

# n i e m a n

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fall 1973

The Press in the 1972 Campaign:

The Harvard Conference on Campaign Decision-Making



1973 Nieman Convocation

**What Ever Happened to Humor in the Media?**

Panelists Russell Baker, John Kenneth Galbraith,  
Robert Manning and Robert Yoakum

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**Can People and This Planet Co-exist?**

Panelists Gerald Holton, Jean Mayer,  
Matthew S. Meselson, George W. Rathjens, Carroll M. Williams

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# nieman reports

fall 1973

vol. XXVII no. 3

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Nieman Reports is published quarterly by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, 48 Trowbridge Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. Subscription \$5 a year; add 40¢ for foreign mailing. Single copies \$1.25. Third class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts.

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Long ago, in quite another world, the "managers" of the 1972 presidential campaigns—of the spectacular Nixon-Agnew victory and also assorted Democratic failures—gathered in the Harvard Faculty Club for two days of reflection on how it all had happened. The time was January 1973, the co-sponsors, Harvard's Institute of Politics and Nieman Foundation; the participants, eighteen campaign managers plus four political reporters who were there to direct the discussion.

At the time some of us marveled at three things: the remarkable brevity, intelligence, and candor of the participants; the fast pace of the give-and-take (no moments of boredom, almost no speeches); and the rare phenomenon of some 75 Harvard teachers and students sitting mute as observers for two days. In retrospect one can still marvel at everything save the candor: those who managed the President's re-election did not, it turns out, tell all.

Nonetheless, the record—deftly edited by Janet Fraser and introduced by Ernest May—seems to us important, an instructive venture in collaboration between politicians and journalists, with the University serving as middle ground. So from that record we publish Chapter V in its entirety as it appears in the book CAMPAIGN '72: The Managers Speak. Further extracts will appear in a future issue.

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By the time of the Nieman Convocation at the end of May, Judge Sirica, the Washington Post, and several others had changed the American political landscape. The health of the First Amendment was still on our minds, hence our wide-ranging panel on the subject (see NR for June 1973). But so was the gloom of super-seriousness. Where were the wit, humor, pungency in reporting and commentary that usually tend to preserve our national sense of perspective? To judge by the results of our panel on "What Ever Happened to Humor in the Media?" that sense of perspective is still in good shape. So we offer our readers the edited but unsanitized transcript of that discussion.

We also offer, since as always "the future lies ahead," a discussion of that familiar and usually avoidable question, "Can People and This Planet Co-exist?" The answer, in recent times, is maybe. But our panelists did much, we think, to bridge the gap between Lord Snow's "Two Cultures;" and we present the transcript of their discussion with pride.

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Following the custom of some quarterlies, we start with this number to designate by season rather than month, i.e., the September issue becomes Fall; the December one, Winter; March will be Spring; and June, Summer.

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Nieman Fellows Jack Burby and William Gordon have made some discoveries—about former academics (instead of journalism school graduates) as first-rate reporters, and about the NAACP's durable relationship with the press. We are pleased to present their findings, and will welcome others from the Niemans and non-Niemans who seek out our mailbox.

— J.C.T., Jr.

## The Press in the 1972 Campaign

*Introductory Note: In January 1973, for the first time in American history, principal participants in a major election met to discuss the science and the art of campaign strategy: the planning, calculation, contrivance, miscalculation, and mischance that determine what the electorate sees. Campaign managers, pollsters and journalists met to compare notes on their techniques and tactics and on their successes and failures as they reviewed the events of the primaries and election.*

*The straightforward exchanges took place at the Harvard Conference on Campaign Decision-Making, a two-day seminar sponsored jointly by the Institute of Politics in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy School of Government and the Nieman Foundation for Journalism. Eighteen key people participated, including those in the campaigns of Nixon, McGovern, Wallace, Muskie, Humphrey, Jackson and McCloskey. Four political correspondents—David Broder, James Naughton, Alan Otten and James Perry—guided the proceedings.*

*The transcript of the conference has been edited (by Ernest R. May and Janet Fraser) and published in a book, CAMPAIGN '72—The Managers Speak (Harvard University Press, 1973). Especially pertinent to the news media is Chapter Five—The Press in the Campaign—reprinted in its entirety in the following pages. Additional excerpts will appear in the Winter issue of Nieman Reports.*

**James M. Perry** (*National Observer*). Our discussion here suggests that the voters may not have been very interested in Vice President Agnew, but members of the press damn well were. I suppose you could go back to the [1969] speech in which particularly television journalism was attacked for having an alleged leftward bias. In a recent column in

*Newsweek*, Dick Dougherty [McGovern's press secretary] guesses that 90 per cent of the reporters covering George McGovern voted for him. I'm not sure that's correct—I think it was considerably less than that—but Dougherty ends up by asking why they didn't write it that way if they were that much for him. Finally he suggests that what we need is more advocacy journalism. We wonder whether the press, in fact, does have an ideological bias, to the left or any other direction. It would seem that initially the press ignored McGovern entirely and went to Muskie, who was supposed to be the centrist. Then we rediscovered McGovern and found him to be one of the great geniuses of our time, along with his agents—Gary Hart, Frank Mankiewicz, and the rest. Then we decided finally that McGovern and his people were bumbler. We went full circle on McGovern and everyone else. I think the best thing is to let you all beat us over the head if you like, except of course the four of us who are here.

**Max M. Kampelman** (adviser to Humphrey). I would certainly like to challenge anybody who would try to state that the answer to the problem of the press is advocacy journalism. The problem, it seems to me, is the reverse. I sense that the tendency toward advocacy journalism is there—both on the air and in the print media. And even though frequently that advocacy happens to be on my side, I think it's a disservice to our democratic institutions. I don't like it; it's an easy temptation.

But there's another problem, which is exemplified by the nature of the press bus in a campaign. They're all together and there's a crowd up ahead, for example, and somebody looks up and says, "That's a helluva big crowd," and everybody says, "Yes, it's a big crowd." If this fellow had stood

up and said, "What a lousy crowd," everybody would have said, "Yes, it's a lousy crowd." It's a natural thing to reflect what you hear among your colleagues because you certainly know they're not biased—you respect their professionalism. But I think there is a herd instinct in journalism, and it is reflected in the kinds of things you're talking about. It's interesting to me that Jim Perry described what "we" did. There was a kind of uniformity—going to Muskie, ignoring McGovern, going to McGovern, and completely, consistently ignoring Humphrey throughout the whole campaign. A professor at Johns Hopkins got some graduate students in political science to study four or five newspapers, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

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Through a complicated mechanism, they judged column-inches, size of headlines, favorable and unfavorable summary evaluation. From January to June [of '72] there were really appalling figures in terms of Humphrey. There were covers on *Newsweek* and *Time* and on *Life* of McGovern; no covers of Humphrey during that whole period. It's a herd instinct, and I think it's a problem.

**James M. Naughton** (*New York Times*). How did the study factor in the subjective judgment of what is new in the news?

**Kampelman.** They did not try to evaluate that. But, as a matter of fact, it's going to be very hard for me to be persuaded that somehow there was a great deal more new about what Muskie and McGovern were saying than about what Humphrey was saying. Also, you're injecting something else here, which is the whole definition of news, which I think is disturbing. You fellows write a story by starting with a lead which is supposed to be an attention-arresting beginning to a story; and, in my judgment, you've begun the process of distortion right there.

**Gary W. Hart** (campaign director for McGovern). A defense of the press. We were so convinced sometime in '71 that Muskie was getting all the press and that McGovern was getting none that we commissioned one of our volunteers to spend a tedious number of days at the Library of Congress measuring column-inches. We were planning to get a room full of press people then and just let them have it. Much to our chagrin, as it turned out, the totals were within a fraction of the same. It is very easy in a campaign to feel subjectively that your man isn't getting the coverage when, factually and statistically, he is.

On the other hand, I'll have to support Max Kampelman about the so-called pack journalism. Of course, you have to distinguish between the electronic media, the print media, the editors, the columnists, the reporters. The people who write political columns in this country are, by and large, dead wrong—the so-called columnists. The people who report politics are, by and large, excellent. But there are the lazy ones who want to see what Johnny Apple [of the *New York Times*] is going to say and what Dave Broder is going to say and then write their stories. I have literally seen reporters gather around Johnny Apple as he files his lead on the phone, and then go back to their typewriters and type their stories. If Johnny Apple says that George McGovern made a "surprisingly strong showing" in Iowa, that is going to appear in all kinds of papers, just because they heard him say it. That's too bad.

**Anne Wexler** (Democratic voter-registration director). I'd like to hear a little bit from the members of the press about their feelings on covering the Nixon campaign, and what it was like to cover a candidate that in fact did not campaign.

**Perry.** We couldn't cover Nixon, so we all rushed out and covered Agnew. It was a sorry solution to the problem. I think a lot of reporters believe that covering a campaign means to jump on the campaign plane and go along with the candidate and listen to the same speech and measure the crowd he had that day. I did once go with Nixon, and Ron Ziegler [Nixon's press secretary] conned us all by saying that the crowd in Atlanta was something like a million; I measured the square feet of the space where the crowd had gathered, and found that the most you could have gotten in there was 75,000. That's the kind of thing we were doing—going along and saying how wonderful the crowds were.

**Naughton.** The first point that I'd like to make is that we did cover the Nixon campaign 365 days a year. We covered it in China, we covered it in the Soviet Union, we covered it whenever we wrote about the President and his activities. But my second point is that in covering Nixon, either as President or as campaigner, we did not get as close to him as we may have gotten to McGovern in the general-election campaign. We didn't get at him; we didn't irritate him; we didn't draw him out. That was something over which we discovered we had very little control, in part because of the strategy of the Republican campaign. When George McGovern announced, he made a point of being open and, as a consequence, invited the kind of attention that we eventually got around to giving him. I don't know that there would have been any way to avoid giving him that attention.



**Richard H. Stewart** (press secretary for Muskie). I'd like to take exception and give an example of one instance which I was amazed at, frankly, in terms of the White House press coverage. There was a statement by a member of the White House staff who said that he thought the press in the White House asked soft questions and that he didn't see any great need for press conferences.

**Jeb S. Magruder** (Committee for the Re-election of the President). That was John Ehrlichman's statement.

**Stewart.** And it was just a few days later that the President held his first televised press conference after the Watergate disclosure. That press conference was kind of a jocular give-and-take between the President and the press—everybody was happy and everybody was kidding with the Pres-

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**Even though frequently advocacy happens to be on my side, I think it's a disservice to our democratic institutions. I don't like it; it's an easy temptation.**

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ident. It was a helluva press conference, from the President's point of view. Not one person in the White House press corps had the guts to ask Nixon a question about Watergate, which was paramount in everybody's mind at that time.

**Perry.** You hear all the time these days that print has lost its influence and doesn't have that much impact on a campaign—that what is important is electronic. Do any of you who ran campaigns have thoughts on the question of print versus electronic?

**Robert J. Keefe** (consultant to the AFL-CIO). Walt deVries [political analyst] has published a lot of work in that area. He thinks that print is a major influence, but his studies do not show it to have the influence of electronics—at least in his target groups.

**Peter H. Dailey** (The November Group—Nixon). It's obvious that television is the dominant element today. The average television set is in use in a house six hours a day.

**Ben J. Wattenberg** (adviser to Jackson). When you try to work the press on behalf of a candidate, you find that the way to get the video coverage that you want is to get the print coverage that you want. In other words, video people take their cue from what the commentators, the reporters, the guys traveling, write—whether Jackson is a conservative or a liberal, whether Humphrey is an old politician or a new politician, whether McGovern is the wave of the future or the wave of the past. It is very difficult to work the TV network guys themselves because so many of the decisions are made by some faceless people up in New York.

Whereas you can get to Dave Broder by picking up the phone. It's a different process really.

**Kampelman.** And these fellows in New York are reading the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

**Rick G. Stearns** (deputy campaign manager for McGovern). A lot depends on the quality of the paper and how it is perceived by the community. The McClatchy papers in California must be worth 200,000 votes in the Central Valleys. I have seen people walk into polling places in Fresno and Sacramento carrying recommendations clipped from their papers. And I think one reason we lost Fresno County in this election was that the McClatchy papers did not endorse McGovern—which came as somewhat of a surprise since it was the first time in my memory that they had not endorsed the Democratic nominee. Another aspect that ought to be mentioned is the extent to which the press conditions campaign decisions. I would guess that we subscribed to eighty or ninety newspapers from around the country, and these were our main sources of information about what was happening. What the candidate said in Seattle or what he said in Portland was probably more determined by newspapers than by any other single set of information that we were receiving, other than the advice of our local campaign managers.

**Wattenberg.** I think that this year we saw the advent of something very salutary in political journalism—increased attitudinal reporting. You can't cover a candidate by going out and looking at the crowds; the real story, of course, is what's going on in the minds of the voters. The *New York Times* really made a departure with Jack Rosenthal's work on the Yankelovich studies. And Dave Broder and Haynes

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**You fellows write a story by starting with a lead which is supposed to be an attention-arresting beginning . . . and . . . you've begun the process of distortion right there.**

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Johnson [of the *Washington Post*] did structured attitudinal interviews. Although I didn't always agree with the results, and people tended to buy some notions that weren't wholly valid, I think basically the development in the press was very good.

As for what Max Kampelman said about the bias of the press—in the Jackson campaign we felt that early on we were blacked out of coverage. We felt this was partly because the press people were leaning to the left, which may or may not have been true; but the view I ultimately came to was that any such bias is superseded by another one. We saw it first with Muskie, when they built him up and then tore him down, and then with McGovern, when they built him up and tore him down; they have the bias of the piranha fish—they will go after anything that bleeds.

**Dailey.** I think one thing that has to be considered is the fact that for George McGovern and for many of the people involved in his campaign, this was their second or maybe their first effort. You've got to realize that this was President Nixon's fifth Presidential campaign, and you can't go through that many campaigns without having developed certain understandings and disciplines.

**Charles Guggenheim** (media adviser to McGovern). A voter once remarked to me about a candidate I was helping that "to know him was to dislike him." This election may have been a case in which George McGovern's appearances on television hurt us more than they helped us. And I think if Richard Nixon had been on television news as much as George McGovern, the Democrats would have gained votes. Having come out of five Presidential campaigns, Nixon must have realized this. I imagine that the President might have said, "Well, look, I'm on television in China; I'm on television in Moscow; I don't want to be on television talking to George McGovern." I think we have to understand that more does not mean better, that more does not mean we're going to win, that more may mean less.

Another point: we should recognize the effect that the press has on our decisions on where we go and how we operate. *Newsweek* did a survey that showed the most widely read column in the United States is Jack Anderson, closely followed by Art Buchwald, or it may be in reverse

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—but only 4.3 per cent of the people who read newspapers read those columns. Again, I don't think a day went by in the McGovern campaign when someone didn't get absolutely livid about what somebody was saying in a column that was read by only 1.5 per cent of the people in this country, and this influenced the election because it influenced us to go out and do something or react to something or get upset about something. But we have to put these things in perspective. The real events are so much more important.

**Perry.** What about the contention that the press has a bias toward the left?

**Magruder.** I think we [in the Nixon campaign] felt very comfortable with the news coverage of this campaign. The one thing which surprised us was that the press didn't zero in on us earlier and start to realize what was really going on in our campaign. We were very pleased because we did not want to get our strategy out on the line early, but I think some enterprising people could have found out more

about our direct-mail activity and our really unusual use of the telephone. I thought this was just a lack of aggressiveness on the part of the press. On the whole we were pleased, though of course, as you know, we think there is advocacy journalism to some extent in the Eastern liberal establishment axis. I think that it's more prominent than it should be in the *Washington Post* and in the *New York Times*. But that's a point of view.

**Perry.** Are you suggesting that if the press had zeroed in on your direct mail and your telephone banks there would have been an adverse result?

**Magruder.** No, I just think it was a news story that was missed early by the press; I don't think it would have had a negative result. I think it might have given the opposition more opportunity to gear up, but maybe not. In our case, we made effective use of the information we had on the McGovern organization to get our troops going. We really

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**Press people . . . have the bias of the piranha fish—they will go after anything that bleeds.**

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pounded home to them the fact that George McGovern had a very strong, tough-minded organization. We had a problem of apathy with our troops, and this helped us tremendously in gearing them up to work.

**Hart.** I'd like to ask the reporters their opinions on whether the McGovern campaign was too open. Were we too available?

