

# n i e m a n

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Ragtime Revisited • E.L. Doctorow and Joseph Papaleo

*... The question of the writer ... is, How am I going to get through to you what I know to be true?*

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Masses and Classes in Communication • Richard C. Wald

*The intention of publishing changed from talking to the ... right people, to talking to the most people ..*

Rust Around the Iron Curtain • Murray Seeger

*Moscow can ... impose a tough discipline on its neighbors ... but ... the old iron bands have rusted.*

Holy Moses • Morton Mintz

*The relation between the press and Robert Moses ... was ... a widespread and continuing phenomenon ... that thrived on non-auditing of press performance.*

Nieman Fellows, 1977-78

The Walter Lippmann Memorial Fund

Reports on the Press in India, Israel, Portugal and Thailand

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## Editorial

### “African Nemesis?”

As this issue finally goes to press, the full implications of the South African Government's October repression are still under-reported in the U.S. media.

At the heart of the matter are two chilling developments: first, the jailing of virtually the entire urban leadership of South Africa's blacks, including scores of moderates who believed in a multiracial solution; and second, the “liquidation” of the two largest black newspapers, the imprisonment of their editors, and the “banning” of the nation's most outspoken white editor.

The implications of the silencing of the blacks have been widely discussed in the U.S. press. It has been noted that the Pretoria regime has thereby put away—and undoubtedly, radicalized—those very people with whom it must talk if all-out race war is to be averted. It has been further noted that with this move even the faint hope of dialogue across racial barriers recedes, and the day of the long-predicted blood-bath is advanced. As many have phrased it, when the ruling whites finally agree to talk about political and economic sharing, who will be willing to talk to them?

The implications, however, of the imprisonment of black editor Percy Qoboza (and his colleague, Aggrey Klaaste) and the banning of white editor Donald Woods—these implications have been less clearly understood.

Some attention has been focused, of course, on the brutal injustice of both moves in terms of the plight of the individual editors. Under South African law, Qoboza and all other black “detainees” are summarily jailed until next August 10th (at a minimum); the government needs to file no charges; and no trial is necessary. As for that ingeniously cruel Afrikaner invention, “banning,” Woods has been silenced as a journalist for five years (endlessly renewable)—cannot write, speak, or be quoted, cannot join in any social or political group or event, cannot receive but one visitor at a time, and is tightly restricted in his condition of modified house-arrest.

Percy Qoboza, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 1975-76, has been famous at home and abroad for his (Johannesburg) *World's* courageous reporting and editorials on the condition of the blacks ever since his return to South Africa in June 1976. And Donald Woods is renowned for the searing anti-apartheid stance of his (East London) *Daily Dispatch* and his syndicated columns. So it is natural that the U.S. media's remarkably widespread outrage should have focused on the silencing of these two good and brave men.

But Pretoria's press crack-down has other implications, in both the short and long term.

Take, for instance, the liquidation of the *Daily* and *Weekend*

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# Ragtime Revisited

## A Seminar with E.L. Doctorow and Joseph Papaleo

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*Editor's Note: Continuing our practice of taping Nieman seminars from time to time, we present the following transcript of a session with Joseph Papaleo, chairman, Department of English, Sarah Lawrence College, and author; and E.L. Doctorow, author of Ragtime and the Book of Daniel. James C. Thomson, Jr., Curator of the Nieman Fellowships, introduced the speakers.*

**James C. Thomson, Jr.:** I first met Joe Papaleo some years ago on a tennis court—we are neighbors and friends on Cape Cod. Mr. Papaleo has many distinctions: he is Chairman of the English Department at Sarah Lawrence; he has authored a couple of novels that were published, some others that weren't perhaps—

**Joseph Papaleo:** Well, that's what I'm going to talk about—

**Thomson:** Joe Papaleo is at work on a novel, a fiction version of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and he had the good sense, some years ago, to hire for Sarah Lawrence College a guy named Doctorow—

**Papaleo:** Who's been of no help—

**Thomson:** Does he ever show up for his classes?

**Papaleo:** Well, he showed up after I made the mistake—

**Thomson:** Anyway, I thought that since we had Ed Doctorow as well as Joe Papaleo, we would ask Ed Doctorow to respond to Joe's opening comment since Joe was his Department Chairman and hirer. And the question we'll begin with, as advertised on the menu, is "History as Fiction"—the creation of false documents.

Our two distinguished outsiders who are going to talk about literature or the problem of trying to write are willing to operate under what I call the "Polish formula" which is *liberum veto*. The reason why Poland never succeeded as a nation was that every man in the Polish Parliament had a veto on every proposition, and that's why Poland is barely alive.

*Libertum veto* means that we will have a transcript of these proceedings kept in a locked safe and we will distribute them to anyone who has raised their voice and is identified, and you can say, No—out! We will then publish in the most famous magazine in the country—beloved *Nieman Reports*—please subscribe—we love it—and we need you. End of spiel. Are we ready? Joe Papaleo, why are you here?

**Papaleo:** A couple of years ago I made the mistake of getting the idea of a piece of fiction based on the Sacco-Vanzetti case. I had written what my editor called ethnic fiction for a very long time, and I had hoped to write about two Italian radicals, turning to fiction. And I made the mistake of going to where they lived and to the Harvard Law Library where I kept finding facts which had not been known about Sacco-Vanzetti, and being energized by the facts, as if the facts would make fiction. I would then write a few chapters and my fiction editors would read the chapters and say, This is all facts. I was very confused as to what I was doing, and then slowly discovered that my imagination was being, in some way, cancelled out or depressed, and the confusion was that I was assuming that the energy of the new facts was the kind of energy that fiction writers get, that is like vibrations, to create fiction.

An example is that I met Rose Sacco's best friend, who told me that Mrs. Sacco was alive and was living in Watertown, and I could see her; and I was about to see her when I met Ed Doctorow who told me, Stop—you do too much and you're finished. He began to speak of his research and how he had a chance to meet, I think, a close friend of Emma Goldman—and he stopped himself. I think I had already done too much. I wish I had met him on the path earlier, but I hadn't.

So I've been thinking a great deal about that phenomenon which we all know, which is the imagination. How does one light it up, for fictional purposes, from historical information? This particular genre, which is getting popular and which has been popular for a long time, has been a stimulus for fiction for many, many hundreds of years and has a revival now, with Truman Capote, or with Norman Mailer. Fiction writers are trying to discover their identity in these ways. In the case of political figures, I borrow a statement from Ed Doctorow—we

have in America an amnesia about a lot of our radicals. It was the discovery of the anarchists, the Italian anarchists, who were alive and were talking to me, right out here in Needham, that confused me in terms of the creation of fiction. So I begin by presenting the fact that I have a problem; and I've finally gone back to the oldest form of fiction—to letters.

**Thomson:** So this will be an epistolary presentation?

**Papaleo:** Partially an epistolary presentation—yes, and an attempt to base it on the character of Vanzetti and on all the study I've done—what we call research.

**Thomson:** Ed, would you like to try to elaborate on this problem you face?

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## We have in America an amnesia about a lot of our radicals.

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**E.L. Doctorow:** It is true; I am guilty; I did say to Joe that it was dangerous to know too much. The teaching of fiction-writing in American colleges usually includes the admonition to the student: "Write about what you know." What is implied is that you can only know things that you've experienced, that you have seen and witnessed. And of course, I don't think the writer of fiction is restricted by that. He can put himself in other skins, he can imagine what he has to know. He knows things in an intuitive manner. A fact doesn't mean that much to him, unless it's very beautiful in itself and resonates within him, in which case he can put it down, as he discovers it. But if it's not right, he can change it. This kind of thinking preceded scientific enlightenment and empiricism.

That is why I told my friend Joe Papaleo that it might be a mistake to see Mrs. Sacco. Just by thinking as a novelist, he could know everything she could tell him—possibly more. I would probably start, for the purpose of argument, by defining a journalist as a writer of fiction who doesn't acknowledge that he's making things up.

Someone asked me the other day if I'd ever done any journalism. And I suddenly remembered that I had a course in journalism at the Bronx High School of Science. And I sort of learned how to write a lead—is that what you call it? During the semester we got an assignment to do an interview and I took that assignment to heart and I turned in an interview with the stage doorman at Carnegie Hall. He was a lovable old man who, of course, had immense knowledge of musical literature and knew all the great artists, and he wore a blue serge double-breasted jacket and floppy brown pants and worn-down shoes, and he was a refugee from Hitler's Europe—and the teacher

read my interview with the kindly old doorman whom all the artists knew and loved. She said, This is absolutely terrific. I think we ought to get a picture of him and run this in the school newspaper.

I said, Well, I didn't know how to take pictures.

And then she said, Well, we have this marvelous photography student; he'll go down with you.

And I said, Well, I don't know if I can go down. It's a subway ride and I don't have the fare. And I hemmed and hawed and of course I had to confess that there was no such doorman—that I had made him up.

I suddenly realize I don't know why I'm telling this story. Only I suppose that my fate was decided at that point. If there wasn't a terrific old doorman at Carnegie Hall, there should have been. For all I know, there now is.

—But what were we talking about?

**Diana Thomson:** You were talking about the problem with using fact and fiction. We've had terrible trouble with that in *Ragtime*.

**Doctorow:** The truth of the matter is that to get a book going, you have to achieve a degree of irresponsibility that, once it comes upon you—and you're very lucky if it does—any such thing as truth in the factual sense is very destructive to your enterprise. But somewhere along the line, usually toward the end of the book, you realize that people are going to start asking questions and so you have these little discussions with yourself. You begin to defend your book and you begin to justify it and discover rationales for it—maybe if you're lucky—a whole aesthetic.

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## The writer of fiction . . . can imagine what he has to know. A fact doesn't mean that much to him . . .

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I had done that and a few people here heard it—Justin and Anne Kaplan have been through this before, but it's the proposition that there is really no fiction or non-fiction; there is only narrative; and that there are obviously ways to distinguish between the two—fiction and non-fiction—but certainly not in terms of verifiable truth; one mode of perception has no greater claim on truth than the other; that the difference has to do perhaps with distance—narrative distance—from the characters; it has to do with the kind of voice that is talking, but it certainly hasn't to do with the common distribution between fact and imagination. I believe everything in *Ragtime* is true.

**Papaleo:** I wanted to say, Ed is suggesting with *Ragtime*, a new kind of lying.



**Doctorow:** For a fiction writer, history simply is a source of imagery—images. He can organize these images and arrange them within the compositions that satisfy him.

On the other hand, if you think about it, historians do the same thing, only with a greater degree of distance toward their material. I wish Bernstein and Woodward had not stuck to the factual detections of investigative reporters. By doing that, it could be argued that they lent themselves for cover up. With the highest scruples of investigative reporting, they ran into the limits of the form. If they had taken off from what they knew they might have gotten a greater, more comprehensive understanding of exactly what happened.

**Jack E. White, Jr.:** Is it the case, though, that you were just having a good time when you were writing *Ragtime*? What you're coming up with now is all the stuff that you came up

with to answer the questions that you thought people were going to put to you because you write about Harry Houdini and Henry Ford and Sigmund Freud. And if that's the case, why are you repeating yourself? Why don't you tell us about what you were really thinking about when you wrote the book?

**Doctorow:** What I was really thinking about happens to be on the page. Of course I was having a good time. What kind of a puritanical society is this that a writer can't have a good time?

**White:** I was having a good time reading, that's why I'm asking you. I figured if you had all these things on your mind when you were writing a book, you probably would produce a rotten book and I don't think you did.

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## Participants in Doctorow/Papaleo Dinner Seminar

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Charles W. Bailey, editor, *Minneapolis Tribune*; member, Nieman Advisory Committee

Tony Castro, reporter, *Houston Post*; Nieman Fellow '77

Rodney Decker, columnist and editorial writer, *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City); Nieman Fellow '77

Zvi Dor-Ner, producer/director, Israeli Television (Jerusalem); Nieman Fellow '77

Monroe Engel, Senior Lecturer on English, Harvard University

Brenda Engel, Assistant Professor, Lesley College

Frank Freidel, Professor of American History, Harvard University; member, Nieman Faculty Committee

Melvin Goo, editorial writer, *Honolulu Advertiser*; Nieman Fellow '77

Marc Granetz, junior, Harvard University

Justin Kaplan, author, Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer

Anthony Lewis, columnist, *The New York Times*; Nieman Fellow '57

J. Anthony Lukas, author and Pulitzer prize-winning journalist; Nieman Fellow '69

Robert Manning, editor-in-chief, *The Atlantic*; member, Nieman Advisory Committee; Nieman Fellow '46

Jose Antonio Martinez-Soler, editor, *Doblon*, Madrid; Nieman Fellow '77

John E. Painter, Jr., staff writer, *The Oregonian* (Portland); Nieman Fellow '77

Dolph C. Simons, Jr., president and publisher, *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*

(Kansas); member, Nieman Advisory Committee

Paul Solman, associate editor and reporter, *The Real Paper* (Cambridge, Mass.); Nieman Fellow '77

Cassandra Tate, reporter, *Lewiston Morning Tribune* (Idaho); Nieman Fellow '77

Diana Thomson, Teacher of Fiction Writing, Harvard University

Hennie van Deventer, news editor, *Die Beeld*, Johannesburg, South Africa; Nieman Fellow '77

Richard C. Wald, president, NBC News; member, Nieman Advisory Committee

Jack E. White, Jr., Atlanta correspondent, Time-Life News Service; Nieman Fellow '77

(NB: Affiliations are at time of seminar.)

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**Doctorow:** You know, you do all sorts of things to get your work done. For instance, you can see just how shaky a writer is and just how far over the edge of the cliff he is, but how much that title he keeps repeating is pulling him back; he says the title of the book he's doing to keep himself from falling. And so you use anything you can to get yourself through the day, and to get the book done. You can use the title, you can invent an aesthetic, you can write a manifesto, you can go to a bar and talk to other writers.

These are all ways you have of getting your work done, they're all justifiable in personal terms, if you finish the book.

**Charles W. Bailey:** We're dealing with a couple of continuums here, it seems to me. The one that has been suggested by Ed Doctorow anent journalists and historians has upset some people within my hearing, but there's also a continuum between non-journalists and novelists, and you've got a room full of people here tonight who have played around with different parts of that continuum.

Tony Lukas has written probably the best book about Watergate. Who's to say what's truth and fiction? Tony Lewis has written about Clarence Earl Gideon and the right to counsel; and it might have been a part in a novel about the military overthrow of the government; and who's to say that that's all fiction these days? I do think that you should be loose about where you're at on that continuum. It is one of the good things for writers in this period that the reader can't be sure where he is at. Don't sweat it. One of the nice things about *Ragtime* is that it ran the reader back and forth across that continuum. You were never sure what Mr. Doctorow was reporting and what he was making up. That is wise, after all. That's the end of my observation.

... there really is no fiction or non-fiction;  
there is only narrative ...

**Dolph C. Simons, Jr.:** Chuck, doesn't Capote—in *In Cold Blood*—purport to quote verbatim comments from the court or from the head of the Bureau of Investigation or the warden or scenes in Leavenworth which the reader is supposed to take as a verbatim conversation? Whereas in *Ragtime*, the way I read it, we're not supposed to assume that this is a specific quote of a specific person that can be checked against history.

**Bailey:** I think that Doctorow has an advantage that Capote didn't have here, in that Doctorow was dealing with something that happened 60 years ago.

**Simons:** But *Ragtime* makes no attempt to try to pass that stuff off as verbatim—

**Bailey:** Does *In Cold Blood*? You think that because it happened yesterday, it has to be verbatim?

**Simons:** I thought that Capote tried to indicate that this was indeed what was said and going on, as in Bernstein and Woodward—what the facts in the situation actually were.

**Bailey:** I think maybe Ed is a little unfair to Bernstein and Woodward, because I think that all they were trying to do was to capitalize on some work they had done for *The Washington Post* and make a lot of money out of it. There was nothing wrong with that—not a goddam thing is wrong with a reporter trying to get rich as long as he tells the truth. And later comes the chance to take off and to swing with it. They were doing some non-fictional things there that were very important, I think, and putting their stories together into a book.

... I believe everything in *Ragtime* is true.

**Anthony Lewis:** Well, I feel that it's almost intrusive to ask a novelist, unlike a journalist, what are the sources of his writings; why he wrote something—it's really none of our business in a way—but here we are. The thing that strikes me, not only about *Ragtime*, but about those other books—if I'm wrong I hope you will correct me—is their very political character. I wondered if you'll just say something about whether you feel—and I've already apologized for asking such a question but I'm driven to it—whether you have felt in all your novels that there is some general political theme or point of view—more so than many novelists—that you are expressing.

**Doctorow:** A novelist is thought to be a political novelist only when the politics of his novel are not the prevailing politics of his society. Then the politics stand out. We could discuss as a proposition the idea that all novels are political; all art is political, which seems to be endorsed in most countries of the world where the profession of novelist or artist is slightly more dangerous than that of high speed automobile racing. We have novelists who are put in insane asylums, who are tortured and put in cages, who are exiled. What does the rest of the world know that we don't know, about fiction and about art? I've often made the observation that this is one of the few countries in the history of western civilization in which artists are not seen to be a danger to the state.

There is a Yale historian, you'll forgive me for mentioning Yale, a man named Robbin Winks, I believe, who went back and read the dog stories of Albert Payson Terhune of a few years ago, and discovered something astonishing. Albert Terhune was a very popular author who produced a long string of books about

dogs. *Bob, Son of Battle* was one of them. Do any of you remember *Bob, Son of Battle*? What Winks discovered is that all of these hero dogs were white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant dogs who defended the rather luxurious property of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant homeowners. They heroically leaped at the throats of intruders, rapists, mad men, criminals and perverts, who were invariably black or Asiatic. Albert Payson Terhune is a highly political novelist. There's no question about that. But I didn't know that when I read *Bob, Son of Battle*.

There is an aestheticism in this country, which Saul Bellow talks about a little bit in *Humboldt's Gift*, I think,—a way of dealing with moral questions as if they were subject to aesthetic criteria. This is a point of view from which I dissociate myself, but it would define, for instance, the English department where Joseph Conrad is taught without reference to his highly conservative politics, or Dostoevsky without reference to his messianic conservatism, or James, or any of these highly political novelists. What the teachers talk about is the human condition, or the structure of the novel or stuff like that.

But there are writers around today who cannot be dealt with on strictly aesthetic terms, like this chap from Iran who was put in prison and tortured and is testifying wherever he can as a witness against the Shah's secret police, Savak. Or Solzhenitsyn, whom we regard critically as a bad writer, but who nevertheless has things to say about the Gulag Archipelago that more or less transcend these normal critical, aesthetic responses.

And I think I am a political novelist although I don't know exactly what my politics are—perhaps reformist Democratic with anarcho-socialist pretensions; but we have a peculiar way of containing our writers in this country, which is not to grant them any politics at all. So I guess what I'm saying is, thank you for recognizing me.

... For a fiction writer, history is simply a source of imagery [to be arranged] within the compositions that satisfy him.

**Monroe Engel:** I was going to ask Mr. Doctorow whether he really wanted to go on making statements about the entire history of the novel or whether he wanted to talk about what he was doing himself. Because if he was going to stay on the entire history of the novel, I doubt that too much knowledge has been a disadvantage—I think that's at least arguable.

If he's going to talk about what I think is the much more interesting question of how he has found his own imagination can be energized, that's something different. I'm much more interested in having him talk about the second question than the first, and that's what I think Tony's question is about. If he

wants to keep the historical context open to say that he really is talking about what has happened in the history of fiction, he can make that choice and I would like to know it.

... It's almost intrusive to ask a novelist, unlike a journalist, what are the sources of his writings ...

**Doctorow:** Help.

**Engel:** Well, let me ask it more directly. Are you talking about Balzac or Dickens or—?

**Thomson:** Nobody talked about Defoe. I don't understand.

**John E. Painter, Jr.:** I have a question. Why did you decide to marry off an anarchist and a capitalist with a sort of unhappy and disaffected middle-aged housewife from New Rochelle?

**Doctorow:** Why not? It just worked out that way.

I appreciate the question about the kinds of things that energize my imagination. That's really a very astute question. I don't know. I think if I knew too well, it would be bad for me.

**Painter:** There was an incident in your book when the anarchist passed through New York and was going through New Rochelle and the little girl saw a little boy on the street, where you could have taken a different turn in your development and end up having the little girl marry the little boy, instead of the mother and the father.

**Doctorow:** Mailer would say on this imaginary shelf on either side of the novel as it is written, is the novel just to the left of it which could have been written, and the novel just to the right of it which could have been written.

**Rodney Decker:** I'd like to ask both gentlemen: it seems to me the work of both of you deals with judgments—judgments that we reach about people, about times, and about ages. Now, I'm suspicious of judgments where the person who judges doesn't somehow get down on his hands and knees, doesn't stoop into human detritus, and look at the facts that maybe are there, but ought not to have been there. And yet you reach rather specific judgments on these things—or it seems to me that you do—and could you comment on that please? Both of you.

**Papaleo:** I'm not quite sure what he's saying.

**Decker:** Are you talking about Sacco and Vanzetti? I should

guess that the question is, did they do it? I should guess that that has to deal with facts that are facts.

**Papaleo:** The fictional part of Sacco-Vanzetti, which I haven't got yet, reminds me of what Ed was saying about Bernstein and Woodward. It's not the facts of what happened, it's the horribly bad taste of Richard Nixon, or the vulgarity of John Dean. Those aspects of character which resemble—forgive a word like hubris—that's what the fiction writer's looking for and in that, you get the truth, rather than the facts which, when they pile up too much, don't even make the truth, or obscure it, as Ed was suggesting in the case of Woodward and Bernstein.

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**. . . this is one of the few countries in the history of Western civilization in which artists are not seen to be a danger to the state.**

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**Decker:** It's exactly that suggestion that distresses me a bit. That somehow we're going to write about Sacco and Vanzetti and we hope we're going to write movingly. So that after the people have read it, they will say, It was this way or it was that way, and we should feel strongly about it. And yet we don't want to know the facts, somehow. If I were to talk to a judge or a jury who have had that attitude, or to a historian, I would be distressed. Why shouldn't I be distressed talking to a novelist?

**Papaleo:** Forgive me. I spent six months in the Harvard Law Library. I read all the letters, all the unpublished letters, all the six volumes of the case. I know so many facts. You don't mean that. That's not the—

**Decker:** Why, then, didn't you go talk to the lady?

**Papaleo:** Why didn't I talk to Mrs. Sacco?

**Decker:**—Because she would have had more facts—

**Richard C. Wald:** My question was along the same lines, but triggered by something that Mr. Doctorow said. I think I am one of those people on the continuum that Chuck Baily talked about who see the craft of the novelist as dealing with common matter with different tools. And my question would be, at what point is a fact intransigent; at what point is it that there has to be a real archipelago or there has to be a prison camp? At what point is it that there has to have been a J.P. Morgan, and he wasn't black? Where is the point at which the fact needs to be revealed, as different from the point at which you can play with the pieces?

**Doctorow:** That's the key question. There are some facts as, for instance, the facts of what the Nazis did in Europe in the 1930s and 40s that have this intransigent quality that you speak of, in the face of which too facile a statement about the indistinguishability of fact from fiction is really appalling. But if the Nazis had won the war the facts of the death of six million Jews would now be construed quite differently. I think what I'm saying to Joe is—that it's possible that there's a certain kind of non-factual witness which doesn't destroy the facts or lie about them or change them, but in some peculiar way illuminates them. That's what we're talking about. It is the kind of muscle that novelists and poets develop, which in a—well, I think of what Henry James said about it. He said, If you have a young woman who has led a very sheltered life and she happens to walk past the army barracks and hear a fragment of conversation among the soldiers coming through the window, she can then, if she is a novelist, go home and write a novel about army life. And that's what I'm talking about. There are different sources of knowledge—one of a fact can be enough for a novelist to intuit an entire life.

**Simons:** Does that bother you?

**Bailey:** Yes, I'd like to ask you a technical question. What was the last thing or person that you took out of *Ragtime* before it was published? What was the last piece of whittling that you did—of editing you did—to remove an element from the story before it was in final version?

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**. . . There's a certain kind of non-factual witness which doesn't destroy the facts or lie about them or change them, but . . . illuminates them.**

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**Doctorow:** I remember very clearly a major bit of editing. It was a chapter in *Ragtime* in which Houdini put on his act for the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. After he flew the plane and landed, he was then invited to do a command performance in a hunting lodge in the Black Forest. Houdini did this performance and then warned the Archduke that his life was in danger, whereupon he was immediately wrestled to the floor by the Archduke's people, thrown into jail, and accused of being an anarchist. I really enjoyed writing that chapter.

**Bailey:** Why did you take it out?

(continued on page 43)

# Rust Around the Iron Curtain

by Murray Seeger

The East European news beat, long considered to be a dull, closed world for Western journalists, is beginning to open up interesting possibilities for those writers with patience and determination. The old foreign desk attitude, that the countries of the Communist bloc are all the same and about as interesting as the dull brown color of the Soviet Army uniforms that dominate the area, is breaking down.

Certainly, a reporter entering East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania or Bulgaria for the first time, will realize immediately that he has left the relatively cozy working atmosphere of Western Europe. If he has had no experience with Soviet-style regimes, the correspondent may wonder just what has happened to make his more experienced colleagues believe anything has changed.

But the region is changing, perceptively, and country by country. The nationality differences that always peppered Central and Eastern Europe are as clear as ever. Now there are political differences, too. It is these subtle political differences that make the area worth giving new attention to.

The six countries share a common, strong identity with Moscow on the basic question of domestic politics—the monopoly of power held by the Communist Party. Moscow can impose a tough discipline on its neighbors through the mechanisms of the military Warsaw Pact and economic Comecon agreement but there is no doubt the old iron bands have rusted. The ideological differences have put cracks in the old monolith. As one friend puts it, East Europe is now the “goulash archipelago.”

With these changes, it is now easier to gather information in some countries than in others. People in some streets will talk with reporters when it is fairly certain official party or police eavesdroppers are absent. In the most open of the six countries, people will now occasionally discuss politics and personalities in a way unknown a few years ago, and rarely found today in the Soviet Union.

There are clear differences in visa rules and the degrees of surveillance and intimidation a visiting correspondent can expect. Still, writers can find more interesting, readable stories than were available even five years ago. The best way to examine the scene is country-by-country.

## East Germany

This country is unique among the East bloc, or Warsaw Pact

group, because it has no history beyond the unsatisfactory post-war status quo in defeated Germany.

Originally the Soviet occupation zone, East Germany has a national policy aimed at proving its right to be treated as a separate and different state from its bigger, richer cousin, West Germany. All the former Nazis, all the killers of Jews, all the veterans of the Wehrmacht, live across the frontier, according to this line; East Germany, like Poland and Hungary, was “liberated” by the Red Army from Nazi occupation.

Because of this policy, the officials of the German Democratic Republic refuse to accredit journalists based either in Bonn or West Berlin because these writers tend to contrast the two Germanys and write about the ugly effects of the long fortified border and Berlin Wall the Communists erected to seal in their society. The East Germans have traveled all across the United States offering “accreditation” to domestic reporters as well as correspondents stationed as far from East Berlin as Rome and London.

The Associated Press and United Press International, under duress, accepted these terms for writers based in Copenhagen and Vienna, but the other American news organizations, with State Department support, have rejected the East Germans’ ploy as an attempt to dictate American news policy.

Instead, most coverage of East Germany is done from West Berlin or Bonn. The East Germans cannot bar Americans from entering East Berlin which, along with the western portion, is still legally occupied by the four wartime allies. This allows American correspondents to meet many East Germans privately and to make official appointments for the kind of stilted interviews common in all Communist countries.

West German journalists who work under a special agreement between the two countries have been able to do especially good work for both the printed media and radio and television so that other correspondents in their audiences are provided with a steady flow of fresh information.

The American who wants to visit one of the cities such as Leipzig, Dresden or Weimar in East Germany proper, that is outside the Berlin city circle, must obtain a visa and is usually required to hire a car, driver and a “watchdog” guide-translator.

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These limits, similar to those imposed by Soviet officials for visitors to areas outside Moscow, inhibit correspondents and many refuse to accept them. Instead, these writers wait for special occasions such as the twice-a-year Leipzig Trade Fairs when the restrictions are relaxed.

Despite these rules and attempts at surveillance, most American correspondents find their unofficial contacts with East Germans very rewarding. When the watchdogs are out of earshot, the correspondents find what they expect in East Germany—polite, open people who are anxious to talk about their lives; Germans who happened to be left on the Communist side of the dividing line when their country was occupied after World War II. The 22 Soviet divisions stationed in an area the size of Ohio guarantee there will be no immediate changes in their situation.

### Poland

As the largest of the Soviet bloc countries, with more than 33 million residents, Poland has a special status of its own. The different public uprisings that have marked the country's postwar history have all been put down by domestic security forces. The relatively small, detested Soviet garrisons, if unleashed on the Polish population, would ignite a conflict neither Moscow nor Warsaw wants.

The Poles, therefore, have a self-confidence missing in such cowed states as East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Whatever mistakes, excesses and conflicts appear, they are almost purely Polish, and there is a limited form of internal dialogue about them. In the last two years, the Poles have relaxed their visa rules which were already among the easier in Eastern Europe.

