with its own problems of survival, became much more market-driven with an American-style emphasis on sensation and entertainment. Environmentalists took advantage of the appetite for drama. Greens and reporters fed each other's needs much as they have in the U.S. Writing about the environment became cool, as cool as those guys from Greenpeace chaining themselves to whale harpoons and embassy doors.

Environmental protests became a hot news beat. Crimes against nature were one of the most powerful sources of regional discontent in autonomous regions, like the Republic of Karelia. There, on the Finnish border in Russia's northwestern tip, protesters forced the cancellation of nuclear power plant projects and stopped indiscriminate dumping of chemical wastes into rivers and reservoirs. Dmitri Rybakov, a local environmental leader, told *The Los Angeles Times* that the activists used the local media to muster support for their cause.

"With the growth of democracy in the republic, we've been able to speak on the radio, give interviews to newspapers and generally get out our message directly to the public," Rybakov said in a 1995 interview.

The relationship has been mutually beneficial. Ecology groups give reporters access to information that is otherwise hard for them to obtain. Govern-

ment officials habitually reject public records requests. Russia has few centralized data banks on toxins, air pollution or water quality that can be reached at the touch of a keyboard. Reporters are generally untrained in searching the Internet. Information from academia is limited, given the perennial shortage of money for original scientific research. And what little government does make available on the environment is notoriously inaccurate and outdated.

The environmental community is trying to fill the information void. In a first step, Ecoline, a nonprofit group that provides environmental databases, recently set up the nation's first ecology information center in Moscow. The major source of information for journalists remains environmentalists, who are typically well informed but usually just more available to the press.

The future of the green beat rides on the profession's commitment to better reporter training and environmental education. The journalism school curriculum today is basic liberal arts with little reporting on the street. Many journalists simply are missing the fundamentals. They often fail to independently research or check for accuracy or evaluate the quality of information and sources. Reporters' bylines are attached to unedited news releases from industry and activists. They generally pick up only what is easy and obvious. They are not trained to spot stories in what seems to be routine.

This is unfortunate because government decisions with the largest consequences for the well-being of people and the land are generally worked out without public notice or environmental assessments.

For example, the press altogether missed the story of government plans to accept foreign radioactive waste for reprocessing in the central Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk until President Boris Yeltsin signed the decree in January 1995. Had reporters been paying closer attention they would have seen Minatom, the Ministry of Nuclear Energy, paving the way for such a controversial operation by securing certain

Ecology Media in Russia

There are two main forms of environmental journalism in Russia today, the mainstream market-oriented media and the green media.

The green media comprises non-commercial newsletters, newspapers, magazines, on-line bulletins and video-production services supported by grants and run by activists. There are several national publications such as *Zelenyi Mir* (Green World) and *Spaseniye* (Rescue) newspapers and *Ecos* magazine, all low-circulation, shoestring operations typically run by people with little journalism experience and circulated mostly in the environmental community.

In one electronic bulletin, the quarterly *Baltic Region*, publisher and nuclear scientist Oleg Bodrov in the St. Petersburg area provides

extensive analysis of the environmental effects of radiation.

A good example of a community-oriented alternative environmental newspaper is *Bereginya* in Nizhny Novgorod. Grant Sarkisian from Armenia and Mickail Shishov from the Altai region of south-central Russia film environmental stories on video.

In the mainstream national media, environmental news has become a staple in the last two years. Dozens of reporters now cover the environment full-time. In broadcast, Tatiana Khromchenko hosts one of the longest-running environmental news shows, on Radio Yunost. Russians also can tune in to Yevgenia Novikova on Echo Moskvi and Veronica Gerasimenko on Radio Russia. ■

changes in environmental law and hunting for international customers interested in getting rid of nuclear waste cheaply.

This past fall, the media missed another big environmental story that could have easily been picked up had reporters been looking for more than hand-outs. On the surface it looked like only a name change: The Environment Ministry was reorganized as the Comity of Environment. The change actually signified loss of status for environmental protection in the Yeltsin administration. Among programs suspended was dioxin monitoring - expensive but critical in a country where one in three people reportedly lives in areas with high concentrations of the toxic hydrocarbon.

Journalists' lack of environmental education is most apparent when they write about environmental health risks. In May 1995, when Russian scientists released a report on widespread dioxin contamination in the Far North region of Arkhangelsk, both green and main-

stream media incorrectly blamed the level of dioxins—a byproduct of the region's paper industry—for specific illnesses. The researchers, however, cautioned that they could not prove a direct correlation. Additional study of the local population's declining health was needed to link cause and effect, the scientists said.

There is reason to believe that the profession will improve. Starting in 1995, the environmentalist Socio-Ecological Union in Moscow and the National Safety Council's Environmental Health Center in Washington, D.C. have jointly run a course on the basics of environmental reporting for journalism students at Moscow State University. The course puts special emphasis on critical thinking and evaluation of information and provides Internet training. In addition, environmental education is now mandatory in Russian high schools and colleges. What is needed now are more qualified teachers in the field, especially for the future journalists who can then enlighten the public at large. ■

Did Media Kiss Off the Election?

By MARK JURKOWITZ

At the end of every presidential campaign season, journalists often gather at locales like Harvard's Shorenstein Center and the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center to dissect their performance and offer up some mea culpas. After the 1988 race, there was chagrin at the way superficial images and themes—such as Willie Horton and flag factory visits—influenced coverage. After 1992, the press examined its pursuit of the “character issues”—including Gennifer Flowers and the draft.

It's harder to predict the subject that will dominate the post-1996 election media introspection. After all, the Dole-Clinton face-off was essentially a static affair with no pivotal moment—a dynamic the media reinforced with the drumbeat of polls that showed the race to be non-competitive. Voters weren't particularly interested. The conventions were so scripted that Ted Koppel marched his “Nightline” crew out of San Diego. None of the so-called new media—from cyberspace to MTV—played a significant role. And citizen apathy toward the campaign seemed to influence its assessment of the press.

When Andrew Kohut, the director of the Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, asked people for one-word descriptions of campaign coverage, the top five responses were “good,” “biased,” “fair,” “adequate,” and “poor.”

“Pretty mixed reviews,” says a somewhat bemused Kohut.

In its November 11 election post-mortem issue, Newsweek ran the headline “Bored to the Bone,” foreshadowing the basic question for the media to mull over in the aftermath of this election. Did their performance contribute to putting the ennui in democracy?

“What is the role of journalism anymore?” asks Terry Eastland, Editor of Forbes MediaCritic. “The theory of all this, to use James Fallows's term, is to

reinvigorate democracy. What accounts then for the historically low turnout?”

Media Studies Center research director Lawrence McGill also agrees that it's worth questioning “the role the media played in signaling to voters this wasn't a campaign worth watching. It's like continually announcing there's a 10-run lead in the seventh inning. Let's go get a beer.”

Back in August, the Pew Research Center released a survey indicating that 73 percent of those polled thought the presidential campaign was dull. If the level of coverage throughout most of the campaign is any indicator, so did the press.

From January through the end of July, network coverage of the race was down 43 percent from 1992 levels and 51 percent from 1988 totals, according to Andrew Tyndall, publisher of the Tyndall Report, which analyzes broadcast network news. Thomas Patterson, the Benjamin C. Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, evaluated network coverage from January through September and concurs that it was off by about 40 percent from 1992. Moreover, the incredible shrinking TV sound bite continues to dwindle. According to Patterson, the average candidate TV sound bite ran about seven to eight seconds this campaign season, down about one second from the previous presidential race.

In a report issued on October 15, the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication evaluated front-page campaign stories in The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times from September 1 through October 10. In terms of words devoted to the subject, the 1996 count was down 45 percent from the corresponding period in 1992. The actual number of front-page stories dropped 59 percent from 1992 levels.

During the late stages of his campaign, a sarcastic Dole remarked that the 10th Amendment to the Constitution was “about 28 words. That's about what I got in The New York Times today.” (The Times responded by noting testily that it had provided Dole with a daily average of 1476 words for the previous six days.) Dole's knock at The Times was part of an eleventh-hour strategy that included attacking the media. But his instinct about leaner coverage was right. The problem is that many in the media would blame the phenomenon on his floundering candidacy.

“The remarkable thing about the presidential campaign was the lack of



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coverage," says Andrew Tyndall. "I don't blame the networks. I blame the Dole campaign."

Perhaps the two non-newsworthy nominating conventions were the perfect metaphor for this year's campaign coverage. The broadcast networks cut back nightly air time to about one hour and viewers stayed away in droves. Koppel, declaring "Nothing surprising has happened. Nothing surprising is anticipated," conspicuously stomped out of the Republican conclave. By the end of the summer, network news executives were talking about getting out of the convention business and letting the cable networks—like CNN and MSNBC—handle the future chores. This despite surveys indicating that even in the wake of this year's tightly controlled conventions, a majority of citizens still want them carried live by the networks.

"I think we've seen the last of them" as "a major television event," says Tyndall of the conventions. "It was really a fifties or sixties style event."

Also contributing to the lull in coverage was the failure of any single issue to really capture and hold media attention. For a brief shining moment—particularly when Pat Buchanan was leading his pitchfork revolution during the New Hampshire primary season—the subject of economic anxiety seemed to be emerging as a defining concern. The New York Times produced its widely acclaimed series on "The Downsizing of America." Residents of Derry New Hampshire participating in The Boston Globe's "People's Voice" public journalism project were talking openly about middle-class economic fears. But as the days grew longer and warmer, economic anxiety vanished off the media radar screen to be replaced with news of the bulls charging on Wall Street, positive economic indicators and polls indicating the public thought the country was on the right track. Economic anxiety proved to be a comet flashing brightly but quickly across the media landscape.

Thomas Patterson's theory is that issues often disappear from the headlines as their champions fade. Thus, the demise of Buchanan's campaign took economic anxiety off the table just as

What Happened To Local News?

Rocky Mountain Media Watch conducted three snapshot surveys of election news and political advertising on 192 local television newscasts in 45 cities across the United States eight, five and two weeks before the November 5 ballot. Most local TV newscasts in the sample totally ignored state, local and municipal election contests and races. The majority of election related stories were about the United States presidential contest. In contrast, the 386 political ads that aired during these newscasts were mainly about congressional candidates, statewide races and ballot initiatives. The net result was that advertising dollars, more than actual journalism, determined the local election information citizens received from local TV newscasts.

Steve Forbes's eclipse sounded the death knell for any serious discussion of the flat tax.

The 1992 campaign was famous for the significant role of "new media," alternative media outlets that challenged the hegemony of the major networks and the powerful print outlets. Talkmaster Larry King practically invented the Ross Perot candidacy. Bill Clinton played saxophone on Arsenio Hall's late night talk show and chatted with MTV reporters. Jerry Brown brandished his 800 number at every campaign stop. This time around, new media—to put it simply—flopped.

Early in the campaign season, Columbia Journalism Review editor Suzanne Braun Levine ventured that the Internet would be the MTV of the 1996 campaign. It didn't happen.

A Pew Research Center survey revealed that only 3 percent of the respondents went on line more than once a week to get campaign information. The Media Studies Center reported that only about 6 percent ever visited a politically oriented Internet site.

"I don't think the net culture played any role at all," says Jon Katz, the media critic for *Wired* magazine. "The candi-

date who could have used it [Dole], didn't know about it. The candidate who knew about it [Clinton], didn't need it." With Dole desperately looking to connect with voters, Katz believes he could have used cyberspace the same way Clinton used MTV in 1992 had his campaign been savvy. And Clinton, a candidate creative enough to find new modes of communication when the situation requires it, was content to simply sit on his lead.

Though having a Website was standard procedure for the candidates this year, Katz says those "Websites are like the equivalent of ghost ships in space. There's no one to talk to.... You have to use it as a live, interactive site." He thinks Dole could have used the last 96 hours of the campaign more wisely had he eschewed the marathon plane tour for interactive chats with citizens.

If the Internet was a not-ready-for-prime-time player this campaign season, neither was another controversial "new media" approach called "public journalism" or "civic journalism." (Actually public journalism—which grew, in part, out of disgust with press complicity in the desultory 1988 presidential campaign—is less a new medium than a new way of fulfilling an old journalistic obligation: grassroots reporting.) Using focus groups, town meetings, polls and conversations over coffee, news outlets are listening more closely to citizens and trying to connect them to the officials elected to respond to their concerns. The concept holds promise, but the kinks are still being worked out.

Included among the public journalism practitioners this campaign season was The Portland Press Herald. In conjunction with Maine Public Radio and TV station WGME, The Press Herald initiated a "Maine Citizens' Campaign" with residents of Sanford, Maine to formulate a series of questions for the presidential candidates during the primary season. The Boston Globe's "People's Voice" campaign, conducted with WBUR-FM and TV station WABU, hoped to gather Derry voters in the same room with the Republican hopefuls. In North Carolina, The Charlotte Observer joined with The Raleigh News and Observer, four other papers, five

television stations, three public radio stations and public television to put the major issues identified by the voters on the front-burner of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaign coverage.

The results illustrate some of public journalism's growing pains. In both Maine and New Hampshire, many of the Republican presidential candidates simply refused to meet with the citizen groups. "It's tougher than people thought," says Edward Fouhy, the Executive Director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, which funds many of these projects. "The [candidates'] handlers hate it. It's a lot less predictable."

"I'd give myself a C or C+," says Fouhy, when asked to grade the election-year public journalism efforts. "We've got a long way to go."

The North Carolina project was harshly criticized in a November 4 *New Yorker* article for arbitrarily limiting the scope of coverage in the heated Jesse Helms-Harvey Gantt Senate race, which Helms won. In a *Boston Globe* story, Gantt himself complained that he had difficulty generating interest in challenges to Helms's ethics because the media outlets had deemed those types of issues off-limits.

Terry Eastland is critical of this preoccupation with focus groups because it caused the press to convey a message that citizens "don't like meanness, don't like incivility, don't like confrontation" and that "Dole would be in political trouble if he tried to make character and ethics an issue."

"By using these focus groups, it became a method a constraining" the campaign, Eastland adds. "I think it's an outgrowth of horserace journalism in which the polls pre-occupy the journalists....It helps define the shape of the campaign." With Dole a decided underdog, that kind of lay-off-the-rough-stuff message—so evident in voters' reaction to the two presidential debates—may have inhibited his strategy.

Eastland could also have been referring to a late October page one *New York Times* story headlined "Aggressive Turn By Dole Appears To Be Backfiring." The story was generated by a *Times*/CBS poll indicating that Dole's attacks on Clinton's character had enlarged the President's lead to 22 points

and eroded Dole's advantage on the trust issue.

When the story of the 1996 campaign is written it may be said that never have so many polls showing so little movement influenced so many stories. Numbers junkies got their regular fix from CBS/*NY Times*, ABC, *Wall Street Journal*/NBC, Reuters/Zogby, Pew Research Center, Harris, Hotline/Battleground and USA Today/CNN/Gallup polls.

Lawrence McGill says the "overkill of reporting of poll results"—along with Koppel's San Diego exit and breathless coverage of the Colin Powell boomlet and the inevitable letdown when he opted out—helped convince voters the election was not worthy of attention.

With the horserace fundamentally stationary, many observers question the need for the constant printing and airing of polls that simply reinforced the obvious. So eager were journalists for a sign of movement that a blip in the daily CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll—a 20-point Clinton lead that supposedly evaporated to nine points in about a week in late September—generated a flurry of interest and stories. Trouble was, the lead bounced back from nine to 22 just two days later. (A Gallup official attributed the Clinton drop to an effective GOP attack ad and his subsequent bounce to his handling of fighting between Israelis and Palestinians.)

A September Annenberg report suggested that poll-driven coverage was unfair to the underdog, citing story lines such as "Dole visits Connecticut despite gap in polls," (*New York Times*); "although polls show President Clinton out front with a double digit lead, Dole says he hopes the upcoming debates will decide the race," (NBC); and "Dole faces struggle in two Jersey precincts," (*Washington Post*).

"If you look at the coverage of Bob Dole, it looks very much like Walter Mondale's in 1984," says Thomas Patterson. "It doesn't have anything to do with bias. It's the journalistic narrative. It's not Republican and Democrat. It's winning and losing." A strong case can be made that media coverage al-

ways favors the front runner. And as the guy who was losing, Dole had to endure much of the bad news. To their credit, however, journalists largely avoided the temptation to treat Dole's September 18 fall over a faulty railing as a metaphor for a stumbling campaign, although *The Washington Post* generated controversy with a prominent page one photo of the mishap.

Still, no modern presidential campaign would be complete without charges of liberal media bias, fueled in part by talk radio and the Republican candidates themselves. In the waning stages of their 1992 and 1996 campaigns, both Bush and Dole hammered on the issue.

That message resonates with many Republican voters. A September study from the Roper Center revealed that 52 percent of the respondents thought campaign coverage was balanced, eight percent detected conservative bias and 32 percent complained of liberal bias. More ominously, 61 percent of the Republicans surveyed by the Media Studies Center believed coverage favored the Democrats.

"A majority of Republicans are saying the media are biased toward Democrats," notes McGill. "It's kind of come to a head now. It's gone beyond accusations and it's perceived as more of a stain now." Yet McGill cites a Media Studies Center survey of black voters in which 41 percent saw a pro-Republican media bias while only 3 percent felt the tilt was toward Democrats. Black voters, says McGill, perceive a "media that belongs to the fat cats." Clearly, bias is in the eye of the beholder.

Despite some legitimate concerns, it's pretty hard to pin the Dole loss on the Fourth Estate. Many of his problems were of his own making. The more relevant question—as an uninspiring and undistinguished election season fades into history—is how culpable the media were in contributing to that malaise. Having decided early on that the contest was boring, journalists moped and groped, and conveyed the unmistakable message that nothing very significant was going on. After a while, that became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. ■

Inquirer Learns a Lesson for Us All

BY GENE FOREMAN

The lessons of journalism are never more vividly and forcefully taught than when it is the journalist who is being written about.

For example:

Lesson of journalism: Check your facts. Don't print rumors. Don't assume that everything printed in every publication is true.

From Philadelphia magazine, June 1996: "in the [Philadelphia Inquirer] newsroom, long-distance phone calls were briefly banned, as was travel to New York."

From Time magazine, Oct. 21, 1996: At The Inquirer...reporters were told they could not dial directory assistance, and at one brief point all long-distance calls were banned, as was travel to New York City, all of two hours away."

None of these things happened. They were rumors in the dark days a year ago as Inquirer managers, at the behest of Knight-Ridder corporate headquarters, sought to draft a 1996 budget that would raise the company's profit margin to a level nearer the industry average.

No question, that budget hurt. It led to the buyout of 30 staffers, including some of our most distinguished colleagues. But it did not damage our news coverage in the draconian manner Philadelphia, Time and other publications have been reporting.

At The Inquirer in the last year, we've been reading about ourselves in the press—a lot. It has been an anguishing experience, not just because of the kind of factual errors mentioned above but, more disturbingly, because of the broad brush strokes. In pieces about cutbacks in the newspaper industry we typically find ourselves portrayed as Exhibit A: a once-proud organization that has fallen as a result of budget cuts. Never mind that in at least a quarter of a century,

The Inquirer has yet to lay off a single newsroom worker for economic reasons. Never mind that we still produce a paper of remarkable quality every morning.

Is there something to be learned here?

The lessons of journalism teach us that when we paint the big picture, we should be truthful and fair. They teach us that in the details, we should aim to be precise. In short, the facts must be allowed to get in the way of a good story.

Like journalists everywhere, we have heard—and tended to dismiss—these gripes about the press:

- The news media feed on themselves; once a distorted perception gets into print, it is replicated over and over, so the subject can never stamp it out.

- Reporters always have a theme in mind when they set out to do a story, so they discard any facts that don't fit.

- The media resist publishing divergent views and are unwilling to correct their own significant errors.

Now that all those things have happened to us, the thoughts are chilling and not a little ironic: could there be at least some truth in the drumbeat of media criticism? Could we be more careful to be accurate and fair, and more willing to check out allegations that we have been neither? If the subjects of news accounts complain that they were unfairly portrayed, couldn't we let them have their say?

This examination of press coverage of our newspaper is intended to be instructive.

A good place to start is to try to put our own situation in perspective. So, with allowances for the obvious fact that we're participants, here's our take:

Gene Roberts, who was The

Inquirer's top editor from 1972 to 1990, led a revolution that transformed the paper from one of America's worst metropolitan dailies to one of its most distinguished. Particularly during the late 1970's and the early and mid-1980's, The Inquirer greatly expanded its staff and operating resources. Roberts established a tradition of enterprise reporting that examined issues in depth. As testimony to its journalistic achieve-



Gene Foreman, Deputy Editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, has directed newsroom operations at the paper since February 1973. Before that he was Executive News Editor of Newsday on Long Island. He received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Arkansas State College in 1956. He was on active duty in the Army as a field artillery lieutenant in 1956-57 and stayed in the Reserve for 11 years, attaining the rank of major. Foreman was president of the Associated Press Managing Editors in 1990 and is currently a board member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

ments, *The Inquirer* won 17 Pulitzer Prizes during Roberts's tenure.

In the late 1980's, *The Inquirer*—like many other metropolitan dailies—stopped expanding and, in staff size, started retracting. This process accelerated in the 1990's and was punctuated with the buyouts last fall. To say the least, these developments were unsettling to the staff and to the editors who now direct the newsroom, nearly all of whom were hired or promoted by Roberts and who remain committed to the traditions of substantive, explanatory journalism that he championed. Not surprisingly, we would rather see more newsroom resources rather than less, and we also believe that in the long run, this would be good business as well as good journalism.

Yet, in the face of fiscal adversity, there have been achievements and even expansion. When its new printing plant came on line in 1992, *The Inquirer* began producing the daily zoned sections for the Pennsylvania and New Jersey suburbs that Roberts had envisioned. The new presses also gave us an opportunity to print in color, and the paper was redesigned to showcase that color while continuing to emphasize the substance of our reporting. New sections have debuted to reader approval—for example, Monday's Health & Science and Thursday's Tech.Life. Aggressive enterprise reporting has continued.

Although attrition has reduced *The Inquirer's* staff by 10 percent from its peak (560 full-time equivalents in 1996 versus 621 in 1987), the paper hired 30 journalists in 1995 and 19 through October of this year. The newshole, after reductions a year ago, is comparable to what we had in 1988 (up 8 percent on Sundays and down 2 percent on weekdays, when space for the new zones sections is factored in). The non-salary budget—newsroom operating expenses—has gone up since 1987 but has not kept pace with inflation.

Fair reporting, then, would depict a proud newspaper that is striving to serve its readers better, despite a staff downsizing.

That is not the reporting we have been reading.

There was the spate of stories portraying a newspaper's decline after last fall's budget reductions. Then, in September, when we published Don Barlett and Jim Steele's provocative 10-part series about the global economy, we were examined yet again by the media, with some critics depicting the series as a desperate attempt to win a Pulitzer Prize. Also this fall, *Time* magazine published a takeout on the newspaper business that reprised the telephone and travel reductions that didn't happen.

We understand fair comment and criticism. Just as *Inquirer* columnists, critics and sportswriters dish it out to politicians, artists and ballplayers, we have to take it gracefully when media critics fault us for how we perform in public. But criticism is not fair if the underlying facts are wrong. Politicians, artists and ballplayers have a right to expect their critics to get their facts right; so do we.