**Perry.** It was the most garrulous staff that I've ever seen—they lined up to talk to you.

**Hart.** I guess that answers my question. Wait until next time.

**Naughton.** I doubt seriously if I can improve on that answer, but I would like to say that Jeb Magruder raised the question of enterprise in the political press corps in trying to determine what may have been going on in the Republican campaign. Access is, of course, very important to enterprise. It was very easy to obtain access to key people in the McGovern campaign, and this was not true on the other side.

**Magruder.** That's really not true. Your guy Bob Semple used to float in and out, and he would come over and say, "I've got a real problem—I'm handling the White House and I'm supposed to handle you and I really can't take the time." I'd say, "Well, that's fine, Bob, nice seeing you," and Bob would come in once every four months. That's really what happened in the case of the *New York Times*.

**Naughton.** But I would like to suggest that anyone familiar with both headquarters could easily have noted a contrast between the McGovern and the Nixon campaign offices,

## THE PARTICIPANTS\*

David S. Broder, *The Washington Post*  
 Jack L. Chestnut, campaign manager for Humphrey  
 Peter H. Dailey, *The November Group* (Nixon)  
 Charles Guggenheim, media adviser to McGovern  
 Gary W. Hart, campaign director for McGovern  
 Max M. Kampelman, adviser to Humphrey  
 Robert J. Keefe, consultant to the AFL-CIO  
 Jeb S. Magruder, Committee for the Re-election of the President  
 James M. Naughton, *New York Times*  
 Alan L. Otten, *Wall Street Journal*  
 James M. Perry, *National Observer*  
 Rick G. Stearns, deputy campaign manager for McGovern  
 Ben J. Wattenberg, adviser to Jackson  
 Anne Wexler, Democratic voter-registration director

\*Partial listing

simply in terms of ability to enter any given office. It was much more difficult, time-consuming, and frustrating for those who were covering your campaign to get at people with any degree of ease. I wasn't covering you, but I'm aware of other people's complaints.

**Magruder.** In your case, it wasn't until September or October that Linda Charlton was evidently assigned to the Nixon campaign. She was all over the place, seeing everybody. We gave her access to everything, and she wrote some very good stories. But that was very late in the campaign, and the stories could have been written in June.

**Naughton.** Another part of the problem is that we have been conditioned for so many years to assume that the campaign exists where the candidate is. We have not spent nearly enough time talking, first of all, to the voters, who are, after all, going to make the decision, and secondly, to the technicians in the campaign. I think that's changing; I think it changed to a large extent among a number of media people this year and will, no doubt, change considerably in the future, if we're allowed to get in.

**Magruder.** The guy who had the best stories consistently on what I call the internal workings of the Nixon campaign was Lou Cannon of the *Washington Post*. He continually scooped the other newspapers with very accurate informa-

tion on our programs and was really the first one to get into the surrogate program in any depth.

**David S. Broder** (*Washington Post*). That was a compliment to my colleague, but I must say that I think it's somewhat disingenuous to argue that there was not a difference in the matter of access to the two campaigns. The difference was pervasive at every level. You mentioned your telephone banks. I recall a year ago in New Hampshire running into a very charming lady from Minnesota who was up there running your phone-bank program. She was somewhat disconcerted at being recognized and said, "It's off the record that I'm here." And I said, "Well, that's a little difficult. Instead of that, why don't you give me your own version of what this campaign is doing here with your phone operation?" She said, "I cannot do that." I think she meant that quite literally. And it was, as we all know, quite a different situation at the Doral Hotel [in Miami] at the Republican convention and at the Democratic convention.

**Magruder.** We agreed that that was a mistake. I think we felt that we were overly security conscious because of demonstration problems. We agree with you there, and we have said so publicly.

**Broder.** But of all the disparities between the campaigns that have been mentioned here, I would guess that the most consequential, in terms of the outcome, was the disparity in access to the two candidates. I compliment you, from your point of view, on the degree of control that you maintained over access to the President. In effect, the only things that we were able to report about the President's campaign were those things which he selected to make available for reporting. This goes to a question that we haven't really discussed here—and it's probably beyond the scope of this meeting—as to whose campaign it is. The whole assump-

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. . . Part of the problem is that we have been conditioned for so many years to assume that the campaign exists where the candidate is.

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tion here is that the campaign is in the control of the candidates and their managers. I would suppose, as reporters, that it would be our institutional bias that the campaign, in one sense or another, belongs to the public. This was an attitude that I think we found very little reflected in the Nixon campaign this year.

**Dailey.** It gets back to whether or not there really are two candidates, and to whether or not the President, by his performance in office for three and a half years, isn't already providing far greater access than the candidate. By being President, he is campaigning in a sense; his performance in office is really being judged. It's all out there.

**Stewart.** But he can't be questioned on his performance the way the candidate is who is in the field every day with the traveling press corps. The fact of the matter is that the press people did not have the same opportunities to parry with the President that they did with Senator McGovern or Senator Muskie or Senator Humphrey or Senator Jackson. I just don't think that this is in the best interest of the country. By staying in the White House, I think the President made the right decision in political terms, but not in terms of the good of democratic institutions.

**Magruder.** The Nixon campaign certainly always had a relatively controlled press policy. We always were accessible in campaign headquarters, but under controlled conditions. We wanted interviews to be scheduled through the press office so that we would have some knowledge of output.

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**. . . I don't think there is any reason why, in running a campaign, we (Republicans) shouldn't be able to control the output of our own employees.**

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You may disagree with that policy possibly, but I don't think there is any reason why, in running a campaign, we shouldn't be able to control the output of our own employees. Much of what they might say could be very inaccurate because, with only a partial knowledge of things, they could get into all sorts of areas that they really don't know anything about. We tried to give the press people a broad-gauged look at the campaign so that they would get the story as accurately as possible. I think in this case that less, not more, was probably best from all points of view. [To David Broder] It's true that you would have a hard time talking with an employee up in New Hampshire in a casual situation, but you would not have had difficulty in talking about that same telephone bank with the proper people.

**Hart.** Jim Perry made it very explicit that he thought that people in the McGovern campaign talked too much. Dave Broder seems to be suggesting some beneficial aspects of being open. Where do you draw the line, in case some of us ever do this again? In two and a half years, I don't remember ever calling a reporter and asking to get together with him, or inviting a reporter to lunch. On the other hand, I didn't turn too many of them down. Where do you draw the line?

**Perry.** I think that's your problem. The point I was making was that there was a lot of self-serving going on within McGovern's staff. One person would whisper to you about how badly this other person was doing. It struck me that there were some disloyal people involved in that campaign.

**Hart.** So it wasn't quantity so much as it was what people said?

**Perry.** Yes. And a lot of it was minutiae of one kind or another that didn't go to the heart of what the campaign was about. It just seemed like almost adolescent behavior on the part of some people.

**Jack L. Chestnut** (campaign manager for Humphrey). These things become problems in a campaign if the campaign manager doesn't set some rules and guidelines for people about who can talk to the press in certain areas. In a campaign, many of your employees are very temporary, and in some instances you don't have much knowledge of their background or their capabilities. They have only limited information in any particular area, but they're questioned on the broad range of the campaign and expected to give an opinion. Then you see, "A well-placed source in the XYZ campaign says so and so," and you may get an image that is almost impossible to overcome. It's one of the management problems that you have in a campaign; and if you don't establish these rules, you particularly leave open an opportunity to those who are disloyal, to those who are seeking additional positions of power within the structure of the campaign and will use this as a device.

**Magruder.** I think there's a natural desire, when questioned by the press, always to have an answer. A person who doesn't know the answer to a question may make up an answer, and his answer may become a major news story even though it's absolutely incorrect.

**Stewart.** Quite frequently I found in some of the less responsible papers that somebody would be quoted as a Muskie source, and it would turn out to be some eighteen-year-old kid out of high school who was spending a couple of days in the campaign and was overwhelmed to be asked a question by a guy from the media. The ego thing is so strong that people can't help saying something, and they

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**Jeb Magruder said the press was great this year when we were kicking hell out of McGovern, but we weren't so good last year when we were kicking hell out of Nixon . . .**

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say the glibbest thing they can think of so that it will get into print. The comment is never attached to a name, yet when the public reads it, they make the general assumption that the quote is from somebody who really knows what's going on.

**Alan L. Otten** (*Wall Street Journal*). There are good reporters and there are bad reporters, just as there are good academicians and bad academicians, and good lawyers and bad lawyers, and even good campaign tacticians and bad ones. But the basic thing, it seems to me, is the old and perfectly obvious and trite point that you kill the messenger



bringing the bad news. Jeb Magruder said the press was great this year because we were kicking hell out of McGovern, but we weren't so good last year when we were kicking hell out of Nixon, and we weren't so good again when we were kicking Nixon on Watergate. Dick Stewart thought we were great when we were saying Muskie was the front-runner, but he didn't like it when we said Muskie cried. The McGovern people liked it when we said McGovern was up, but they didn't like us when we said he screwed up on Eagleton. Humphrey people didn't like us when we

**Not one person in the White House press corps had the guts to ask Nixon a question about Watergate, which was paramount in everybody's mind . . .**

said he was running all over the country making a million promises a day. The press wasn't making those promises; the press didn't pick Eagleton; the press didn't tap phones, if in fact anybody did; the press didn't cry. I think it's very easy to pick on little things and get away from what was really basic and continuing throughout the campaign.

**Wattenberg.** But everybody that I've known who has ever worked on a political campaign—right, left, or center—comes up with the same basic viewpoint—that what you read in the media isn't what's happening. It's a fairy tale. It's distorted. I think most of us know members of the press who are good, honest, loyal, wonderful people, but there's something in the mechanism of having to write a story, of having to file daily, of having to find news where sometimes there may not be very much news, that produces a picture for the public that does not coincide with the reality of either the candidate or the campaign.

**Naughton.** I think this discussion has been very interesting and has, among other things, once again proved what I regard as a truism, which is that there are no two groups in American society which are more paranoid than politicians and the press.

It's hard some days to stay within shouting distance of reality.

— Robert Yoakum

## What Ever Happened to Humor in the Media?

*Introductory Note: Participants in the Nieman Convocation last spring (cf. Nieman Reports, June 1973) were treated to a discussion of humor in the media with Russell Baker, columnist, New York Times; John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul M. Warburg Professor of Economics at Harvard; and Robert Yoakum, columnist, Los Angeles Times Syndicate. Robert Manning, Editor in Chief, the Atlantic, moderated.*

*What follows is a lightly edited transcript of the proceedings.*

**Manning:** I'm the straight man for this morning. I'm Bob Manning and welcome you all to the funny hour. Jim Thomson got a call at 5:00 o'clock this morning from Chicago Airport where Bill Mauldin, who flies his own plane, reported that he couldn't get out of the airport, so he's not going to be with us. And Ken Galbraith has to make it all the way over from Francis Avenue and I assume he's on the way; we haven't heard otherwise, so he'll be joining us. There were going to be four, but there will be at least two University members and I'll manage to keep them honest as much as I can.

But the plans have gone slightly askew, somewhat in the fashion of a Southern melon grower I heard about recently who each year when his melon crop came into ripeness, became fed up with going out the next morning and discovering half his melons stolen. He finally arrived at what he felt was the perfect solution. He had a big sign printed which said: "One of these here melons is poisoned." He put it up in front of the patch and went to bed and sure enough, he got up the next morning and every one of his melons was in place. He was feeling very good about it until he went out front, where the sign was and saw a new sign, "Now two of these here melons are poisoned."

We're just going to sit here and Bob Yoakum and Russ Baker are going to give us a few thoughts about the state of humor in the media and we hope that we can talk among ourselves and all of you. I don't think any introductions are really needed. Bob Yoakum is a fellow I've known for many years and just to show that he's got a sense of humor, I'll tell the circumstance under which I first met him. He was trying to get organized and raise money to start a new



magazine, a weekly news magazine, to compete with *Time* and *Newsweek*, and a man who can contemplate that, back in the days when they were at their absolute height of financial and journalistic success, obviously has a sense of humor. The result, of course, is that he now has his own column which is syndicated by the Los Angeles Times Syndicate, reaching upwards from 20 to now 30 newspapers. Bob lives in Connecticut and he's one of these fellows who's managed to arrange to work out the kind of professional life that pleases him and organize it around his own desires and own ideas about what he wants to write. Let him take it from here.

**Yoakum:** I should explain that once my colleague was Art Buchwald, or Fat Fingers, with whom I did the column back in Paris days. Art said, "We ought to keep doing this column; I think humor has a future," and I said, "I really don't think it's going to work." So I went off and saved the world—that's why it's in the shape it's in today—writing long, serious, factually accurate pieces. And the Buchwald column kept going, and after he passed his first 100 newspapers, I thought maybe Art was right. Then he passed 200, 300 and 400, and I said the hell with this other stuff, the world is in worse shape as a consequence of my writing about it seriously, so I've now switched back to humor.

It's too bad that Bill Mauldin can't make it, but it did remind me: the fact that he couldn't get out of the Chicago Airport this morning brings to mind the story I read in the paper the other day that you may have seen, about the man who was arrested for running down a runway nude without a stitch on, flapping his arms, trying to take off; and I thought that's about the stage we're all at. It's humorous that we're having a hard time staying ahead of the news these days. This is not the first time it's happened.

Russ Baker, has an enormous advantage over others on a panel of this sort, and others in our tiny little vineyard, because Russ for several years covered Congress. Nobody else has that kind of background and advantage. When I was on the *Herald Tribune*, and when Buchwald and I

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were doing a column together, an occasional Congressman would pass through and we would try to interview him, but usually in Paris, they would be too busy working, even to be found. All of which leads me to the first reason for what James Thurber called, in 1960, the decline of humor and comedy in our times which, in my view, is that humor isn't taken seriously. There are no Pulitzer Prizes for humor. When NBC the other day ran an hour-long show on the importance of Watergate, they interviewed historians

and pundits and politicians and even a few civilians, but no humorists. I am waiting for the day when humorists will be considered to be valuable enough to interview.

Humorists, said James Thurber, lead an existence of jumpiness and apprehension. They sit on the edge of the chair of literature. In the house of life they have the feeling they have never taken off their overcoats. On another occasion, in an article called "The Case for Comedy" printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Thurber said playwrights of that period—1960 I think this was written—fell for the false argument that only tragedy is serious and has importance, whereas comedy is just as important, and often more serious in its approach to truth and—what few writers seem

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to realize or admit—usually more difficult to write. I'm sorry to use so much Thurber, but you have to give enormous credit to a man who could puncture Madison Avenue's kick on illiteracy, which isn't over yet, with one ideal beer ad that went, "We still brew good like we useta could."

Most politicians treat humor with the trepidation of a Democrat making a phone call in Washington these days. In 1954 my wife and I invented and passed on to Adlai Stevenson an expression, "Eggheads of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your yolks"; and Stevenson used it, it was given wide currency at the time. There were many negative comments and some people liked it. Later, in a letter thanking us for it, he said, "I am always put on guard against my tendency to laugh in this solemn business, and some sober friends have thought this remark unwise, but I am still on the side of occasional mirth."

So, Point One, humor isn't taken seriously. Booth Tarkington said, "Sobersides look at humor the way a duchess looks at bugs."

Point Two, it's hard for a humorist to outdo reality, and I'm not going to bear down on this one because so many people have made the point. What if a satirist had written a piece involving the President of the United States, White House Aides, CIA disguises, the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, suitcases bulging with hundred dollar bills carried by aides up and down White House corridors, Martha Mitchell, the head of the FBI burning documents, Howard Hughes even, a band of anti-Castro fanatics. Any sane editor would have said, "Sorry, but this is too far out, we can't use it."

We've all had trouble staying ahead of the news, and I'll give you but one example in my own case. I wrote a column about the New York police raids on massage parlors. This has been the big thing in New York recently. It was given quote, highest priority, close quote, in the City Council re-

cently; and there they have succeeded; they have closed down the massage parlors. It was called Captain Rooney Leads a Crackdown on Vice, and I invented this captain who was busily cracking down on vice, and he was on the telephone with his task force out there with the massage parlors. He was having troubles. One of his men almost drowned while trying to get a confiscated water bed into an elevator. One of the vice squads was robbed. There were

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all kinds of problems: at one point I had a patrolman call to say that in a gang shoot-out a couple of pedestrians, who just happened to be passing by, were killed. He said, "By the way, we think our side came out okay."

Within twenty-four hours, two innocent bystanders were shot and killed in a gang warfare, before the column had even appeared in the papers the day after that. It is very difficult to stay ahead of contemporary events. It's hard even to stay in touch with reality. It's hard some days to stay within shouting distance of reality.

