

# NIEMAN REPORTS

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FIVE DOLLARS

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# The Rodney King Video Revisited

BY BILL KOVACH

**I**N A MIDNIGHT HOUR OF March 3, 1991, a private citizen named George Holliday aimed his television camera and recorder at a group of Los Angeles Police Department officers subduing a black man named Rodney King.

What he recorded that night set in motion a series of events in Los Angeles including the removal of the police commissioner; a restructuring of the police department; and, criminal and civil charges against the officers involved in the arrest. It also led to a deadly riot in South Central Los Angeles when the officers were acquitted of the criminal charges.

The Holliday film has also led one organization to begin an ambitious plan to monitor human rights abuses worldwide by arming human rights advocates with television minicams. It is the hope of this program that they can reproduce the explosive impact of the Holliday film with equally compelling footage.

Like warnings of a distant storm the Holliday images continue to flicker ominously through our society. But, as we celebrate the power of the public spotlight journalists should pause to

consider how effectively the new technology truly delivers reality, or a "higher truth", and the degree to which it creates its own reality.

On pages 29-33 of this issue of Nieman Reports we reproduce a chapter from a book written for Sergeant Stacey Koons of the Los Angeles Police Department by Robert Deitz (Nieman Fellow 1972). We run it, not because we agree with its conclusions but because it fundamentally challenges how the press handles such images in a way which deserves serious consideration.

Simply put, Mr. Koons and Mr. Deitz conclude that consistent and persistent biased and distorted news coverage of the arrest of Rodney King were directly responsible for the South Central Los Angeles uprising because the film it presented the public was not shown in the proper context. The police officers, this argument goes, did their job by-the-book and with a minimum of force.

The ultimate proof presented is that the criminal court jury found the officers not guilty of criminal behavior. The public saw sadistic violence while the criminal court jury saw a judicious, even

humanitarian, use of controlled force. The difference between the two was the context within which the film was presented to the two audiences.

In the book, as in the courtroom, many of Sgt. Koons challenges of the press are presented as fact with so little supporting material they can be dismissed simply as argument—more stylistic than serious.

But beneath the rhetorical argument lies the fundamental question of how well contemporary journalism can present the news in reliable context. Are journalists sufficiently motivated and careful to manage the powerful new communications technology? Are the journalistic rules and institutions reliable, or do dramatic images and powerfully narrated stories overwhelm the work of journalism?

Some recent evidence, like the coverage of the Persian Gulf War or national political campaigns, suggests that images are in the saddle and drive the system. At times, such as a political campaign, the images are contrived. At times, such as the Gulf War, existing images are manipulated and controlled. But in each case the evidence of recent years is that the importance of the image can overwhelm the system journalists have erected to protect against misleading reports.

To be able to bring to the public dramatic images of live events in the Gulf War, television stations were willing to broadcast unexamined images worldwide. In order to have access to film in managed briefings in Saudi Arabia or managed tours of Baghdad, networks were willing to serve as conduits of government propaganda. In each case individuals with a vested interest in how the images would be seen were

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# A Good Job on the Campaign—But

*Except for a Worrisome Surrender to Low Standards of Fleet Street Tabloids, the Press Improved*

BY R.W. APPLE JR.

**E**XCEPT FOR ONE SORRY surrender to British tabloid standards, the news media did a better job in this campaign than in the last, and the complaints increased. Which should surprise no one.

Four years ago, we allowed the candidates to reduce the substance of the campaign almost to zero, by mindlessly reporting upon and picturing stunts as news events. Television networks that would not dream of giving air time to an auto company's public-relations flummery happily pictured George Bush's visit to a flag factory and Michael Dukakis's ride in a tank. Newspapers that screen their own ads for (reasonable) veracity allowed political commercials full of exaggeration if not mendacity to go unchallenged, as if only words that emitted directly from the candidate's mouth really mattered.

Media critics, academic specialists and reporters and editors themselves saw what was happening and vowed not to let it happen again. Conferences, articles and staff meetings without end produced a resolve within the business to set sterner standards, in the hope that doing so would help to improve the level of political discourse.

New approaches were tried out in the off-year elections, especially in the Texas gubernatorial contest, which produced some of the sleaziest commercials on record. These were noted, analyzed and denounced, and lo and behold!, the candidates who did the most reprehensible advertising lost. It would be reassuring to think that media vigilance had something to do with the outcome; at a minimum, it seems to me, we can take some credit for stimulating

debate about the Neanderthal ideas (e.g., sending more people to the gas chamber proves one's worth as a public servant) contained in the commercials.

By the time 1992 began, almost every news organization had its designated ad-watcher, and editors and producers were determined not to permit the candidates to control what they wrote about and showed. Some of the innovations had relatively little effect. Despite their resolve, the networks found it impractical, from their viewpoint, to use longer sound-bites; they were longer at the beginning of the year but shrank as November approached. Newspapers devoted more resources to the issues and to candidates' positions, but they still had some difficulty in connecting the issues to the campaign; there was relatively little change in the old tendency to feature stories about the horse race and about the candidates' activi-

ties on and off the stump, past and present, and to relegate discussion of major questions of domestic and foreign policy to separate, most unrelated pieces.

In general, there was a seriousness to the coverage that matched the seriousness of the electorate. Times are hard, and people fear that they will get harder, not only for laid-off manufacturing workers, but also for people all across the socio-economic spectrum whose jobs are being squeezed out by a world economic upheaval. The end of the Cold War, the resultant demilitarization, the globalization of finance, the formation of new trading blocs—all that means permanent structural change in America, and people sense it, even if they don't understand it. In such a climate, voters demand specific answers about specific policies. So the general election campaign, and its coverage,



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was dominated, one senator said, by talk of “jobs, jobs and jobs” with education and health policy close behind. For many of the same reasons, negative commercials, only recently considered the sine qua non of a successful campaign, however noxious, played only a very small role in the Presidential contest of 1992.

The Republicans tried hard, at their convention and later, to change the subject to “family values” or the wasteland that Bill Clinton had supposedly created in Arkansas or his purportedly anti-American activities while a student in Britain. When the news media noticed, the Republicans cried “foul,” perhaps on the grounds that journalists are meant to be cheerleaders. President Bush, who had reveled in the coverage he received in 1991, when he was cast as the Lion of the Gulf, who wined and dined the very reporters he later condemned, said the campaign coverage was the most biased he had ever seen. Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming, shedding crocodile tears at the awful prospect, predicted at the end of the campaign that the press would soon be tearing at the very flesh of President-elect Bill Clinton.

### **Some Cheerleaders But Not a Majority**

I do not doubt that there were cheerleaders for Clinton in the ranks of the press corps, but I am dead certain that they did not constitute anything remotely approaching a majority. Most of the apologists, furthermore, work not as newspaper or television reporters, but as columnists or magazine journalists, where the ground rules permit love affairs with candidates, however ill-advised and self-defeating they may be. Besides, Clinton took a terrible pounding during and after the New Hampshire primary, the worst I can recall in almost 30 years of American campaigns in terms of both intensity and duration. Has everyone forgotten so soon? The Clinton camp spent much of the first four months of 1992 railing at the coverage given to the candidate’s dodgy record on the draft, his modest youthful experiment(s) with marijuana,

and the allegations of Gennifer Flowers, about which more later. I remember, for example, being upbraided at the Gridiron Club dinner by one of the governor’s media advisers, Frank Freer, who said the biased coverage of *The New York Times* and others was going to drive him and fellow idealists out of politics.

### **Staying Away From Candidates**

During the general-election campaign, I spent no time with the candidates and almost none in Washington. Instead, I traveled through most of the pivotal states, talking to politicians and others, hoping to gain a different perspective on the Presidential contest. It was an intriguing exercise for many reasons, but one phenomenon stood out: to a perhaps unprecedented degree, senior Republican officials, including governors and senators, were quite willing to point out, on the record and in pungent language, why they thought their party was in trouble. That only happens when the mistakes are clear, and that relieves the reporter of the onerous burden of trying to sift through conflicting claims—a stage of our work where unconscious bias can easily creep in. This time, the Republicans made the case for us.

The first weekend after the election, George Bush the whiner disappeared and the old George Bush went on the radio to state the simple truth: it was his election to lose, and he lost it. Most politicians never say that, and he deserves a salute for doing so. It wasn’t the press corps that spoiled the economy, or put the two Pats on in prime time at the convention to read all sorts of people out of the party, or started campaigning all-out only late in October. We get it wrong more often than we should, but the errors arise more out of ineptitude or insufficient effort than out of malice or bias. But then, the news media don’t decide who wins Presidential elections. Remember, Richard M. Nixon, who was far less popular among reporters than George Bush, nonetheless won twice, and so did Ronald Reagan.

This campaign will be remembered, it seems to me, not as the year when biased reporters cost George Bush a second term but the one when political journalists became less central to the process.

The decision of the candidates to appear on talk shows, on Larry King and Arsenio Hall, and almost every day, toward the end, on the breakfast-time programs, has been widely noted. Journalists complain that the questions in these forums tend to be too soft, and that the talkmeisters fail to ask follow-up questions. They may have a point. It is also true that the talk-show format tends to prompt extended discussion of issues, and that, especially considering the ability of such programs to reach far beyond the traditional audience for politics, is a consummation devoutly to be wished. If some reportorial egos on the bus are bruised, that is no bad thing, and there remains ample room for analytical and investigative reporting by the professionals, which is what they are best at.

### **Skill of Questioning By Rank and File**

Less widely commented upon were two instances of innovative, direct candidate-voter communication that may have broad implications for the future. The first was the skill of the questions asked by rank-and-file undecided voters in the Richmond debate, which ought to make reporters evaluate the kinds of questions they ask in the future. The non-professionals posed questions designed not to entrap, not to demonstrate inconsistencies, but to elicit information and reveal character. A young woman’s seemingly naive inquiry—how has the recession affected you personally?—evoked, in George Bush’s clear discomfiture, one of the more telling images of the campaign.

Ross Perot, whose relationships with the political press bordered on the non-existent, especially in the second phase of his on-off-on campaign, found an effective alternative to news conferences and interviews and stump speeches and

*continued on page 12*



# Talk Shows Muscle In

*Print Press Played Supporting Role Even Though  
The Coverage Was Better Than Ever*

BY SANDER VANOCUR

AND ON THE THIRD day of the Eleventh month of the Election Year of the Lord 1992, members of the press could look upon everything they had made and, behold, find it was very good.

Well, not exactly very good. But it was good.

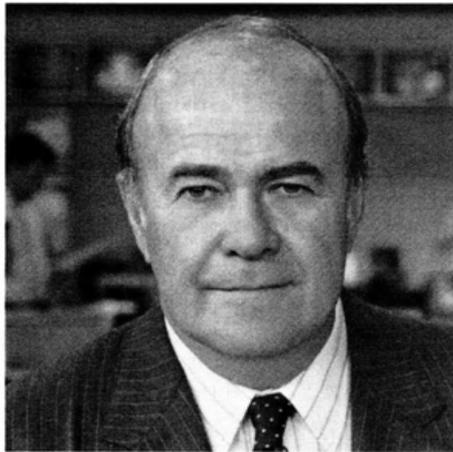
But, as we are all supposedly good in the eyes of God, cannot Larry King, Phil Donahue, Arsenio Hall, Oprah Winfrey, Sally Jesse Raphael, Tabitha Soren and Kurt Loder, Bryant and Katie, Charlie and Joan, Paula and Harry, also look upon their works and find them good?

Why not? They were just as powerful a force in the 1992 campaign as—perhaps a more powerful force than—the Establishment Press. And if Ken Auletta is a bit premature in writing in the November issue of *Esquire* that the Boys on the Bus are dead (and presumably the Gals on the Bus as well), then let such judgments be tempered by saying that in the 1992 campaign, The Boys and The Girls on the Bus were in bed with some very unlikely companions, particularly during the Gennifer Flowers episode early in the year.

Let it be noted that the Establishment Press did not invite the talk show hosts and hostesses into this trial marriage. Nor was there ever any talk of “but will you respect me in the morning?” The hosts and hostesses just moved right into the campaign, bringing the candidates with them. It can also be argued that the candidates moved in, bringing the hosts and hostesses with them. Whoever brought whom, the result was the Establishment Press found itself playing supporting roles to the new stars of campaign politics.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The Establishment Press was out this year to seek redemption for the sins and follies of campaigns past. Why else did journalism's Best and Brightest gather at Harvard and similar cerebral watering holes at the end of the 1988 campaign to repent and seek absolution? And in confessions redolent of the Moscow trials of the 1930's, like recovering alcoholics, they foreswore future dependence on the John Barleycorn of campaigns as horse races, photo opportunities, poll envy and peeping through keyholes for violators of the Sixth Commandment.

As a card-carrying certifiable political alcoholic nearing the end of a besotted career of gulping down politics of varying proofs and served up in all kinds of vessels, I noted with some skepticism these pretensions of future journalistic sobriety, which fell just short of sleeping on a bed of nails or proclaiming: “The Devil made me do it.”



They reminded me of a Sunday morning in January, 1980, having breakfast with Walter Mears of The Associated Press at the Howard Johnson in greater downtown Augusta, Maine, as we awaited the previous evening's results from the Maine Democratic caucuses. Such is the glamorous life for which political reporters are celebrated in Icelandic ballads and in the films of Hollywood.

We fell to discussing past predictions of political rehabilitation, which in those days generally fell under the all-purpose rubric of “next time we'll cover the issues.” Mears recalled a magazine spread in which the leading lights of political journalism were canvassed as to how they were going to cover the 1976 presidential campaign. The spread featured a picture of journalistic worthies, accompanied by a short quote as to how he, she or their organizations would cover the campaign differently

*Sander Vanocur began his journalism career as a reporter for The Manchester Guardian, although he has spent most of his career in television. He joined NBC News in 1957 and gained national prominence as White House Correspondent and National Political Correspondent, and as a contributor to the “Today” show and to the “Huntley-Brinkley Report.” At ABC, which he joined in 1977, he has covered the State Department, the Falkland Islands War, the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections and numerous other stories. For years he was Anchor of the ABC News program “Business World.” He now heads his own production company, Old Owl Communications. He lives in Washington with his wife, the former Virginia Backus.*

than previous campaigns. Mears had offered this contribution: "The Associated Press will do the same splendid job in 1976 that it did in 1972."

Let me temper such heretical views, lest they dilute the necessity and purity of post-1992 clambakes in which political consultants, journalists and their academic probation officers gather to deplore the 10-second sound bite, campaigns as horse races or the idea that people don't want to hear about politicians' sex lives.

At the risk of diminishing the role of academic soothsayers and reducing the number of times they are quoted high up in stories or invited to appear on "Nightline," let me say that this year's election coverage, in print and on television, has been good, much better than it has been in a very long time.

Apart from the feeding frenzy produced by the alleged deflowering of Gennifer Flowers by Clinton, the print press performed better than ever, with Germond and Witcover steady as always, and The New York Times, especially Maureen Dowd, providing a breadth and depth of coverage that is without precedent. It can be argued that The New York Times had greater resources than other news organizations. That may be true. But it also had a focus and irreverence that I have not seen since Jim Perry, Jim Dickenson and Bob Merry covered politics for the late and much-lamented Dow Jones publication, The National Observer.

If I have one major reservation about print press coverage this election year, it is the way most of its members seemed to ignore or dismiss the early reports in The Los Angeles Times by Douglas Frantz and Murray Waas on how the Bush administration was trying to coddle Iraq right until its invasion of Kuwait. The story was generally ignored or downplayed in the early stages. One reason for this may be the refusal of Eastern editors to accept the fact that The Los Angeles Times has become a great newspaper. Another reason may be that there was a certain reluctance on the part of the Establishment Press to accept House Banking Committee Chairman Henry Gonzalez, who spurred the investigation, as not quite measur-

ing up to the accepted image of the Washington mover and shaker so beloved and pursued by the Sunday morning talk shows.

Had the national press paid as much attention early on to this story as it did initially to Gennifer Flower's allegations, it might have had a greater impact.

### **Bode and Brooks Especially Good**

Television coverage, especially CNN's Ken Bode and Brooks Jackson, was, on the whole, pretty good once it, like the print press, got over the feeding frenzy of the Gennifer Flowers episode. One conspicuous exception to that observation: ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC short-changed their viewers during the two conventions, not so much by cutting back on their coverage, as by making their anchors floor reporters and their analysts, those from within and those from without, seem more important than the apparent and not so apparent political developments that were unfolding as the campaign managers succeeded or failed in presenting an appealing picture of their candidates to the nation's viewers. As a former floor-walker whose white carnation has been retired, I am no doubt somewhat biased. But when anchors come down to the convention floor, they tend to become the story itself, obscuring or diminishing the proceedings. While I understand that the competitive reasoning to elevate network anchors to the status of omnipresent oracles is television's unique contribution to the cult of personality, it is an impulse that should be resisted. Leave such deification to talk show hosts, the fellow travelers in political coverage.

At the risk of bringing down the wrath of Elijah Lovejoy, let me say that there is nothing wrong with politicians' circumventing the Establishment Press to get their views across to the public. For all I know, it may also have been a useful way of increasing voter participation in the electoral process, a process that has seen voter turnout dropping in every presidential election since 1960, except for the one just concluded. My own unscientific hunch is that the talk show process not only increased voter

turnout, but probably contributed to the enormous audiences that watched the debates.