Thus, when editor Max King wrote a letter to *The Wall Street Journal* about a column by Holman W. Jenkins Jr., he was not complaining about Jenkins's assessment of the Barlett/Steele series ("a flotsam of harnacked de ma"). Instead, King hoped to get *The Journal* to correct Jenkins's misquoting him. In doing legwork for his column, Jenkins had interviewed King and asked if *The Inquirer* was "pioneering" a new kind of journalism. King said no and observed that drawing conclusions from several years of detailed research and investigative reporting is a valid part of traditional journalism. When Jenkins's column appeared, there was this passage: "Max King... explains that Messrs. Barlett and Steele are pioneering a new branch of knowledge, 'conclusive journalism.' Neither 'opinion' nor 'balanced day-to-day reporting,' it involves such 'voluminous research' and such a 'level of authority' that... what? Seemingly, those two guys can say anything they want." King wrote to *The Journal* pointing out that "pioneering" was Jenkins's word, not his, and that he had specifically rejected the label. But readers of *The Journal* would not be allowed to read King's views. What King got in-

Douglas P. Woodlock Richard Jewell And O.J. Simpson

Losers in litigation always tend to think the press is biased against them. But there is something more out there. Those who abuse the process—let's say a hypothetical justice department employee or defense counsel by selective leaking—has an aider and abettor: you. If you knuckle under to disseminating this information on the pretextual justification that the people need to know right now and immediately the half-baked ideas or the particular perspectives of one side or the other, then what you have done is participated in distorting the process for the resolution of those cases. So it is more than simply an ethical issue. It has to do with your larger responsibilities to tell the truth in its fullest and nuanced sense. Relying upon leakers like the Justice Department employee [who said that Richard Jewell was a suspect in the Atlanta Olympic bombing] or the pipeline from the defense team in the O.J. case [which circulated speculative and inadmissible evidence] simply distorts that process and undermines your fundamental goal, which is to tell the truth in that nuanced fashion.—*United States District Judge Douglas P. Woodlock, at the National Conference of Associated Press Managing Editors, September 19, 1996.*

stead of a correction was a two-page letter from Jenkins that, in essence, said he didn't agree with King.

King had an even worse experience when he asked Philadelphia magazine to correct a dozen factual errors in the 9,000-word piece it ran in June. In the October issue, the magazine ran King's letter cataloging the mistakes but then gave the writer of the offending article an equal amount of space to evade responsibility and pillory the paper again. The writer explained: "...I had thought the days of confusion and inner turmoil at his paper had ended. The fact is, almost all the 'mistakes'... came from his own staff...." The writer went

on to dispute King's correction of The Inquirer circulation figures that appeared in the original article, saying that the paper's reporting of circulation is "a shell game" and that the paper frequently gets "slapped on the wrist" [by the Audit Bureau of Circulations] for, in effect, cooking the books." This is a reckless charge that cannot be substantiated; not since early 1990, when an ABC audit adjusted our daily circulation downward by 0.032 percent, has there been any ABC citation against The Inquirer.

To its credit, Time magazine did publish a letter from King pointing out the mistakes on Inquirer reporters' access to telephones and travel. It's willingness to set the record straight was refreshing. Our experience elsewhere made it clear that there is not widespread sharing of the doctrine that a publication should be a forum for divergent opinion and receptive to subjects of news coverage seeking redress of grievances. Nor should the owners of printing presses seek to get the last word in argument through the practice of rewarding the right of reply to the writer of an article. Editors' notes, in our view, ought to be used sparingly—for example, to correct a fact in a letter.

The Barlett/Steele series, "America: Who Stole the Dream?" illustrates how we think publications should treat criticism. We published dozens of letters and columns on our editorial and commentary pages and finally an entire section of a Sunday paper giving comment pro and con about the reporters' findings that United States government policies on trade, taxes and immigration were short-changing the American middle class. As in previous takeouts they have done in the last quarter-century, Barlett and Steele wrote in a bold, provocative style and amplified their conclusions with statistics and vignettes about real people who were experiencing the economic phenomena identified in the series. Although nearly all of the 4,000 readers who wrote or telephoned did so to praise the series, we sought to balance the opinions we published. Among the reaction pieces that

appeared in The Inquirer was a Newsweek column by Robert J. Samuelson, who dismissed Barlett and Steele's work as "junk journalism" and rebuked the paper's editors for their ineptitude in running the series.

The Weekly Standard magazine in Washington devoted three pages to an article by Christopher Caldwell denouncing the series as an exercise in flawed economics. Caldwell wrote: "...Since Barlett and Steele won their last Pulitzer seven years ago, The Inquirer has seen its reputation for everything except political correctness reduced, while dozens of its top journalists have fled." Like Holman Jenkins in The Wall Street Journal, Caldwell argued that Max King claims Barlett and Steele are practicing a new type of journalism and said King had not been able to define it.

Some observations here: first, Barlett and Steele's conclusions are hardly politically correct, coming down as they do on free trade and liberal immigration. Second, while naming Inquirer journalists who have "fled" to The New York Times, Caldwell does not note that at least a dozen staffers turned down Times offers and that The Inquirer has simultaneously attracted key editors Peter Kaufman from The Times and Phillip Dixon from The Washington Post. Third, if The Wall Street Journal had published his letter, Max King would have been on record with his definition of Barlett and Steele's style of journalism.

A myth we have struggled to debunk is that economic pressures have forced us to retreat from staffing foreign and national news. On his Weekend Edition broadcast August 17, Scott Simon of National Public Radio told listeners: "Some Inquirer staffers worry, not just that their newspaper is becoming diminished, but less distinctive, as wire copy begins to fill the news space left by closed bureaus...." What closed bureaus? At the time of Simon's radio show, we had not closed a single bureau. It is true that since then we have shuttered our Boston bureau, concluding that we can cover New England from our New York bureau. (Our six

foreign and eight national correspondents are roving reporters.) We have made it an article of faith—both for symbolic and news coverage reasons—to keep our bureaus open. That has taken extraordinary effort in admittedly difficult times, which makes it all the more frustrating when reputable news organizations report falsely to the contrary.

Curiously, two articles about The Inquirer this year referred in similar—and sinister—language to the presence of circulation department managers at some of our story conferences. Philadelphia magazine reported in its June issue that Charlie Tramo, Vice President of single-copy sales, sat in on a morning news meeting its reporter attended; the article commented: "To some in the newsroom, having the circulation chiefs sit in on editorial meetings is anathema." Then, in Time magazine's October 21 piece, there was this passage: "Staff members cite with dismay the collapse of the time-honored wall between 'church' and 'state'—the editorial and the business side—which is meant to ensure journalistic integrity. The head of circulation now sits in on story meetings...."

If the "wall" has collapsed, as Time reported, it fell a long time ago. For a quarter-century, we have been talking regularly with circulation managers about how they can promote our features. In the 1980's, Gene Roberts ran the circulation department as well as the newsroom.

An episode last summer involving The Wall Street Journal illustrates all three media faults itemized at the beginning of this article. As we saw it, a Journal story that mentioned us prominently: 1. bent the facts to fit a preconceived theme; 2. repeated distortions that had been published elsewhere; and 3. declined to correct the record when the mistakes were brought to its attention. That The Journal has a deserved reputation for reporting excellence makes this experience all the more remarkable.

On August 26, The Journal ran a story purporting to show that metropolitan newspapers are cutting costs by

hiring "temporary labor." In the piece, written by a college intern, *The Inquirer* was depicted as contributing to a decline in journalistic quality by hiring recent college graduates as two-year interns to cover the suburbs, at lower salaries and benefits than staffers. The story covered ground tread in a 1994 *Columbia Journalism Review* piece that was similarly one-sided. Reporting at *The Inquirer*, *The Journal* story intoned, "used to be reserved for the nation's top reporters—not its cheapest ones." By juxtaposing a paragraph about our intern program with one about another newspaper that supposedly strung along a prospective employee by giving him repeated extensions of his internship, *The Journal* left the impression that we too were baiting and switching. In the four years since the internship program was formalized, *The Journal* reported, only four interns have been hired onto the *Inquirer* staff.

The *Journal's* picture of our intern program was hardly fair. To begin with, our intern program was not concocted to offset staff reductions. *The Inquirer* has been paying non-staff journalists to cover the suburbs for decades and in significant numbers (there are now about 150) since 1982. As *The Journal* reported, we formalized an intern program in 1992, but the concept of a temporary, learning relationship for beginning journalists had been established in the early 1980's. We saw an internship as a tradeoff: promising journalists who do not land staff jobs after college graduation would work up to two years covering the suburbs for us. From this arrangement we get quality coverage at a labor cost comparable to our suburban competitors' (this is the relevant comparison, not to the *Inquirer* staff). In turn, the interns get coaching from *Inquirer* editors and placement help in finding staff jobs at mid-sized dailies. Although interns occasionally move directly to our staff, we do not dangle *Inquirer* employment as a lure. We have placed more than 100 interns in staff jobs around the country in four years. The

Journal did not report that this was the interns' goal or that so many had succeeded with *The Inquirer's* help. Our intern program has been praised by college journalism professors, who refer graduates to us, and by editors of mid-sized dailies, who have hired our interns.

When I protested to a *Journal* editor, he checked with his staffers and ultimately stood by the story. He explained that *The Journal* reporter had talked with "the right people" at *The Inquirer*. If they didn't volunteer the information that would balance the picture, it was not *The Journal's* fault. There would be no correction or clarification.

All these experiences have been a refresher course in the lessons of journalism.

One lesson retaught is that we should underscore our commitment to be accurate and fair. We should ask questions: How would we feel if we were in the place of the people we've written about? Would we feel that we have been depicted fairly and that we had a chance to respond to criticisms in the article? Another lesson is to be even more sensitive to people who tell us they didn't get a fair shake in our news coverage. They deserve our empathy and a chance to tell their side of the story. ■

Ben Robertson

Civic Journalism—A 1941 Harbinger

Iwould like to see our papers become both more trivial and more serious. I had rather read that rabbits are eating Mrs. Smith's flowers than that Mrs. Smith spent Saturday in Ocean City. I had rather read that Mrs. Jones has been painting some wicker chairs than that she gave a luncheon Tuesday. I would like to see more papers study the work Barry Bingham and Mark Ethridge are doing on *The Louisville Courier Journal* and Paul Smith is doing on *The San Francisco Chronicle* to isolate the problems of their particular communities, to define them, and then to campaign for their solution. I would like to see the newspaper of the average community become more aware of its power as an integrating force. I would like to see it become a continuous mass meeting of the people. I commend to all our editors for study the work that is being done by three South Carolina papers—the work being done by James Derioux on *The Columbia State*, by Roger Peace on *The Greenville News and Piedmont*, and by Wilton Hall on *The Anderson Independent and Daily Mail*. Those editors and their staffs are arousing the people of South Carolina; they are bringing together, for the first time in our history, the people, the politicians, the newspapermen, and the professors. They are making South Carolina realize that if democracy is going to



work it must function in the hometown as well as in Washington—that the people must either plan for themselves or the government will have to plan for them. They are making the newspaper the center of this planning.—*Ben Robertson, reporter for The Associated Press, The New York Herald Tribune and the newspaper PM, in an address to the University of Missouri School of Journalism on May 10, 1941. He died in an airplane crash near Lisbon on February 22, 1943.*

Newspapers' Fate Tied to Revival of Cities

BY LEO BOGART

We're hearing again about the imminent demise of daily newspapers in their printed form. Roger F. Fidler, formerly of Knight-Ridder, has announced that electronic newspapers will replace printed editions by 2005. And Frank M. Daniels III, former executive editor of The Raleigh News and Observer, predicts, "Newspapers are going to die. As printed, daily newspapers will disappear over the next 15 to 20 years."

They're wrong. The American press is not about to vanish, and it is less threatened by technological change than by the troubles of our cities. Journalism is an urban art, flourishing in the marketplace, its rollicking, competitive enterprising enthusiasm kept alive by personal encounters in gas stations and supermarkets, in courthouses and police stations, in banks and hair dressing salons, in schools and playing fields, in theaters and restaurants, in dives and hangouts. The future of the press depends on how the cities overcome their problems to regain their vibrancy.

But first, the threat from the revolution in electronic communications. Yes, this revolution is forcing media companies to diversify, is prodding print publications and television organizations to adapt their content for computer retrieval and attracting a considerable amount of interest—if not as yet a great deal of money—from advertisers.

At home or at work, about one-fifth of Americans are now hooked up via telephone modem to the Internet directly or to a computer-based electronic information service like CompuServe, Prodigy or America Online. That includes a lot of people who dip in and out. Some on-line services lose and replace 10-15 percent of their subscribers each month. A third of the people

with Internet accounts have not used them in the last three months.

Yet it is the so-called information flow that's been grabbing everyone's attention. Most newspaper, magazine and book publishers assume that the growth of electronic information services will accelerate to build a true mass market. Many fear that such services may replace the printed word. Almost all agree that they must gear up to deliver their output electronically. The premise is that there is a sizable group of consumers who are willing to pay extra for the convenience of accessing information selectively and when they want it.

One widely held model is that developed by the MIT Media Lab, which in its Daily Me electronic newspaper gives readers information on subjects in which they have shown an interest. If the reader is in control, who needs the journalist?

The idea of individualizing media content has come about largely as a result of advertisers' interest in targeting, an interest that has always existed but which can now be more efficiently met because of the computer. Vast new data bases identify individual consumers and minute classes of consumers in terms of their consumption of products and media. This is demonstrated by the remarkable growth of business information services that supply—on line or in hard copy form—statistical and technical data, like credit ratings, stock quotations and syndicated market research.

Publishers understand that their greatest resource is their capacity to package information, not the machinery to print and deliver it. The book business has moved aggressively into cassettes and CD-ROM's. For publish-

ers of newspapers, magazines and newsletters, the real opportunity lies in the capacity to supplement what is printed with copy that never survives the editing process, and to link current reports with retrieval of related material from the archives. Around the world, about 2,000 newspapers and magazines offer specially prepared electronic versions of their regular printed editions. In 1993, only 20 U.S. daily newspapers were on line. Today about 200 are, in one way or another, but none appears to be making any money at it.



Leo Bogart is the author of "Preserving the Press," "Press and Public," "Commercial Culture: The Media System and the Public Interest," "Cool Words, Cold War," "Polls and the Awareness of Public Opinion," and other books. He is the former Executive Vice President and General Manager of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau. This paper is adapted from a recent talk at a conference of journalism educators held at Middle Tennessee State University.

Despite the excitement over electronics, printed newspapers are not headed for extinction. Newspapers will survive because (1) readers want to sit back comfortably, not all tensed up at the keyboard; (2) periodicals provide readers with an identity, and it's not easy to establish your persona through an electronic data stream; (3) printed newspapers let the eye scan and process large quantities of information at a glance; (4) newspapers are tangible, and therefore authoritative; (5) they are economical.

Today's newspaper is far less expensive than the equivalent amount of text would be over an on-line service, in part because advertisers pay three-fourths of the expense. Would readers bear three-fourths of the load for newspapers on line, or tolerate unrequested advertising messages occupying most of the screen?

No. The main threat newspapers face is not electronic competition, but the crumbling of the cities they serve, the cities that nourish journalistic enterprise.

Technology operates in a social context. In the last three decades our country has undergone a series of revolutions, in race and gender relations and in the switch from a manufacturing to a service economy. All this affects where and how people live. When we think of new media in the digital era, we must first consider what is happening to the media already in place. News media still serve people who share the common interests and landmarks of a particular geographic area, but increasingly they help to create interests that transcend spatial limits.

It is curious that the term "civic journalism" or "public journalism" has lately become a subject of debate. Without a commitment to civic betterment and to the public good, how could journalism exist? The three words, "city," "civilization," and "civility," have a common Latin root, and with good reason. In all cultures, cities are the seat of civilization. Here human lives are intertwined and interdependent, and dense personal interaction stimulates learning, the arts, economic exchange and mate-

rial well-being. From interdependence also stems civility, the tolerance and mutual respect required to maintain social order.

Over the centuries, the economic and political lives of cities have depended on a fund of shared information and symbols kept current and vivid by local news media. Newspapers bind people and institutions in cities of strangers. Cities are marketplaces, and local media provide the essential economic news, including advertising, that markets require.

The rise of newspapers has been inseparable from the growth of cities. They began as court circulars and as instruments of commercial information and later expanded their coverage to include both town gossip and foreign intelligence. Since they started in cities that were at the same time centers of trade and of government, their purely local news reports were of interest throughout the entire realm. A newspaper published in Lisbon or Paris or London or Vienna reinforced the capital's sense of its own importance; it gave the urban spirit a universal character that survives to this day in great national newspapers like *Le Monde*, *Yomiuri Shimbun* or *Izvestia*. Readers who came to the newspaper as a form of coffee-house entertainment automatically absorbed information about civic problems and politics and controversies.

With progress in the technology of papermaking and printing, periodicals could publish more often, lower their costs and expand their readership. The result has been a greater differentiation between localized publications and those that serve a regional or national constituency. Improved transportation extended the distribution range of the press. It also widened trade and personal contacts well beyond cities' political boundaries.

We live with the consequences. Suburban residents are now a majority of the metropolitan population. They no longer identify with city news and civic personalities. It gets harder for the press to sustain readership and circulation. As cities are drained of consumer purchasing power, stores follow their best

customers to the suburbs and advertising is siphoned off.

I review this familiar history only to underline the point that in this country newspaper journalism, for all its frequent derelictions, has been a great integrating moral force. The weakening of the press damages the civic spirit. The press has always served as a channel for the expression of grievances against local authority, even under totalitarian dictatorships. Soviet newspapers received vast quantities of reader mail, much of it complaining about specific local problems. Although only a small portion of it was printed, the Communist Party newspapers routinely turned it over to the appropriate government agencies, where it may occasionally have been acted upon.

At its best, in Western democracies, the press has had the vital political function of maintaining constant surveillance over government at every level. Curious, painstaking, inspired, crusading journalists have fought bureaucracy, uncovered scandals, exposed corruption and inefficiency. Often they may have done this for less than noble motives: to boost readership or to serve the political allegiances of their papers' owners. These base reasons have nothing to do with the splendid results. Investigative journalism requires a commitment on the part of a newspaper's management, an investment of human resources and of precious newsprint. It also takes courage, as shown in the cases of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate.

Courage and a passion for ideas are not easily compatible with the profit goals of today's media corporations. All but a handful of American newspapers today are alone in their markets. To avoid offending any substantial part of their constituencies, they have become depoliticized. Every forthright expression on the Op-Ed page must be balanced by a contrary view. A growing number of papers no longer endorse candidates for public office. The St. Paul Pioneer-Press has dropped daily editorials altogether. Yet if devotion to the truth is journalism's reason, the formulation of opinion is its heart.

Media are an ambivalent social influence. By creating many separate specialized interest constituencies, they accentuate variety and differences among people; they are socially divisive. On the other hand, they create the connections that enhance human relationships, by providing a constantly replenished fund of shared information and ideas.

U.S. newspapers, since the 19th Century, have been identified as a true mass medium, an extraordinary unifying and cohesive force, giving everyone access to the same pool of vicarious experience. That may be changing. As newspaper and news magazine reading slowly erodes, class divisions reassert themselves.

With the evolution of niche marketing for many consumer products, national advertisers have increasingly been fascinated by media that deliver highly selective audiences. Common occupations or avocations can arouse deeper feelings of affinity than common residence in a particular geographic community. A growing number of publications—whether they are financial or sporting newspapers, scientific and trade journals, or magazines serving the special interests of dog lovers, philatelists, or cooking enthusiasts—affirm the shared interests of people who are widely dispersed.

Specialization has also been manifested in radio and now in cable television. As the number of channels multiplies, programming tends to be differentiated along the familiar lines of taste, educational level and social class that characterize print media. The video audience will fractionize further because the Telecommunications Act of 1996 allows the telephone companies to supply video entertainment and information and the cable systems to offer telephone services. Thus, like radio before it, television, which began with pretensions to universality of reach, is already showing signs of specialization, reestablishing the consciousness of class differences that conflict with the ideal of a civic community.

Neither television nor radio offers a

substitute for newspapers' ability to provide people with a sense of collective experience and civic identity. In 1996, for the first time, U.S. advertisers are spending more money in broadcast and cable television than in newspapers. Both advertising support and audience attention have shifted to nationally uniform audio-visual entertainment at the expense of newspapers—locally oriented, information-centered print media. For several reasons, the appeal of the audio-visual media cuts across the municipal limits that have defined most daily newspaper audiences.

(1) Radio and television signals are transmitted over a wider area than the effective same-day distribution range of a typical daily newspaper. (2) Broadcast media that flow in time, are pre-eminently used to fill time. Entertainment, unlike news, is not linked to a particular place. (3) The mass audiences generated by broadcast entertainment have attracted national advertising, especially for low-interest packaged goods that primarily seek to register their brand identity and image.

Although most Americans now say they get most of their national and world news from television, the audience for the network evening newscasts is much lower than it used to be. CNN is now a worldwide presence, at least in the rooms of luxury hotels. In the United States, its cumulative daily audience amounts to less than 3 percent of television viewers, and it faces new competition from MSNBC, Fox News and a number of other planned 24-hour cable news services.

Audience fractionization has also lowered the ratings for local or regional news shows, which attract more viewers than the network newscasts, and are highly profitable for television stations. The public distinguishes one station from another mainly by its newscasters. On the local as on the national level, television familiarizes the public with government officials and other political personalities. But local newscasts are customarily produced by staffs only a small fraction the size of those employed by the newspapers in the same cities. They rarely have the resources to do serious original news

coverage. They are dominated by ephemera and trivia.

Cable television, in many cases, televises the proceedings of town councils and other municipal agencies and presents debates on civic issues. Such programs provide the opportunity for an enriched debate on the issues and concerns that face cities, but their audiences are minuscule.

Broadcast news programs have never been able to match the independence shown by newspapers, for several reasons. Since radio spectrum frequencies are allocated by government license, broadcasters may be somewhat more reluctant than newspaper publishers to challenge entrenched political powers. But much more important, serious journalism requires time and effort on the part of the audience as well as of the reporter.

Up to this point, I have traced the connection between media and urban development to argue that local newspapers have served a unique function. As they lose their universal reach, broadcast news is not a real substitute.

Now, on the eve of the 21st Century, the established media are unsure, even anxious, about their future. Technological innovation is moving so rapidly that today's terminology and concepts are outmoded tomorrow. Only a few years ago, everyone was speaking of the "information superhighway"—a phrase rarely heard any more. Then it was "500 channels"—both an under- and overstatement. Then "interactivity" was going to turn everything upside down. Now it is here, and it already seems like yesterday's word.

The transformation of all information, verbal and visual, into the binary form of digitalization, has put the computer at the center of the communications world. We use it with CD-ROMs to store information, with modems to transmit it over telephone wires, coaxial cable or fiber-optic strands. Modems in turn make possible electronic information services like the Internet, electronic archiving and E-mail. The market for every form of new technology is expanding. Components keep

getting smaller; manufacturing costs keep going down. Print media production was already going electronic a quarter-century ago, making it possible to distribute text in an electronic format as well as on the page. It is now a commonplace truth that there is no longer a line between print and video, or between mass and individual communications.