The other day I found myself calling the CIA to find out what a speech alteration device was. You may have read in the newspapers about the various elements in the disguises used. They had glasses and one thing or another, but then they mentioned speech alteration devices, and I wanted to use this in a column, because I had (in my column) these incompetent burglars caught; and I called the CIA and finally worked my way up to an assistant director, and I told him I'm doing a column on bungled burglaries and he laughed uneasily, and I said, "I need to know what a speech alteration device is." And he said, "You know I've read that in the paper too, and I've been wondering myself. I didn't dare ask the guys downstairs because their eyes are rolling back into their heads." He tried to be helpful, though; he said, "I assume it's something you put in your mouth, maybe like marbles."

The Third Reason, in my view, for the decline of humor is that it isn't just the world that's in sad shape, so are the satirists. Humorists are having a hard time not taking themselves seriously. In other words, humor should be taken seriously, but of course humorists must never take themselves seriously. But the world is so bloody sad, so bloody and so sad. Mark Twain said it: everything human is pathetic. The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven; and again, Will Rogers: "Everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody else." He also said, by the way, "A comedian can only last 'till he either takes himself serious or his audience takes him serious." Putting out instant humor is hard on

the psyche, as any humor columnist's wife will testify. Anyone looking around with his eyes open should be crying. Groucho Marx is credited with having said, "If you find something to laugh at these days, you're not paying attention."

Item Number Four: Many newspaper editors are made nervous by humor—especially if it's non-political—and don't know where to put it. According to a Gallagher Report, only 3.8 per cent of the publishers in the United States have editorial backgrounds. They, and not a few of the editors, feel uneasy in the presence of humor—except in the comic strips. One of my client papers, the Sunday Times of London, like some other British papers, will print humor for the sake of humor. It won't have to be relevant to anything at all, it just goes on the "leader page" and can by U.S. standards be quite irreverent.

In this country, humor hasn't found a place of its own in the newspapers. It needs hooks and hangers and excuses and wedges and shoe-horns and justifications in order to get in—to the point where one of my client papers here in the States puts what they call pure humor, that is humor unadulterated and unsullied by politics, on a separate page called the peach page, so-called because of the color of the page. That's a step ahead, in my view, because at least there is a place for humor that doesn't have a political hook on it, but of course some columns aren't political enough for the editorial page and are too political for the peach page, and then you just fall in between, and you don't get in the paper that day.

Most political humor is okay, but editors get twitchy when satire is used, as it should be routinely to deal with such subjects as religion and sex, and the letters that come in may justify their view. The fruitiest, nuttiest letters I get

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are letters where I've mentioned Billy Graham's name in some way that they didn't consider complimentary, they being some of the readers.

I'm strong for diversity, in other words; which may explain why I appeared within one month in the 150th anniversary issue of the Sunday Times of London, and in the same month in the 3rd anniversary issue of Penthouse.

Final Point: It is harder to ridicule an endangered species. Take Congress for example. Congress has always been a fair target. Not only a fair target, but an inviting one. Mark Twain doted on Congress. "It could probably be shown by facts and figures," he said, "that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress." Will Rogers used Congress as much as he did his lariat. During the disastrous Mississippi floods of 1927, when he became really

quite worked up on the subject, and on apathy over the fate of the people in the Mississippi Valley, he told audiences, "You hear a good deal about what Congress is going to do with the Mississippi Valley. I don't want to discourage the Valley, but I would advise them to put more confidence in a boat builder. One row boat will do more for you, in a flood, than all the Senators in Washington talking about you. I've got more faith in high ground than any Senator I ever saw. It's the Democrats that are under water, so it's going to be hard to get New England Republicans interested."

Of course Presidents have eventually been targets too. It is appropriate today to recall Rogers' account of his meeting with President Harding. "Do you want me to tell you the latest political jokes, Mr. President?" said Will Rogers. "You don't have to, Will," he said, "I know them already, I appointed most of them."

But, Congress clearly needs our help. Should we be taking pot shots at them? I do still, and so do Russ Baker and Art Buchwald and others. But I feel uneasy doing it. Like a sick man who calls a doctor, then puts a banana peel on the front step.

Why wasn't there more satire about the military during Vietnam or the Hundred Years War? The brass has been bloody-minded, pig-headed and just plain wrong about nearly everything, including military judgment, but how can one make fun of them, while they are out there being shot at? In any case, not many writers succeeded in doing so. Some black extremists should be ridiculed, along with

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white extremists, but how can a white writer get away with it in a society as filled as this one is with racial hatred?

Finally, what about our old reliable targets, the cops? There is corruption; they are as corrupt as they have ever been in most cities, but it is harder to make them targets of satire while they are, literally, the targets of ambushes—even though past and present brutality and dishonesty may be a major factor in the reason for the ambushes. Even with all those hurdles in mind, we're going to have to keep at it; and I will, too, and cops, I think, will make a good ending. They were the subject of the funniest jokes I heard in Washington recently. I attended the Editors' meeting down there and then the Counter-Convention that followed it; and there were other subjects from Watergate, for example. But the funniest line I heard came from Billy Cohn. The former Light Heavyweight champion in 1939-1941, who grew up in a very tough neighborhood, said,

"I was 25 years old before I realized that cops were also paid by the city."

**Manning:** If any of you live in a town where you are not provided with Russ Baker's column, I think you should complain to your Governor or Chamber of Commerce. Russell, I think, invented, several people Bob was talking about. I think he invented Billy Graham. I think he invented John Mitchell with that Mr. McGoo voice that will exclaim, as the Gates of Lewisburg are closing behind him, "This is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of."

Since you all know Russell, I'm going to tell you who he is not. He is not the son-in-law of Everett Dirksen, he is not on Senator Ervin's Senate Select Committee, he is Russell Baker, New York Times.

**Baker:** If I look unduly distressed this morning, it isn't solely because the party lasted so late last night; but largely because when I got here and picked up the program last night, I discovered that the subject of this meeting was to be "What Ever Happened to Humor in the Media." I thought this panel discussion was going to be on the subject, "Should Frank Sinatra warn Spiro Agnew against being seen in public so frequently with the President."

However, after the party was over last night, I faced up to the necessity of talking of humor and what we call "the media" here in Cambridge, and I got up early this morning and that is when I asked the man at my motel where I could find the media. I thought that as a person with some tradition of reporting it was incumbent on me to do some investigation on the subject. He pointed me towards Harvard Square—a ghastly sight at 7:30 on a Saturday morning.

Well, I went over there and I found a media. I brought it with me; it cost 15¢; it looks like this [holding up a copy of *The New York Times*] and I began looking to see what had happened to humor in the media.

I discovered a great deal of it was very amusing. There is a four-column story right here in front: we're sending up some space people to go into orbit, and they are going to repair a huge piece of technological equipment that is beyond my powers of description, at a height of 200 miles above the surface of the earth, while it revolves around 18,000 miles, and they are probably going to do an excellent job of it. Well, I sat and smiled and smiled this morning, because I have a four-year-old Buick! I'm sorry—I know that intellectual people feel that way about people who drive Buicks, but I have a brother-in-law who is a Buick dealer (that's another story). I haven't been able to get the front end of this car aligned properly for three of the last four years. And it occurred to me while reading this story, that if I could persuade NASA to put my Buick in orbit . . .

Then I moved over to the off-lead and there is a three-column story here about a friend of Nixon who has been

identified as a backer in the purchase of the Western White House, and this story is obviously a plant. They were having a wild time at The New York Times last night. A multi-millionaire businessman named Abplanalp. It's A-b-p-l-a-n-a-l-p. It's almost a palindrome. But to be a perfect palindrome, it would have to be A-b-p-l-a-n-a-l-p-b-a, or Abplanalpba. The New York Times has created a palindrome interruptus. I discovered that Mr. Abplanalp has put up a million and a quarter dollars, if my reading of figures is correct—they probably aren't—I'm terrible on mathematics

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—a million and a quarter mortgage, and I started figuring, at the rate at which I pay off my mortgage, it means it is going to take Nixon 417 years.

We move down to the bottom of the page, and there is a wonderful story about the networks getting the Watergate hearings off the networks. They are going to rotate them, because the public is bored with the thing and prefers to watch game shows and soap operas. Well, that is more like it, isn't it?

The bottom of page one is the funniest story of the week. Our Foreign Aid Program: first of all, I must explain, we spend a great deal of effort to stop the opium trade coming out of Iran and Turkey, with the result that the price of opium has gone up in the world market; and we thoughtfully handled that, made it impossible for the farmers of Afghanistan to get rich, by providing enough agricultural assistance for them to fill the opium gap. And the story at the bottom of page one says "AFGHAN FARMERS ARE HARVESTING A BUMPER CROP OF OPIUM POPPIES ON NEWLY IRRIGATED LAND THAT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED WITH AMERICAN FOREIGN AID."

We pass inside the paper, "STARVATION IN THE SAHARA." There is a body in the street in Buenos Aires, diamonds are for sale on West 57th Street; and go on to page four—this brought me up for a long laugh. You may remember that last week the Senate Appropriations Committee, in what could only be called a historic vote, voted 24 to 0 against extending the President's authority to bomb Cambodia. Well, it seems that two members of the committee have now reversed themselves, Senators McGee and Hruska, two noble hawks, have issued a joint statement which can be best savored if you imagine them reading it in unison, which reads, "It ill befits an institution of greatness to allow its movements to respond to the tempests of

time and politics, while ignoring the perspectives of true national interest that has through history given Congress its dignity and true leadership." So much for Mr. Yoakum's unwarranted concern over the death of that group.

Well, it was getting late, so I rushed on to the back of the paper to check the weather, to confirm my suspicion that it was going to rain for the rest of the month, and on the very last page there was a marvelous story from Washington explaining—as you may know—that the President, the Administration, has closed the Rhode Island Naval installations, and they are very upset about that down there on the water, particularly since the Committee to Re-Elect the President ran some rather ostentatious newspaper ads during the campaign indicating that they would be kept open if the President were re-elected. This morning we had a statement from the ineffable De Van L. Shumway, press secretary of the Committee to Re-Elect the President, who placed the ads in the Rhode Island newspapers, and he has really the statement that takes the prize for candor in four years of the Nixon Administration and says, "An ad never pretends to be an absolute firm 100 per cent commitment to anything."

Well, I'm delighted that Professor Galbraith showed up. I was counting on him to impose a reasonable pattern of discourse on this rambling discussion; if he hadn't, I think we would be in some trouble. But before we all proceed to the inevitable conclusion to which the title of this kind of subject relentlessly urges us, that humor is dead, we ought to look around and see whether there was ever much humor in the media in the first place.

The thesis that humor is dead must be at least as old as the mastodon. I imagine that the second man ever to cut letters in stone tablets was the first to take off on this

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theme. There isn't anybody writing anything funny on stone tablets anymore, I imagine them saying, not like the old stone tablets used to be. Most recently, the theme has been developed by Time magazine—it's one of Time's favorite themes, they do two essays a year on it—and it's the famous style they have down there, which itself was a good bit for stone tablets.

I'm willing to believe that humor in the mediums isn't what it used to be, but I really don't believe it was ever very much. My memory of what it used to be, at least, is not terribly impressive. There was Bugs Baer and the Hearst Newspapers, when I was a boy; and if you were fortunate enough to live in New York, there was FPA, the old New Yorker School of humor, Will Rogers was functioning on the radio, briefly syndicated in The New York Times (I



suppose he was a very funny man; at that time I wasn't up on laughing). Benchley, Thurber, Perelman and then those awful ego contests that went on at the Algonquin Round Table.

I think when Time and the people who ring the bell for humor complain that humor is dead, what they are saying is that certain kinds of humor are dead. The kind of humor we associate with the twenties, this thing called college humor, madcap humor, it was an innocent kind of humor, it was essentially good humor. I think good humor has

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probably had it. We are too sophisticated for good humor, we know too much about the world; we've grown up, to some extent. At least we've grown beyond the point of when we can enjoy a laugh, a joke, just for the fun of having a joke. It's my impression, that there is very little anymore which grows out of the sense of fun, pure sense of fun. It tends instead to be heavily moralistic, has a tone of uplift and discouragement, and a tone of bitterness. And behind it always lurks the writer's squalid intention to do some social reform upon us.

I think we may be coming close to something that is similar to the survivor's humor that we are familiar with from the ghettos of central Europe. We're not anywhere near that yet, but the kind of humor that has developed here is taking us in that direction. There's very little fun in it, except for those who are capable of being titillated by the assumption that not only are we all in the hands of madmen, but that's the way it ought to be.

The difficulty for the humorist lies in trying to create situations of fiction that are even more preposterous than what I just read in the newspapers. I was astounded to pick up a newspaper a couple of weeks ago and see a headline about Chuck Colson. It said Chuck Colson had taken a lie detector test. (You remember Colson—he is the fellow who would walk over his grandmother.) Colson had taken a lie detector test, and it said he had told the truth. And this was a story in the newspaper.

I said we'd come full circle back to a situation where news is now "dog bites man." And I think that perhaps the function that people—I take that back, I don't think of myself selling a function—but the work of people like me and Yoakum here may be done with. We weren't there when they needed us during the Eisenhower era, and on; and now they don't really need us any more.

**Manning:** We couldn't pursue this subject in a community like Cambridge without laying a heavy academic hand on

it; and Ken Galbraith has kindly agreed to come over from his palatial home across the street and give us a few remarks, looking at it from the academic point of view. He, like the other speakers, doesn't need an introduction, a now some-time ambassador, adviser to presidents, originator of a famous college course called Galbraith on Galbraith, and distinguished author. Ken, you have the floor.

**Galbraith:** Thank you, Bob. I'm a little bit stunned by the thought that I am supposed to impose order, and a measure of gloom, on this otherwise pleasant occasion this morning, and I shall proceed to do both.

I was a little bit astonished by the subject of discussion this morning. I was laboring under the quite serious impression that American journalism, at least, has never been written with quite so much an edge as the moment. You have only to spend a year in England to see what ghastly non-amusing writing is like, and to yearn to get back, even to the front page of The New York Times. We may be a bit glum about insanity, but I think English journalism has reached a point where there isn't even a recognition of the interior insanity of life. So, let's not be totally self-flagellant about this; we're not all that bad. The British are now engaged, as Burke said, in one of their periodic episodes of concern for public morals. No one is going to ask the fundamental question of how it could ever happen in London, that those noble idiots would be paying for sex!

I would like to make one or two suggestions about the purpose of amusement, humor in writing: it is on a whole not—I'm quite serious about this—not to make people laugh. That generally, once you think of it, it's a device for holding attention, holding people with you.

There is a certain problem involved in a theater, in getting up and leaving a lousy play. There is nothing involved at all in closing up a newspaper, or stopping a lousy article; and one does, I think, rely on humor much more for holding and making them fear that their vanity will somehow be abused if they miss some slanted comment, than one does for the purpose, actually, of evoking laughter.

There is also the problem that Russ Baker and others have mentioned, that only humor can illuminate the ridiculous. One lives at a time when an enormous number of things are hilarious, and one has to treat them with a degree of hilarity; there is just no other possibility, and the examples of this have never been so numerous as in these last months.

A current New York Magazine has an enormously long, enormously glum article by Joe Kraft, on the possibility that there is a conflict of interest in bringing John Connally into the White House. Now having Joe Kraft or Bill White deal with a subject of that sort is just impossible. The notion that John Connally, the great wheeler-dealer, the long-time friend of the dropouts of the IRS, the attorney for



Gulf Resources, member of the firm that laundered the money in Mexico. (Let's leave out just for the moment the usual "alleged." He unquestionably did.) The notion that he should be brought into the White House to clean it up cannot be dealt with by Bill White. As I was saying the other day at the county convention, having those fellows cover an event like that is like having somebody go to hear Gilbert and Sullivan who can't hear either the music or the lyrics.

This goes on to a great many other things. I don't think, for example, that one can possibly understand the economic policies, (getting to the very serious problems with which I am concerned) of the Nixon administration unless one is prepared to come up honestly and say, "George Schultz and Herb Stein and the other economists were hired from E. Howard Hunt." We've got to the point on economic policy where we can only understand it in terms of failed economists who were hired by failed burglars. It seems to me that these are the two purposes of humor: to illuminate things which can only be understood by somebody who has a poorly developed sense of the ridiculous. I don't know that we are doing quite so badly as my colleagues in this panel suggest.

I think, perhaps, that a much greater problem is that humor is, of course, a very difficult and a very dangerous—always a very dangerous—instrument to use, and one

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that has a very serious backlash. There is some standard of good writing, but there is certainly no standard of what is considered acceptable humor. What one person finds very funny, somebody else finds appalling. I'm sure that both of my colleagues here have the same experience, that sometime or other, when they thought they had done something very good, that was the occasion when they got the most severe letters, not only from readers, but also managers and editors.