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**Despite rules and attempts at surveillance, most American correspondents find their unofficial contacts with East Germans very rewarding.**

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Correspondents arriving in Warsaw are helped with interviews which are more informative, by far, than is normal in other Communist states. Officials will express disappointment that reporters insist on meeting with spokesmen for the recently-formed political dissident group, the Workers Defense Committee; but such meetings are not interfered with. Government officials have helped Americans cover the sensitive story of Germans who want to emigrate to West Germany.

Warsaw spokesmen will, of course, promote their own official line and complain that a true picture of modern Poland is not being reflected to the west.

The Poles, in fact, have been so successful in dealing with the

American press that the policy has enhanced their political strategy to make relations with Washington and the large Polish-American community the best enjoyed by any European communist country.

### Czechoslovakia

On the opposite side of the scale is Czechoslovakia, which once had an especially high standing in American esteem from its creation, with the vital support of President Woodrow Wilson, in 1918. The crushing of the 1968 attempt to reform the Stalinist regime by a Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion has left the country in a national coma.

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**The Czechoslovak secret police are so deeply infiltrated by the Soviet KGB that it is hard to know when a decision . . . comes from Prague or Moscow.**

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Prague, one of Europe's most beautiful cities, is a depressing place to visit for those fortunate enough to get a visa. Few Czechs would talk politics before January 1977, when a reform group called Charter 77 surfaced with a manifesto criticizing the regime. Since the organizers of Charter 77 include many supporters of the popular, deposed reform leader Alexander Dubcek, the Moscow-dominated government has increased its controls on visiting journalists.

A blacklist has been drawn up to completely bar some correspondents from returning to the country. Although there are probably more who will find out they are blacklisted when they try to enter Czechoslovakia again, the current list for sure includes Paul Hoffman and Malcolm Browne of *The New York Times*; Leslie Colitt, a free-lance who covers for both the National Broadcasting Company and the (London) *Financial Times*; and this reporter. In my own case, which may be typical, a Czech official told a Western diplomat: "A very high level decision was taken to bar him and it would take another very high level decision to reverse that action."

The Czechoslovak secret police are so deeply infiltrated by the Soviet KGB that it is hard to know when a decision they make comes from Prague or Moscow. The reporters who have visited the capital in recent months were conspicuously shadowed and some were questioned and searched by police. Two of the resident foreigners representing Agence-France Press and Reuters were sprayed in the face with chemical irritants after they visited dissident spokesmen.

Before the Charter 77 movement caused the government to become even more paranoid than before, foreign correspondents had tried to objectively present the country's legitimate complaint—that the U.S. Congress has obstructed an agreement to close the issue of postwar Czechoslovak debts to American

creditors. The recent Prague actions make it even less likely that issue will be resolved and 20 tons of pre-war official Czechoslovak gold returned to Prague.

Czechoslovakia is the one example of an East European state which has made entry and access to sources more difficult for foreign correspondents in the last year.

## Hungary

Along with Warsaw, Budapest is a city that Western correspondents can actually enjoy visiting. The food is better than Warsaw—which has been suffering shortages for more than a year—and the scenery marvelous.

The government tries to be helpful with visitors and in the vital economic area, especially, there are many competent people willing to talk with limited freedom on the issues facing their country and the entire Comecon group.

American correspondents have been included in Budapest television discussion programs in which their remarks were translated accurately into Hungarian. It is possible to develop contacts with locals who will speak with relative frankness about political issues. The Hungarians do have “disinformation” specialists who try to peddle an official line covered with paprikash, but they are no more harmful than official spokesmen in most capitals.

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**Along with Warsaw, Budapest is a city that Western correspondents can actually enjoy visiting.**

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Hungary has been slower than Poland in establishing good ties with the United States but Budapest did recently sign its first formal cultural agreement with Washington. One incentive for the Hungarians to continue their efforts to improve communications with the U.S. is the fact that the big Hungarian-American community is still largely opposed to the regime of Janos Kadar who was put into power by the Soviet Army after it crushed the 1956 revolution and who is blamed for terrorizing the late Cardinal Mindszenty.

As with Poland, Hungary grants journalists visas with little delay. Surveillance is not obvious and visiting reporters can move freely.

## Romania

When a severe earthquake struck southeast Romania and Bucharest in March, many foreign correspondents assumed the government would close its borders at least for 24 or 48 hours in order to make sure order had been re-established.

Instead, reporters arriving by car from Belgrade had only the usual hour-long delay crossing the frontier and those who flew in from Frankfurt on the day's only flight were granted visas at Bucharest airport, as usual. “What are you here for, tourism or business?” a border guard asked. When told the visitor was an American journalist, the guard waved him past with a “Welcome to Romania,” that belied the national tragedy taking place only a few miles away.

Ordinarily, the Romanians handle Western correspondents in an interesting way. Access to the country is easy and travel is unrestricted, but official interviews are hard to arrange without a great deal of advance notice. There has been no real opposition to President Nicolae Ceasescu but his regime has followed a policy which suggests a lack of stability.

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**. . . The guard waved him past with a “Welcome to Romania!” that belied the national tragedy . . . only a few miles away.**

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During the earthquake, however, the official Agerpress agency, after some delay, established a helpful system for getting correspondents and camera men around to different disaster areas. Photographers were given a free hand to take dramatic rescue pictures but disaster workers were under strict orders not to answer questions. When one man in civilian clothes, who was maintaining a security line around a ruined building, was asked if his helpers were neighborhood volunteers, policemen or Communist Party members, he would only answer: “All questions to Agerpress.”

The agency was unable or unwilling to provide accurate casualty figures through the disaster. For three days the number of officially reported dead was less than the number of bodies counted in the same period by foreigners touring the city morgue. When I tried to move over a telex wire a higher estimate of death given by an Army officer, the machine was stopped in mid-paragraph. The delay lasted about ten minutes and the machine resumed after a Romanian helper called to complain of “trouble” on the line.

After the earthquake, the Romanians were very displeased with a story I wrote and they barred Browne from making a return visit from his Belgrade base. The government later explained these were specific reactions to specific stories they did not like and that all American reporters would be welcome to Bucharest, as before.

## Bulgaria

When one American attempted to go to Sofia for the first time last year, he asked Bulgarian officials about getting a visa as a journalist. That would take six months, he was told, but if

he just wanted to go to Bulgaria he could get a visa at the Sofia airport.

In effect, the Bulgarians are following a policy similar to that in Romania: access to the country is relatively easy, but the government does little to help reporters once they are there, unless arrangements are made far in advance.

Sofia, like Bucharest, has no dissident movement to generate sparks. The government's policy seems to be based on its general lack of interest in increasing ties to the United States.

Alone among the East European bloc countries, Bulgaria has benefited enormously by its close ties with Moscow. It is also the one country where cultural and national relations with Soviet Union are so deep that the regime's alliance with the Kremlin has broad popular support.

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**Sofia, like Bucharest, has no dissident movement to generate sparks.**

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Sofia is an attractive city but it generates little news of interest to Americans. One correspondent who, after some haggling, arranged to visit a "typical" leading artist, left the man's home only to meet another escorted correspondent arriving for the next interview.

Still, with its nationality problems with two neighbors, Yugoslavia and Turkey, and a general desire to maintain its own identity, Bulgaria, too, is worth a correspondent's attention.

The two remaining Communist states of the region represent the two extremes in conducting official relations with the outside world and its inquiring journalists.

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**In comparison with the other one-party states of Eastern Europe . . . Yugoslavia is a relatively open and liberal society.**

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### Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia, independent of Moscow domination for decades, grants non-resident correspondents six-month visas which can be used for an unlimited number of visits. The government is helpful in arranging interviews and providing background information.

Unlike countries of the Soviet model, where Communist Party officials stay in the shadows and avoid Western reporters, the Yugoslav Party has its own spokesmen who will discuss internal and external political affairs.

The Yugoslavs have been testy over reporting about their political prisoners and the protests of critics concerning restrictions enforced against dissidents leaving the country. In comparison with the other one-party states of Eastern Europe, however, Yugoslavia is a relatively open and liberal society.

### Albania

Then there is Albania—a country so tightly closed that diplomats stationed in Tirania have to leave the country to make routine long distance telephone calls. No American reporters have been allowed into the state for many years. If anyone wants to write a book about the place, it will have to be called *Outside Albania*.

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**Accompanying détente as a political policy, is its inseparable twin, increased trade and closer economic relations.**

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There seem to be three reasons why the Warsaw Pact countries, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, have lowered their barriers to journalists.

One clear reason is that the political policy of détente between Moscow and Washington enables the smaller capitals to open their doors to more Western traffic. The countries know that their treatment of correspondents is seen as one measure of their interest in improving all relations.

Accompanying détente as a political policy is its inseparable twin, increased trade and closer economic relations. Again, since Moscow has sought Western credits and trade, so, too, the satellites have increased their economic ties to the West. Moscow is clearly unable to supply all its own economic needs, much less those of its clients, so they must make their own deals. This too, requires them to open more doors than those for bankers and traders.

Then there is the ever-present element of nationalism, the force that has proved time and again to be more powerful than any other ideology. Each of the East European countries wants to be seen as a unique nation—even East Germany, which to be honest would have to claim Prussia as its antecedent.

The 1974 Helsinki Agreement of European Security and Cooperation, while seen as a give-away to the Communists by some Americans, actually has enhanced the national spirit of the East Europeans. The most independent of the countries—Poland and Hungary—have used Helsinki as legal authority to permit more contacts with the West when some party conservatives have objected.

In Prague, the former American charge d'affaires, Jack Perry, carried the Helsinki agreement in his pocket when he

was fighting to get more visas for American journalists to enter Prague.

The confused debate last year over the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine and former President Ford's foolish misstatement about life in Eastern Europe turned the news spotlight back on the area for a time. Interest waned again until new outbreaks of political dissidence were perceived in Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany.

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. . . Interest in the area is rising slowly as it becomes more obvious that the days of Moscow's ability to keep its allies in lockstep have passed.

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Unfortunately, the American news organizations are just beginning to rebuild their badly neglected reporting networks in the East.

*The New York Times* has recently reopened an office in Vienna and tries to cover the area from there and Belgrade. *The Washington Post* has divided the turf between reporters in Moscow and Bonn, with a stringer in Belgrade. *The Los Angeles Times* covers from Bonn as do *The Chicago Tribune* and *Newsweek*. *The Baltimore Sun* covers from Moscow.

*Time* magazine recently put a man in West Berlin to watch the East instead of having a third correspondent in Bonn. The National Broadcasting Company also covers from West Berlin while Columbia and American Broadcasting work out of Bonn or wherever else a crew and correspondent are available. The AP and UPI have local stringers in the different capitals and monitor the national wire agencies in Vienna or Frankfurt. UPI has a staffman in Belgrade and Reuters has staff correspondents in Warsaw, Prague, Belgrade and East Berlin.

In general, however, it seems clear that interest in the area is rising slowly as it becomes more obvious that the days of Moscow's ability to keep its allies in lockstep have passed. The development of a more independent form of Eurocommunism is followed closely in Eastern Europe. The concept of political "Finlandization" of the area, while repugnant in pure democratic terms, looks highly attractive to the people of Eastern Europe.

Coming  
Paul Freund  
on the  
Bakke Case

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## Holy Moses

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by Morton Mintz

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I propose that we go back to the source and substance of social reality, the lives of the people, and learn from them, without the intervention of preconceptions or sentimentalities, what their problems are and where those problems come from. We journalists are mesmerized by ostensible events—the legislature, elections, scandals, disasters. We do not go among the people and really learn their lives.

—Ronnie Dugger

When the press in any community fails to try to hold accountable those who wield substantial power, and when there are neither "alternative" media nor mechanisms to monitor press performance, unaccountability is bound to flourish. Newspapers and broadcasters who neglect their accountability mission are slighting their ethical obligation under the First Amendment, as Walter Lippmann put it, "to provide, even at a commercial loss, an adequate supply of what the public will in the longer run need to know." They numb what the late Hannah Arendt, the philosopher, termed "the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world;" they seem to recognize dimly if at all that survival requires "men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously, namely, *legein ta eonta*, to say what is." Tom Gish, who with his wife, Pat, publishes *The Mountain Eagle*, whose offices in Whitesburg, Kentucky, were destroyed by arsonists in 1974, expressed the "need to be skeptical, to be suspicious, to ask a million questions, and to demand answers of all who would come to save us, no matter what cloak they wear." He went on to say:

Had we asked the right questions and insisted upon the right answers at the right time, we might have been saved from a TVA that devastates an entire area for its strip coal; from a Corps of Engineers that builds dams simply to build dams; from a Forest Service that serves only the lumber industry; from an Appalachian Regional Commission that seeks not to assist but to eliminate an entire culture rich in its own heritage. We might even have been saved from our own folly in turning over the greatest wealth in the nation to a few money men from the outside who wanted our minerals.

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The performance of the press in holding power accountable in regions, states, counties, and cities surely if subtly influences the performance of the national press in holding power accountable on Capitol Hill and in the White House and other power houses of Washington. And because news organizations around the country are clients and affiliates of the news services and networks, i.e., paying customers, they significantly affect what those very large and very important enterprises report—that is, how they define news.

Our case in point is Robert Moses and the press of New York City. For decades, Moses wielded truly fantastic power—directly in New York City and New York State, but also indirectly, through his influence on the public officials he taught and inspired throughout the United States. “In the twentieth century, the influence of Robert Moses on the cities of America was greater than that of any other person,” according to Lewis Mumford, who for thirty years was Moses’ bitterest—and ultimately most vindicated—critic. For this the press bore

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significant responsibility. It is fair to say that had the press been independent of Moses rather than idolatrous, had it told the public what it needed to know in the longer run, had it helped the public to take its bearings on the real New York rather than on Moses’ mythical New York, had it simply provided all of the essential facts, and had it done these things consistently and in good time, as was its duty, New York City—and, by extension, many other American cities—would not have deteriorated as terribly as it has.

This conclusion flows from *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (Knopf, 1974). In this marvelous book—seven years in preparation and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in biography—Robert A. Caro (Nieman Fellow ’66) chronicles the performance and, more often, the non-performance of the press at critical stages of Moses’ acquisition, exercise, and retention of power. The press episodes are dispersed through an epic 1,246-page work. Here I try to knit them into a whole. Thus assembled they emerge as unique journalistic criticism—researched, revealing, insightful, instructive, and spanning decades.

The press treated Robert Moses reverently. Granted benign motivation on the part of its owners, *The New York Times* fell down on its knees before him and stayed there year after year after year. The *Times* and other papers printed Moses’

handouts as if they were gospel, fawned on him in thousands of editorials, brushed aside citizens with evidence and even proof of wrong-doing, and chilled and put down those few on their staffs who itched to investigate what he really was doing. I emphatically do not imply that nothing has changed. To the contrary, press standards are much different and much higher now, most certainly at the *Times*; and there are today checks on press performance that did not exist in the heyday of Robert Moses—alternative media such as *The Village Voice*, *New York Magazine*, and *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Yet the prolonged, craven handling of the Moses story is more than an artifact. It is important not only in itself, but also because it helps us to see and understand parallels in the treatment the press to this day accords those it cares to build up—presidents; vice presidents; secretaries of State, Defense, and Treasury, CIA and FBI directors, congressional committee chairmen, generals, admirals, governors, mayors, candidates, bankers, corporation executives, and assorted celebrities. The relation between the press and Robert Moses, even though extreme in its dimensions and duration, was at bottom not an isolated or a one-time phenomenon, but a widespread and continuing phenomenon—one that thrives on non-auditing of press performance.

Although Caro’s focus on the press is entirely in the Moses context, he brilliantly illuminates the generic problem of an unaudited press contributing to unaccountability in public figures. I now draw extensively but not exhaustively from this fascinating reporting, starting with a few specific measures of Moses’ power. Unless otherwise indicated, Caro’s book is the source of all quoted material:

For the seven years between 1946 and 1953, the seven years of plenty in public construction in the city, seven years marked by the most intensive construction in its history, no public improvement of any type—not school or sewer, library or pier, hospital or catch basin—was built by any city agency, even those which Robert Moses did not directly control, unless Robert Moses approved its design and location. To clear land for these improvements, he evicted the city’s people, not thousands of them or tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands, from their homes and tore the homes down. Neighborhoods were obliterated by his edict to make room for new neighborhoods reared at his command.

Out from the heart of New York he built 416 miles of parkways. Across the St. Lawrence River and at Niagara he built giant power dams and then adorned them with parks, playgrounds, beaches. For forty-four years—until Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller dethroned him in 1968—his power was “so substantial that in the fields in which he chose to exercise it, it was not challenged seriously by any Governor of New York State, or, during a thirty-four year period... in which it extended over city as well as state, by any Mayor of New York



City.” In 1968 dollars, the public works he had built cost \$27 billion. He built them *early*; when he began building state parks and parkways in the 1920s, twenty-nine states didn’t have a single state park. “That was how he put his mark on all the cities of America.” His “influence on the development of the expressway system in the United States was greater than that of any other single individual.”

His—*his*—“Triborough” confederation of four public authorities “had its own fleets, of yachts and motorcars and trucks, and its own uniformed army.” In 1960 it directly controlled 161 square miles, an area half as large as New York City. The *surplus* from tolls collected by just one constituent unit, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, was about \$30 million a year.

Moses lived “like an emperor . . . On Sundays, when he rested, one of the three boat captains who took turns skippering his favorite yacht waited by a telephone, sometimes for an entire day, just in case he might decide that he wanted to go fishing.” (For the White House, it was the Air Force that stood by, waiting in Richard Nixon’s case for a call saying he wanted to fly to the establishments he maintained, at great cost to the public, in Key Biscayne or San Clemente.)

At Jones Beach, Moses turned over a \$4 million stadium “to his favorite bandleader, Guy Lombardo, virtually as a gift on which Lombardo reaped immense personal profits, so that Lombardo’s orchestra would be consistently on call. . . .”

He used the wealth of his empire “to keep many city officials in fear. With it, he hired skilled investigators he called ‘bloodhounds’ who were kept busy filling dossiers, and they knew what use Moses was capable of making of them. . . . They had seen him dredge up the dark secrets of men’s pasts and turn them into blaring headlines.” Presidents on taking office had the FBI, the CIA, and the Internal Revenue Service.

During the twenty year period ending in 1968, Moses had from the State Department of Public Works “a secret veto power over all state contracts for public works in the New York metropolitan area. No engineer who had ever forcefully and openly disagreed with a Moses opinion ever received even one of the thousands of contracts involved.”

America’s nineteenth-century robber barons had understood the importance of monopoly, absolute monopoly . . .

Robert Moses, whose aim was not economic but political power . . . had understood that competition was a threat to his aims. He . . . schemed for ten years to remove that threat, to obtain over all modern water crossings within New York—the water crossings that were a key to all automobile transportation within the city—an absolute monopoly. And now he had that monopoly.

And with that monopoly, he saw to it that in the single decade ending in 1965 public investment in new highways in and around New York would total about \$2.7 billion but there

was built not one mile of new railroad or subway. And so each day the crowding in New York’s subways, for hundreds of thousands of people, was inhuman. In 1965 more than one out of five subway cars had been in use for more than half a century—cold in winter, sweltering in summer. There wasn’t enough money for repairs; so what had for decades been called “the safest subway system in the world” deteriorated to the point where it was having more serious accidents than any subway system in the world. “When Robert Moses came to power in New York in 1934, the city’s mass transportation was

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***The New York Times* fell down on its knees before [Moses] and stayed there year after year after year.**

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probably the best in the world. When he left power in 1968, it was quite possibly the worst.”

Robert Moses—“not accountable to the public . . . not accountable to anyone”—did give the press an out in the form of a giant obstacle. He concentrated his power in public authorities whose records were closed to public scrutiny. When *The New York Post* tried to get access to those records, Moses denied it. The courts rejected a legal challenge by the newspaper, ruling that authority records have the same legal status as a private corporation’s. This was very important to Moses. It enabled him to build a priceless—but false—reputation that he was outside of and above politics, and that the authorities were, too. The ruling enabled him to claim that the authorities epitomize “prudence, efficiency, and economy.” In one way or another, more than 1,400 editorials in metropolitan newspapers in a single six-year period, 1946 through 1951, echoed this claim. And the ruling also enhanced his claim that authority projects cost taxpayers nothing because private investors financed them through the purchase of revenue bonds.

These statements were believed implicitly for almost forty years by the public . . . And this is not surprising. For Robert Moses repeated his contentions a thousand times and for four decades they were repeated, amplified and embellished by a press that believed them, too. Because of the forty years of adulation of the newspapers—and of the public that read the newspapers—for forty years nothing could stand in Moses’ way . . .

Prudent, efficient, economical? So incredibly wasteful was Moses of the money he tolled from the public in quarters and dimes that on a single bridge alone he paid \$40,000,000 more in interest than he had to. Authority projects cost the taxpayers nothing? Covert “loans” made to authorities by the state—loans designed never to be repaid—ran into the hundreds of millions of dollars. The cost of city-purchased land on which authority facilities were built, ran into the hundreds of millions. The cost of taxpayer-financed toll roads leading to authority facilities ran into the billions. And the loss in tax revenue because authority-controlled land was removed from the tax rolls drained the city

year after year. [Less than a year after Caro's book was published New York City was broke.]

Most important, had the records of the authorities been open, they would have disproved another aspect of the lie: the legend that Robert Moses was no "politician" . . . that he managed to create his public works at a remove from politics. Actually, as these records prove, Robert Moses' authorities were a political machine oiled by the lubricant of political machines: money.

What was the press saying through most of the forty years? "Continually, in five- or six-part series or Sunday-supplement feature stories or long interviews, it said he was totally honest and incorruptible, tireless in working sixteen and eighteen-hour days for the public, and it allowed him to repeat or repeated itself the myths with which he had surrounded himself—that he was absolutely free of personal ambition or any desire for money or power . . ."

His flaws reporters and editorialists made into virtues: his vituperation and personal attacks on anyone who dared oppose him were "outspokenness;" his refusal to obey the rules and regulations of the WPA (federal Works Progress Administration) or laws he had sworn to uphold was "independence" and a refusal to let the public interest be hampered by "red tape" and "bureaucrats" . . . If there were larger, disturbing implications in these flaws, they implied that he was above the law, that the end justifies the means, and that only he should determine the end—they ignored these implications or joked about them . . .

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**The surplus collected by . . . the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority was about \$30 million a year.**

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By the end of the 1930s, one national magazine after another was eulogizing Moses and his methods. They made him "a folk hero, a figure larger than life, almost mythical, shrouded in the mist of his own legends, a Paul Bunyan of Public Works, a John Henry of Highways . . ." This brought planners and engineers to New York from other cities, and they carried The Word back home. Some spent weeks or even months "watching Moses' men and, when they returned to their own cities, applied the principles Moses had taught them in building their own parks and roads." Many in the media suggested that Moses become the Republican nominee for President—the ultimate accolade. At *The New York Times*, Moses was the Sacredest Cow, just as other Men Who Get Things Done were untouchable at newspapers elsewhere.

[*Times*] editors and reporters may never have been directly ordered to give Moses special treatment but, during the 30s as during the 20s, they were not so insensitive as not to know what was expected of them. Moses' press releases were treated with respect, being given preeminent treatment and often being printed

in full. There was no investigating of the "facts" presented in these press releases, no attempt at detailed analysis of his theories of recreation and transportation, no probing of his assumptions on which the city was building and maintaining recreational facilities and roads. The *Times* ran more than 100 editorials on Moses and his programs during the twelve-year La Guardia administration—overwhelmingly favorable editorials.

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**At *The New York Times*, Moses was the Sacredest Cow, just as other Men Who Get Things Done were untouchable at newspapers elsewhere.**

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Moses was a racist. His racism was blatantly obvious. During the 1930s, for example, he built 255 playgrounds in New York City—but only one in Harlem. Negroes protested—"begged for playgrounds." Moses ignored them. So did the press. The Rev. Shelton Hale Bishop, who was rector of St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church on 134th Street in Harlem, tried to have something done. He wrote letters to the editor; and fourteen years went by before the first was printed. In 1943, a grand jury investigated the high crime rate in Bedford-Stuyvesant. It found the lack of recreational facilities to be a contributing factor. Moses issued an eight-page press release claiming the report lacked "the slightest foundation."

The press, the instrument best equipped to investigate the situation and come up with independent facts and figures, never made any such investigation . . . In 1950 (i.e., seven years later), the *Times* would send a reporter to Harlem to make his own, independent tour, and he would report that playgrounds for many Harlem children were vacant lots, in which "bare-legged children" played "on dumps of broken glass, rusty cans and refuse. . ." But during the 1930s the press was taking Robert Moses' word for what was being done in the slums. A day by day review of the *Times*, *Herald Tribune* and *Brooklyn Eagle*—and a more cursory review of the city's other major dailies—for the entire 1934-9 period did not turn up a single editorial even hinting that Moses' playground-building program might be neglecting the slums.

During the administration of Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri, the federal and state governments poured \$493 million into the city for highway and housing construction. "Every cent of this money was spent under Moses' command." Yet:

The public never knew the extent of Moses' influence. One can search through the daily issues of the city's nine remaining daily newspapers (remaining, i.e., in the early 1950s)—issues crammed, day after day, with 'inside dope' on City Hall—without finding a single accurate analysis of that influence.

Congress in 1949 enacted a housing act. Its Title I stretched the power of eminent domain so far that state and local agencies now could condemn land and turn it over to private parties empowered to build housing on it. "Here was power new in the annals of democracy. And in New York, that power would be exercised by Robert Moses. 'In my opinion,' urban expert Charles Abrams was to say, 'under present redevelopment laws, Macy's could condemn Gimbel's—if Robert Moses gave the word...'"

But Moses used his new power of "urban renewal" to hound tens of thousands of the poor—blacks and Puerto Ricans, mainly—out of their homes without finding them new ones. They had to flee to other slums, making "conditions already bestial, inhuman...even worse." But the existing slums could not hold them all. "So they would move into areas adjacent to the slums, into areas in which landlords, without incentive to keep up their property anyway because of the slums' proximity, would see an opportunity for financial profit and take it by breaking up large apartments into small ones and by cutting down on maintenance and repairs. The slums would spill over their boundaries, spreading into blocks as yet untouched by blight." In this and other ways Moses was creating new slums.

But the public was not educated or aroused, because the only medium through which it could be educated or aroused—its press—was not interested. The liberals wanted the press to get the facts behind Title I, but the press made no move to get them.

Reformers—ridiculed by Moses—tried to "persuade the *Times* to send out reporters to ascertain if the statements that Moses was making—and the *Times* was printing as if they were fact—were actually factual," but the *Times* refused. So did the *Herald Tribune*. "As for the *News*, it was to fulfill its responsibility to the public by exposing 'Communists' in the Housing Authority...Among the city's other dailies, only Dorothy Schiff's *Post* told readers there might be another side to the Title I story besides Moses'."

In the seven years after the end of World War II, "there had been evicted from their homes in New York City for public works—mainly Robert Moses' public works—some 170,000 persons," almost certainly a conservative estimate. But this was "more people than *lived* in Albany, Phoenix, Little Rock, Sacramento, Tallahassee, Topeka, Baton Rouge, Trenton, Santa Fe, etc." News organizations somehow didn't perceive this as "news." But that is a common fate of things that truly matter: Richard Nixon subverting the Constitution, supertankers destroying the oceans, the marketing of oral contraceptives before it was known if they were safe, the rivers of blood at unsafe work sites.

Manhattantown was a Robert Moses Title I urban renewal housing project. It required the razing of six square blocks of

tenements and old apartment houses on the Upper West Side. Slums? Yes, in the sense of dwellings that were old and dilapidated. But not by other yardsticks. They were clean, racially integrated, "stable, settled, friendly." The people—3,628 families—"had a sense of community, of neighborhood..." Their rents were low. The transportation was good. Drugs? A scourge in Harlem—but not here. Moses got those families out. Brutally. The eviction notices weren't even mailed; they were tacked up on the entrances: "DEMOLITION OF THIS BUILDING WILL BE STARTED AT ONCE. TENANTS MUST VACATE. FOR INFORMATION CALL RELOCATION OFFICER, COR. OF WEST 100th STREET."

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During the 1930s... [Moses] built 255 playgrounds in New York City—but only one in Harlem.

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The city government had pledged that "tenants will not be evicted from the site of a public improvement unless and until quarters equivalent to those occupied are available." Moses was the supposed instrument of the pledge. For years he managed to create the impression that it was being honored. Of course it wasn't. Moses also

had been giving the impression that he had taken great pains to assure every evictee "decent, safe, and sanitary" living quarters. When the Planning Commission staffers obtained access to files on tenants for whom relocation responsibility had been "discharged," they found that more than a third of the files—for some projects, more than half—were marked: "Disappeared—whereabouts unknown." *Disappeared!* Moses *couldn't* know that the living quarters into which his projects had forced tens of thousands of persons were "decent, safe, and sanitary." He couldn't know *what* the new living quarters were like. He didn't even know where these living quarters *were*.

It was not the press that tried to find out what had happened to the families evicted for Manhattantown, just as it was not the press that bothered to make the same elemental inquiry in other cities. In New York it was the Women's City Club that did it.

The club decided to do what no newspaper, government agency or other civic group had done before: study relocation on a Title I site (they selected Manhattantown) in detail—on the site.

No whispers prepared the club's young women for what they found... And in the buildings—people still lived. Visiting these people—entering these shells of buildings, shrinking perhaps past the huddled wreckage of a man that lay in the doorway, stepping into a dim hallway filled with the stench of urine and vomit and, in its shadows, a vague menace, stumbling up unlit flights of

stairs that had steps missing, grasping for a banister that wasn't there—was an unnerving experience for these women. Mrs. Eliner Black recalls a man on the street shouting earnestly as she opened the door to one tenement: "Don't go in there, lady! It's not safe to go in there."