How does this great transformation impinge on the market for journalism? When a distinguished editor like Michael Kinsley goes to work for Microsoft, we know something is up, but what? Slate may be more successful in its printed form than as an electronic magazine. The on-line world has its limitations, but it is bound to change the established media that connect people to the places they live in and to each other. Furthermore, new communications technology will affect journalism indirectly by changing urban economies and the way people move around.

These days we are often confronted with a Utopian—or perhaps, dystopian—vision of a future in which much of life's business can be done at a computer keyboard or through teleconferencing, and where people work and shop and bank and amuse themselves at home, with minimal need to be physically near each other. If this vision were to come to pass—as many intelligent and serious people believe it will—it would mean that cities would no longer serve any social or economic purpose, and that the local news organizations that serve cities would lose their publics and no longer have an economic base.

Consider the shopping and trading patterns that have always been at the center of urban life. Will stores be replaced by direct marketing through computer networks? Consumers can already refer to electronic catalogues of merchandise and use their home computers to order anything they want in the right size and color. Newly announced software systems will greatly facilitate this process. However the lackluster performance of home shopping channels on cable television, where consumers can order conveniently by telephone, suggests that most people

still prefer to see what they are buying at first hand. In retail stores people can touch the merchandise and encounter friends unexpectedly. It is one thing to order the baby's diapers by computer, another matter when buying a car, no matter how much information there is on the computer screen. Stores won't disappear. However, they don't have to lose much of their business to create repercussions for the economic viability of local media that depend on retail advertising.

There will be a drain on other sources of media revenues. Real estate agents are already using computers routinely to share listings of available properties. 6,000 of them have sites on the World Wide Web. They can send prospective customers videocassettes that allow them to walk through a house on a simulated tour. With CD-ROMs, such a demonstration can soon be offered over a telephone line.

Electronic yellow pages can be kept continuously current. Advertisers would not have to move far in that direction to change the economics of the telephone directory business and of classified advertising—which has become steadily more important to newspapers as their department and chain store business wanes.

The essence of urban life, what gives it its vitality and intellectual energy, is the density of population, the intensity and randomness of direct human contacts. The nuances of emotion that can be expressed and exchanged face to face are lost when mediated by letter or telephone. They disappear altogether when the computer keyboard becomes the instrument of communication. How powerful a force will it be?

On-line chat groups flourish on the electronic networks, their participants drawn from what is literally a worldwide web. Anyone can create his own Web site, posting news about what he has eaten for lunch, what he dreamt about last night, and what his personal horoscope reveals. Enthusiasts for this activity assert that those who log in constitute a community, that they are bound together by genuine ties of feel-

ing and share each other's joys and griefs. But these largely anonymous electronic contacts are mainly impersonal and superficial. They are reminiscent of the chance connections radio amateurs used to make three-quarters of a century ago, when the letters "CQ" tapped out in Morse code could bring responses from fellow hams in distant and exotic places. Ten years ago the same notion was behind the fad of "citizens' band" (CB) radio. No sane person sits by the telephone, dialing numbers at random in the hope of making new friends. Once the novelty fades, the contacts lose meaning.

In a quite different category are the electronic bulletin boards set up for people who share a specialized professional, business or avocational interest. Such facilities speed up the flow of information and permit the exchange of meaningful opinions and current news on topics of common concern. They bring together people anywhere in the world who might rarely have the opportunity to meet, and they multiply the frequency of contacts among individuals who otherwise meet only at occasional conferences or conventions. No one can doubt that these services will grow tremendously, because they serve the vital interests of the small but significant numbers of people who are actively seeking information.

Academic scholarship, commercial marketing research and journalism have been profoundly affected by the availability on line of government and industry statistics, wire service news, professional journal articles and a rich variety of archival data. These resources enormously reduce the time formerly spent in libraries or morgues to gather intelligence and to make comparative analyses. Reporters, researchers, students and professors can be more productive, but that does not eliminate the need for newsrooms, or for schools, universities and research centers.

Not so very long ago, streets in the downtown business district of any great city were filled with messengers carrying messages from one office to another. The telephone changed all that. Along with the automobile, it helped to disperse business activity and popula-

tion farther into the urban perimeter where rents and labor costs are lower and social problems are fewer. Routine repetitive data processing and office services have long ago left corporate headquarters for cheaper locations. New communications technology is accelerating this trend. Yet there comes a point where decentralization is counterproductive—where the savings are outweighed by the loss of intellectual stimulation. That point may already have been reached.

In a recent telephone conversation, I asked a woman I was talking to in another city if she would pass on a message to a colleague who sits in an office adjacent to hers. Her response was, "I'll send him an E-mail." In my day, when you had something to say to someone next door, you got up, walked over, and, if the person was not on the telephone or in a meeting, you talked to him. Perhaps with busy executives, intimate personal conversations are now obsolete, but I doubt it. When we eliminate the smiles, the cups of coffee, the small talk and gossip that surround the bare bones of business transactions, we destroy some of the major satisfactions of work.

Magazine articles sometimes describe happy and successful individuals who work at home with the aid of a computer, a modem, and a fax machine, but it is doubtful that most people would find such a routine very satisfying. Two-way communication will not bring fundamental changes in the work place and will not make cities obsolete. However it could make them less exciting places to live in, and less interesting territory for good journalism.

The pathological condition of downtown Camden or Gary or Detroit was not brought about by computers, nor will it be solved by them. Preoccupation with technology is an inevitable response to the transformation of the competitive media environment. But this preoccupation may be deflecting the attention of newspaper managements away from their—and America's—most serious problem: the continuing deterioration of the central cities whose fate is inseparable from the past and future of the press. ■

Letter to the Editor Prague's 'Exuberantly Free Media'

To the Editor:

Nieman Reports is to be commended for its thorough and insightful review of the state of media and the practice of journalism in Eastern Europe (Summer '96).

The only exception, I regret to say, was Beverly Wachtel's dyspeptic and opinionated rumination on Czech media. Her report was so far off-base, so unlike the Czech Republic I've lived in for the past two years, that it seemed as if she'd made a wrong turn somewhere and ended up next door in Slovakia, where independent journalism really is under siege.

She speaks of the impending "death of nation-wide public radio, the restriction of political content in the media" and a "crisis in the dissemination of information to the public...."

Nonsense. Czech public radio and its flagship news and current affairs program Radiozurnal (funded as elsewhere in Europe mainly by public license fees and some advertising) are alive, politically independent—and expanding.

Radio Free Europe's own Czech service, weaning itself from U.S. support, launched a partnership with Czech Radio last February creating a daily 18-hour stream of local, regional and world news, features, discussion and commentary that reaches every corner of the country on AM transmitters, some of them powerful enough to be heard in London every night.

The daily fare includes contributions from BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle, giving Czech listeners a saturation picture of their own country and the world they have happily rejoined.

Restrictions on political content in the media? Not in the sense the phrase implies. Certainly the government exercises no constraint (much as it, like most governments, might like to.)

As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, many Czech newspapers still have ties to political parties and reflect their

views, but the print spectrum is very broad, from left to right, gutter to ivory-tower, and some papers are truly nonpartisan.

If anything, print media could benefit from a little more constraint in the form of professional journalism standards in areas of accuracy, fairness and balance.

Is this a "country without a national newspaper?" Ms. Wachtel overlooks several, including Lidove Noviny, one of Central Europe's most venerable and sober national newspapers. Up from the underground where it survived communist times, Lidove Noviny has suffered from a pro-government reputation in the past few years, but a new editor is asserting its impartiality and circulation is rising.

Apart from Poland, you won't find brassier, more exuberantly free print and broadcast media in Europe. How could you overlook Nova TV, an entirely private and hugely profitable nationwide channel that has captured a 70 percent audience share in the Czech Republic?

Does the official Czech radio and TV licensing council really "act against the will of the government simply because there are no laws preventing it from doing so," as Ms. Wachtel laments? I'm afraid so, but that's the way it was designed. After 40 years of government control of media, Czechs seem quite happy to let independent regulatory bodies act independently of government, especially where news and information are concerned.

Someone told them that's the way it works in a democracy. I'd recommend the same civics course to Ms. Wachtel.

Robert Gillette

The writer, a 1976 Nieman Fellow and a former Moscow and Warsaw bureau chief for The Los Angeles Times, is Director of Broadcasting at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Prague.

Chile's Cautious Free Press

By VERONICA LOPEZ

When I was a girl of 15 my grandmother, who had been working on the election campaign of Eduardo Frei, took me to see my first political rally. It was the first time I saw the tumult and wonder of democracy in action. What made it all the more exciting was the feeling of political change in the air, and while Frei did not win that election, he won the next and became the President of Chile. I also followed first hand the role of the press in promoting the political process, for my grandfather, Frederico Helfmann, had been a former partner of Augustin Edward, the founder of *El Mercurio*, first and still most popular of all the daily newspapers in Chile. My grandfather and his brother had formed *Editorial Zig Zag*, which created and published many of Chile's most important magazines at the time. As I grew up, surrounded by piles of magazines, I played with them as other children play with toys. Of course, I could not know then that one day I myself would play a role in developing two new Chilean magazines.

The years that followed my awareness of politics were difficult ones for Chile. There were national economic problems and the inevitable tensions that attend when there is a wealthy landholding class on one side and a large poor peasant class on the other. There followed an elected leftist government under Salvador Allende which nationalized many of the vital businesses in a faltering economy. Owners and key managers of businesses were sometimes tossed out onto the street by militant workers who took over the factories and ran them into the ground. Opposition from the military and right wing grew and ultimately there was a coup

d'état. Allende's overthrow and death September 11, 1973 was followed by a stern right wing military government, which imposed order upon the nation but at a human cost that has never been fully reckoned. As the nation moved from left, to right, toward center, the press in all its forms has had to struggle, and only those that could transform themselves managed to survive.

The return of democracy on March 11, 1990 marked the end of official censorship after 17 years of dictatorship but not complete freedom for the media. Not everything is being discussed fully and openly, particularly the issues that deal with the trials against the military for acts that occurred in the past and with the attempts to reform the Constitution. For reasons of economy and self-interest the press is unwilling to get too far ahead of the slow political process.

Even though General Augusto Pinochet gave up his dictatorship, the country still operates under a Constitution he established in 1980. This means that in the Congress and other national councils where important political decisions are made, military men, either retired or in office, can and do hobble the plans of the coalition government of President Eduardo Frei, son of the man of the same name elected President when I was in my teens. In the Senate, nine of the 47 Senators were chosen by Pinochet and not elected. They join with elected right-wing Senators to constitute an overwhelming majority in the Senate. In the House of Representatives the political parties that back the government are in the majority, but no law can be enacted without the Senate's approval.

Further, a unique "binominal" elec-

tion law, promulgated under the military regime, requires that the leading candidate in a parliamentary race must win by at least twice as many votes as his nearest opponent before the second seat in the precinct can go to a member of the same party. Otherwise the second precinct seat goes to the leading candidate from the opposing party. The result is an artificial over-representation of the right. The new government has tried to reform the Constitution,



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but all these attempts have failed in the Senate.

The media does have the legal right to speak out but economic factors, especially the nature of media ownership and the need for advertising revenues, are working against a truly free press. Most of the Chilean media are owned by private companies that support the views of the right wing parties rather than those of the elected government. These companies would rather avoid the issue of human rights; they support a "forget the old and start anew" formula that argues against trials for past military misdeeds. They favor democracy as long as it means modern enterprise, privatization of state-owned companies, no strikes and no communist come-back.

Occasionally, news about some military men is broadly covered, as when General Manuel Contreras, former chief of DINA (the Chilean secret service) was finally imprisoned after being sentenced as the intellectual author of Orlando Letelier's assassination in

Washington in 1976. (Letelier had been chancellor under President Allende and lived in the United States after the 1973 coup.) Stories about Contreras were not necessarily the act of a totally free press since he had been fingered by Pinochet supporters as the man who authorized the assassination; it was a way to shield Pinochet from any blame.

As news appeared about what went on during the military rule, there was (and still is) a list of names and issues that the general media does not touch. But there are occasional flashes of journalistic heroism, as last year, when the National Channel stirred a huge controversy because of a TV jail interview with an ex-DINA officer, Osvaldo Romo, who publicly confessed and revealed in detail how tortures were planned and carried out. This year, private TV station Venevision risked an interview with Carmen Soria, daughter of a Spanish diplomat who was tortured and killed during the military government and whose case was recently filed under the amnesty law. Soria bravely accused

Pinochet and no other of her father's death.

In the first case, the National TV Council, which regulates National Channel's new autonomous structure, openly criticized the station's manager for having allowed Romo's interview to go public. In the second case, the Army started a trial against Soria and asked the government to charge her with serious offenses against the Commander in Chief of the Army, but the government refused to get involved.

In general, broadcasting is the leading source of

news because of low readership of newspapers and magazines in the last 20 years. Prior to that Chile was well known on the continent for the quality of the coverage and the technical caliber of its print press. But things changed when the papers began to lose credibility during the military rule. Magazines that risked publishing news against Pinochet and the government were shut down. In some cases, editors were imprisoned and journalists faced trials.

El Mercurio, the oldest newspaper in Chile and still owned by a grandson of Agustin Edwards, has managed to maintain customer loyalty throughout its 150-year history, but these days its daily readership is low (58,000 copies in a country of 14 million). The Sunday edition has a higher readership (150,000) and delivers more extensive articles. The paper predominantly voices the views of the right wing, but its editorial page and Sunday reports have great influence throughout the country. In this regard it has no competitor.

La Tercera, owned by Grupo Copesa and chaired by Juan Carlos Latorre, is a more popular daily. It sells over 100,000 copies daily and over 250,000 copies on Sundays, but it doesn't have the influence of El Mercurio, nor is it able to capture any of the advertising revenue that goes to its competitor. Neither El Mercurio nor La Tercera faced political problems during the Pinochet era. On the contrary, both companies, which suffered serious economic problems during Allende's times, were granted important loans by the State Bank under the military government.

A third paper, La Epoca, founded by a group of politicians and professionals who, at the time (1987), opposed Pinochet, offered a broader point of view and deeper handling of the news, targeting intellectual readers. A great hit at first because it disclosed important human rights violations, the paper did not get any support from advertisers and couldn't retain all its staff and journalists who had conducted the deep investigations of what happened during the military government.

In 1988, a national referendum said



"no" to Pinochet and the process of preparing for free elections began. La Epoca didn't change its focus and insisted on covering human rights issues despite the lack of financial encouragement from the corporate advertisers. The paper went on a downhill slide that couldn't be stopped and was finally sold to Grupo Copesa, the owners of La Tercera.

Since my grandfather's days, magazines in Chile have played an important role in informing the public. *Ercilla*, one of the magazines he published, was held in such high regard that one of Chile's prestigious journalism awards is named in honor of its first editor in chief, Lenka Franulic. In the early 1960's the leading magazines often sold 90,000 copies or more on newsstands each week. (There are no significant mail subscriptions in Chile.) By the mid-60's readership started to decline, in part because of the increasing cost of paper after the oil embargo and in part because of competition from TV. When Pinochet assumed power readership dropped further as the public lost trust in the printed word. The magazines also faced competition from newspapers trying to stem the loss of readership by including supplementary magazines inside the daily papers. Sales of leading magazines declined to a mere 10,000 copies a week.

The magazines that were against Pinochet during his rule received money from international organizations and were able to fight for human rights. They sold well, but they were shut down many times and when they reappeared, they were much weaker. With democracy, those magazines lost their financial support and were not able to redefine their target, so now they too have disappeared.

Magazines that backed Pinochet had little or no influence except *Que Pasa*, which has managed to survive and is now the only weekly with some weight in economic and political matters. It also belongs to Grupo Copesa.

Three years after the start of the Pinochet era, a colleague and I decided to form a new magazine, *Cosas*, which celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. Although it was an international celeb-

rities magazine, much like *Hola* in Spain and *People* in the United States, it was the first and only publication to publish political interviews with those who opposed Pinochet without being closed down. My partner and I, both women, felt we could succeed if we didn't go too far in criticizing the government overtly.

The first years of censorship were difficult and we were called in by the government a couple of times and told to lower our profile. Rather than doing direct news stories, we hired top journalists and directed them to do interviews with public personalities, doing our best to achieve balance. Supporters, and opponents of military rule, even Pinochet himself, were interviewed in the pages of *Cosas*. During our occasional breakfast interviews with Pinochet, he would suddenly bang the table with his fist if there was a question he didn't like, then just as quickly he would again turn on his charismatic personality. For its spirit of journalism during a difficult period, *Cosas* won national and international awards. It was cited by Flacso, an organization for Latin American studies, as an example of dealing with politics under camouflage.

Later (1980) I sold my interest in *Cosas* and left the magazine to pursue other interests abroad. When I returned to Chile in 1986 I had hoped to launch a news magazine, but the military would not accept any form of news media that might help the opposition. I spent almost two years knocking on doors and waiting before I was able to talk to Pinochet himself about this matter. The meeting took place in a sumptuous living room in La Moneda, the presidential palace, under a huge golden chandelier called the Lamp of Tears. "So you insist on starting another magazine," he began. "And do you plan to publish political events?," he asked. I explained that as my new partners were an international holding company that mainly published women's magazines, my new project would not be a weekly news magazine. However, I also made it clear that as my work and credibility were at stake, the magazine would not hide from political issues. As he escorted me out of his office without

promising anything, I at least had the feeling that he had respect for my position. A few months later authorization was granted and the magazine *Caras* was started in 1988.

Using a format similar to its older competitor but with a heavier emphasis on national issues, *Caras* adopted a large page design with high quality photos. It devoted much space to culture and current events, to stories that were not covered well during the period of censorship and to issues considered taboo by Chilean society, such as AIDS, the divorce law and the law to enforce rights for illegitimate children. Today, *Cosas* and *Caras* together receive 80 percent of all magazine advertising and each sells 20,000 to 30,000 copies fortnightly.

The big change in Chilean media has taken place in the audiovisual area, where new technologies and eager foreign investment have produced an even greater concentration of corporate media ownership than in the print press. In broadcasting, the leaders are the traditional Channel 13, owned by Catholic University but managed as a private company, and the National Channel, once a state channel but now an autonomous entity still much influenced by the government. They compete for the highest ratings and together receive more than 50 percent of TV advertising revenues.

Then there is Megavisión, owned by Grupo Claro and Televisa. Grupo Claro also owns a newspaper, a publishing company and is involved in cable TV with Grupo El Mercurio. Ricardo Claro, head of the group, is a well-known right wing businessman who owns many companies throughout the country. Televisa, his partner in broadcasting, is a very well-known Mexican TV and radio broadcast company. Televisa's holdings include a chain of continental magazines produced in Miami and Mexico City. In Chile, they are my financial partners in the *Caras* magazine project.

The fourth TV station in Chile is Venevisión, formerly Chilevisión, now owned by the Venezuelan media group Cisneros. A fifth station, La Red, is look-

ing for foreign partners. Finally there is the TV station Rock and Pop, which targets young people and currently has low ratings. It has incorporated news programs that have been reviewed favorably. This station belongs to the Grupo Cooperativa, which has been a leader in radio broadcasting for many years. Cooperativa opposed Pinochet and fought for human rights, thereby receiving considerable acclaim. It operated a chain of radio stations throughout Chile but, after non-renewal of many licenses under Pinochet, they were left with only three stations.

In the arena of cable TV there is Metropolis-Intercom, the joint project by Claro and Grupo El Mercurio. Grupo Luksic, for years a mainstream Chilean company, entered the media market with VTR, which recently merged with CableExpress. Intercom-Metropolis and VTR-CableExpress control almost 80 percent of the subscribers' market. Among the foreign companies that run telephone companies and cable TV in the country are TCI-Bresnan, United International Holding (UIH), Southwestern Bell, and Telefonica de Espana. This growing international presence threatens a loss of cultural identity in a country that has not worked hard at instilling cultural values and, on the contrary, has lived through events that caused most of these values to go underground.

As the numbers of cable TV households, fiber optic connections, computers per person and use of the Internet grow, Chile is becoming a technology leader on the South American continent. This pace promises to continue along with the country's economic development and the rapid changes in the whole global market. All the major Chilean newspapers are on the World Wide Web. But, unfortunately, the pace of technology is not going hand in hand with improving media coverage. The press is not mobilizing forces to promote the political and social changes that the country requires to move forward as a whole.

The following key points may help us understand why this is so. Allende's government bitterly divided the Chilean society and credit for the resur-

gence in economic growth which we now enjoy is given to Pinochet and the military government. Historically Chileans have divided themselves in thirds: left wing, center, and right wing. President Frei is in office because the opposition to Pinochet was able to form a coalition of parties from the left and center, which allowed their candidates to win the two presidential elections since Pinochet stepped down as head of the government.

But with very few exceptions, those who favor these parties don't own the media. Further, they don't own the large companies that control the bulk of advertising revenues. So the power to move the press lies predominantly in the hands of the right wing. For this section of society, Pinochet is the man who saved their property and put everyone back in their place—workers in the factories and students in the schools. The inability of the media institutions to encourage total democracy is illustrated by how touchy the country remains on any question involving the military. Nobody wants to take an action that will jeopardize the very existence of their company or set in motion events that could lead to a return of government by the military or the extreme left. So the media struggles with self-imposed censorship as it tests how far it can push ahead and when it has to pull back. Perhaps this explains why a cautious free press has yet to assume its full role in our fragile democracy.

The opportunity for a more complete democracy will come next year when Pinochet's power to name the nine senators and his term as Commander in Chief of the Army runs out. When Pinochet steps out of the constant limelight, it is likely that the military will finally return to its former place in society, but that doesn't mean that Pinochet himself will be forgotten. He could still play an influential role in many public and private activities. Nevertheless, the way could be cleared for an understanding between the government and the right wing parties to reform the Constitution, change the electoral law, conduct trials on human rights abuses and complete fulfillment of the long desired democracy. ■



Thabo Mbeeki 'People-Driven' In South Africa

So here we are. We have a government which has to take decisions which are about whether 10,000 people will have a job tomorrow or will not have a job tomorrow. Whether the people who are sitting in jail in death row will actually be hanged or will not be hanged. I am saying that you can look across the entire spectrum of social life and you would see that these are decisions that this government has got to take because it is a figure of transformation that has all sorts of earth-shaking impact on the people. Whether I as a white parent am going to find that my child tomorrow is in the same classroom with a black child, a very traumatic experience for mother and father, possibly. Big decisions... It therefore becomes doubly important that the people should know what it is that this government is doing so they can impact on its decisions which have important impact on their lives. Therefore to say people-driven necessarily means that the people have got to be informed. Now that is the particular challenge. How do you do it?—*Thabo Mbeeki, Executive Deputy President, Republic of South Africa, at Nieman Fellows breakfast, September 13, 1996.*

The Foreign Correspondent in Rangoon Reporting Isn't Easy

BY BERTIL LINTNER

A Thai businessman once asked me, "Why do you hate the SLORC so much?" The State Law and Order Restoration Council rules as the military government in Burma, a country I've covered for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* since 1981.