Mark Twain has been very much mentioned here. I always thought one of the very best of his comments, partly because it is addressed to people who have been a constant source of trouble in my life—namely, the very short, who are naturally very jealous of those of us who are tall and more closely watched and therefore trusted—was a letter in which Twain was describing somebody as extremely short, so short that his doctor cannot tell whether he has a sore throat or hemorrhoids. I remember once telling that—with an awful reaction to the depths of the dissent and the vulgarity that the Harvard Professor was capable of.

Somebody mentioned the problem of race, which is similar: Noel Coward was once telling a mutual neighbor of ours about the reason that he did not get a knighthood. It was a gathering of people of great intelligence there, great sophistication, all white. I think the story is perhaps true. He, at the time of the coronation in 1952 or '53, was then the senior man of British Letters, and he was invited to sit with the aged Royal Dukes and Duchesses and the Queen Mother, and many other people of pristine distinction, in a stand just outside the Abbey. A big parade came by, and some of you who watched it on television will remember that apart from the Queen or the Queen-to-be, the proceedings were rather seized by the Queen of Tonga, an enormous woman, very dark, who weighed 270 or 275 pounds. One side of the carriage sank down very regally, and she was in terribly good humor. She bowed to the crowd, and was very much the center of attention and affection. She was accompanied by a small, equally as black, man—but very small—and as she went by, one of the Royal Duchesses said, "I wonder if that is her husband." And Noel Coward said, "No, it is her lunch." And this produced an absolutely—well, to finish that part of the story—it is alleged to have taken his name off the list of the palace for ten years. But the *telling* of this story later in this particular gathering of saintly people produced an absolute outraged remark about racist stories.

Well, I suppose it also indicates that the humorist's trade is a much more perilous profession than that of the people who are in the safer business of drawing somber morals in our society. There is also the fact that humor has to be used with care, because it is the most destructive of the weapons at the command of the writer. I think, for example, that most of us here in this room always regarded John Mitchell as a thoroughly ridiculous figure until people began to laugh at him. I suspect it was even only then that the Grand Jury decided that it would also go along. This being so, it seems to me that people like Baker and Yoakum should recognize that they hold in their hands a weapon far more powerful than anything that has been given to the sainted figure who has just left this room for Washington. I refer, of course, to Archie Cox. I'll return this subject to the humorous . . .

**Manning:** I don't know if either of you have any after-thoughts or counter-comments to make. You've got an invitation to do so, then we'll bring everybody else in on this.

**Baker:** I think we have let this become far too grave, we have let it sound like a state occasion or burial. Why don't we let people talk?

**Yoakum:** I'd like to help out. I wanted to make only one comment about the British Press. I didn't mean to give the impression when, I managed to slide in my appearance in the Sunday Times of London (circulation, one million

and a half . . .) That's very helpful by the way; when the Los Angeles Times Syndicate is putting out information about the circulation in the papers, we don't add these little details that one million and a half of that circulation is one newspaper, but I agree with your views on the British press. The point I made, however, was that I found generally speaking that it's easier to get on a "leader page" there with humor without any other kind of angle to it than it is in most American papers. The press itself is in many cases really ghastly. A British correspondent in Zambia, say, is apt to cable as follows: "I sat down and spoke with the Prime Minister this morning," or "I watched with horror as," and then in parenthesis (pick-up wire). I find such reporting indefensible. I simply want to record my agreement in case there is any misunderstanding on that.

**Manning:** I have one question for the Gravity Board. One thing that I wonder about is the almost complete absence of intentional humor, (I am not referring now to Eric Severeid or Barbara Walters) but to *intentional* humor on television news.

**Galbraith:** You are not suggesting that Eric is funny are you?

**Manning:** I said "intentional."

**Galbraith:** I still rejoice above all over my last conversation with Eric Severeid, in 1952. I was writing speeches for Adlai Stevenson, and Eric came up to me and said, "Ken,

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**If you have a sense of humor, you just happen to be several degrees over on the spectrum, so you are seeing the world from a completely different point of view . . .**

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Adlai Stevenson has only one chance to be president of the United States: he must give a big speech." This was at LaGuardia Airport, and I said, "Don't be so full of shit, Eric." He looked at me very strangely, and a great friendship dissolved, and we never spoke.

**Question:** There is that funny news we get in Washington, if you watch the television news at eleven o'clock at night—on 3 or 4 channels—they are all being terribly amusing—the people that do the news do strain, so it is not for lack of will.

**Baker:** I don't think that television lends itself to the uses of humor. You see, you can't contrive humor really. Neil Simon can do a book-joke play, but humor comes out of a perspective. If you have a sense of humor, you just happen to be several degrees over on the spectrum, so you are seeing the world from a completely different point of view—from what we call serious men. And to get on in television, you must be a serious man; it doesn't encourage the employment of people with unorthodox points of view.

**Question:** I suppose, too, that it is an added problem that humor can be dangerous; and that when you try to keep

your FCC license, you don't play around with dangerous things.

**Yoakum:** I really don't think it is that sinister. I happen to have gone to the movies not long ago and saw a lot of old clips of Sid Caesar's early show when he was doing them live, and they were terribly funny. This stuff approaches art. It is very pointed—it's marvelous social commentary, is funny as hell, but there is nothing like that on television anymore.

**Comment:** I think Bob is right as regards all that stuff. You can do a column in The Times or the Washington Post, whatever, making John Connolly out to be the ridiculous man he is, but you can't do that over the networks. Anybody who did that on the seven o'clock news would be thrown off. There would be a terrible explosion.

**Manning:** How about some questions from the floor? We have a little time left.

**Comment:** Well, I didn't know you stay up late in Washington—at eleven o'clock there is an ABC-Comedy news hour, with Mort Sahl and various other people. We feel that it is very funny. However, ABC doesn't feel the ratings are funny, because they are taking the show off the air. That was the only attempt that I have seen, within the last three years, at the kind of humor we are talking about, the very topical kind of humor. But it does happen on occasion.

**Comment:** There was also The Great American Dream Machine, which didn't last very long. I guess that was considered a little dangerous.

**Comment:** I saw the Mark Russell show twice, when we were on a recent visit to Washington. I thought it was terribly funny. I began to wonder during the show whether that would translate easily. Some of it would, some wouldn't. I think it is very difficult to do such for television, for a number of reasons. I certainly agree that the networks probably wouldn't allow some of the kinds of comments we routinely make in print. In addition to that, there is the

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**. . . Humor has to be used with care, because it is the most destructive of the weapons at the command of the writer.**

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problem of people who, as you pointed out, take it seriously. Remember, you get different reactions.

Buchwald once wrote a column about how there wasn't only J. Edgar Hoover, there were 26 imitations of J. Edgar Hoover; and one paper printed a front page story the next day saying this wasn't true. Many people were upset. Other papers had phone calls. People were in a state of dismay. When you're dealing with a network and you indulge in that kind of humor, you might set off a war. It is more difficult. I think Mark Russell would agree that very little of his material can be translated into print, and I think it's very difficult for one sort of humor to be translated into the other . . .

**Comment:** It seems to be that this is something that better be advocated with discretion. There is a folk-humor in Washington. It would be interesting to know who it is who invents this—you know, the man who has the Committee to Re-elect the President now saying, “four more years and maybe ten to twenty.” I once went, years ago, to a meeting of a Gridiron Dinner, and I came away with the impression that the humor at that ghastly occasion was something the Harvard Lampoon would regard as being below high school level; it was simply awful.

**Comment:** There is a conspiracy to laugh at affairs like the Gridiron. You are glad to be there, it shows that you are the sort of fellow who can wear white tie and tails and sit down and have dinner with lobbyists, gangsters, Congressmen. You feel so good you can laugh at anything, and you do.

**Question:** The sad part of this, I’m afraid, is that most of the speeches at the Gridiron Club have been written for the person to give them by the resident Washington humorists. Am I correct?

**Baker:** Yes, I think so. I don’t engage in that, but I know a number of them do. A week before, they come down and have secret conferences around Cleveland Park, get the gag-lines worked out.

**Comment:** Senator Muskie used his—I don’t know who wrote his Gridiron speech three years ago—but he used it for a year.

**Question:** Do we have to wait for the so-called humorous columnists to see the humor in Washington?

**Baker:** I don’t want a lot of humor in the news. I read very little of it. I am a bit of an elitist when it comes to humor. I think most of it is not very funny, including a lot of my stuff, and I certainly don’t want the White House

**We’ve got to the point on economics policy where we can only understand it in terms of failed economists who were hired by failed burglars.**

reporters being witty. They have a hard enough time telling me what happened yesterday, and if they do that competently, I am very satisfied. I think it’s delightful that Chris Lydon can tell us who had the black flag at camp—that was Haldeman—and Zeigler did set it up, and all of that, but that’s a little bonus we ought to be thankful for. I don’t think it should be encouraged at all.

**Galbraith:** I think this is the clearest case you can possibly imagine of somebody trying to protect a monopoly.

**Yoakum:** I made the point that editors make these decisions in the end, and if the copy doesn’t please them, it doesn’t get used and the syndicates don’t sell it and so forth. It reminds me of another event at the Counter-Convention when the UPI bureau chief for Washington got into a re-

lated subject and said that they had received from their client paper in Marietta, Ohio, a request: we want two kinds of stories each day, one that will make readers cry and one that will make them horny. The Howard Hughes-Clifford Irving story was considered ideal from that point of view. But we are still employed in the long run by editors who make that sort of decision, and many of them I find incredibly humorous—that’s because they aren’t taking my column.

**Manning:** In the matter of humor in the White House, I think it’s true that this is perhaps the most humorous administration, but it’s fairly traditionally a difficult place for humor. If I can be allowed to recall one incident that was

**There is some standard of good writing, but there is certainly no standard of what is considered acceptable humor.**

way back, a case of proof that humor can be damaging, (which it was in this case): I was just starting covering the White House as Number Two man for the UP, and trying, among other things, to strike up some relationship with Steve Early, who was a very important man. I hoped he at least would recognize my name if I called up on the phone sometime to get some information. He was a difficult man to get to know, and at one of his morning briefings, the first one I’d attended—though I tried for two weeks to make an appointment with him—the announcement had come out in the morning papers that Elliot Roosevelt was going to be married again. I think it was for the third time, to Faye Emerson; and the ceremony was to take place in a glass booth overhanging the Grand Canyon. The morning of the Steve Early briefing, a reporter said, “Steve, is the President going to Elliot’s wedding?” and Steve said no. Someone said, “Is Mrs. Roosevelt going?” “No.” “Any member of the family going?” “No.” And I found myself inadvertently saying, “Mr. Early, who usually goes to Elliot’s weddings?” It took me six months before I could get the time of day from him.

**Question:** I’d like to ask Russ Baker if he finds it competitive now that the Times has Safire doing things like his column on his mother?

**Baker:** No, that’s not really competitive with me. I have never involved my family in the column. I’m willing to let Safire have the family material.

**Question:** What about David Eisenhower, Russ?

**Baker:** David Eisenhower. Well, he’s got to write one more piece for the page. Everybody’s entitled to make a fool of himself once.



## The Press and The NAACP

It is through the editorial pages that the impact of an opinion-molding organization like the NAACP is often judged, and press reaction—both positive and negative—goes back almost to the time of the inception of the NAACP more than sixty years ago.

In 1920, during the NAACP national convention in Atlanta, members issued a report which included a statement of the organization's relationship with the press:

"More publicity was secured at this annual convention than ever before. The proceedings of each session were carried throughout the country and were reported with gratifying fullness and accuracy."

In contrast, a few decades later, the NAACP received a good deal of negative criticism from Southern newspapers. In the Sylacauga (Alabama) News in 1962, for example, under the title, "They Came, They Saw, They Left," it read:

"And that just about describes the NAACP convention in Atlanta. They picked a city in the Deep South with malice aforethought believing and hoping that a spirit of unrest and disorder would be created. Such, however, was not the case, nor was there the expected ballyhoo and publicity.

"Let the NAACP stay up North where it originated and where it belongs. And let them hold their future conventions up there."

Not all of the negative criticism of the NAACP came from the South. The Marinette (Wisconsin) Eagle-Star under the title, "Too Aggressive," published in 1962:

"The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People seems to be getting too aggressive with the result that its members will stir up more trouble.

"At a convention in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the leaders said he wants his rights today—now—all of them. He said Negroes needed cabinet status, membership on the Supreme Court, membership in everything."

Most of the nation's leading publications have taken a different approach, emphasizing the constructive line of the NAACP.

The Macon, Georgia, News noted that the local branch of the NAACP had been cited for outstanding voter registration activity. It also noted that the "rate of increase in Negro registered voters was higher than any other area in the South." It concluded that "we can't blame Negroes for

registering and then casting their votes for candidates or issues they regard to be in their best interest. . . But we definitely can blame those white citizens who complain about heavy Negro voting and then don't take the trouble to register and vote themselves."

Under the title "Responsible Militancy," the Washington Post said:

"In and out of season—and especially during the long season when all the forces of law and authority seemed to be arrayed against Negro rights—the NAACP has fought the good fight for Negro emancipation in the full meaning of the term. In defending Negro rights it has, of course, defended American rights and has served the welfare of the whole nation.

"The incorruptibility of the NAACP in terms of its vital principles, its unflagging militancy and its success in pressing litigation have earned it accolades from many Southern whites. It is altogether bewildering, however, to hear complaints from Negroes that the NAACP is not militant enough—that it is guilty of 'tommings' because of its sagacious, resolute reliance on reason and the law for the advancement of Negro interest."

A year later, at its 1963 annual convention in Chicago, the NAACP had press coverage from 37 newspapers, top national magazines, the Associated Press and United Press

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**When the NAACP was founded in 1909, an average of three blacks a week were lynched in the United States.**

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International. In addition, radio and television in Chicago gave daily coverage of the proceedings. Forty-eight reporters were registered at the convention—almost twice the attention given to all other civil rights organizations combined—at a time when black militant groups were reaching their peak.

Among the newspapers represented were: The New York Times, the New York Herald Tribune, the New York Post, the New York Telegram-Sun, The Los Angeles Times and the Dayton Daily News. In terms of space, the Los Angeles Times devoted 104 column inches to the convention; the New York Times, 112 inches; the New York Herald Tribune 198, and the Chicago Sun-Times, 428 inches.

Magazines that covered the gathering included Time, Newsweek and Jet.

Following the convention, newspaper clippings and letters—totalling 2,500 from 50 states—helped to document the newsmaking capabilities of the NAACP.

Later, as black separatist groups gained momentum, the Milwaukee Journal wrote in August, 1966, under the editorial title, "Moderate—Effective":



One development that caught the interest of the black press and the press generally during the 1960's was NAACP's emphasis on the need for expanding the black vote in the South. Another was the cry for equal employment opportunities, and the declining influence of the Ku Klux Klan. The Baltimore Afro-American newspaper, noting the presence of a Ku Klux Klan splinter group in Atlanta during that decade commented recently:

"The NAACP met downtown, in the city auditorium—welcomed by the mayor and other dignitaries. The Klan met in a cow pasture—welcomed by no one. The NAACP had a planned program of reports, addresses, public meetings and social affairs. The Klan had an unplanned schedule of sulking on the street corners trying to pass out white supremacy literature to business-like Atlantans who didn't want it."

"The attention given to the more militant organizations in the forefront of the struggle for civil rights occasionally blinds us to the more substantial contributions made by the more temperate leaders and organizations.

"Such an organization is the NAACP—such a leader is Roy Wilkins, executive director."

A by-lined story by Martin Arnold in the New York Times Magazine, September 28, 1969, said:

"The NAACP is the only black organization of national influence that has not suffered financially—or lost other less tangible support—because of the tension between blacks and Jews, who in this country make up a large share of the political liberal community. The Association's money, other than the foundation funds—has traditionally come from blacks, who constitute at least 90 per cent of the membership, not from white liberals."

In an editorial printed during the NAACP's 62nd annual convention in Minneapolis, the Milwaukee Journal said, "When the NAACP was founded in 1909, an average of three blacks a week were lynched in the United States.

"Since then the NAACP has become our largest and most effective civil rights organization. Through law suits, lobbying in high places, educational campaigns, demonstrations and non-violent methods, it has dramatized racial injustice and helped break down some tall barriers to equality."