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## News organizations somehow didn't perceive things that truly matter as news.

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The people living in these places—the people Moses was “helping”—were living in them “because they had no place else to go. Their only alternative was the abyss.” The club issued a detailed, far-ranging report. It told the full story—documented, referenced, solid—of what was happening to people under Title I. It was therefore a threat to Moses. To get it out in a way that would command attention, reformers sought to have it issued under the imprimatur of the City Planning Commission. There, however, Moses managed to stall it. While it was stalled, he rewrote it. He “removed key statements,” modified others to change their meaning; “false statistics were inserted;” relocation procedures were transformed into “a noteworthy achievement for which credit was due.” More than nine months later, after the *Post* had been charging suppression for weeks, a majority of the commissions adopted the report as rewritten by Moses. The minority commissioners uncontrolled by Moses were so furious that the majority allowed them to append a minority report retaining most of the Women’s Club’s original findings. Now a snow job was needed. The snow man was Samuel I. Rosenman, special counsel to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, president of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. Moses issued a statement: Relocation had been “successful.” Tenants have been spared “unnecessary hardships.” A large number of “slum, substandard and unsanitary buildings have been cleared and have been demolished.” Soon, “new, safe, sanitary buildings will rise.” The statement, said Caro, “possessed rhythm, punch—everything but the truth.” But a reporter seeking the facts now would be confronted with two conflicting sets—and would not know that it was the one with cachet that was false. But

reporters were not trying to find out the facts. Their publishers and the editors who carried out the publishers’ wishes made sure of that . . . The public at large hardly knew about [the minority report]—because it was hardly told about it . . . The *Times* did not even bother to mention the relocation controversy until the seventh paragraph . . . Of the city’s newspapers, only the *Post* devoted any substantial space to the relocation facts so laboriously uncovered. The reformers had provided the city’s press with facts that disproved the statements by Moses and other city officials from the Mayor on down that the press had been

printing for months. If the city’s press was unable—or unwilling—to obtain for itself ammunition to shoot holes in the curtain of secrecy surrounding the relocation of tenants on the vast Title I sites, it no longer had to do so. The ammunition had been stacked up, ready for its use, by others. But the press did not use it. The fate of poor people had never been news in New York City; it still was not news.

Scandal is the great catalyst of journalism. The need for the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 had existed for decades: each year, thousands or tens of thousands were being needlessly killed, and hundreds of thousands needlessly injured. But what got the law was scandal—General Motors caught harassing and snooping on Ralph Nader. What got Richard Nixon was a scandal: a stupid burglary at Democratic National Committee headquarters stupidly executed, detection, the bad luck to have reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein put on the story, the worse luck to have them backed up by *The Washington Post*, a cover-up, a cover-up of the cover-up, etc. And what finally set up Robert Moses for dethronement was scandal—although the New York press pushed it aside for years.

After months of investigation, the Senate Banking and Currency Committee on October 1, 1954, held a hearing, in New York City, on Manhattantown. By late afternoon, the committee had made it a matter of public record—privileged public record, so that a newspaper drawing from it need not fear a libel suit—that Moses, on behalf of the city, had handed Samuel Caspert, Manhattantown’s ostensible founder and “a Democratic clubhouse figure,” real estate worth \$15 million for \$1 million; that of the 338 buildings that were required to have been demolished by the date of the hearing, “about 280 buildings were still standing, their tenants still paying rents;” and that “not one brick had been laid for any new buildings—and that not one piece of financing for new construction had been obtained,” and that Caspert and his partners had made huge profits off the buildings still standing. In one deal, Manhattantown sold all of the gas stoves and refrigerators in the tenements to a corporation headed by Caspert’s son-in-law for \$33,000. Manhattantown then rented the appliances right back; that is, it paid for the privilege of using what it had owned. The rental fees were such that the son-in-law’s corporation, in less than a year, after all expenses, earned \$115,326.37. “At the end of the year, Manhattantown bought back the stoves and refrigerators for the same amount it had sold them: \$33,000.”

Robert Moses had conceived the Manhattantown project. He had directed its planning. He had selected the cast of characters who ran it. He had shifted the cast around when the political winds in the city shifted. It was a Robert Moses project from beginning to end. The *Times* story did not mention Robert Moses once. The other papers followed suit. His name was hardly mentioned; no editorials called for his removal.



Over the next eighteen months, protests and questions about Title I projects mounted in New York. There were many rumors about the men to whom Moses had handed over much of the program. At least six public and civic agencies, including the Women's City Club, made new investigations and surveys of relocation. Except for the *Post*, the press gave all of this " cursory treatment." It did not even track the scent of the bigger scandal left by the Senate hearing: "Manhattantown was one Title I project; there were ten others then under way in the city—one of them, in fact, also run by Samuel Caspert and friends."

Not one investigative reporter was assigned to probe further into Manhattantown or Title I. Some reporters wanted to, but were refused permission, in some cases probably because of their publishers' admiration for Moses, in most cases simply because it seemed to editors a waste of time: where Moses was involved, they felt, there would be no scandal to be found; trying to find it would be a misuse of manpower that could be more profitably employed investigating politicians or bureaucrats.

In 1956 Robert Moses was caught desecrating Central Park, converting a glen into a parking lot. Caught not by the poor, the blacks, the Puerto Ricans, the inarticulate, the helpless; not by the neighborhood spokesmen who almost never were able to get a citywide daily newspaper or a television or radio station to cover their protests of the projects of Robert Moses. No, he was caught this time by the well-educated and the well-heeled who loved the glen and who, with a single series of rapid-fire phone calls, were able to get reporters and photographers to the scene from all the major papers, four television stations, and seven radio stations. Mothers, in a brilliant media tactic, had turned out with their baby carriages to confront the bulldozer. Beauty and the Beast. *Page one!* And there it stayed for weeks. At the *Times*, "the brilliant conservationist John Oakes was taking a more active role on the editorial page," and behold! there appeared on April 20, 1956, an editorial that, while perpetuating the Moses myth, said he was wrong to destroy "sacred land" for a parking lot for diners at the Tavern-on-the-Green.

The contrast between the non-responses of the press to the hundreds of thousands of people who were devastated by Robert Moses and the tumultuous coverage of his devastation of a lovely glen is part of a larger phenomenon, one that would later surface on a large and ugly scale in Southeast Asia. Frances FitzGerald, author of *Fire in the Lake: Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam*, was distressed by press coverage of the war in Indochina. One reason for her distress, she said in an essay after the war ended, was that:

Whether taking its lead from Administration officials or from rather deeper currents in American society, the press never altered its perspective on the Indochinese . . . No more at the end

of the war than at its beginning did Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao casualties figure in the same calculation with American dead and wounded: We all know that 55,000 Americans died in the war, but how many ARVN soldiers died in American-made uniforms?

Then, too, the press rarely reported what Saigon government officials or opposition leaders said. Had journalists reported what Ngo Dinh Diem said, had they given him as much space as they gave Robert McNamara (who, after all, knew very little about Vietnam), the Kennedy administration might have had a good deal of difficulty raising support for sending American aid and advisors to Vietnam. But the war to the press was exclusively an American venture, and so it remained until—mysteriously—there were no more Americans in Vietnam. In 1973, a "South Vietnamese official" told Sylvan Fox of the *Times* that Nixon had promised Thieu that the United States would intervene immediately if the Communists committed any blatant violations of the cease-fire. The story of the secret agreement became a big one—but not until two years later when an American gave it out.

When in the 1950s Robert Moses was destroying the homes of the poor and the helpless for his projects and relocating them by the hundreds of thousands into abject misery, he was able to ignore their protests because they were powerless, just as our forces in Vietnam could relocate whole populations in Vietnam from their ancestral homes into squalid camps and ignore their protests because they, too, were powerless. But now, up in Central Park, Moses at last had to fight news sources and persons, not blacks, Puerto Ricans, and neighborhood spokesmen who could not get press attention. And so he regrouped.

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**"Moses *couldn't* know that the living quarters into which his projects had forced tens of thousands of persons were 'decent, safe, and sanitary.' . . . He didn't even know where these living quarters *were*."**

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Then, "in after-midnight darkness, when the enemy's sentries had been withdrawn for the night," he struck. "At 0130 hours on April 24 . . . a hand-picked Park Department platoon headed by a gardener first class moved into the glen, hammered steel stakes into the ground around its perimeter and wired them to a 'snow fence' of wooden slats, about four feet high, strung on wires . . . By the time daylight revealed the scene to the apartments above, and the first of the mothers came running into the park, the bulldozer had pushed over a big maple tree and Park Department axmen were chopping it into small pieces."

"And the media went wild." *The World-Telegram's* lead story fumed about the "sneak attack," the *Post's* about Moses' "brilliant victory" over "a small band of women and children." Photos of women weeping as trees fell around them



appeared on the front page of each of the dailies but *The Herald Tribune* and the *Times*. The television newscasts “were, if possible, even more dramatic.” Now that the public was seeing, *really seeing* Moses, it raised hell. The newspapers got letters by the thousands. Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. got close

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The statement, said Caro, “possessed rhythm, punch—everything but the truth.”

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to four thousand on a single day. The press followed up. The tavern for which Moses was destroying the glen turned out to be only for the well-to-do: it charged—in 1956—\$4.50 for a hamburger and a glass of beer. Its operator, Arnold Schleiffer, an old favorite of Robert Moses, had struck a deal under which he had, in four years, greased \$1,786,000 on public land and had paid the city only \$9,000—half of one percent—for the use of that land. This was “a typical Moses arrangement,” made by the man who “had been boasting that he had ended all favoritism to concessionaires, and for more than twenty years, the press had been repeating and amplifying that boast, and ignoring Issacs’ [Stanley F. Issacs, a former borough president and intrepid liberal reformer] attempts to present them with the facts that would have disproved it. But this time, when Issacs talked, the press was listening.” When the Battle of Central Park had ended, no one who had followed it closely “could believe any longer that Robert Moses was in public life solely to serve the public. It had been all too obvious that what he wanted was to be not the public’s servant, but its master, to be able to impose his will on it.” In this changed perception of Moses lay the beginnings of his accountability. Before the battle, Gene Gleason, investigative reporter for *The New York World-Telegram and Sun*, would have been turned down had he proposed investigating Robert Moses; now he was turned loose.

The Tavern-on-the-Green concession contract spelled immense profits for someone, Gleason explained. And that was just one contract; Moses in his many different governmental roles was the author of scores—hundreds probably—of contracts. *World-Telegram* rewriter, Fred J. Cook recalls the reporter saying: “This is the most powerful s.o.b. in the city. If this is so bad at the tip of the iceberg, there must be more.”

Gleason decided to focus on Title I, his interest having been piqued a few months earlier by a *Post* series in which Joe Kahn reported that almost two years after the Senate Banking Committee’s Manhattantown hearings, the only development on the site was a parking lot. The first major result was a series, researched by Gleason and written by Cook, that showed Title I

to fuel “the cycle of overcrowding and bad housing that creates slums;” most importantly, the series did not emulate the press habit of referring to the Title I program as the “city’s,” but “made sure that readers understood it was the city’s Slum Clearance Committee, Robert Moses, chairman.” But *World-Telegram* management hardly covered itself with glory: it put only one of the seven articles in the series on page one, it ignored the series on the editorial page, it kept Moses’ name out of the headlines on the pieces, and, in a sure sign of panic, it apprised Moses in advance of the contents of each article—and gave him space each day to write an attack on the Gleason-Cook stories.

Still, the series ran; and, as investigative reporting frequently does, it flushed out volunteers with all kinds of tips, leads, and information.

And the two journalists’ telephones began humming with calls—some anonymous, some not, some from private individuals, many from officials up to and including a liberal Bronx Congressman—revealing the secrets of the Moses operation: the politicians who were the real interests behind his “front men” developers, the deals that had been made with city agencies to immunize these developers from health laws.

The officials Gleason talked to were terrified, believing their phones were tapped; he met them “after dark, in their automobiles or in out-of-the-way bars,” just as Bob Woodward later would meet Deep Throat in a parking garage. He found that the developer of Manhattantown, Samuel Caspert, was also the developer of Pratt Institute Housing in Brooklyn. There he found, and Cook wrote about, “a ninety-two-year-old woman huddling in blankets and an overcoat in an apartment in which a thermometer registered 40.5 degrees and about a mother who hadn’t been able to give her two little boys a bath all winter because there hadn’t been any hot water . . .” And Gleason also

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Scandal is the great catalyst of journalism.

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found that the Title I developers, the Moses men who had reaped fortunes from such misery, were nearly \$1 million delinquent in taxes and interest owed the city. *The World-Telegram* printed the stories, but remained far from fully supportive. Other dailies “were in general picking up the Gleason-Cook stories only to allow [Mayor] Wagner to deny them.” A day after Gleason and Cook reported that tenants at the Pratt site were freezing, and that the Department of Health had done nothing about it because of a secret agreement with the Slum Clearance Committee, the *Times* straight-facedly said that “the Department of Health reported yesterday that tenants awaiting relocation from slum-clearance sites had been getting more heat and better sanitary services as a result of its

crackdown on five developers." The story repeated without qualification the following lie:

Robert Moses, chairman of the Slum Clearance Committee, said his agency, which is in charge of Title I development, had made no deal with the Health Department. He said he had told all developers they must obey all city regulations.

"The *Times* did, on May 26, run one long story on Title I; the headline read: 'CITY LEADS NATION IN SLUM CLEARING.' " Thus did the *Times* equate news with what Robert Moses said; and when the war in Southeast Asia came along, the press generally let presidents, secretaries of Defense and State, and, in the case of television, "action" determine the agenda for news coverage. "Whom is the 'responsible' American press being responsible to—the government or the American public at large?" Frances FitzGerald asked. "Possibly the press can change, but it is a bad sign that, like the Ford administration, it had not stopped to review its own role in the Indochina war."

Nor did the "responsible" press—in New York; in Washington, where the vast Southwest sector was levelled; or anywhere else, as far as I know—ever stop to review its role in, among many things, Title I.

Except for Gleason and Cook. They went on finding and reporting corruption and linking it to politics—and to Moses. "By March 1958 the circle had tightened to a point at which Gleason and Cook were able to print that 'Moses man' William S. Lebowitz, the director of Moses' Slum Clearance Committee, was a stockholder in the Nassau Management Company, a real estate firm that had been set up on a shoestring just three years before—and that during those three years it had collected, largely for tenant relocation on Moses' slum clearance and highway projects, fees totaling \$2,250,000" *The World-Telegram*, nervous about continuing to be alone out front, day after day edited out of Cook's stories his key point: "a Robert Moses aide had received immensely lucrative contracts from Robert Moses without competitive bidding." The stories would appear on, say, page twenty-seven. The myths surrounding Moses had been created on page one; and that was where the papers continued to publish stories on his triumphs, such as the Throgs Neck and Verrazano Bridges. While Gleason and Cook "had been trying to blacken his name, it had, instead, been enshrined, forever, in concrete and steel and imperishable pieces of the public domain."

The Gleason and Cook stories might—probably would—have made the front pages, along with Moses' triumphs, had other papers picked up their stories. But the other papers didn't. Thus critical reporting of Robert Moses—like critical reporting of Richard Nixon for months after the Watergate break-in—did not acquire the essential "respectability." And so the

momentum briefly provided by competition in the Battle of Central Park was lost.

The frustrations of it all would have stopped almost any newsmen but Gleason and Cook. Each was superbly skilled, the first as investigator, the second as writer; each was *caring*—hating injustice. A colleague wrote of Gleason that "nothing halts him. Time is of no consequence: he will work 24 hours without thought of rest. Weather never daunts him: he has sloshed through rain, crawled through snow, braved bitter cold and sweated through oppressive heat . . . No one awes him." Cook, over-worked handling routine stories in a typically understaffed Scripps-Howard shop, found his bosses "never wanted to give me any time" for the Moses stories, "so I just had to keep them going myself, as a side effort, so to speak." Caro said: "During the 1950s few journalists—even the most liberal—criticized the FBI; in a brilliant article for *The Nation*, Cook criticized the FBI. At the very height of the storm of invective against Alger Hiss, Cook wrote a book defending Alger Hiss. And by 1959, Cook had come to care quite deeply about Title I."

I used to get these phone calls. I remember there was this drug-gist . . . He had a little store in the Washington Square area for twenty-five years, and all they were offering him was \$750 for his fixtures, and he had just paid \$15,000 for them, and when he tried to get to see someone about them, they wouldn't even listen to him . . . There were dozens of calls like that. Dozens. They were too small fry for anyone to listen to them. I had this deep sense of injustice. I felt I knew Moses. The son of a bitch doesn't give a good goddamn about people, and he never did. The power brokers care only about power and who the hell the little human beings are who get trampled in their game doesn't mean a hoot in hell to them.

Despite their frustrations, Gleason and Cook—Moses called them "guttersnipes"—kept at it. They saw Moses ramming through new projects that destroyed more neighborhoods, they saw him presiding "with a grim smile of triumph at ribbon cuttings," and they saw *The World-Telegram* losing interest in their work. When that happens, Cook said, when the paper "doesn't play these things, the well sort of dries up, you know." By the early winter of 1959, "we were pretty much dead."

But only in *The World-Telegram*. There was, they decided, one hope for keeping the Moses-Title I story going: sharing Gleason's hard-earned information with a competitor.

Only the *Post* would give Gleason's information the play it deserved and invest the time and energy necessary to dig out its own, and there was a *Post* reporter, thirty-one-year-old William J. Haddad, who had already proven, in sensational exposés of City Building Department malpractice, that he possessed all Gleason's toughness and tenacity—in addition to the rare ability to discern patterns in seemingly unrelated facts, to identify the locus, not just the symptoms of corruption.

Luckily, Haddad and Gleason already were friends. Gleason gave him information, and Haddad was soon writing stories based on it. The *Post*'s stories had the effect on Gleason's city desk that he had known they would; his editors got interested in Title I again—even more so because Gleason was able to provide them with new leads, given him by Haddad. For Haddad quickly arrived at the same realization as Cook and Gleason. "We found out very early that it had to be a joint effort," he says. "It would never go—it would rise and die in one paper—unless another paper picked it up. Then the TV would pick it up, and then the political authorities would start to react—that was the carbohydrate that made it work." Soon, like two flamenco dancers spurring each other to wilder and wilder efforts, Haddad and Gleason were both helping and striving to outdo each other, their stories picking up and taking off from each other's and hitting harder and harder. As the tempo accelerated, moreover, the tipsters joined in again, a whole chorus of disgruntled bureaucrats who realized that this time there was a real chance that someone would print their information.

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***The World-Telegram*, nervous about continuing to be alone, out front, day after day edited out of Cook's stories his key point . . . The stories would appear on, say, page 27.**

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The *Post* and *The World-Telegram* were afternoon papers; soon the third afternoon, *The New York Journal-American*, could no longer ignore the banner headlines of its rivals day after day and began printing Title I stories. Then *The Herald Tribune* joined in. The pooling continued and rippled wider, to include *The Village Voice* and almost daily meetings with Hortense Gabel, a valiant reformer and the only city official openly willing to help them.

The press of the city awake at last! Fred Cook exulted, and he was right. The press had not been awakened by its owners (with the exception of the *Post*'s Dorothy Schiff, of course) or by its top editors (with the exception of the *Post*'s James Wechsler, of course). It had been awakened by its reporters, not by its famous reporters but by young unknown staff writers scheming together to force publishers and editors to do what the young men felt was their duty. But it was awake.

There followed the Second Battle of Central Park—over a foolish, vindictive decision by Moses man Stuart Constable to try to stop Joseph Papp's Shakespeare in the Park—in which the press inflicted painful new wounds on Moses, who steadfastly took the blame while apparently disapproving of what Constable had done and accepting defeat with rare grace. During the hullabaloo the *Times* assigned Wayne Phillips to investigate Title I. Gleason, Haddad, Joe Kahn, and other reporters, aided by a puzzling decision by Moses to make certain hitherto secret records available, meanwhile kept

producing a torrent of Title I revelations. On June 1, 1959, the *Times* on page one carried a story saying that a redevelopment plan proposed by Robert Moses "calls for the payment of nearly \$400,000 for land that the owners had offered for nothing." On June 26, the *Times* began a four-part series in which Phillips brought the Title I revelations together in unified form, showing that city's slum-clearance program "in all its shocking dimensions. The entrance of the *Times* also gave the Title I exposé a new respectability, the cachet conferred by the newspaper's reputation for accuracy." But the paper was schizophrenic: it printed Moses' objections to the series not in the "Letters to the Editor," but as *news*—raising doubts about the credibility of the series. When Moses threatened Mayor Wagner with a resignation, an old Moses gambit, the *Times* editorial sounded as if nothing had changed: "Our confidence in Mr. Moses as an honest, incomparably able public servant is unshaken. His resignation from any office would be an irreparable loss. Where is his equal?" But disenchantment soon would set in at the *Times* as Moses kept attacking—and as Phillips and a fellow reporter, Charles Grutzner, and reporters at the other papers, kept turning up new material.

The Incorruptible, Uncorrupting, Apolitical, Utterly Selfless Public Servant Moses had been a synthetic character, largely puffed up by the press. That character had endured for thirty-five years. But in 1959 the process of deflation by the press—a process that had been going on intermittently for several years—had begun in earnest. In that process there had been a large amount of unfairness. But that process had in the end arrived at the truth. At the beginning of 1959, the Moses image had stood in most of its glory, intact except for a few small chips. At the end of 1959, it lay in unsalvageable ruins.

So did the lives of scores of people over whom, during those thirty-five years, he had asserted unaccountable power. And so did much of Fun City.

## Coming

The Press Overseas:  
healthy or ailing?

What do foreign  
Nieman Fellows say?

# How Television Reports Conflicts: Observations of an Unhappy Practitioner

by Zvi Dor-Ner

## The Nature of the Beast

First, let me be repetitious. Television is bad for you. It wastes your time, making love and happiness banal, suffering and violence trivial. We complain about this state of affairs, though we know that the purpose of television is not to provide good programs (what an idea) but to supply the greatest number of viewers for commercials.

While television is bad it is also influential. It provides the largest portion of the world's information diet. An American child spends more time in front of television than with other kids or teachers. In Japan more than half of the kids questioned said that they loved television better than their fathers. (Whom do you love most? Mamasan, papasan, or Sonysan?) Those who service appliances know that malfunctioning televisions are not tolerated. Families will endure dry faucets and blocked toilets but not a blank screen.

Violence is a great TV attraction. It comes in many forms and in different disguises, both as entertainment and as news. Although the people who make commercials don't admit it, the selling of violence as a solution to both private and national problems is not much different than selling detergents to solve sexual problems.

## Reporting Conflicts

As traditionally done, television reporting of conflicts is motivated in part by the medium's attraction to violence. In this sense, reporting violence is self-serving and tends to exacerbate conflicts. Living and working in an area of protracted and violent conflicts, I am both a consumer and a newsman. As a consumer, I am a real addict; my day is structured to maximize intake of news. Since I am in the business, my preoccupation is usually seen as legitimate. It is as legitimate as the need for a fix. As an addict, I feel well-qualified to tell you about it.

I was exposed to some of the problems of covering conflicts in June 1968, on one of my first assignments for Israeli television, which had been created one month earlier. As a cameraman I was filming the Arab demonstrations in the old city of Jerusalem on the first anniversary of the Six Day War. A group of young Arabs carrying palm leaves, a tribute to the fallen Arab soldiers, was attempting to cross through the Lion's Gate to a makeshift memorial outside the walls of the old city. Soon I

found myself between the line of policemen with shields and clubs and the demonstrators, who had stopped at the sight of the police. I was painfully aware that my Arri-BL camera with a front brace would slow me down if I had to run and would make ducking impossible.

It took a while to realize that my presence there had turned a few dozen purposeful people into a cast of dramatic production. Whenever I turned the camera on the demonstrators, they would shout angrily, wave the palm branches and advance a few steps. When I turned the camera on the police, an order would be given. They would stamp out their cigarettes, straighten their line, and march forward a few steps.

Both sides had spokesmen. The police sergeant wanted to be interviewed, to tell me "No comment," as he was instructed. The self-elected leader of the demonstrators wanted to recite one version of the Arab-Israeli history. For the sake of peace—mine and theirs—I stopped filming and left the scene, followed by some of the kids in the demonstration. When I drove by later, the demonstration was over and the policemen were playing soccer.

If we ignore the general validity of the demonstration, it is obvious that somebody was being manipulated. It is harder to say who and for what purpose. As far as I could judge, neither the Arabs nor the Israelis wanted violence (in that particular incident) but they would have bashed each other, with dedication, for my—the viewer's—benefit.

## Let You and Him Play For Us

Other conflicts, more civilized, such as an American election, are increasingly run for and by the television. During the last presidential campaign, I heard a CBS radio report from Philadelphia where Carter had arrived on the traditional Democratic whistle-stop train campaign. The reporter explained, seriously, that this form of campaigning is very efficient, allowing the candidates to meet face-to-face with a large number of people. The reporter also noticed that many of the people at the station were upset because a platform for

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television cameras was placed between them and the train, preventing face-to-face contact. The only way one could have this traditional experience was to watch it on television news that evening. It was designed for television, not the immediate audience.

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**. . . the purpose of television is not to provide good programs . . . but to supply the greatest number of viewers for commercials.**

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The demonstrators in Jerusalem and the organizers in Philadelphia knew, intuitively perhaps, that press and television do not reflect conflicts but are conflicts' principal arena. A long time before war becomes hot, flags and slogan are deployed, issues are defined, demarcation lines are drawn, affiliation and commitment are established on the nightly news and the front page.

The participants in such events are all taking part in a staged act for the benefit of a third party. They are acting out the traditional role of adversaries and the press is acting out the roles of stage and author (if one can be both animate and inanimate).

Are such events news? Are they newsworthy pseudo-events? One can be sure that the volume of these "things" will grow in scope, sophistication and number. Some of them, like the presidential debates, are extremely useful. Others are outright deceptive. To differentiate, to identify events for what they are, not to serve as an instrument for wrong ends, calls for some new sensitivities. Primarily, it requires an acknowledgement that the press is subjective and selective and therefore has the responsibility to exercise judgment. Recognizing that by its existence the press is manipulative, we must be certain that we use this ability legitimately.

### The Tools and the Tradition

Active participation in stirring up conflicts is rooted in both journalistic practice and tradition and in the tools of the profession. A reporter, asked to identify what constitutes a news story, will respond in terms of current happenings, change, interest, impact, importance to community, etc. In reality, identifying and gathering news resembles a search for a wallet by a man who, having lost it in one corner of the park, looks for it in another under the street light because he can't see in the dark.

The selection of news to be covered is more than anything a product of bureaucratic and logistic consideration, tradition and convention. Journalists and the news organizations have neither organizational framework nor time and clearly no

intention to evaluate, compare, and rank news stories. The image projected by news organizations of some sanctified objective process is absurd.

The most acute shortcomings are in the process of identifying news stories. There is an infinite number of happenings every moment, and they don't come designated with stars as items on the wire service printouts. In this most important aspect, the press is almost totally dependent on government and institutions' spokesmen. During the Fourth of July weekend, on the last day, the news is devoted totally to crimes, sports, and weather. There is no political news because the government and its spokesmen are on vacation.

In a conflict situation the stream of information is intended to influence the public in a direction considered worthy; lacking research facilities, journalists depend on calculated briefings and even more on calculated leaks. Often secrecy and censorship are used for the purpose of manipulation.

The successful Entebbe operation, carried out in total secrecy, promoted such a struggle for credit on the part of military and politicians that all the details were revealed, including some that were of acute embarrassment to a friendly government. On the other hand, a military operation of different dramatic impact but of equal strategic importance against El-Fath in Karame is still veiled in secrecy because it was such an abysmal failure.

### By Hook and By Crook

Not only is the system of identifying news imperfect, but also the tools of television coverage and its logistics contribute to a coverage of conflict which selects the most destructive elements. The principal concern of the television journalist is not with content but with logistics. Can I get to the site? Will I have adequate light to shoot? Can I get the necessary papers, permission, and paraphernalia? Will I be able to ship the material out in time? As a result, many important stories are not covered. Open societies are penalized; many critical stories come out of democratic and free societies and few out of

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**. . . the selling of violence as a solution to both private and national problems is not much different than selling detergents to solve sexual problems.**

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totalitarian ones. It is a source of enlightening frustration for most journalists to realize that the freedom of the press is a by-product of democracy, not a guarantee of it.

The principle concern of the cameraman covering a news situation is to get a vivid picture. He thrives on situations



packed with action. The best are willing to risk their lives for such pictures; others are happy when others risk their lives to provide them; still others, like a cameraman in Boston recently accused of arson, are willing to sacrifice somebody else's life for vivid and very commercial (hot) footage. He knows that this is the kind of footage that gets on the news.

The editor has similar preoccupations. From the stories which are shot he will try to select (in a ratio of about 1:20) the material which has the most action and energy. He will try to create a structure of drama and conflict. A long and drawn out process will be compacted and simplified.

Time is a serious constraint for all reporters. The average duration of a television news item does not exceed one minute. Since many subjects cannot be adequately reported in such a time, reporters prefer to choose, therefore, subjects that can. In addition, this time limitation forces the reporter to select the strongest and most belligerently unqualified declarations, and to use people and events as symbols (a crying baby, insensitive police, rebelling students, agony and ecstasy, etc.).