Hate? I've always considered my reporting frank and critical, but accurate. I've been first to report on major developments in Burma, now known as Myanmar. I revealed the arms trade with Beijing in 1990, when the first Chinese ship loaded with munitions arrived in Rangoon. The same year, I reported on the heroin trade from Burma's sector of the Golden Triangle through Yunnan and on to the rest of the world, and the opening of the Chinese market to narcotics. I broke the news about a mutiny in the Communist Party of Burma in 1989.

But that is precisely the problem. I've infuriated the Burmese generals by digging up aspects of Burma that they want to be kept secret.

This journalistic excavating began in 1985, when my wife and I trekked 18 months through rebel-held areas. The fact that we covered 2,275 kilometers (1,422 miles) on foot across Burma, from the Indian frontier to the Mekong River boundary, contradicted the government's claim that it controlled the entire country. The Burmese generals then put a 300,000 Kyat (then about \$50,000) reward on my head, but I returned to Bangkok to report on my experiences.

Kyaw Ba, the general then in charge of trying to capture me, is now Minister for Tourism. Asia Inc., a business magazine, recently portrayed him as "the only tourism minister in Asia whose appointments secretary wears camouflage fatigues, opens mail with a bayo-

net and complements his steno pad with a revolver and concussion grenades." That not even such a dedicated general was able to capture me caused consternation in Rangoon almost 10 years ago, and fueled the hatred toward me.

A stream of vitriolic articles in Burma's state-controlled media have denounced not my writings, the accuracy of which they haven't been able to dispute, but me personally. My entire family, even my infant daughter, was attacked under the headline "To Bertil Lintner And His ilk" in the *Working People's Daily* in 1989. On May 4, 1990, an even more vicious article in that paper commented on the execution of London Observer correspondent Farzad Bazoft in Iraq, and said I deserved the same fate.

The SLORC wasn't running those stories because it expected them to be believed. The council wanted to identify me as an enemy of the state, a person whom any Burmese who wanted to stay out of trouble must avoid. For those who had never read my writings, but knew of the SLORC's hatred of me, it served the purpose of portraying me as the villain in today's Burma. That's why I got questions such as, "Why do you hate the SLORC so much?"

A Rangoon-based U.N. official once told me, "I appreciate critical journalists. But you have to be fair and factual. It wasn't nice to imply that Gen. Khin Nyunt [head of Burma's secret police] could be a transvestite." I never wrote anything of that sort. It came from a sensational Agence France Press report. But the SLORC propaganda had worked: I was the source of anything negative about the SLORC.

In fact, I never hesitated to write unflattering stories about the SLORC's

opponents. In July 1992, I reported that pro-democracy students in Burma's jungles had executed some of their own activists, falsely accusing them of being SLORC spies. In November 1995, I described how opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the darling of the Western media, was becoming marginalized. For several years, I was banned from the headquarters of the Karen rebels along the Thai-Burma border because I had written about their setbacks in battling the government.

The news media often have used misleading language about Burma, though perhaps not as badly as *The Working People's Daily* (now renamed *The New Light of Myanmar*).

In 1974, the body of U.N. Secretary-General U Thant was flown back to Burma for burial. A critic of Burma's government, U Thant was a national



Bertil Lintner, a Swede based in Bangkok, is a freelance journalist and a leading expert on Burma. He writes for the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review, Svenska Dagbladet of Sweden, Politiken of Denmark and other newspapers and magazines. He has written four books about Burma.



DOMINIC FULTON, BURMAI BANGKOK

Members of Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council's "Information" Committee questioning a foreign reporter, June 1990.

hero, but the army refused to pay him the respect many Burmese thought he deserved. A group of students abducted the body to organize a proper funeral. The army responded by shooting dead scores of people. Yet in 1980 Edward Heyman, an American political scientist, suggested that the students' action was "one example of a terrorist group adopting another's tactics." He equated them with urban guerrillas in Argentina, who had abducted ex-President Pedro Aramburu's corpse. He made no mention of the Burmese army's brutality.

Likewise, the Rangoon massacre of 1988—when the army machine-gunned unarmed demonstrators, killing thousands—is now often referred to using the euphemisms propagated by the Burmese authorities. I've heard several diplomats and U.N. personnel refer to the 1988 events as "the disturbances," and Western and Asian media have reproduced this and similar expressions.

In April 1989, the SLORC decided to give me a visa, which I appreciated. I had always wanted to present their side

of the story as well. On the second day of my stay in Rangoon, an army jeep picked me up and drove me to a conference hall where I encountered the entire government information committee. At the head of the table was the then-chief of information, ex-Col. Soe Nyunt. On his lap was a file which evidently contained translations of everything I had written about Burma.

What I had thought was going to be me interviewing them turned into a harangue of attacks from Soe Nyunt. "Why do you write all these falsehoods about our country?" he asked. I said my reporting was accurate, and if there was one factual error in his file, I would write a public apology in the *Working People's Daily*. Soe Nyunt flipped frantically through the file. Eventually, he said:

"You reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of 13 April 1989 that the sale of a gems and jade emporium in Rangoon in March netted U.S. \$5.4 million. The correct figure is U.S. \$7 million."

I said that when my article was pub-

lished, only the gems had been sold, and it was not until the jade sale that the figure reached \$7 million. That ended that discussion. Soe Nyunt closed his file and continued to harangue me and my writings, but gave no examples of what was incorrect. I sighed and gave up. Later, Soe Nyunt was the one who under the pen name "Bo Thanmani" ("Officer Steel") said that I deserved the same fate as Farzad Bazoft. I have been on the visa blacklist since that visit.

If such encounters with the generals were my only response from my Burmese readers, I would most probably have chosen a different occupation years ago. But I'm always heartened to receive letters from Burmese, inside and outside the country, thanking me for what I have written and encouraging me to continue.

That's when I feel that being a critical journalist hated by a vicious government is the world's greatest profession.

■

Art's Obsession With Violence

BY DANIEL RUBEY

Art in the last decade seems obsessed with violence, blood and death. Damien Hirst slices farm animals like sausages and displays them in glass tanks of formaldehyde. Ron Athey cuts patterns into a man's back with a scalpel, blots the blood with paper towels, and hangs them on clotheslines pulled out over the audience. Cindy Sherman exhibits photographs of what looks like vomit and body parts. The London Observer provokes a public uproar by printing Joel-Peter Witkin's photograph of a dead baby.

In the past, art like Goya's horrifying series of etchings "The Disasters of War" (1810), with its images of dismembered bodies impaled on trees, or Picasso's more stylized "Guernica" (1937) protested the violence of war. Christian art sanctified the suffering of Christ and his saints. But contemporary art often lacks clear meanings, and it raises questions for journalists trying to find approaches to disturbing material.

At 36, Damien Hirst is already "the most famous living British artist," according to the London-based Art Review. Apparently no one can write about British art without mentioning Hirst; my Nexis search retrieved 1,933 hits—a feeding frenzy for contemporary art. Hirst won the prestigious Turner prize in 1993 for "Mother and Child Divided," a cow and calf sliced from nose to tail and placed in two vats filled with formaldehyde. A 1990 work called "A Thousand Years" reportedly put a rotting cow's head, maggots, flies and a bug zapper in a glass tank.

Of course, Hirst is not as famous as Picasso—every journalist's favorite artist (39,746 hits). But he's become a pop

icon for those who love his work and those who hate it. The popular media tends to be suspicious of new art forms and the art world in general. Journalists are shocked (shocked!) or ironic and sarcastic. But actually, the media like to be titillated by the art world. Bizarre behavior by artists—Van Gogh's cutting off his ear, Andy Warhol's factory—is news; overnight success by young unknowns is news. But this cycle of titillation and outrage doesn't address the work, and often what's said is based on hearsay or misinformation, as if art weren't important enough to bother getting it right.

The art press, on the other hand, sensing it has a live one, rushes to justify and explain, to create a new discourse about the work. Art in America authoritatively moves Hirst into the canon with a thorough, explanatory piece; Artforum refers approvingly to Hirst in their hip "Letter from London." The London-based Art & Design prints a theoretical piece locating Hirst's work within Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime.

The problem is that viewers don't seem to experience the required shock and terror. I remember approaching the cows the first time with some anxiety, if not quite terror, about the smell—some memory from my police-beat days I don't want to revisit. But the actual experience was like a science exhibit. At the Jeu de Paume exhibition of British sculpture in Paris last summer, one appreciative student, brainwashed by the formalist credo usually blamed on Clement Greenberg's defense of abstraction in the 1950's, was quoted by The Observer as saying, "When I look at the Hirst I don't see the cow and calf, I

see the blue liquid around them."

So what *is* Hirst's work about? His exhibition last summer at the Gagosian Gallery in New York's SoHo district included two animal pieces, but also a wide range of other works. Two cows were sliced into one-foot vertical sections, placed in twelve seven-foot tanks, and set in a row with enough space between them to walk through. Hirst titled the piece "Some Comfort Gained from the Acceptance of the Inherent Lies in Everything." In an interview



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Andres Serrano, ASE-179-A-PH, "The Morgue (Knifed To Death I)," 1992; cibachrome, silicone, plexi-glass, wood frame 49 1/2 x 60". Ed: 3. Diprych.



Andres Serrano, ASE-180-A-PH, "The Morgue (Knifed To Death II)," 1992; cibachrome, silicone, plexi-glass, wood frame 49 1/2 x 60". Ed: 3. Diprych.

COURTESY PAULA GOOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK

quoted in the exhibition catalogue, Hirst defines the lies as "The lie of Coca-Cola, the lie of smoking, the lie of government... The lie of living forever." Who's telling the lie of living forever? My guess is a society obsessed with youth and beauty and Barbie doll supermodels and Mr. Clean, which looks away from disease, old age and death.

A giant ashtray filled with butts called "Party-Time" might refer to lung cancer, but Hirst described it in *The Economist* as an analogy of life and mortality through the destruction of clinically pristine cigarettes. Rotating spin paintings produced by laying circular canvases on a spinning turntable and throwing colorful glossy household paint at them seem like metaphors for the "violence" of the abstract expressionist gesture. A 10-by-40 foot billboard with rotating vertical slats displays, in turn, the words "The Problems With Relationships," images of hammer and a peach and images of a jar of Vaseline and a phallic English cucumber, continuing the stylized references to violence and relating the whole exhibit to advertising.

If the show takes a position on the "Inherent Lies in Everything," it's complicity, not exposure. The exhibition was like a party, it was about being young and having fun and ignoring the

fact that we're going to die. Just dancing in the graveyard. In one piece a beach ball is supported by a column of air. Someday the blower will be turned off; for now, it's fun.

Journalists expect the artist to explain what all this means. They want artists to deliver good quotes and suspect a hoax if they aren't forthcoming. But there isn't necessarily any "meaning," any message to be communicated in much of contemporary art. Artists talk to each other about technical problems; art critics follow the evolution of style, form and color. They don't talk much about meaning.

Hirst told *Art Review*, "my work's about life and death and all that stuff." Fair enough. Some artists are articulate about their work; others aren't. It's not always reasonable to expect artists, particularly young artists, to offer sophisticated verbal interpretations. Words and visual images are different media, and people skillful in one aren't always equally skillful in the other. Visual images shouldn't translate easily into words; art should offer another dimension. Writing well about art is hard because it requires language allusive and metaphoric enough to capture that other dimension.

But beyond questions of interpretation, there's a great deal to say about how the media acts as a form of market-

ing for the art world. Hirst's brief career has cleverly exploited the symbiotic relationship between the media and the art world. Hirst creates works that can be termed violent or shocking, and therefore news. Media notoriety means recognition, and recognition increases prices. Last May, *The Observer* reported that a spin painting found in a rubbish heap in east London was thought to be an early work by Hirst and valued at £30,000. When it turned out to be by the not-so-famous Andy Shaw, the price dropped to under £2,000.

Art has a business aspect like everything else, and galleries, museums, the academic world and the media all interact in the production and marketing of new cultural icons. It's not surprising that advertising mogul Charles Saatchi has reportedly purchased the cow piece, as reported in *Newsweek*. The Gagosian gallery downtown in SoHo handles the cutting edge for the main gallery on Madison Avenue uptown, where they sell the Picassos. (Running concurrently with the Hirst edition downtown, Gagosian had an exhibition of Picasso portraits uptown timed to coincide with the Picasso Portraiture show at the Museum of Modern Art.) No one is making big bucks off of Hirst's work; reportedly in England they've sold for five figures and production costs were close to sale prices. Saatchi may have

raised the price to half a million for "Some Comfort Gained...." But those Picassos uptown presumably sell for millions.

Another story journalists tend to write is about art as anti-establishment, the "épater les bourgeois" story. Several stories about the Hirst exhibit at Gagosian asserted that the gallery had wanted to exhibit two cow carcasses simulating copulation without any preservative, just rotting in a glass case vented with a filtration system, but that the project had been vetoed by city health officials. One story said such a show at Gagosian in the past had been shut down by the New York City Health Department.

Actually, according to gallery director Elan Wingate, Hirst had proposed the project, but the gallery decided to "work with him on developing a different piece" because of anticipated complaints. The existing health codes are vague and there's no place to apply for a permit, Wingate said. If they had installed the show and then gotten complaints, they would have had to shut it down for the entire run to take air samples, he told me.

Sometimes it seems that the actual work isn't offensive or sensational enough, and the media have to embroider it. Early reports of Ron Athey's performance in Minneapolis had AIDS-infected blood dripping on the audience, a provocative exaggeration corrected by Frank Rich in *The New York Times*, but not before there were the usual complaints about the National Endowment for the Arts from Congress.

Genuinely confrontational work, like Sue Coe's "Police State" drawings or her investigation of slaughterhouses in "Porkopolis" (1989) and "Dead Meat" (1996), draws less media attention (289 hits). Coe protests violence and suffering in all aspects of modern society, from rape, to vivisection, to war and bomb testing, to AIDS and the oppression of minorities and the poor. Her images have been printed in a number of publications, including *Mother Jones* and *The New York Times*. Her images of the New Bedford pool table rape show better than a photograph or written account the violence and brutality of rape, removing any possibility of voyeurism or erotic fantasy. Coe's closest models are the German expression-

ists George Grosz and Kathe Köllwitz, and their extended critique of German society.

Coe's a vegetarian, while Hirst likes his lamb chops rare. She's done real investigative work about the practices of killing animals for food, getting into places closed to the public by making access to local slaughterhouses part of her lecture fee. But the media hasn't been much interested, perhaps because Coe's images speak eloquently for themselves, but also because we don't want to hear about it. The brutality Coe documents is part of moving from a farm economy where everyone killed their own animals to a society where the slaughter is centralized and out of sight. The general public (including Alexander Cockburn, who wrote an introduction on the history of meat-eating for "Dead Meat") isn't going to stop eating meat and doesn't want to pay the additional costs kinder practices would entail. And the media isn't going to make us look.

The current art world obsession with the body and violence began in 1970's performance art, with works like Chris Burden's "Shoot," in which Burden had himself shot in the arm. This obsession seems like a cultural return of the repressed, a resurfacing of material banned from the public eye. Sue Coe's images focus on the naked, wounded body, animal and human, in order to instruct and protest, and there's a long history in Western art of images of torture and execution serving similar (not identical) instructional purposes. Images of the torture and death of Jesus and Christian martyrs in religious art from the Medieval period through the 17th Century induce piety, and images of public torture and execution from the Renaissance through the 19th Century warn against crime. But those images also have a voyeuristic content fueled by natural curiosity about the inside of the body and nature of pain and death.

In the film "Braveheart" the camera tastefully looks away as Mel Gibson's guts are pulled out. But death by disemboweling, either manual or with the help of a crank, was common in northern and central Europe at least through the 16th Century and was illustrated in



COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

Damien Hirst, "Away from the Flock," 1994 (second version), steel, glass, formaldehyde solution & lamb; 39 x 59 x 20 inches.

gory detail in popular woodcuts. Similar images of public torture and execution were printed in the popular and lurid "penny bloods" and almanacs of the early 19th Century. Our own age is more squeamish, and we hide these kinds of things away in prisons and hospitals.

Journalists play a gatekeeper role, taking pride in their own ability to deal with blood and death but self-censoring accounts and images that appear in print or on TV. Clearly much of this censorship is in response to reader/viewer sensibilities. When *The London Independent* published a picture of Joel-Peter Witkin's photograph "The Feast of Fools," a still-life tableaux containing a dead baby, reader outrage convinced the paper's art critic to write an apology and declare Witkin's work indefensible, thereby joining the un-

spoken agreement of our age to leave such sights behind closed doors.

It could easily be argued that the tension between the body as unblemished surface and as bloody interior is fundamental in Western art. Skillful artists have always tried to depict the body beneath the skin and studied anatomy in order to do so. The artistic temptation to cut the skin and show what lies beneath is behind "The Flaying of Marsyas," one of Titian's greatest paintings (mid-1570's) and the subject of paintings by a wide range of great artists, including Raphael, Ribera and Rottmayr. In the story from Ovid's "Metamorphoses," the satyr Marsyas is punished for his hubris in challenging the god Apollo to a pipes contest by having the skin cut from his living body. Art has always wanted to celebrate and preserve the beauty of life, but also to suggest its inevitable death and decay. On closer inspection, those beautiful 17th Century Dutch still lifes of elaborately arranged flowers are covered with insects and a worm is eating the heart of the bloom.

The most disturbing and transgressive images of our moment in history seem to be photographs of dead bodies which began (to my knowledge) with Witkin's tableaux in the late 1970's. The photographer Cindy Sherman made a series of photographs in the late 1980's referred to as the "bulimia" or "vomit" pictures which included one image of a corpse's face and others of body parts. According to her New York gallery, Metro Pictures, Sherman didn't

photograph actual bodies; she used masks, rubber and prosthetics.

Sherman never offers interpretations of her work, but the concern with the rotting, dismembered, dead body in this series seems in some sense a feminist dialogue with the smooth, controlled unbroken surfaces of male minimalist art of the 1970's—the regular, symmetrical polished metal of Donald Judd, the neon lights of Dan Flavin, the parallel line paintings of Frank Stella. Sherman's work reasserts the messy "female" interior and with it the issues of death and decay minimalist art denies.

The morgue photos of Alexis Rockman and Andrés Serrano, on the other hand, are of actual corpses, and raise institutional questions for me about who controls access to information in this society. Photography gives these images much of their power because it has an authority derived from the fact that it contends that it records and gives access to something that was really present in the real world; but I have to admit Cindy Sherman's huge close-up of the death mask has haunted me ever since I saw it in 1989. On the other hand, Damien Hirst's promotional photo of his head cheek to jowl with a cadaver is merely a tasteless joke.

Most of Rockman's work in recent years has been super-realist paintings of real and imaginary plants and animals often locked in death struggles, a fascinating cross between Charles Darwin and Hieronymus Bosch. But in the fall of 1991 he exhibited photographs of medical cadavers to which he was given secret access by a medical student. The photographs are chilling and almost impossible to look at, both for the horror a dissected human body generates in an age as protected from such sights as our own, and for some sense of outrage and desecration.

And yet looking at these photographs also carries a sense of empowerment, some assistance with accepting our inevitable mortality. Rockman told me in a phone interview that he was both fascinated and frightened, unable to look through the viewfinder of his camera, but that afterward the experience seemed to have inoculated him against



Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828); *The Garrotted Man* ca. 1778-80, etching printed in blue ink, working proof, 330 x 210 cm.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. BEARNS FINE, 1920 (20.22).

some of his own fears about illness and death and made him better able to deal with the death of his grandmother and later his father.

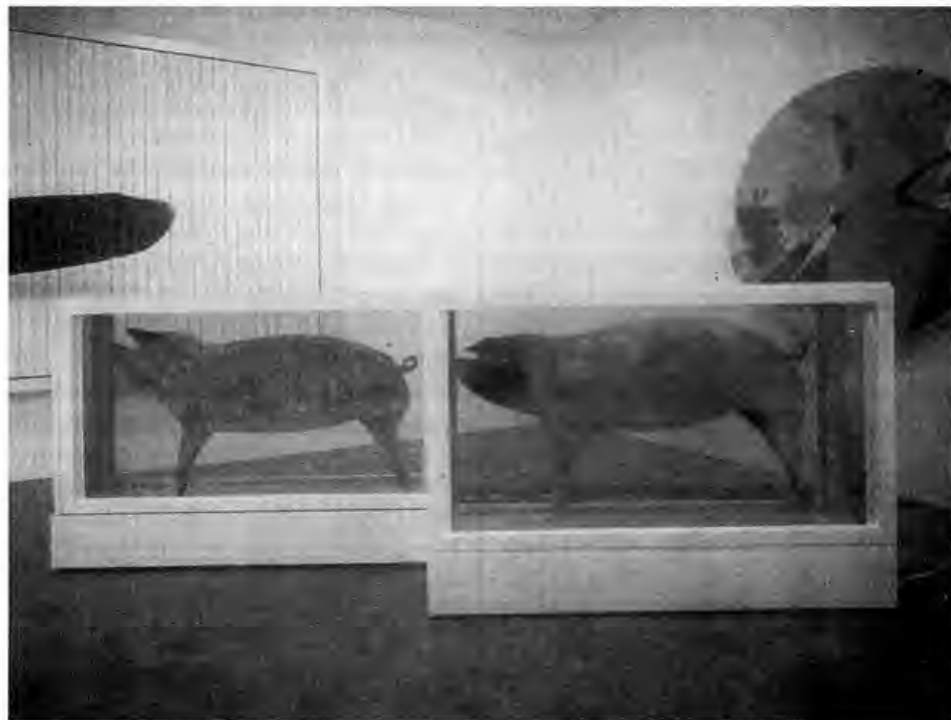
Rockman's exhibition was ignored by the media, as far as I know. But 18 months later, Andrés Serrano, already notorious for his "piss christ" and Jessie Helms's attacks, opened a show of morgue photographs at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, and that exhibition drew some media attention (109 Nexis hits out of 2,157 for Serrano). Where Rockman violated the secrecy of the medical establishment, Serrano talked his way inside a police morgue at some undisclosed location. Serrano's images range from horrifying shots of burn victims and violent deaths to almost sentimental images of a child who died of meningitis. All the photographs were closely cropped to include only carefully composed parts of the bodies (head, hands, feet), and printed in a very large format (49.5 x 60 inches).

Some critics have praised Serrano for breaking through the concealment of death in modern society; others have criticized him for his disrespectful voyeurism and his romanticizing of death. I can't decide those questions here, but Serrano's dressing up the baby's corpse with a bit of ribbon and a soft blanket can be seen as an act of pity and respect, much like the postmortem photographs of dead children in flower-strewn coffins popular during the 19th Century. My point is simply that there aren't simple answers to the questions posed by this work.

Finally, I'm not certain John Naisbitt was right when he said in "Megatrends 2000" that the arts will supplant sports as America's obsession in the future. But Lynne Cheney and the National Endowment for the Humanities reported in 1988 that total spending to attend cultural events exceeded the amount spent on spectator sports by 10 percent in 1986, and anyone who has been to a blockbuster show at a museum recently has seen capacity crowds of people dutifully reading labels and listening to tapes. Visual art is important because it's the cutting edge of visual representation in a society. Artists produce the visual iconography and



Sue Coe, "Judas Sheep." 1990. Gouache, watercolor, graphite, and collage on white Strathmore Bristol paper, #97 from the series "Porkopolis." Copyright 1990 Sue Coe. Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Damien Hirst, "This Little Piggy Went to the Market, This Little Piggy Stayed Home," 1996; steel, GRP composites, glass, pig and formaldehyde solution.

symbolism a society uses to think about itself, to imagine its future and remember its past, to exploring its collective dreams. By any measure, there's a great deal of interest in the arts today. It's

important for the media to be as knowledgeable and intelligent about art as it is about other topics of public interest.