It has been said that this process is not journalism. Of course it isn't. But if politicians think—and the evidence is all on their side—that this is one way to successfully circumvent Establishment print and television reporters, then they are going to try to do more of it next time, perhaps differently. They will act on the sound principle that within certain limits, nothing succeeds like excess. Like other species on this earth, members of the Establishment Press will simply have to adapt to a changing environment. That should not prove difficult if we remember that the one thing that conventional journalism, print and electronic, can offer and talk shows cannot, is a contemporary and historical perspective. That does not mean a greater emphasis on analysis, or that dreaded word, editorializing, in our stories. What it does mean is that we can put matters in context without diminishing the immediacy and freshness of the daily reporting process. That is a matter of no small importance. And while I would hate to deprive political journalists and media experts of the pleasure of gathering at the end of the year for the purpose of examining one another's entrails, accompanied by great lamentations of what was done wrong, the fact is that apart from a few lapses, not the least of which is the continuing idolatry of polls, the press this year went to school on what it did wrong in 1988 and to a great extent avoided a repetition of its earlier mistakes.

To pretend otherwise is to indulge in uncalled-for self-flagellation. Sure, it's a tough process. But it is also great fun covering politics. And it is not at all helpful to dwell unduly on the difficulties of covering politics in an age of electronic Miss Lonelyhearts, who have changed the rules of how politicians comport themselves during campaigns. Above all, let us not dwell on the difficulties. As Winston Churchill said during World War II: "Do not argue the difficulties. The difficulties will argue for themselves." ■



# Media's Liberal Tilt

*Complaints, as Usual, Rose and Response of Monitors  
And Editors, as Usual, Was Tepid*

BY RICHARD HARWOOD

THE OMBUDSMAN'S TASK, under the best of circumstances, involves more drudgery and frustration than myth would have it. The office is not a microcosm of the International Court of Justice at the Hague. It most resembles the local department store's complaint department, whose sole employee is an ex-floor walker. He possesses few if any temporal powers and absolutely no power of the spiritual variety. A customer who found the newspaper unsatisfying once demanded of me A) a more challenging publication or B) a cash refund. "A" was beyond my powers of delivery and "B", since it involved money, clearly was the province of others, perhaps the controller or the Vice President for Circulation; maybe even the publisher.

Gordon McKibben, the estimable Ombudsman of The Boston Globe, gave the true flavor of the work in a report to The Globe staff this autumn: "An editorial cartoon by Marlette showing Al Gore mooning Bush and Baker drew a dozen or so protests, and there was a strong pickup in comments on political coverage generally. At least 15 or 20 Virgos called to point out a missing Virgo from the horoscope. Many readers caught an obit with an inconsistency involving Babe Ruth and the [Red] Sox. Our coverage of Woody Allen's affair with Mia Farrow's adopted daughter struck a number of readers as flippant. Another lottery mistake drew the usual chorus of calls...."

"A good many true blue Clinton backers believe the media is slighting their man—too much on the draft—in an effort to appear balanced. Readers see sexism in the sports pages, negativism in [the business section], poor spelling,

indecent underwear ads, inconsistent organization of news sections, ethnic slights, repeated horoscopes, even a few words of praise...."

Among the individual comments he recorded, my favorite is from a Mrs. Siegel, obviously a contemporary of mine:

"Your print is getting so light, not like it used to be and I've been reading The Globe more than 30 years."

The job is particularly bothersome during presidential campaigns. There are two reasons for that. The first is that these campaigns act on newspaper readers the way Loco Weed is said to act on mustangs and sheep in the western United States. They are seized with curious passions and irrational impulses, which often find release in outrageous charges against The Daily Bugle and its designated punching bag, the Ombudsman.

A second reason for this quadrennial discomfort is that we are often forced to confront some of the contradictions inherent in our jobs. That was one of the epiphanies of my Ombudsmanship. It led me to a better appreciation of

Charlie Wilson, the affable chairman of the General Motors Corporation who became Secretary of Defense in the first Eisenhower administration. That was in 1953, this century.

G.M. was a big defense contractor, which inspired charges of conflict of interest at his confirmation hearing. Demands were made that he sell his G.M. stock at a considerable financial sacrifice. He argued that his stock holdings would not influence his decisions. But, entranced by the prospect of high office, he surrendered, sold his stock and put the money in a blind trust. That cleansed him in the eyes of the politicians.

The sociologist C. Wright Mills had a different view of the affair. Wilson, he argued, was essentially right. His stock was not the problem. Taking Wilson out of General Motors, he said, was easy. But taking General Motors out of Wilson was impossible.

They never got The Post out of me and I suspect most Ombudsman are like that, appointed to the job after years of association with the institutions toward which they are now ex-



*Richard Harwood, Nieman Fellow 1956, was deputy managing editor of The Washington Post from 1976 until his retirement in 1988. He was recalled to serve a term as Ombudsman, from 1988 to 1992, and is now a columnist, writing on media affairs for The Post and other newspapers.*

pected to become neutral and disinterested. They want to make the intellectual and emotional leap from being a member of the team to being the referee. It seems easy for lawyers: prosecutor today, defender tomorrow. But it is difficult for us because we have so much of *The Bugle*, *The Times* or *The News* in our blood and bones.

We are duty-bound, on the one hand, to represent and attempt to advance certain interests of the public; its desire, for example, for accurate and untainted information. On the other hand, we have a public relations responsibility to the newspaper. Our very existence in the hierarchy is intended to enhance the public's perception of the paper (usually a local monopoly) as a caring and responsive institution. We embody its good intentions, its commitment to self-improvement, its desire to be "reader friendly". We validate this image of responsible corporate behavior by the critical judgments we render, by the laying on of the lash, so to speak, and by our willingness to admit error. At the same time, as products of the newspaper culture we are in a strong position to rationalize its behavior, to act as its advocate and defender. The editors and reports are old pals. The publisher has buttered our bread.

Only a twisted soul would take pleasure in denouncing and criticizing these people for incompetence, prejudice or other sins. They are family. We understand and sympathize with the complexities and difficulties involved in their work which often is equated in our minds with God's work here on earth.

So we do not always probe as deeply as we might into the "inarticulated premises" of the vocation or into the particular practices of our own newspaper. These temptations are most powerful in election years. The critics are many and strident. They see bias and unfairness in every turn of the page.

Allegations of that nature were widespread this fall according to a number of Ombudsmen—McKibben at *The Globe*, Joann Byrd at *The Washington Post*, Art Naumann of *The Sacramento Bee* and Larry Fiquet at *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*, to name but a few. Their

papers, it was contended, were guilty of a general tilt toward the Democrats and toward Bill Clinton in particular:

Too many unflattering pictures of George Bush were published. Too many letters to the editor endorsing Bill Clinton were published. Too much space was given to Democrats and not enough to Republicans. Stories on the economy were too negative. Ross Perot was treated as a nut and given an unfair shake.

Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate for president in 1952, should have lived to see this day. He complained sorrowfully about his treatment at the hands of the press.

### **GOP Supported By Publishers**

He had a point. An ideological alliance between the Republican party and most of America's newspaper owners came about in the 1930's in reaction to the New Deal. It continued through the 1950's. Republican presidential candidates could count on editorial endorsements from 80 to 90 percent of our daily newspapers.

In the years since, a remarkable and relatively unnoticed redistribution of "power" and "influence" has come about in American newspapers. I refer to "power" and "influence" over the presentation of news and opinion. They have passed in large measure from owners and publishers to editors and reporters and, to some extent, from straight white males within newsrooms to various in-house groups with their own views on how the news should be shaped: minorities, women, gays and lesbians. These modern newsrooms now enjoy a degree of journalistic autonomy unthinkable in the autocratic era of the Pulitzers and Hearsts or even in the late 1940's and early 1950's.

The degree to which this transference of power has occurred is suggested by a recent poll of 205 newspapers conducted for presstime, the magazine of the Newspaper Association of America, formerly known as the American Newspaper Publishers Association. Who, presstime wanted to know, decided which candidate to endorse in

the presidential election? In 98.5 percent of the cases, newspaper owners left that decision in the hands of underlings, usually an editorial board. Publishers and CEOs intervened in this process in fewer than 30 percent of the cases.

This is consistent with the findings of Stephen Hess in his studies for the Brookings Institution of the Washington correspondents. Years ago they complained bitterly of home office censorship by publishers and owners. Today their work is virtually unedited. (This may be a mixed blessing. Younger reporters often complain that the lack of editing leaves them to sink or swim on their own.)

The point is that within very broad parameters—support for democracy and a free market economy, for example—it is fair to say that a newspaper's content and its editorial policies are no longer set in board rooms by rich Republican owners and stockholders. Journalists now make those decisions and they their own agendas. In the main they are members of the middle and upper-middle classes, college educated urbanites with reasonable standards of living. (The median salary of a large city newspaper editor in 1991 was \$275,000; the highest recorded was \$471,000. Beginning reporters in New York are paid \$1,000 a week). These journalists by and large are Democrats, "liberals" and, in the larger cities, are labor unionists, members of the American Newspaper Guild (AFL-CIO). The profile is the reverse of the press barons of the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's who, as Stevenson said, were "automatically against Democrats...as dogs are against cats." As the American Society of Newspaper Editors put it in a major sociological report a couple of years ago: "If you believe that the newsroom is basically liberal-Democratic in its political outlook, you're right. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) define themselves as either 'Democrat or liberal' or 'independent but lean to Democratic/liberal.'"

These journalists, like the publishers and owners of the past, are not unfeeling robots. Their political and social values give our newspapers their modern character. They are rarely partisan

in the overt and heavy-handed way of the old Manchester Union Leader or the old Nashville Tennessean. But in their news and editorial treatment of contemporary social issues—affirmative action, homosexuality, feminism, environmentalism and abortion, for example—they take sides. Their policies increasingly are shaped by the changing composition of newsrooms and by the professional organizations that have arisen in the aggressive quest for power: the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, the Native American Journalists Association, the Asian American Journalists Association and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

The “social issues” involved here are very frequently tied in to divisive public policies when then become determinants in our labeling practices; they define the “liberal” from the “conservative”, Jesse Helms from Jesse Jackson, The Globe from The Union-Leader, The Washington Post from The Washington Times, the Nation from Commentary, Democrats from Republicans. They split our readers into warring camps.

In the bad old days we could blame the publishers for whatever seemed wrong with press. That was Joe Liebling’s method during his days as a press critic for the New Yorker. His targets almost always were greedy, Republican press barons, who turned their newspapers into propaganda organs.

“The relations between the Grand Old Party and the newspaper owners,” he wrote in 1961, “remind me of a man I saw come into a fine old barroom on a snowy Sunday with a boy of about three years old....He ordered a sour-mash bourbon, sat the boy on the end of the bar and told the bartender to give him a maraschino cherry....There the two stayed all afternoon....Every time the old man took a shot, the boy got a cherry. The boy seemed to feel this was an equitable arrangement. He was so small.

“In the same way, while the big Republicans, during a favorable administration, sell themselves natural resources...and resell to the government, at unlimited profit, patents de-

veloped in government laboratories, their Administration buys the publishers’ cherries.

“These take the form of exempting newsboys from the provisions of the minimum-wage laws, making ex-publishers ambassadors to small countries dependent on American goodwill, giving newspapers licenses for local television stations, appointing practicing publishers’ wives to rather larger countries [and] permitting newspaper owners to call on the President for five minutes when they want to impress particularly important advertisers....”

### **Vanguard of Press Attuned to Democrats**

This image of the American press evaporated in the 1960’s as the old barons became extinct and as the press and television networks became identified in the public as major actors in the social movements of our time, the civil rights movement as prime case in point. They became sympathetic purveyors of the popular culture that emerged in the 1960’s and 1970’s. They were part of the vanguard of the feminist movement. Today the metropolitan press, as the presidential endorsements suggested this year, is philosophically attuned to the Democratic party.

This is not a perception that the industry or that journalists themselves promote. They prefer to be seen as sterile automatons who have no opinions or policy preferences. Ombudsmen over the years have had a tendency to respond along the same lines when ideological questions are raised. The newspaper, we maintained, cannot be “biased” because it is produced by “professionals” operating under a code of “objectivity”. In this state of scientific impartiality we occasionally misspell a name, fail to record an event, create a defective headline or print an unflattering or disturbing picture. But these are essentially technical, manufacturing problems. They do not arise out of either incompetence or conviction.

Leonard Downie, the executive editor of The Washington Post, this fall addressed a column to readers who might believe that the paper’s editorial endorsement of Bill Clinton would influence its news coverage:

“Neither I nor any of the editors and reporters who cover the news under my direction has anything to do with these endorsement decisions or any of the other opinions expressed on the editorial page. Neither editorial page editor Meg Greenfield nor any of the editorial writers has any involvement in our coverage of the news, including the election campaign.

“In this way, the editorial opinion-making and news coverage functions of the newspaper are kept completely separate in what we irreverently refer to as the ‘separation of church and state’....”

For his own part, Downie revealed that he refuses to vote or to form private opinions on public issues—abortion, for example—lest his objectivity be impaired.

Would that it were so simple, that opinions in a newspaper could be caged up on a single page, as a tiger is caged up in a zoo. But that is impossible. Every news judgment is based on a sense of social values and priorities. The news columns and every department of the modern daily convey opinion as well as fact—the opinions of local and national columnists, the opinions of sports, business, art and cultural critics whose commentaries frequently spill over into the arena of public affairs, the opinions of cartoonists (Gary Trudeau, for example) and other illustrators whose work appears throughout the paper, the opinions of an Art Buchwald and other humorists whose main work is political commentary.

Our papers and their Ombudsmen deal gingerly with these matters if at all, especially in election years. I’m not sure why the subject is more or less taboo. It may have to do with our notions of “credibility” and the myths of objectivity. But papers can be both credible and fair without denying that they stand for something, not only on their editorial pages but in terms of the values and beliefs that enter into the ways we shape and select the news. ■



# Beware of Transition Traps

## *Media Should Be Cautious About Reading Major Policy In Minor Actions of Incoming Administration*

By ADAM CLYMER

**T**HE FIRST THING to acknowledge about coverage of a presidential transition is that it will inevitably be too friendly.

Indeed, in the 11 weeks between the morning Bill Clinton woke up as President-elect and the morning he will drive to the Capitol to take the oath of office, he will probably get the easiest, most friendly press coverage he will ever see. The first press conference will undoubtedly receive an exaggerated play in newspapers and on television, as the first step in the press's effort to satisfy the wishful curiosity of a public that elected him despite doubts.

In small ways the excesses can be curbed. The small folksy things he does to get on television could be left off the tube. We can be spared the 1992 equivalent of Gerald Ford toasting his own muffin.

But on a larger scale, the dominance of the kind of news seen the first few weeks after the election is likely to continue, largely because of a lack of competition and serious challenge. Not much else will probably be happening. The Washington bureaucracy will not know enough of Clinton's plans to offer critical leaks. And the Congressional opposition will not be in place to cast doubts on the feasibility of an idea or the competence of a prospective department head.

The after-effect of having the stage to themselves may be less than ideal for the Clinton Administration. After months of being challenged by the press and contradicted by the Bush Administration, the likely letup in scrutiny may be greeted as one of the perks of office, like the tennis court or tickets to the Kennedy Center. The new Administra-

tion may take the inevitable end of this honeymoon as an insult to the Presidency, or to the American people who chose them, or to Arkansas. But that's their problem.

The realistic press response to this reality is to get beyond it and try to add its concerns, and the public's, to the Clinton agenda. That concern is basically to try to report what is really going on—how the decisions made in the transition seem likely to affect the stated objectives of the incoming Administration—and also its ability to deal with problems it will have to face, but not talked about, such as potential bank failures.

The wrong approach is a forced effort to find fundamental policy implications in lesser Cabinet appointments. The purpose served by choosing a particular nominee may simply be that the campaign thought it owed him or her

something and believed the individual would be adequate to the demands of the job.

Indeed if there is a shortage of much bigger news that day the new secretary of Veterans Affairs may get on the front page, a place where he is unlikely ever to be found again, unless scandal forces him to quit. The instant profile will inevitably be favorable, full of the reasons for the selection and not the rejected arguments against it. But if the selection makes the front page, or the evening news, then the press incurs a modest obligation, to go back and check a few months later. Somewhere there should be room for a story on how the appointment is turning out. By then, Administration colleagues, members of Congress and civil servants will have something to say. There is probably no reasonable prospect that television news will bother, but newspapers might.



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Besides jobs, policy is the other dominant element of coverage in the transition period. Mr. Clinton wants to show that he can get off to a fast start in dealing with some of the nation's problems, and so there will be reports on Administration plans or potential plans ("...is seriously considering asking Congress to..."). These are often trial balloons, unless they are being leaked by someone like a committee chairman who thinks the idea is dumb. Is that a lead balloon story?

Measuring just when an inclination becomes a policy is never an exact science. But it's especially difficult to know what is really a decision in the confused days of a transition, with some important people in Washington, others in Little Rock, still others in Williamstown or Berkeley and some more on vacation. Even thoroughly forthright sources may be wrong.

### **Trial Balloons Can Be OK**

But the trial balloon story is a perfectly legitimate exercise, so long as that is what the article says it is presenting. Occasionally Washington reporters won't do that because they have come to believe that political insiders are telling them something, because they believe in the First Amendment, or have suddenly become committed to John VIII:32: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." But most reporters do know enough to suspect baser motives and to ask themselves "Why do they want me to use this?"

The problem is not so much naiveté or arrogance as a reluctance to diminish the story by leveling with the audience and acknowledging that the idea may not be settled, unshakable policy. When the idea is presented as, for example, a tentative first step toward building consensus on health care policy, it may go much further toward explaining what is really going on than if it comes as a gee-whiz revelation of what the Administration will do the minute it takes office. Another caution that is sometimes discarded in the anxious effort to reveal the new Administration's

soul is the question of just what it really can do the minute it takes office—besides review a parade.