In July, 1971, the Chicago Tribune wrote:

"All has not gone well in the battle for the NAACP. But all was not bad either. . . The NAACP's record speaks for itself. The NAACP is the champagne of civil rights groups—aged but effervescent."

The Atlanta Constitution said in an editorial a month later:

"The NAACP has been almost drowned out in the violent rhetoric and pointless posturing of recent years. . . The

Black Panthers and other extremist groups have made the most noise and have attracted the most attention. But it is worth remembering that the solid racial progress that has been made in America in this century owes an incalculable debt to the NAACP's patience and skill and willingness to work within the framework of American laws and institutions."

In a Harris poll published in The Boston Globe and other newspapers in January, 1972, the NAACP was described as "topping the list of all-black organizations among blacks." Its closest competitor at that time was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by the late Dr. Martin Luther King.

The press has recognized also the strong leadership of Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP. The Los Angeles Times in an editorial dated September 13, 1973, titled "Half-Century for a Cause" paid tribute to his accomplishments.

"For 50 years Roy Wilkins has been a professional in the business of protest. His motivation was plain enough. He was the grandson of a slave and by the time he became an adult in the early '20s, he was fully aware of the oppressive discrimination suffered by blacks.

"While the dramatic speeches and actions of younger leaders monopolized the headlines of the past decade, Wilkins insisted that the NAACP and blacks choose more

### **The NAACP is the champagne of civil rights groups—aged but effervescent.**

prosaic weapons: the ballot, greater participation in government and constant pressure for increased employment, fair housing and unsegregated education.

"None of these points is new, nor startling. But Wilkins at 72, after a half-century of triumphs and defeats, is still dealing with the realities of this society. He is a long distance runner."

"We have hit upon black aspirations and ambitions in the United States," Wilkins says. "That is the prime reason why we have lasted. . . And if it's a problem in civil rights, the NAACP has definitely been involved in it. If you are black, you have been affected by it."

Commenting on a speech by Roy Wilkins, the Arizona Star wrote:

"Man will have to meet the things that social movement and development pose. If he does not, a dark age can develop. All that is needed is for bigotry, superstition, and ignorance to be allowed to assert their way."

Heading the NAACP's office in Washington, D.C. is Clarence Mitchell, chief lobbyist. Mitchell maintains a full staff to keep a close eye on the law-making machinery in the nation's Capital, and is concerned with legislative matters as



they affect the interest of minorities. Promoting the proper legislation through Congress is part of the duties of Mitchell's office.

"All Americans are in debt to him," wrote the Washington Post in 1968.

A year later, in a Sunday feature in its magazine, *The Potomac*, on January 12, 1969, the Post called Mitchell "one of those rarities in modern day politics—a liberal who knows how to count."

"Over the last decade, he and his co-workers have spent endless hours trudging through capitol halls in quest of the one thing that counts in Congress. Votes."

"So much depends on our making use of civil rights remedies now available to us under the law, and under the laws we can write," Mitchell says. "Some people think you get things done only with strong muscle; yet it is the law that enables people to protest."

The NAACP's most difficult task during recent years has been to meet the rise of black militancy—led mostly by young people, who through their rhetoric and assertiveness have attracted wide attention through the media. Some of them received their training from the NAACP, and became big news

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**Some people think you get things done only with strong muscle; yet it is the law that enables people to protest.**

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because what they did was dramatic. Bands of young black nationalists have fostered an extremist doctrine; some have gone so far as to demand the abandonment of all democratic principles and goals, and a reversal of the trend toward integration.

In a recent editorial, "Watchdog of Civil Rights," the Chicago Daily Defender commented: "... The talk about old leadership, which was leveled at the NAACP administrative officers, is fashioned out of an improbable assumption that a new leadership would be more in tune with events and exigencies of the time than the old."

"Those who promulgate such an advocacy often forget that it is the old leadership, through hell and high water, that has brought us where we are today battling with undreamed-of success any and all invasions of our vested rights."

"The old leadership lacks neither insight, imagination, nor intellectual vigor and tenacity to continue the fight against segregation and discrimination. These are the twin social evils which are trying yet to keep blacks out of the main stream of American society."

"The NAACP, from the time of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, one of its founders, to this day has never wavered in the lingering struggle for justice and equality, and in the determination to alter the second-class status of black citizens."

"... The NAACP must be praised for its invariable resolve to make American democracy a reality and not a dream."

This new mood of black militancy was generated by institutional racism which did more to nurture white racism than to end it. Black separatists have engaged in name calling, threats, intimidation, suppression of opposing views, and acts of violence. The NAACP has denounced these groups as not being representative of responsible young black leadership.

This reporter was present at the 59th annual convention of the NAACP in Atlantic City when a group of young delegates with a nationalist bent petitioned the NAACP to form an autonomous, more militant body within the NAACP. When the proposal was denied, some of the youth

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**The NAACP's most difficult task during recent years has been to meet the rise of black militancy . . .**

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staged a walkout, complaining that "the Association is no longer relevant to the needs of black people." The incident made news over the national radio and television networks. It was also top news in some of the leading newspapers. "What did not make the news," complained one long-time NAACP supporter attending the convention, "was the large number of young people who did not walk out of the convention."

As the NAACP has learned from the past, patience and foresight pay off, even with the young militants.

"Some of the young people who deserted us two years ago are beginning to return," Roy Wilkins said recently.

A story by Joel Dreyfus under the headline, "NAACP: No Generation Gap" in the New York Post of July 6, 1971 said:

"They are young and black. From Tugalo to Memphis. From Brooklyn and Oakland. Some wear Afros and a few wear the black, red and green of black liberation."

"Conspicuously different in dress and manner from older and more conservative members of the NAACP at the annual convention, they showed fewer signs of the generation gap that plagues the majority of youth and adults."

"In common with older members and with their youthful 'brothers and sisters,' they share their color, their view of the world and their trust in being able to make the system work."

In press coverage generally, by the black and metropolitan newspapers, news magazines, radio and television, the attention given to the NAACP has been exceptional; the NAACP is still representative of the majority of black leadership. As the oldest civil rights organization in the United States, it has also the largest membership—some

450,000—including an enrollment of 60,000 young people attached to its nearly 2,000 chapters in the United States. There is no black American who has not been touched by it in one way or another.

Integrated from its inception, the NAACP was started by Negroes and whites with the majority of the membership black, including its principal officers. In the early violent years when such organizations were controversial and termed subversive, the NAACP published in 1919 a report of lynchings that occurred between 1887 and 1918. More than 3,436 people had been executed by mobs during this period. Many were whites who had been sympathetic toward Negroes.

Despite these early efforts at suppression, a group of young Negroes started in 1905 what was called the Niagara Movement. Headed by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, four years later it became the NAACP. Since that time, its policy of moderation, patience and determination has made it the most effective organization in the field of civil rights. A leader in championing the cause for blacks and human rights, the NAACP has consistently followed its platform of progressive action based on the abolition of race distinctions. Its goal is to create a situation where whites as well as blacks can live and work in an atmosphere of peace and harmony for the general betterment of America.

As Roy Wilkins so adequately said, "Where else can we find a better substitute for the NAACP?"

— William Gordon

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## Can People and This Planet Co-exist?

*Introductory Note: Another panel on the program of the Nieman Convocation last spring (see p. 9 this issue) was directed to the more sober issue: Can People and This Planet Co-exist?*

*Gerald Holton, Professor of Physics, moderated the discussion of panelists Jean Mayer, Professor of Nutrition, School of Public Health; Matthew S. Meselson, Professor of Biology; Carroll M. Williams, Bussey Professor of Biology—all Harvard University faculty—and George W. Rathjens, Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

*The transcript of the proceedings was edited by William Stockton, NF '73, and Washington science writer for the Associated Press.*

**Gerald Holton:** We are delighted to conduct this panel for two reasons. First, it comes at a time when all of us are eager to help celebrate the press. I think that the Ellsberg and Watergate cases may turn out to be for the press an achievement analogous to what the moon shots were for applied science; that is, to demonstrate in a clear-cut paradigmatic way the power of the Fourth Estate. Second, we acknowledge our debts as scientists to those few brave reporters who have convinced their employers to let them cover news about science. Many of us feel that our survival as a species—our survival at the current level of civilization at any rate—depends among other things upon proper communication between scientists and the public.

Louis Lyons yesterday listed things which don't get talked about much in the press. His list might have included science. But he also put his finger on the problem when he talked about Mr. Conant's [James B. Conant, former Harvard President] remark: "Please look over this speech and be sure that there are no headlines in it." Scientists, alas, share part of the guilt for the lack of enough communication. They typically give out rather bland or self-serving announcements of what they do and how one might reward them for it. That is changing now, and one of the reasons has to do with the changing psychodynamics of science itself.

**Jean Mayer:** I am coordinating for the United Nations an evaluation of the child nutrition programs in the developing countries. We need to know better than we do now how the present world situation as regards food and agriculture affects children. The project involving several international organizations will try to decide first what the main problems are. As we approach 1975 it is obvious that we are dealing with a population which is still increasing very rapidly. Although in many parts of the world the increase is beginning to slow down, it has not slowed down enough to prevent us from approximately doubling the population of the world somewhere between 2000 and 2010.

We also approach it with both discouraging and encouraging news as regards food production. Food production is one of the things that determines the appearance of our planet. As you fly across the United States it is obvious that

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**. . . The Ellsberg and Watergate cases may turn out to be for the press an achievement analogous to what the moon shots were for applied science . . .**

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what shapes most of what you see is agriculture, or what has been deliberately left as woods, or cannot be cultivated without enormous irrigation projects. Until recently we met our food needs with an area much smaller than the area under cultivation in 1930.

This year in the United States we are approaching a turning point—50 million out of the 60 million acres which had been put in the set-aside plan have been released for food production. In the U.S. food production allows us to do two things—export an enormous amount of our crops—more than half of our wheat crop last year—and also to support a totally unreasonable intake of animal protein. It's unreasonable from the point of view of nutrition because it's accompanied by very large amounts of fat. It's unreasonable from the point of view of the economy of the world in that it's totally unreasonable for us to be a net importer by 1.1 billion pounds of animal proteins last year.

In the world at large we hear a great deal about the Green Revolution and rightly so, it's one of the very hopeful elements in the food picture. I think it's important, though, to realize that the Green Revolution is not simply a matter of introducing a new variety of wheat or rice or corn which would replace varieties which have a lesser yield. Instead it is introducing new varieties which have the ability to respond to large amounts of fertilizer by a much greater increase in yields than the local varieties which over the years have been selected to give fair to middling yields without modern agriculture.

To introduce them therefore means to introduce very

large industrial and social changes. The world is composed very largely of farmers who are growing food for their families on relatively small amounts of land and without intervention of a cash economy. The Green Revolution means that they have to buy new seeds and they have to buy fertilizers and equipment. Therefore they have to grow money ahead of their crops. And you can see immediately that it means a complete change in how the crops of the world are handled.

It means introducing managerial abilities at the farm levels. It means introducing agricultural credit. It means introducing agricultural extension programs. It means a total transformation of the way in which most of the people in the world live. Therefore, it is going to be a relatively slow process. While it is easy to substitute one type of grain seeds for another, it is very difficult to bring agriculture from the middle ages to the Twentieth Century in the space of a few years. This is going to be somewhat too slow in many ways.

The most difficult years as far as food production is concerned are immediately ahead. I think the period between 1975 and 1985 or 1990 is likely to be very much more difficult from the point of view of food production than the period from 1990 onward. This will be because of the slowness of the changes needed in order to expand agricultural production faster than the population as a whole. Until two years ago we had been able to do it. But since then we haven't. We might be able to do it again in 10 or 15 years, but the next 10 or 15 years are going to be difficult.

One of the consequences incidentally is that there will be a greater area of land under cultivation than might be necessary 50 years from now.

From the standpoint of health I think we can continue to look forward to reduction of infant mortality due to the infectious diseases. While some important factors at hand

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**Many of us feel that our survival as a species . . . depends among other things upon proper communication between scientists and the public.**

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such as increases in literacy and urbanization would tend to produce a decreased birth rate, the population will continue to increase because the main gains in health still aren't operating in developing countries. Gains against the congenitive diseases, noninfectious diseases are extremely slow. This explains the fact that in the United States we are spending \$84 billion in medicine as compared to \$12 billion in 1950. I know we aren't accounting for factors such as inflation and population growth in these figures, but the striking fact despite this, is that the life expectancy of adults is the same today as it was in 1950. The tremendous increase in

cardiovascular disease is swallowing up all the improvements in medical knowledge and medical services we have made. And we have not reorganized our mode of life to try to cope with this problem.

To summarize, I think that we can look towards very difficult years in the next 10 or 15 years. I can't resist—even though I know George Rathjens will speak about this—mentioning the fact that when thinking about the world organizing itself to cope with these problems, the single dominant fact of our life as a species is still the fact that we are spending between \$200 billion and \$250 billion a year in preparation for the next war. That this amount of money has not been available for development makes all the problems very much more difficult.

The underdeveloped countries do well if they grow at a compounded rate of four per cent. Many of them put

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**The tremendous increase in cardiovascular disease is swallowing up all the improvements in medical knowledge and medical services we have made.**

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about ten per cent of their national budget into defense projects. And there's one hell of a difference between a compounded increase of four per cent and one of 14 per cent. That margin is really what we need badly now in order to protect the children of tomorrow.

**Rathjens:** I'd like to speculate a bit about whether war is going to be more likely or more dangerous in the years ahead and try to break it into two kinds of war—war as we have known it and nuclear war.

From what has happened in Vietnam, in the context of our discussion here, we can see that that kind of war isn't going to destroy mankind. It's not even going to destroy civilization. It may seriously perturb what goes on in this society, but the bulk of the people do survive and conventional weapons are all that are used. I think we can expect that to continue to be the case. Such wars are viciously destructive. But the fact is that the cost of killing people with conventional arms is high and most people survive. Even with all the power the United States has been able to bring to the little peninsula in Southeast Asia most of the people are still alive. The country has been devastated, but conventional arms are not going to destroy a whole civilization.

With each passing year I suppose we can draw up some additional hope that as nuclear weapons are not used, the idea of using them becomes less and less attractive to planners who are not building all of our military establishment around the expectation that if we fight a war it will be a nuclear war. There was a day when all of our airplanes were designed only to carry nuclear weapons, and that is no longer true. So there is one factor that is supposed to

diminish the prospect of nuclear war and that is with each passing year you probably get more used to not doing it. I think that is the only encouraging thing on the horizon.

But then consider the world's need for energy—the energy crisis. If it is to be solved, the only way you can see any hope for the 1980s will be nuclear reactors. And the more nuclear reactors there are, the more available is the material for manufacturing nuclear weapons. There have been only five nuclear powers so far and I might say I have been extraordinarily surprised that we have main-

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**Southeast Asia . . . has been devastated, but conventional arms are not going to destroy a whole civilization.**

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tained the situation for as long as we have. But it is likely to come to an end particularly if some nations feel they are threatened and have large numbers of nuclear reactors available to them. The nuclear material will be there.

That is one factor. The other involves internal considerations. If you look at the successive state of the world messages that the President has delivered I see a trend that from my point of view is disturbing. The trend is to revert to a situation wherein the so-called tactical nuclear weapons, the smaller nuclear weapons, have greater credibility and perhaps greater likelihood of use. The situation that was attained in the Kennedy-Johnson years was one where there was increasing acceptance of the idea that these really were the weapons of last resort—only to be used for retaliation if the United States was attacked in a massive way. But increasingly—in the writings of the Defense Department statements and in planning—the idea that one wants to be able to use nuclear weapons with greater flexibility is appearing. The idea is one wants to have them available for increasing kinds of contingencies.

However, while the number of nuclear weapons is proliferating enormously, the damage inflicting capability probably is declining a little bit because with greater improvements in delivery systems and sizes getting smaller, the fallout situation also is diminished. But the ability to destroy cities, of course, does not change. What this means is that we are for quite a long time, I would say, going to be a long way from the situation where we could destroy all civilization or all mankind even if there were nuclear war. You might destroy most of civilization as we know it, but you are not going to destroy all of society. If one could distribute nuclear weapons in a way optimized to destroy population, one could probably do it with something like 100,000 to a million megatons of explosives or some number like that. We are probably at least one or two orders of magnitude (10 or 100 times) below that in the amount that would be used in a major nuclear war and it wouldn't be



distributed evenly over the earth. It would be concentrated in a few countries, very much in the northern hemisphere, so whole civilizations could be destroyed, but not all mankind. On that optimistic note . . .