Violence in Popular Music

By J.D. CONSIDINE

On May 30, Former Secretary of Education William Bennett, Senator Joe Lieberman, the head of the National Political Caucus of Black Women, C. DeLores Tucker, and representatives from Senator Sam Nunn's office held a news conference in Washington to denounce 20 recording artists whose work the group considered detrimental to the nation's youth.

Demanding that record companies stop promoting "vicious, vulgar" music, the group singled out 20 artists—including such best-sellers as Tupac Shakur, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Cypress Hill, Too Short and Tha Dogg Pound—for specific abuse, but heaped most of the blame on the recording industry. Lieberman castigated the companies for marketing albums that "glorify murder and drug abuse and that celebrate the beating and raping of women," while Tucker thundered that record companies "have the blood of our children on their hands." Said Bennett, "Nothing less is at stake than civilization." Clearly, this was meant as a wake-up call for America.

Spokespeople for the recording industry were ready with immediate rebuttals, which ranged from talk of First Amendment rights to a reminder from Pam Horvitz, President of the National Association of Recording Merchandisers, that there are "millions of Americans who, as adults, are entitled to listen to music with mature themes." Given the success Bennett and Tucker claimed in forcing Time Warner to sever its relationship with Interscope Records (home of such controversial acts as Snoop Doggy Dogg, Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson), there was every reason to believe that this latest broad-

side would have the same sort of impact as Bob Dole's 1995 attack on the music and movie businesses.

But when the reports ran the next day, America yawned and turned the page.

What happened? How had perversity in popular music—a hot issue since Elvis first wiggled his pelvis—become such a non-issue? It seems unlikely that Bennett and his staff would have had a hard time coming up with vile lyrics to quote; indeed, it would be far easier to imagine that the 20 examples cited at the news conference had been winnowed down from a much larger group of candidates. And while some of the artists mentioned—Cannibal Corpse and Lords of Acid, for example—were relatively obscure, most were million-sellers. The menace in this music should have been obvious to millions.

In fact, it was—but not quite the way Bennett, Tucker, Lieberman and Nunn had imagined. If anything, the music's ubiquity had the opposite effect. Because for every adult who was alarmed and offended by the lyrics Bennett and company quoted, there were another five or ten who recognized those artists from their children's CD collections, but saw nothing in the behavior of their sons and daughters that suggested those albums were turning them into desensitized destructors. As far as these parents were concerned, Washington's "lyric vigilantes" had cried wolf! once too often.

They weren't the only guilty parties, though, as much of the media has been only too happy to amplify those cries. No sooner had Susan Baker, Pam Howar, Tipper Gore and the "Washington Wives" who comprised the original membership of the Parents' Music Resource Center aired their complaints

about caustic lyrics before a meeting of the Senate Commerce Committee in 1985 than *People* magazine had a cover story inquiring "Has Rock Gone Too Far?" Nor was *People* alone in its clamorous concern. Indeed, the population had been whipped into such a frenzy by the notion of nasty music corrupting America's youth that poll after poll showed that the average American voiced concern over lyrical excess—although, tellingly, far fewer felt it was the government's business to decide what they or their children should listen to.

Nor did the press need prompting to point out how horrifying popular music had become. In March of 1990, *Newsweek* ran a cover story that antici-



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pated many of Bennett and Tucker's complaints about the thuggishness of popular music. Boasting the headline "Rap Rage," the package included read-outs of provocative lyrics, a list of rap albums rated movie-style from G to X (most were rated R), and an essay arguing that rap was mired in a culture of anger, bigotry and gang violence. Although Newsweek did "balance" its coverage with a few token admissions that, yes, not all rap music was negative, it was hard not to miss the magazine's underlying message: this is scary music made by scary people.

To be fair, though, Newsweek was just following a larger scheme of stereotypes about popular music in America. For writers and editors who mainly knew rap as the dull-thumping blare that spewed from the jeeps and boom boxes of menacing young men, it was easy to assume that the music was just one more ugly manifestation of urban blight. So rap became synonymous with angry young black men (and later, according to *The New Republic*, pathetic white wanna-be's), just as country was the music of choice for wholesome, good-hearted middle Americans, and heavy metal was the domain of brain-dead Beavis and Butt-heads.

So it was hardly surprising that, when a rumor drifted out that the youths arrested in the near-fatal mugging of a Central Park jogger had been chanting Tone-Loc's "Wild Thing," *The New York Post* immediately ran it as a telling detail, even though the story could not be confirmed by police. Likewise, an Ohio mother's assertion that her son would never have set fire to the family trailer (in the process, killing his two-year old little sister) if he hadn't been imitating "Beavis & Butt-head" was widely reported, while a CNN report, quoting neighbors who insisted that the boy had a history of fire-starting and the trailer was not wired for cable, went largely unmentioned.

Also unexamined was the assumption, implicit in most pop music-and-violence stories, that there is a causal relationship between lyrics glorifying violence and violent behavior on the part of listeners. That people would leap to the conclusion that the two are

linked is understandable; as the Parents' Music Resource Center would argue, if lyrics could convey positive messages and inspire good behavior, as many rock stars are wont to boast, why shouldn't we assume that the negative messages of lyrics would inspire bad behavior?

Of course, no one gave peace a chance just because John Lennon said so, nor has it been demonstrated that anyone has gone out shooting cops after listening to Body Count's "Cop Killer." Truth is, no evidence of a causal relationship between song lyrics and violent action exists. In fact, every attempt to demonstrate such a relation-

Some Controversial Lyrics

My adrenaline's pumpin'
I got my stereo bumpin'
I'm 'bout to kill me somethin'
A pig stopped me for nothin'
(chorus)
DIE, DIE, DIE PIG, DIE!
FUCK THE POLICE

—From "Cop Killer." Written by Ice-T, performed by Body Count.

I'm as hard as fucking steel, and I've got the power

I'm every inch a man, and I'll show you somehow

Me and my fucking gun
Nothing can stop me now
Shoot shoot shoot shoot shoot
I'm going to come all over you
Me and my fucking gun

—From "Big Man with a Gun." Written by Trent Reznor, performed by Nine Inch Nails.

Punk police are afraid of me
A young nigger on the warpath
And when I finish, it's gonna be a bloodbath
Of cops dyin' in L.A.

—From "F— tha Police." Written by MC Ren and Ice Cube, performed by N.W.A.

My destiny's to die
Keep my finger on the trigger

Am I paranoid? Tell me the truth
I'm out the window with my AK
Ready to shoot
Ran out of endo
And my mind can't take the stress
I'm out of breath

Makes me want to kill my damn self
I see death around the corner

—From "Death Around the Corner." Written by Tupac Shakur and Johnny "J." performed by 2Pac. Shakur died Sept. 13, victim of an assassination.

ship in court has failed, from a lawsuit in Nevada that failed to prove that "hidden messages" in a Judas Priest album drove two teens to shoot themselves, to a Texas murder case in which the defendant unsuccessfully claimed that if he hadn't been listening to a Tupac Shakur song, he would never have killed that Texas ranger.

Still, reporters and editors continue to get sucked in by dubious suggestions of cause-and-effect. So when New York policeman James E. Davis, who successfully lobbied to have realistic-looking plastic guns removed from toy store shelves, declared in 1994 that MTV was a "vehicle that some rappers use for violence that is perpetuating itself in our community," few who covered his campaign to get guns off of TV challenged his basic assumption. Nor did many bother to report that MTV in fact had the most stringent anti-gun policy on television.

Why not? Probably because precious few reporters actually watch MTV, or spend time listening to the music under attack. And it shows.

Perhaps the most notorious example occurred in 1992, when a Texas law-enforcement organization calling itself CLEAT organized a boycott of all Time Warner products to protest the inclusion of a song called "Cop Killer" on the self-titled debut of Ice-T's Body Count. Because Ice-T is best-known as a rapper, and it was easy enough in the wake of recordings like N.W.A.'s "F— tha Police" to imagine a gangsta rap writing about killing policemen, "Cop Killer" was consistently described as a rap song.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. Body Count is a heavy metal band—a trash act, to be specific—and it takes only one hearing to recognize that "Cop Killer" had about as much to do with rap music as Metallica's "Enter Sandman." The fans knew this, of course, and consequently assumed that anyone who referred to "Cop Killer" as a "rap song" hadn't listened to the recording, and so didn't know what they were talking about.

A similar situation emerged last year, when William Bennett read the profanity-studded lyrics from "Big Man with a Gun," by the alternative rock act Nine Inch Nails, to squirming Time Warner

stockholders. He couldn't have picked a better shame-inducer, as the curse-filled text crudely connects male sex and gun violence. But by pronouncing the tune a glorification of guns and sexual violence, he completely missed the point. As a single spin of the album reveals, the noise and tumult of the music is no glorification of violence; if anything, it underscores just how ugly the acts described in the lyrics are.

Bennett may not have understood how to weigh the words against the music, but millions of teen-aged Nine Inch Nails fans certainly did. Maybe that's why Bennett's performance failed to shock American parents into action. As a 1990 poll of parents' views of music lyrics showed, although seven out of ten parents were "concerned" about the content of song lyrics, most also felt that lyrics had less influence on children's values than parents, friends, teachers, TV, movies or books. So if their Nine Inch Nail-loving children seem healthy and well-adjusted, the average parent isn't going to waste time worrying about naughty words on some lyrics sheet.

What parents do worry about are practical issues, like whether junior will come out of a concert mosh pit with a serious injury. Somehow, though, moshing just isn't as sexy an issue as foul-mouthed rappers and alterna-rockers.

Some of the blame for that lies with the fact that most mosh pit injuries aren't even serious enough to make the police blotter. To date, there has been only one mosh-pit fatality in the U.S., but the number of claims for injury filed against concert promoters has increased six fold in the last five years, with most of that increase attributed to such mosh pit activities as crowd surfing (where audience members are passed over the heads of a roiling pit of slam dancers) and stage diving (where audience members scramble onto the stage in order to leap onto the heads of fellow fans). At least two cases have resulted in paralysis—and multi-million dollar lawsuits.

Although the press does report major incidents, like the death of a Smashing Pumpkins fan at a Dublin concert

this spring, most stories about moshing have tended to take a tabloid approach, treating it either as a wacky new dance the kids are doing, or an evil dance of death. Needless to say, neither view is likely to have much credibility with actual concert-goers, some of whom have seen or been moshing since the early '80's.

It's tempting to blame such lapses on bad reporting, but there's a more disturbing dynamic at work. Ever since educators in the Victorian era decided that the fine arts had an elevating and refining effect on the average citizen, it has been assumed that popular culture appealed only to society's baser instincts. That's one of the reasons why Bennett—himself a champion of "traditional" values and aesthetics—finds it so useful to demonize popular music; pop, by its very nature, is considered to be crass and ephemeral, more the result of commercial calculation than artistic inspiration. Moreover, the powerlessness of popular music's perceived constituency—teenagers, blacks, unskilled laborers and housewives—makes it seem unlikely that too many people would care one way or the other what happens to hit records or their creators.

But the popular music market is far broader than that. According to data gathered by the Recording Industry Association of America, nearly half of the recordings sold in 1995 (47.3 percent) were purchased by people over 30, with teens making up 25.1 percent of the buying force. Moreover, those older listeners are just as likely to buy rock, country or R&B as the younger ones; purportedly "mature" styles like jazz and classical constitute a mere 5.9 percent of the music market.

Rock fans, in other words, are everywhere, from loading docks to executive suites, and spread across a wide demographic (it is, after all, 40 years since "Love Me Tender" topped the charts). Isn't it time the press paid more attention to them, and less to the William Bennetts of the world? ■



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James O. Freedman The Essayist

Unfortunately, it is those persons who enter a room like a marching band who commandeer our immediate attention. The voices of quieter, more thoughtful people—of thinkers and writers, of philosophers and dreamers—frequently get overwhelmed by the din. Some of those are the quiet voices of the printed page, and here I am thinking especially of essayists.

The essayist's craft is a function not only of creativity but also of an exceptional thoughtfulness and a rare ability to observe, describe, and analyze. Essayists lead us to think about things that we might otherwise not have thought about—ideas remote from our usual considerations, distant from the beaten track of our minds—informing profoundly what we see and do and think. More than many other writers, essayists explore what Socrates called "the examined life"—examined in the double sense of being keenly observed and deeply considered. That is the great appeal and power both of the classic essayists—Montaigne, Bacon, Addison, Steele, Emerson—and of the most engaging essayists of our own time—E.B. White, James Thurber, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin, V.S. Prichett.—James O. Freedman, *President of Dartmouth College, in his "Idealism and Liberal Education."*

BOOKS

A Dilemma of Mainstream Journalism

The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point
Haynes Johnson and David Broder.
Little, Brown and Company. 668
Pages. \$25.95.

By RICHARD PARKER

Most newspaper reporters spend their working lives filing stories that are 400, 600, sometimes 800 words long; when one is done, it's on to the next, an endless stream of words that sometimes makes the front page and more often does not. Not many journalists routinely get to write pieces over 1,000 words and producing a series—measured in days of coverage, rather than inches—usually calls for some sort of celebration.

How then should we celebrate Haynes Johnson and David Broder's "The System"—a 668-page book intended, in some sense, as the ultimate in single-issue newspaper series? Since its publication this spring, the book has been widely reviewed for a more general audience in *The Times*, *The Post*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Washington Monthly*, *Businessweek*, and dozens of papers around the country, as well as in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, and other leading health-specialty publications.

The book clearly deserves attention. Johnson and Broder got unprecedented access to participants in the health care debate as it unfolded—from the President and First Lady to their most vehement opponents—on condition that they publish nothing until it was all over. As a result, "The System" gives us what amounts to an almost panoptic, day-by-day account of what many consider, as one participant described it,

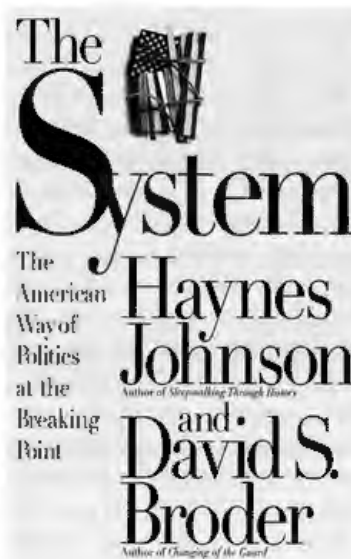
the battle over "the last great social policy of this century."

But for journalists, the book also contains cause for reflection and concern. "The System" is in many ways ultimately a curious and troubling book—in its construction, in the tale it tells, and in what it reveals about the dilemmas of modern mainstream journalism when faced with controversial issues such as this.

Of course, for the moment Washington's interest in health care has faded, displaced by the Republicans' massive Congressional victory in 1994 and nowadays by President Clinton's remarkable political resurrection. But the problems of America's health care system remains achingly unresolved, and these two senior Washington Post reporters clearly hope that, far from giving us merely a battlefield-level reconstruction of policy history, they're adding to the debates ahead of us and to a broader understanding about what's wrong with American politics today.

But have they? To answer that question requires, I think, a reading of "The System" on three levels: first, what and how Johnson and Broder have told us through their work itself; second, how they analyze the press's role in actually narrating the health care debate as it took place; and finally, what their beliefs about "The System"—and inferentially, the press's role in it—tell us about how Americans will have to face the issue of health care in the future.

Other reviewers have already underscored the book's most unmistakable problem: at 668 pages, it's simply too long for all but the hardest-core political and policy junkies. As densely inhabited as "War and Peace," as intricate as Proust in its rendition of political



maneuvers, positions, actors and organizations, "The System," as Anthony Lukas reluctantly concluded in *The Times*, "is destined, I fear, to gather dust and coffee rings on night tables across the land."

That's a shame, because the book offers its own answer to its sprawling scope. If you step back for a moment, you realize that Johnson and Broder have eschewed purely journalistic forms in favor of—though they don't tell us this—a modern version of a classic Greek drama. They give us a list of the players at the beginning, for example, divide the book's 600-page narrative portion into three acts (which they call "Books"), further divide each act into subordinate scenes, and then end (in classic Greek fashion) with the Chorus summarizing the lessons and insights the play was meant to impart.

If you're daunted by a 600-page drama, modern or otherwise, the Chorus's conclusions offer a condensed, and in many respects, rich reward. Beginning on page 601 and end-

ing 40 pages later, Johnson and Broder—playing the Chorus themselves—show us why they've won Pulitzer Prizes. If you're interested in a densely wrought set of first-rate judgments, insights and analysis about why health care reform failed, start reading here and then afterward decide whether you need to read the play itself.

But "The System" leans on more than just a classic Greek order for its structure. In the lengthy narrative section (I'll call it "The Play"), the authors clearly have also looked to a much newer form, famously pioneered by modern journalism's most celebrated dramaturge, Theodore H. White. White's "The Making of the President," the first book-length work to take its readers behind the scenes of a Presidential campaign, was a huge bestseller when it appeared because it offered enticing revelations of the reality that lived behind the formalized rituals and surface forms of political life.

It was simultaneously successful for what appeared to be a deeper reason at the time: White's style seemed to whisper that once we "knew" how politics "really worked," our formerly distant leaders would no longer be so distant at all. On the one hand, they'd be almost intimate acquaintances, with whom we might forge a somehow more equal and accessible bond; on the other—and this was magnetically true of the Kennedys—through new-found intimacy, we would somehow be lifted into a higher, more glamorous, more powerful world than any we'd known before. In this world, our dashing, beautiful and intelligent friends, Jack and Jackie, not some distant President and First Lady, would occupy our White House with us.

Of course, White's "insider" style quickly fell prey to its critics, including Teddy White himself. By 1972, White pronounced a damning judgment on his creation in Timothy Crouse's "Boys on the Bus." Describing how reporters swarmed over George McGovern after his nomination, trying to ferret out the tiniest details of his personal life and habits, White despaired:

"All of us are observing him, taking notes like mad, getting all the little

details. Which I think I invented as a method of reporting and which I now sincerely regret. If you write about this, say that I sincerely regret it. Who gives a fuck if the guy had milk and Total for breakfast."

In "The System," Johnson and Broder's decision to opt for White's style in advance of the health care battle itself, before its form or length could possibly be known, produces a trap that makes the book rich in ironies. Thus the book's "Play" is awash in precisely the kind of filigree that White came to detest and condemn. As Presidential aides watched a TV monitor of Clinton presenting his health plan to Congress, for example, Johnson and Broder tell us who ordered food for these minions, what was ordered and what it cost; we almost yearn to hear one of them ask for "milk and Total," just to repeat White's scornful words.

The irony is that it's precisely their addiction to this legacy of "insider" reporting that makes Johnson and Broder's final summations as the Chorus all the more powerful—and undercuts *The Play* that precedes it. In *The Play*, the authors seem convinced that all their "behind-the-scenes" scenes give readers the most encompassing understanding of "what happened" to health care reform. But then acting as the Chorus, they convince us—and here *The Play* and the Chorus bitterly collide—that *all the details, all the interviews, indeed "the play" itself, so painstakingly assembled over 600 pages, never really mattered at all.*

To understand why requires shifting for a moment from the conceit of theatrical forms to that of warfare. Great military strategists know that wars are seldom won or lost simply through the intricacies of the battles they encompass. Instead, to anticipate a war's outcome, they try to judge the relative strength and strategic deployment of force (with "force" defined as more than military power) before the first battle begins. Churchill famously understood that Hitler would lose, and England survive, once Roosevelt and America were committed to war. The Second World War itself might take several years, but Germany's industrial and manpower base could never match

the Americans and the British, once the former were fully deployed.

Gen. Giap grasped much the same in Vietnam by understanding not just the military power deployed by the Americans, but the larger disposition of purpose and the will-to-win that Washington never truly possessed. That was why the Tet offensive, which Giap's forces lost on the ground, became an American defeat and prelude to our loss in the war.

In the case of health-care reform, what Johnson and Broder, playing the Chorus, finally make clear is that Clinton's plan was as doomed as Robert McNamara's from the start. Bill Clinton was elected with 43 percent of the vote and faced a Republican opposition, led by Newt Gingrich, that saw defeat of the Clinton plan as pivotal to their hopes for Congressional victory in 1994 and Presidential triumph in 1996. Clinton then compounded his problem and thereby destroyed his chances for even partial victory by allowing the bill-creating process to give birth to a gigantic Rube-Goldberg-ish contraption that not even its most fervent supporters could understand, let alone explain.

That realization, provided only at the book's very end, is what makes "The System" so odd organizationally: *The Play* leads you through the skirmishes, the feints, the tactical maneuvers, the fights among the generals, colonels, and the disillusion of the troops. Then you begin reading the Chorus and discover why all the detailed action was irrelevant.

But the Chorus itself is even odder and more troubling in a second way: the gap between its analytics and prescriptions. Unlike *The Play*, where its authors eschew the appearance of judgment, the Chorus's analysis is brutally straightforward. On one page we're told simply that the health care debate "shows how private interest can triumph over the public interest, how a powerful minority can manipulate opinion to defeat a reform desired by the majority, how hope for needed change can result in more cynicism...."

On another, we're reminded that "the boast of the Democratic Party throughout its history was its readiness

to fight the forces of smug complacency and to mobilize on behalf of all...who are struggling to feed, house, and educate their families..." and that failure over health care "screamed to the world that the Democratic Party...had lost its core, lost its heart, lost its soul."

On yet another, we're warned that "pro-business groups of all kinds have gone immeasurably beyond the old methods of financing campaigns in order to prevail. They have become cryptopolitical parties of their own—unelected and unaccountable—employing skilled operatives who at other times run presidential and senatorial campaigns." And they warn us that we face "a grim picture" that suggests "a polarized, class-based society, where people with money are going to be fine but people without money are going to be much worse off, a social Darwinist society...."

Taken together, this is damning stuff and after hundreds of pages of neutrally shaped narrative dramatics, a startling turn in the book. Here suddenly is neither Aeschylus nor Teddy White, but Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Upton Sinclair.

Then suddenly the authors stop and swiftly return sword to sheath. Excoriating analysis turns to prescription, and struggling to find hope in health reform's defeat, Johnson and Broder reach out for solution—and find it in bipartisanship. Bipartisanship, they tell us, is what's needed to cure the system's failures. They point to the crime bill, the 1986 tax bill and, most importantly, to America's half-century anti-communist foreign policy as models. Yes, "there were bitter debates..." over the conduct of that long struggle, they admit; but then they declare the Cold War "a historic achievement for freedom and democracy, a victory...and vindication of the governing institutions of the United States—all that comprise The System."

But surely this is the path to madness. America's Cold War foreign policy as model for America's domestic future? The McCarthyism, the brinkmanship over Cuba and the Berlin Wall, the bloody war in Vietnam that killed three million Vietnamese and tore America apart, the CIA and FBI

intrigue that mocked everything a democracy stands for, the alliances with the Shahs and Mobutus, the Guatemalan and Chilean and Indonesian juntas—on these sorts of bipartisan compromises we are to rebuild American democracy, and "the system" that governs it?