On its own it can fill a lot of Schedule C jobs, like those on the White House staff, on its own. And it can nominate people to positions that require Senate confirmation. Almost all of those people get confirmed, but John Tower was not approved as Secretary of Defense in 1989 and Ted Sorensen did not get to be Director of Central Intelligence in 1977.

And a new Administration can issue executive orders. For example, when Mr. Clinton said November 12 that he would revoke the Bush Administration's prohibition of abortion counseling at federally funded family planning clinics, he made a promise he can keep. But remember, John F. Kennedy campaigned for office promising to ban discrimination in federal housing by executive order when he took office. It took him 22 months.

Most of what seems to matter to Mr. Clinton he cannot do on his own. He will need to get the 103rd Congress to pass it.

President Bush spent a lot of his time this fall blaming Congress for inaction, and congressional leaders regularly responded that his use of the veto was the problem. Mr. Clinton and Ross Perot said it was Mr. Bush's fault. Mr. Bush and Mr. Perot said it was Congress' fault.

Sometimes one side knew what it wanted and the other side blocked it. Mr. Bush sought banking legislation to loosen the restrictions on banks that date from the depression. Congress did not want to do just what he said, but did not know what it did want to do instead. Congress wanted to require employers to give workers unpaid family and medical leave. Mr. Bush blocked them, and anyway, he didn't press very hard.

Much inaction can be attributed to Administration indecision or Congressional uncertainty. Mr. Bush did not know what he wanted in the second tax bill of the year and offered no guidance to lawmakers who wanted to work with him. And even the Democrats on the Hill couldn't figure out what sort of

health care bill they wanted, and so they brought none to the floor of either House. In the end, the voters seemed to reach the conclusion that Ross Perot was right—it was both their faults. Even though election day produced fewer defeats for incumbents than expected, that was largely the result of vulnerable officeholders getting out of the way earlier through retirements and a lot of primary defeats. As a result, Mr. Clinton and Vice President-elect Al Gore will be two of 123, 124 or 125 (depending on how the Georgia and North Dakota Senate races finally come out) newly elected federal officials taking office in January. The 110 new Representatives are the most in any year since 1948.

That opens up two lines of inquiry rarely pursued in covering transitions. One is how the new Administration looks at dealing with Congress. Campaigning, Mr. Clinton has given remarkably few clues, for the obvious political reason that he saw profit neither in identifying himself with an unpopular Congress, nor in taking political shots at lawmakers he expected to have to work with. It seems unlikely that his staff is likely to offer the obvious clues to his attitude toward the Hill that Jimmy Carter's aides did when they provided Tip O'Neill with lousy tickets to the Inaugural Gala.

### **Arkansas Legislature May Offer Clue**

It may be mildly instructive to look at how Clinton dealt with the Arkansas legislature over the years. He probably knows that a heavily Democratic Southern legislature is not the same thing as Congress. Even so, knowing it and acting on it are different matters. He doesn't have any experience to guide him, or us, on how he will deal with Senate Republicans, who have a vast ability to gum things up and whose leader, Bob Dole, seems to despise Clinton. Some of the new Presidential appointees, presumably, will have had Washington experience and relations with Republicans. One small step is to look at them and see how they have dealt with Republicans in Congress, and Democrats, too.

An even larger piece of this transition is to look at the Congress he will be dealing with and to try to measure how it will see its interests in relation to his. To listen to the Democratic leaders, all will be just swell now that they will have a Democratic president to deal with. They have all sorts of reasons to hope they can get together. Tom Foley has often proclaimed that what makes the American people mad at Congress is not the House Bank where checks never bounced or even whatever it is that happened at the Post Office. George Mitchell insists that the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings are not responsible for that growing disdain. Each often maintains that the real reason the public is angry is that Congress has failed to solve problems like economic growth and health care, a failure they attribute to Bush. Now they have to prove they can legislate on such matters, or acknowledge failure even on their own chosen terms. One step along that road is the House plan to have its committees organized and ready to start dealing with legislation by Inauguration Day, not by late February as in most years.

One major difference between their situation now and the situation when Carter came into office in 1977 was that the Congress then had not been so thoroughly thwarted as it has been in recent years. Then it had overridden some vetoes by Presidents Nixon and Ford. In particular, it had enacted the War Powers Act. It had negotiated with both of them to get some bills passed. And it had recently accomplished the supreme test of Congressional supremacy, forcing President Nixon from office in 1974.

So just as Carter and his staff treated them with disdain, many lawmakers sneered back. Each acted as if it thought it did not need the other. Now the Congressional leaders and the President-elect act as if they understand that they do need each other. But will the committee chairmen, who have been far less challenged than the leaders, feel the same sense of urgency? We can ask them, and we can watch them.

Will the leaders make an effort to stack key committees in a way to get the kind of bills they want to the floor intact? That's a blunter style of leadership than either body has seemed to want lately.

But it isn't just the leaders and chairmen who have to be looked at, it's the rank and file, too. The new lawmakers fall largely into two groups. One is made up of people who have campaigned as if Congress itself were one of the major problems facing the nation, arguing about term limits and the line-item veto and such remedies. The other, somewhat larger group, includes experienced state legislators, mayors, city council members and others who ran for Congress to attack national problems and get programs and money for their districts. The sharply increased ranks of black and Hispanic members fall mainly into the second category, and may have more influence than many of their freshman colleagues. That attitude may commend them to top leaders and chairmen.

The best thing about covering Congress is that it's accessible, and new members are the most accessible of all. So it will not be hard to talk to them, and measure them. The freshmen will be on public view as they start to function as a much larger than usual part of the Congress, in their own meetings and orientation sessions, in party caucuses, and soon enough, in committees.

The new members, despite the attention they will get, are still only 23 percent of the 103d Congress. The behavior of the holdover Republicans will be almost as interesting, and not just as they start fighting for their 1996 presidential nomination. While on the job at Congress they have to decide whether to oppose everything the Democrats want or try to offer alternatives and have some influence on the ultimate legislative product.

The transition itself may be technically over on Inauguration Day. But taking the early measure of the administration and of the Congress it hopes to work with is a task that will go on to and past its early tests on the Hill, and at least to the point where it loses a fight, and we can see how it takes failure. ■

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## Apple

*continued from page 4*

30-second commercials in 30-minute infomercials. He looked like an instructor in a World War II training film, with his pointer and his primitive graphics, and he sounded like a salesman traveling the Texas byways, but the material was serious, and millions watched. The problem, of course, is that such a tactic is available only to candidates who have \$60 million to spend.

The least-noticed development of all may be the most serious, and that is the importation into American politics of certain standards and practices from the lower reaches of British journalism.

Gennifer Flowers's charges had been investigated in detail by a number of news organizations and found wanting, largely because of a lack of corroboration, weeks before a supermarket tabloid printed them. Once it did so, most mainstream news organizations pounced on the story, despite their own earlier qualms and despite the fact that the tabloids and the tabloid television programs that emulate them regularly pay their subjects for their stories. Always a no-no here, that has long been common Fleet Street practice.

The effect is to surrender to the tabloids, as in 1988 many surrendered to the campaigns themselves, the right to set the agenda for newspaper and television campaign coverage. The Flowers story dominated the final stages of the New Hampshire primary campaign, and came within an ace of driving Clinton from the race. There was simply no resisting the force of Ms. Flowers's charges of infidelity editors and producers said, and they may be right. The Times resisted running anything more than a few paragraphs until she appeared in mid-Manhattan for a press conference of Ringling Brothers proportions. For The Times's pains, it was derided by many in the trade for old-maid primness. But make no mistake; picking up the products of yellow journalism and making them one's own exacts a substantial toll in the credibility of news organizations that are struggling anyway to maintain it at a time of pervasive distrust of all institutions. ■



# Objectivity Myth Shattered

## *Argentine Journalist Chuckles Over 'Impartiality' Of American Press During Campaign*

BY MONICA FLORES CORREA

**W**HEN I WATCHED DAN QUAYLE argue with the TV fiction character Murphy Brown, I had to admit reluctantly that we Argentines have no monopoly on surrealism in politics. But the fascinating experience of covering this campaign also shattered—not without some secret joy for this iconoclast—another foreign myth: that of the objectivity and impartiality of the American press. I had been told many times that European and Latin American journalists possessed some merits and even could amuse but they had only a whiff of the journalistic objectivity that was supposed to grow only in this land. Europeans and Latin Americans were biased, I was told, opinionated, ready to show off our political affiliations. Americans were neutral.

During my Nieman year my American fellows hinted to me that the American journalism impartiality was more a gentle fiction than a fact. However, for no precise reason, adherence to the fiction was almost mandatory. The Persian Gulf War first and the presidential election later showed me that words—as good old Humpty Dumpty said—mean what the writer wants them to mean in America, as elsewhere.

In the presidential campaign I saw a media consensus that the Republicans had to leave the White House and the Democrats had to take it over. This is not an accusation against the press for being too liberal. It is just a confirmation that every word pronounced or written in this world has a political vocation and therefore intentions.

Most likely the American press will keep calling pumpkins carriages—that a la Lewis Carroll, what we see is not exactly what we see—that there is some

kind of objectivity merely because stories include two sources with differing opinions or because reporters interview people with opposite ideas. This interpretation is all the more puzzling as American politicians and journalists usually call things by their name, especially when discussing issues. Foreign observers are struck by and feel sincere admiration for the openness with which issues such as abortion, homosexuality and AIDS are treated here although the American public may take it for granted.

### **Press Adept At Clarification**

Another remarkable aspect of this campaign was that while the candidates were rather fuzzy on the issues and sometimes their idea of precision was to overwhelm the public with statistics, the press succeeded in integrating the fragments of information into a quite clear picture of the candidates' stances.

I was shocked by the morbid indulgence in the vivisection of the candidates' past private life and by the somewhat hypocritical habit of "forgiving" some of the candidates' actions and then immediately denouncing the candidate for not having told them the whole truth on time. Foreigners tend to believe that if some of the candidates' past actions are not very relevant today then it is not important whether he told the full truth about them.

The candidates' campaign indifference to the foreign press was borderline disdain. We know that we don't bring them votes but given the enormous influence that this country exerts on the rest of the world it would be only fair for the campaigns to give us a better

chance to observe them. They should not seclude us foreign correspondents in segregated buses or planes on campaign tours and shut us off from all contact with the candidate, as the Clinton campaign did. That happened to me on one of Clinton's tours. My first look at Clinton was typical of what would happen during the following days. We foreign journalists were confined in a section behind a yellow line at the Little Rock airport far from Clinton. From the distant plane ladder the candidate was abstractly waving to the crowd. The Japanese, German, French and Italian correspondents with me smilingly agreed that this was a very good symbolic image of the United States, the isolated superpower, waiving its hand to the distant world. ■



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# Reporting Ethnic Conflict

*Harvard Human Rights Director Calls on Press  
For Less Random and More Probing Coverage*

HENRY J. STEINER

**E**XTRAORDINARY AND TERRIFYING things happen as ethnic groups battle each other. A high percentage of the world's violations of basic human rights grows out of them, for ethnic conflicts have the long lives denied their victims. Spiraling hatreds generate rounds of retaliation and atrocity. Killings and torture reach beyond combatants to the helpless civilian populations standing, or cowering, by. Sporadic violence shades into systematic terror, then ethnic cleansing and ultimately genocide.

Reports of these struggles between ethnic groups—I mean the term to include racial, religious, linguistic and national-origin groups—should make good press; the conflicts' sheer savagery should catch the eye and reach the emotions of readers. Moreover, despite their remote locations and extreme violence, these conflicts are less alien than might first appear. Foreign

ethnic struggles tap into the American psyche, for racial and other hatreds scar our national life as well. The phenomenon is truly universal, a tragic and perhaps even indelible part of our human nature. But with few exceptions, newspaper reporting has failed to attract more than a fleeting public attention or to engage deep feelings, let alone realize the more challenging goal of educating the public.

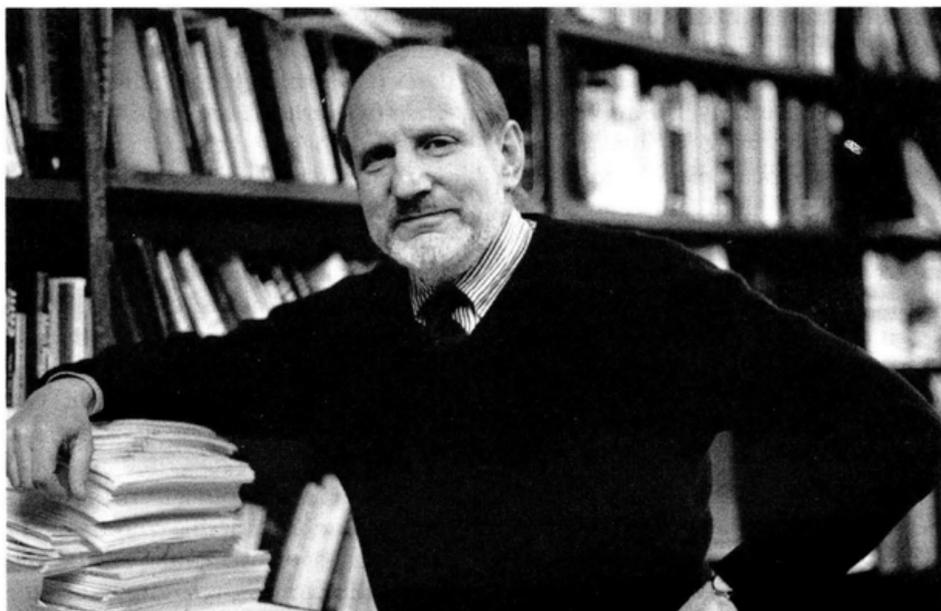
Journalism about ethnic conflict has little persistence, follow-up or continuity. Some conflicts seem to escape the press entirely. Reporting of many others, including some of the most destructive, is sparse and selective, rarely probing. It tends to concentrate on dramatic extremes—a massacre of innocents, the assassination of a group of priests, terrorists' strikes, a promising peace initiative, the massive exodus of

refugees. Rather than portray in graphic and human terms the wanton cruelty and intense suffering of these conflicts, rather than inform about their whys and the possible ways out of them, newspapers usually leave their readers with only a brief memory of aimless, discrete and horrid events.

Within present conventions and attitudes, the nature of most reporting about ethnic conflict—I refer to the large, leading, prestigious daily newspapers—is not only understandable but predictable, perhaps even inevitable. The typical reports of these conflicts reflect problems that journalists confront in describing large and complex events in general, and international or foreign matters in particular. Journalists must draw readers in quickly. They uncover facts to tell a story, not to write complex history or social theory or to

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change the world. Nor can they report "everything" important, particularly things foreign. Competing with a range of media, newspapers cannot ignore what their readers prefer or are even capable of absorbing. Such givens of journalistic life surely constrain what the press might attempt or could achieve in reporting ethnic conflict.

Nonetheless, those constraints must here be challenged rather than passively accepted. Given the millions killed and scarred by these conflicts over recent decades, given their persistence all over the globe, given their tendency to shatter international stability by provoking cross-border violence and flows of refugees, newspapers cannot easily justify their present practice on such familiar grounds. The leading press describes itself, and properly so, as charged with a public mission that requires it to reach beyond the profit motive. The social responsibility that it bears in a democratic society must include informing the public in some meaningful way about the major and alarming events of our time. Such a responsibility will never make more forceful claims on news coverage than with respect to ethnic conflict.

For most of the public, what is not reported in the media simply has not happened. The deaths of tens of thousands, the flows of hundreds of thousands of refugees, have not happened. Silence facilitates slaughter. On the other hand, information in the media opens the possibility of public concern, debate, and pressure on domestic or international political processes. Effective reporting of what has occurred may thereby influence what will happen. Here as much as any place, the press could make a difference. But making that difference will require the press to wrestle with a number of problems.

## The Problem Of Numbers

We live in the age of statistics. Everyday reporting, even debates among presidential candidates, assault us with their arsenals of numbers and percentages. The national debt, annual deaths from a disease, divorce and crime rates,

weapon reductions, wife battery, pollution levels—we hear much about which the general public may grasp little and retain less.

Ethnic conflicts abound in statistics. So many are refugees, so many killed or raped or homeless or starving, so many are children or elderly or women. It is indeed the very size of these numbers that brings such conflicts into the news. Like the reports of such leading non-governmental human rights organizations (NGOs) as Amnesty International, the Watch Committees and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, newspaper accounts often stress the relevant statistics.

But statistics can have a dulling effect. Even those about death or physical disasters are sufficiently commonplace to make ethnic conflicts less remarkable. Those conflicts must compete for attention with hurricanes and life expectancies, cigarette smoking and AIDS. Perhaps numbers about automobile-related deaths, or about plane crashes or cancer, strike home. Most of us can readily imagine ourselves among the victims. The individual tragedies are potentially our own.

Sensitivity to the power and meaning of numbers, to the drama and horror underlying them, can become particularly blunted when the events on which the numbers are based remain alien to our normal experiences. Nothing in the contemporary American experience—in contrast with historical slavery and the destruction of American Indian civilization—prepares readers for the dimensions of these foreign conflicts in their wanton killing and systematic cruelty. No wonder that readers find it difficult to feel the terror and tragedy of victims.

The successful reporting—successful in conveying a sense of the intensity and massiveness of the suffering—recognizes this danger of abstraction that blocks empathy and obscures meaning. It deals not only with numbers but with experiences of victims. The phrase said to be Lenin's—one death is a tragedy, a million a statistic—applies with particular force to foreign ethnic struggles. The public may understandably become more incensed at the rape and murder

of four American nuns in a foreign conflict than at massacres of tens of thousands of local participants in that conflict. But it will also show more interest—at least journalists are more apt to provoke that interest—when several foreign priests are assassinated in an isolated episode than when the slaughter of multitudes continues over years.