The constant struggle of the journalist is to identify differences, to point to areas of contention, to amplify extreme statements, and to show violent behavior. Most journalists are competitive; they want desperately to produce an item that will get into the very finite half hour of national news. They need real awareness and conviction not to play this game. All of these concerns combine: The casualness of news gathering and the need to create a story which is brief and vivid make any violent eruption a real find. Such eruptions are news by any definition—they have all the attributes necessary to make great news items.

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**... reporting violence is self-serving and tends to exacerbate conflicts.**

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Terror is an example. TV news organizations have been known to be willing participants in transactions in which terrorists supply acts of great excitement (vivid and brief) in exchange for publicity.

The Symbionese Liberation Army, with a dozen members and a screwy ideology, for two years received more coverage than I.T.&T.—that is absurd. The Baader-Meinhof gang has on occasion directed the news coverage of the German TV network, including placement of the camera and transmission of dictated statements.

In the rush of excitement it is easy to forget how politically ineffectual terror is. While the Angolan Liberation Front, without terror, made it from colony to statehood, Yasir Arafat—with some spectacular deeds—made it to the UN. No big improvement for the Palestinians, but one hell of a TV show.

## Who Suffers?

The result is an ignorance on the part of the relatively sophisticated public. At one of the first receptions of the Nieman year, the hostess actually apologized to me for entertaining me at the same time as another Nieman, a journalist from Lebanon. Later on, I often had to assure people that I liked him personally and valued his opinion. It was obvious that we were expected to punch each other, or at least demonstrate hostility.

There is nothing in the news coming from the Middle East that would suggest that the Arabs and the Israelis have a large number of common values (the least is civility), a great deal of common tradition, similar aspirations and desires, and in Israel share in the trappings of everyday life such as buses, restaurants, and often friendships. In the accepted editorial judgment, to transmit information suggesting that Arabs and Israelis can cooperate would run contrary to the need of having a "vivid" item. The reality of shared values and common interests is sacrificed for the dramatic value of "unbridgeable" conflicts.

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**... press and television do not reflect conflicts but are conflicts' principal arena.**

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In the case of the American coverage of the Middle East, the danger is that the kind of ignorance described before becomes the grassroots motivational base for American foreign policy. Here where American diplomatic involvement could produce some good, the spirit of media coverage creates an attitude that "the Arabs and Israelis deserve each other." Stereotyped and simplistic thinking are coming to represent reality. In this kind of situation, there is a lot to be said for ignorance.

## My Country...

During the October War, the Israeli television's military correspondent produced throughout very emotional and courageous reports covering the paratrooper units that crossed the Suez Canal and moved toward Ismaalia. A few weeks later the same man was covering the Turkish airborne attack on Cyprus. I talked with him on the telephone when he was at the Ledra Palace Hotel in Nicosia. And while I could hear the explosions over the phone, he told me I would never know what a pleasure it was to cover somebody else's war. Journalists covering conflicts in which their own nation is involved are very much aware that they are combatants of a sort, that they have a commitment to their country, they want to understand their side, to appreciate its sacrifice, its fears, and its rights. This plays very much into the interests of government. The government is concerned, and justly so, more with preparing people for war than

with creating an attitude that will be conducive to the process of peace. There is an immediate punishment for promoting peaceful attitudes if war erupts. The opposite can be managed more easily.

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## The principal concern of the television journalist is not with content but with logistics.

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Journalists, together with teachers, are creators of the national consensus—the rough collage of ideas, attitudes, and ideology that constitutes the national agreement on issues. In times of peace, national consensus becomes wide and flexible; in times of conflict, it becomes rigid and narrow. This is unfortunate. The needs are the reverse. When keeping an open mind is a necessity, there is less and less information to sustain such receptivity. In conflict situations it is easy for journalists to ignore their responsibility to question assumptions and explore alternatives; instead they act in favor of their nation's "morale."

### Us Versus Them

Invariably most journalists will tend to look at the given conflict as US versus THEM. The US versus THEM viewpoint can come in a wide variety of forms and many degrees of sophistication. But the end result is a creation of polarity, mistrust, and fear. You will recognize these messages as shared by media on many sides of many conflicts:

- We are reasonable and honest; they are absurd, infamous liars; we cannot believe them at all, but we believe them when they say that the world would be much better without us.
- We are sensitive and hurt easily; they are like the mythical Hydra: they have nine heads and in fact enjoy it when somebody engages in the thankless task of cutting because they can grow immediately two for every one cut.
- We have a long history; they are riffraff.
- They don't appreciate the things we are fighting about; therefore, we deserve to win.
- They have such a different standard (all they want is loose shoes, a warm outhouse). We are lofty and profound and continuously think of poetry.
- They would be better off to accept our solutions; for us to accept theirs amounts to suicide. Why can't they see it our way?
- Their leaders are disreputable, terrorists, and war-mongers; ours are peace-loving freedom fighters.
- They conquer; we liberate.
- We might not be totally right; they are totally wrong.
- We have a responsibility to our children, to future

generations, to history; they should let us fulfill our responsibilities because they don't have such things as children or history.

- Our religion is truer than theirs; our God is bigger—even if he's the same one.

If such communications continue for long, "truth" becomes self-evident, assumptions solidify, and open-mindedness becomes an empty phrase. Even without formal limitations, journalists in such situations develop a potent form of self-censorship which prevents them from questioning the wisdom of the US and THEM division.

More important, the perceptions of both peoples grow so far apart that they become impossible to reconcile. They use different names, different terminology, know different facts. They totally distrust one another.

At this stage they give up on trying to convince each other and divert their energies to convince third parties of their right. In the United States where every nationality has its own built-in ethnic lobby, the problem is especially acute. In the fight for the American public opinion, the sides forget that the first opinion they have to change is the opinion of the adversary, not the opinion of the Americans.

### Some Needs

This is the time to say that I am not a pacifist. I don't think that every conflict can be resolved peacefully, nor that all issues are negotiable. But mass media has responsibility that goes beyond the responsibility to its stockholders or its national

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## Stereotyped and simplistic thinking are coming to represent reality.

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consensus. It should cover conflicts in a way that does not accelerate them. Wherever a problem of communication is superimposed on other issues, it should use its good offices to begin useful communication between the conflicting sides.

There is no lack of worthy messages; assuming that these are appropriate to the situation let me suggest some:

- Slogans and conventional wisdom do not represent reality.
- The situation is complex, yet manageable (often war seems a neater solution than a complex, peaceful resolution).
- Both protagonists have problems they will have to solve together.
- The people and the leadership on both sides of the conflict are honest and believe themselves to be reasonable.
- There are practical things to be done (many, many small things) to improve the situation. Better journalism is one of them.

# Masses and Classes in Communication

by Richard C. Wald

I would like to discuss some aspects of mass communication both as an opposite to class communication, and as an object of value in itself. What I think we need is some sense of mass—what it is in a communication sense, how it can be defined aside from the absolutes of size (10 people are a class, 100 are a mass)—and some sense of its value to news people: To whom is it good and is it good for? Let me use a little history and a little interpretation to show that it's not as simple as the cliché put-down makes it.

Most likely it was the Egyptians who invented large-character wall posters, but they cut the characters into the stone, instead of painting on it. The intention was the same—to convey a message to the passerby. The messages were mainly about captains and kings, more or less as they are in China today, and the glyphs that are the alphabet evolved from pictures. If you've gone to the exhibition of King Tut's remains, you can easily learn to read the cartouche that spells his name in a very old rebus. The literary requirement is not of too high an order.

The pharaohs wanted to tell the world about their deeds, their honors, and their gods, and that was the way they did it. Literacy was probably no more widespread in those days than in these, but if you wanted something said exactly as you wanted it said, carving on the walls seemed the best mass instrument at hand. Word of mouth is pretty good, but it has that tendency that kings dislike, of getting a little unruly.

That was the mass medium four millenia ago. Not a huge amount has changed since then. The spoken word is still quicker and more widespread; the written word a little slower, a little more exact—and a little less available to all. But either can be a mass medium.

A mass medium, in its most elementary definition, needs to be *inclusive* (almost anyone seeing or hearing can understand it); it has to be ubiquitous (no complicated rules, efforts or costs to get at it); and it has to be unmediated (you don't need to have someone standing at your elbow telling you what it means, or which side is up, or giving you a long course in how to understand it).

A class medium is different. It is *exclusive* (some can be aware of it but can't understand it); it can be complicated of access (either the rules are tough or the costs are high or there's just a little of it); and it is mediated (you need a course of indoctrination before you can understand, someone has to teach it to you).

There are overlapping areas inside each definition, of course,

but essentially that's the difference between broadcasting and reading. But it isn't as simple as that, either.

The first mass medium was also the class medium: speech. Its elementary news aspect is rumor. It travels everywhere, it involves millions and it carries belief as few other things do. Whether the rumor is of the illness of kings in a heathen land or the disappearance of toilet paper from the supermarkets, its speed and its power are legendary.

It has always been so. The poems that are the Iliad and the Odyssey were a mass medium long before blind Homer shaped them into the talk, the distinctive, taught speech that was both marked by class knowledge and definitive of that knowledge. The elevated language he brought to the myths was a class, not a mass, language. His use of it, and learning that use, defined and extended the class.

Reading comes later. It has always been a kind of quirky business in our culture, going in and out of fashion with the eras. I'm not sure that everyone who read Socrates could have read Plato's Dialogues; and while Caesar wrote a soldier's prose about the Gallic Wars, you didn't have to read to be a Caesar.

Indeed, after the fall of Rome, the petty Caesars didn't read at all. Charlemagne was a poor hand at it and the people who could read, the clerks with ink-stained fingers, were *a* class, but definitely not *the* class of Europe for more than five centuries. Kings and princes and dukes and earls *did* things; priests and scribes *read* things, and a very workable division it was until schooling spoiled it. It's been a comparatively few generations since a gentleman's education went much beyond enough letters to read about hunting, fishing and shooting.

In the Middle Ages, indeed, stained glass windows may have been a main form of mass communication, after the spoken word. Twenty years ago at Chartres, it was possible to find ordinary country people who could see and distinguish individual figures in the Rose Window and tell their stories to visitors. For generations before, to illiterate farmers and townsmen, the windows were the wall paintings, the glorious inscriptions, that told the greatest story known. And they were about the only graphic way of telling it to them. Their bible shone on the walls. The pictures told a story that they could "read."

Before Gutenberg got to us all, I think people *heard* quicker. Those long, densely packed sermons of John Donne were delivered in services that never lasted very long because fashionable parishioners wouldn't stay. They were delivered at a speed that would probably defy comprehension today. But they were understood then.

*Richard C. Wald, president of NBC News and a member of the Nieman Advisory Committee, delivered the above address at the University of California, Riverside, last spring when he was the 1977 speaker for the Press-Enterprise Lecture Series. Founded in 1966, the intent of the series is to bring annually to the university someone of achievement and prominence in journalism.*

Shakespeare's plays probably played faster. The prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* talks of "our two hours' traffic on the stage," meaning that, intermissions and all, blank verse was going to go winging along and get the audience out in two hours. Our eyes have grown so used to reading that our ears don't hear that fast.

Gutenberg did get to us. In our culture, the printed word began gathering force at about the time of the American Revolution. Among those who framed the Constitution, literacy was so much assumed—and illiteracy was so much ignored—that what *we* think of as a concession to mass communications, the First Amendment, was in fact a concession to a small group of printers on behalf of a very few readers.

In 1776 the population of the 13 colonies was about 2,500,000 persons. Roughly half of them were literate. But the total circulation of the Colonial press was about 40,000. The press was powerful because it appealed to the class that was making the decisions and shaping the actions of the new nation. It was powerful because it was on the side of the winners, as well as the thinkers. But it wasn't powerful as a *mass* medium.

For print, the change from class to mass came at the end of the 19th century. In 1880, there were about 970 newspapers in the country with a total circulation of 3,500,000. Ten years later, there were 1,600 papers with 8,400,000 circulation. And in 1900, there were 2,000 papers and 15,000,000 circulation. The explosive growth was made possible by the perfection of the rotary press that could print that many copies, and the growth of the cities that made it possible to circulate vast numbers of papers in a fairly small area.

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**Word of mouth is pretty good, but it has a tendency that kings dislike, of getting a little unruly.**

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For the first time in modern consciousness, there was a split in perception between class and mass. The old readers and papers were not only *a* class in terms of exclusiveness, access and mediated communication; they were *the* class culturally and socially. They weren't the ink-stained wretches. They were the kings and the earls. And there was a real tendency to look down on the "penny press." In the eyes of the establishment, what Charles Dana and the others were doing was pandering to the most squalid tastes, for filthy gain. Also, the new press talked about politicians in a most disreputable way, conducted all sorts of campaigns against the organization of things as they were and generally behaved like newspapers.

It was a new era. Print took its profit and direction from the perceived needs of the people who bought the paper, not from factions with a party purpose to serve. The *intention* of publishing changed from talking to the best people or the right people,

to talking to the most people; and the professed idea of instruction or enlightenment gave way to the idea of entertainment. Nice people didn't like most reporters. The yellow press was read but not respected. When Will Rogers said he only believed what he read in the papers people laughed—because everyone knew that the papers would print *anything*.

What ultimately made the press respectable was probably World War II, when we were all joined in a great patriotic enterprise and newspapers were the place where you could learn of battlefronts and heroism and new measures to collect tin foil. We were in it together. And the papers were helping. And they became respectable. The war was also the beginning of radio as

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**The first mass medium was also the class medium: speech . . . Its speed and its power are legendary.**

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a news medium. It could bring you those events faster, with the actual sounds of battle. And the great commentators would explain what was happening in tones that commanded belief and trust. And at its end, television came awake.

Thus began the great massness of modern mass communication.

A wire service story that appears in most of the papers in the United States is a great example of talking to a mass. But that mass has to read it, and many can't read, many simply don't. The mass that can read has to buy the paper, and many can't, or simply don't. And the reading, buying, mass has to understand the story, simply written though it may be, and many can't or don't. They're looking for something else.

But in radio or television? Well, there are 72,869,000 households in "the lower 48," the area I'm describing. There are television sets in 97.4 percent of those homes. (There's indoor plumbing in 97 percent of them). And 45 percent of those homes have more than one television set. And there are more radios than people in the United States.

A wire service story that was spoken over most of those television sets and radios would have been heard by a far greater mass than would have read it. They've already paid for the set; and the electricity is cheap; and, true, a lot of them don't pay attention, and a lot misunderstand, and a lot don't speak the language well—but still, the mass is greater by far.

What is the consequence of such masses? What can news people say to them and what will they understand? What does it mean to have such an audience?

Obviously, nobody knows; else why have sociologists?

But from this vantage point in our history, there are a few things that seem to be true.

Look for a minute not at news but at the mass impact the turntable revolution has brought us. Maybe it came into focus



when the Beatles came upon us. They have sold more than 600,000,000 records world wide and they are still selling briskly. 600,000,000 *anything* is a lot.

In 1966, at one of the pinnacles of their fame, John Lennon was quoted as saying, "The Beatles are bigger than Jesus Christ." They were certainly outselling gospel singers. What is it they were saying? Well, their biggest selling single record, the first single recording to sell more than 10,000,000 copies, was "I Want to Hold Your Hand." I will quote to you the first two stanzas and the last:

Oh, yeah, I'll tell you something  
I think you'll understand.  
Then I'll say that something,  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND.  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND.  
Oh, please say to me  
and let me be your man,  
and please say to me  
you'll let me hold your hand.  
Now let me hold your hand  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND,

I say  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND  
Oh yeah  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND  
I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND.

The message is not in the words. It's in the rhythms, in the volume of the sound, in the repetitions themselves. It is in the emotive connotation, the response you get in your stomach and not your head, that the message lies.

Now look for a minute at a kind of mass *news* that used to be: yellow journalism. When the great circulation wars were fought for the allegiance of huge numbers of readers, what the papers dealt in was sensation. That word has two meanings here: reports that will startle; startlement or feeling itself. There's some of it still left, Lord knows, but by and large the old yellow journalism is dead. The papers and magazines that have survived are not the ones that stoop to any momentary thrill and damn the Truth, but those that had a better regard both for the objects of their stories and for the persons in their circulation. Respectability tended to win out. In part that's because it is more hospitable to advertisers; in part it is because people really do want the truth, or as close as they can get to it.

In short, massness, the search for numbers, circulation, did not mire us permanently in the gutter. The gutter lost. We are really us, the people we know, not an abstract defined and limited by number.

But still, on the newsstands, what sells is the juicier headline, the sexier picture, the flashier writer. Respectability does not define a new mass. But in the mass as it always was, there is a

more complex, a more sophisticated appreciation of what is sensational.

We have lived through a time when the traditional events of ordinary life have been turned upside down and we can see a president abdicate, a religious leader shot and this country lose a war. The old ways of gathering in the crowds are like old clothes, interesting but not for now.

When we seek massness, we seek something common from person to person. The great paradox is that all communication needs to find common ground to talk from one to one, else we cannot understand each other. The better we do that, the greater the possible audience. For a class, the common ground is narrowly described: a grasp of math; or of Latin; or of the history of the Incas.

But what is the commonality of mass with which news can deal? How is it described? I think it is found in the emotive connotation, in those things you can feel, or that "everybody knows," rather than in more consciously learned things.

Simply enough: What sells popular television programs? The seven deadly sins and a sprinkling of humor; that's what. It's what we always knew. But what has happened to us is that we don't take it raw any more.

Now, I postulate that news is important. It is important because we live in a democracy and we have to have information on which to base those judgments that help us rule ourselves. It is important because government needs the informed consent of the governed. It is important because we live in perilous times and we can be hurt as a community, or as individuals, by ignorance. In some mystical ways, it may be important because so many people *say* it is important and, ever since that First Amendment, have kept on saying it is important.

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. . . the First Amendment was in fact a concession to a small group of printers, on behalf of a very few readers.

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If it is important, it is important to all. The value of having media that are ubiquitous, inclusive and unmediated is that they can reach all. Pharaoh doesn't have to hew stone; he can talk to us in our millions of households.

And while print has the tendency to move toward exclusiveness, restriction, mediation, lending itself to smaller groups, broadcasting does not. It casts more broadly. In the attempt of each, though, to reach masses, they must do it through the touchstones that Everyman understands: honor, love, lust, greed, hate . . . The short words with long histories.

What is happening to us now is that our entertainments are becoming ubiquitous and are fighting for the mass as never before, because the possibility of mass is greater than ever before. On television alone, there is more drama in a week than this

country used to see in a year. And drama is the ancient, best user of those touchstones.

The touchstones, the keys, are Truths, not news Fact, or truth. We are men and women who rarely understand ourselves, but we do *feel* our common mortality. It's ringing the changes on that which traps our attention. It isn't the existence of a medium or a common consent that creates a mass in communication. There's no big vote that elects one channel and the others step back. Nobody commands an audience in our system. You gather one by speaking to the concerns of each, to the pity and the terror individuals understand, to the knowledge that's in the bone. And when you do that, in a medium capable of carrying such efforts, you gather a mass.

At our worst, we squander Truths for senseless entertainment and try to substitute lights and glitter and rhinestones for the real stuff. It can be done, but it debases the currency. At our best, we speak to the understanding that isn't taught.

And if news is important, and if the medium is available, then news has to look to using Truths. But we are not dramatists. And a decent regard for the objects of our inquiry and the persons in our audience dictate that we should not manipulate the Truth. Our point is not simply to gather a mass to sell to an advertiser but to use the medium to communicate with, to say something to, large numbers. The way to do that is to speak our facts in terms that touch the mass. And the way to do *that* is to see the news in terms of the people concerned.

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### ... What sells popular television programs? The seven deadly sins and a sprinkling of humor, that's what.

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It is for this reason that mass media tend to concentrate on that dumbest of all television questions: "How did it feel?" If you attempt to see the fire, or the hijacking, or any event, through the window of a single person's perception, you gain and you lose. What you lose is some wider perspective, or a sense of context. A reporter has to supply that. But what you gain is an identifiable response to a situation, a response that is understandable—and sometimes compelling—to a huge number of people.

And what is true for an event is also true for an issue. Print deals better in abstracts and broadcasting better in concretes—but for both in the attempt to be a mass medium, it is hard to deal interestingly with a gold crisis, or monetary reform. Insofar as they can be dealt with well in mass media, they need to be dealt with in personal terms, through the experience of individuals.

It is a continuum that we half sense in the perception we have of our media. It stretches from gossip column to newspaper essay. What you can describe in terms of personal experience

that an average person can comprehend, you will have said understandably to a wider audience.

There is a kind of sneering reference abroad in the land about the massness of mass audiences, about the futility or maybe the perniciousness of having them. They are here, though. They are necessary to the way we live. And used wisely, they reinforce our humanity in ways we are still perfecting.

## Addendum

*The most important national news story in the days immediately preceding Richard Wald's lecture was the Hanafi Muslims' seizure of three buildings and numerous hostages in Washington, D.C. on March 9, 1977.*

*Among the questions put to Mr. Wald from the audience at the conclusion of his lecture was a request for his views on the responsibility of the press in reporting such violence. He responded as follows:*

It is the attempt of everybody to use the media—everybody with an idea, a mission or a cause. If you run a campus dance, what you try to do is get KUCR or the *Highlander* to do something about it, and you figure, "Well, they won't print much or say much if I just say there's going to be a dance," so you give the dance a theme and you try to use the media. There is a continuum of that attempt to use the media that stretches from the simplest, most innocent, nicest events all the way up the scale to terrorism. Terrorism: if you look at it, you feel it. It is an attempt to engross you so that you'll listen to an idea and be converted to it. We in the media are the object of that feeling; we are to be used by it. It is, in my business, the absolute essential of our lives to be honest with the audience. We make mistakes all the time—no question about it—errors in fact, not too many; errors in judgment, many more; errors of all kinds. Insofar as we are honest about it, you will continue to listen to me and believe me and that's all I've got to say. Insofar as I hide anything from you, you will believe me the less. Insofar as I censor things, you will believe me the less. The great examples of that are—and don't go to the Soviet Union where nobody believes what's printed, but come a little closer, say, to France—where the government can and does rule things off of radio and television and out of the newspapers at its will.

And people always take that stuff with a grain of salt. "Yes, this is what they reported but what really happened is . . ." That's because they don't play fair. We American journalists may not be smart, but we're honest. So, it's not in the cards that when a terrorist act occurs I will not report it. I wouldn't have it that you will learn later that someone was shot where there was a hostage, or something like that, because I didn't tell you about it at the time. You will then look at me and say, "Well, what else is it that he isn't saying that he ought to be saying." On the other hand, I don't want to be used. I don't

want to aid and abet that theater. I don't want myself to become a victim of it. I am, too, a citizen of this country, of this culture we live in. So, I'm torn. I want to report, but I don't want to help to overdramatize or dramatize.

In our business we learn slowly. I think what we learn is that when such a situation occurs—taking the one in Washington recently—what you see you report about in those regular news reports that you do. When you know something to be true and serious, and you know it for a fact, you report it. The cops are very good at handling things like this, in some places. Listen to what they've got to say. Don't think you're smarter than they are. It's their business. We are reporters, we are observers; they are participants, we are not. I am now giving you the lecture I gave to everybody at NBC. You must remember that when it is over, we have to live. We have to be honest, fair, in our reporting. We also have to be sensible, restrained, competent.

Don't phone into the besieged building just to get the scoop

of talking to that guy. It's just going to give him what he wants. He's going to use you more than you use him. Unless for some reason you are the only contact, unless for some reason you are the only person—and it does happen—who can get information from such a person, don't do it. Give up the momentary thrill. Don't become Dick Daring. Be a reporter. Don't hide it, don't overdramatize it. It's a terrible tightrope to walk but if you don't try walking it, you'll lose everything you've got. I don't know any really good rules to guide us in those situations, but what we do is: we try to hire sensible people, promote smart bosses, tell them to be careful, and generally it works. They wind up being sensible and smart and they don't do terrible things and it works out okay. Every once in a while, it doesn't. It's the price we pay for the system we have.

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## "African Nemesis?"

*(continued from page 2)*

*World* papers—and under the law those papers are not merely suspended; an official "liquidator" has actually been appointed to dispose of the properties. Not only are black and white readers (and, notably, foreign journalists) thereby deprived of much accurate reporting on ghettos like Soweto. And not only are some 600 employees of the two papers put out of work. But in addition, the papers' anti-apartheid white owners, the Argus group, is deprived of its second largest holding, after the (Johannesburg) *Star*—and will undoubtedly face some critical economic and political decisions.

In other words, one of the two nationwide anti-government newspaper chains has received a financial body-blow.

But above and beyond the threat to Argus's existence and courage, there is the much larger threat to all of South Africa's press in Pretoria's October repression.

For nearly 30 years now, since the minority Afrikaner Nationalists achieved power, tightened their grip, and relentlessly deprived 80 percent of the population of their rights, South Africa's English-language press has served as a *de facto* opposition party. In very recent years they have begun to be joined by a few elements within the Afrikaans-language press. And although constrained by a complex of laws that would astonish and enrage American or even British journalists, South Africa's newspapers have remained the freest on the African continent.

Visitors to that "beloved country" have been puzzled by this phenomenon. Why have Pretoria's Nationalists tolerated such a degree of press freedom? The answer seems to be two-fold. First, while systematically re-shaping their parliamentary democracy into a one-party police state, the Nationalists have

claimed to be operating a free and democratic society—and their prime evidence for the claim, their major window-dressing, has been their tolerance of a vigorous opposition press. But second, and equally important, that press has been virtually devoid of any political power. The white enfranchised readers, for instance, of the nation's most respected opposition paper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, can only elect to Parliament a tiny handful of people—for some years, only Helen Suzman; for they are a minority within the white minority—and the huge non-white majority remains totally disfranchised.

So, a moderate degree of press freedom is a luxury that Pretoria has been able to afford—and it has tended to mute the criticisms of troubled foreign visitors.

But as of this autumn the Nationalists have clearly decided that that luxury is dispensable. For with the moves against Woods and Qoboza, the writing is on the wall for all reporters, editors, and publishers, whatever their color: Either get yourselves into line, or we will put you out of business—ban you, jail you, liquidate your papers, or possibly selectively, do all three.

One may still hear sounds of defiance from South Africa's opposition press. But all power rests with the State; and the State is now entirely willing to use it.

For those who know and love the people and landscape of South Africa, this news is hard to bear. It fills one with sadness, anger, and a deep sense of hopelessness.

For there was always a chance, over the past three decades, for inter-racial conciliation, for a non-violent solution to South Africa's unique problems; and much of the press had played a strong role in arguing for such a solution. But time has been running out. And with the events of October 1977, that chance has probably vanished.

—J.C.T. Jr.

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## Special Announcement to Our Readers

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# The Walter Lippmann Memorial Fund

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President Derek C. Bok announced in a news release dated September 15, 1977, a grant of \$100,000 to the Nieman Foundation for Journalism in memory of Walter Lippmann, Harvard 1910. This grant, to be matched by external donations, is being made to help inaugurate a fund drive for the renovation and endowment of a new Nieman headquarters in a centrally located Cambridge landmark. The grant derives from a bequest that Lippmann himself left to Harvard at the time of his death in December 1974.

In announcing the challenge grant, Mr. Bok said, "Walter Lippmann was a man of far-reaching influence in the shaping of American opinion and public policy over more than half a century. He single-handedly raised the standards of journalistic commentary—part of the original Nieman mission. It is entirely fitting that funds from the Lippmann gift be used to assist a program he helped found 40 years ago, a program which has been of such value to the profession he loved."

The new Nieman headquarters—Walter Lippmann House—will be at One Francis Avenue, a structure built in 1836, in a Greek Revival style, by the Harvard College carpenter, Ebenezer Francis.

James C. Thomson Jr., Curator of the Nieman Foundation, welcomed President Bok's announcement. "For 40 years now this program has lacked its own facilities for the Nieman

Fellows and faculty and visiting speakers to meet in seminars. In recent years we have wanted to find the right way to celebrate the unique contributions of Walter Lippmann to the field of journalism. Harvard's grant gives us a chance to do both. In 'Lippmann House,' the Foundation will have for the first time in its existence fully adequate headquarters, including a room spacious enough to accommodate all 16-20 Fellows at seminars—and larger groups when necessary. There also will be study space for Fellows and increased shelf-space for Harvard's 'Nieman Collection of Contemporary Journalism.' "

To match the grant and also create a full endowment for Walter Lippmann House, Mr. Thomson has announced the launching of a Walter Lippmann Memorial Fund Drive to raise \$400,000. This drive will seek contributions from the wide range of journalists in the print and electronic media, Nieman alumni/ae, and others who were friends and admirers of Lippmann.

The newly created Lippmann Fund Committee includes those listed below. Its members are convinced that the \$400,000 goal can be reached, and that Lippmann's memory can be best celebrated through this exciting endeavor at his alma mater. Never in journalism have a man and a program been better joined for a better purpose—Walter Lippmann and the Nieman enterprise.

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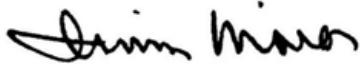
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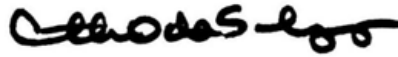
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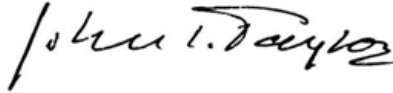
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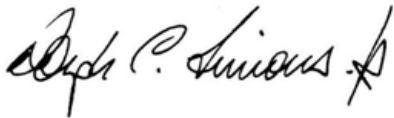
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Readers who wish to join their colleagues and participate in this memorial to Walter Lippmann are invited to fill out the form below.