**Meselson:** Can People and this Planet Co-exist? The question might be rephrased to Can Mankind Be Eliminated? Can we conceive of a way in which all pockets of human existence could be eliminated? My conclusion is that it is difficult to conceive how to do this. On the other hand, probably very little thought has gone into it. It is important that thought go into it because otherwise we might do it inadvertently. So I'll concentrate on extreme cases.

Let us dismiss nuclear war. You can't do it that way. We have had about 500 megatons of nuclear testing and we know the worldwide radiation exposure that has resulted. A big nuclear war would produce approximately one hun-

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**. . . One factor that is supposed to diminish the prospect of nuclear war . . . is with each passing year you probably get more used to not doing it.**

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dred times more. For people in the southern hemisphere this would give a total lifetime dose of only a few rems, which is a small dose. It could cause about 0.1 per cent of additional children to be born with serious genetic disease. It might cause a five per cent increase in cancer rates. But it certainly would not wipe out mankind.

Let's consider another way in which the conditions of life on this planet might be adversely changed. The oxygen in the air is replenished, on the average, every 20 years by photosynthesis. This enormous production of oxygen by plants doesn't lead to an increase in oxygen in the air because it is removed by an equally enormous consumption of oxygen by reaction with organic matter and with certain minerals. The situation is rather like a great corporation with very limited liquid assets but with tremendous income and tremendous outgo. A small change in either can cause sudden bankruptcy.

In that sense if the amount of photosynthesis were to be reduced, the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere would fall to a lower level rather quickly, within a period not much more than 20 years. For worldwide geophysical changes, that's extraordinarily rapid. It could conceivably be that worldwide photosynthesis would be reduced if some pollutant should poison the photosynthetic capability of the phytoplankton in the surface layer of the sea where a substantial proportion of the global photosynthesis occurs. Within a time of 20 years you might reduce atmospheric oxygen content by 10 per cent.

That wouldn't be so bad in itself. If you lived in Cambridge it would be less of a change than moving to Denver.

But once you reduce the oxygen you also reduce the ozone in the atmosphere, another form of oxygen. This will allow more ultraviolet light to penetrate the earth's atmosphere. This in turn may reduce photosynthesis further by an unknown amount.

The situation could be aggravated by the injection of dust into the atmosphere. Today, more dust is placed aloft by man's activities than by Nature's, such things as volcanic eruptions. We will probably introduce even more dust before we learn to introduce less. Dust reflects sunlight back into space and deprives plants of light for photosynthesis. You can see we are beginning to enumerate one of many factors that need to be considered in dealing with the question of atmospheric oxygen stability. And nobody knows the interrelationships accurately enough to make absolutely confident predictions. The interesting thing is that the oxygen in the atmosphere is replaced every 20 years and because of that, it possibly is a weak point in our environmental life support system. However, we should note with some relief that the consensus of the people who have thought about this at length is that catastrophic possibilities seem unlikely regarding removing the oxygen from our air.

Another thing often talked about is direct toxicity to man by chemical pollution. Let's consider DDT. This chemical is not very poisonous to man. But it has some interesting properties. It is rather stable in the environment. You put it out there and it stays around without effectively decomposing or leaving the biosphere for a long time. It is also very mobile. You release it here, it vaporizes, goes into the atmosphere, is washed back down by rain and circulates around the earth.

A third important property is that DDT is biologically magnified. Being preferentially soluble in fats, it passes from water into living things. One creature eats another and re-

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**. . . There very probably do exist chemicals that could pose a serious global threat to man if released in quantities that are quite feasible.**

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tains most of the DDT that was in what he ate. Then something else eats him and because most creatures eat far more than their own weight of other creatures before they are done, you end up with a concentration or magnification at each step in the food chain. We are near the top of the food chain and everywhere you go human beings have DDT in them in the order of a part per million. This is the consequence of a worldwide utilization of DDT of roughly ten billion pounds spread out over about twenty years, or an average of about 500 million pounds per year.

Fortunately, a part per million of DDT is not poisonous in the human body so far as we know, although certain other animal species may be more sensitive. Because of con-



cern over the buildup of DDT in the biosphere, its use is declining considerably, especially for purposes that are not considered essential or where substitutes can be provided. As a result, DDT levels in man and other animals will slowly decrease.

But could there be a chemical that is stable, mobile, and biomagnifiable but much more toxic than DDT? If so, its release in practical amounts could cause worldwide poisoning of man and other species. Such chemicals are not inconceivable. A possible example—it hasn't been studied enough to be sure—is a chemical called dioxin (2, 3, 7, 8-

### More research on virus disease should be a priority item for our species.

tetrachlordibenzo-p-dioxin). It is highly toxic to the survival and reproduction of some mammals at the parts-per-billion level, although the sensitivity of man is unknown. If, as seems quite possible from what is presently known, dioxin behaves like DDT in the environment, a little arithmetic shows that an annual release of a million pounds could cause very serious worldwide contamination. This is not much as industrial chemicals go. About a billion pounds of synthetic organic pesticides are made each year in the United States. Fortunately, even if dioxin has all the nasty properties of which it is suspected, nowhere near a million pounds of it are released each year. It is only a trace contaminant in the herbicide 2, 4, 5-T and certain other industrial chemicals, and steps are being taken to monitor its presence in the environment and to reduce the amounts released. But the point that I wish to make is that there very probably do exist chemicals that could pose a serious global threat to man if released in quantities that are quite feasible. The best safeguard is not the impossibility of creating such chemicals but rather the unlikelihood of inadvertently making and releasing enough to cause more than localized or limited harm.

A third and maybe the worst possibility is virus disease. We don't know how to cure virus diseases, except for some obscure ones. Virus diseases can be highly contagious. They can cause global epidemics, like the flu. Fortunately, the virus diseases which are highly contagious are not generally fatal. Why this is true we don't adequately know. We really don't understand well enough the laws of viruses. It is conceivable that there could arise a fatal viral infection, possibly with a host reservoir in animals, which could sweep the world. More research on virus disease should be a priority item for our species.

What can mankind do about these very exotic, truly speculative possibilities, but very catastrophic should any of them occur? It would be prudent for a few individuals to get together periodically to think about these matters. The ob-

jective would be a kind of early warning system for mankind. We are like a great ship steaming in the sea and we don't even know if there are such things as icebergs floating out there. Maybe there are icebergs and maybe there aren't. But we don't have a regular watch up in the crow's nest.

**Williams:** You might want to consider how many insects in the world belong to you. Well, I have made a little calculation here and it says that at any one moment there are a billion million insects alive and this means that approximately your share of this population is about one million. Obviously we don't have to worry too much about this hoard of living things because only about a tenth of one per cent are harmful in any way, shape or form. So 99.9 per cent of these are harmless and we can stop worrying about them.

But if the human race wants to continue to practice modern agriculture it has to cope with this tenth of one per cent; likewise if the human race wants to avoid some of the world's most ghastly diseases including some of these virus diseases that are virtually incurable. So the people that say you are just going to have to forget about this problem had better prepare to go back and live in a cave under the conditions of a perpetual stone age. We are going to have to cope with these creatures.

I think we are getting an inhouse capacity to do so and it involves the technique of turning the insects' hormones against them. In particular the insects have a hormone we call the juvenile hormone, and it is this hormone that we finally extracted and characterized. It now has been synthesized into many analogs and one of the very interesting developments has been to find that this type of molecule is quite peculiar to insects. The molecule can be synthesized in many forms but some kinds of life do not use it. We know of no other organisms except insects that use this type hormone. Further, when you start making analogs of this hormone, it is a great bonus to find that certain kinds of these synthetic materials are highly selective.

For example, we have a terrific kind of molecule called VR515 that has just been registered for production and is the champion molecule produced in mosquitoes. It is quite selective in mosquitoes, and I think the day is near at hand when we can do without mosquitoes but not harm other forms of life and other insects. So I believe that the problems generated by the resistance to conventional pesticides and by the toxicity of conventional pesticides will be lessened. We will see that we do have molecules that have biodegradable, nontoxic hormonal reactivity and high selectivity features that *are* going to help the human race in the perennial battle with insects.

## VIEWPOINT

### Academics:

### First-rate Reporters

Late last spring, 28-year-old Michael J. Malbin showed up at *National Journal Reports*, asking whether we might need one more reporter. In July, a spot opened up and Malbin joined the staff. The first piece he wrote was a splendid, 7,500-word account of the way Congress finally talked itself into breaking into the highway trust fund and using gasoline taxes to finance public transportation. The report included an assessment of the impact of the pro-highway and anti-highway lobbies, which is the conventional way to explain why Congress acts the way it does on highway legislation (impact minimal, Malbin concluded). But the report went so far beyond the easy answers that Malbin got a fan letter a few days later from Rep. James C. Wright, Jr., D-Tex., who was a central figure on the Senate-House conference committee which wrote the final draft of the bill.

Said Wright: "My faith in the craft of journalism is hereby restored."

The scenario is fairly common to city rooms, but in this case there was a big difference. Malbin's craft is not journalism, but teaching. He is a political science professor by trade and the highway story was the first job of reporting he had ever done. But we didn't hesitate to hire him as a reporter because he is the third academic to join our staff and taking aboard professors with no journalism experience no longer really is a gamble for us. Besides, he said the magic words: "I'm tired of relying on secondary sources. I'd like to do some first-hand research."

Our first convert was William Lilley III, who left Yale University in 1969 after seven years of teaching urban history. His transition to journalism was relatively easy because he covered urban

affairs for us. The second was Claude Barfield, another Yale history professor who came to Washington originally to do research for a book on Theodore Roosevelt. He switched fields completely to become a journalist. For three years, he has been covering science and technology for NJR with a style that puts him with the top men in his field in this tough journalism town.

Of course, three former professors is a very small sample on which to base an argument that Washington reporters need not come from a journalism school or even from an apprenticeship on small weeklies or dailies. Nor does it mean that all professors make great journalists. *National Journal Reports* is not typical of U.S. journalism, although one can hope that one day it will be. Deadlines for our reporters come every three to five weeks rather than every day. We focus on precise reporting of changes in federal policy, digging out the names and ages and middle initials of people that few Americans ever hear about but who shape programs for energy, the environment, the economy, or whatever else really counts in Washington.

Lilley and Barfield learned from the rest of our correspondents—whose backgrounds by and large are more typical of the average journalist—but the other correspondents have learned from the professors. The flavor of our reports has been influenced by the professors' perceptions of Washington and there clearly are some lessons for journalism of the future to be drawn from the way they operate.

We were in the last few hours of agony over a report on the way a federal budget gets put together when I first recognized that there was something different about the approach of the academics to reporting. I asked several of our correspondents to get from their departments some examples of the way the budget bureau chews up agency requests for money. Talking to reporters about that part of the budget process can only get an agency budget officer

in big trouble with the White House. It is information that usually gets into print only when it is leaked by a bureaucrat whose pet program is being clobbered. But Barfield came back to the editorial offices with page-on-page of figures he had gotten from a total stranger. He got the budget data roughly the same way all three of our professors get their information: they approach government officials with a kind of irresistible curiosity not about what the officials are doing wrong but about what they are doing, period. They have a nice strong sense of history, and it gives them a rare feel for what's really important in this city.

They picked up some good habits on campus that helped them make the transition to journalism. At the risk of laying it on too thick, I'd say:

- \* They go to basic resource documents—books, monographs, census figures, doctoral theses, committee hearing records—rather than to newspaper clippings when they build a base for a report and interviews.

- \* They have a useful sense of detachment when they are reporting; they know they are not likely to make history, only cover it.

- \* They understand from reading history that there are any number of factors that make men and women in Washington act the way they do and that greed and love of power are not necessarily universal motives. Says Lilley: "I've had people say, you missed the point, he did it because he hates Nixon, but it works most of the time."

- \* They care—really care—more about the big picture than about the small, contemporary slice of it that they are working on at any given time; it makes the slice all the sweeter.

"The secret memo and the scoop have never been my thing," says Barfield. "What I am interested in is, 'What is the policy? What are the tradeoffs?'"

"If there's a difference," says Lilley, "I think it's because I have always been interested in the longer-range changes

that were going to result from whatever the people were doing, not short-term judgments about whether what they were doing was right or wrong."

Never having been a journalist, Barfield says, it never occurred to him to call a public relations man when he was trying to line up interviews. "I started from the beginning," he says, "calling the people I wanted to talk to."

As to interviewing technique, Barfield says: "I just let them start talking about what interests them. I get down pretty much what they're doing and who in particular is doing it." Barfield doesn't challenge a source when the source starts saying things that conflict with what other people have told him.

"I just say, 'I heard this in contradiction to what you're saying, what do you think about that?'" It's pretty much a case of letting a guy hang himself on his own terms."

The academic life, says Malbin, "teaches you to be dissatisfied with conventional explanations. And it teaches you to look for patterns.

"The job of a reporter is to make current events intelligible. Actions have to be placed in some sort of context. And you have to know and deal with what is not being discussed as well as what is."

Both Malbin and Barfield are uncomfortable with advocacy journalism.

Says Barfield: "I hear the people in the Washington bureau of one major newspaper bitching about the fact that the home office insists on precise facts to support a conjecture in the piece. Hell, that's the least you could ask for."

"My big gripe about advocacy journalism," says Malbin, "is that anybody who practices it is automatically entering into the political process, trying to change things himself. Change isn't necessarily good in every case.

"A reporter should explain things in a way that makes sense and let people who want change use his information as a basis for getting it."

For the record, the academics are a minority group at NJR. We have 15 other journalists who came from J-

schools or who worked their way up through the job of copy boy or otherwise developed their styles in traditional ways, like covering sports.

Perhaps the lesson in the fact that we have had three faculty members make the transition from campus to editorial office without any particular trauma is simple. It may well be that they are just symptomatic of a change that is coming in journalism. Editors are beginning to discover that corruption is not the only likely target for independent investigation and analysis. Many of them are beginning to clear space for in-depth studies of all aspects of the system in a way that can tell readers not just where the country has been but where it is going. As nearly as I can tell, the only change our professors have made has been in environment. They still are teaching. And that is a good reminder for all of us that that is what journalism is all about.

— John F. Burby

## Associate Nieman Fellows

Three journalists from abroad were appointed Associate Nieman Fellows for 1973-1974 to study at Harvard University. They have joined the twelve American Nieman Fellows selected in May.

The three newsmen are:

Paul Bichara, 27, senior editor with Radio-Diffusion et Television Francaise (ORTF) in Paris, France. A graduate of the American University of Beirut, he is studying economics, United States history and business management.

Edward J. Doman, 40, sports reporter for the Cape Herald, Cape Town, South Africa. Mr. Doman is concentrating

on African politics and race relations in the United States.

Jung Suk Lee, 41, News Director of the Korean Broadcasting System, Seoul. A graduate of Seoul National University, he is studying the history of East Asia and modern China.

The Nieman Fellowships were established through a bequest of Agnes Wahl Nieman in memory of her husband, Lucius W. Nieman, founder of the Milwaukee Journal. The Fellows come to Harvard for a year of study in any part of the University.

## Book Reviews

### The Newsmongers: Journalism in the Life of the Nation, 1690-1972

by Robert A. Rutland

Dial Press; \$12.50

This is neither a history of the United States nor a history of its press. Why then bother with something that is neither fish nor flesh? Both the history of the country and the history of its journalism have been narrated and assayed separately, and sometimes more thoroughly, many times over.

As one goes along, however, it appears that there is something new here. The reader can see, with the sure perspective of hindsight, what journalism has had to say about the deeds of our past, over almost three centuries. More than that, he can see the press not only reporting and commenting on the affairs of the day, but helping to shape them—and vice versa. It soon becomes apparent that journalism, from the days of the colonial censors to the days of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, often misunderstood what it was reporting and advocating.

The author, Robert A. Rutland, once briefly a reporter, is now a scholar and teacher of history at the University of Virginia. He takes his title from an 1817 comment, *On Newsmongers*, that told the Americans of the day to mind their own business instead of yielding to their "impertinent curiosity" for news. This because "Your heads are too shallow to contain the myriads of novel ideas ye wish."

Mr. Rutland points out that in the beginning, and for many a later decade, there was something in journalism for everybody but the printer—the original publisher, editor, reporter, and ad sales-

man. This has surely been remedied, now that the colonial printer—ever ready to start a paper at the drop of a postmastership—has become a multimillion, multimedia corporation.