In its distinctive ways, television can erase the barrier between the abstract (statistical) and the narrative (human). It can report in aggregate terms while offering scenes of suffering victims. A picture, we know, is worth a thousand numbers. Journalists reporting ethnic conflict must use analogous techniques. Interviews with participants—their experiences, perceptions, hatreds and hopes—can inform beyond the power of towering numbers. Spontaneous remarks of those caught in the violent chaos may best capture phenomena that are characteristic of many ethnic conflicts, like the degree to which each group's complaints and fears form a mirror image of the other's. Fleshed out personal histories—the history of a family before and during the period of violence—may best draw the experiences of distant victims into the human imagination of readers.

## The Problem Of Context

Statistics, concrete facts, narrative account by victims — all help to explain what has occurred. They may, however, give readers only the faintest clues about the "whys" for those occurrences. The problem is one of events that are unsituated, that are portrayed outside their historical, political and cultural context.

The problem is shared by human rights organizations. Comparisons between NGOs and the press with respect to their outlook and mission clarify what newspapers are now doing and might better do. NGOs investigate ethnic conflicts because of the rampant violations of human rights typically associated with them. By stripping the outlaw states of their veil of secrecy, NGO reports make an indispensable contribution to the

human rights movement. The reports themselves may be effective ways of shaming and thus influencing the behavior of a delinquent government. International institutions and national governments rely on them to determine what steps to take toward such a government.

NGOs concentrate on the quantity and types of violations, without serious attention to context or causal analysis. Their reports are not speculative inquiries into the "whys" or ways out. At most, they sketch the historical facts leading to the conflict before turning to a careful account of violations of basic human rights. Almost never do they examine proposals for structural changes in governance or the economy that would lower the risk of future violence. Most leading NGOs remain primarily statisticians of violence.

The reasons leading NGOs to define their role as reporters in so self-limiting a way are not always compelling. A more speculative inquiry and expansive analysis would often be appropriate and helpful; it would advance understanding and discussion. Nonetheless, the self-limitation that holds their reporting to statistical information and to concrete and immediately relevant facts is plausible, often necessary. NGOs must maintain a posture as nonpartisan (and in that special sense, apolitical) institutions, above the fray of political parties and forces, not advocates of one or another political leader or ideology. Their commitment is to the rule of law, specifically of international human rights law. Their vital and immediate task is to help to curb violations, not to achieve a utopian world. Their credibility, vital for arousing public opinion and for effective lobbying, dare not be open to serious challenge on the ground that they have become but other ideologically driven political groups. Leading NGOs mean to "tell it like it is," let the ax fall where it will.

This self-imposed injunction becomes more problematic for the press. To start with, newspapers need not seek in the same way a reputation "above suspicion" as objective, neutral reporters of events. Their integrity and repu-

tation rest on more complex factors stemming from their more complex roles. Newspapers mean to inform beyond communicating only "facts." They mean to educate and provoke in diverse, imaginative ways. They reach a broad public, not the small and knowledgeable set of decision makers who are the prime targets of NGOs. That public, even the readership of the elite national newspapers to which this article refers, is not well educated about foreign countries, particularly those in the Third World which do not directly touch interests of the United States.

To make their reporting of foreign struggles connect with their readers, journalists must provide more context than may be necessary in reports of domestic ethnic conflict. It is true that many Americans are ignorant of the lives led by members of this country's least well off and most discriminated against ethnic groups. Nonetheless, most Americans share some cultural and political assumptions about this country and have a common familiarity with the causes and character of our ethnic conflicts. The many factors contributing to the Los Angeles riot were not a mystery to newspaper readers. The factors leading to or out of violence in a wide range of Third-World countries generally are.

Those factors are legion. How deeply into history, for example, do hatreds and violence reach (say, the Muslim and Christian communities in Northern Nigeria, the Sikh and Hindu communities in the Punjab); what correlations exist among race or religion and economic or political power (say, Northern Ireland or the Cypriot conflict); what foreign support or opposition fuels a conflict or frustrates its resolution (say, India's relation to Sri Lanka); what socioeconomic and political structures must be changed before grievances can be overcome or some framework of give-and-take established (say, in Iraq); how likely or even possible are such changes; is a dissident group protesting against oppression likely to become the oppressor of smaller ethnic groups within its own territory (a problem, sadly, of universal relevance)?

Exploring such questions could convert journalists into policy analysts and then scholars, newspapers into periodicals and then books. The question is one of degree. Interviews with those informed about the sources and types of ethnic conflict and about the relevant region surely help. Journalistic comment and analysis will help to transform statistics into situations. Human rights violations, once located in the history, culture, and power relationships of an ethnic struggle, become comprehensible rather than random. A readership may become engaged.

### **The Problem Of the Alien 'Other'**

The difficulty in engaging the public stems in part from the remote origins of most violent conflicts. Not surprisingly, Europeans who are caught in such conflicts—say, the populations in Northern Ireland and the (former) Yugoslavian federation—draw press attention. Most Americans are geographically and culturally related to the European scene. But the great majority of severe ethnic conflicts involve Third-World peoples about whom Americans as a people know little and to whom they feel little relationship—or even empathy. History suggests the ways in which we Americans implicitly devalue the lives of victims in such regions, even to the point of viewing warring factions as demonstrating nothing so much as their inferiority to civilized peoples.

In these respects, the Third World (has it now become the Second?) might as well be extra-terrestrial, where it would draw at least scientists' attention. The luckless Kurds stayed in the public eye for a brief period only because of a war and its aftermath in which the U.S. was directly involved. The Punjab and Kashmir, or the Sri Lankan conflict, or Tibet seem to gain press coverage only upon the occasion of a fresh outrage. Ethnic-based slaughter in the Sudan or violence against the Roma people in East Europe rarely surfaces in the papers.

There are exceptions. In countries like Guatemala, where the U.S. has been importantly involved by providing mili-

tary and other assistance, or from where refugees seek asylum in this country, ethnic conflicts figure somewhat more frequently in the news. More significant exceptions to this minimal treatment of Third-World ethnic violence fall into special categories. Violations of rights of ethnic minorities by enemies of the U.S. during the heyday of the Cold War were widely reported—Nicaragua and the Misquitos, for example. The breakup of the Soviet empire, the residues or failures of Communist rule, and the implications of ethnic conflict in that region for a new world order strike so deep a scholarly and public interest that ethnic violence in and among the Caucasian republics receives more journalistic attention.

Moreover, conflicts whose participants come from both Europe and the Third World and that have geopolitical significance for the United States draw ongoing comment, as is true of ethnic conflicts where one or both groups have closely related communities in this country. The turmoil in South Africa between and within the different races, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian and Northern Ireland struggles, have retained their special pertinent character over decades. There we have no shortage of information and context.

### **The Problem Of Fact-Finding**

Conflicting ethnic groups often write conflicting histories, not simply about what happened centuries ago—history shades into epic and faith—but about yesterday's events. Each group tells its own story about what took place on the given night, how many were killed in a military sweep, who tortured the villagers, what provocation led troops to fire on a civilian demonstration. NGOs seek as diligently as possible to resolve conflicting versions of facts that are inevitably informed by political goals and advocacy.

These difficulties surely inhibit press coverage. Journalists are rarely in a position to make the detailed inquiries that investigators for a NGO will pursue to probe a disputed incident. Despite their good intention to report what in

fact happened, there is always the danger that journalists become prey to one or another contrived history. The reporting over events in Bosnia, atypically rich and continuous for an ethnic conflict, has encountered such problems—who perpetrated a massacre, were there death camps, was an event attributed by the press to one group deceptively arranged by the other?

Although certainty on some disputed matters may often be an illusion, educated guesses must be made. Perhaps journalists can do no better than follow their best judgments while alerting a readership to the claims of "the other side." Probably NGOs offer the most neutral and responsible source of information, although even the most assiduous among them cannot be error-proof. Where independent verification is implausible, the best choice for journalists may be to attribute facts to reputable NGOs and follow their accounts in newspaper reporting. This prudent path, of course, will not be available while the blood is fresh. The newspaper report is due tomorrow; NGOs arrive next month. Only follow-up stories can solve this problem.

Journalists seeking to uncover facts must either deal with each side to the struggle or risk becoming information agencies of one group. By the same token, those reporting ethnic conflicts should not look only at violations of human rights by a government's forces (if we can identify a coherent government) but must include nongovernmental (insurgent) groups' terrorism as well. For NGOs, this problem has a formal legal dimension: does the human rights movement seek to regulate conduct of nongovernmental as well as governmental forces in these situations? Treaties dealing with internal armed conflict and the protection of civilian populations make clear that the answer in many relevant contexts today is "yes." Some leading NGOs such as the Watch Committees now report on serious violations of rights by all combatants. Newspapers, free of any formal limitation, should follow this lead.

### **The Problem Of Resources**

A newspaper's predictable response to many of the preceding suggestions would emphasize that resources are limited. Papers cannot ignore market demand, and in any large readership, domestic news trumps foreign. A small number of foreign correspondents is all that most papers can afford. One or two correspondents may be assigned to cover an entire continent. A journalist ordered from Peru to Guatemala or Haiti, from South Africa or Nigeria to the Sudan, to cover a fresh incident can hardly acquire understanding of the conflict's history and complexity.

Given present assumptions, these points are telling. Still it is bizarre that such assumptions continue to reign. We live in an era of systemic thinking. We recognize that things distant may have serious implications for the world we live in, hence for our own lives. International interdependence has become almost a premise to reasoning. Novel international regulation in fields like human rights has revolutionized older concepts of sovereign independence partly by stressing that interdependence. But newspapers pondering the appeal of foreign news insist on seeing themselves as dutiful suppliers of what readers "want," as passively responding to preferences and interests that are simply "out there". The "market" is imagined as a given.

The press may treat as a given what it helps to mould. By its coverage and perspective, it surely influences the reach of the public's concerns. Newspapers regularly informing a readership about events in, say, Bosnia impose pressure on national and international political processes, partly by the technique of shaming governments of many countries as well as international officials who have closed their eyes. What is widely known cannot be as readily ignored. A press that long blinked Somalia and now occasionally reports about its condition might have influenced the course of things through earlier attention.

Should not the press feel an obligation to educate the public about such vital matters? Are massive killings that stand as the modern successors to the Holocaust not newsworthy, beyond Americans' interest, too painful or esoteric for readers to ponder? Could not resources be more effectively marshalled, so that—for example—a given newspaper could remain closely informed about a given dispute and see it through, even if the cost were to forego other than episodic coverage of other conflicts (which, in turn, other newspapers might examine)?

### The Problem of Journalistic Role and Mission

Why ought newspapers give more frequent and deeper coverage to foreign ethnic conflicts? One could respond by underscoring the meaning of these conflicts for all of us, not only for participants. They remind us of the sorrier aspects of our human existence and nature. They are a part of our times and our culture that ultimately threatens and diminishes us all. To blink such massive and deliberately caused suffering has no more justification than did the avoidance by the press of what was

happening to Jews in Germany in the 1930s, then during the Holocaust itself. Ask not for whom the bell tolls.

A second answer stresses that phenomena like ethnic conflict threaten not only many lives but the entire structure of the postwar human rights movement. The press has given minimal attention to that movement. Few Americans are aware of its development and potential significance. The distancing of the U.S. government from that movement for several decades, as well as its grudging attitude even today to this country's formal involvement with international human rights, have fortified the sense that human rights is for other cultures and folks. We are said to have our distinctive, superior traditions and constitutional ways. We are instructors rather than students when it comes to human rights. We have nothing to learn.

In some ways, journalists buy into and strengthen this mindset. When reporting about our internal life, they avoid the "foreign" vocabulary of human rights. We talk of, say, police brutality or free speech only in relation to constitutionally based rights or liberties, not in relation to international

human rights as such. This distancing appears to have spill-over effects with respect to reporting about violations of those rights in other parts of the world. Ethnic conflict is a powerful case in point. These struggles pose the most serious, systemic instances of violations of human rights in today's world. Many of their excesses are proscribed by related bodies of human rights law and so-called humanitarian law (the law of war or internal armed conflict), both expressed through international custom and treaties that are readily accessible to the press.

If journalists report about domestic hate speech and racial discrimination in employment, about a whole range of internal matters, in such a way as to make clear the relevance of governing statutes and the Constitution, they can report about ethnic conflict in a similar way, indicating the ways in which the participants have violated the human rights movement's customary and treaty rules. By referring to these bodies of norms and to the action or passivity of the international institutions meant to implement them, the press could become a potent instrument for public education about international human rights.

Most significant, reflective and more persistent reporting could heighten awareness of these tragedies to the point of provoking political debate and pressure from parts of the public—pressure on, say, the United States government to take some form of unilateral action (involving aid or trade, diplomatic intervention to seek solutions, and so on) or to work towards a collective response (UN or regional sanctions, humanitarian intervention). Without the involvement of the press, no such public debate is likely to take place. The press can make a difference. ■



Thomas Nast

# Hurricane Andrew—An Old Lesson

*Newspapers Must Keep Watchful Eye to Make Sure Government Protects Public From Shoddy Construction*

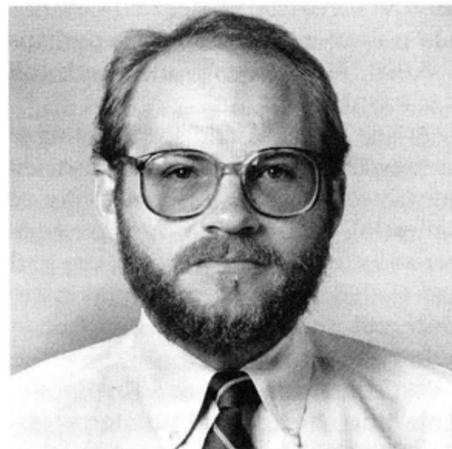
BY MARK SEIBEL

**I**N THE WAKE OF Hurricane Andrew's devastating blow through southern Florida in the early morning hours of August 24, there has been much discussion about the lessons to be learned from the storm's lessons about shoddy construction, about storm preparations, about the need to carry out accurate and timely damage assessments. Public agencies have appointed special task forces to sift through debris and through their own records to learn how such devastation can be avoided in the future, or, at the very least, how to better cope with the damage when it cannot be avoided.

The sad part of all these discussions is the realization, when structural engineers have finished examining the piles of rubble, when bureaucrats have sifted through their telephone logs and when news reporters have poured over building codes, that there really are no new lessons to be gleaned here. The lessons are all old and well-tested: hurricanes are dangerous and unpreventable natural events; houses must be built to withstand them; governments have an obligation to limit the risk of catastrophe when hurricanes hit.

If Hurricane Andrew has taught journalists in southern Florida anything it is this: news organizations are the only effective way to be certain that government is fulfilling its role of public protector. In an era when news selection seems driven evermore by the need to entertain, the challenge for journalists becomes how to combat the impulse to forego coverage of building codes and zoning commissions, the kind of government stories deemed too dull for the new generation of TV-trained news

consumers. For as anyone living in south Florida can testify now, it was in that kind of meeting, in the discussion of roofing felt weight, inspection requirements and what kind of nails to use, that Andrew's devastation really began. After Hurricane Andrew, residents of south Florida realize that more than insiders should be interested when long-tested building techniques are abandoned in the service of faster production and cheaper housing. For tens of thousands, the cost of such changes were their homes and livelihoods—some paid with their lives. The truly frightening thing about a hurricane is not its powerful winds, though those are indeed terrifying, or its driving rains, though they too bring catastrophe. No, the truly frightening thing about a hurricane is the knowledge, in this day of weather satellites and instant communication, that if you die in the storm's fury, it is quite likely your own fault, or someone else's.



Tornadoes, too, have spinning winds and driving rains, and earthquakes can rip apart the very earth itself. But when they come there is little their victims can do to protect themselves against the onslaught. Midwesterners may get a five or 10-minute weather service warning that a tornado's echo has been detected on radar. Californians know that sometime in the next century it is likely that the San Andreas fault will slip in devastating fashion. But the warning time before the actual event is so short that at best one can seek last-minute shelter. To be the victim of an earthquake or a tornado is often as simple as being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Not so with hurricanes. Those who find themselves in the path of a hurricane have time to get out of the way—hours, if not days. And before they go, they can take steps to protect their property, to minimize, if not prevent, damage.

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Hurricane Andrew first came to the attention of South Floridians nine days before it came ashore when the weather service announced that a tropical wave had been detected off Africa. In an average year, 100 such waves are detected and most fade away before becoming serious. Some become tropical depressions, the next lowest category of storm and fewer become tropical storms, a rank reached when winds hit 45 miles per hour. Still fewer become hurricanes, when winds hit 74 miles per hour. Even when they do, South Floridians rarely become immediately alarmed.

Before Andrew, it had been nearly 30 years since a hurricane had swept through Miami, Hurricane Betsy in 1965. Since then it had almost become an article of faith that hurricanes turned away well before striking the city, sliding north into the Carolinas or south into the mountains of Cuba or Jamaica.

### **This Time The Storm Hit**

But by Saturday, August 23, it was clear this time would be different. A high pressure zone had settled over northern Florida and its impact on prevailing winds held Hurricane Andrew hard to a westerly route, setting it on a straight path to Miami. In the middle of the night, Miami became a city with a mission. Hardware stores and lumber yards, normally closed, were crowded as everyone sought tools to withstand the storm: plywood to nail over windows, batteries to keep flashlights and radios operating, drinking water for those long days when water from the tap, if available, was likely to be impure.