Having just brilliantly shown us how "the system" has lost cohesion and balance to an inept President, a full-blooded Republican partisanship, the power of money over majorities and a Congressional power structure without hierarchical controls, one asks: from where will even a Fifties-era bipartisanship come?

Toward the very end of this Chorus, Johnson and Broder devote four pages to the role of the press in the failure of health care reform. They note that while much individual reporting was first-rate, it was overwhelmed by "top-down" reporting and faithfully tell us of researchers' findings that showed "the politics of the battle was reported twice as often as the impact of the plan on consumers."

From all this, they dolefully conclude that "the emphasis reflects the 'insider' perspective that is the bane of today's journalism; a tone and focus that leaves millions of ordinary citizens feeling that they have been excluded from the conversation. What people *really* wanted to know was how the various plans would affect them and their families, and the media did not answer those questions well.... To use a Vietnam-era metaphor, the press was left looking like a pitiful, helpless giant."

And of course, they're right. But the very failures they find in the contemporaneous coverage of the debate are the errors they repeat in their own reconstruction of it.

One searches through "The System" for a simple, clear-eyed description of the various health plan alternatives. One looks for cogent descriptions of how the other major industrial democracies have succeeded in constructing health care systems at a price well below what Americans now pay. The German and British health systems earn a page each, Canada's half-a-dozen,

mostly passing references as if we all knew how these systems worked. But, of course, most Americans knew hardly anything at all about them even when the debate ended—and at the end of "The System," we're still no better off.

James Fallows has called coverage of health care reform "the press's Vietnam." Wading through all that Johnson and Broder have told us, one wonders how to disagree. But in "The System," the press is still simply the clear lens of public discourse; nowhere in the listing of "the players" in their drama does the name of a single journalist appear. Yet to pick one example of that influence, the "Cooper Plan"—which for a time figured as a prominent "alternative" to the White House bill—was in no small part a press creation, lifted to prominence by reporters and editorialists as part of their "horserace" coverage, not by its sponsors' influence or seniority in the Congressional debate. And while the authors lament paid advertising's role, there's a curious disjuncture in their views—an unwillingness to recognize how powerful "the media" are in shaping public opinion, as if newsrooms can maintain an unreflective silence on the contents of the pages in which "news" appears, as if journalists were free of any responsibility whatsoever from how advertising departments share their papers' or networks' credibility with the highest bidder.

In effect, while showing us the tragedy of American politics corrupted and disfigured by a partisanship that is far from two-sided, two quite decent journalists have given colleagues even more reasons to question the journalism that reported that tragedy and the role it played in creating it. In those questions—questions Johnson and Broder can't answer—lies a second tragedy. ■

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He Covered The Country, Not Just The War

**Dragon Ascending:
Vietnam and the Vietnamese**

Henry Kamm

Arcade Publishing. 320 Pages. \$24.95.

BY DAVID WARSH

This is an apparently inconspicuous book from a boutique publisher about one of America's least favorite subjects. It is nicely produced and includes a dozen pages of photographs. But there have been few advertisements and no hoopla. Instead of taking a book tour, its 71-year-old author spent the summer at home in Provence. There have been a few reviews.

It may be worth stepping back and reviewing the circumstances in which it was written.

When my friends and I were cubs excited to be making our livings in the news business in Vietnam, we used to play the game of arguing about who was the greatest reporter of the Vietnam War. Because Saigon in the 1960's and early 1970's was mecca for a certain type of newsmen, the press corps there at any given time included an unusual number of top people. It was apparent from the very beginning that there were many different ways to do a great job. But we went on arguing anyway, just the way we had argued 15 years before about the relative merits of Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays and Duke Snider.

There were, for instance, the three reporters who were assigned to Saigon at the very beginning of the American involvement. This was before the mission became a war: David Halberstam of *The New York Times*, Neil Sheehan of *United Press International* and Malcolm Browne of *The Associated Press*. Their influence was so great that they altered the course of subsequent events. President Kennedy attacked them and sought their recall because they doubted the official version. They became famous as a result. So glamorous were these men and their milieu

that William Prochau wrote a book about them: "Once Upon a Distant War."

Halberstam went on to write a shelf of best-selling books, including "The Making of a Quagmire" in 1965 and "The Best and the Brightest" in 1972. Sheehan held his course over the years with breathtaking purity, breaking in 1971 the story of the Pentagon Papers in *The New York Times* and, 17 years later, publishing "A Bright Shining Lie"—a biography of John Paul Vann, who as a lieutenant colonel in the early 1960's had been foremost among sources for Halberstam, Sheehan and Browne. Of this remarkable trio I have sometimes argued that it was the comparatively little-known Browne who turned out to be the finest journalist, because although he too wrote a book on Vietnam ("The New Face of War") he alone has kept to the present day the daily newspaperman's faith, turning out ever-more sophisticated stories for *The Times* from all over the world—for the last 11 years for its science section. (As a result of this matter-of-fact devotion to his craft, Browne's 1993 memoir, "Red Socks and Muddy Shoes," is especially interesting.)

There were many highly effective journalists of the middle years: Ward Just ("To What End?"), Robert Shaplen ("The Lost Revolution"), Jonathan Schell ("The Village at Ben Suc"), Gloria Emerson ("Winners and Losers"), Frances FitzGerald ("Fire in the Lake"), Michael Herr ("Dispatches"), Michael Arlen ("The Living Room War"), Keyes Beech ("Not Without The Americans"). I mention here only those who wrote the best books about Vietnam, leaving out altogether those who, like Homer Bigart, Peter Arnett and Horst Fass, Morely Safer, Peter Kann, Charles Mohr, Laurence Stern, Stewart Alsop, Seymour



Hersh, R.W. Apple, Bernard Weinraub and David Greenway, worked their influence through dispatches and personal conduct.

In the late period, Americans lost interest in their costly war. The center of the attention shifted to Washington. So Saigon newsmen turned to indirectness to make their points. Nicholas Proffitt ("Gardens of Stone") and Jack Fuller ("Fragments") wrote novels. So did combat diarists Phil Caputo ("DelCorso's War") and Tim O'Brien ("Going After Cacciato"). James Fenton wrote poetry. The legendary Kevin Buckley wrote as Penelope had once spun her tapestry, spun and unspun; when he finally finished, the book turned out to be about Panama. By the time Stanley Karnow published his magisterial history of the war in 1983—complete with an accompanying multi-part multi-national series on the public broadcasting network—the game was over for the American press, or so it seemed. It fell to Tizyard Terzani, a vet-

eran Italian journalist, corresponding for a German magazine, to write the best book about the fall of Saigon.

Looking over this back-of-the-envelope list, I want to argue that perhaps the single most remarkable reporter of the entire war was Henry Kamm, who covered the country for *The New York Times* from 1969 to the present day. Kamm is not especially famous, although he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1978 for his coverage of the boat people and is listed in "Who's Who." Yet, looking back over the nearly 30 years since Kamm first took up his beat in Southeast Asia, I think that it is accurate to say that, taken as a whole, Kamm's dispatches dominated American conception of the second half of the period of American primacy in Vietnam the way that the trio of Halberstam, Sheehan and Browne dominated the first, and for the same reason: much of the time he was the one there.

Not that he didn't have plenty of company at the beginning of his reconnaissance. When Kamm arrived in Southeast Asia in 1969, it was for an assignment to Bangkok—definitely the sidelines of the American war. When Richard Nixon widened the war to include Cambodia in 1970 instead of bringing it to an end, Kamm was one of a multitude who reported it—concentrating, as it happened, on the vicious pogrom by Cambodians against ethnic Vietnamese living in the border areas that the wider war unleashed. When the South Vietnamese Army invaded Laos in 1971 in a futile attempt to choke off the Ho Chi Minh trail, Kamm was there. He stayed on to document the secret American air war in Laos.

From the very beginning, Kamm brought a very different sensibility to his day-to-day reporting about Vietnam. For years, the war had been reported as if it were a rock concert staged by the Americans in which the Vietnamese were a supporting cast. Perhaps it was his European experience that led Kamm to an identification with middle class victims of the war, not just the soldiers or peasants featured in most reports. Perhaps it was his knack for making and keeping friends in every nook and cranny of Indochina. Surely it mattered that he married a Vietnamese woman.

At any rate, he quickly learned how to do something that hadn't been done before, to enfranchise mandarins and communists and artists and bureaucrats and small businessmen in the way that earlier reporters had given voice to the Buddhists; that is, to paint a much richer picture. I remember very well our saying among ourselves at the time that this was somebody finally who knew in his bones about the experience of civil war.

The defeat of the South by the North in 1975—and the flight from their embassy roof of the last few hundred Americans and several thousand of their allies—was extremely traumatic for those who had been most deeply involved. Their interest in the country seemed to end with the war itself. The legendary Malcolm Browne, for example, who in the closing days of the war returned to Saigon and conducted negotiations between warring sides on the front page of *The Times*, wrote that the fall of Saigon "seemed like the end of the world." Only after he had reached Manila did he realize that "the war was over and Vietnam was gone." It was gone for Browne but not for Kamm. He kept returning. And each time, he came away with a story.

This was a period in which America collectively wanted simply to forget. Partly by way of expiation of sins, Sydney Schanberg wrote a magazine article about the interpreter he had left behind in Cambodia, which gave rise to the movie "The Killing Fields." Barry Wain of *The Asian Wall Street Journal* wrote "The Unwanted" about the boat people. Nayan Chanda kept Vietnamese events under scrutiny in the pages of *The Far East Economic Review*. But it was Kamm who in 1977 moved back to Bangkok as chief Asian diplomatic correspondent (after stints in Paris and Tokyo), and from there managed to get his stories about the boat people on the front page of *The New York Times*, insuring that Americans would be informed even when they didn't want to be. And so, through Kamm, they learned of the Vietnamese re-education camps, of the heart-breaking decision of millions of people to risk their lives at sea, of the hostile reception that awaited them, of the bitter war that ensued after

the Vietnamese moved into Cambodia against the Khmer Rouge. All this led to the governmental decision that America should open its doors to those who were refused admission elsewhere.

In 1979 Kamm was in Hanoi to cover the short, brutal Chinese war against the North. In the early 1980's, he returned to faithfully depict the dreary Stalinist backwater that Vietnam had become. In 1986, he chronicled the sudden eruption of the liberalization known as *doi moi*—which owed in part to Gorbachev, in part to Le Duan, whom Kamm notes made his single far-reaching contribution to liberalization by dying in that year. And in the late 1980's and 1990's, Kamm's reports underscored the scandalous American disinterest in all things Vietnamese, with the exception of those extravagant anthropological digs for American bones. In all those years, Kamm's voice was clear and sonorous—but there rarely was much of a chorus accompanying him.

Now Kamm has written a book about Vietnam, "Ascending Dragon," and it is a book unlike any of the others. In his preface, Kamm writes, "This is a book about Vietnam today, and although it is written by an American, its subject is Vietnam, not the American intrusion upon the life of Vietnam, or the pain that America inflicted on itself by its willful interference." Thang Long—"ascending dragon"—was the name by which Hanoi was known, before the Vietnamese capital was moved to Hue in the early 19th Century. From its title page, then, the architecture of the book is designed to leave no doubt in readers' minds about what it was that happened. The North won the war. The Vietnamese communists have a legitimacy far greater than those of the former Soviet Union's European satellites. The concerns of the North must be expected to govern the peace, even though the South now is so wealthy that it could buy the North outright—if only for a moment it were permitted to do so.

In deference to the American preoccupation with the war, he begins the book with a pair of set pieces. He travels to My Lai, where an empty clinic intended to commemorate the massacre nevertheless sports a plaque advertis-

ing its American donors' good intentions. And he visits Bac My hospital in Hanoi, which was badly damaged in the Christmas bombing of 1972. There he finds Tran Quoc So, who survived that morning because he was operating in an underground surgery. "We were bombed three times. I was here for all three but this is all in the past. Let bygones be bygones. All this suffering took place in the past."

Kamm then moves quickly on to the present-day situation. Vietnam is the way it is today because of the Soviet collapse, he says. For the Russians Vietnam had been like Cuba, expensive to prop up, but worth the trouble because of the annoyance it caused a foe. Not any longer. The Russian collapse was a devastating blow to the old men who led the Vietnamese Revolution, but they retired or adapted. Ten years in the communist cocoon was long enough; since 1985, Vietnam has learned to stop thinking of itself as a client state of the Soviet empire and to start thinking of itself as a modernizing Southeast Asian nation, with more in common with, say, Indonesia, than with East Germany.

There are a couple of chapters of fast-moving history in the book, recalling the early evolution of the Vietnamese state in opposition to its enormous neighbor, China, and its eventual domination by the French, the Japanese and the Americans. But a good deal of Kamm's story is told through a series of interesting portraits of persons on almost all sides of the war. I found myself wishing he had a little more time for the second- and third-class officials I see on the diplomatic missions that pass through Boston: the formerly youthful commanders of North Vietnamese battalions now patiently awaiting their chances for power. But Kamm long ago made his choice of how to approach Vietnamese society. Never mind the economists and the planners. "I have learned over the years to believe in the truth of dissidents above all others in the countries that muzzle critical voices," he says. He's probably right.

My two favorite vignettes in the book concern men I knew slightly, Phan Xuan An of *Time* magazine, who was the only fully accredited Vietnamese correspon-

dent for an American outlet, and Cao Giao, the political analyst for *Newsweek*. Men like these were about as close as many of us got to having Vietnamese friends. They might answer a question or discuss a point or even arrange an introduction. Occasionally I would go for a cup of harsh French coffee with Cao Giao in Givral to hear stories about the old days or look at photographs of his children. Mr. An turned out to be among the highest-ranking double agents in Saigon, promoted to brigadier general in the North Vietnamese Army after the city's fall. Cao Giao, arrested in 1978 at the age of 61, spent thirteen months in total darkness in solitary confinement, before Amnesty International began the inquiries that led to his eventual release. Unemployable in Vietnam, he died in exile in Paris in 1985. Kamm makes the touching point that, despite having chosen opposing sides, both men remained essentially faithful to the disciplines of truthfulness that is at the very heart of the news business.

If Kamm's book has a flaw, it is in chapters on economic development at the end. This is a reporter who has simply, at long last, run out of steam. The next really good account of Vietnam's place in the world economy surely will be written by a kid. But Kamm's heart is, of course, entirely in the right place when it comes to encouraging economic growth. His scorn for American foot-dragging in the normalization of relations is very great. Fewer than 2,000 Americans are still listed as "missing in action"—most of them either in remote mountain areas or the South China Sea. The so-called "full accounting" for American MIAs has cost American taxpayers more than \$165 million—and the Vietnamese people unimaginably more in terms of foregone opportunity. Meanwhile, the remains of literally hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese soldiers lie in unmarked graves. Yet both Presidents Bush and Clinton have denied Vietnam a full-scale commercial treaty. "If American sympathy for the people of Vietnam were of great moment," Kamm writes, "would the American people have allowed their governments, for more than 20 years after the end of

the war, to deny them the reconciliation and help in healing of their wounds for which Germans and Japanese did not need to wait after a much greater war?"

Typical of Kamm is that he relates almost no personal history in the book—not even that he was born in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland) in 1925. He thanks his late parents, Paula and Rudolf Kamm, "who from their own harsh experience taught me to be wary of those who wield power, and to listen with sympathy and respect to those upon whom it is wielded." He mentions his friend Elie Wiesel, who he says unknowingly goaded him to write the book. He doesn't tell the story of his emigration to the United States in 1941, his time in the American Army, of the five languages he brought with him when he went to work as a copy boy for *The New York Times* in 1949. There is no photograph of him in the book; only occasionally is he visible in the text, and then usually in a moral sense. He quotes Bernard Fall, who began "The Two Vietnams" with the line, "This book is in praise of no one." He writes himself, "I have tried to live up to that even-handed motto insofar as all governments, Vietnamese and foreign, and men of power in all countries that involved themselves and their might in Vietnam are concerned. But this is a book in praise of the Vietnamese people, north, center and south."

Typical, also, is that Kamm says absolutely nothing about newspaper politics at *The Times* during the 25 years he covered Vietnam—though he could hardly have been unaware of the various political tensions at the paper. Yet Kamm maintained his effectiveness as a reporter on the most volatile foreign policy issue of the day by remaining somewhat aloof from the main channels. He was never based in Saigon. He scrupulously stuck to what could be reported as indisputable fact, and his book is the same: it attempts nothing more ambitious than to relate what he has seen and heard himself. (Sometimes this unleveraged one-story-at-a-time approach cost him: Noam Chomsky and others complain that Kamm was inattentive to Indonesian atrocities in East Timor during his

Bangkok tenure.) The point is that in no sense can his voice be labeled "neoconservative," though there is much in his book that would please a neoconservative.

It is fashionable in some quarters to swipe at The New York Times for having printed the dispatches of Walter Duranty and Herbert Denny from Stalin's Russia, or Herbert Matthews's glowing accounts of Castro's Sierra Maestra campaign. But such rubber-necking selectively leaves out the names of any number of enthusiasts of various established orders employed by The Times over the years. It omits the role of Abe Rosenthal in rebalancing the paper politically during the 1970's. And it completely ignores the fact that, having begun with Halberstam, having hired both Neil Sheehan and Malcome Browne to make substantial contributions to its coverage of Vietnam, maintaining a parade of a couple dozen men and women of the highest caliber in between, The Times then found Kamm within its ranks to serve as its closer. No other newspaper even comes close to this record of sustained high-level curiosity and responsibility. The more you know about it the greater the wonder.

In the end, then, of all the galaxy of journalists who reported seriously from Vietnam, it seems to me that the argument about who had the most remarkable career comes down to these four men who devoted much of their lives to the story: Halberstam, Sheehan, Browne and Kamm. Which one do you prefer? The insight and ambition of Halberstam? The hundred-year Irish memory of Sheehan? The unremitting drive to be at the center of events of Browne? Or the persistent quiet moral courage of Kamm? He brought to life a nation of 73 million people who are locked in a frustrating struggle between their future and their past—and revealed something discomfiting about the United States in the process. Great as the first three were, for my money the greatest reporter of the war was Kamm. ■

David Warsh is economics columnist for The Boston Globe. He reported on the Vietnam War for Pacific Stars and Stripes and Newsweek, 1968-1970.

When Drive for Profits Clashes With Ethics

The Chain Gang: One Newspaper Versus the Gannett Empire

Richard McCord

University of Missouri Press. 290 Pages. \$24.95.

BY ROBERT H. ESTABROOK

Those who wonder what the increasing merging and chaining of newspapers is doing to the character and soul of American journalism will find plenty of substance for their concerns in this book. From personal experience Richard McCord tells how Gannett, the sponsor of the Freedom Forum and the champion of many journalistic innovations, has behaved like a Mafia mobster in seeking to kill competition. The story is frightening.

The personal experience with Gannett tactics began in New Mexico. McCord, who had grown up in rural Georgia and attended Vanderbilt University, pursued his dream of owning his own weekly after working four years as a reporter on Newsday and another stint on The Santa Fe New Mexican.

Irritated when the accountant in charge there killed his story about the hazardous waste dumped by a large mining company, he resigned. With the backing of investors and advertisers, McCord and his wife started the free-circulation Santa Fe Reporter in 1974 with only \$70,000. The basic salary for each of the 15 staffers was \$100 a week; McCord, as General Manager, drew \$125.

The prime ingredient was hard local news of the sort the daily New Mexican was not carrying. Although woefully undercapitalized, The Reporter in 1979 finally started earning a respectable profit. Its news stories won state and national recognition. One editorial was a runner-up for a Pulitzer Prize.

Gannett, which had bought The New Mexican from Robert McKinney in 1975, maintained but did not increase, its competition for advertising.

Then McKinney, who had been retained as publisher, sued Gannett for



fraud and breach of contract. His general manager said that Gannett expected a profit of 36 to 38 percent of income, which would be impossible on a short-term basis without destroying the newspaper. Gannett brought on a new president and general manager, Paul Vann, who had been Advertising Director of The New Mexican before Gannett transferred him to a similar position on The Salem Oregon Statesman and Capital Journal.

Forewarned that a defunct Salem weekly, The Community Press, had filed an antitrust suit against Gannett, contending that the chain had "systematically set out to destroy" the paper, McCord flew to Salem in the winter of 1981 in an effort to find what difficulties the weekly there had encountered before it closed.

With a reporter's determination to check out every possibility, McCord went to the federal courthouse, where

he was told that the main file in the case had been taken to the judge's chambers. To his astonishment, the clerk on duty apparently either did not know that the case had been sealed at the behest of Gannett or concluded that he was a lawyer involved in it. In any event, she brought him the inch-thick file.

For most of three days, fearful that he would be asked his identity, McCord meticulously copied the entire file on a legal pad in longhand. Here was confirmation of everything he had been told or suspected about Gannett tactics.

In a letter to then Gannett President Allen Neuharth, *The Statesman and Journal* publisher, N.S. (Buddy) Hayden, had described the establishment of "Operation Demolition" to achieve the goal "to fatally cripple *The Community Press*." When the effort did not proceed as quickly as he wanted, Hayden admonished Vann, the ad manager, that "Dobermans [the operatives] don't sleep."

Laid out in astonishing candor were the techniques Gannett used—free advertising to keep business out of the weekly, spreading rumors that it was going broke, bonuses for taking advertising accounts away, rebates that amounted to bribes of big advertisers that stopped using *The Community Press*, and all sorts of special deals.

From others McCord learned that in 1975, when Gannett had a monopoly before the advent of *The Community Press*, it had imposed a 43 percent ad rate increase in a single year. It also had obtained a "sweetheart deal" from its newsprint supplier, Boise Cascade, at 10 percent below the market prices.

Armed with an impressive array of evidence, McCord returned to Santa Fe to write an elaborate six-page story for *The Reporter* on "The Newspaper That Was Murdered." It won considerable local acclaim but to McCord's disappointment achieved little national recognition. Only *The Columbia Journalism Review*, *Advertising Age* and *Publishers Auxiliary* treated it in detail.

Yet the story became known in various parts of the country and served to warn Gannett that its tactics were being closely watched. *The Reporter* still had plenty of competition from *The New*

Mexican, but it began to flourish. In 1988, after 14 years of grueling work, McCord decided to sell it.

The jury in Santa Fe later found Gannett guilty of six breaches of contract with McKinney, but not fraud. Federal Judge Santiago Campos returned the paper to McKinney's control and eventually he bought it back.

While McCord was still cleaning out his desk, a call came from an old friend, Frank Wood, Publisher of *The Green Bay News-Chronicle* in Wisconsin, who had helped *The Reporter* with a loan at a crucial time. Gannett's *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, with five times *The News-Chronicle's* circulation, was not content with merely most of the pie but wanted it all and was using underhanded tactics in an effort to squeeze out the smaller daily altogether. Would Dick come to Green Bay and do what he did in Salem?