From colonial beginnings there followed the familiar revolution wrought by the printing press: tradesmen, farmers, merchants—ordinary citizens—muscling into the business of government that was by divine right the preserve of the gentry. Mr. Rutland says that "a hundred men and their printing press allies" made the Revolution. Ben Franklin in his brother's *New England Courant* "and other obstreperous newspapers signaled the rise of a new kind of journalism in America that would not truckle for long to any officialdom." In the Revolution the press proved its mettle as "an instrument in the battle for social and political change," but it didn't always battle for the right.

Take the Civil War. Horace Greeley, best known and most influential newspaper prophet of the 19th century, was distressed that his fellow editors insisted that no patriotic newspaper should object to that early Vietnam, the Mexican War. But soon Greeley was himself fanning the passion over slavery until at length it burst into flame. Greeley and the other warhawks of the North—Bennett and his *Herald*, the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, and all the rest—had their counterparts in Southern editors who were equally blind to what they were doing. We follow the *Charleston Mercury*, the *Mobile Register*, the *Richmond Enquirer*, and many more on both sides, as they gradually abandoned compromise and stilled the voices of moderation. The country was first polarized, then split in two. And journalism bears a heavy burden of blame for the four years of national trauma, of bloodletting both physical and moral, that followed.

In the end it was General Lee who, convinced that "valor and devotion could accomplish nothing more," called off a war that had begun "because some

50 newspaper editors and politicians somehow thought earnest fighting would never occur."

It all makes instructive reading. In the beginning the northern cheerleaders-in-print called the Union rout at Bull Run a victory. Such journalistic blindness to reality is with us still. Witness Joe Alsop and others of days just past, who saw the Tet offensive of 1968 as a great American victory despite the evidence that it made even hardhats about-face, from tolerating an American war in Indochina to rejecting it, and rejecting President Johnson with it.

This book sometimes quotes obscure journals in obscure recesses of the past, journals rarely mentioned even in the histories of journalism, on the controversies of the time. But mainly it shows that, then as now, it is normally the urban press that reaches the heights—and at other times hounds the nation into calamity.

Mr. Rutland takes issue with Frank Luther Mott's designation of the period between 1800 and the coming of the penny press in 1833 as the dark age of American journalism—which its scurrility, irresponsibility, and venom surely justifies. Mr. Rutland sees this as a golden age instead, in that "never before or since have newspapers been so much a part of the national life, or more influential, or more imbued with a democratic spirit."

No doubt. But maybe it's a matter of semantics, of how you look at it. Compare the early 19th-century journalist's inability to distinguish between opinion and fact, propaganda and news, with the objectivity pioneered by late 19th- and early 20th-century editors and publishers, and it hardly looks like journalistic gold.

Today objective news is again misinterpreted and therefore scorned, by some among the younger generation. And while Mr. Rutland pays his respects to interpretative journalism it is not really explained and understood here, in its full dimensions as gradually developed



from its beginning in the 1920s—almost literally with the gun moll Celia Cooney, *The World*, and Walter Lippmann.

There are the inevitable minor errors (and typos, as when fourty survives twice on page 343) such as calling Salmon P. Chase a native of Ohio. Why, even us non-natives right here in Cornish, New Hampshire, know he was born down on Route 12-A, in a house that still stands, complete with historical marker.

There are also evaluations with which one might quarrel. Mr. Rutland dismisses without naming him the AP's Edward Kennedy, who skirted World War II censorship with the news that Germany had surrendered unconditionally, as an "overzealous reporter" who "filed a premature story." It wasn't premature at all. Unlike Roy Howard's innocent but false armistice report of 1918, Kennedy's story had the facts 100 per cent right. He did deliberately violate a pool agreement to wait, which outraged many at the time. But it was technically justifiable. And today, thanks again to hindsight's clarity, it is hard to fault Kennedy for telling the world what had happened at Rheims. He struck a blow for a war-weary world's right to know. The trouble arose only because diplomacy sought to conceal the truth that history's biggest and bloodiest war was over. Why? So that Joseph Stalin could first stage his own propaganda show of surrender in Berlin a day and a half later.

In the beginning of his book Mr. Rutland says that probably the most striking thing about American journalism since 1776 "has not been a remarkable stirring of ideas but instead the awesome technological progress made in gathering and distributing news to a mass audience." His last chapter tells of the coming of television. But he doesn't even mention the multi-channel cable that, as shown in current experiments, threatens before long to kill newspapers and even television as we know them.

Mr. Rutland does note the familiar

struggle between the counting room and the newsroom. But, like most other critics, he nowhere puts his finger on the reason: that since the modern world began with Gutenberg no society anywhere on earth, at any time, has been willing to pay the full cost of the news it needs to get along with itself. That is why we have to have advertising, with its corrupting pressures, or else subsidy, which is usually worse.

But all this is nitpicking. What stands out in this historical pageant is the interrelation between the press and politics, between the reporter and editorial writer and a society in constant flux. It makes one wonder what tomorrow's historian will say about today's journalism. In his *The Making of the President 1972* Theodore H. White has an interesting chapter on the clash between Mr. Agnew's effete conspiracy of the Eastern liberal press—Eastern plus L.A. and St. Louis and Chicago and Louisville, plus CBS and the other networks, plus the newsmagazines—and the aggrandized presidency of Richard Nixon. According to Mr. White, President Nixon, who in last year's campaign went into hiding behind his above-the-battle act, "baffled the news system as few others had before."

In the end "that vanguard of the press which claimed it understood and spoke for the people better" than George McGovern himself was defeated. And, "by the record he had written in the understanding of his people," Richard Nixon won. Mr. White, of course, did most of his writing too soon. Too bad the American people did not know on November 7, 1972 what they know now.

Projecting one's imagination to 2073, what will the future say of Richard Nixon and that numerically small but formidable minority of the press that kicks him around? Those familiar with history, with academia's disciplined search for truth, with the humanities and the meaning of civil liberty, have a pretty good hunch. But we don't know. That is the lesson of this chronicle of what

the papers were saying way back then.

Our forefathers—more knowledgeable by far in ancient history than we—were well aware that no contemporary can be sure who, among the prophets of any given day, is going to turn out later (alas, when it no longer matters) to have been right. To drive home the point Mr. Rutland cites James Madison, summarizing his reaction to the fact that liberty of the press was sometimes "carried to excess" and "sometimes degenerated" into licentiousness:

"Perhaps it is an evil inseparable from the good with which it is allied; perhaps it is a shoot which cannot be stripped from the stalk without wounding vitally the plant from which it is torn. However desirable those measures might be which might correct without enslaving the press, they have never yet been devised in America."

Nor anywhere else, even now. Madison wrote in 1799, in the time of the Sedition laws whose noxious odors linger still in the Oval Office. Whether a century hence this country will persist in allowing its reporters and editors to be free we cannot know. But it was true in 1799 that there is no substitute for a press free to be wrong, and it is true today. It can hardly be otherwise in 2099.

—Herbert Brucker

The one thing which surprised us (Republicans) was that the press didn't zero in on us earlier and start to realize what was really going on in our campaign.

—Jeb Magruder  
Campaign '72 Panelist

## The Death and Life of Malcolm X

by Peter Goldman

Harper & Row; \$8.95

During his lifetime, Malcolm X was feared by many, appreciated by few, and understood by almost no one. His best-selling autobiography—on which he was working at the time of his assassination on Sunday, February 21, 1965—became immensely popular for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly the rising climate of black awareness during the '60s made it required reading for people seeking a new racial identity; two other writers whose works likewise benefited from that tide were Frantz Fanon and W. E. B. DuBois. It was popular also because few had paid much attention to Malcolm during his lifetime. His fame—or infamy—was the result of his apprenticeship to Elijah Muhammad, spiritual leader of the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims), a sect looked upon by blacks with disinterest, if not disdain.

And his story sold well because of the spectacular way in which his life was cut short by three men with guns in full view of two to four hundred hard-core Malcolm supporters in a hotel ballroom in Harlem. Malcolm died believing he would be murdered by Black Muslim hirelings. Many of his followers believe to this day that he in fact was, but concrete evidence of this has not been found. Several conspiracy theories surround his slaying; but when the three gunmen were convicted, the state of New York closed its files on the case.

The title of this book, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF MALCOLM X*, is an accurate reflection of its subject matter. Malcolm is slain on the third page; then it flashes back for almost 300 pages and brings us once again to the climactic moment in an utterly complete ex-

position of detail. The arrests and trial of the accused and an evaluation of Malcolm occupy the remainder of the story.

Peter Goldman leaves no doubt where his sympathies lie. Toward the end of the book he tells us, "One does not want Malcolm to have died shabbily. He was an authentic black hero, and a hero ought to have a glorious end, in combat, eye to eye with the real enemy. Instead Malcolm X died in squalor, at the hands of black men—so the official theory ran—as the casualty of a tong war. For those who followed or admired him in life, and for that larger number who have helped beatify him since his death, the notion that his assassination should be so mean—so *banal*—has proven intolerable."

Then, in the same passage, Goldman writes, "The creation of the Malcolm legend has included the creation of a better death for him—a death in which black men may have been the immediate agents but in which the orders came from the establishment, or the white power structure, or Washington, or the police, or, most commonly, the CIA." The reader is given a meticulous examination of all these theories.

Goldman, now a senior editor in the Nation section at Newsweek, has brought impressive credentials to his monumental task. He came to my attention ten years ago when Newsweek published its first special section on what was coming to be known as the race problem, "The Negro in America." Since that first cover, he has been a principal contributor to or writer of every one of the six subsequent covers on that subject up to and including the most recent, "What Ever Happened to Black America," last February, just after he returned from the leave during which this book was written. A Nieman Fellow in 1960-61 from the St. Louis Globe-Democrat where he covered the "race beat," he had his first meeting with Malcolm on assignment in the Shabazz Frosti Kreem, a Black Muslim luncheonette in St. Louis' North Side ghetto.

Between then and the time of the assassination, Malcolm met several times with Goldman and Ms. Goldman, Helen Dudar, a writer for the New York Post who did many stories about the man and the Nation of Islam. Using original materials, primarily, Goldman tells us that the book could be labeled an "unauthorized biography" because of his inability to reach some prime sources. Among them were Malcolm's widow, Mrs. Betty Shabazz, and his half-sister, Mrs. Ella Collins, who took over his Organization of Afro-American Unity.

Even so, it is obvious that Malcolm, who never admitted feeling any emotion greater than contempt for Caucasians, had a measure of respect for Goldman. What had begun in 1962 as short, guarded interviews, over three years grew to the long, three-hour conversations that those who knew Malcolm came to cherish.

Early on Goldman writes of Malcolm during his glory days in the Black Muslims: "To see whites singly was to compromise the faith and the wintry purity of vision and purpose it gave him. There would be no microscope for Malcolm. 'When you begin to think of it in terms of an individual basis,' he said once, 'you lose sight of the whole question. It's collective.'"

But the seeds of Malcolm's undoing—and tangentially his death—were sown on his pilgrimage to Mecca, which Goldman treats with considerable compassion, and his trips through Africa. All whites were devils in Malcolm's view, but after he was expelled from the Nation he had, Goldman writes, "to deal with the awkward and heretical discovery that there were a few devils he respected and a very few he even liked."

This statement begs for moralizing—especially from a writer who today describes himself as having been a true believer in "classical '50s and '60s liberalism." But Goldman successfully resists the temptation from beginning to end. He sticks only to the facts as he was able to ascertain them and never

takes the reader by the hand for a tour through the politics and consequences of demagoguery. Goldman is so factual and makes such an attempt to remain intellectually honest with his subject that the book drags at times.

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF MALCOLM X is not an easy book to read. Not that it is poorly written; quite the contrary. Rather it is difficult to go inside a man's head and live with him while he approaches what he and you know is going to be an ignominious death. You see the man awakening to a new life, and you wish he had had a chance to live long enough to get on top of it. Anyone who read the "Autobiography" needs this volume to appreciate the man more fully. Everyone else should read it as a classic biography.

— Carl W. Sims

## Ralph McGill, Reporter

by Harold H. Martin

Atlantic-Little Brown; \$10.95

Sometime around 1963, when the South was in the throes of the civil rights revolution, I happened to be visiting relatives in South Georgia who still live on the family farm which is affectionately described in the official county history as "the Jenkins Plantation."

Slaves had tilled that soil once, but by 1950 almost all their descendants had gone—gone to the cities. Only a handful remained to operate the fleet of trucks, tractors, mechanical cotton pickers, and all the other accoutrements of modern agriculture.

It was a quiet Sunday morning, and the events in Birmingham and other troubled cities seemed remote indeed, reaching us only through the raucous television newscasts and, chiefly, through *The Atlanta Constitution*, which had been placed daily in our roadside mailbox for as long as I can remember.

My mother happened to be reading *The Constitution* at that moment, in fact, when she put it down with an annoyed sigh and announced to all present:

"I love to read Ralph McGill's column, but I sure don't understand why he hates the South so."

I didn't pursue the point, because Southern boys who want to go home again learned long ago that it is best not to engage the kinfolk in debates over social change, because they always end in futility and frustration, if not acrimony. So I suppressed a chuckle and pondered the irony that little did this gentle lady know that this Ralph McGill who hated the South had so significantly influenced her own son's social, political, and journalistic thinking—as indeed he influenced a whole generation of Southern journalists who came upon the scene around the middle of the century. They didn't call Ralph McGill "Pappy" for nothing.

A few weeks ago I was visiting "home" once again, and Mother asked the name of a book I was reading. I told her it was a biography of Ralph McGill.

"Oh, I want to read it when you're finished," she exclaimed. "He was such a great man."

Well, that just about sums up Ralph McGill, the public man. He has often been called "the conscience of the South," a description which some feel is a bit too generous, considering the fact that McGill had once firmly supported segregated education and opposed "social equality" of the races. In fact, as editor of *The Constitution*, his first timid obeisance to fairness to the oppressed blacks of his region was to order that the word "Negro" be capitalized in his newspaper's columns.

He was, to be sure, like many sensitive Southerners, somewhat schizophrenic on the race question. He would not, for instance, go to bat for Bill Gordon when that talented young black applied for a job on *The Constitution* in 1950. But he then proceeded to work earnestly

to help Gordon win his Nieman Fellowship, which boosted a distinguished career.

He was, in short, a man who was always just a little ahead of his time, always out front, but never quite so far out front that he left those who struggled behind him. The effective output of his journalistic life was such that, toward the end of his career, his old friend Harry Ashmore could accurately describe him:

"McGill is more a preacher than anything else. Through the long season of the South's travail, his eloquent appeal to the conscience of his readers, well larded with hellfire-and-brimstone denunciation of their prejudice, has provided one of the noblest chapters in the history of American journalism. But he is also a troubadour, a social historian, and, when the occasion demands, a political fixer."

But of course, there was also Ralph McGill, the private man, and this is what his old friend and associate Harold H. Martin has captured so brilliantly, so tenderly.

The reviews have uniformly described this biography as "adoring." It is indeed this, because it is basically a tribute to McGill's eloquence, tenacity, perseverance, courage, and, above, all, generosity.

But it is by no means a wholly biased account. Martin, for all his devotion to McGill, pulls no punches when he describes McGill's drinking problem, his bouts with melancholia, his insatiable yearning to travel even when family tragedy loomed, his almost hedonistic preoccupation with food and resultant tendencies toward obesity.

In one particularly horrifying episode—horrifying to me, at least—Martin relates how McGill adopted a child, only to send him back to an orphanage six months later because of bad behavior.

But the special appeal which this book will hold for journalists is McGill's lifelong battle against philistinism.

Judging from Martin's account, George Biggers—"the rough-tongued

and heavy-handed" business manager of *The Constitution* for many years—could dress McGill down in the manner that Henry VIII might dispose of a clumsy footman. In those years, McGill labored only under the pathetic assurance that a friendly Coca-Cola executive would give him a public relations job if he went too far and got fired.

Even when McGill's own disciple, Jack Tarver, became the chief business officer of the newspapers, this battle of nerves continued. McGill, one of the most widely traveled journalists of his time, was humiliated when, on the advice of company lawyers concerned about libel, he was not allowed to cover the Selma and Birmingham civil rights demonstrations.

Martin relates one poignant occasion when McGill, in the last years of his life, was reduced to tears by a veiled threat by Tarver to force him to retire after an in-house dispute over the race issue.

If this book falls short on any score, it fails to develop fully the personal agony endured by McGill after a collision between Tarver and McGill's brilliant young protege, Gene Patterson, which resulted in Patterson's resignation and the subsequent decimation of *The Constitution's* news staff. To me, it has always seemed more than a coincidence that McGill died shortly after this upheaval took place.