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The Walter Lippmann Memorial Fund  
Nieman Foundation for Journalism  
Harvard University  
48 Trowbridge Street  
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I enclose a gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_

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Please make checks payable to: Nieman Foundation—Walter Lippmann Memorial Fund. Your contribution is tax deductible. Thank you.

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# Press Freedom: Courtroom v. Newsroom

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by Curt Matthews

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Three years ago, Mark Gerchick quit his job as a reporter for a daily newspaper in Miami and headed for Harvard Law School to seek his fortune—in the newspaper business.

He sensed that a crisis of litigation was descending on the press. He told his classmates at Harvard that it would be safer and more lucrative to defend freedom of the press in the courtroom than in the newsroom. He may be right.

## Litigation Threatens Free Press

In November 1973, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, a group concerned about the rights of journalists to gather and report news for the information of the public, counted 67 lawsuits pending in the courts and directly related to the principle of "free press." Last year, the Reporters Committee listed 377 such cases pending in the courts.

Lawyers for news organizations, as Gerchick expects to be when he graduates from law school, generally are making money. Reporters sometimes are going to jail.

There are publishers who believe that if the trend continues the courts will become—by economic default if not by legal principle—an effective censor of the daily news. One such publisher is H. Brandt Ayers of the Anniston (Ala.) *Star*, who recently told the Supreme Court about the financial burden lawsuits pose for small town newspapers.

"The causes for which we contend and the problems we face are invisible to the world of power and intellect," Ayers said. "We have no in-house legal staff. We retain no great national law firms. We do not have spacious profits with which to defend ourselves and our principles all the way to the Supreme Court, each and every time we feel them to be under attack."

One option available to publishers like Ayers is to avoid printing anything that might be objectionable to someone. But that is a solution wholly unacceptable to American journalists brought up in the free press tradition of the First Amendment. It also would contravene the underlying principle of the First Amendment, which was intended to assure that the people would have the opportunity to inform and be informed, to circulate ideas of all sorts widely, and to have the maximum possible freedom to examine critically and seek to change the actions of their governments.

Although not insensitive to the point made by Ayers, some members of the judiciary dismiss the notion of a legal crisis developing for the press. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger said recently, "I think history shows that there's never been a time in our 200 years when the press did not think its freedom was being threatened."

Beyond the economic dimension of the courtroom problems being faced by the press, there lies the ominous prospect of the press alienating and losing the confidence and support of the public. In a democratic society, the government is supposed to reflect the attitudes of the people. If this is so in bicentennial America, then the concept of a free press may be in more danger than many Americans realize.

The First Amendment says, in part, "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . ." Nonetheless, in recent years, all three branches of the federal government—not just the Congress—have tried to "make law" that would restrain the gathering and reporting of news:

- The executive branch, under former President Richard M. Nixon, conducted a vigorous antipress campaign and in 1971 went all the way to the Supreme Court to prevent publication of the Pentagon Papers, a secret government history of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.
- The Supreme Court upheld the right of newspapers to print information classified secret by the Department of Defense. However, had the court ruled the other way, in favor of the executive branch, the decision would have been a devastating legal precedent greatly restricting press access to information about the nation's defense establishment and foreign policy.
- Television reporter Daniel Schorr narrowly avoided a contempt citation and possible jail sentence for refusing to tell a congressional subcommittee how he obtained a House Committee report on illegal activities within the Central Intelligence Agency. Congress spent \$150,000 in an effort to force Schorr to say from whom he received the information. The investigation was unsuccessful. Had it been otherwise, another devastating precedent would have been set—the power of Congress to intimidate the press and shut off potential sources of information. The furor over Schorr's handling of the sensitive documents eventually resulted in his resignation from CBS.
- The Judicial Branch, with increasing frequency, in recent years has resorted to "gag" orders and closed courtroom proceedings to limit press coverage on the ground that publicity makes the administration of justice more difficult.

In a decision last year, the Supreme Court upheld the right of the media to gather and publish news of criminal activity, despite a possible ill effect on a subsequent trial. Judges, the court said, have options other than restraint of the press to assure that publicity does not adversely affect the trial process.

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*Curt Matthews, Nieman Fellow '75, is a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in the Washington bureau.*

But had the Supreme Court ruled the other way, judges would have been able to censor the news about proceedings in their courtrooms.

Although each of these confrontations between the government and the press ended with the principle of a free press still intact—the Pentagon Papers were published, Daniel Schorr was not held in contempt of Congress and the judges were relieved as censors of the news—the outcome in each case was something less than a ringing reaffirmation of the First Amendment.

The high purpose of the First Amendment—protecting the public's right to know what the government is doing—was often remote and ill-defined as the government battled in court and in Congress with aggressive reporters, editors and publishers. It is in the nature of things that reporters, editors and publishers sometimes get caught up in litigation over how much freedom the press should have. But too many encounters in court could tend to further erode public esteem of the press. As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart has pointed out, the publisher who defies a court order to defend First Amendment rights of the press may be hard to distinguish from the rock-throwing bigot who claims to be defying a court order in the cause of individual rights.

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**He told his classmates at Harvard that it would be safer and more lucrative to defend freedom of the press in the courtroom than in the newsroom.**

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Can the reporter who refuses to cooperate with a grand jury investigation on grounds of a remote First Amendment privilege expect much more public sympathy than Richard Nixon got when he refused to co-operate with the processes of justice by asserting a similar claim of special privilege? Each time a major libel suit makes its way through the courts, the human vulnerability of the press under pressure of deadline is exposed. Public distrust of the press is reinforced.

John B. Oakes, editor of *The New York Times* editorial page, addressed himself to this problem recently. He said, "The experience of Watergate is the most recent demonstration that a free press is essential to a free democracy. Yet, ironically, just as government, because of its size and complexity, has distanced itself from the individual citizen, the press has been distancing itself from the individual reader at the very moment when democracy needs it most." Expanding on this theme, Oakes said:

The intimate, almost personal, relationship between newspaper and reader of an earlier day has declined; and the consequent growing alienation of public from press threatens even greater

danger to press freedom than specific legislative or judicial restraints . . . As the confidence of Americans in all our institutions has been weakened, as our society has at the same time become more complex, more broadly sophisticated and less trustful, and as newspaper management has tended to move steadily away from the personally directed journalism of an individual editor toward the impersonality of a corporate structure . . . public understanding of the inextricable connection between press liberty and public liberty has been correspondingly blurred.

The public's declining sense of respect for the press has been demonstrated in a number of recent public opinion polls. Last year, a poll by Louis Harris sought to measure public trust of various social institutions. Only 26 per cent of those polled expressed trust in the press.

The inherent danger of a growing number of confrontations between press and government and the by-product of public disdain for the content and the conduct of the press is neatly summarized by Oakes: "If there comes to be a widespread public conviction that the press is a closed institution and therefore not to be trusted, or that the press is willing to defy the national interest or trample on individual rights merely to sell papers, the First Amendment protections may indeed crumble. . ."

The problems the press has had of late in trying to define and exercise its First Amendment rights inevitably reduce to legal problems for publishers and broadcasters. Court proceedings are an expensive and nonproductive activity for any business enterprise. And newspapers and broadcast stations are no exception.

For example, when former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew filed suit against a *Washington Post* reporter for an article the newspaper published regarding Agnew's early political career, the pretrial expenses amounted to \$25,000, according to Joseph Califano, who represented the *Post*.

"The case never went to trial," Califano notes. "The \$25,000 was just for pretrial work."

To obtain a Supreme Court verdict in July, 1976, that judges did not have the right to impose restraints on the publishing of news, the Nebraska Press Association spent \$100,000 and sought contributions from various news media around the country to help pay its legal bills. Spending such amounts to defend reporting of a public official's background, to protect a reporter's right to print news of court proceedings of interest to the public, raises concern among some news executives that economics, not high constitutional principle, will ultimately determine the meaning of "free press" in the United States.

### Confidential Sources Dilemma

Because their business requires them to be where the action is, American journalists on occasion have been shot at, flooded out, beaten up and shoved around. In the last four years, a new

hazard has confronted the news profession: Twelve journalists have gone to jail to defend the principle of a free press. It is not that these newsmen have committed a crime. Judges have placed them behind bars for refusing to disclose their sources of information. Added to other conflicts that have brought the press and the courts into ever-sharper contention, the situation has begun to resemble a running battle over the meaning of the First Amendment. The recent case of the "Fresno Four" illustrates what is happening.

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### Lawyers for news organizations . . . are making money. Reporters . . . are going to jail.

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On April 25, 1975, a Superior Court judge in Fresno, Calif., cited the managing editor and three reporters of the *Fresno Bee* for contempt of court. They had refused to tell where the newspaper obtained information drawn from a secret transcript of a grand jury that was investigating a city councilman.

The published information disclosed that the councilman had acknowledged before the grand jury that he had received a \$5,000 retainer from a group of businessmen who intended to bid for a garbage collection franchise in Fresno. The *Bee's* article said also that the councilman further acknowledged that if the group received the franchise, he would get an additional \$20,000.

The judge had ordered the transcript sealed because, he said, disclosure of its content might prejudice the community against the councilman—who was indicted for allegedly accepting a bribe—and make it difficult for him to get a fair jury trial.

Explaining why the newspaper used the information, George Gruner, managing editor, said, "We thought the public should know that an elected official had a financial interest in the awarding of the franchise. It looked like a clear conflict of interest."

The judge wanted to know where the newspaper got its information. The newspapermen, who had promised their source anonymity, refused to tell him. After a year of legal argument, the "Fresno Four" were sentenced, on July 30, 1976, to indefinite jail terms. They began serving the sentences on September 3. Fifteen days later, still determined to preserve the confidentiality of the news source, they were released and the judge acknowledged that no amount of incarceration would persuade them to talk.

Why are journalists so dead-set on protecting their confidential sources? In most cases, it is because they realize that such sources are their only means of obtaining hard-to-get information about government or business scandal and corruption. A government worker aware of corruption by a high public official is not likely to tell it to a reporter, and thus risk his own job, unless his role and his identity is kept secret. A

petty criminal who knows about police payoffs may lose his life if the underworld learns he has disclosed information to the press.

Many journalists recognize that exposing corruption and thus assuring clean government for the people is not possible without confidential news sources. Watergate was the foremost example of that maxim. Now Watergate has given news impetus to investigative reporting. More than ever before, reporters are seeking out sources who will leak information to expose scandals in government. And government is striking back. When news is published that embarrasses the government, the protective reaction is to plug the leak. To plug it, you must find it. The easiest way to do that is to ask the journalist where he obtained the information. The practice of trying to force reporters to disclose confidential sources is a relatively new development that in time, at least, was related to the attack on the press by the Administration of former President Richard M. Nixon and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. A report recently issued by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press lists more than a dozen cases pending in seven states where journalists are under threat of court sanctions if they refused to disclose the source of news they have reported.

Several cases were fought through the courts and eventually arrived in the Supreme Court for resolution. The question was: Do reporters have a First Amendment right to refuse to disclose confidential sources? Unfortunately, the court's answer was ambiguous. The decision dealt directly with reporters who had witnessed criminal conduct or had information about such conduct. But reference was made in the decision to the broader question of reporters who protect sources not involved in crime.

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### Many journalists recognize that exposing corruption and thus assuring clean government . . . is not possible without confidential news sources.

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Several questions were before the high court in a series of cases that were joined:

- If a reporter (Paul Branzburg of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*) gains information through a confidential informant of illegal activity, and then, with the help of that informant, witnesses such activity, can he be compelled to testify before a grand jury? The high court says yes.
- If a reporter (Earl Caldwell of *The New York Times*) gains information from a confidential source and on the basis of that writes about illegal activity, can he be compelled to appear before a grand jury? The high court said yes.
- Can he be compelled to testify? That question, the Supreme Court said, had not been presented for decision.



So, the net result of the court's ruling is that reporters who actually witness a crime can be subpoenaed and compelled to testify about who and what they saw. Those who may have information can be subpoenaed and they must appear—again, under threat of jail—but it remains an open question if they can be compelled to testify.

All this was muddled even more by the way the court split over the *Branzburg* decision. Justice Byron R. White wrote the decision and three other members of the court fully agreed with his logic. The necessary fifth member of the court's majority, Justice Lewis F. Powell, so modified his concurrence in this case, that the decision has been characterized as four and one-half to four and one-half draw. Justice White saw little merit in protecting a source not personally engaged in criminal activity, but who wanted anonymity in the press to preserve job security or personal safety or to avoid dishonor and embarrassment. He wrote, "We doubt if the informer who prefers anonymity, but is sincerely interested in furnishing evidence of crime, will always or very often be deterred by the prospect of dealing with those public authorities characteristically charged with the duty to protect the public interest as well as his."

Bob Woodward, one of the reporters at *The Washington Post* most responsible for uncovering the Watergate scandal, disagrees with Justice White. His source, whom he has identified only as "Deep Throat," expressed concerns about telling the Federal Bureau of Investigation of irregularities at the White House. "Beyond that," Woodward says, "James McCord [a key figure in the Watergate scandal and a former FBI agent] said he was afraid to deal with the FBI."

Haynes Johnson, another reporter for *The Washington Post* and a Pulitzer Prize winner when he worked for the *Washington Evening Star*, has stated that his reporting in the 1960s on civil rights activities in the South would not have been possible without assurances of confidentiality to sources—black and white—who feared the consequences of stating publicly what they knew.

Scholars, jurists and journalists who have closely analysed the processes of democracy and the role played by a free press generally agree that the concept of the nation's Founding Fathers is distorted when journalists are put in jail for gathering and circulating the news. There is less agreement, as illustrated by the Supreme Court's decision in the *Branzburg* case, about the degree of distortion and its ultimate impact on the democratic process. In the courts, this disagreement reduces to a weighing of practical public interest against the principle of free press.

For example, in the *Branzburg* case and those related to it, the issue was whether the public interest was better served by tracking down persons that Branzburg and Caldwell said were breaking the law, or by honoring a special privilege that would allow the reporters to stay in touch with the law breakers and perhaps further enlighten the general public (and the police) about their illegal activities. The *Branzburg* decision, before it

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## "Leaks" and Democracy

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Although the government is sometimes distressed by "leaks" and occasionally tries to influence public opinion against the individual who releases embarrassing information to the press, some students of government look differently on the flow of information from sources inside the government.

"The class of confidential communication commonly called 'leaks' play, in my opinion, a vital role in the functioning of our democracy," says Richard Neustadt, professor of government at Harvard University. "A leak is, in essence, an appeal to public opinion. Leaks generally do not occur in dictatorships."

Noting that leaks to the press open the government's decision-making process to public scrutiny and evaluation, Neustadt adds, "If the confidentiality of communications to newsmen could not be assured, I am convinced that the number of leaks would be greatly diminished."

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was rendered, was anticipated as the definitive legal word on the rights of reporters to keep secret their sources. It proved to be much less than that and the result has been predictable—some reporters still refuse to name their sources and some judges are still sending them to jail. Until new cases resolve the difficult issues, the threat of jail for reporters persists, and the antagonism between the press and the courts increases.

In a positive effort to reduce the threat and the antagonism, the Ford Foundation has been sponsoring, in cooperation with universities and newspapers throughout the country, a series of conferences to bring together reporters, editors, judges, lawyers and government prosecutors to talk about their differences. [For a review of a series of such conferences co-sponsored by the Nieman Foundation, see "New England Conferences on Conflicts Between the Media and the Law," NR, winter 1976/spring 1977.—ed.] Fred W. Friendly, professor of journalism at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and an adviser at the Ford Foundation, believes the conferences have improved the chances for the press, the bench, and the bar to reach a better understanding of one another's viewpoint.

Why should this be of any real concern to the public? People go to jail all the time. Why are reporters any different?

Thomas I. Emerson, professor of law at Yale University, has provided an answer in his book, *Toward A General Theory of the First Amendment*. Freedom of the press, Emerson says, differs from freedom of speech in that it is not an end in itself. The freedom to report, edit, and publish is not intended to make noble those who report, edit, and publish but rather it is for the benefit of the general public, Emerson says. And he writes:

Once one accepts the premise of the Declaration of Independence—that governments derive 'their just powers from the consent of the governed'—it follows that the governed must, in order to exercise their right of consent, have full freedom of expression both in forming individual judgments and in forming the common judgment.

### Gag Orders and Fair Trials

Depending on your age, these names may mean something: Bruno Hauptmann, Sam Sheppard, Erwin Simants. Regardless of your age, these men and the focus of public attention upon them helped to determine what you read in the newspaper about crime.

Hauptmann, Sheppard and Simants were not journalists—each was convicted of murder. Their "contributions" to journalism came through the courts where lawyers argued and judges finally decided if the intense news coverage given their cases had prejudiced the system of justice and made their trials unfair. Taken together, the trials of Hauptmann, Sheppard and Simants generated the legal and ethical standards that currently guide reporters, editors, and publishers in the gathering and publishing of crime news.

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... the publisher who defies a court order to defend the First Amendment rights may be hard to distinguish from the rock-throwing bigot who claims to be defying a court order in the cause of individual rights.

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Bruno Richard Hauptmann, an immigrant working as a carpenter in New Jersey, was arrested in 1935 and accused of kidnapping the 19-month-old son of Charles A. Lindbergh, the first man to fly across the Atlantic Ocean and a national hero. Because Lindbergh was held in such high esteem by the public, there was intense interest in the man accused of kidnapping and killing Lindbergh's infant son. There was also intense competition among the news media to convey information to the public about Hauptmann and the Lindbergh kidnapping case. The case dominated the nation's newspapers and radio news broadcasts for months before Hauptmann stood trial. Even before the trial began, Walter Winchell, perhaps the best-known radio newscaster of that period, proclaimed in a national broadcast that Hauptmann was guilty. Other commentators followed Winchell's example before the trial had ended. Hauptmann was convicted and executed.

A committee of the American Bar Association later called the press performance in the *Hauptmann* case "the most spectacular and depressing example of improper publicity and professional misconduct ever presented to the United States in a

criminal trial." Reactions such as that and a shift in public interest from crime news to national and international news during World War II tempered the reporting of crime and the courts for the next 10 or 15 years.

Then came the case of Dr. Samuel Sheppard, a socially prominent osteopathic surgeon near Cleveland, who was tried and convicted in 1954 for the murder of his wife. Sheppard appealed his conviction on the ground that publicity about his case before and during trial had prejudiced the public—and the jury that heard his case—against him. The Supreme Court agreed in an 8-to-1 decision in 1966. He was tried again in November of that year and acquitted. Sheppard's appeal rested primarily on five large scrapbooks filled with clippings from three daily newspapers in Cleveland. A front page editorial in one Cleveland newspaper called for Sheppard's arrest and carried the headline, "Why Isn't Sam Sheppard in Jail?" Another page one editorial ran under the headline: "Somebody's Getting Away with Murder."

When Sheppard stood trial, the conduct of the press within the courtroom was consistent with the sense of justice that had been exhibited in the pretrial reporting. Justice Tom Clark, who wrote the Supreme Court opinion overturning Sheppard's conviction, said the trial was conducted in a "carnival atmosphere." Clark further noted, "Every court that has considered this case, except the court that tried it, has deplored the manner in which the news media inflamed and prejudiced the public."

Still, the Supreme Court refused to censor the press by imposing restraints on publishers, editors or reporters. Instead, the court urged judges to take whatever precautions they thought necessary to protect the rights of accused persons when the press—reflecting the interest of the public—focused the light of publicity on a particular case. The court noted that judges have several alternatives available to accommodate both the First Amendment ideal of a free press and the Sixth Amendment guarantee of a "public trial, by an impartial jury" for those accused of crime. Among the alternatives are transfer of the trial to a community where reporting of a crime has been less intense than where it occurred, delay of the trial until publicity subsides, in depth questioning of prospective jurors to gauge the impact of publicity and instructions from the judge during a trial to assure objective consideration of the evidence presented. Beyond these safeguards, the judge can also order potential witnesses in a case, the parties directly involved, and their attorneys, to refrain from comment about the case outside the courtroom.

The *Sheppard* decision was the Supreme Court's most definitive statement on the free press-fair trial controversy when Erwin Charles Simants was arrested in October 1975, in the small farming community of Sutherland, Nebraska. He was charged with killing the Henry Kellie family—father, mother, son and two daughters.

The judge who conducted the Simants trial speculated shortly

after the accused man had been arrested that press accounts and radio and television broadcasts regarding Simants could prevent a fair trial. Sensitive to the admonitions of the Supreme Court 10 years earlier in the case of Dr. Sheppard, Judge Hugh Stuart issued a protective order—characterized in the press as a “gag” order—prohibiting the use of certain facts in news reports about the case. The information Judge Stuart sought to keep from the public included a medical report that suggested some of the victims had been sexually assaulted after they were murdered, and a statement by Simants’ father suggesting that his son had confessed the crime.

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### **. . . the trials of Hauptmann, Sheppard, and Simants generated the legal and ethical standards that currently guide . . . the gathering and publishing of crime news.**

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Judge Stuart’s order was symptomatic of a trend that began developing several years after the *Sheppard* decision. Statistics compiled by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press show that between 1967 and 1973 the courts issued a total of 13 protective orders to curb or limit reporting of a criminal proceeding. Then, in 1974 alone, a total of 14 such orders were handed down. Judge Stuart’s order in the *Simants* case was one of 14 issued in 1975.

The growing friction between the press and the judiciary prompted the American Bar Association’s advisory committee on fair trial and free press to draft a set of procedures to guide those involved in trials of particular interest to the public. However, the ABA delayed adoption of the resolution outlining the procedures until the Supreme Court ruled in the case of Erwin Simants.

The order issued by Judge Stuart was challenged by the Nebraska Press Association, a group of newspapers and broadcasting stations in Nebraska, as a violation of the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of the press. Lawyers representing the news media eventually argued before the Supreme Court that two key factors should govern its decision in considering the constitutionality of the order:

1. The First Amendment guarantee of press freedom bars a judge or any other government official from censoring the news.
2. A defendant’s Sixth Amendment right to a fair trial by an impartial jury can be protected with procedures other than restraints on the publishing of news.

The Supreme Court agreed unanimously with the arguments. However, several members of the court cautioned that freedom of the press was not an absolute privilege—that is, under some as yet unforeseen circumstances, the press could be censored. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger noted in the court’s

opinion, “The extraordinary protections afforded [the press] by the First Amendment carry with them something in the nature of a fiduciary duty [to the public] to exercise the protected rights responsibility . . .”

Justice John Paul Stevens made much the same point, noting that judges may be free to impose restraints on the press if the reporting of a trial is “shabby,” if information is gathered illegally, privacy blatantly violated, falsehoods circulated, if the interests of innocent persons are neglected, or the motivations of the publisher or broadcaster seem “perverse.” Thus, the Supreme Court’s ruling in the *Simants* case in July 1976, like that in the Pentagon Papers case of 1971, stands as a victory for a free press—but not a total victory.

In the Pentagon Papers case, the Supreme Court held that the federal government had no legal authority to restrain the press from printing secret government documents disclosing deceit by federal officials in the conduct of the Vietnam War. However, as it did in the *Simants* decision, the court had reservations. If the press was irresponsible—for example, publishing troop movement information in time of war and thus endangering human life and national security—the privilege under the First Amendment could be restricted, a court majority seemed to agree.

Between the lines of the Supreme Court ruling in the *Simants* case, some journalists see an ominous potential. Jack Landau, a trustee of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, says that although the decision strikes down prior restraint on the publishing of news, it leaves open the possibility that judges will begin to close the judicial process itself to curb the gathering of news. Decisions to bar the press from arraignments and other pretrial court proceedings, to seal records and documents

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### **. . . Several members of the [Supreme] Court cautioned that freedom of the press was not an absolute—that . . . the press could be censored.**

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relating to a trial, and to conduct business in chambers rather than in public, still rest largely with individual judges. Such steps can be taken fully consistent with the Supreme Court’s rulings in both the *Simants* and the *Sheppard* cases.

The American Bar Association, at the prompting of the Reporters Committee, has recently adopted a resolution urging judges to avoid, if possible, the use of such procedures and to hear arguments from representatives of the press before issuing protective orders or adopting procedures that would restrict public knowledge about a trial. The ABA resolution clearly states why the public interest is served by open trials. “It is clear that the free flow of information concerning court business is important and necessary not only to the requirements of a free

press and a fair and public trial, but to greater public understanding of the judicial function and the rule of law in our society."

### Libel Threats Subdue the Press

Is Brother Lester Roloff, a fundamentalist preacher in Texas, keeping the lid on news of political scandal in that state? Some journalists say he is. He filed a \$50,000 libel suit against the *Texas Observer* in 1974 after articles in that publication were critical of the way he ran three child-care centers. The *Observer*, a small fortnightly newspaper (circulation 10,500) published in Austin, has a well-earned reputation for aggressive reporting. But its management now concedes less vigor since Brother Roloff went to court.

Shortly before Molly Ivins quit as editor of the *Observer* to take a job with *The New York Times*, she said, "We recently rejected a solid story on some illegal business doings in Dallas—we can't afford to get sued again." Cliff Olofson, business manager of the *Observer*, says, "You hear people talk about the chilling effect of libel suits. Well, I believe that has happened to us."

The chill has reached beyond the *Observer*. Last year, the *Dallas Morning News* began investigating a suspected connection between some politicians in Texas and a banking scandal in Dallas. When articles appeared about this in the *Morning News*, two libel suits were filed, one for \$20,000,000 and another for more than \$12,000,000.

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### A subtle but pervasive attitude of self-censorship, motivated by a fear of libel litigation, has developed among publishers.

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"We have not totally abandoned the story," says Terry Walsh, managing editor of the *Morning News*. "But we have printed very little since the libel suits were filed and we are working closely with our lawyers before proceeding further."

The situation in Texas is not unusual, says Richard M. Schmidt, general counsel for the American Society of Newspaper Editors. A subtle but pervasive attitude of self-censorship, motivated by a fear of libel litigation, has developed among publishers, Schmidt says: "I can judge by the calls that come into my office that many newspaper editors and publishers are just not running as freely as they did before."

Self-censorship is not new. Publishers and broadcasters of the news traditionally have exercised discretion to keep what is printed and said within the bounds of good taste. (There are still millions of people who do not know precisely what former

Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz said that caused his resignation.) However, self-censorship merely to avoid the cost of libel litigation adds a raw economic dimension to an area that traditionally has been controlled by public interest and journalistic principle. Such censorship would seem inconsistent with the purpose of the First Amendment, yet, as demonstrated in Texas and elsewhere, the press apparently can be silenced by the mere filing of a lawsuit for substantial damages.

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### The threat to public intelligence is that lawyers, not journalists, will determine what news reaches the public.

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Legal scholars recognize that some conflict is inevitable between the free press provisions of the Constitution and the libel laws enacted by each of the 50 states and interpreted by hundreds of state judges. There is no federal libel statute. Libel is defined generally as any publication that is injurious to someone's reputation. In the jargon of lawyers, a libel is a "tort"—that is, a lawsuit that arises from an injury or wrong committed by one party on another.

Before 1964, the law of libel was reconciled with First Amendment considerations on the basis of truth: A claim of libel would be rejected in court if the publisher could demonstrate the substantial truth of what had been printed and circulated. However, the Supreme Court dramatically changed a fundamental provision of libel law 13 years ago in a case entitled *The New York Times* versus *Sullivan*. Sensitive to the purpose of the First Amendment—to keep the public informed—the Supreme Court recognized that a "good faith" critic of the government is peculiarly vulnerable to charges of libel when the criticism is published. For that reason, the court ruled that public officials could not sustain a libel allegation unless it could be proven that the publisher had acted with malice. To prove malice, the public official would have to establish in court that material was published with knowledge that it was false, or "with reckless disregard of the truth."

Three years after the court's decision in *The New York Times* case, a ruling involving the old *Saturday Evening Post* magazine established that persons who can be considered "public figures" also must prove malice on the part of a publisher before a libel claim can be sustained.

The Supreme Court's rulings in these two cases stand as the high-water mark for press freedom under the laws of libel. Since then, the court has twice dealt with cases that define more specifically who can be considered "public officials" and "public figures," and in each instance it narrowed the scope of immunity for the press.



In 1974, the court ruled that a well-known lawyer in Chicago, Elmer Gertz, involved in the much-publicized defense of a man charged with killing a policeman, could not be considered a public official or a public figure. Gertz charged a John Birch Society publication with libel after it asserted that he was a Communist. The Birch Society contended that Gertz could be considered a public official because he had been counsel to certain civic groups and city committees and that he could be considered a public figure because of his participation in community and professional affairs and the publication of books and articles. The Supreme Court rejected those arguments. "We would not lightly assume that a citizen's participation in community and professional affairs rendered him a public figure for all purposes," Justice Lewis F. Powell wrote for the court.

Last year, the Supreme Court retreated still further from the broad doctrine of press privilege set forth in 1964. The court decided that Mary Alice Firestone, wife of the heir to the Firestone tire fortune and a highly visible member of "society" in Palm Beach, Florida, was not a public figure. Mrs. Firestone was involved in a much-publicized divorce proceeding that was reported—in a single paragraph—by *Time* magazine. While the divorce case was pending in court, Mrs. Firestone voluntarily held several press conferences. Still, the Supreme Court found that she had not voluntarily placed herself in the public spotlight and so deserved the full protection of Florida's libel laws.