Sunday morning dawned clear and brilliant, but the beaches and parks were vacant. The sounds of frantic preparation—whining power saws and pounding hammers—floated over every neighborhood. Cars spilled out of grocery store parking lots. Inside, the shelves were stripped bare of tuna, soups, anything that could be stored without refrigeration. Lines snaked around gas stations. Along the beaches and low-lying areas, the mandatory evacuation was in full swing. Nursing

homes were emptied of their enfeebled residents. Oceanview condominiums were shuttered. Boaters searched desperately for inlets.

In the neighborhoods west and south of Miami, residents prepared to receive friends from nearer the water. These were, for the most part, areas of newer homes, built in the boom days since the last hurricane, tract homes that had gone up in mere weeks as Dade County's population soared. Now, people prepared to weather the storm, safe in the assumption that they were a long way from the surge, the wall of ocean water that rushes ashore with the hurricane's eye and causes most of the destruction.

It was in the vast expanse of newer homes well away from the water that the truly horrific stories can be told. There, middle-class suburban families watched in terror as their homes blew apart around them. Huddled in closets, covered with mattresses on bathroom floors, they waited for death through the hours of fury.

At one multi-story condominium complex, the exterior wall simply dropped away. At another complex, an enormous concrete beam crashed down on occupied apartments. In hundreds of homes, residents ran from room to room, trying to stay ahead of the storm's wrath, finally finding shelter in the last standing closet or in the bathtub.

When the storm finally passed, the residents emerged stunned, grateful to be alive. South Florida's lush vegetation was gone. Hundreds of thousands were without electricity, scores of thousands had no water. The homeless: perhaps 200,000. Miraculously, the death toll was less than 20.

At The Miami Herald, the dawning of the new day brought frenzied effort. On Sunday night, with no possibility of delivering a Monday morning newspaper at the height of the storm, the staff had settled for an extra, printed in English and Spanish, distributed free at public shelters.

With the storm gone and The Herald, with little damage and uninterrupted electricity, the staff prepared another extra, this one for afternoon delivery at the shelters and wherever else papers could be passed out. At the City Desk,

Rick Hirsch, an assistant city editor who had spent the night at the paper, coordinated the gathering and writing of the extra. Throughout the day he fielded phone reports of destruction and dispatched reporters. Finally, with the edition finished, he asked permission to see if he had a home. His neighborhood, Country Walk, had been hard hit. His house was a total loss.

Tuesday morning, many residents were amazed when the paper arrived at their door and for the next two weeks, The Herald, perhaps unlike at any time in its recent history, became the area's dominant news source. Television continued to broadcast, but without electricity or cable television, few people could see the pictures. Radio stations stayed on the air, rebroadcasting the television reports, but as the days wore on, batteries in radios began to fail.

### **Papers Delivered To Homes Everywhere**

Reading the paper became a vital link. With the circulation in disarray, The Herald set up an emergency distribution system whose tenets were simple. wherever there appeared to be life in a home, no matter how damaged, deliver a paper, subscriber or not. Carriers were joined by editors, advertising sales reps and executives in deliveries.

With phone communications snarled, the paper became the community go-between, running lists of missing people and the folks looking for them. Lists of pleas for help. Lists of offers of aid. Reporters were assigned to staff phones to gather these listings.

A computer basket was created for story ideas. All newsroom staffers were urged to contribute their experiences so that the story would be told not just from the perspective of a journalist, but with the rare insight one gets from suffering through the tragedy. Almost every other kind of news disappeared from the paper as the first section was devoted exclusively to the hurricane for days.

Collecting the news was no easy task. With roads blocked by downed trees and power poles and traffic lights blown

away, getting in and out of the areas of heaviest damage was difficult. Reporters, accustomed to spending no more than 45 minutes driving between the southern part of the county and The Herald's building near downtown, found themselves on the road for as long as five hours.

The logistics of covering the storm were daunting. There were not enough flashlights, drinking water or food for reporters sent into an areas where the most basic services were gone. A local phone call was all but impossible to make. No hotels remained standing in the damage zone; reporters could not avoid the five-hour commute.

### **Cellular Phones Knocked Out**

The Herald had long ago stocked up on cellular phones in the event of a major news story. But the phones were virtually useless because the winds had knocked over the relay towers. The Herald turned to its satellite telephone equipment, purchased not for making phone calls from the county, but as a hedge against the chaos editors expect whenever the government changes in Cuba. From just a few miles away, reporters used the satellite phone to beam their stories 23,000 miles into space and back to a receiver in New York, which passed the signal to The Herald.

The Herald rented a 32-foot RV—those who had to sleep there referred to it as a horse trailer—so that some reporters could remain in the damage area without losing hours of reporting time trying to find a way out. At the weekend, a helicopter was pressed into service to carry film from Homestead to the paper for processing.

Amazed by how some neighborhoods were devastated while others nearby seemed to have suffered little, The Herald engaged four engineers to examine the destruction. Their findings, reported that next Sunday, less than a week after the hurricane, were chilling: hundreds of the homes destroyed by the hurricane showed signs of incredibly substandard workmanship. Roofing braces had not been nailed to walls they were supposed to support. Plywood roof sheathing had

never been attached to roof trusses. Staples, not nails, had been used to build roofs; shot by guns, many had totally missed the supports. That story was accompanied by photographs and graphics that showed specific houses and how the failures had occurred, allowing winds to get under the roofs and destroy walls.

In the weeks that followed, more evidence of such construction failures flooded in. A group of engineers announced that thousands were made homeless unnecessarily: their houses had collapsed in moderate winds because of shoddy practices. Another group of 50 engineers and architects found that most roofs that suffered damage simply hadn't been nailed on properly.

In perhaps the most tragic finding, a structural engineer engaged by The Herald determined that the apartment complex where the highest concentration of hurricane deaths had occurred had been built without required steel reinforcements on a concrete beam. The beam had been lifted by the winds and fell on residents. The structural engineer's conclusion: people died to save a few hundred dollars in steel.

Yet perhaps the most frightening discovery, in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew's devastation was to be found in The Herald's own clip files. For decades, The Herald had documented investigation after investigation, allegation after allegation, that in their rush to approve new housing, local governments had looked the other way, allowing substandard construction and inadequate inspection.

In 1976, a grand jury had warned that building inspections were so shoddy that new buildings "could be blown down in a hurricane." The report found that roofing inspectors weren't even getting up on ladders before certifying the roof was built correctly. In 1990, another grand jury warned that building inspection practices were so incompetent that they put "the general public at risk." Between the two studies, more than a quarter of the houses in Dade County had been built.

Despite the publicity, officials then had paid little attention. Sifting through minutes of building code meetings going back decades, reporter Lisa Getter found that the South Florida Building Code, designed to protect the area from hurricanes, had been eroded in countless ways over the years. Thinner plywood was allowed. A requirement for storm shutters was dropped. In 1961, government officials allowed the use of staples to attach roofs, then ignored reports in 1983 and 1984 that the staples weren't working. Few of these changes received newspaper attention, yet they were major contributors to what became the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history.

### **Greatest Challenge Is Staying With Story**

Will the future be any different? In the months since the hurricane, South Florida residents have become experts on construction. They can tell you the difference between a hip and a gable roof, why one survives a hurricane better than the other. They can tell the value of hurricane straps and the importance of nails in attaching plywood to a roof.

Decisions of the board that governs the local building code have gotten wide attention as officials struggle to find a way to permit reconstruction while not allowing the same mistakes to be repeated. New, heavier materials are now required on roofs. Inspections are to be more rigorous. Materials that had become common, such as press-board, have been banned.

All of this is being sucked up by an anxious and aware readership. But how does a newspaper maintain that interest five or 10 years down the road, when memories fade, developers are anxious to try new construction techniques and there is money to be made?

That is perhaps the greatest challenge for a newspaper. If there is a lesson to be learned from Hurricane Andrew, that is it. ■

# Earthquakes—Patience to Hold Back

*Aside From Plans to Keep Operation Functioning, Editor Says Little Can Be Done to Prepare for Coverage*

BY JONATHAN KRIM

**T**HE EXPERIENCE OF our newspaper in dealing with the 1989 northern California earthquake will never be forgotten. We've been permanently branded by the horror and the heroism, the devastation and the determination, the anguish and the awe.

I'm sure we share this feeling with any news staff that has lived through a disaster that touches readers and chroniclers alike.

Yet unlike any other natural disaster that is likely to confront a news organization, earthquakes strike without warning. No matter how large or devastating a quake might be, science has yet to provide even the slightest clue of when or where one will occur.

With that in mind, it is logical that in the three years since northern California was rocked by a 7.1-magnitude temblor, I have been deluged with questions from editors around the country asking whether we at The San Jose Mercury News have a written plan of action for responding to an earthquake.

Surely, these editors reason, our experience would enable us to codify the secrets of successful quake coverage.

I suspect that, invariably, I have disappointed these colleagues. We have no such plan.

And I would counsel any editor against spending large blocks of time and resources on such a blueprint for coverage. In fact, I believe that one of the major keys to our success was our willingness to hold ourselves back from following procedures that one would think of as automatic in the midst of a disaster.

Before I explain why, let me mention a few things that news organizations can and must do to prepare for a disaster such as an earthquake.

First and foremost, they must do everything to ensure that they can continue to function in the aftermath.

Despite how obvious this sounds, or perhaps because it's so obvious, I've noticed that this advice often travels into one set of editors' ears and quickly exits out the other. Exacerbating this problem is the fact that this kind of preparedness is not usually in the control of editors; it involves those responsible for maintenance of the entire facility.

But there is no amount of coverage planning or brainstorming that will help one-tenth as much as editors insisting

that their organizations be able to care for their staffs and function as quickly as possible after a quake.

To wit:

- Having a back-up power system. Those responsible for obtaining diesel generators for our plant in the event of the loss of electricity were as responsible for our success as anyone. Perhaps more so.
- Having cellular-phone capability. Temporary loss of telephone service is a given in an earthquake. The need to communicate is never greater. We were caught short in this area, and were saved only by the fact that phones were not down for long in many areas.



*Jonathan Krim is assistant managing editor/special projects for The San Jose Mercury News. He supervises the newspaper's investigative team and oversees readership research for the newsroom. At the time of the 1989 northern California earthquake, Krim was metropolitan editor, in charge of local and state news operations. In that capacity, he had overall responsibility for the paper's earthquake coverage, which won the Pulitzer Prize for local coverage in 1990. Krim, 37, has been at Mercury News since 1983. In 1985-1986, he directed and edited the project on the hidden overseas investments of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos and his cronies that won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting. A native of New York City, Krim holds a journalism degree from the University of Montana. He has worked on papers in Montana, Arizona, Washington, D.C. and California.*

- Having reciprocal printing agreements with other area newspapers, in the event of press damage. The Mercury News ended up printing several smaller dailies and weeklies in the first several days after the quake. Some day, we are likely to need the favor returned.
- Having a facility that is as quake-proof as possible. Many older buildings, which newspapers often occupy, are sorely lacking in required engineering and other safety features. Our building is relatively new, and weathered the quake fairly well.
- Having ample stores of supplies in case of greater damage. Keeping stocks of potable water, hard hats, flashlights, bicycles, first-aid equipment and other necessities is crucial.

As you can see, none of these items involve journalism. But whether we as journalists like it or not, they are the most important things that can be done to prepare.

On the coverage side, editors need to be as ready as they would be for any big story. Are there updated directories with names and numbers of all emergency-service personnel? Do staffers know what to do if they are off when a disaster strikes? And so forth.

But when it comes to actually covering the story, it's hard to plan ahead.

In our case, the quake hit in the middle of the evening rush hour, just as a World Series game involving our two home-town teams was set to begin. Much of our staff was at the game. We could not have asked for worse circumstances.

As we emerged from under desks and shook off our fright, the enormity of our task was apparent. We had about five hours to put out a newspaper.

The first and most overpowering instinct of any journalist in this situation is to act; to move, to go, to dispatch, to direct, to do something, anything. Succumbing to such instincts after an earthquake can be disastrous.

Quakes are capricious in their devastation, damaging areas and then diving underground, only to surface miles away to wreak more havoc. The epicenter is not always the place of greatest destruction. And because they strike without warning, they cause instant gridlock. Our highways, jammed with cars, basically stopped functioning.

It was with great difficulty that we fought our instincts and, in effect, barred the doors of our newsroom. Everyone was ordered to stay put until we knew more. To have simply dispatched the staff to go find devastation would have been folly. They would have gotten swallowed up.

There was work to be done in the newsroom. Some phones worked. Our back-up power allowed television and radio to work. We could learn a lot in that first hour that would enable us to plan how to use our resources.

And we had many people already in the field; at Candelstick Park, in our suburban bureaus, or at home. To a man and woman, they instinctively knew what to do, and they went to work. By hook or by crook, they found ways to contact the main office. A coverage plan began to take shape.

So when I'm asked for the best piece of advice I can give on covering an earthquake, I respond: Resist the urge to act until you know more about the situation. Things will not be as they first appear. You have more time than you think.

But first-day efforts are but a small part of successful disaster coverage. As they days and months rolled on, we strove to always think of building community.

We covered the news, but we also told people how to give and receive help. We investigated bad construction, but we also let people, in print, vent their feelings of horror and frustration. We covered the heroes, and sometimes even the humor.

The bottom line is that we fought off another basic journalistic instinct: to always be the detached observer. We were living this story along with our readers, and we weren't afraid to show it. ■

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# Silly Grins or Information?

*TV Meteorologist Contends That Forecasters Need Time To Educate, as Well as Inform, the Public*

BY BOB RYAN

**W**E HAVE NO WAY OF knowing for sure, but it's a reasonable guess that when early man stood erect, and first communicated with others of his species, he said, "How's the weather?" The weather has been a universal ice breaker, a topic of conversation and interest throughout history and across country borders and cultures. Droughts, floods, cold, hurricanes, locusts, pestilence and allergies have been blamed on demons, gods, nature and, yes, even the TV weatherman.

Despite this universal interest, television news programs have been criticized for devoting too much time to the weather and TV forecasters have been ridiculed for their antics in trying to entertain viewers. What is not understood by television producers and especially by newspaper editors is that there is much more to weather reports than rain or shine. Weather reports can—and should—be the basis for educating the public in science.

Competent meteorologists on TV—and many metropolitan stations now employ trained meteorologists—can offer this extra dimension in science education. He or she can do this entertainingly without wearing a squirting flower or a silly grin. Similarly, the wise newspaper editor will devote more, not less, space to meteorology, going beyond the forecast. USA TODAY showed the way; more papers should follow.

The value of trained broadcast meteorologists was dramatically demonstrated during Hurricane Andrew. Meteorologist Bryan Norcross of WTVJ-TV in Miami had, in the words of his news director, "made a pest of himself" in getting the station to prepare for a po-

tential major hurricane that Norcross knew would one day hit south Florida. Because of Norcross's insistence and planning, WTVJ was prepared when Hurricane Andrew hit. Hurricane specials that Norcross had produced were aired during the storm. Norcross and WTVJ news personnel were on the air for 23 consecutive hours, both on TV and an FM radio simulcast.

## **A Personality vs. A Meteorologist**

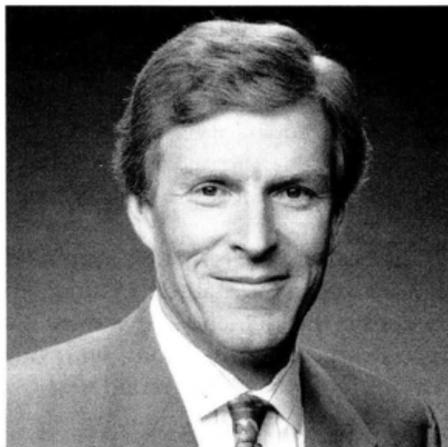
While a competing station had recently fired a broadcast meteorologist and hired a "personality" whose great Andrew quote was, "I didn't even have time to bring in my lawn furniture," Norcross was a source of information, knowledge and reassurance to people huddled in their homes while the most devastating storm ever to hit the United States raged outside.

After the storm passed, Norcross was hailed as a hero and was credited with saving lives in helping south Florida get

through a meteorological night of terror. There are other examples where meteorologists as weathercasters, trained professionals who know what they are doing, make a difference not only in educating viewers and raising audience ratings, but also in saving lives.

But first, a little history.

The earliest records of weather in America were recorded in mariners' logs. The Pilgrims wrote of enduring the harsh New England winter upon their arrival in 1620. Obviously there was no climatologist on board the Mayflower or they would have sailed to Palm Beach for the winter. Washington, Franklin, Jefferson and other Founding Fathers took time from their nation building duties to make regular weather observations and conduct some atmospheric experiments. Franklin, writing "Poor Richard's Almanac" may have been among the nation's first weathercasters—and no computer graphics.



*Robert T. Ryan will become president of the American Meteorology Society in January, the first broadcaster to head the organization. The chief meteorologist of WRC-TV (NBC) in Washington, he has worked for television stations in Boston and Providence and in 1978 was the first broadcast meteorologist to appear regularly on the Today Show. Born in 1943 in Peekskill, NY, he received a bachelor of science degree in physics in 1968 and a master's degree in atmospheric science in 1973 from the State University of New York in Albany. He, his wife Olga and their son live in Virginia.*

A national weather forecasting service (part of the Army Signal Corps) was first established in the mid-1800's. Regular weather reports then could be routinely disseminated to the newspaper reading public. However, the science of weather, meteorology was still in its infancy and public trust in official forecasts was not high. The great Blizzard of '88 and the Galveston hurricane of 1905, which killed 5,000, were the types of weather disasters that could not be forecast 100 years ago. Even as recently as the 1940's weather observations had many blanks. Ocean reports were sparse, communications slow by today's standards, and upper air observations difficult. Storms like the great 1933 New England hurricane still caught the public by surprise and inflicted a large loss of life. Folks in the central U.S. were fatalistic about tornadoes. These whirlwinds drop from severe storms in a matter of minutes and were essentially unpredictable and struck without warning. In 1935, 300 Texans were killed by tornadoes.