Dick would and did, in the summer of 1989. The last half of the book is a moving account of his four-month effort to turn the fortunes of *The News-Chronicle* around, at least temporarily successful. Despite the doubts of a dispirited staff, he was able to put together a series of articles, "It's Now or Never," that documented the many *Press-Gazette* efforts to undercut and drive its smaller competitor out of business. The effect was momentarily reinvigorating.

But the story does not end there. McCord remained apprehensive about the long-range prospects of *The News-Chronicle*. In the course of his investigation he had come across similar Gannett tactics against newspapers in Hartford, Little Rock, Boise, Jackson, Miss., and with a California outdoor advertising company.

One of his strongest indictments is against the joint operating agreement between Gannett and Knight-Ridder in Detroit that was approved by Attorney General Edwin Meese against strong contrary recommendations on his penultimate day in office. Before the 1995 Detroit newspaper strike, at least, this was looked upon as a license for *The News and Free Press* to coin money (although, contrary to predictions, they lost it).

McCord implies that Knight-Ridder sold out its principles. He does not conceal, either, his bitter contempt for former Gannett chairman Allen Neuharth, who presumably approved his corporation's methods while doing much writing and talking about First Amendment freedoms.

What McCord does not emphasize enough, in my view, is that there are many dedicated journalists on Gannett and other chain papers who, despite limitations, do their level best to put out good newspapers with probing reporting and incisive editorial pages. Some of the best papers in the country are chain-owned. It is the end result of the process, the 36 percent bottom-line fixation, that worries me.

Among the haunting questions this cogently argued book leaves with the reader are these: Is the Gannett approach McCord describes a virus to which all chains are ultimately susceptible? Is journalism being afflicted with a version of Gresham's Law, in which the bad inevitably drives out the good? Are the market forces such that those who resist the 36 percent formula in publicly traded newspaper empires are doomed to be swallowed up by a combination of galloping cupidity and ascending mediocrity?

Are newspapers first and foremost a "business" in which ever-increasing dividends are the criterion of success, not public service and a necessary but modest profit? Is greed the final and inevitable winner, prevailing over all those noble ideals about informing and educating the public that induced some of us to take up the profession?

If so, God help American newspapers—and the American Republic. ■

Robert Estabrook spent 25 years on The Washington Post, on the editorial page and as a foreign correspondent, and then 16 years as Editor and Publisher of a country weekly in northwest Connecticut, The Lakeville Journal, with which he and his wife Mary Lou are still associated.

Authorized Biography of the Great Seducer

Jesse: The Life And Pilgrimage Of Jesse Jackson

Marshall Frady

Random House. 552 Pages. \$28.50.

BY PAUL DELANEY

If you have not, as a journalist great or small, been blessed with a wake-up call from the Rev. Jesse Louis Jackson, then something is missing from your credentials. Haven't we ALL heard the call from Jackson between midnight and dawn?

He was the perfect seducer, treating each journalist as though he or she were the one and only. He called me when I was a reporter; called my editor, Abe Rosenthal. Marshall Frady says those calls also went to some of America's top journalists, including Brokaw, Hewitt, Rather, Bradlee. Should have known!

Frady's intelligent, well-written and on-target authorized biography is the best so far on a personality more complex than a Toni Morrison character. But it is also real journalism. Good analysis, some of which I disagree with. Frady was taken a bit but not taken in by Jackson, the Great Seducer.

Jackson is such a contradiction that one cannot believe, cannot know what to believe, from one chapter to the next. Life by anecdotes and parables is most difficult to negotiate. If latitude—stretching the truth, preacher's prerogative—is part of Jackson's makeup, exactly what is acceptable as fact? Frady used a few former staffers and supporters and analysts/friends to try to explain Jackson, but even they could not fully comprehend nor decipher the contradictions.

Frady utilized one person who knows Jackson better than anybody, his wife, Jackie. Terrific passages about this "free-spirited creature," her beauty, passion, rage, independence and unforgiving anger. There is more to the Jesse Jackson story than has been allowed, and she is the one to tell it, as well as reveal

more about her own fascinating life and thoughts, if she does a book.

The strength of the work is Frady's relationship to his subject. They grew up 26 miles apart in South Carolina. Frady was from a white middle-class background and attended Furman University, the school in Jackson's hometown, Greenville, Jackson dreamed of attending but was barred by segregation. Frady had the luxury of spending six intimate years with Jackson, closer than the civil rights leader has permitted any journalist. For most of us, Jackson maintained control by keeping us at a distance, a phone call away was his preference.

But by gaining such access for such a long period, Frady is able to provide insights missing from other books and articles. And he dutifully gives credit to some of the writers—Clarence Page, Roger Simon, Barbara Reynolds and Elizabeth Colton. Frady captures the whirlwind existence of his dashing hero, offering a delicate balance of the good and the bad.

Probably no minds will be changed about Jackson. It remains: you're either for him or against him. There is little middle ground. The book gives aid and comfort to all sides.

There is healthy and hearty skepticism, for example, about Jackson's feigned reluctance to take the Operation Breadbasket job offered by Martin Luther King Jr.; his poor organizing ability; problems over federal money his organizations seemed to have squandered, or inability to adequately account for; his clumsy attempts at wiping clean his Greenville background, and double-speak on certain issues, like relationships with women.



And, of course, the controversial blood-on-the-clothes and cradling a dying Dr. King story. Many have forgotten and forgiven Jackson for that; many others have not.

But then, everything Jackson touched was with drama and controversy, from his birth and upbringing to his presidential runs and run-ins with the powerful, the privileged, friends and supporters (typically, he was terrible to work for). He could not have it any other way.

This brilliant rhetorician—perhaps the best since Dr. King, certainly the best around today—has this tremendous ego and need to be seen and heard. Dr. King recognized it early, observing that "Jesse compulsively needs attention." This is manifested in his almost maniacal drive to be on the tube or see his name in print. Thus, his penchant for forever phoning journalists.

But there was also a love-hate rela-

tionship with those very same journalists. Jackson was a great source of news; yet we knew we were being exploited (the name of the game, though) and we rebelled and retaliated. He was perplexed, or faked it, when he received bad press.

And he had his little games, as well, and could be disingenuous. Once at a meeting I attended in Chicago, he called a press conference and kept the reporters, particularly the television cameras, waiting in the basement while he addressed an audience of black businessmen. Jackson criticized the media for not being present; citing it as an example of the press ignoring black leaders.

Frady himself was understandably perplexed by many things he witnessed as he accompanied Jackson on trips domestic and foreign. Jackson was incredulous that he was not offered the Vice Presidency spot on the Democratic ticket in 1988, after polling nearly seven million votes in the primaries. Then, albeit bitter, he proceeded to campaign

vigorously, as he repeated in 1992 after being personally humiliated by Bill Clinton over the Sister Soljah issue, and as he did in 1996 although disagreeing with Clinton on just about everything.

Some of Jackson's actions left Roger Wilkins aghast. After Clinton was elected, the President asked Jackson to be part of an American delegation observing elections in South Africa. Despite the Sister Soljah incident, he accepted when others, like Harry Belafonte, refused. "Jesse was delighted," Wilkins said.

"I just wish sometimes that he would not need recognition as much as he does" Wilkins added.

On the other hand, Jackson never lost the common touch; whether part of his performance or not, he would recognize the cleaning lady or the bus boy or the waiter, to their great delight. White leaders and politicians seldom had to do that, other than purely for show.

Jackson was an example of many extremely talented blacks who felt dis-

respected by whites, the "smart-assed white boys" syndrome, as former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young termed it, passed over for promotion and the big jobs. In time, a rage begins to develop. Jackson personified that dilemma and Frady captures it well and in depth.

"He looked at all these mediocre white boys running around Washington with puffed-up titles, and he knows he's smarter than they are," Wilkins said.

And now, Jackson has moved back to Chicago, maybe an acceptance of his elder statesman role, perhaps to watch his and all our children succeed him. Maybe he now can concentrate on becoming a serious journalist, with his own column in *The New York Times* or *Our World News*. ■

Paul Delaney, former New York Times Editor and reporter and recent head of the Journalism Department at the University of Alabama, is Editorial Page Editor of Our World News, the soon-to-be-published weekly offering "a world view from a black perspective."

A Remarkable Life, a Dull Story

Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism

Ben Burns

University Press of Mississippi. 230 Pages. \$27.50.

BY LISA G. BAIRD

Ben Burns's 40-plus years in journalism began as a cub reporter, and later copy editor, at Communist Party newspapers in New York and Chicago—punctuated here and there by stints as a housepainter during those pre-World War II dry spells when jobs were hard to find.

In 1942, on the introduction by a party leader with whom he had worked, Burns, a nonreligious Jew, found himself inside a former shul, now the offices of *The Chicago Defender*, one of the nation's most prominent and powerful black newspapers. Not long after, he linked up with John H. Johnson to become the Founding Editor of the first

successful national black magazine, *Negro Digest*, and later, the venerable *Ebony* magazine.

As you may have guessed, Burns is white.

A remarkable life, indeed. And yet it suffers an agonizingly slow, painful premature death in Burns's new book, "Nitty Gritty: A White Editor in Black Journalism."

Burns ventured back into the rich field of his life and somehow managed to serve up for his readers a scrawny, dried-up harvest. It is heart-breaking.

If you've ever had this experience, you'll know what I mean: you're assigned a subject to interview, to profile. You know this person has a fascinating story to relate, and you look forward to

having him share it with you. And then the horror sets in. The subject drones on and on. He is without animation, he offers only the briefest summaries, devoid of color and texture, his characters lie flat, dimensionless. Your mind races, you search desperately for any way to coax this story out of him, to bring it to life, to get him to give you something you can work with. But it just ain't gonna happen.

You finish the assignment dejected, shaking, uncomprehending. How could this have gone so wrong?

Well, the answer is simply this: some people cannot tell a story. Sadly, Ben Burns is one of them.

His recitation of the facts in "Nitty Gritty" is just that—a recitation of the

facts. It's your basic "I did this and then I did that and then such-and-such happened" treatment.

The book begins its long self-destruction early. There is a promising beginning: Burns's return to hometown Chicago in 1941, "jobless, homeless and about to become a father," after three years with Communist papers.

"How do you begin life anew at age 28? I asked myself. What hope was there of my finding any newswriting job with a resume that had 'Communist' emblazoned all over it?...How could I possibly escape endless tomorrows of working for my father painting houses, the only other craft I knew and where I was assured of a regular paycheck?"

The "propitious" answers came with *The Defender* job.

"Hired as temporary fill-in editor, I was soon inducted into another world and in effect began a new existence."

Yes! This is the story I'm yearning to hear. Tell me all about it.

"We spent our first several months working together in compiling a two-part, 68-page supplement that was to become a notable achievement in black journalism, featuring original contributions from the top names in black and white America....I worked on the technical aspects of the supplement, routine chores of writing letters and sending cables soliciting articles, drafting headlines and layouts, doing the copy reading to enliven the often prosaic manuscripts submitted by pundits and politicians ranging from Justice Hugo L. Black and Herbert Hoover to H.G. Wells and Lady Astor. My own written contribution to the supplement...was an article on job prejudice titled 'Let My People Work,' written as if I, as its author, were black. By intense reading and research to supplement my still meager knowledge about black life, I was able to assemble the supplement without making too many boners."

And that's how it goes, on and on. Want to know exactly what it was like putting together that supplement, meeting those deadlines, handling that "prosaic" copy? Want to get a sense of how it felt, what was going through his mind

and heart as he sat there writing under the guise of a black man?

Tough.

Want to know what some of the luminaries Burns came to know and work with were like—Richard Wright, Gordon Parks, Lena Horne, to name just a few?

Tough.

Of *Defender* Editor-in-Chief Metz T.P. Lochard, Burns writes:

"'Doc' was the epitome of the polymath intellectual, well-read, inquisitive about the universe at large, as truly nonbiased a man as I have ever met, unfettered by racial confines in his thinking, a man in the tradition of the finest black minds of his generation, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. The Haitian-born Lochard embraced people with his scintillating charm, his pervasive zest, and a warm infectious smile, revealing a mouthful of tobacco-stained teeth."

Of writer Allan Morrison, whom he recruited for *Negro Digest*: "The soft-spoken but highly articulate Montreal-born Morrison later came to be a close friend. He was one of the most gifted and conscientious black journalists I have known, a dependable, forthright intellectual who showed great acuity in the many articles he later wrote for me as New York bureau chief of *Ebony* magazine. I often turned to him for guidance and comfort when faced with perplexing editorial decisions, and he could always be depended on for judicious sagacity, especially on sensitive racial issues."

Are you groaning yet? So much for putting characters to paper. Burns's book would be worth struggling through his often torturous writing (this is my favorite: "Even so, in the early war years so much was written about the Negro that we had to discard for lack of space much that was perceptive and approbatory in white journals.") if it contained some true insight, some unusual perspective on matters of race, as one would be entitled to expect from someone with his experiences. Again, disappointment lurks.

"In later years I often found curious reactions from people who learned that I worked for a Negro publication. Even

when they knew I was not black, they were aware of my testiness on the matter of race and would be on their best behavior when talking to me about Negroes....There were many acquaintances whom I recognized as confirmed racists and whom I realized were free and easy with such epithets as 'nigger' and 'coon' but they rarely used these words in my presence....Sometimes I became unduly sanctimonious, putting them in their place for using frowned-upon words like *Negress*. I often regretted this assumption of righteousness."

He comes closest to the heart of his situation with this passage: "...I was inevitably caught in a no man's land between the races. I was seen either as a well-meaning but less than knowledgeable champion of the black cause (since many blacks felt that no white liberal could ever truly know or feel the evils of racism) or else as a perfidious newsmonger depriving a black editor of a job."

But he misses the opportunity, again, to really explore himself and tell us, from the soul, what it is for a white man to live in a black world, and why he chose to do so.

Ebony's moderation and Johnson's insistence on breaking from the black press's tradition of protest to give advertisers what they wanted to see and highlight the "happier" side of "Negro life" was the source of endless irritation for Burns—as with many younger African-Americans of the time—and of constant arguments with Johnson, most of which Burns lost.

But by that point, I was too annoyed by Burns's stingy account of his life and generous accolades to his editing skills and how he was responsible for virtually every aspect of the success of the magazines he edited, too much of his platitudinous descriptions of the other people who made it all meaningful and way too much of his naive commentary on matters of race to be much of a cheerleader for him.

When Johnson abruptly—in writing and from a distance—fired him, I said, "Amen." At least it meant I was almost finished with the book. ■

Lisa G. Baird is an Associate Metropolitan Editor of The New York Post.

Beautiful, But Would It Work on the Web?

At the Heart of It

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives

Walt Harrington

University of Missouri Press. 241 Pages. \$19.95.

BY BRAD GOLDSTEIN

Sacrifice makes great reading. It's something everyone understands. Should I work an extra job to pay for a child's music lessons or pass up a promotion to care for a sick relative?

Personal and professional sacrifice lies at the heart of every piece in Walt Harrington's new book "At the Heart of It," a collection of stories taken from his days at *The Washington Post* magazine.

Using narrative to tell his stories, Harrington focuses his reporter's skill to hunt for the telling details, the motives and desires that make the workaday people he writes about appear extraordinary.

Harrington falls in the category of the honest writer who doesn't allow his story to overwhelm his subjects. There are no murderers, no stars, nor any of the characters that normally show up on Ricki Lake or Montel Williams. Give him the people the rest of the media overlook: the gospel singers, the two-income families, the working poor, teenagers or the old and infirm.

"The stories in this collection are my personal answer to the hollowness, the human disconnect, of modern life," he says in his introduction.

As I read through this collection, I couldn't help but wonder how Harrington's pieces would adapt to the World Wide Web, the very medium that epitomizes modern life. Will the world of hypertext links, audio clips and 3D video turn Harrington's work into a quasi-electronic game, jumping from one room to another and destroy the feeling he works so hard to create?

Jon Franklin, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for *The Baltimore Sun* and writing teacher at Oregon State University, believes Harrington's stories can't work on the World Wide Web. "It doesn't do narrative," Franklin says.

"It's not linear. If it works, the reader suspends disbelief. The reader is not going to punch a hypertext link. If he does, it fails."

But do the links necessarily have to interfere with the story? While Harrington's words tell it all by painting a picture, it wouldn't detract from the story if supporting documentation was available in much the same way Walker Evans's work didn't detract from James Agee's story in "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men." It's possible to split a computer screen into frames, putting Harrington's text on one side and a table of contents that could provide supporting information on another.

I don't think the spell would be broken if Harrington's story "Amazing Grace," about Stephanie Burrous, a gospel singer, came with audio files of her voice. Why not give the reader a chance to hear the demo tapes Burrous sent to record producers across the country before she was touched by the Holy Ghost? Let's hear how Burrous's voice changed when she suddenly realized she was meant to sing the Lord's praise rather than the Top 40 songs she hoped would bring fame and fortune.

One of my favorite stories, "To Have and Have Not," takes the reader on a trip through what is perhaps the most under-reported terrain, "the American netherworld between poverty and the middle class." Some would argue there's a certain irony in presenting interactive stories about people who can't gain access to the World Wide Web. I don't know if that's a fair argument. The more pertinent question is: Can the Dan and Sara Sullivans, the people who inhabit the netherworld in "To Have and Have Not," afford the time to read *The Washington Post* or any other newspaper when they're working and at-

tending night school to stay above the poverty line?

In the introduction, Harrington poses a rhetorical question: "When Dan Sullivan brings his wife home the bottle of Manischewitz wine—all he can afford at \$3.95—to celebrate his new job at Radio Shack, do I feel his hope as well as the claustrophobia of his life?" If God is in the details, then this story is divine.

Sara's trip to the grocery store—running down the aisles, checking the prices, forgoing the sale on ravioli until a better tasting brand comes down in price, all the while staying within the \$40 budget—is masterful.

While I loved the scene, it wouldn't take much to offer the reader a hypertext link to Sara Sullivan's checkbook or even to a series of photographs of the Sullivans in their small apartment.

The techniques writers pull out of their toolboxes to draw a reader into the story, setting scenes, using short sentences filled with active verbs, creating tension, are similar to those used on the World Wide Web.

I'd wager more teenagers would read Harrington's wonderful essay "Tough Games, Tough Girls," if they could jump to a page and see the box scores for the years before and after Sheri D'Amato, the Vince Lombardi of high-school girl's soccer, became the coach of the Storm.

Maybe after seeing a chart with more wins than losses, some awkward, gangly teenager who never gets picked when it's time to choose teams can better understand D'Amato's philosophy when she says "...it's delusional to imagine you'll ever make that cut if you don't give up to get. If you don't give up junk food and parties on the nights before games. If you don't give up lazy spring breaks and languid summer vacations. If you don't jog and practice ball handling on your own....If you don't give all that you got."

I'm an eternal optimist. I look forward to reading more of Harrington's wonderful stories. I'm sure I'll find his everyday heroes somewhere in the not too distant future on the World Wide Web. ■

Brad Goldstein, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, is the Computer Assisted Reporting Editor of The St. Petersburg Times.

A Third Party to Solve Racism

Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America

Tom Wicker

William Morrow & Company. 218 Pages. \$25.

BY AMY ALEXANDER

In 1995, conservative enfant terrible Dinesh D'Souza published a book called "The End of Racism." Filled with dubious research and anecdotal "evidence" of blacks' inferiority, D'Souza's book presented itself as a rock-solid argument on why integration efforts have failed in America. Like "The Bell Curve" had a year before, D'Souza's book set off an emotional repudiation from liberals. Racial integration may have failed, they argued, but not simply because of Big Government and social programs that emphasized give-aways over self-reliance, or because of African-Americans' supposed inherent inferiority to whites. Integration has failed, in large part, because of denial. The refusal of many white Americans to acknowledge the lasting negative impact—on the nation herself—of three centuries of black enslavement followed by another century of legalized discrimination has manifested itself in a hundred destructive ways, including anti-affirmative action drives, Draconian crime legislation, dwindling public education funding, and widespread white fear of blacks as the "other" Americans. This socio-intellectual exchange has become somewhat of an annual rite in the publishing world, with partisan heavyweights from each end of the ideological scale churning out hundreds of pages purporting to support their respective theories.

All along, solutions have been few and far between.

Now, former New York Times columnist Tom Wicker, a dyed-in-wool liberal, comes armed for bear. Early on in "Tragic Failure: Racial Integration in America," Wicker makes clear his vision of how he thinks we might finally begin healing the festering problem of black-

white relations: African-Americans and politically and economically disaffected whites should form a third party.

"Such a new party could build upon predicted demographic change that in the next century will bring today's minorities into rough numerical equality with non-Hispanic whites," Wicker writes in the introduction. And before we can begin to wonder if maybe retirement has dulled the newsman's edge, Wicker lets us know he's neither naive nor overconfident. This third party may not win the presidency any time soon, but at the least it would give the two parties currently dominating the political landscape genuine cause for pause. (Think of how the Whig party evolved into the Republican party in the 1850's.)

"It might even win the support of those millions of despairing Americans who now take no part in the politics of a prosperous nation they believe to be ruled by the affluent and for the affluent," Wicker says.

This vision of a third party, similar to that of former Independent presidential candidate John Anderson and a handful of other former pols and academics, is radical in its simplicity. Previous efforts to solve the calculus of history, perception, miseducation and psychic conditioning regarding black-white relations have all been launched from moral and (latecoming) legal positions, with tragically ineffective results. And while this political force may not save us, we cannot afford to not try it, Wicker argues.

Supported by meticulous research and presented in a chronology that lays to waste any claims that racism against blacks in America has been legislated away, Wicker writes in a style that is informed and informal. Here, as with Andrew Hacker's 1992 book "Two Na-

tions," Wicker uses government statistics and independent studies to buttress his arguments, with devastating effect. Relying also on a hefty amount of investigative journalism (not surprisingly from New York Times reporters), he fleshes out the disturbing statistics with anecdotal narratives that bring to mind Lawrence Otis Graham's "Member of the Club:" only here, instead of one precocious black man's odyssey into a white America besotted by racism and denial, Wicker culls stories from prominent African-Americans like Vernon Jordan, Earvin "Magic" Johnson and Shirley Chisholm. In turning to African-Americans who by most accounts have "made it," Wicker cleverly demonstrates that even blacks who have "bootstrapped" their way out of poverty—and presumably the trapings of discrimination—are not immune to lingering white fear or notions that blacks are inferior. Fear of crime, for example, is merely an extension of the overall fear many whites have of African-Americans regardless of their economic standing, Wicker writes. And media, which reflects all the shortcomings of society at large, generally do a shamefully poor job of covering the stories and trends, which shows why and how integration has failed thus far in America (more denial).

"White fear of crime is directed primarily at the underclass, at the ghetto; white fear of crime therefore has become fear of African-Americans. That fear, however exaggerated, is a salient fact of life in the American city today, breeding the suspicion and animosity from which it is only a short jump to hatred."

Strong language, to be sure. But Wicker recognizes an undeniable fact of the race conundrum in America today: white America must take responsibility for its role in our shared "race problem," even as African-Americans must look for realistic means of achieving political and economic self-sufficiency. ■

Amy Alexander is editing an anthology of African-American essays on Louis Farrakhan and black leadership. It will be published by Grove Press in 1997. She lives in South Florida.