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**There are still millions of people who do not know precisely what . . . Butz said that caused his resignation.**

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The Supreme Court split 5 to 4 in the *Gertz* case and 5 to 3 in the *Firestone* case. Justice William J. Brennan, the senior member of the court, who wrote the court's opinion in *The New York Times* case, dissented in both cases and contended that there should be no retreat from the broad press privilege established in the decision he wrote 13 years ago.

"Although calculated falsehood is no part of the expression protected by the central meaning of the First Amendment," Brennan said, "error and misstatement is recognized as inevitable in any scheme of truly free expression and debate." Brennan said the press needed "breathing space" if it was to avoid the kind of self-censorship that would inhibit the function of a free press as envisioned by those who drafted the First Amendment.

The most recent decisions by the Supreme Court relating to libel make it clear that there is judicial uneasiness with the standards of *The New York Times* decision of 1964. Justice William Rehnquist, who wrote the court's opinion in the *Fire-*

*stone* case, said bluntly of *The New York Times* decision: "The suggested privilege is simply too broad."

But some publishers and legal scholars fear that a narrowing of the privilege will bring a new wave of lawsuits and a generally sedentary press. The threat to public intelligence is that lawyers, not journalists, will determine what news reaches the public. David A. Anderson, a former reporter who is an assistant professor of law at the University of Texas, recently explained the dangers to press freedom if lawyers get too deeply involved in the process of editing. "Lawyers who handle publishers' and broadcasters' libel problems are usually the same lawyers who handle their tax work, collections, contracts, labor relations and other corporate legal work," Anderson said. "Rarely do they handle more than one or two libel suits a year. Such lawyers are

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**"We recently rejected a solid story—we can't afford to get sued again."**

—Molly Ivins, editor, *Texas Observer*

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likely to have little experience in libel litigation. Nor are they accustomed to advising clients to push the law to its limits." Lawyers in the newsroom are likely to give editors "the same conservative advice" they usually give when advising on tax matters, contracts and other corporate matters. "The lawyers's ultimate responsibility—and therefore his loyalty," Anderson says, "must be to the owner who employs him. He knows that the purpose of his employment is to save the owner money."

The journalist, however, if he is sensitive to the language of the First Amendment, realizes that his ultimate responsibility is to the public—even if it means losing his job, going to jail, or sometimes standing on principle when it would be more comfortable to accept the practical.

Given the Supreme Court's revised view of libel law, the increasing costs of defending against libel suits, and the emerging new standards of law relating to rights of privacy, many journalists expect a "chill" of litigation to continue to restrict press freedom.

Arthur B. Hansen of Washington, recognized as one of the foremost libel lawyers in the country, said in a symposium on law and journalism, "The law of libel is probably as turbulent today as any in the First Amendment field." He noted that every state was given an opportunity, within limits, to establish rules of liability for publishers and added, "Believe me, they are doing so and with the most divergent results."

It remains to be seen how well those divergent results can co-exist with the idea of a free and robust press vigorously searching for news that will enlighten the public.

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## Nieman Fellows, 1977-78

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Eleven American journalists have been appointed to the 40th class of Lucius W. Nieman Fellows to study at Harvard University in 1977-78. The Nieman Fellowships were established through a bequest of Agnes Wahl Nieman in memory of her husband, who founded *The Milwaukee Journal*. The Fellows come to Harvard for a year of study in any part of the University.

The new Fellows are:

**Frederic W. Barnes Jr.** 34, reporter, *The Washington Star*. Mr. Barnes, who holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, will study economics at Harvard, specializing in public finance, monetary policy and international trade, in addition to ancient history and early English literature.

**Alice C. Bonner**, 28, reporter, *The Washington Post*. Ms. Bonner is a graduate of Howard University and the Summer Program for Minority Journalists, formerly at Columbia University, now at Berkeley, California. At Harvard she plans to study the legal aspects of federal human resources programs, government organization and management, and evaluations of social programs.

**David L. DeJean**, 32, associate editor, *The Louisville (Kentucky) Times*. Mr. DeJean, who received his bachelor's degree from Indiana University, will concentrate on ethics and technology, and American political and social moralists.

**Alan Ehrenhalt**, 30, editor and political writer, the *Congressional Quarterly*. Mr. Ehrenhalt holds degrees from Brandeis University and Columbia University. At Harvard he plans to study campaign politics in America, welfare reform, psychology and music.

**Kenneth J. Freed**, 40, diplomatic correspondent for the Associated Press. Mr. Freed is a graduate of the University of Nebraska. He will specialize in American foreign policy, the politics and development of the Third World countries, and United States-Soviet relations.

**William H. Henson**, 31, chief editorial writer, *Gulf Publishing Company*, Biloxi, Mississippi. Mr. Henson has his

bachelor's degree from Louisiana Technical University, and will study American constitutional, criminal and environmental law.

**Bruce V. Locklin**, 39, investigative news editor, *The Record*, Hackensack, New Jersey. Mr. Locklin holds a bachelor's degree from Lafayette College, and at Harvard will concentrate on American government, public policy, criminal justice, economics, and psychology.

**Richard L. Nichols**, 31, staff writer, *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, North Carolina. Mr. Nichols is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He will specialize in the history of the American labor movement, political economics and sociology, in addition to the economy of the South.

**Daniel I. Schechter**, 35, director of news and public affairs, WBCN-FM, Boston, Massachusetts. Mr. Schechter earned degrees from Cornell University and the London School of Economics. At Harvard he plans to study multi-national corporations, the Spanish language, the problems of South Africa, and the impact of journalism on public opinion.

**Molly K. Sinclair**, 36, consumer writer, *The Miami Herald*. Ms. Sinclair attended Lee Junior College and the University of Houston. She will focus her studies on the business world as it affects consumers, including business economics, history, philosophy, bookkeeping, accounting and business procedures.

**E. Franklin Sutherland Jr.**, 32, reporter, *The Tennessean*, Nashville. Mr. Sutherland is a graduate of Vanderbilt University, and at Harvard will specialize in political science, economics and the relations between American business and state and federal government.

*The Fellows were nominated by a committee whose members included: John Clive, Professor of History, Harvard University; W. Thomas Johnson Jr., publisher of the Dallas Times Herald; Joseph A. Loftus, retired labor reporter; Barbara P.*

*Norfleet*, Lecturer on Visual and Environmental Studies and Curator of Still Photography, Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University; *Judith N. Sisklar*, Professor of Government, Harvard University; *William Small*, Senior Vice President and Director, CBS News; *Wallace L. Turner*, San Francisco Bureau Chief, The New York Times; and *James C. Thomson Jr.*, Curator of the Nieman Fellowships.

Four journalists from abroad have also been appointed to join the 11 American Nieman Fellows in the Class of '78. These Associate Nieman Fellows are funded by sources outside the University; the Nieman endowment is ordinarily restricted to citizens of the United States.

The Associate Nieman Fellows are:

**Arun Mathai Chacko**, 29, chief reporter for *The Indian Express*, New Delhi. Mr. Chacko holds a bachelor's degree from St. Stephen's College and Master of Arts degree from the University of Lucknow. At Harvard he plans to study international relations, comparative governments, and fiction writing. He was selected for an Associate Nieman Fellowship by the Press Institute of India, and his fellowship is supported by the Ford Foundation.

**Obed A. Kunene**, 40, editor and political columnist, *Ilanga*, Durban, South Africa. He will concentrate on the social, economic, political and educational disciplines, as well as studies in the mass media. Mr. Kunene's appointment is funded by the United States—South Africa Leader Exchange Program, Inc.

**Karol J. Szyndzielorz**, 40, senior columnist on foreign affairs, *The Daily Zycie Warszawy*, Warsaw, Poland. He received his master's degree from Warsaw University. His studies will focus on international problems, including armament and disarmament, and a comparative analysis of energy policies of the Western world. Mr. Szyndzielorz is the fifth recipient of a German Marshall Fund Fellowship within the Nieman program for journalists from Europe.

**Satoshi Yoshida**, 29, economics reporter, Kyodo News Service, Tokyo, Japan. Mr. Yoshida holds a bachelor's degree from Keio University. At Harvard he will study the history and government of the United States, and the effect of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) on U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. His appointment is funded by the Council for International Exchange of Scholars and, in part, by the Robert Waldo Ruhl Fellowship Fund within the Nieman Foundation.

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## Ragtime Revisited

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(continued from page 8)

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**Doctorow:** I took it out because I couldn't—once that chapter was done—I couldn't then write past it. It was a good chapter, it pleased me, but it stopped me cold.

**Bailey:** Was that because you couldn't then get him out of jail?

**Doctorow:** Partially. Mostly it was that I had violated the voice of the book, or the narrative distance, that I had come in a little too close, that I had put myself in the position of having to plot, and that's not what this book was about. It did not have a plot. And so I took out that chapter; and saved some of the tricks for Houdini's appearance later in New Rochelle.

**J. Anthony Lukas:** Who is the hero of *Ragtime*? I ask because in another celebrated *Playboy* interview, Robert Altman says it is Tateh. Who do you think it was?

**Doctorow:** I don't know. I've never thought about it. Tateh becomes an American success story, but at the expense of his socialist principles. I don't know if that's heroism. He becomes

a movie maker, which is what Bob Altman is. Maybe that's why Bob likes him.

**Paul Solman:** What you said about political journalism and all that business still disturbs me. The guy who comes around and testifies about the Shah of Iran's Savak, is it all right with you personally that when he bears witness about this situation, he makes it up—what the torture methods are and so forth?

**Doctorow:** I think what's critical here is the extent to which his art will propose to you that you are being tortured. Because if he just tells you what happened, or if he espouses political ideology, or shows you his scars, that would be a certain kind of truth. But if he writes so as to persuade you that you had gone through this with him, then what he has done is true.

**Solman:** A lot depends on context, I grant. But if Baraheni says to me if he meets me in conversation, or at an event where he is describing what happened and what they do in Iran, isn't he making some kind of implicit pact with me that he is telling me as best he can what events actually transpired? Do you not see that as an important distinction?

**Doctorow:** I think we hear things all the time, from all sources, yet we live in states, most of us, of moral insensitivity. So the question of the writer, whether he is a journalist or writer of

fiction or poet whatever, is: How am I going to get through to you what I know to be true? And no matter what he's experienced or what he's been through, he has no way of reaching you, paradoxically, unless he really knows how to write; and it's true that that talent, that gift, can be *used* and this guy can be going around saying terribly mean, nasty things about the Shah of Iran.

**Solman:** Well, I'm not really worried about the Shah. I'm worried about what happens, how he immobilizes people, if people then find out that what he said was not literally the case.

**Doctorow:** The point is if he's telling us something we didn't know before, we can act on it, we can verify it; but we won't unless we've really been moved by what he said.

**Brenda Engel:** I guess I'd say that perhaps a continuum is not from fact and fiction so much as from public to private knowledge, that fiction has always been based on people's lives, on things that are true, from Dickens to Balzac to Saul Bellow. Some of these characters happen not to have been publicly known, as Emma Goldman, for instance. But it doesn't mean that they weren't real. I find the two were rather confused in *Ragtime*, because my husband is a cousin of Harry Houdini. You know, a little fiction, a little fact, the private world and the public world are mixing. In the case of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote made private characters, who had perhaps some notoriety or some publicity, into well-known people. But I have a feeling that because we're in a meeting of journalists, these dichotomies are in the world that most of us know, in the world of public figures.

**Marc Granetz:** I have been very upset about the idea of trying to energize a writer by use of facts. R.V. Cassill, among others, has said that clearly the search of modern fiction is for subject matter. The historical novel, since perhaps *In Cold Blood*, is in a modern revival—providing that “matter.” Defoe did, but he didn't do very much with it. This modern revival of historical facts (not knowing *too* much and then taking off on the facts) provides motivation for a writer or fodder for his fiction when he can't really work on pure imagination. You said you want to tell the truth as you know it. But do you need as a basis Sacco-Vanzetti, or something else actual to begin to tell the truth as you know it; actually, then, in fact as the modern public knows it? I see it as a little bit of failure of imagination. Maybe I'm completely wrong.

**Doctorow:** No, you may be right. That has occurred to me too; it's a pretty good point. I don't know, I resist any such thing as an aesthetic manifesto, for once you've done something, you claim, well, this is the way to do it, the only way to do it. Really, I think a novelist writes what he's capable of writing at

any given moment; and this is the book I seem to have been able to do, so I did it. And it really is that physical a thing. You just press on and where it's possible to move forward, you do, and that's what turns into the book. If it's any good you will have broken somebody's rules. Of course *War and Peace* has Napoleon in it, which may be a failure of Tolstoy's imagination.

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... The search of modern fiction is for subject matter.

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I'm coming to the conclusion that one of the reasons today's fiction writers are not read terribly widely is because we constrain ourselves. Writers of fiction come out of a very specific class in this society—the middle class. And we do not know what's happening anywhere in this country. We do not know what it feels like to mine coal or to be on welfare and most of us are recording our middle class marriages and failures and divorces as if somehow that's the whole world and that's what's happening. It may be a failure of imagination to begin to use history, or the materials of history, but at least I didn't write a book about growing up shy in the middle west.

**Thomson:** Or sharks—

**Painter:** Are you going to do a *Son of Ragtime*?

**Papaleo:** We're forgetting something—and forgive this textbookish sound—the truth, and the truth of *Ragtime* is the book—the book of fiction. It's not really Harry Houdini or really anything. It's the metaphor it makes. In fiction it's the whole big metaphor it makes, which operates as a separate world from which we get another word about this present moment: the truth. And that is something which doesn't depend upon facts.

**Bailey:** No, that's absolutely right, though. You write something and somebody says to you afterwards, Wow, how did you figure that out? How did you know that was an important subject? And you're absolutely helpless because you can't say to them, Well, we thought it was a good story.

**Comment:** Right. But there were these intuitive sources that you referred to. . . .

**Bailey:** But you can't say that. That's not a respectable thing to say to a newspaper editor.



**Painter:** We have a short comment. There's a wonderful quote from Picasso that we artists lie in order to be able to tell the truth. And it seems to me that's what he's saying.

**Thomson:** Jimmy Carter says if you never lie, you'll never tell the truth.

**Melvin Goo:** Mr. Doctorow, to what extent, if any, would you care for a reporter writing for a daily metropolitan newspaper to move away from the seemingly pedestrian calling of just writing about the facts that he finds?

**Doctorow:** Oh, I would really love that. As a matter of fact, I have a fantasy about *The New York Times* and this is what it is: that on a day when Tony Lewis' column is not scheduled to appear, *The New York Times* is published—distributed to all of us—and I have written it all. If I could get Punch Sulzberger to agree to issue the paper as written in its entirety by me, on just one day, I would spend many, many years preparing that particular city edition. And I would consider it—it would be my life's work.

**Bailey:** But the question is, would you be willing to do it in the constraints of time and place, or whether you would get enough for me to do it with you in your way, so that it would have that immediacy and that truth of being the take-off on what happened.

**Doctorow:** It would be designed to blow us *Times* readers right off the street.

**Thomson:** Are you going to start at eight o'clock in the morning of the day when that happens?

If you do it, then what happens? Then you can't write it, you've got to be there. I want to know some day what writing fiction did for you, I mean seriously.

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**If [the book] is any good you will have broken somebody's rules.**

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**Doctorow:** It puts my kids through college . . .

**Engel:** I want Mr. Doctorow to go on if he will with something he started talking about—that is, you said that all novels now are written by middle class writers, and that's true, but hasn't that always been true? And if it hasn't always been true, then I am wrong. But if it has always been true, what makes that different now?

**Doctorow:** It probably always has been true. But I find it hard to call Edgar Allen Poe a member of the middle class, or Herman Melville.

**Robert Manning:** Is that a personal difficulty, or a matter of fact?

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**We all seem to be novelists for the Republican Party.**

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**Doctorow:** It has probably always been true. But I live now, and that's the way I feel about things now: that we're all sort of doing this stuff that's fairly useless and there are a lot of people around the country who we don't know about and who are not educated and not college graduates, and who don't belong to the Book of the Month Club and own two cars, and so on.

I look at a guy like James T. Farrell, who really is terribly neglected by the Academy, by the critics for many, many years, a writer who lacks grace in the academic sense of the word, but he nevertheless reported about the lower and lower-middle classes in Chicago in the 1920s, or Dreiser, who talked about working girls and their rise and fall; or Richard Wright, who talked about the terrifying isolation of black people and their frustration, and the lower classes.

I don't really know who's around today who's doing that kind of recording. We all seem to be novelists for the Republican Party. That's why I'm feeling very happy that we have a new administration—I mean, just from a working writer's point of view, the national psychology is going to change over the next few years. I don't know what is going to happen, but it could lead to a different kind of novel.

**Engel:** I think that's right. Can you go on with that? But then what is the middle class novel supposed to do? I mean, we're not likely to get novels from anything other than middle class novelists. And that's why I want you to talk about the particular situation now. How is that material to come in? Where do you see it coming from?

**Wald:** It doesn't matter where the writers come from. If writers are novelists, and this pure young girl can walk by the barracks and intuit Army life, and write a novel about it, it doesn't matter where she comes from. It doesn't matter whether the novelist comes from the middle class; the middle class like everything else is right in the middle. But it matters what is the style or subject matter, what is the intention of intellect? And it seems to me that there *are* styles, there are Chicago schools, and there are Paris realists. What you are talking about is how

does politics set the style? How does a generation direct its mind? If you don't see the proletarian literature now produced by the middle class, isn't it because people aren't paying attention to the proletarians, not because there are no writers who are proletarians?

**Doctorow:** Yes, I agree with that. That's why I think that if Washington begins to attend to some of our terrible built-in problems, there will be a change probably in the kind of art that is being done, not just fiction, but the other arts as well.

**Question:** Are you sure about that?

**Doctorow:** I think we are all highly subject to things like climates of opinion or national psychological states.

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**... novelists are no longer the culture heroes they once were, except to journalists.**

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**Hennie van Deventer:** I have a very stupid question to ask, but since we have been carrying on at such a high intellectual level, I feel—

**Thomson:** Watch out! Watch out!

**van Deventer:** I don't even know if this is true of America, but surely it is very true about the country where I come from—I mean South Africa—that so many extremely good journalists turn out to be very rotten novelists, and so very many extremely good novelists turn out to be extremely rotten journalists. I would like to hear your comment on that observation.

**Bailey:** That's a long-range question.

**Doctorow:** I'll answer anything.

**Thomson:** Would you like to begin with Allen Drury?

**Comment:** Journalism destroys the imagination.

**Doctorow:** I'm not sure I agree.

**Jose Antonio Martinez-Soler:** Fiction is a kind of censorship. Well, I come from Spain—

**Papaleo:** Where the reverse is always true. Journalism distorts the sense.

**Doctorow:** I think that there used to be a tradition in this country of the novelist coming out of the journalist. It doesn't really exist any more. Maybe there is some connection today

with what we were talking about, the middle class novelist, who knows about the middle class life, and the fact that so many novelists today teach in universities and do not come out of newspaper work. It occurred to me before, during the dinner, that novelists are no longer the culture heroes they once were—except to journalists.

**Tony Castro:** The other day I was talking with some one who was saying that for a long time in the history of American literature there has been this great expectation of when are we going to get the great American novel, and he said it is all based on the premise that the novel has to be the form of any great literature in our day. That may not be the pace that James Agee set, as Agee's letters to Father Flye were better than even his novel, and maybe even his book on the sharecroppers. Are you not also suggesting that it may be the case that the loss of the cool, cool status, that the novelist might have had, may have been a false kind of thing—that the American novelist has been living in the past with European novelists, Russian novelists?

**Doctorow:** Yes, except that if you examine the history of novelists, you discover that the novel has never quite been the primary act of culture that it is supposed to be. And that novelists have always lied about themselves and what they were doing in an attempt to get a kind of authority for their work. From the very beginning, as I often say, Daniel Defoe pretended to be the editor of *Robinson Crusoe*. He claimed it was really a memoir—that he had only sort of fixed up the punctuation, which is approximately what Richard Nixon said about the Watergate case.—He took the same position. A really interesting thing about Nixon, I think, is that he was trying to make a composition and he almost did it, through all those months, and our fascination was that of people watching an artist at work. Fortunately, his novel failed terribly.

**Justin Kaplan:** Well, I have a combination—a question and a comment here. Ed Doctorow and I have been over some of this ground before. Of course, the question has to do with a piece of very shaky information I have, and that is, How would it bother your reading of Albert Payson Terhune as a political novelist if it were true that Terhune grossly mistreated his dogs? Which, I believe, was true.

**Doctorow:** I recognize the intentional fallacy.

**Kaplan:** All right, call it what you will.

You and Joe, in talking about Sacco and Vanzetti, may have come to grips with the real thing. I think that, reduced to a very simple statement, it means a helluvalot to me whether Auschwitz actually happened or was simply imagined by someone. I think that once you begin forgetting that distinction, you're in terrible trouble, or I am, anyway.

**Doctorow:** That's of course, exactly the point. But would you grant me the right to write about Auschwitz, even though I had never been there?

**Kaplan:** I think you're sidestepping your question.

I think it has to do not with your credibility or credentials as an eyewitness but with the literal, historical existence of the circumstances, which are not dependent upon whether you were there or not.

**Doctorow:** Nothing can be written that hasn't happened—if it hasn't happened, it will. Emerson, I think, said anything that can be thought can be written. If I imagine Auschwitz, then someone else can. Hitler imagined Auschwitz and look what happened. The imagination, the human mind, intrudes on life and composes experience all the time. It kills and makes history.

**Bailey:** Can I ask what may be a clarifying question? Are you suggesting that by fictionalizing something like Auschwitz, you diminish the perception of its reality?

**Kaplan:** Not really, but what I was suggesting is once you fictionalize actual circumstances, you begin to turn to the realm of pure invention. Then I think you undermine a terribly important reality. I'm not quarreling of course with anyone's right to write fiction.

**Bailey:** I think you are answering my question, Yes, though.

**Kaplan:** I wasn't aware of it.

**Bailey:** I'm not arguing with the fictionalizing, if by fictionalizing J.P. Morgan or Auschwitz, or Harry Houdini, or whatever, you undermine the perception of the reality of the real thing.

**Kaplan:** You don't though. You don't necessarily.

**Simons:** Undermine the reality, or the truth?

**Lewis:** I have a different question. Mr. Doctorow, I thought I heard you say a moment ago—or maybe I might have just got it wrong—that fiction would become more radical, or socially challenging, with a more socially-challenging administration taking office. You said something like that, didn't you?—We're going to have to have a change in administration and maybe fiction will follow. That strikes me as a rather amazing notion, since I thought it was the other way around—that during reactionary periods in politics it was the writers of fiction who challenged the assumptions, whether it was Dickens, or Orwell or whoever.

**Doctorow:** Why do you think we have a new administration?

**Thomson:** We have one real live American historian present, Frank Freidel, who has not been heard from. does he want to say something?

**Frank Freidel:** I'm counting journalists as historians tonight.

**Thomson:** No, you're not historians. You're journalists.

**Diana Thomson:** I have a possible difference. The way *Ragtime* deals with reality is different from the way Joe is trying to deal with reality with Sacco and Vanzetti. Because Sacco and Vanzetti is a whole, continuous, real narrative, and his problem is how to use which parts of it properly so it still stays real but is sufficiently interesting. Whereas *Ragtime* doesn't pretend to be a whole, coherent fictional reality. It's really made up of a character here, and a character here, and a character here, and they're sort of put together which may be the most exciting thing about it—to read about characters who have been exciting your imagination for years, suddenly in there together, working together. And really, *Ragtime* is a lot more imaginative, I think, than you are giving it credit for. You're assuming it's a piece of journalism that's been fictionalized and I think that it is something a lot more creative and a lot more different than that.

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### Nothing can be written that hasn't happened —if it hasn't happened, it will.

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**Freidel:** I would say one thing. I think you gave Joe very bad advice, because you've got facts, facts, facts, and if you get to Sacco's widow, you will get feeling, which could stimulate his imagination.

I have never written a piece of fiction in my life, or at least I've never published a piece of fiction, but I do have a feeling that there would be great stimulus in terms of the emotions—feelings—because what I find as an historian, and after all I'm trying to recreate also, is that often through talking to people one gets totally a different perception.

Take Herbert Hoover, for example, notorious for his very dry as dust speeches. One didn't get that feeling when one talked to Hoover, the feeling there was one of dealing with somebody who had been a simple country boy in Iowa, because he had an Iowa idiom. That never came through in anything he wrote, and yet it came through in his conversations.

So when you talk to people who are involved in the times, it can be a marvelous stimulus to the imagination, more so than some times just simply reading through books and newspaper files.

**Doctorow:** You mustn't take Joe Papaleo's professions too

seriously. What he's going to do now, and he's quite serious about this, is the kind of torture we go through. I used to be an editor and whenever I said to a novelist, How's it going? and he said, It's terrific! Just great!, I knew we were in for bad times. But the novelist who really complains a lot and says he doesn't know what he's doing and worries and bites his nails and does socially impermissible things, then I think we have a chance for a really good book.

Of course, there's an immense literature about Sacco and Vanzetti but nobody, still nobody knows; and what the novelist often discovers in dealing with famous cases is that some kind of transcendent question occurs, having nothing to do with guilt or innocence.

**Lukas:** First I want to say I spent the weekend with Joe McGinnis who says to tell you that he is editing the *Playboy* interview you taped last summer and he is struggling to bring fictional truth out of prosaic reality. Second—

**Doctorow:** I never said I lusted in my heart. . . .

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**What the novelist often discovers in dealing with famous cases is that some kind of transcendent question occurs, having nothing to do with guilt or innocence.**

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**Lukas:** The second question I have, though, is in a sense more a statement, I suppose, than a question, but I would be interested in your reaction to the statement. The fact, I think, is that there are a lot of people in this room who have been struggling with the question of fact and reality in the kind of journalism that they do. Since Capote, since the "new journalism" there are a lot of journalists today who realize that the separation is not as simple-minded, I think, as we might have believed some decade or two decades ago. And I do believe, therefore, that somewhere between having our newspapers written on wire service tradition and having Ed Doctorow write our newspapers, there is a mean that a lot of us are struggling to find. I'd rather read Ed Doctorow's *New York Times*, but I want to read that between hard covers, and I'll pay—it'll probably cost \$17.50 at that point.

But I always felt when I worked for the *Times* that what my editors were telling me was that objectivity meant that I should write within *their* definition of, within their unquestioned assumptions about, reality. And my problem with working at the *Times* ultimately—after ten years—became that I wanted the freedom to write within *my* assumptions about reality, not

their assumptions; and that became a problem and so I left.

But I think that's a problem that a lot of the Niemans who are in this room, and who have come to hear you tonight, are struggling with at their newspapers. And I think really what you said tonight has a lot of implications, serious implications, to them and the journalism that they are trying to do. Whether they do it ultimately for their newspapers, or they start sending their manuscripts to Bob Manning, or whether ultimately they start trying to do it between hard covers, but I think that it has real implications for journalism today, too. I would be curious as to see whether Doctorow had any reaction.

**Doctorow:** I've always thought that the most objective, accurate kind of reality in newspapers is on the sports pages. The ball game is a very discrete event, and the account is usually backed up with statistics. If you read an account of a baseball game or a football game, it's really incredibly true. But, nevertheless, you never read in a newspaper account of a baseball game what it feels like to run under a fly ball in center field on warm summer afternoon.

**Comment:** You don't read *The Boston Globe*.

**Granetz:** I just wanted to say that I don't see anything but bad implications in what Mr. Lukas has said because—

**Thomson:** So much for you, Tony—

**Granetz:** I am extremely offended by the idea that authors should have gone beyond what they did and come up with some kind of transcendent reality.

Woodward and Bernstein discussed sources—we have three sources: we have four sources, we have seven sources: can you question the authority of our book? And I think they would have been offended if you would have thought that they should have written something other than they did. I can't see anything but improvement in literature's integrity as fiction tries to separate itself from journalism, stopping the production of the type of novel that needs the impetus of history and misinforms a lot of the reading public. I think it is not on very steady ground as far as literature's theory goes, whatever that's worth. There is a movement to join the two; I think both of them would be better off separate. I see a lot of journalists try to write fiction and I see a lot of fiction writers trying to write journalism and both results are surprisingly miserable.

**Lukas:** May I reply? It was the wine getting to me undoubtedly which meant that I was evidently not expressing myself well. I don't at all mean that journalists ought to be writing fiction, but I think that there is a serious question about what reality is. There were, in the 60s, let me tell you, real differences between people on American papers about what reality was. We



did not go to Chicago trying to write fiction, or Vietnam trying to write fiction. But you know that Charlie Mohr got in a great deal of trouble with *Time* magazine and he had to quit *Time* magazine because his editors accused him of writing fiction. I think you're being glib when you suggest that the issue is merely reporters trying to do Ed Doctorow's business. It's reporters struggling with what reality is.

**Bailey:** Let me interrupt and follow that. If you read what Ward Just wrote in a book called *To What End* about Vietnam, which is fact, you will think it is fiction. I don't know where you are on that continuum when you read that. Nobody who reads it is going to know and people who were there aren't going to know. But it is fact.