By the 1950's modern weather forecasting was making significant strides. The first crude satellite pictures actually allowed meteorologists to see the weather from above. Communication networks allowed weather data to be rapidly disseminated and private forecasting companies came into being to meet the needs of a variety of weather sensitive clients. Newspapers were still reliant on the U.S. Weather Bureau (as it was then known) for simple graphics. But the local "official" forecast was printed sometimes 12 hours before the public would read it.

### **Crystal Sets Picked Up The First Broadcasts**

The advent of local radio and television newscasts across the country in the 1940's and 50's expanded the outlet for weather information to a timeliness and specificity not possible through print media. The nation's first broadcast weathercaster was probably E.B. Rideout. Rideout was a printer working for the Weather Bureau in Boston and began radio weather reports in the late 1920's, a time when a few individuals

who had crystal sets could hear his reports. Though interrupted by World War II, Rideout's radio career continued until about 1960. In various parts of the country, in the 30's and 40's, there were a few pioneering individuals, such as Rideout, who prepared local weathercasts, but the bulk of local broadcast forecasts were still presented by radio reports from Weather Bureau offices.

As local TV newscasts grew in importance in the 50's more and more stations started hiring individuals to report the weather. Many of these early weathercasters were local radio personalities who moved to the new media of TV. A few of the first TV weathercasters were actually trained meteorologists. Some of these pioneer weathercasters such as Don Kent in Boston, Francis Davis in Philadelphia, and Harry Volkman, still doing a wonderful job in Chicago, used the simple tools of chalk and blackboard to make and present the first TV weather maps.

In the early days of television journalism there was no spot for a woman anchor, few reporters were women and weathercasts became a vehicle for female presence. The "TV Weather Girl" era of the 50's and early 60's found stations competing with each other cosmetically rather than journalistically . . . maybe even more so than today, at least in the area of weather reporting. The early weathercasters, who were meteorologists, such as Harold Taft in Dallas, worked hard to bring a bit of the science of weather to an ever expanding audience. An audience that was receptive to learning a bit of the "whys" of the weather rather than seeing a cute wink or hearing an old joke.

By the 1960's, meteorology was making significant strides. Geostationary satellites now provided continuous clear pictures of the weather. Another broadcast meteorology pioneer, Roy Leep in Tampa, provided his audience with the first regular and "looped" satellite imagery. Weather radars could detect and track the movement of severe thunderstorms and the increasing speed of computers brought the age of numerical

weather forecasting. A significant increase in the skill and resultant credibility of the weather forecast was at hand.

Television and radio news management, seeking to enhance the credibility of ever more competitive news broadcasts, began hiring meteorologists in increasing numbers. Most had no broadcast experience but quickly learned on the job. The public had as much interest



as always, and now they had a credible person who could not only provide a forecast but also an explanation of the weather. A current estimate is that 50 percent of the TV weathercasters are meteorologists or have a science degree.

With the advent of broadcast meteorology, the American Meteorological Society developed the Seal of Approval program. The aim was to promote TV and radio weathercasts of high caliber that are scientifically competent, provide informational value and include an educational or explanatory component. Over the years the AMS Seal program has undergone some changes to meet a changing broadcast environment. Recent updates have tried to make the program as objective as possible, but the basic goal remains the same now as when the program started in 1959.

Radio weathercasting followed a bit different path than television. The U.S. Weather Bureau, which became the National Weather Service, gradually withdrew from providing live free radio weather reports to stations. Recognizing that a public-private mix would best meet the needs of the country's weather market, the government worked with private weather companies and encouraged these companies to meet the special needs of their clients, which include many radio stations. Government meteorologists, released from having

to provide radio reports, were then free to concentrate on the important tasks of forecasting and issuing weather warnings.

With the NWS no longer providing free competition, some companies, Accu-Weather Inc. perhaps best known, grew by providing radio weather reports for many stations across the country. In addition, a number of private meteorology firms, whose principal business is radio work, came into being during the last 20 years. In some markets, individual weathercasters, who are also TV weathercasters, provide reports for local radio stations. The private sector, represented by local radio and TV weathercasters, is now the principal conduit for weather watches and warning and other critical weather information generated by meteorologists of the National Weather Service.

### **USA TODAY Showed The Way in Newspapers**

The print media was the last to take the step from government-provided information and generic maps to full color weather pages. USA Today, launched in 1982, changed the way the public saw the newspaper weather page. The full-color forecast map, with sidebar graphics and explanations of topical weather events takes a page from today's computer graphic TV displays . . . or vice versa. It grabs the reader's attention and provides a wealth of information and importantly, often some explanation of the day's weather headline.

A debate has gone on for years as to the merit of weather, or meteorology in media. Is it news, information, or entertainment? Knowing whether it will be sunny or raining tomorrow is not the most critical piece of news we in the media can give the public. On the other hand if severe weather, tornadoes, winter storms, or a hurricane threaten an area, are we serving the public by having the forecast delivered by a talking clam or a personality who knows or cares nothing about weather? Weather in media has always been a mix of news, information and entertainment. Unfortunately all too often in broadcasting, especially TV, the mix of information

and entertainment has gotten so blurred that we are pushed to be weather entertainers rather than broadcast meteorologists providing information, at times critical information, in an enthusiastic (sometimes entertaining) way to an interested public.

Journalists and media managers have never really understood the fascination and interest of the public with weather. Not just snowstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, but all weather, hot, cold, clouds, wind, the works. How often we meteorologists read the cliched-filled columns of journalists bemoaning the attention the weather page gets or the time the weather report gets on TV. The average person loves to hear about the weather and loves to talk about it but many media managers still don't get it. They think there is more interest in reading 122 sports scores or watching four minutes of bowling bloopers.

I suspect most of our journalistic colleagues began life as English majors and were forced, at some point, to take a course in science and have been vowing revenge ever since. The idea that science can be fun (meteorology is actually fun for some people) or the average person would enjoy learning more about the whys and wherefores of the weather somehow seems alien to the producer or editor who, as a student, had been forced to take that course to meet the dreaded science requirement. This fear laid the basis for the notion that if I don't like it, but the average Joe wants it, we'll have to make it entertaining somehow.

### **Time of Nerds And Boobs Is Over**

With the many tools we now have in broadcasting, computer graphics, time lapse of the sky, animation, even Star Wars-like flybys of hurricanes and storms, the information itself is entertaining. Yes, there was a time of the weather nerds and a time of weather boobs, but there are now more and more competent broadcasters with degrees, meteorologists enthusiastic about what they do and able to make the information itself entertaining. USA Today showed how much the public

would take to an eye-catching but scientifically competent weather page in print. The public would be better served and, I think more interested, if similar ideas were put into more general practice in broadcasting.

### **Better Forecasting On the Way**

We have a greater variety and more life threatening weather than any other country. The science of meteorology has advanced to the point where, during the next few years, new tools and systems will allow meteorologists to observe and predict the weather in a detail and skill never before possible. People will be seeing new displays on TV, hearing references to new radars on radio, reading of new satellites and more understanding of global climate change, ozone depletion and other weather and environmental concerns. I believe the average person has a desire to be informed and, yes, even educated about our changing environment and weather. It may be more important than ever before that if the journalistic community is to fulfill its responsibility of keeping the public informed, it makes sure to do so by having competent people providing the weather information an informed public needs. There is nothing wrong with having someone who knows his subject, such as a trained meteorologist, actually talking or writing about that subject.

Sy Syms, in his TV pitches as president of Syms Clothing says, "An educated consumer is our best customer." That slogan should apply to the media and meteorology as well as coats and pants. ■

# Uncovered: The Changing Natural World

*The Media Report Hurricanes and Other Disasters Brilliantly  
But Ignore the More Vital Environmental Shifts*

BY BILL MCKIBBEN

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE some great natural disaster rips into view, and for a day or a week we read stories about survivors and bravery and damaged homes and the National Guard. If it's big enough, like Hurricane Andrew, the stories may last a month, but soon they fade, and we go back to usually ignoring the natural world and concentrating on exclusively human affairs.

If the scientists turn out to be correct about impending global environmental alteration, however, that situation may change in two ways: first, the frequency and intensity of catastrophe may increase dramatically, and second the idea of a stable normal "nature" may start to disappear, replaced by a shifting and unsettling fever chart of environmental insecurity.

The best example is the greenhouse effect. Current forecasts call for increases on the order of 4 degrees Fahrenheit in global average temperature during the next century, as carbon dioxide traps heat near the planet that would otherwise radiate back out to space. In other words, the amount of energy in the earth's physical systems will increase considerably.

In everyday terms, according to a growing number of experts, this extra energy will be felt in more and greater natural disasters. Hurricanes, for instance, draw their power from the warmth of the sea surface. At current global temperatures, Hurricane Gilbert, with top winds of about 200 miles per hour, is about as strong as hurricanes can grow. But an increase of only a few degrees in sea surface temperature could mean hurricanes with winds 50 miles an hour higher, and since damage

from winds increases geometrically, not arithmetically, these storms would be more devastating than any we've ever known.

By the same token, the heat waves that periodically grip our cities should become more frequent and more intense. One scientist, James Hansen, has said that even by the 1990's the man in the street should be able to notice the change, and that by the middle of the next century a city like, say, Dallas could go from 19 to 75 days above 90 degrees.

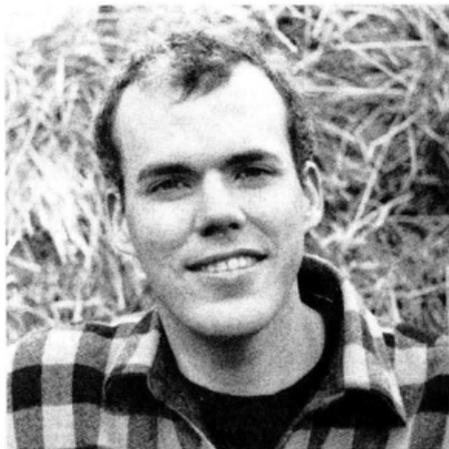
With more heat comes increased likelihood of drought. Although warm air holds more water and total precipitation should increase, the higher rates of evaporation will more than cancel out that effect. If, as predicted in some computer models, the virgin flows of the Colorado drop by as much as 50 percent in the next century, it is hard to imagine any other story mattering much more to the Southwest.

Heat and drought also work their effect on agriculture—1988, the warmest and driest summer on record in the continental United States, saw corn and

soybean yields fall by as much as a third. A repeat of such a summer, which the computer models tell us is precisely what we can expect, would obviously wreak havoc with both domestic and international economies and food supplies.

These stories, as they happen, will all be covered in luxurious detail. I recently wrote a book analyzing everything that came across a television set on the largest cable system in America for a single day in the spring of 1990. As it happened, that day featured some flooding in Texas. It's nothing that anyone in the rest of the world can remember now; in fact, it had surely been forgotten by the end of the week. For 24 hours, however, it was given loving attention by every single newscast—the cliché footage of elderly men and women being carried from nursing homes, the stock shots of people in rowboats plying their suburban streets.

But the more important story will almost certainly be undercovered—the incremental, almost imperceptible changes that will bring our children



*Bill McKibben's first book, "The End of Nature," is now available in 16 languages. His second, "The Age of Missing Information," deals with the media environment, and was published last spring by Random House. His work appears in The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, Outside, and a wide range of other national publications. He lives in the Adirondack Mountains with his wife and a lot of trees.*

and our grandchildren a vastly different physical world. Because it has been so predictable in the past, and because it seems so overwhelmingly large, we believe intuitively that the physical world is basically dependable—a hurricane here, a forest fire there, but the world stays basically the same.

Scientists tell us, however, that the rate of climate change will be between 10 and 60 times faster than anything humans have previously experienced. That is, through our emissions we may force the natural world to change at something like the same rate that human society has changed in this century. There is no reason to assume nature can adapt as fast as we can, and the stresses will probably begin to mount up—not dramatically, just irreversibly.

### Why Do Bears Live In Yellowstone Park?

For instance, forests live where they live because, among other things, it's a certain temperature. If the temperature goes up about one degree Fahrenheit, vegetation zones shift perhaps 40 miles. If the temperature goes up 5 degrees, trees that live in Albany want to move to Montreal. Trees being trees, they stay in place—it's just that, stressed by the heat, they succumb much more easily to the host of insects and fungi that are forever afflicting trees. Some computer models have suggested that by the middle of the next century the hemlock may survive only above the Canadian border, with similar shifts for other species—and of course for the entire ecosystems that have evolved around them. To put it another way, bears do not live in Yellowstone National Park by some immutable natural law or some act of Congress or some arrangement with the Wyoming tourist authorities. They live there because it's the right climatic zone for them, and if that changes they will vanish into the private land to the north where their survival is unlikely.

Another example concerns sea level. For a while, the main scare stories about global warming concerned melting ice caps and flooded metropolises. As people have learned more about the stability of the Antarctic, though, fears

of science-fiction flooding have waned. Simply because we won't be taking gondolas to the 40th floor of the Empire State Building, however, doesn't mean that incremental change won't be devastating. Some glaciers *will* likely melt. Anyway, warm water takes up more space than cold; a rise of as much as a yard in sea level is seen as perfectly possible. A yard doesn't sound like much, but it would destroy half or more of the coastal marshes lining our nation's shores. These wetlands may have no time to migrate inland and no space either—an awful lot of beaches are now bordered by highways. And these marshes are the most biologically important parts of the ocean, the great spawning grounds.

So it goes in a dozen other areas, too. You cannot change the climate system without throwing off everything that depends on it and that means pretty much everything on the face of the planet and for several meters beneath the surface. These changes may be incremental, but taken together they might well create a new world.

To date, coverage of these phenomenon has been largely limited to a single type of story. A scientist will issue a report predicting something about our climatic future, usually in the most macro terms. A reporter will interview the scientist, and then interview one of a regular roster of other scientists who will say that the first scientist is sloppy or overeager. While these types of stories need to be written, albeit with greater savvy, they are not in my opinion the most important journalism.

What would really matter, over the long term, would be if newspapers began to regard the natural world as a legitimate source of news, not just when it "malfunctioned," but day in and day out. For instance, repeating annual events—bird migrations, the appearance of frogs in the spring, the drying out of the woods in late summer—should be covered regularly, just as the budget process of the legislature is covered even when it is not producing earth-shaking news. At the moment we cover wild animals when something bizarre happens, whales beaching themselves, say. But if the regular migration

of whales up the West Coast was a yearly story, it would begin to give people some baseline of knowledge about the natural world from which they could start to sense deviations.

At the moment, the fact that the hemlock won't exist south of the Canadian border doesn't bother people much, because very few of them have no idea if hemlocks grow in their area and even if they do, which tree is a hemlock. But if the forest was treated as important, worthy of regular coverage even when it wasn't burning down, then the small shifts that in fact may signal the unraveling of the ecosystem would become more apparent.

### Day-to-Day Coverage Makes the Difference

To use a human analogue, the idea has grown over the last 20 years that America is no longer astride the world; that in fact our power is in relative decline compared with other nations. That important realization did not come because someone wrote a prize-winning series on America in *Decline*; it grew from the day-in day-out coverage of the deficit and the poverty rate and the manufacturing trouble in Detroit and the length of the Japanese schoolday and the quality of German appliances and so forth. It emerged from a background of complex details, and if the media had not managed to transmit a workaday notion of economics or sociology it would not have emerged at all.

The relationship between people and the earth, and the changes we are almost certainly causing, is an even bigger story, with even more far-reaching implications. What we do to the planet in the next 100 years will last for all human history. But we are so used to thinking of nature as background, as static and unchanging and in news terms unimportant, that we run the risk of missing this story entirely, or covering it only when, like Hurricane Andrew, it demands coverage. We lack a grammar for journalistic writing about the natural world. The people who find it, who develop the vocabulary and the techniques, will be the great enlighteners of the next century. ■

# PRESUMED GUILTY

## 'The Media's Responsibility,' a Chapter of Book Giving A Police Version of the Rodney King Case

BY SGT. STACEY C. KOON

WITH ROBERT DEITZ

**A**J. LIEBLING, THE distinguished World War II correspondent and press critic for *The New Yorker* magazine in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's, once compared journalism to cheap-shot guerrilla warfare.

Journalists, Liebling said, were people who hid up in the hills and waited until the battle was over. Then they would come down to the deserted battlefield and shoot the wounded.

At the time, Liebling was referring only to editorial writers, but he could as easily have been describing today's reporters. Because, since the early 1970's and the Watergate episode, reporters and editors have taken upon themselves the responsibility to determine the proper standards of social and political behavior, a responsibility that goes far beyond what the Founding Fathers anticipated when the First Amendment guaranteed freedom of the press. And all too often these standards have been established

without a thorough examination of facts that might lead the media to a different conclusion.

The Rodney King affair is a classic example. If ever there was a case of instant trial and conviction by the media, particularly television, this was it. Some background is necessary here to understand why and how the media conditioned the American people to presume guilt on the part of police officers in the arrest of Rodney King, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

First, it should be noted that I do not believe a media conspiracy existed to blame the cops rather than the proper culprits—primarily the inadequate use-of-force policies adopted by Los Angeles officialdom in the early 1980's. The media are altogether too diverse, too diffused, for such collusion. It is silly to suggest that thousands of editors, reporters, and television and radio commentators conspired to convict me and my officers in the court of public opinion on a presumption of guilt created by an incomplete and usually edited eighty-two-second

videotape. An intrigue this widespread would be even more difficult to organize and sustain than the alleged "conspiracy" to beat Rodney King that the Los Angeles DA's office and others have tried to hang on my officers and me, the CHIPs, and the Los Angeles Unified School District police. No, instead of a media conspiracy, at least four other factors were at work here.