Self-Serving Memoirs

BY MURRAY SEEGER

In the aftermath of international communism's collapse, we have been flooded with memoirs that we never expected to see. The boys from Moscow, particularly, have tapped the deep pockets of American publishers, eager to supply an open market for "inside" stories of Kremlin intrigue, KGB dirty tricks and sidelights on Western leaders as viewed from the East. Moscow politics are recognizable to any student of the trade; the major difference from Western politics was that in Moscow there were no second chances—you were in or you were out.

The new memoirs are as self-serving as the political diaries and autobiographies we have been reading for ages. But, with the new contributions from the east, journalists can re-examine issues and incidents and compare the versions presented by a wider scope of participants.

Take the case of Nick Daniloff, Nieman Fellow and long-time correspondent in Moscow who was arrested by the KGB and charged with espionage in August 1986. The story appears in "Turmoil and Triumph," by former Secretary of State George P. Shultz and "From the Shadows," by former CIA Director Robert M. Gates. Former Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin ignores the episode in his "In Confidence."

Shultz found the case to be especially volatile fuel for his distrust of the CIA and its controversial director, William Casey. Gates, who had been Casey's deputy, explored the details and found a complete bureaucratic screw-up. Both men agreed that the CIA had stupidly fed Kremlin paranoia about journalists as spies by attempting to use Daniloff as an unknowing intermediary with a potential source of secret Soviet information. "What idiocy," Shultz concluded.

"If Daniloff had not been a reporter but rather a businessman, at least some in the American press... would have been tearing the Administration to shreds, accepting the Soviet charges as true, denouncing the CIA and Daniloff and citing [President] Reagan's tough statements as proof the United States was not serious about better relations with the USSR," Shultz wrote. "But Daniloff was a journalist. The press was being helpful."

Gates relates the same facts as Shultz (and as Daniloff did in his earlier memoir, "Two Lives, One Russia"), but draws drier conclusions. "A political firestorm attended all of this," Gates writes of the disruption in relations between the two countries that reached Reagan and Soviet Leader Gorbachev.

The incident "was a disturbing harbinger of the operations directorate's haphazard and scattered record of its activities," he concluded. "Compartmentation and security were one thing. Disorganization and confusion were another."

Shultz, a former professor at the University of Chicago, carried on a bitter rivalry with the CIA where Casey operated

in such secrecy that the White House did not know the extent of his activities. The CIA and the Pentagon interfered with the slow processes of negotiation that Shultz knew well from his training in labor economics.

Gates, the career bureaucrat, tells no secrets while defending his agency except for those cases when its ineptness was too well known to cover up. He snaps at Shultz's criticisms. Both men devote long sections to the spy wars between the KGB on one side and the CIA and FBI on the other.

On the other hand, Dobrynin makes a statement by pretending this nasty conflict blazed outside his radar scope. The index in his book does not mention the KGB (Committee on State Security), the military security agency (GRU) or the Central Committee of the Communist Party, of which Dobrynin was a member.

The diplomat does talk early about his relations with Col. Georgi Bolshakov, chief of the GRU in Washington, who masqueraded as chief of the Tass Bureau and was a back channel for communications between the Kennedy Administration and the Kremlin during the Cuban missile crisis. The emphasis here is that Dobrynin was to take over this channel. The role of the disguised newsman was known before.

Dobrynin relates that there were six different "residents," or KGB chiefs, during his 24-year tenure as ambassador. He names none of them nor their covers and makes no mention of the spy scandals that culminated with the arrest of Aldrich Ames, the CIA agent who made his first contacts with the Russians during Dobrynin's tenure.

"For my part, I did not interfere in the everyday business of their intelligence work, nor was I informed or interested in their concrete operations and their agents; that was beyond the range of my duties," Dobrynin wrote. The agents at most had "rumors and hearsay" while he had access to his "confidential channel."

There were problems in the embassy, however. The KGB men and women were paid better, had more generous expense allowances and bigger apartments than Foreign Ministry employees. They were quickly identified by the FBI. Occasionally accused in Moscow of being "Americanized," Dobrynin assured his status by keeping his party lines polished; he out-ranked the residents politically. And he continues to keep their secrets.

Despite its failings of omission and its ingratiating tone, the Dobrynin book is the most interesting of these three because he tells things we in the press did not about the Kremlin and its leaders. Neither Shultz nor Gates goes much beyond what we know from previous reporting. ■

Murray Seeger is a 1962 Nieman Fellow.

NIEMAN NOTES

COMPILED BY LOIS FIORE

The Editor Turns Cub Reporter

BY CONSTANCE CASEY

Being a book editor had its raw moments. The prominent novelist calling in a rage about a negative review, screaming to intimidate me, hoping thereby to get a better review for his next book. (Note to authors: this does not work.)

But raw moments were rare. The day-to-day work of putting together a Sunday book section at The San Jose Mercury News and writing a book review every week was generally free from direct contact with intense misery, plane crashes and gunshot wounds.

Most reporters at the paper were dying to be the book editor. It seemed enviably peaceful to them; they had visions of reading "Middlemarch" twice. They didn't know you had to read so many not-so-good books-of-the-moment that you were way too tired to read George Eliot.

I wanted to be a reporter, and now I am.

I didn't go totally basic; I'm not doing police in Dayton or the school board in Tacoma. I'm one of the national correspondents for Newhouse newspapers, in the Washington bureau. After two good years at Newhouse, I'm beginning to see that it wasn't the infrequent raw moments that drove me away from the book section, it was more the frequent tame moments.

Leaving book criticism and turning to reporting was a change I first described to myself eight years ago in my Nieman application. Invoking my heroes A.J. Liebling and H.L. Mencken, I said I wanted to study satire. My argu-

ment was that satire, as practiced by those two and by others I hoped to read at Harvard, like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, was really very, very accurate reporting.

The move toward change had something to do with wanting to be pushed to be sharper, tougher. After eight years at The Mercury News, my piece of the literary world had come to feel too precious and too safe, at a remove from real events. It was a good eight years, but I was writing about people who were writing.

Being the editor of a book section can be like being out of the wind, in a backwater. Election night 1988, I walked into a Nieman party and asked, only half-joking, "Who won?"

"You can tell which one is the book editor," Nieman Curator Howard Simons commented. Which he meant as a funny observation, but it did sting.

After The Mercury News, I had a few years as a freelance but regular book critic for The Los Angeles Times, while studying documentary film-making. (This was also a chance to stick around San Francisco to get to know my two sons before they grew up. I'd been commuting 58.6 miles to San Jose.) And then a year as Assistant Editor of Book World, the Sunday book section of The Washington Post, a job I lucked into when my husband unexpectedly got a job with the Clinton administration. I was subbing for an editor on sabbatical, so I couldn't have stayed there forever, which gave me a nudge onto the different path.

At The Post I did a lot of editing, not much writing, and felt increasingly chained to the computer, fixing stuff. Unchained now, I wander the country by phone and plane, meeting, to understate the case, a wider range of people.

Which is interesting and what I was seeking, but presents some difficulties. Most of the folks I used to interview or edit had written a book, or at least a 750-word review or two. With a few exceptions, they were used to thinking in sentences.

Out in the real world it's often harder to elicit complete sentences and thoughts; you have to learn to coax people along, without leading them. The harder thing to get used to was being less gentle, with having to ask direct, obvious questions. This, along with hundreds of other tracking and searching skills, was stuff that the guys sitting in the desks right around me in the Newhouse national bureau—the Washington correspondents for The Newark Star-Ledger, The Staten Island Advance, The Mobile Press—had learned years before, at their first jobs. In bad moments I feel I'm a little old to be catching up; in good moments I figure I'm fending off deterioration by exercising different parts of the brain.

It's all very well to want to be closer to reality, but a few times in the past two years, out on the road I've thought, "What the expletive am I doing here?" In a parking lot on Denver's Skid Row, a vacant lot in the South Bronx, or just having my third-in-a-row hotel-lobby

continental breakfast.

Sometimes, reading my notes after a couple of days on a trip, I see that this guy says he sleeps two hours a night, that he once contemplated blowing his brains out, that God is directing his every move. I was alone with this guy for eight hours, and he's expletive-ing nuts.

In both the book section and the news pages, of course, writing is writing. As an inexperienced book critic at 20-something I was too timid to paraphrase, and thus quoted way too many big chunks of the book being reviewed. As an inexperienced reporter at 40-something, I once again feared paraphrasing, and so I quoted every person I could get on the phone. Patiently, Robert Hodierne, Deputy Bureau Chief, explained, "If 12 people all tell you the same thing, you can just choose two people to quote. Or you can say it yourself." That piece of wisdom made it much easier to write stories in under 1500 words.

The beat I devised and Bureau Chief Deborah Howell (who, God bless her, was on my Nieman selection committee) took a chance on may not seem at first like the hardest news in the world. It's called, and this always gets a little laugh, *Doing Good*.

What it isn't: feel-good news.

What it is: News stories about people who see a problem and apply their talents to it. The pediatrician in West Virginia who goes in a van to reach her asthmatic patients up in the hollows. The retired science teacher who organizes community gardens in the South Bronx. The Seattle nurse who set up tent hospitals serving hundreds of thousands of refugees at a camp in Zaire and then lost her legs when her truck drove over a land mine there.

The beat also includes the politics of philanthropy, fast becoming hardball as government funding ebbs for alleged frills like art and music. And the boom in the number, and power, of charities and non-profit groups.

Surprisingly often now, even as the *Doing Good* reporter, I find that the most neutral conversation can end with a hostile sentence beginning, "You in the media..." Suddenly I find myself

blamed for something Sam Donaldson did. Once a very dignified executive at a huge family foundation simply hung up on me.

A minister in Texas very severely warned me that I couldn't write the story I was calling him about because I wasn't a real, that is born-again, Christian. A little later he said, "I can hear the evil in your voice." And finally, "I know you reporters. You all just want to make me look like some Fundamentalist wacko." Well, I won't make you look like a wacko, which wouldn't take a really big effort at this point. What I can do is leave you out of the story entirely.

Actively evil I'm not, but I am willing to take the rap for being a reporter, a Member of the Media, a jackal of the press, rather than a literary type hanging out in the library.

Back when the prominent novelist or others got angry at a negative review, I developed a rationale for doing the job of critic. I would mutter to myself, about the complaining author and his or her book, "Nobody asked you to write the damned thing."

I was looking for a comforting principle recently, along the same lines, to apply to the bumps in the road of reporting. Here's what I'm trying out:

"Look, it's just me here, not Sam Donaldson. One fairly intelligent person doing the best I can. You should know that it's in your interest as well as mine for me to get this story straight." ■

Constance Casey is a National Correspondent for Newhouse News Service.

—1953—

Watson Sims has retired as General Executive of The George H. Gallup International Institute, Princeton, N. J. He will continue as a consultant to the Institute, where he is also Gallup Scholar in Communications. In September, he moved from Rocky Hill, N.J. to 406 Crowfields Drive, Asheville, N.C. 28803.

—1976—

Gunter Haaf, in Germany, worked as a journalistic consultant to San

Totty Lyons Dies at 90

Catherine B. Lyons died October 17 in her home in Cambridge. She was 90. A memorial service was held November 12 in the Appleton Chapel of Memorial Church in Harvard Yard. Totty Lyons was affiliated with the Nieman Foundation for 17 years. She began as an assistant to Curator Louis M. Lyons in 1947, and the two were married in 1950. For years she helped fellows as they dealt with Harvard's academic and bureaucratic tangle as well as the joys of a Nieman year. She also helped her husband in the preparation of material for his broadcasts at WGBH-TV, where he had a news show from the 1950's to the 1970's. She retired from the Nieman Foundation with her husband in 1964. He died in 1982 at 85 years old.

Among those she leaves are a daughter and four stepchildren.

Francisco's *WIRED* magazine for several months this spring and summer. *WIRED* tried to get a joint venture going to publish a German edition of their upstart magazine. Unfortunately, their talks with two major German publishing companies, Gruner + Jahr and Der Spiegel, both of Hamburg, stalled in September.

Haaf, who had been Editor in Chief of "Natur" magazine, Munich, until the paper was sold last December, is a partner with Pro Scientia GmbH, a press agency serving mostly medical and scientific institutions in Germany (no commercial customers, no product PR). He's working and living now in Poeking, south of Munich.

—1980—

Jan Collins Stucker, who admits she is still a bit suspicious of the efficacy of the Internet, writes that she and the co-author of their 8-year-old newspaper column, "Flying Solo," now have their own site on the World Wide Web: <http://www.flyingsolo.com>

"Our column, which appears in more than 220 newspapers via the Knight-Ridder/Chicago Tribune wire, provides comprehensive informational services

about divorce and matters affecting the elderly," she says. "My co-author, Jan Warner, is a veteran divorce and tax lawyer and an entrepreneur. I co-write, edit, and give the 'woman's perspective.' It's an interesting sideline and I think we provide a lot of useful information for people going through life transitions."

Jan is still an editor at the University of South Carolina and continues to freelance.

—1981—

Don McNeill has just published a debut collection of fiction titled "Submariner's Moon" (Oberon Press, 400-350 Sparks St., Ottawa, K1R 7S8. Ontario, Canada—ISBN # 0 7780 1054 6). The connective tissue of the stories is the island of Newfoundland where McNeill was born, and they span the present century from the great war to the present.

"Although I have not lived in Newfoundland for many, many years," says McNeill, "I felt compelled to write these stories as if they were some sort of unfinished business. The inner purpose, I now believe, was autonomy: to free myself from the authority of a past given to me by others by re-creating it for myself."

—1987—

Fernando Lima writes:

As you are probably aware, I am a founding member of MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa) along with **Gwen Lister** (NF '96). MISA is the umbrella organization for all the independent media of our region, and it was formed under the auspices of the Unesco sponsored 1991 Windhoek Declaration. While Gwen was in the United States, I was elected Vice Chair which in practical terms meant I was the Chair of the organization. We just had our annual meeting at Lake Malawi where I met with **Kabral Blay-Amihere** (NF '91), a long-time friend and rep for WAJA, the equivalent of MISA in West Africa. At Lake Malawi we also paid tribute to another Nieman, **Allister Sparks** (NF '63), who received the MISA '96 Press Freedom Award, the first Southern African prize in his career.

Charles Powers Dies at 53

Charles T. Powers died of a heart attack on Wednesday, October 2, at the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center. He was 53. He had just completed his first novel, "In the Memory of the Forest," which will be published by Scribner's in February.

A memorial service was held October 5 in Bennington, not far from the white frame house where Chuck lived. Friends, family members and fellow journalists attended. **Chuck Alston** and **Susan Dentzer Alston** from the Nieman class of 1987 spoke. Another classmate, **Nancy Lee**, assisted in the preparations.

Powers was born in Neosho, Missouri, and graduated from Kansas State University. He began his journalism career in 1966 as a city reporter with The Kansas City Star. There he became known for his graceful writing, his understanding of the people he wrote about, his bite and his humanity.

In 1969 he became metropolitan reporter for The Los Angeles Times, writing longer, more personal stories for the "View" section, including coverage of the mass suicide of cultists in Guyana in the 1970's. He then moved to the New York bureau and in 1980 went overseas, covering Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. He moved to Bennington to write fiction in 1991.

His family has requested that donations in his memory be made to the Bennington Free Library or the New York Public Library. Plans are also in the works to establish a Charles T. Powers memorial fund through the Nieman Foundation.

—1993—

Terry Tang, editorial writer at The Seattle Times, has accepted a position on the editorial board of The New York Times. She will be moving to New York City with her husband, Bill Lee, and son, John, and starting at The Times in January 1997.

—1994—

Lorie Conway's book, "Boston: The Way It Was," published by WGBH, is now out. The book, pictures and memories of Boston in the 1930's and 1940's, is based on the Emmy Award-winning WGBH television series, which Conway wrote, produced and directed.

Conway describes the book this way:

"In the book, over 100 images tell the story of a unique time and place in Boston history...from James Michael Curley, who served four terms as Mayor, one while in prison for mail fraud, to Boston during World War II; 128 pages of photographs and text reveal an era when movies were a dime, doors went unlocked and ladies could go, unescorted, to a midnight burlesque show at the Old Howard, America's oldest theatre.

"The photographs are from the renowned Leslie Jones, a Boston Herald

I stepped down in Malawi from the leadership of MISA while taking another job as the Projects Director for NSJ, The Nordic-SADC Journalism Center, a training institution for journalists in the region (funded by the Nordic countries but run for the first time by a regional management team since October 1, 1996). The chairperson of this institution is also a prominent South African journalist and Nieman Fellow '89, **Joe Thloloe**.

A few years ago Sparks formed a training institution in Johannesburg, the IAJ (Institute for the Advancement of Journalism), with whom NSJ has strong cooperative ties. In our programs we both cooperate with the Poynter Institute in Florida, where my Nieman colleague and friend **Valerie Hyman** ('87) is working. The world is really small, and I am sure Howard Simons [Nieman Curator 1984-89], would have been delighted to notice all the activity.

—1988—

Eileen McNamara, a columnist for The Boston Globe, won an award in the annual writing competition of the New England Associated Press News Executives Association. McNamara won first place in the local column category. The awards were announced in September.

photojournalist who wandered the city for four decades in his trademark two sizes too big overcoat and woolen cap. The other main contributor is famed street photographer Jules Aarons, who was fascinated with Boston's old neighborhoods.

"I am presently writing a documentary on Jewish history in Boston."

—1995—

Janet Wilson is now with The Los Angeles Times as an investigative reporter. She covers Orange County.

Any Ideas For Nieman Reports?

We welcome suggestions for journalistic areas to explore in these pages and for offers to write about them. Specifically, we are thinking of doing a package of articles on the problem of reporting on the sharp gap between rich and poor. What's a good way of covering that subject? Who should write about it for print, for television? Are there good pictures out there we could use? Send ideas to Editor, Nieman Reports, 1 Francis Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138. Or send by E-mail to rphelps@harvard.edu

Call to Journalists With Disabilities

A presidential committee is exploring the idea of facilitating the creation of a national association to address the needs, concerns and issues of professional journalists with disabilities. Tony Coelho, committee chairman, said the agency was prepared to act as a catalyst, but not as a sponsor, in formation of the proposed association, which would be open to print and broadcast journalists at all levels. Further information can be obtained from John Donnelly, The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1331 F Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20004-1107. (202-376-6200).

—1996—

Tom Ashbrook has left his position as Deputy Managing Editor of The Boston Globe to launch a start-up electronic publishing company. The new company, BuildingBlocks Interactive, will first focus on consumer home design, using the Internet and CD-ROM distribution to offer interactive editorial content and direct links to manufacturers and service providers. Ashbrook's plunge into new media came after 15 years with The Globe. Tom reports that he misses newspapering already but has found the capabilities of the digital realm irresistible. "As this technology goes mainstream, the new opportunities for powerfully engaging the public are huge," said Tom. "I decided that if I wanted to really embrace that potential, I couldn't just dabble at the edges. This is a very different corner of journalism than I've worked in, but I believe the lessons learned here will soon be applicable across a broad front."

Jonathan Ferziger has been named Regional Editor for Asia-Pacific for United Press International. Ferziger's work for UPI has ranged from covering New York State politics to covering the Middle East to reporting from Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. He has been with UPI for 11 years.

—1997—

Myra Ming has received a Gavel Award from the American Bar Association for her work on "Geronimo Pratt: A Case of Injustice?" The series of reports examines the case of Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, a former Los Angeles Black Panther Party leader, who is serving a life sentence for a 1968 murder that he insists the FBI and local police know he did not commit.

Since 1958 the American Bar Association has presented Gavel Awards to recognize work that has been exemplary in helping to foster public understanding of the law and the American legal system.

Ming is Senior News Producer for KTTV in Los Angeles, Calif. ■

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Dealing With a Complicated Truth

BY MICHELE McDONALD

Our adoption paperwork had been finished, approved and sent to China in December 1995. The hardest part of the adoption process for me then began. Waiting. The wait became more complicated and difficult a few weeks later when Human Rights Watch, Asia, released a report asserting that China had a deliberate policy to "minimize" its population of abandoned children. Thousands of children die, the group said, from a system of "malign neglect" including deliberate starvation and abuse.

The report was not a total surprise to me. In June, I saw a British television documentary called "The Dying Rooms," which included film of an emaciated child, reportedly left to die of starvation. In fact, I had heard hints of terrible conditions in China's orphanages a year earlier when I was in Hong Kong, and briefly, in China, photographing a series on Pentacostalism for *The Boston Globe*.

As a photojournalist I felt the story of the treatment of abandoned children in China in state institutions was an important one. Most of the children in orphanages are not actually orphans—they are primarily girls, abandoned largely as a result of state population policies and a preference for boys, especially in rural areas where boys are seen as more likely to be able to provide support for their parents in their old age.

I followed the extensive media coverage after the Human Rights Watch report carefully. It would have been emotionally devastating for me to begin the adoption process all over again. There are few adoption options for 40-something adults. (China is the only country to consider older age an asset—you must be at least 35 to adopt a Chinese child.) My biggest concern was that China would react with defensiveness and anger to the report and end all foreign adoptions.

At the end of January, we received a letter from our adoption agency telling us it was experiencing delays in the process of obtaining final approval from Beijing for waiting families, perhaps coincidentally, or possibly as a result of the negative media reports. The agency suggested waiting families should contact our United States politicians with messages of support for the relevant Chinese agencies and with the opinion that "recent media coverage has presented an unfair picture of the care given to children in orphanages in China." Many of the parents and prospective parents we knew were doing just that—firing faxes and letters off to Chinese and American officials of every sort.

I couldn't bring myself to do this. As much as I wanted our child, I didn't doubt that conditions, at least in the Shanghai

Children's Welfare Institute, were as horrendous as the documentation seemed to prove. If abuses existed, I believed they should be exposed for the greater good, whatever my personal loss.

On the other hand, I wasn't at all convinced that the specific Shanghai orphanage abuses represented evidence of a national policy of the government to intentionally "eliminate" unwanted or unadoptable children. The other evidence—of tragically high mortality rates (50 to 80 percent) for abandoned children in several provinces in 1989-1990, though true, is not necessarily linked to a widespread and intentional government program to kill babies.

In 1990, I photographed a series on Boston's alarmingly high black infant mortality rates for *The Boston Globe* with reporter Eileen McNamara. Roughly three times more minority babies died in Boston before they were a year old than white babies. In fact, minority babies in Boston had a higher infant mortality rate than children in many third-world countries. The causes were complicated—they included racism, poverty, lack of education and access to basic health care. Boston's black infant mortality rate was not the highest in the nation and was not unlike the rate in most American cities. But to link the high black infant mortality rate directly to intentional city or national American government policy would have been unfair and untrue. I believe the Human Rights Watch report accusing the Chinese of a direct, causal link between intentional government policy and the death of abandoned children was unfair and overly simplified.

Our personal story has a happy ending. The only direct result of the critical reports on Chinese orphanages on our adoption was that we were restricted from visiting our daughter Annie's orphanage—something adoptive parents had always been able to do in the past.

Although concerned about what conditions we would find Annie in, we found evidence that supported our sense that she had been loved and well cared for: a touching note from the baby's foster mother sewn over the heart of the innermost garment the child was wearing when she was given to us, expressing happiness for the child, but also asking for pictures "to relieve my longing for her." ■

Michele McDonald, a 1988 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance photojournalist.

NIEMAN REPORTS

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