**Zvi Dor-Ner:** I think it's a very comfortable notion that was introduced: the continuum between fact and fiction, and I think we are working with it for such a long time because it is so comfortable. But I suspect that it is totally irrelevant. The continuum is between good and bad, and the things move along this kind of continuum; and the better it is, I think we have different standards for it, or we don't know how to put standards to it. So if somebody writes a lousy fact and it's judged as fiction, it doesn't matter. If the opposite happens, it doesn't matter.

**Cassandra Tate:** Do you see anything—this is to Doctorow—that makes you feel uncomfortable about what nearly everyone seems to agree is a growing tendency to merge history, fiction, and journalism? Does that make you uneasy at all?

**Doctorow:** I just wonder why people are so alarmed at this? Politicians, journalists, and historians have always made up history. I should think the right of composition would extend to novelists as well.

**Thomson:** All right, may I make the following important statement. First of all, the Nieman tradition has been violated by seven minutes—it's seven minutes past ten. Second of all, we are deeply grateful for everyone who was here and who even spoke. Third of all, there is a story that I always tell—my wife tells me that I tell it wrong—but it's appropriate to this evening, and it is about Alice B. Toklas going to Gertrude Stein after some incredible seance she had set up. Alice had been able to call forth as several people have tonight, at great length and with enormous group interest—

**Diana Thomson:** Not Alice, Gertrude—

**Thomson:** There, she was right, I was wrong. Gertrude had held forth and Alice said to Gertrude after the event, "Gertrude, you've said things tonight that it will take you years to understand." And in that vein, I would like to thank Joe Papaleo and Ed Doctorow and everyone else.

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## The Press Emergency in India

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by Cushrow R. Irani

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In my report to the Philadelphia Assembly of the IPI in May 1976, I had described briefly the situation facing the Indian press under the Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government in June 1975. No one could have foreseen then that the situation would change so radically in less than a year and that the press would regain its freedom so dramatically. But conditions did get worse after May 1976 before they got better.

The persecution of the *Indian Express* and *The Statesman* proceeded apace. In July 1976, *The Statesman* was threatened with the forfeiture of its printing presses in Delhi on an obtuse interpretation of the censorship regulations. Once again, the threat was met by legal challenge and, two months later, the government had no alternative but to back down in open court. All through the period of Emergency the paper's shareholders were threatened with imprisonment and worse to force them to part with their shares to nominees of the establishment and all directly in the name of Mrs. Gandhi and her son, Sanjay. But not a single share changed hands as demanded.

In the case of the *Indian Express*, the concessions made by the owners only whetted the appetite of the government for more. Majority control of the board of directors was conceded; the editor-in-chief, S. Mulgaokar, was removed and the paper was forced to deploy some reporting staff exclusively to cover Sanjay Gandhi's activities. But this was not enough. The rearguard action fought by Ramnath Goenka, the strong-willed owner of the *Indian Express*, increasingly irked those in authority who demanded total subservience. In October 1976, several steps were taken in quick succession. The paper's bankers, a nationalized bank, were directed to withdraw facilities. Simultaneously, on the first of the month, electric power was shut off to the printing presses in Delhi. When the Delhi High Court ordered restoration of the electric supply, an attempt was made to seal the presses three days later. When this, too, was successfully challenged in the court a very curious thing happened: on Sunday, October 31, 1976, an official notice appeared in the *Hindustan Times* (owned by K. K. Birla, who had been imposed on the *Indian Express* as chairman) announcing the sale by

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*Cushrow R. Irani, Managing Director of The Statesman, delivered the above report to the members of the 21st General Assembly of the International Press Institute which met last June in Oslo, Norway.*

auction of the paper's central air-conditioning plant and other equipment later the same day. The *Indian Express* knew nothing about this until the intending purchaser, who had acquired the property for a song, came to claim possession! This gross abuse of authority was again successfully challenged in the Delhi High Court.

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### All through the period of Emergency the paper's shareholders were threatened with imprisonment . . .

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In August 1976, it was sought to bring both newspapers to heel by starving them of advertising. More than one circular marked "secret" was issued by the Information Ministry to heads of all nationalized banks, airlines and other government-controlled or government-managed corporations supposed to be autonomous, requiring them to deny all advertising to these two newspapers. Both newspapers challenged these circulars in court, *The Statesman* first in the Calcutta High Court and the *Indian Express* followed in the Bombay High Court. The challenge was on the ground that the circulars were without authority of law and had been issued *mala fide* after all other attempts to control and dominate the affairs of the newspapers had failed. The circulars were withdrawn by Mrs. Gandhi's government after their defeat in the Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) elections and before they left office.

#### Censorship & PPOMA

Censorship was imposed for four specific purposes:—

- the defence of India and civil defense;
- the public safety;
- the maintenance of public order; and
- the efficient conduct of military operations.

In practice censors banned innocuous items of public interest—anything that suited the convenience of the ruling coterie in Delhi. They would even suggest how some items were to be featured. This "advice" was buttressed by vast powers under the new regulations— forfeiture, seizure and closure of newspapers and the arrest and detention without trial of those held responsible. All these flowed from the declaration of the Emergency. It was sought to institutionalize these powers so that they would be available even after the withdrawal of the proclamation of Emergency. The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act (PPOMA), incorporating the entire coercive apparatus, was quickly passed and made a part of the Constitution so that it could at no time in the future be challenged in a court of law.

#### Brave Little Journals

In my report last year I had said that at no time had the government's objective to control the press extended to more than the half dozen leading national English-language dailies. Experience has now shown the statement to be incomplete. Vast powers of censorship were used to snuff out a number of small but brave publications. In fact, the credit of being the first to challenge the censorship orders belongs to *Freedom First*, edited by M. R. Masani, who moved the Bombay High Court when the censor objected to as many as eleven articles scheduled for publication. In a memorable judgment, the Court struck down the Censor's orders and held:

In spite of the proclamation of emergency and the Presidential Orders a citizen is free to say, write and act as he likes so long as he does not transgress the law and so long as what he does is not prohibited or regulated by law. . . . What the respondent [Masani] was doing by his petition was not to seek to enforce any of his common law rights or any rights under Part III of the Constitution but to challenge the legality of the action taken by the appellant on the ground that it was without the authority of law.

The Court proceeded to lay down important principles that should guide the censor in his duties. In ringing language the Court declared:

True democracy can only thrive in a free clearing house of competing ideologies and philosophies—political, economic and social—and in this the press has an important role to play. The day this clearing house closes down would toll the death knell of democracy. It is not the function of the Censor acting under the Censorship Order to make all newspapers and periodicals trim their sails to one wind or to tow along in a single file or to speak in chorus with one voice. It is not for him to exercise his statutory powers to force public opinion in a single mould or to turn the press into an instrument for brain-washing the public. Under the Censorship Order the Censor is appointed the nurse-maid of democracy and not its grave-digger. Dissent from the opinions and views held by the majority and criticism and disapproval of measures initiated by a party in power make for a healthy political climate, and it is not for the Censor to inject into this the lifelessness of forced conformity. Merely because dissent, disapproval or criticism is expressed in strong language is no ground for banning its publication. [*emphasis author's*]

The example of *Freedom First* was followed by *Himmat*, edited by Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and several others.

The attitude of vindictiveness was best illustrated in the harassment of *Opinion*, edited by A. D. Gorwala, a retired 76-year-old civil servant. He was asked to show cause why ten issues of *Opinion* should not be confiscated. The very next day

the printing press informed Gorwala that they could not print the weekly any longer. There was no reply from government to Gorwala's pleas to explain why the issues were considered objectionable. He had to find a different printing press almost every week, as the police kept following him and press after press was intimidated. He was next served with an order demanding a security deposit of Rs. 25,000 within 15 days, knowing that this was well beyond his means. Gorwala then started cyclostyling the paper. Moved by the old man's courage, one of his earlier printers came forward and said he was prepared to take the risk but only one more issue could be printed before the government lost patience and passed a special order prohibiting Gorwala from publishing *Opinion* and prohibiting every printing press from printing it. This plucky little journal had to stop publication.

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**Censorship was imposed for four specific purposes: the defence of India and civil defence; the public safety; the maintenance of public order; and the efficient conduct of military operations.**

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In his letter to his readers explaining why *Opinion* would not appear, Gorwala summed up the situation admirably. He said:

Neither the Government of India nor the Government of Maharashtra can be so stupid as to harbour the apprehensions they profess to do. They know *Opinion's* reasoned columns offer no comfort to the rabble-rouser or the conspirator. They know the public *Opinion* serves. Such people do not riot in the streets. They read, they argue, they think, they consider, they come to their own conclusions. And it is these conclusions the regime is so afraid of, the conclusions reached by the minute fraction of educated Indians constituting *Opinion's* readership! What a tribute, in their own peculiar way, these mighty, powerful governments pay to *Opinion* readership and *Opinion* when they decide that they cannot allow this tiny organ of public information and public reasoning to live!

There were other small publications also snuffed out by one device or another under the censorship regulations—among them: *Janta*, in Bombay; *Seminar*, in Delhi; *Bhoomiputra*, in Gujarat; and *Sadhana* in Maharashtra.

### Censorship by Telephone

The censoring authorities relied more and more on censor-

ship by telephone. It was understood that instructions given over the telephone were meant to be taken seriously and any default would invite the full rigour of all the vast powers acquired under the Emergency. Thus, no appreciative comment was allowed on the Israeli raid on Entebbe airport or on the transfer of High Court judges from one state to another as punishment for passing honest judgments, and even the celebration of the birthday of Morarji Desai (then in prison, today India's Prime Minister) by his friends and followers was not allowed to be reported.

### Code of Ethics

It must be admitted with regret that at all material times a number of journalists were available to the government to do their bidding, acting "voluntarily." To make it appear that only a small section of the perennially "difficult" newspapers were "out of step with reality," a Code of Ethics was drafted in the Information Ministry and put out as a "voluntary" code framed by the industry. No front-ranking journalist had anything to do with its drafting. Under the slogan of self-discipline, amenable sections of the staff of newspapers were sought to be mobilized to set up "self-regulatory" bodies to "enforce" the Code. Here again, almost anything not acceptable to the government came within the mischief of the Code. In any event, one is struck by the absence of any reference to the basic right to freedom of speech and expression in a Code of Ethics apparently designed for the benefit of newspapers and journalists!

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**Under the slogan of self-discipline, amenable sections of the staff of newspapers were sought to be mobilized to set up "self-regulatory" bodies to "enforce" the Code.**

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### Journalists Jailed

The overall pattern was to terrorize and intimidate all those connected with the press into submission. Over a dozen journalists were arrested and detained without trial. Many more were threatened. Repeated demands that those being detained be brought to trial were ignored. The government's attitude toward the right to be informed of what was going on, was best illustrated by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's reply to a question at a press conference. She was asked why the government did not disclose even the total figures of those arrested under the Emergency regulations, because in the ab-

sence of such figures it was possible that greatly exaggerated figures and reports would gain currency. Rejecting the request, Mrs. Gandhi said that even if the correct figures were to be disclosed, the press would persist in exaggerating them!

## India's Night of Destiny

The weekend of March 19-20, 1977 was in every sense a turning point in India's history. As results from the various constituencies poured into Delhi, it was apparent that the poor, the neglected and the deprived of India's people had given their verdict in language unmistakable to any politician. As *The Economist* said, "No one will ever be able to say again that there is a choice between freedom and bread." The Indian people had made it clear that although bread was important, freedom was dearer to them.

The new government, elected on a specific mandate—the issue of basic human rights and civil liberties—set about quickly to dismantle the coercive apparatus which held the Indian Press in thrall. The hated PPOMA legislation was repealed immediately after the lifting of the state of Emergency. The law protecting the press from legal action in reporting faithfully the

of, although again, for the record, they left "voluntarily." The agencies reconsidered the matter and decided to ask for a merger.

Both agencies were registered corporations. Winding-up proceedings would have been cumbersome and would have involved proceedings before high courts. A new body called Samachar was brought into being as a society belonging to a handful of individuals, and to whom PTI & UNI surrendered their functions. The editor of *The Hindu*, G. Kasturi, was named chairman of Samachar's managing committee. Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Special Envoy, Mohammed Yunus, was made a member of the Committee. A government official became chief executive. Total control of the single news agency thus passed into government hands using the pretext of the managing committee.

Following the change in government, a special committee of newspapermen has been appointed to review the position and make recommendations as to what should be done with Samachar. They have also been asked to suggest a proper news agency set-up for the country, consistent with the principles of freedom of the press and freedom from government interference.

### Press Council

The Press Council is to be revived and, in a recent statement, the Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, has asked the press to set up its own Press Council. It will be recalled that the Press Council was abruptly dismissed without explanation in December 1975. It is commonly believed that the object was to prevent it from proclaiming its findings in the *George Verghese* case. Verghese, a journalist of high reputation was removed from the editorship of the *Hindustan Times* (owned by K. K. Birla). The Press Council was not disputing the right of the newspaper's proprietors to change the editor, nor was it enquiring into the question of whether the action taken was legally

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The monopoly of newsprint in the hands of the government has to be given up and a decision is still pending on future policy as regards government advertising.

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proceedings in Parliament (earlier repealed by Mrs. Gandhi's government) was restored. Punitive action against publications was withdrawn and those forced to close down were encouraged to resume. No journalist is now detained without trial.

### News Agencies

In my report last year I had said that the two major news agencies in the country—Press Trust of India and United News of India—which had built up a fine reputation, existed only as empty shells. The first demand was that both agencies should agree to merge "voluntarily." When this was rejected, they were told that large arrears of subscriptions due to them by All India Radio would continue to be withheld and would only be paid following a decision to merge. No doubt, to help in the process, the general managers of the two agencies were got rid

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The rearguard action fought by . . . the strong-willed owner of the *Indian Express* increasingly irked those in authority . . .

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within the framework of Verghese's contract. It was carrying out its proper function of pronouncing a verdict on the allegation, which appears to have been fully substantiated, that Verghese was removed as a result of direct pressures from the very top of the political ladder. To prevent a damaging finding, the Press Council was summarily dissolved.

(continued on page 54)



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## Code of Ethics

As the press is an essential organ of the democratic set-up, an important vehicle of communication and an instrument in the creation of public opinion, the journalists should regard their profession as a trust to serve public interest. In pursuance of this objective, the press should provide a truthful, comprehensive and reliable account of the events in a context which gives them meaning, project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society, regard itself as a forum for comment and criticism and discharge social responsibilities by clarifying the goals and values of society.

Our goals are enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution which embodies the resolve of the people to secure for all citizens "justice—social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation." This Preamble is reinforced by the Directive Principles of State Policy which lay down that "the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice—social, economic and political—shall inform all the institutions of the national life."

To discharge this social responsibility, it is evident that the moral and ethical behaviour of the press should reflect the values of society at large; so should criticism.

In pursuance of this trust and social responsibility, the following Code of Ethics will be applicable:

1) In the discharge of their duties, journalists shall attach full value to fundamental human and social rights and shall hold good faith and fair play in news reports and comments as essential professional obligations.

2) Journalists and newspapers shall endeavour to highlight and promote activities of the State and public which aim at national unity and solidarity, integrity of India and economic and social progress.

3) Journalists and newspapers shall avoid publication of reports and comments which tend to promote tensions likely to lead to civil disorder, mutiny or rebellion. Violence must be condemned unequivocally.

4) Journalists and newspapers shall ensure that information

disseminated is factual. No fact shall be distorted nor information known to be false, or not believed to be true, shall be published.

5) No sensational or tendentious report of a speculative nature shall be published. Any report or comment found to be inaccurate shall be rectified by prominent publication.

6) Confidence shall always be respected. Professional secrecy shall be preserved.

7) Journalists shall not exploit their status for non-journalistic purposes or for seeking information for non-journalistic purposes, and shall not allow personal interest to influence professional conduct.

8) There is nothing so unworthy as the acceptance or demand of a bribe or inducement for the exercise by a journalist of his power to give or deny publicity to news or comment.

9) Journalists and newspapers shall not indulge in personal controversies in which no public interest is involved.

10) Journalists and newspapers shall not give currency to, or publish rumours or gossip or even verifiable news affecting the private life of individuals.

11) Newspapers shall refrain from publishing matter (including advertisements) which is obscene or is likely to encourage vice, crime or unlawful activities.

12) Journalists and newspapers shall promote and project the national objectives of democracy, secularism and socialism.

13) Journalists and newspapers shall refrain from giving tendentious treatment to news of disturbances, involving caste, community, class, religion, religion or language grouping and shall not publish details of numbers or identify groups involved in such disturbances except as officially authorised.

14) Journalists and newspapers shall not publish information or comment detrimental to the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, or friendly relations with foreign countries.

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## Press Emergency

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(continued from page 52)

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It is not as though the entire coercive apparatus has been dismantled. A lot remains to be done. The monopoly of newsprint in the hands of the government has to be given up and a decision is still pending on future policy regarding government advertising. Under the previous government, the Information Ministry

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Right through the nightmare of the Emergency, government spokesmen continued to extol the virtues of a "responsible" press.

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had claimed authority to fix the advertising rates for newspapers, and the quantum of advertising to be allotted to each, not only in respect to the government's own business, but also for the vast volume of advertising of the nationalized industries, semi-government bodies, and even those bodies in which government has some say in management. These together represent as much as 30 percent of an average newspaper's advertising volume.

### "Best Press Freedom is in India"

Right through the nightmare of the Emergency, government spokesmen continued to extol the virtues of a "responsible" press. A brochure on the Indian press published by the Information Ministry for the edification of delegates attending the conference of non-aligned countries in New Delhi, referred to press freedom in India in the following terms:

While the Government authority in India keeps itself scrupulously away from the functioning of the press, the initiative taken by it has considerably helped the growth of the press spatially and in depth. The press in India has been the beneficiary of several official measures and its freedom of operation has been singularly free from any type of interference.

V. C. Shukla, Information Minister, reviewed his handiwork with great satisfaction and even proclaimed that the "best press freedom is in India." He announced that the "patriotic and responsible sections of the press" were growing satisfactorily and added, with *The Statesman* and *The Indian Express* in mind, that the people were not with the newspapers which opposed government's policies designed "for the benefit of the people." What the people thought of the policies of Mr. Shukla and of the government of which he was a part was demonstrated

in Delhi itself during the election campaign. It had been announced that the censorship orders would remain but that they would not be enforced. The Chief Censor became the Chief Press Advisor and it was well understood that the press was being carefully monitored to see how they used the few crumbs of freedom bestowed on them from the high table. A few days before polling day, Information Ministry officials were sent to the homes of *Statesman* journalists, suggesting that they should do something to change the paper's attitude if they were worried about their jobs after the elections, because it was settled policy that *The Statesman* and the *Indian Express* would "somehow be taken over" soon after the elections. Ultimately, Mrs. Gandhi's government never had the opportunity to carry out those threats but even during the election campaign the circulation of *The Statesman* and the *Indian Express* in the capital more than doubled, whereas those papers which had found favour with the Minister suffered alarming losses. The tide was beginning to turn.

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One word of caution, before I conclude. A great deal is being heard these days, at seminars and discussion meetings throughout the country, of the need for safeguards, protection and guarantees which are supposed to help prevent a similar situation arising again. Much of the discussion is wrongly directed. It would be a mistake to imagine that it was the absence of special privileges for the press, and of special status and protection for newspapermen that was in any sense responsible for the generally poor performance of the Indian press during the period of Emergency. Nor can any conclusions be drawn by referring to ownership patterns in the various newspapers. Guarantees and safeguards are all very well but there is a clear danger that they will be accepted as a comfortable substitute for a commitment to a high professional code and for a dedication to basic values, a willingness to stand up for those values, and a readiness to suffer for them should the need arise. The new Minister for Information, L. K. Advani, was not far wrong when he taunted the press, saying, "When you were merely asked to bend, you chose to crawl." Let us, as Mahatma Gandhi used to say, turn the searchlight inwards. Pitiless exposure is the best guarantee that all this will not happen again. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what happened, otherwise, public memory being short, the lessons will not be learned. After all, history repeats itself largely because we do not learn the lessons of history.

## Portugal's Press at a Crossroads

by Milton Hollstein

When Portugal's military junta nationalized the banks in March 1975, it became the reluctant guardian of eight bank-owned national daily newspapers. True to its vow to permit free expression after 42 dismal years of rigid censorship, the government has been propping these papers up to the tune of \$2 million a month, a heavy investment in an impoverished country. And the state-owned press also has been something of an embarrassment to the moderate and freely elected but shaky Socialist government now in power.

After a commission reported on months of study and public debate, the government announced this fall that it would no longer pick up the bills and would authorize salary cuts and layoffs. It also wondered whether it should hand back three papers to their original owners. But some editors remained skeptical that the council of ministers had the strength and will to move resolutely against opposition from the papers, the workers and a multitude of clamorous political factions. If it does, some of the papers doubtless will go under.

The capital, Lisbon, a city of only 800,000, has three morning and five evening newspapers. Oporto, the second largest city, with 300,000 population, has three mornings. One of the three morning papers and three of the five evening papers in Lisbon and two of the three in Oporto are state-owned in full or in part. As in the less-developed countries, there are no papers of any consequence of the smaller cities. This is another factor the government considers worrisome. For the moment it has the upper hand over the far left, and it is pledged to building a democratic public opinion among the once-inert populace of nine million.

The year-old constitution contains lengthy guarantees of personal rights but forbids private ownership of television. Most radio and all television were nationalized earlier, but television is primitive and the government-appointed managers are struggling against the daily disruptions by Communist-run unions.

Two newspapers were suspended previously but their plants and other assets were kept intact and their staffs still were being paid, since it is difficult and unpopular to fire anyone in Portugal.

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... The state-owned press ... has been something of an embarrassment to the moderate and freely elected but shaky Socialist government now in power.

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Even more bizarre is that the government, because it is pledged to "pluralism" of opinion, has been supporting papers of a wide political spectrum, including some that regularly attack it. Two of the state-owned papers are closely allied to the Communist Party, although the government got rid of Communist dominance in most of the press in a shakeup following an aborted left-wing counter-coup in November 1975. Oddly, too, one of the few papers believed to be in the black is the pro-Communist *Diário Popular*, a well-edited evening paper in Lisbon with about 68,000 circulation. Its tone is a marked contrast to the strident *O Diário*, the non-governmental organ of the Communist Party.

That Portugal has a free press at all is remarkable. Today print media of every political coloration flood the country and are available at kiosks everywhere. Yet the nation has known only brief periods of

such freedom. From the time the dictator Antonio Salazar clamped down in 1926 until the coup of April 1974, all forms of expression were rigidly controlled. Salazar's successor in 1968, Marcelo Caetano, effected some liberalization but profoundly disappointed the press by failing to end censorship.

Immediately after the 1974 coup the press, which had been predictably spoon-fed, bland, and almost entirely compliant, indulged in an orgy of what one press elder statesman called "gratuitous accusation, complaints, uncontained hatred and vile demonstrations." The result was that the provisional government, the first of six, issued a tough press law. Three newspapers were suspended briefly and one, *Luta Popular*, the mouthpiece of the Maoist MRPP, indefinitely.

Among the independent national news-

papers are seven weeklies. These weeklies were an especially important balance wheel during the fitful summer of 1975, when a Communist-leaning triumvirate was in power under the Armed Forces Movement, and their circulations boomed. They represent a wider graduation of opinion to the right of the Communists. At the extreme right is *A Rua*, which supports the discredited Salazar policies. All but one sprouted since the revolution, when Communist workers' councils seized control not only of the entire daily press—except the great socialist daily *República*—but also of the radio and television stations.

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These weeklies have managed to avoid the flabby administrative overhead that characterized the pre-junta press, when owner-banks used the losses as a tax write-off. At least two, the conservative *Tempo* and center-left *Expresso*, have been consistent money-makers. One of the best is *O Jornal*, founded in 1975 as an independent leftist paper by Joaquim Letria, a TV personality who had been information director of the state-owned television service. Fed up by censorship from below by the workers' councils, he rallied to his new journals 15 former newsmen who were willing to work unsalaried at the outset. *Jornal* then joined a small housing journal which now owns 48 percent of the paper and provides administrative and

port can maintain a press not dominated either by the political parties or the government itself. The independents already enjoy free postage inside the country, reduced telex and telephone rates and subsidized newsprint.

In a lengthy article on the newspaper situation shortly before the government decision, the editor of *Tempo*, Nuno Rocha, who is also chairman of the International Press Institute in Lisbon, argued that it was imperative that the government take a firm stand in weeding out the state-owned papers and subsidizing the independents. He said the assets of two of the closed newspapers could be sold and that some papers could be merged or turned into cooperatives. One suggestion heard

loss of possibly upwards of 3,000 jobs. Editors of the threatened papers also have been vocal. *A Capital's* editors, in an eloquent appeal carried in *O Jornal*, said the paper's continued independent identity was warranted because *A Capital* was committed to objectivity. The press has indeed become more sober and responsible since the early days of the revolution, when it reflected not only the Communist surge but also the general chaos. The government has plans to create a school of journalism to replace *ad hoc* night courses now offered with informal government support. The International Press Institute has pledged as yet unspecified aid to the press under a grant from a Norwegian foundation.

Still other critics of the government's move protest that a cutback in the number of newspapers would signify disrespect for the new constitution because it does not limit or condition the operation of the press. Given the difficulties of operating a newspaper in a stagnant economy, the argument for government aid becomes plausible. However, it has always been clear that a nationalized press and an open dialogue are incompatible in the long run. Portugal's chancy but idealistic search for a better way to achieve "variety in unity" certainly deserves the attention of free people everywhere.

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## The press has indeed become more sober and responsible since the early days of the revolution. . . .

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advertising support. The paper had 90,000 circulation, immense by Lisbon standards, in its first year and made a profit. Down to 62,000 in late 1977, the paper was in a touch-and-go financial situation, having run at a profit in the first half of the year and at a deficit in the second.

*Republica* is no longer published. It became a *cause célèbre* in 1975 when printers to the left of the Communists seized the paper in a feud with its socialist editorial staff. In a move that helped topple the triumvirate, Mario Soares, now the nation's premier, withdrew from that provisional government in protest against its unwillingness to order the paper returned to the socialists. *Republica* finally was returned in January 1976, but by then its editor, Raul Rego, who had served two terms in prison for his unorthodox views in the Salazar days, had founded a new evening daily, *A Luta* ("The Fight").

The independent press has been arguing for continued and enlarged government subsidies, contending that only state sup-

during the year of debate is that the government create an "Institute of State Participation" in which it would retain part of the capital but put management of its interests in the hands of an impartial administrator.

Among contemplated mergers have been the integration of two Oporto papers, *Jornal de Noticias* and *O Comercio do Porto*, into a single morning paper, and the amalgamation of *A Capital*, an evening Lisbon paper, into the government organ, *Diario de Noticias*. *A Capital* is a center-left daily that closely supports the government, but it is an especially big money loser. *Diario* is the circulation leader in the country at 86,000 and the only broadsheet daily. Since the shake-out of Communists that demoted or reassigned 22 staffers, the paper has been reasonably impartial, even in its news coverage of Alvaro Cunhal, the Communist Party chief, although the editorials reflect government thinking.

Opponents of the press reorganization plans include the unions, protesting the

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## How Thai Newspapers View Themselves

by Guy B. Scandlen and Kenneth Winkler

There is a Thai belief that in "years of a comet, Kings die," which is to say that comets accompany social change. The reader may need to be reminded that 1973-74, the period in which this chapter was researched, was a year of momentous changes in Thai society.

The most prominent change was the student revolution, which overthrew a military dictatorship, replacing it with an interim benevolent caretaker government and finally an elected one. It was during this revolution that the press assumed a greater credibility in the eyes of the Thai people. In addition, there were labor problems—culminating from years of repressive treatment by former governments—political scandals, and a world-wide newsprint shortage that threatened the existence of many newspapers.

Though the data in this study is based on primarily intensive analysis from July to October of 1973, the development and ramifications of the material collected stretch far into 1975.

We feel that Thailand is a case study of a developing press where the printed media—the only information media not directly controlled by the government—have been given new freedom in a tremendously responsible dual role: having established credibility, to play ombudsman to masses of people without influence in a society structured upon influence; and to diffuse information and opinions to the people, thereby helping to create more informed participants in the political and economic processes of development.

In order to understand how newspapers view themselves, thirteen daily Bangkok-Thonburi papers were chosen according to highest published circulation figures. The newspapers were: (English language) *Bangkok Post*, *Bangkok World* and *The Nation*; (Thai language) *Siam Rath*, *Thai*

*Rath*, *Ban Muang*, *Chao Thai*, *Daily News* and *Prachatiptai*; (Chinese language) *Sakon*, *Siri Nakorn*, *Tong Hua Daily News* and *Sing Sien Yit Pao*.

Articles were clipped, read and grouped into five categories by frequency of occurrence. The categories were: (1) the newsprint crisis, (2) government statements and restrictions, (3) press comments from Deputy Prime Minister Prapass Charusathien, (4) charities and service actions by the newspapers themselves, and (5) press responsibility as seen through editorials. Specific articles cited below are identified by month and day of 1973 and 1974.

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The shortage and higher price of newsprint hit Thailand . . . hard due to the fact that most pulp and print is imported. . . . The Philippines refused to sell 7,000 tons because what they had already sold "was enough for Thailand."

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The shortage and higher price of newsprint hit Thailand quickly and hard due to the fact that most pulp and print is imported. Papers of all three languages were concerned over the government proposals for new mills, price changes and taxings. Of articles studied in the Chinese press, 58 percent dealt with the problem, as did 40 percent of the Thai and 65 percent of the English language press.