The first was the media's self-assumed role as a watchdog to sniff out official wrongdoing and bring it to public attention. This is a laudable goal, but it was not envisioned by the framers of the Constitution when they wrote the First Amendment guaranteeing a free press. The media and its leading spokesmen and spokeswoman would have you believe this, but it is not true. As I have learned from my journalist colleague who assisted with this book, for most of the

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## Kovach

*continued from page 2*

able to determine the context within which the images would be presented. Only later did we learn how consistently we had been misled and deceived.

Time and again, in order to accommodate the demands of the dramatic image media managers demonstrate their willingness to by-pass the journalistic filters in order to get the image on the screen.

For a competitive free system it is senseless to argue that journalists forgo the speed, impact, and power of the new technology. But it is important to understand that the technology places

equally powerful demands on the journalist. The most important demand is that the boundaries of the image be stretched as far as possible in order to widen and deepen the context within which it is understood.

There are many ways to stretch the frame for context. In Baghdad did a censor sit outside the frame projected on the screen? In Kuwait, was the unerring smart bomb attack one of many or the only successful attack that day? How representative of the 12 minutes of the Holliday tape were the 82 seconds which were shown? The answer to each of these questions could fundamentally change the validity, value and importance of the image itself.

If Sgt. Koons argument is correct then the context within it is presented can overwhelm even the most powerful image. One picture is no longer worth a thousand words, as the Chinese maxim claims. Now that we are deep into the visual age we have found that each picture may require a thousand words.

It is increasingly important that journalists understand this need and see to it that the first context is constructed to meet the needs of an informed public. Or the press becomes nothing more than a system which looses images upon the world which will be manipulated to serve selfish and narrow private interests. ■

nation's early years newspapers were largely journals of partisan political opinion with no allegiance to either the truth or the broad public interest. It was only in the 1840's that the press began to adopt the role of advocate of the public interest. Over the years, this role, largely worthwhile, has become institutionalized. There's no question that aggressive media attention to official wrongdoing has uncovered many sins by appointed and elected officials and others in authority. The abuse of public trust by the railroads in the Nineteenth Century, the muckraking exposes of oil cartels and beef trusts, and, of course, Watergate leap immediately to mind.

But when the media's suspicions of fiendish official behavior become paranoid and they accept facts without examining the evidence, the media's own sins can be far more dangerous than wrongdoing by government. Look at the LA riots, for example. More than 50 people dead, thousands injured, almost \$1 billion in property destroyed. Whatever the underlying social and economic causes for the discontent, you can make a good case that the riots were prompted by the media's unwillingness or failure to report facts during the Simi Valley trial that would have cast legitimate clouds of doubt over a presumption of guilt. But these facts would have intruded upon a good story and they were not reported. And so, by omission, the media prepared the public for guilty verdicts. Just recall some of the reactions to the Simi Valley verdicts of innocence:

"I was stunned," said Mayor Tom Bradley. "I was shocked. I was outraged. I was speechless when I heard that verdict. Today this jury told the world that what we all saw with our own eyes was not a crime. The jury's verdict will never blind the world to what we saw on the videotape. Nobody could have anticipated this verdict. Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, told The Los Angeles Times that the

acquittals were "outrageous, a mockery of justice." Hooks insisted that "given the evidence [presumably the George Holliday videotape], it is difficult to see how the jurors will ever live with their consciences. Bradley's and Hooks's reactions were typical. Condemnation of the verdict poured from every quarter.

Yet the verdicts of innocence were almost a foregone conclusion from the moment the trial began. For one simple reason: the facts, evidence, and law demanded a not-guilty finding, although you never would have believed it from reading news accounts or watching TV news. By the time of the trial, of course, the George Holliday videotape had been shown so often that it would have been difficult for the media to stand back and say, "Hey, folks, maybe there's more here than what we've been showing you for a year." As Jonathan Alter said in a postmortem in the May 11, 1992, issue of *Newsweek*: "A fire needs oxygen.... From the very beginning, the oxygen that has given life to the Rodney King story is television."

Even more to the point was a piece by Thomas B. Rosenstiel of The Los Angeles Times on May 3, 1992. He wrote: "In the Rodney King case, several experts said that during coverage of the trial, television stations, always eager for the most compelling picture, would replay the [George Holliday] videotape rather than show the more mundane images from the courtroom itself. While that does not mean the verdict was correct, it may help explain why it seemed so shocking to the public." Rosenstiel went on to report a wonderful example of how television can casually distort in its effort to add graphic drama to ordinary words. He noted that on Cable News Network, "one jury member's explanation that [Rodney] King was in control at all times and that the force used against him was reasonable was shown...written in text across the bottom of

the screen while the pictures of the beating played above it." Presumed guilty? Media distortion? You decide.

Moreover, there's a strange contradiction in the media's First Amendment rights, one that works against private citizens who become unwilling objects of harmful reporting. In the 1964 Sullivan decision, the [Supreme Court] generally held that it is difficult to libel a "public person." And how does somebody become a "public person"? By media publicity, of course. So the media have the power to make me and my officers "public" people, and then can report almost any inaccuracies without fear of penalty. For example, *Time* magazine said on May 11 that Rodney King sustained "half a dozen blows to the head from Koon alone ...."

Where *Time* got this information is a mystery. At no time did I physically strike Rodney King (unless you regard using the TASER as a "physical strike"). The Holliday videotape shows no blows to Rodney King's head, and certainly none delivered by me. It is clear that I am removed from the center of activity, directing my officers from about five feet away. Yet I am a "public person," made reluctantly so by the LAPD's unauthorized release of my name to the media as soon as the Rodney King affair got hot. So I had no recourse against *Time* except to ask for a correction (which the magazine made in a later issue).

The second factor is a news-gathering socialization process that makes reporters and editors suspicious of officialdom and, since at least the 1960's, particularly distrustful when cops and civil rights are involved. This socialization process means that journalists become clones of one another, at least intellectually. Although reporters and editors like to regard themselves as fiercely independent chroniclers of the truth and facts, it has been my experience that they tend to think very much alike. (This is true of cops, too. In fact, it's true of almost all professions.) This explains the "pack" mentality that you see in journalism today—one newspaper reporter or TV cameraman comes up with a story, and all the others rush to report it so they won't be left out. You see the pack mentality at work in journalism every day. It is most evident in politics.

And there's another contradiction here as well. Right along with being suspicious of officialdom, journalists tend to rely heavily on official pronouncements, to treat them as facts that require no examination. This explains the curious spectacle of reporters obediently parroting the words of an allegedly wronged citizen (in this case, Rodney King, with help from his lawyer), then find-



Sgt. Stacey C. Koon

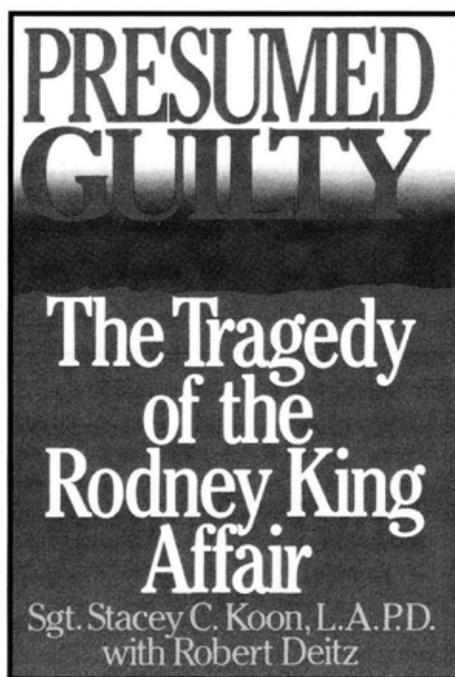


Robert Deitz

ing official confirmation of those allegations (from the Los Angeles district attorney's office, along with comments by Mayor Bradley and members of the Los Angeles City Council and Police Commission). These reports are dutifully conveyed to the public without any probing scrutiny or examination of conflicting positions to determine whether the statements are truthful or irresponsible, self-serving lies. In short, reporters like to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. They try to have it both ways, and they often succeed.

A third factor that influenced the imbalanced coverage of the Rodney King affair is simply that the media have become big business. And, like all big businesses, the profit motive is paramount. So it's in the media's best interest to be as sensational and controversial as possible in order to build ratings for the evening news and sell newspapers and magazines.

Once the media jumped on the Rodney King story, no detail of the affair could be ignored, regardless of its relevance to the events of March 3, 1991. One evening, for example, I received a telephone call from a Los Angeles Times reporter who seemed reluctant, almost embarrassed, to ask her question. She said she had heard that I had a close relative who was openly gay, and she wanted to know if the rumor was true. Yes, I said, it was true, although I failed to see what the lifestyle of someone I love, a lifestyle that I don't approve of but that does not intrude upon my feelings for the person, has to do with the arrest of Rodney King. The reporter didn't print the information; presumably the editor decided that it was not exactly a matter of burning public interest. Yet the media could and did intrude



with as much drama and controversy as superficial facts allow.

The Rodney King affair was perfect for television: cops cruelly beating a black man. And if that incident could be presented in a fashion that could resurrect the images of Old South police brutality, so much the better. Then television would have not only drama and controversy, but a rich mixture of official wrongdoing, the social and historical drama of the civil rights movement, and rogue Los Angeles cops out on an orgy of savage behavior, all in one juicy morsel.

That's why it was inconvenient for television to include the first two seconds of the George Holliday videotape. Those were the

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upon an innocent third party's privacy in their restless pursuit of any fact or detail that might add drama to the Rodney King incident.

The fourth and final factor involves the nature of television. Television is a news medium that is visual and visceral, not given to thoughtful analysis or explanation of facts that might detract from the theatrics of news-as-entertainment. The main interest of television news is to portray an incident

two seconds that showed Rodney King rising from the ground to attack Officer Powell—deliberately. Those two seconds did not reveal police batons swinging on a helpless black man, writhing innocently on the ground. Never mind that he was neither helpless nor harmlessly squirming to avoid getting hit; those crucial first two seconds impaired the drama of the videotape because police batons weren't falling.

So most viewers of the Holliday videotape never saw {and still haven't seen} the attack on Officer Powell. Neither were they told that Rodney King earlier had thrown off four police officers who had swarmed him in an unsuccessful effort to put him in handcuffs. Nor was it commonly reported that Rodney King had overcome two blasts of 50,000 volts each from my TASER. All of these facts, you see, did not conform to the image of police officers brutalizing an unoffending black man. And that was the image that played well on television.

A thorough analysis of how the media covered the Rodney King affair from the beginning to the present would require enough research to earn a doctoral degree in mass communications. So far, the media's introspection has been confined to looking at its failure to anticipate the Los Angeles riots in terms of social issues and rap fast-talkers. The prestigious Nieman Reports, for example, published by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, is widely regarded as the media profession's journal of intellectual opinion. It is to journalism what the New England Journal of Medicine is to doctors—widely read, widely quoted, and a molder of professional thought and conduct.

Yet in a report on how the media failed in its responsibilities in the Rodney King affair, the 1992 summer issue of Nieman Reports proclaimed: "We Weren't Listening—By Not Tapping Into Rap's Message of Violence [the] Media Failed to Prepare Public for Rampage." The article, by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Harold Jackson of the Birmingham News, noted that the media hadn't taken care to listen to the rage growing within Los Angeles's black community, rage that was expressed in rap music but ignored by more establishment minority leaders. "The media are no longer trusted to tell the whole story of the neglected communities where violence is most likely to occur," Jackson concluded. "The media must regain that trust."

Journalist Jackson's contention that the media are not listening to outrage in the black community is doubtless true. That the media have lost trust is certainly true. But you can make an equally good case that the way the media have treated the Rodney King affair, especially television's repetitive replays of an incomplete and edited videotape, did indeed "prepare the public for rampage" as much or more than had it taken heed of rap musicians.

Absent a thorough academic study of just how many times the George Holliday videotape was replayed on national and local television outlets, let's look at just a few

specific examples of how the media distorted the story.

On April 30, with the riots 24 hours in progress, ABC ran the Rodney King videotape three times on the "World News Tonight," according to Accuracy in Media (AIM). AIM quoted Howard Rosenberg, the Pulitzer Prize-winning television critic for The Los Angeles Times, as saying that television had

lice officers on a 7.8-mile chase at speeds of up to 115 miles an hour at midnight, then tosses four cops off his back, then absorbs two blasts with a TASER, then attacks a cop, all the while refusing to obey police commands to be handcuffed is, indeed, "at risk."

Time magazine's report on the Simi Valley verdict refused to concede that justice might have been served, not betrayed, by

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**In the indictments handed down August 5, 1992, the Justice Department specifically said race was not an issue. That's because it isn't. Rodney King was subdued and arrested because he was a felony evader, not because he was a black man.**

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"fanned the flames" by continuing to show the video.

But TV kept the fans churning. For example, on May 3, Sam Donaldson of ABC was on "This Week With David Brinkley." Donaldson said: "There the man [Rodney King] was on the ground, covering up toward the end, being beaten into insensitivity [sic], and this all-white jury decided the police were the good guys. Now, I don't want to be too hard on those 12 people because I think that's very indicative of what happens all across the country. We do have a society which is still racist, and in the case of the police, a society which wants to forgive them any transgression as long as they are not breaking into our house or beating our children .... The message it sent is very dangerous.... We are all at risk from that type of action."

As one of television's foremost news reporters and commentators, Donaldson's comments are worth some analysis. Yes, Rodney King was on the ground. No, he wasn't "covering up toward the end," but constantly rising to threaten the officers. And, no, he wasn't being "beaten into insensitivity" or even into insensibility. The jury never heard testimony to that effect, and Donaldson either was speaking from ignorance or deliberately distorting the truth.

The medical reports introduced as evidence in the trial clearly show that Rodney King was never unconscious, that he was alert and aware at all times, and that the preliminary diagnosis of his injuries at Pacifica Hospital were PCP overdose and superficial facial lacerations. All of that information was publicly introduced in the trial, and Donaldson should have known about it. About the only thing Donaldson said that might be true is that "We are all at risk from that type of [police] action."

As a veteran street cop, I can assure you that anyone who gets drunk and leads po-

the jury's not guilty verdicts on most counts. Instead, Time blamed an inept prosecution. "With race the ever present issue in the case—King has claimed that he was taunted throughout the beating with racial slurs—the prosecution did little to bring home its significance to the jury." Maybe that was because Rodney King himself had said in a videotaped interview only a couple of days after the incident that race was not a factor, and perhaps the prosecution wanted to avoid explaining that annoying little contradiction.

Time went on to say that the race issue "will now be central to the civil rights investigation the Justice Department is still pursuing." Well, it may be central to Time magazine, but it's not to the Justice Department. In the indictments handed down August 5, 1992, the Justice Department specifically said race was not an issue. That's because it isn't. Rodney King was subdued and arrested because he was a felony evader, not because he was a black man.

Finally, Time concluded that the acquittal "cannot have provided much satisfaction to many who watched the beating of King or the televised rioting that broke out once it was announced .... And the videotape will go on to haunt the nation with its scene of what still looks like sanctioned sadism. For most Americans, no legal argument about the stages of police procedure can explain away those images, though legal argument may have worked for 12 jurors in Simi Valley who were disposed to heed it. To most Americans, black and white, in this case good lawyering triumphed over justice itself."

Time's reaction was painfully characteristic of how the mainstream media reported the verdict and the reasons behind it. Only smaller, more targeted publications have sought to unravel the truth about the incident and why the Simi Valley jury returned

the verdict it did. Accuracy in Media, for example, attempted to place a full-page advertisement in the Houston Post, defending the jury verdict and advertising its analytical report on the trial proceedings. According to AIM editor Reed Irvine, the ad was rejected.

Perhaps the most thoughtful analysis was made in the June 1992 issue of the American Lawyer. Roger Orloff, described by American Lawyer Media President Steven Brill as "a careful, liberal-leaning lawyer," provided a devastating critique of how the mainstream media summarized the trial in reports following the verdict. Orloff, having carefully followed the trial in its entirety on the Courtroom TV Network, concluded that "The defense case I saw was plausible; indeed, many of its most significant points were essentially undisputed"

Orloff went on to say that news accounts of the trial verdict published by The New York Times omitted some of the "significant points" that apparently influenced the jury. Dissecting The Times' analysis of the defense case, he noted that:

- While the Times accurately reported the defense contention that batons were used "in response to aggressive movements and postures by the mostly prone Mr. King," The Times failed to point out that King had already been TASED twice and had attacked Officer Powell.
- While The Times also accurately reported the defense claim that the officers had to use all but deadly force to prevent King from rising from the ground, Orloff added, "Yes, but can the reader appreciate the strength of that argument without understanding *that King had already twice risen from the ground and advanced upon the officers?*" (emphasis in original)
- And, third, while The Times characterized King's injuries as "not as serious as the prosecution contended," that wasn't quite true. The defense argument, Orloff continued, was that King's injuries were not the sort someone would expect to see if King had been hit repeatedly in the head with power strokes from a police baton, "the crime most of the nation's population assumes was committed [by the officers]."

In his analysis, Orloff admitted to his concern about defending the Simi Valley verdicts, adding that he feared "the reactions of people I work with who will see this article's headline and byline and never read the

rest." Orloff concluded: "And I am terrified at the prospect of quotation out of context. After all, imagine if the media were to summarize this article the way they summarized the trial."

But Orloff's work has largely been either ignored or not seen by the nation's mainstream media, nor, indeed, by even the specialized professional publications. Orloff's conclusions cannot be shunted aside simply because the media continue to portray the Rodney King affair in the most dramatic—not the most truthful—terms possible.