Ralph McGill's generation produced some extraordinary native Southerners indeed—writers like William Faulkner and W. J. Cash, jurists like J. Waite Waring and Richard T. Rives, moral pillars like James McBride Dabbs and Clifford and Virginia Durr. Struggling against much personal and professional adversity, McGill made a significant contribution to his generation's efforts, and Martin's biography preserves that contribution well for posterity.

— Ray Jenkins

## The Woman Alone

by Patricia O'Brien

Quadrangle; \$7.95

Someday—and I hope it is soon—women may come up with a slogan about womanhood that triggers the same sense of self-respect blacks have expressed in "Black is Beautiful" and homosexuals more recently celebrated as "Gay Pride."

At the moment, the women's movement is more characterized by deprivation than celebration, and the sisters are suffering a great deal from a poverty of pride.

Those of us who have shunned traditional roles, humiliating social conventions, and limited horizons have ridiculed and rejected the Old Woman. But we are not at all sure what the New Woman should be.

Those of us who have cast off everything—homes, husbands, and all the old expectations—too often find, to our sorrow, we have also rejected our selves. In fact, without the old trappings, we aren't even sure there ever WAS a self.

Men's successes—in the board room, the classroom, the office, even in the bedroom—in themselves do not satisfy women. Alone at night, we lie in bed and wish the telephone would ring.

And when we are brutally candid, most of us who are single are searching, more or less desperately, for a man. Not so much because we need the money, the security, or even the sex. But we want him to reassure us that we exist.

"Fill me up!" we scream at him. "Make me exist!"

We end up hoping that the next man will be a little more enlightened than the others and will not so readily put his foot on our backs.

The woman alone, as Patricia O'Brien has painstakingly documented in her book by that name, is a stump of a

human being, making sense only when she becomes an appendage to a man. If she is young, we encourage her to end her solitary state. If she is older, she is pitied or reviled.

"People don't really accept a single girl for being a single girl," says Sheila Farrow, a student interviewed by Ms. O'Brien. "They always figure there's something wrong somewhere."

We learn the cruel images early: the pathetic spinster, the jaded divorcee, the bitchy career woman, the burdensome widow. And we end up believing them about ourselves.

Ms. O'Brien was a single woman—sort of. After an early marriage and four children, she went to college, got her degree, and started a career as a reporter. Unsatisfied with her marriage and her life, she left her husband and children in Indiana and took a job as a newspaper reporter in Chicago. She came home on weekends. She did it for almost two years.

She gives her readers a tour of all those grotesque places Mama warned us we would end up in if we didn't make it to suburbia: the joyless highrises single girls lock themselves into at night; the drab YWCA where women argue over the TV set in the lobby and you can hear the sobbing through the walls.

Ms. O'Brien combines a personal journal with a sociological look at female singleness in a society where people are supposed to be paired up and yet one out of three adult women is alone.

Have you met many women alone who are happy in their aloneness? asks one woman. "Not many," Ms. O'Brien concludes.

"When you get right down to it," a young social worker philosophizes, "a man alone is cool. A woman is not."

In almost photographic detail, Ms. O'Brien documents the fine points of being single: the meticulous planning that women without children commit themselves to, for example, knowing that if they don't make things happen, nothing will.



Or the baffling and infuriating inarticulateness that besets women who are used to having men take charge—and find the tables turned.

"One day I went into my editor's office with an idea for a story, first carefully preparing what I wanted to say, defensive about how good it might be and afraid he would think it was terrible," Ms. O'Brien recalls.

"In the midst of our understandably stilted conversation a male reporter strolled in, greeted the editor, and casually talked about a project that interested him, throwing in a request for time off.

"The two men, both outwardly relaxed and easy, negotiated a bit and settled the problem within a few moments. I sat there, my speech out the window, envious and frustrated, wondering why that type of encounter came so easily for the man and so hard for me."

In the end, Ms. O'Brien returned to her husband and her family.\* Her book, although a competent and much-needed reporting job, lacks the eloquence of women who are truly ALONE, struggling against the demons and wondering why they lose again and again.

Their voices are found in the book's epilogue, which is probably the most valuable and certainly the most moving portion of this book.

Alice Bowen, widow: "When my husband died, things were terrible. The first year, I'd come in the door at night and make it to the hall bench, and just sit there for about an hour, crying. And freezing. I hadn't known how to put up storm windows, so just to make me feel more sorry for myself, I was cold."

Sheila Farrow, student: "I know I use men; I have a tendency to do that. When I get lonely or depressed I want them to come, and then want them to go."

\*[Subsequently she and her husband were divorced in September, 1973, with the children jointly shared.—Ed.]

Marlene Hinchman, attorney: "A friend of mine referred a fantastic murder to me once at a cocktail party. It was a lovely case with lots of potential; someday it's going to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court because it's that kind of a case. And you know what I did? I walked right over to my boyfriend and said, 'Here, this is going to be a great case. You take it.' I actually felt compelled to give it to him."

Martha Stewart, divorcee: "The difficult thing is, women have to get out into the battleground if they want to grow, and most normal married women don't want to experience that battleground. They're afraid they'll get out there and find they now live on different planets from their husbands."

Women alone—single women, widows, divorcees—cannot avoid the battleground. The struggle, Ms. O'Brien contends, is for self-knowledge. She has no easy recipe for acquiring it. Her own path was difficult and unusual. And although many women start the search by joining other women in consciousness-raising groups, she feels that this is only one answer. Her theme is that in general it is very important for women to be more receptive to knowing each other, and to break down the isolation that has been so much a part of the formative process in the lives of many women.

For the moment, there is no slogan that celebrates women's self-respect, because the New Woman, in many cases, has no sense of self. Self-knowledge must come first. For that, perhaps the slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful" points the way.

— Jo Thomas

Coming

Evaluating the Press: the New  
England Daily Newspaper Survey

## Facing the Lions

by Tom Wicker

Viking; \$7.95

It is almost axiomatic among book reviewers that one does not, unless there is no way around it, review a book by a friend; perhaps it ought to be axiomatic among Nieman Fellows that one does not review a book by another—you are, after all, likely to run into the Fellow at a reunion, and why spoil a pleasant social occasion with a dose of literary acrimony?

When the book is by someone who is both a friend and a fellow Nieman, as is the case here, the problem is compounded. But fortunately Tom Wicker has vastly lightened my burden, and every other reviewer's. *FACING THE LIONS* is an uncommonly good novel that fully deserves the popular success it has somewhat surprisingly received. It is one of the finest political novels we have, but it is much more than that: it rises above the run of political fiction because its people are more important than its politics.

Admittedly, ranking *FACING THE LIONS* among our best political novels may seem a limited compliment, because there are not many of them: Henry Adam's *DEMOCRACY*, Robert Penn Warren's *ALL THE KING'S MEN*, William Brammer's *THE GAY PLACE*, possibly Wilfred Sheed's *PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS BE KIND*—that about does it. When the novelist turns political, more often than not he fascinates himself with cloakroom intrigue and bedroom scandal, and does not directly confront the question that serious political fiction must consider: What is it that makes Political Man different from the rest of us?

Wicker has made that attempt. *FACING THE LIONS* is a serious and thoughtful piece of work. Wicker is a

genuine stylist—a rare animal, alas, in our profession—and here he is writing as well as he ever has. The prose is graceful and at times powerful, and Wicker's command of complex material is impressive. There is plenty of sharp political humor, and equally sharp insights into Washington and its people. But *FACING THE LIONS* draws its real distinction from its palpable emotion: this is a deeply felt, aching personal examination of the people who come to Washington and how that city changes their lives.

Two of those people are at the center of the novel. Richmond Morgan, an apostate Southerner, is Washington bureau chief of a large newspaper that has New York Times written all over it. He is a journalistic mover and shaker, "Senators, congressmen, presidents, cabinet members, stayed and went, not unlike tourists, but Morgan stayed on with the monuments and bureaucrats. In a way, Morgan was both monument and bureaucrat, because, like the one, he had permanence and visibility, and, like the other, he had permanence and immortality."

Morgan's rise has paralleled (and to considerable degree been influenced by) that of Hunt Anderson, a youngish senator from Morgan's home state. Anderson's father was an engagingly scoundrelly governor who misused political power for his own financial gain, but was loved by his constituents notwithstanding. Hunt has capitalized on his name to gain office, but he is obsessed with expunging his father's legacy: "I just want to show the best in a man instead of the worst."

Through his chairmanship of a Senate committee investigating migrant labor, Anderson becomes a dark-horse candidate for his party's presidential nomination; he represents himself as "man of the people," and wins a number of primaries. But at the convention his support proves insufficient, and he loses the nomination through his own weakness and the efforts of a cabal of party

bosses. "Do we just have to *let* them steal it . . . ?" his wife asks. "Don't people have anything to say about who runs the country? Doesn't it mean anything we've been running all year too hard to take a breath and we're the only ones who've won any primaries and can show any real votes?" His failure breaks Anderson's spirit, and in the end he dies.

You can, if you like, view *FACING THE LIONS* as a political *roman à clef*. There is a lot of Estes Kefauver in Hunt Anderson, as Wicker readily admits, and his situation is somewhat comparable to Eugene McCarthy's in 1968. More than a few Times staffers will find themselves, or think they find themselves, in the novel, and so will some other Washington journalists.

But it is unfair to Wicker to read the novel so narrowly, for it has many strengths. Its caustic depiction of the Washington press corps is telling, and journalists will read it with the shock of recognition. The novel's atmosphere is authentic: the hotels and bars and late-night restaurants frequented by politicians and the reporters who cover them are vividly depicted. So are the vanishing South that produced so many Andersons and Morgans, and the neon-lit "new" South that is, lamentably, replacing it.

But this is a novel about two men, and Wicker's portrayal of them is what raises it so far above the ordinary. They are viewed with sympathy, compassion, and absolutely no sentimentality. Anderson is "in the arena," Morgan is the purportedly dispassionate observer, the "objective" journalist:

"Not me," Morgan said. "I look at the crowd and I see them cheering on the lions."

Anderson's long arm came out of the darkness and a big hand closed tightly on Morgan's elbow, shaking him gently. "Exactly," he said. "Exactly. But wouldn't you like to be one of the Christians, Morgan?

Wouldn't you rather be in the arena than in the crowd?"

"Hell no. Morgan sits in the press-box."

"Because in the arena"—Anderson's voice was low, unhurried, as if he had not even heard Morgan's reply—"in the arena, among the Christians, that's not common. That's not ordinary, is it, Morgan? Isn't that really something down there facing the lions?"

But the zest for combat is intermingled with the lust for power, and finally ambition destroys Anderson; politics can be a killer, distorting a man's true self, imposing choices and compromises that wound and shrink him. Yet—and this suggests the novel's complexity and subtlety—Morgan too is ambitious. The scars of politics can hurt the journalist as well, and Morgan must face his own lions, even if they are private ones: as the novel closes his marriage is dissolving, and he anguishes over guilt at abandoning the deeper, nobler aspirations that first called him to the writer's craft.

The novel has a couple of flaws. One is journalistic: Wicker tells the reader more than he needs to know, for the purposes of fiction, about migrant labor, tobacco acreage and other political issues. The other is structural: the crucial episode, the convention, is related through an awkward device, a conversation among several of Anderson's associates; the reader finds it difficult to believe that they aren't telling each other things they already know.

But those are minor flaws, and the novel indisputably rises above them. No one disputes that Wicker is one of our most gifted and deservedly influential journalists. Now he has put the rest of us to shame by writing a first-rate novel, one that is notable for its breadth of observation and depth of emotion.

— Jonathan Yardley

## The Right to Know: Media and the Common Good

by William H. Marnell

The Seabury Press; \$6.95

This book is an explicit warning and an implicit threat to the American media: Exercise self-restraint; or you will be forcibly restrained by the people through their executives, legislators, and judges.

The author, a retired professor and one-time chief editorial writer for the Boston Traveler, was apparently led to his subject by the unauthorized release and publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. His clear disapproval of the actions of "Robert Ellsberg" (a blunder in the book's very first paragraph) and The New York Times has spurred him into an extended essay on the prickly question of Free Press versus Other Freedoms.

Professor Marnell takes the reader on an erudite and informative tour through the five problem areas he perceives at the heart of "The Right to Know": prior restraint, free press v. fair trial, libel, privacy, and "moral climate." One learns a great deal about principles rooted in ancient Rome, landmark decisions

in the Anglo-American legal tradition, and some horrendous excesses of our press in the U.S. over the years.

One central message from the author is that no freedom is absolute—except something he mistily calls "the right of the individual to live a life of virtue"—and that men must therefore adjudicate the inherent conflicts between a free press and the rights of those reported upon.

It would be hard, so far, to deny the good sense of Mr. Marnell's argument. The problem comes in how that adjudication takes place, by whom, and with what results. The pie must be sliced; but who shall be trusted to slice it, and along what lines?

Professor Marnell has little good to say for recent adjudicators. He strongly disapproved of the Warren Court—especially that free speech "absolutist," the late Justice Hugo Black. He is alarmed by the Court's famous Sullivan decision on libel in 1963 (the "New York Times Rule") and its decisions pertaining to obscenity. Vice President Agnew reminds him, curiously, of that earlier press critic, Justice Frankfurter.

But there is—surprisingly, in a book published in mid-1973—not a word about some troubling Court moves in a very different direction—the Caldwell case on confidentiality of sources and Mr. Justice Burger's opinion on obscenity.

The weakest portions of the author's argument pertain to the relations between the media and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. "The Government" seems to him some sort of orderly entity rather than the congeries of conflicting interests that actually constitute bureaucracy. He even suggests, incredibly, that were the White House to have published an official newspaper (like the Vatican's *Osservatore Romano*), Dan Ellsberg wouldn't have had to release the Pentagon Papers.

Finally, it is hardly fair to fault a book for being published too early. But Watergate, and how it became uncovered (of which we receive not a word), makes this study seem dated.

Certainly the craft of journalism has no constitutional right to be above the law—a point that needs periodic reaffirmation. Conflicts between the First Amendment and other freedoms will require continued adjudication by the Courts as well as self-restraint by the Fourth Estate.

But Professor Marnell's book appears at a time when Watergate has revealed—however temporarily—the government as prime sinner, the press as major savior. At such a moment his case seems heavily overstated.

— J.C.T., Jr.

(Courtesy of the Boston Globe)

"For myself, I entertain a high idea of the utility of periodical Publications . . . I consider such easy vehicles of knowledge, more happily calculated than any other, to preserve the liberty, stimulate the industry and meliorate the morals of an enlightened and free People."

George Washington, in a letter to Mathew Carey, 1788.

## Notes on Contributors

Ernest R. May is the Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard. Janet Fraser is Assistant Director. (See page 7 for panelists at Harvard Conference on Campaign Decision-Making.) William Gordon, Deputy Assistant Director, Public Information, United States Information Agency, was a Nieman Fellow in 1953. John F. Burby, a Nieman Fellow in 1960, is editor and publisher of *National Journal Reports*.

The Humor panel, chaired by Robert Manning, Nieman Fellow '46 and Editor in Chief, *The Atlantic*, included: Russell Baker, columnist, *The New York Times*; John Kenneth Galbraith, Professor of Economics, Harvard University; and Robert Yoakum, columnist, *Los Angeles Times Syndicate*. The Science panel was moderated by Gerald Holton, Professor of Physics, Harvard University. Other panelists were: George W. Rathjens, Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and, from the Harvard faculty, Jean Mayer, Professor of Nutrition, School of Public Health; Matthew S. Meselson, Professor of Biology, and Carroll M. Williams, Professor of Biology.

In this issue, three authors of books are Nieman Fellows, whose work is reviewed by fellow Fellows. Patricia O'Brien, reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and a Nieman Fellow this year, is the author of *THE WOMAN ALONE*, reviewed by Josephine Thomas, behavioral science writer for the *Detroit Free Press*, Nieman Fellow '71. Peter Goldman, who wrote *THE DEATH & LIFE OF MALCOLM X*, is a senior editor at *Newsweek* and was a Nieman Fellow in 1961. His book is reviewed by Carl Sims, NF '73, associate editor at *Newsweek*. Tom Wicker, associate editor of *The New York Times* and Nieman Fellow '58, is the author of *FACING THE LIONS* reviewed by Jonathan Yardley, Book Review Editor of the Greensboro (N.C.) *Daily News* and a Nieman Fellow in 1969. Other reviewers include: Herbert Brucker, former editor of the *Hartford Courant*, now retired and living in New Hampshire; Ray Jenkins, editor of the editorial page, *Alabama Journal*, and a Nieman Fellow in the class of 1965; and James C. Thomson Jr., Curator of the Nieman Foundation.