Major problems arose because existing paper mills do not have the capacity for producing the 180-200 tons needed for everyday use. In Kanchanaburi, the government closed down a mill for "financial losses" only to approve a joint Thai-Taiwan venture to use some 1,000 square kilometers of bamboo forests in the same area (Post 9/21). Several businessmen wanted to re-open the mill, but after

the revolution it was decided to open it on a "tender only" basis (Post 10/23). Also at Bang-pa-in, the government paper mill had to raise print prices from Bh. 7,400 a ton to Bh. 10,000 while at the same time their chief purchasing officer was arrested for "falsifying official documents" (Post 9/22). Fears that text book prices would be higher were laid to rest when the government allowed printing companies to buy print at the former rate (*Siam Rath* 9/15).

Import overtures were made to Russia, Bangladesh, the People's Republic of China and the Philippines with mixed promises and results. The Philippines refused to sell 7,000 tons because what they had already sold "was enough for Thailand." Even though the Philippines wanted 14,000 tons of rice and "even though they haven't paid their bill" for the previous year, Thailand would "agree to sell the rice if the Philippines sells us the paper" (*Siri Nakorn* 8/30). To solve

the problem ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) officials decided that a regional paper mill should be placed in Java, but experts later disagreed and felt Sumatra would be better and there the matter rested.

On August 1, 1973, all Chinese lan-

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guage papers stopped their evening editions due to rising costs. The English papers had previously raised their prices and were soon followed by the Thai press. *Thai Rath* and *Daily News* both stated they would no longer print advance copies of their editions. (Thai language newspapers frequently print inner pages a day or so in advance, saving the cover pages for late-breaking news. "Popular" newspapers post-date every edition; that is, today's newspaper is published using tomorrow's date.)

pine pulp, then its dependence on imports would be lessened. But conservative estimates said it would take two-five years to make planned facilities adequately operational. Even if the ASEAN plan was feasible, Thai participation would be uncertain considering daily Thai needs multiplied by the needs of other member countries and given current nationalism trends.

Deputy Prime Minister Prapass Charu-sathien was the bogeyman for the Thai press before his ouster by students in Oc-

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... The newspapers championed individuals or causes unpopular with the government because of the press' own growing sense of identification with the people.

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Credibility about the real crisis was brought into question when one journalist remarked that a company known as the Five Tigers told Press Association members that if they ordered newsprint by August 25, they would have no problems with delivery or credit (*Siam Rath* 8/15). This company was criticized by the magazine *Business in Thailand* (12/73) as having a "monopoly on paper" in the country and for manipulating "the market to suit themselves." The charge was underlined in January 1974, when police and students raided warehouses in an anti-hoarding drive and uncovered almost 6,000 tons of unregistered newsprint. Since newspapers in Thailand use almost 200 tons a day, this hardly seems like hoarding; however, the police seized it intending to auction it off. On February 25, *The Nation* said the government was announcing price controls trying to reduce the cost from Bh. 7,000 (US \$350) a ton to the previous year's range of Bh. 3,000 to 6,000 (US \$150-\$300). This was due to the assurance they had from exporting countries that there "will be a sufficient supply at a reasonable price."

If Thailand could have a viable pulp mill ("no one really knows how reliable plans are," *Nation* 1/15) capable of producing an adequate daily amount of bamboo or

tober 1973. His attitude towards the press varied from "they're full of lies" (*Post* 10/21) to they bring "disunity" (*Siam Rath* 9/11). Though his comments rated a small percent in actual coverage, the effect of his comments was strongly felt because he was also Chief of Police and Assistant Commander of the Army. He asked the press not to "write to their taste" (*Siam Rath* 9/11) and not to print solely for "high circulation" (*Ban Muang* 9/12). He did, however, surprise a news conference in July by saying new permits would be allowed for new Thai language papers *only*, as there were "enough English and Chinese language ones" (*Sakon* and *Siri Nakorn* 7/23). This wasn't publicly commented on until August 8, when *Thai Rath* said "favoritism" would play a "decisive role in granting permission to newspapers; we will not be surprised if [permits are] granted to certain individuals and withheld from others." This was confirmed when *The Nation* (10/7) reported two new papers were coming out, one Thai language and the other Chinese language each having as "Chairman of the board . . . the secretary to the Interior Minister."

In a content analysis of Thai papers, Scandlen in 1975<sup>1</sup> noted that newspapers, especially Thai provincial ones, looked

upon themselves as "ombudsmen" for the public. This is partially supported by the amount of help and assistance Thai newspapers report they offered to the people. Following the 1973 October revolution, donations poured into *Daily News* (10/25-26) and *Thai Rath* (10/28-30) which in turn were given to the National Student Center of Thailand (*Thai Rath* 10/22). During the period of this study, *Thai Rath* ran the greatest number of "assistance" stories: farmers (8/30, 9/23), slum people (8/23, 9/10), strikers (8/11) and a prostitute (10/25) used *Thai Rath* as a medium for airing their grievances. *Daily News* also assisted flood victims in the north with money and clothes collections (10/11-13) and scholarships to journalism students, while *Ban Muang*, as did the previous two, hosted visiting monks and students (10/7, 16) and held charity benefits (8/14, 9/7). Chinese papers frequently ask for public help for destitute families (*Sing Sien Yit Pao* 7/26) and get results. English papers did not report any similar charitable functions during that time period. Also together with the Bangkok Bank, several newspapers were working on an agricultural assistance program (*Daily News* 8/10). It is significant that the editors took these situations seriously as evidenced by their appeals for justice and the prominence they gave charities by page placement. Self-aggrandizement (*Thai Rath* 9/20, *Chow Thai* 9/1, *Ban Muang* 10/10) although subtle, usually appeared as enumerations of the good works the papers performed. Chinese papers emphasized how "our papers" aided the community. In one case, *Ban Muang* organized a charity boxing match (10/10), and readers were well reminded about who did the sponsoring.

Government news releases dealing with press responsibility, although not published frequently (20 percent Thai language, 10 percent Chinese language and English language), seemed to have a

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<sup>1</sup> Scandlen, Guy B., "The Thai Press: A Content Analysis". MA Thesis, California State University at Fullerton, 1975.

strong effect due to the editorial comments they inspired. The Public Relations Department vied with General Prapass in ordering newspapers to take responsibility and described itself as "presenting the right news" to the public, as being "close to the newspapers" and as being accepted as an "important source of news" (*Ban Muang* 9/8). *Ban Muang* stirred controversy by criticising a government TV station whose director subsequently wanted to close the paper for "five years." The paper vowed "to fight to the end" (*Ban Muang* 8/27). When the Public Relations Department asked for an apology, *Ban Muang* went to court where it was cleared by the argument that it had criticized "for the benefit of the people" (*Ban Muang* 10/4).

On October 22, *Thai Rath* reported that the Special Security Police would not let them print certain news and photographs about the revolution. Between October 14-15, a word battle had raged. The Public Relations Department fretted that newspapers were using "color words" to describe events to "create more destruction." *Thai Rath* countered by saying the Public Relations Department should not worry and should "try to solve more immediate problems." The papers considered themselves "not the tool of government, we stand for the people" (*Thai Rath* 9/26-28). On October 14, *Chao Thai* said Prapass had given an interview asking for "understanding between the government and newspapers" and the paper said the government "should create good understanding between students and themselves."

The Public Relations Department warned about writing news that "excites" and "sensationalises the situations" (*Post* 10/13) and *Thai Rath* answered two days later that newspapers have "a duty to present facts" even if the Public Relations Department "doesn't want them to do so." Evidently they were backed by the public, for their circulation on revolution day soared to one million (*Thai Rath* 10/19).

The editorial restraint shown by the

papers during and after the revolution is noteworthy. True, the Public Relations Department tried to assert itself by issuing warnings, but the papers policed themselves. After the Government had fallen, some lurid sex stories and many charges of corruption were printed (*Nation* 10/23) as traditionally follows the fall of a regime, but the press was relatively free from tabloid sensationalism. In the end, when the Thanom government was searching for

someone to blame for their downfall, they said the newspapers "incited" the people. Newspapers replied that they had "an allegiance to the people" (*Chow Thai* 10/14).

The new "interim" government dropped the usual waiting requirement for official clearance of articles through the police press officers. The stringent requirements for new papers were waived also. (Previously, new papers bought the

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## An Historical Look at Thai Newspapers

"... Because the Court's *Royal Gazette* is limited to Government News for high and low ranking officials and by definition not suited for foreign or business news, (etc.) my Royal Brothers, other officials and I, after discussion, have started a new newspaper, resembling the *Royal Gazette*, named *Darunohwat* which means 'teachings of youth' ..."

*Prince Kasemsansopak, editor and founder of Darunohwat, in 1874. Darunohwat was the first newspaper operated and published by a Thai.\**

"... His Majesty issues the following announcement: 'Don't believe stories in newspapers because clearly those writings cannot speak directly but indirectly cause embarrassment. To those receiving and reading newspapers: don't believe them to be true' ..."

*Notes from 1865 - 1868 meetings of King Mongkat, Rama IV\**

"I feel that those writing for newspapers have sporting spirit better than groups who say one thing to your face then stab you in the back ... Newspaper writing is a kind of game like billiards or tennis. Our opponent or partner must be of equal ability in order to have fun. If he's weaker, there's no fun. The game's boring. Better to give it up. If our opponent is strong, we may get angry but at least it's fun."

*King Vachiravut, Rama VI, quoted from The Life and Work of Asvopah, by Prapad Treevongse.\**

"Newspapers are full of lies."

*Former Deputy Prime Minister, Prapass Charusathien, quoted in The Bangkok Post, 21, October, 1973.*

"The Thai press takes itself seriously in providing forums for public opinion ... it is the only light in the dark situation of the press in Southeast Asia."

*Pran Chopra, Editorial Director, Press Foundation of Asia, 1975.*

*\*These quotations are found in An Historical Account and Content Analysis of Thai Newspapers by Sukanya Teerawanit, translated by Scandlen.*

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mast-heads from non-operating papers officially registered, but not publishing. Thus, for an exorbitantly inflated price, one could buy the mast-head from *The New Thai Daily* and change it, by down-playing part of the title, to *Daily*, to create a new paper from the ashes of the old.) However, the government, still watchful of the Thai press law, revoked the license of the *Siam Rath* editor for publishing an article from the Sweden-based Thai Liberation Movement which attacked the King. Though only revoked for a month (*Post* 12/20), it served notice that the newly allowed freedoms had their limitations, despite the fact that some citizens believed the editor had "good reasons" (*Nation* 11/30) to inform the public of the existence of the liberation movement.

After the student revolution in 1973, the restriction on establishing newspapers was lifted. In July of 1974, the police reported issuing licenses for 736 newspapers and magazines. 144 licenses were for daily newspapers and magazines. 144 for Thai language, 21 for Chinese language and 9 for English language. The remainder included weekly, fortnightly and monthly publications (*Post* 1974). All of these have not yet appeared on newsstands, and the list is still incomplete for there have since been additional licenses granted to Japanese language newspapers.

Violence dogged newsmen throughout the country during the period of this study. One provincial editor had his ear burned (*Sakon and Siri Nakorn* 8/24, *Chow Thai* 8/25) because of his stories concerning "outlaws" while the editor of Pak Tai in the South found his car in flames. He suspected the police for he had run a series of articles exposing their gambling control and protection rackets and he had no other "known enemies" (*World* 8/28). *Ban Muang* had their northern office raided by "twenty unknown men" (*Ban Muang* 11/13) and another crusading editor was gunned down in Udorn after writing stories about illegal logging operations in "protected forests" (*Nation* 11/8). On the other side of the coin, two scandal writers were

jailed for extortion against an Indian merchant (*Post* 7/11).

Labor problems only involved the Lord Thomson (British) owned *Post and World*. The management was accused of discrimination against Thai employees (*Post* 7/11, 16) as well as the hiring of unqualified aliens "who even higher-placed Nationals have to take direction from" (*Nation* 7/28). This is compared to the welfare program of *Thai Rath* where workers "divide" up the voluntary small monthly saving each contributes (*Thai Rath* 8/3). The *Post-World* syndicate was singled out by a regulation in the newly proposed Constitution that "newspaper proprietors must be persons holding Thai citizenship" (*Nation* 1/5). Earlier charges against these papers that they "violated journalism ethics" by turning over interview tapes on their own initiative with a suspected visiting revolutionary, and then

"boasting" about it later (*Nation* 12/5) went unanswered. Other papers received criticism too, but usually the charges and the answers were printed.

It appeared during this study that a distinct sense of responsibility was developing. Quite often the newspapers championed individuals or causes unpopular with the government because of the press's own growing sense of identification with the people. Even during the October revolution of 1973, the newspapers withheld inflammatory and sensationalized articles and concentrated more on the democratic and humanistic aspects of the situation. Perhaps it was a calculation on their part due to fear of governmental reprisal, but the authors feel that a true sense of responsibility to their readers was manifest and they indeed were attempting to create a public more informed on the political processes of their society.

## Letters to the Editor

### To the Editor:

Thank you so much for publishing my piece ("In Britain, Ratings Are Not Everything," *NR*, winter 1976/spring 1977) comparing and contrasting British with American television. I think it was something that needed saying in the U.S.—although of course nothing except an audience rebellion will change it, the "it" meaning American TV.

A literal error (the omission of two lines) in the penultimate paragraph of the article unfortunately changed my meaning. It should have read:

"We have been bitterly critical of American television because it could *have been so good and has instead been so bad*. Few people could have done more for American society, but did less, than the men who founded and shaped the American television networks."

The omission of the underlined words made it seem as though I blamed those who followed rather than the founders. I meant quite the opposite. I think the

Paleys and the Sarnoffs of this world were the worst culprits. And it is *they* I would doom to spending Eternity watching the output of their own networks.

John F. Day  
Exmouth Journal Ltd.  
Devon, England

### To the Editor:

I liked the Joe Loftus account of his time in government ("On Joining the Government," *NR* summer 1976; autumn 1976). If it matters, toward the end of his first-part article, he makes a minor miscue in small print in which he says the F-111 was the U.S. fighter plane falling down all over Germany. Nope, it was the F-104 Starfighter. The F-111 was the swing-back wing fighter which got its initial combat experience in Vietnam (based in Thailand). The F-111 had its troubles also.

Jack Foisie  
Chief  
Johannesburg Bureau  
Los Angeles Times



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# Books

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## Golden Clan

by John Corry

(Houghton Mifflin Company;  
\$8.95)

To be Irish in America has often meant to have stiff lace curtains and a cut glass bowl in the parlor window; to scrub your front stoop; to say the beads and slander the neighbors; to be pious or at least pietistic; faithful to Church and kin; to like the liquor perhaps; to marry late if you were a man and to suffer silently if you were a woman; to have dark nights of the national spirit, and light, bright moments of wit and revelry; to persevere; to endure and, for many Irish, to triumph in God's good time, comingling as if at the communion rail the tastes of victory and ashes.

For some very special American Irish there has been another ingredient: money. It is about this "Golden Clan" that John Corry (Nieman Fellow '65) has fashioned a small, bright emerald of a book which is wise and stamped all over with Corry's own very Irish-American prejudices and preferences.

Corry has outlined what he delights in calling the "contours of the existence" of the Murrys and the McDonnells and other selected Celt subjects. It's all here, from the patriarch Thomas E. Murray, inventor second only to the great Edison himself in number of patents, to matriarch Rose Kennedy and her splendid, fated sons—her "revenge," as Corry terms them.

Revenge for what? Well, for being looked down upon by WASPs, of course, for being Irish, for being hearty peasant stock that somehow managed to "get above itself" only to bear the guilt ever

after. Oh, genteel, to be sure, and with a special grace, always "offering it up" for the greater glory of God. For that is Corry's not incomprehensible thesis, a thesis he proclaims in tones resonating in turn with wonder and respect, deprecation and gentle mockery.

It was, after all, the American "high Irish" who, between bouts of guilt and black anxiety about who and what they were, managed finally to marry into the prestigious Ford family—which was really Irish anyway, way back. And it was James McDonnell who rented a fleet of buses to take his daughter, Anne's, bridesmaids to the church standing up so their dresses wouldn't wrinkle. It was the McDonnells, too, who courted and preened their own personal clerics, Fulton J. Sheen and Francis Spellman. But it was on Mrs. Nicholas Brady's tennis court at her Rome villa that Spellman and Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli would meet at Mrs. Brady's arranging.

Pacelli would later become Pope Pius XII. One of the first cardinals he would name would be Francis Spellman, by then an American bishop and still the particular pet of the powerful American Irish families.

Of course, the clerics didn't forget their wealthy patrons. Certain things could always be arranged, little things like private, in-home family chapels and requiem masses that would take your breath away and surely catch the eye of the Almighty. When Jack Murray died in 1934, for instance, his mass was celebrated by three bishops, seven monsignors and 30—count 'em, 30—priests. And though it was perhaps not a great day for Jack, it certainly was a great day for the high Irish of America.

In an almost laconic, anecdotal style, Corry has captured much of what it has meant in this country to be rich and Irish,

that curious "sense of being at once superior and inferior to everyone else." Perhaps only an Irish-American like Corry could get away with writing a book filled with the kinds of generalizations about the attributes of a particular racial or national group that are widely believed, even if not always widely discussed in public.

—Ron Javers

(*Courtesy of the Philadelphia Inquirer*)

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## Ring: A Biography of Ring Lardner

by Jonathan Yardley

(Random House; \$12.95)

Jonathan Yardley (Nieman Fellow '69) wants us to like and admire Ring Lardner as much as he does. *Ring* is a heroic effort to help us get there, full of sympathy and qualms, evocations and damning details, some dismay and an appealing protectiveness. It neither huffs nor puffs, in the psychoanalytic or any other mode. And it allows Scott Fitzgerald the last word: "A great and good American is dead. Let us not obscure him by the flowers, but walk up and look at that fine medallion, all torn with sorrows that perhaps we are not equipped to understand. Ring made no enemies, because he was kind, and to millions he gave release and delight."

That he certainly did—in his baseball reporting for various Chicago newspapers, in his nationally syndicated column, in his stories for *The Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines, in his radio criticism for

*The New Yorker*. He even managed to release and delight such notoriously tough customers as Edmund Wilson, H. L. Mencken and Virginia Woolf. Two of his stories, "Haircut" and "The Golden Honeymoon," will live as long as there are anthologies. One of his characters, Alibi Ike, walked right off the printed page and into the deep freeze of America's imagination of itself. "'Shut up,' he explained" is more than a classic line; it is by now almost a neural circuit.

Happy childhood (in the bosom of a more or less aristocratic Middle Western WASP family), long courtship and loving marriage and devoted children (Ellis's moving letters are quoted extensively), sudden fame and quick riches (\$4,500 per story)—of course he would be punished. His friends wanted him to write a novel; he didn't. He wanted to write a hit tune, a Broadway musical comedy; he couldn't. All but one of his children died tragically. Alcohol stupefied him; he was so shy he had to drink to talk and then drink instead of talking. He wasted away, in debt, at age 48.

Did he punish himself? If so, it's hard to see for what. To be sure, a Chicago newspaperman was supposed to drink, but Ring had started in high school. Was there a secret sexual wound? Probably not, or Mr. Yardley would have found it: Ring seems to have been one of the virgins at his own wedding, and happily monogamous ever after; his prudishness—the attack in *The New Yorker* on suggestive lyrics in popular music raises eyebrows, or low brows—was probably typical of his upbringing.

A private despair? Mr. Yardley suggests: "He had worked as hard as he could to fulfill his potential, and when he saw what he had created he felt cheated: His talent was too limited and so was what it produced." There is nothing cheap in this suggestion. Mr. Yardley earns his right to make it after a series of painstaking discriminations and empathetic leaps: "In truth, he probably did not care all that much about being great, but neither did he want to disappoint. He was a miniaturist

to whom the world seemed to be shouting 'Inflate! Inflate!' and he could not handle it."

Imagine, though, a career as a merchant of psychic yard goods, of writing six or seven columns a week, of inventing yourself every morning for a laugh and a meal, of tiring of one-day selves and settling for two or three stock selves, caricatures, alibi Rings. Friends! They tell you that you're an artist; artists don't have deadlines. They lay upon you a transcendent seriousness of purpose; jokes are easier. They require stamina; you have always been a sprinter. They are disappointed; who, ultimately, isn't?

Fitzgerald said Ring Lardner made no enemies because he was kind. Mr. Yardley says he didn't want to disappoint. As well as being Abe North, then, in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, he might have been part Dick Diver, too, with a fatal desire to please. Everybody can't be pleased. Of Abe/Ring, Fitzgerald wrote: "All of them were conscious of the solemn dignity that flowed from him, of his achievement, fragmentary, suggestive and surpassed. But they were frightened at his survivant will, once a will to live, now become a will to die." Why couldn't they have left him alone? To insist that a friend be a genius is cruel.

Mr. Yardley is a graceful critic whose articles and reviews have appeared just about everywhere. *Ring* is a graceful book, beginning on a grace note in the form of an essay on baseball as it once was before the Chicago Black Sox scandal. It is also an agreeably romantic book, because Mr. Yardley clearly believes in many of the same things Ring did: baseball, family, craft, humor, decency, limits. These, in *Ring* have their own geography, as distinct as Niles, Michigan, where the Lardners grew up reading the *King James Bible* and the *Book of Common Prayer*. It is a fine place to be.

If Mr. Yardley thinks more highly of Ring's achievement than I do—too much is too cute and, really, Mark Twain taught us how to write our language—a biographer has to have that regard, that critical

respect, in order to write a biography as good as this one. Listen, we are told, he was honest and did his best, and of how many writers could we say the same?

—John Leonard

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## Shattered Peace— The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State

by Daniel Yergin

(Houghton Mifflin Company;  
\$15.00)

When I went to work in early 1961 as a small bureaucrat in John Kennedy's State Department, I quickly began to feel something alien and creepy in the atmosphere. All through the meetings, memoranda, and cables there lurked one almost tangible constant: a series of tacit and unquestioned assumptions that had become a full-fledged ideology. Its focus was Communism, world wide.

In those days newcomers to State were quickly appraised as "hard-boiled" or "soft-boiled" on Communism by the pros inside as well as their flacks outside. (In those years the primary public egg-sorter was Joseph Alsop, a position now filled by Evans and Novak.) It seldom occurred to anyone that hard-boiled policies could produce soft-boiled results—as in the Bay of Pigs and, ultimately, Vietnam. Verbal toughness was the hallmark of sound thinking. And "negotiations" with virtually *any* Commies were largely deemed anathema (indeed, it was darkly suggested by one hard-boiled careerist that Averell Harriman, the Laos negotiator in Geneva,

would soon be signing his cables "Pushkin"—the name of his Soviet antagonist).

At the time I guessed at the source of the problem: the legacy of Cold War Presbyterianism bequeathed by John Foster Dulles. But I was only partially correct. For what I had joined was, in retrospect, the "National Security State," an older and fully bi-partisan creation. And what I was expected to accept, on joining it, was that state's ethic, developed as early as 1946-47: that virtually anything goes in response to the perceived worldwide "Communist threat," wherever "instability" might break out.

Thanks to Daniel Yergin, a young Yale- and Cambridge-trained historian, I now better understand that curious 1960s atmosphere at the State Department. His book is a masterly and lucid account of the origins of the Cold War and the National Security State. From a post-Vietnam perspective, he has exhaustively pored over the relevant Western archives in pursuit of answers to two nagging questions: How did it all happen? and, Was it all necessary?

The "it" here is the striking turn-about in Soviet-American relations between the Yalta Conference of February 1945 and the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49. The shift was from victorious Great Power partnership to institutionalized hostility, a condition of permanent crisis. The by-products were a transformed American world-view, an enormous expenditure of dollars and lives, and a global balance of terror, only recently tempered by "détentes" here and there.

Scores of Western scholars, statesmen, and others have searched through the rubble of this "shattered peace" over the past thirty years. And at least two schools have evolved—the orthodox types, who have blamed Soviet global ambitions for the collapse of the wartime alliance; and various "revisionists," who have placed the brunt of the blame on American imperialist policy-makers—Wilsonians with nuclear weapons in their hip pockets.

Yergin's research benefits from both the insights and the polemics of those who

came before. And he tries—sometimes with tip-toeing caution—to steer through the minefields of the past.

One central virtue of this book is its readability. The author has a sharp eye for drama, the physical setting of a scene, conversational snippets among the great, the passions and quirks of the actors, the ironies and hilarities of history. He is a gifted story-teller, but still scrupulously accurate and fair, never lapsing into souped-up history as fiction. (Everything that should be *is* footnoted—but never intrusively, since the 76 pages of notes perch quietly at the back of the book.) At his best he reminds one of Barbara Tuchman at her best. The complexity of the terrain would challenge the skills of both Tuchman and William L. Langer. Yet Yergin imposes a structure on chaos, a structure at times too schematic that nonetheless has the feel of truth.

There is one unavoidable shortcoming. What Yergin offers is a new angle of vision from the archives of the Western allies. What is still missing—as he admits at the outset—is any definitive understanding of the internal Soviet record, for the Kremlin's archives remain closed. Until and unless they become available, no history of this era can be complete. One can only guess, on the basis of scanty materials, at the evolving aims and conflicts among Moscow's policy-makers.

The heart of Yergin's contribution is a new way of looking at the shift in Washington's view of the USSR's place in the universe. Specifically, he perceives two sets of conflicting policy "axioms"—those of Riga, in Latvia (the chief U.S. monitoring post of Soviet affairs prior to U.S. recognition in 1933); and those of Yalta, the symbolic high-point of wartime cooperation between Washington and Moscow.

The Riga axioms stressed the unique qualities of the Soviet Union as irrevocably "revolutionary, messianic, predatory" on the world scene; given such qualities, it was argued, no diplomatic settlement was possible with such a nation. Those who held to the Riga axioms numbered most of the State Department's Soviet experts—

notably George F. Kennan, Charles E. Bohlen, and Loy Henderson.

The Yalta axioms, on the other hand, held that Moscow's foreign policy was "often clumsy and brutal, sometimes confused, but usually cautious and pragmatic." From this viewpoint, the USSR "behaved as a traditional Great Power, intent upon aggrandizing itself along the lines of historic Russian goals, favoring spheres of influence, secret treaties . . . the other methods and mores from the 'old diplomacy.'" Under the Yalta axioms, shared by Franklin D. Roosevelt and some of his closest advisers, coexistence and diplomatic settlements with Moscow were entirely possible—regardless of the repellent internal nature of Soviet totalitarianism.

Unsurprisingly, Yergin sees Riga as the father of the Cold War and National Security State, Yalta as the father of détente of the 1970s.

Much of this book is a gripping study of the dispersal and defeat, or change of heart, of the Yalta proponents after the death of FDR—and the gradual triumph of the Riga proponents, now allied to Truman and a new group of policy-makers (especially Forrestal and Acheson). At the heart of the process is a complex sequence of mutual misunderstandings and mutual misperceptions on the part of both Moscow and Washington. Time and again, each felt threatened and/or betrayed by the other—and upped therefore the ante of hostility.

It is Yergin's strong hunch, and he defends it persuasively, that the devastated post-war Soviet Union sought, first and foremost, secure frontiers (i.e., a docile Eastern Europe) and also large-scale reparations from Germany for the USSR's reconstruction. As one American negotiator after another backed away from the \$10 billion that Stalin felt promised from postwar Germany, the Kremlin sensed betrayal. There followed Soviet responses, which Washington saw as provocations; then Western responses, which Moscow misread. And so it went.

Throughout this sad story runs one

troubling theme: the Soviet Union seen by more and more American policy-makers as "a superbly functioning mastermind... at work in every local crisis;" even its times of moderation or concessions were now judged as merely "a matter of expediency." Meanwhile, at home, Harry Truman had had to whip up Congressional and public support for the foreign aid and vast new defense establishment deemed necessary to resist this global menace. Hence his rhetorical contribution, and those of his aides, to a shrill new national consensus of anti-Communism, including new procedures to ferret out "loyalty" and "security" risks among government employees—the "enemies within." It takes little imagination to guess how all this looked from Moscow.

*Shattered Peace* has no heroes or villains, only wiser and less wise men, half-seeing, buffeted by forces they barely understood.

One such man who weaves in and out of Yergin's narrative is that brilliant, brooding ascetic, George Kennan—whose intellectual impact was probably the greatest in furthering the Riga axioms. It was Kennan, architect of the "containment" policy, who felt by March 1947 that Truman was much overstating the case; it was Kennan, too, who dissented from the planning for NATO in 1948, complaining that his views were being applied too rigidly in the creation of a militarized partition of Europe. By 1950 Kennan had become "a critic, rather than a promulgator, of the Riga axioms." But it was

now much too late to rein in the National Security apparatus that he had helped create—or the abuses of that apparatus from Joe McCarthy, the Senator through Richard Nixon, the President.

Yergin's book begins by asking, "Was not some form of detente—some reduction in tensions, some explicit ground rules—possible earlier, much earlier?" His answer at the end, though hedged, is Yes: the Yalta axioms, now back in fashion, were probably sound after all. This book should be read by anyone who doubts that history can teach lessons.

—James C. Thomson Jr.

(Courtesy of The Boston Globe)

## Notes on Book Reviewers

Ron Javers, Nieman Fellow '76, is Associate Editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News*.

John Leonard is Chief Cultural Correspondent for *The New York Times*.

James C. Thomson Jr., Curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard, was an East Asia specialist at the State Department and National Security Council in 1961-66. He is the author of *While China Faced West* (Harvard, 1969).