For example, following the August 5, 1992, indictment of me and my officers on federal civil rights charges wire-service stories continued to refer to Rodney King as a "motorist," without noting that in leading officers on an almost eight-mile chase at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour he hardly qualified as a simple "motorist." Even the ABA Journal, the legal profession's most influential publication, continued to perpetrate that myth in its August 1992 issue. In an analysis of whether a different jury would have reached a different conclusion from the one voted by the Simi Valley panelists, reporter Mark Hansen of the ABA Journal wrote: "King, as everybody knows by now, is the black motorist whose beating last year by four white Los Angeles police officers was captured on videotape for all the world to see."

But perhaps the most egregious example of how the media continue to distort the truth and inflame public passion by incomplete reporting was provided by USA Today on August 6, 1992, in its report on the federal indictments. On page one, the national weekday newspaper described Rodney King simply as a "black motorist." Any uninformed reader could conclude from that article that King was stopped just for being black and driving. But USA Today wasn't quite through with its advocacy journalism under the guise of fair reporting. In an insidepage article, "Catching up with the central figures," USA Today said of Rodney King:

"King, 27, is still struggling to recover from a concussion, several head fractures, and a shattered eye socket and cheekbone from his beating. The former construction worker has been picked up by police three times since the beating, the latest on suspicion of drunk driving. He suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome, his lawyers say, and spent the last year secluded and heavily medicated." The capsule-sized news bite went on to reveal how King made a plea for

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**We made every effort to inform both television and newspapers of the facts as they unfolded. Both media consciously chose to ignore these facts.**

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calm during the riots and how he was negotiating a settlement with the city of Los Angeles.

If ever distortion existed, this is it. It's true that he had a cheekbone fractured, but there was no proof offered at the state trial that it was a result of a beating. Proof *was* provided, however, that the fractured cheekbone came from smashing face-first into the pavement three times. As for "concussion" and "several head fractures," no evidence was ever submitted to sustain any such claims. Nor is USA Today to be complimented for pointing out that King has been arrested three times since March 3, 1991, "the latest on suspicion of drunken driving." It glibly ignores the other arrests that suggest something about Rodney King's character—a complaint of physical abuse filed by his wife and the Hollywood charge, later dismissed, of allegedly trying to run down two vice squad officers after King picked up a transvestite male prostitute; he then tried to flee from officers because he said he feared that he was being pursued by gang members, according to newspaper accounts.

It is also reportedly true that since the incident King has "spent the last year secluded and heavily medicated." But the implication from USA Today's article is that the medication was required for injuries sustained at the hands of police on March 3, 1991, not, as Vanity Fair reported, to keep him sedated so he wouldn't blow a multimillion dollar lawsuit.

Now, contrast that with how USA Today characterized "The Four Officers." Laurence Powell "hasn't been able to work... basically doing nothing," the newspaper quoted a friend as saying. Tim Wind was fired, USA Today reported, failing to note that he had been reinstated. Ted Briseno was accurately identified as "the only officer to break ranks during the trial and blame the others for the beating." The newspaper said I "was trying to sell a 275-page manuscript entitled *The Ides of March* to potential publishers in which he [the author] describes police work and jokes about using force against minorities."

The point here is that USA Today's treatment of Rodney King, when not an outright distortion, was true, but in a positive, laudatory way. USA Today ignored broader negative truths about King. In contrast, what was reported about the status of the officers was negatively true, while ignoring broader positive truths. This is not an unimportant distinction. It is the way public opinion is formed. One can only conclude that USA Today, like most of the rest of the mainstream U.S. media, is sympathetic to Rodney King and hostile to me and my officers.

That's the media's right. But it shouldn't be presented—or misrepresented—as fair and objective journalism. It isn't. Worse, even as I write, they continue to do their best to convince people of our guilt before our second trial even begins. And therein lies the problem. We made every effort to inform both television and newspapers of the facts as they unfolded. Both media consciously chose to ignore these facts. Let me be specific here: The Los Angeles Times reporters who covered the trial were routinely informed of the strategy, tactics, and facts of the defense argument. We also made a specific point of telling these reporters to improve the coverage they gave to the trial. But they either chose to ignore these summaries, or their editors elected to prevent their publication.

A presumption of guilt, when proven false, can result in an explosion of unimaginable fury. We've seen it happen. And we almost certainly will see it happen again if another trial finds me and my officers innocent.

And this because the basic lessons of the Rodney King affair have not yet been absorbed. In this case, to paraphrase Liebling, the media came down from the hills to shoot the wounded before the battle was even over.

What propelled the riots was the media reporting. By ignoring one side of the story, the media misled the public. Then, when the jury delivered its opinion, everyone was surprised. The question must be asked: if the facts had been reported from the beginning, would people have been outraged by the decision? The obvious answer is no. But the media failed in their responsibility, and the city of Los Angeles, and the nation, paid the price. ■

# Florida Experiment Update

## *Radical Makeover Of Boca Raton News— Success or Expensive Stagnation?*

BY SETH EFFRON

**W**HEN THE REDESIGNED and revamped News of Boca Raton debuted in October 1990, Louis Heldman, an executive of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, said "It may be the first newspaper for the Nineties."

Heldman, now executive editor of The Tallahassee Democrat, another Knight-Ridder newspaper in Florida, headed the corporation's 25/43 Project, named for the ages of the baby boomers. It was an effort to lure those young adults, nurtured on television soundbites and flashy images, to newspapers.

The new News is highly organized. Five separate sections each day. All stories start and end on the same page. Labeling, headlines, sub-headlines, maps and background infobites are extensively used to tightly package information and quicken reading.

Items, such as the front-page "30 Seconds: Editor's Choice of Other News and Features," help readers who are too "time-starved" to look inside the paper. The goal, according to the designers, is to give readers a newspaper that "doesn't make them feel guilty for not reading everything."

The flashy paper preens with a pink flamingo on the nameplate. It is a symbol more suited to new-South yuppified baby-boomers in ultra-upscale Boca Raton than, say, a wheelless, rusting pickup truck resting on cement blocks.

The success of the 25/43 Project at The News, costing something around \$2.5 million, is dubious. A bean-counter's cost-benefit analysis might argue it hasn't been because of merely modest circulation gains. But supporters of the project see value in some of

the changes they say are being copied or modified at other Knight-Ridder papers around the nation.

How much of The News is groundbreaking is debatable. It certainly seems to be a daughter of USA TODAY, with its splashes of color, short stories, info boxes, sectioning, weather map and teasing of inside articles. As for organization, sectioning is common in most newspapers, although probably not so closely adhered to as on The News. The teasers on inside stories that take up a column and a half of The News's Page 1 have long been used in other papers. The New York Times began running such paragraph-long teasers on Page 1 when Max Frankel took over as Executive Editor years ago and now runs a column of them on the Metro front every day.

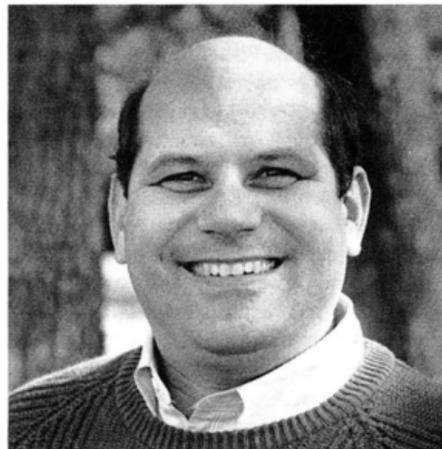
Beyond its dazzling color, what seems to set The News apart are its preference for entertaining features and the shortening of major stories, regardless of their worth, because of the no-jump

rule. It takes editorial skill to fragment those stories into small pieces on deadline. Indeed, it takes keen news judgment to produce such a paper.

### **Circulation Down By Slight Margin**

What's the score of The new News since its debut?

- Average daily circulation of the paper increased 248 subscribers from 1990 to 1991, according to figures in Knight-Ridder's annual reports. That's a 1 percent increase from 22,631 papers for 1990 to 22,879 for 1991. This year, through November 1, average circulation was 22,397, down 234 from the pre-change figure.
- The percentage of households the newspaper made its way into, what the industry calls penetration, dropped during



*Seth Effron, 40, covers state government and politics for The News & Record of Greensboro, NC. The newspaper recently finished a redesign effort, borrowing much from The New of Boca Raton. He has worked for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, The Tallahassee Democrat in Florida and The Wichita Eagle before joining The News & Record in 1985. He is married to Nancy Thomas and has two daughters. Effron was a 1992 Nieman Fellow.*

Circulation Changes at The News of Boca Raton  
1986 Through 1991

Year	Av. Daily Circulation	Daily ABC City Household Coverage
1986	16,259	50.5%
1987	16,685	49.5%
1988	26,914	76.6%
1989	20,033	58.1%
1990	22,631	32.8%
1991	22,879	27.8%
1992	22,397	N.A.

Source: Knight-Ridder Annual Reports

the same period — from 32.8 percent for 1990 to 27.8 percent for 1991.

- Readership surveys appear to indicate baby boomers, the audience the changes were aimed at, like the changes, even if there are no strong indications significantly more of them are buying The News. An April 1991 survey by Simmons Market Research showed 95 percent of the baby boomers liked the frequent use of maps and charts, and a similar percentage liked starting and ending articles on the same page.
- The same surveys also showed readers wanted more “newsy” stories. The newspaper lacked a strong news peg. Fancy graphics that would accompany stories, say on the increasing price of champagne, still didn’t mean news to many Boca Raton readers.
- Ten months after the newspaper was redesigned, two of the paper’s top circulation executives were forced to leave over allegations they overstated the newspaper’s paid circulation. While Boca Raton editors were crowing about circulation gains, their figures were wrong. A statement from the newspaper announcing the executives’ departure corrected circulation figures — reducing them from 30,083, a 38 percent

increase in average daily circulation, to 23,239, or a 6.4 percent increase.

- While the newspaper continues to hype its dedication to short stories and info-bitesized news, one feature on Page 2, a daily calendar with traffic hints and other tidbits was dropped. It required too much editing and readers demanded news stories of greater length and substance. Now, in the same space, (about five full columns) there is long, major story, called a “Point of Interest.”

“Page 2 [with the calendar] never really worked,” said Boca Raton News Editor Wayne Ezell. “We wanted to have the page that started your day — calendar, traffic, etc. And it turned out to be far too labor intensive. We’re getting more into the paper. The good wire service reads from The New York Times, L.A. Times, Washington Post or Knight-Ridder. ...That has gone a long way toward giving more depth.”

A check of key Knight-Ridder newspapers showed that some Boca Raton ideas have been copied or are being considered.

### Miami Editor Likes Boca’s Movie Grid

Asked if he had picked up much from the Boca Raton project, Doug Clifton, Executive Editor of The Miami Herald, said, “I would not say so,” but added that he hoped to incorporate the movie

grid in the Herald’s weekend section. “It’s easy to use. All the readers who’ve seen it love it.” He said he also wanted to try to have a page-one summary of at least one inside story each day. But Clifton does not favor eliminating jumps or shortening stories just to make them shorter.

James Naughton, Executive Editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, said: One of the things we’re picking up is graphics. Better use of graphics with what Boca and USA Today are doing. Seeing the value of informational graphics and how they can be used to tell part of the story.

“Much of what is done [in Boca] doesn’t fit the Philadelphia market. Like trying to contain a story [without a jump]. It really doesn’t give an opportunity to tell a story in depth to an audience that treats the newspaper like a smorgasbord. We will continue to try to respond with depth and breadth.

“We will make sure when stories are routine that they should be treated in a routine way. As a general rule, I worry about newspapers imitating television. Television will always be better at television than print. We can deliver with consistency, packaging, good organization and coherence. And breadth and depth. If we turn out papers into separate pages of easily digestible items, then it’s TV.”

The flashy new format for The News came with shower of publicity.

An October 9, 1990 Knight-Ridder press release promised the new product in Boca Raton would revolutionize the daily newspaper.

It would be a newspaper “specifically designed to appeal to time-starved readers, especially members of the baby boom generation,” according to an Oct. 9, 1990 Knight-Ridder press release.

Two months later Knight-Ridder Chairman James K. Batten declared of the Boca Raton News: “If there is a newspaper of the future, this is it.” News Editor Ezell said the paper was taking a new attitude toward readers.

“Newspapers have failed to treat readers as customers and tailor the product to the interests and expectations of those customers,” he said. “We have to

do what Chevrolet and Ivory Soap do when their products no longer have appeal."

Knight-Ridder's 1990 annual report, issued in the spring of 1991, contained several glowing references to the changes at The News including:

- "After thousands of hours of customer research and experimentation we launched a virtually new newspaper designed to meet the needs of members of the Baby Boom generation. ...Initial customer response has been most encouraging."
- "...This readership-building redesign of The News of Boca Raton, Fla., made it the first daily newspaper written, edited and designed to attract boomers. The project is helping all our newspapers learn how to do a better job communicating with marginal readers in danger of becoming non-readers."

The glowing predictions seemed much darker a year later.

## A Year Later, No Reference

The 1991 annual report didn't contain a single reference, success or failure, to The News in its narrative.

Heldman declined to discuss The News. He said he's been too busy concentrating his efforts at The Tallahassee Democrat to assess things in Boca Raton.

Boca Raton Editor Ezell does concede the paper hasn't gained any stronger hold on its market than it had before the changes were made.

"We are in one of the most competitive newspaper markets in America," he said.

This affluent area of southeast Florida is about 40 miles north of Miami. Larger dailies, The Palm Beach Post from the North and The Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel from the South, both have strong circulation and full-service news and advertising bureaus in the Boca Raton area. Residents can get home delivery of The News along with the Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale pa-

pers along with The Miami Herald, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal.

Bill Baker, Knight-Ridder group vice president for news, said it is difficult to measure what about the paper has been a success and what's failed. When the revamped paper was introduced, The News continued a policy of giving away as many as 15,000 papers daily, sometimes for as long as six months, in selected Boca Raton neighborhoods.

"Readership has been hard for us to track," Baker said, because of the extensive free newspaper drops. He said the impact of giving away so many newspapers wasn't really considered as the company tried to assess reader response during the first three months of the change. "We weren't aware enough of that when we went into that," he said.

Still Ezell and Baker point to the Simmons survey and there subscriber turnover has slowed.

"Most of the innovations that we accomplished and put into the paper have been accepted by the readers," he said. "The consistent organization of the paper, more modern design, the heavy use of color, the heavy use of graphics, the breaking stories into generally shorter, more logical elements," Baker said.

While stories don't continue from a section front to an inside page, often an in-depth story or investigative piece will be summarized on the front page in a six-inch article and then expanded into longer stories on an inside page with charts and photographs.

"We use a lot of boxes, sidebars, nuggets and marginalia on the side of stories," Ezell said. "We are getting more information about a topic in the paper than if we published a 45-inch story."

Several items that were part of the "new" NEWS have been dropped:

- A "News Near You" feature on the local front has been replaced with a column of briefs called "Local Insider."
- The business section, called "Your Money" isn't always packaged in a separate section, as was initially promised.

- The "Outside" page, which had the weather along with features like the Critter Watch (anything that walks, flies, swims or bites in South Florida) has given way to less labor intensive items that can be easily repeated week to week. Those new listings include listing of local parks and attractions and an "earth week" feature that summarizes the past week's weather, natural disasters and temperature extremes.

Even if some of the individual elements of the makeover haven't worked as intended, the overall impact, Ezell says, has reformed the way reporters and editors think about what goes into the paper.

"We tend to write less about government process and more about what people are talking about and about topics close to people's lives," he said.

Reporter assignments, he said, were changed to focus on covering topics as opposed to beats. "We seek to do quality-of-life stories, profiles, stories on the environment, as opposed to what happened in City Hall today," Ezell said.

The product still isn't what he thinks readers really want.

"I'm not happy with the amount of depth we have sometimes," Ezell said. "But that really has more to do with a tight newshole."

## Hard Edge Wanted On News Stories

Reader surveys following the redesign showed that people wanted a harder "news" edge to stories. "They felt they were more like feature stories and they weren't newsy. They were looking for hard stories, people like investigations, like the hard things—get the bastards. But don't only get them at the school boards, let's talk about the bad teachers, get to the PTAs and what about the principal?"

Baker said chief values of the experiment are: involving newsroom staffers more in the newspaper's decision making and helping reporters gain a better sense of what the community they work in expects from the paper.

"It's a hallmark has been becoming more closely connected with the community and getting better input about what readers want and like," Baker said.

Newspaper readers don't necessarily see news in the same categories that news professionals do.

"They want to redefine the categories of what news is, but they want news," Baker said. "They don't want advice on how to raise their kids, but want to know where to send kids to day care."

Reporters at the paper see the changes in the paper's format as something of a less-than-mixed blessing.

### Reporter Required To Change Practices

Michael Washburn covers the police beat. He's worked at the paper since August 1990, two months before the newspaper's redesign.

Detail and perspective, he says, are often sacrificed to meet format and space requirements.

"It really makes you re-examine your writing. On some of the bigger stories you're restricted and some of the minute details that you might want to get in, to add color, you just can't find the room for or get cut before they get into print," he said.

He does like the newspaper's stronger emphasis on pictures and trend stories. He says he does have a chance to take his coverage beyond the crime-of-the-day into trend articles and short profiles.

As the newspaper industry watches The News of Boca Raton and other attempts at innovation, one of the questions is whether some of the assumptions that have prompted the experiment are correct.

While industry executives seem to have accepted the notion that circulation and readership are declining, a study published in American Demographics in June 1991 indicated circulation may, in fact, increase.

"The newspaper industry will have a total readership gain of seven percent in the next decade," according to American Demographics.

"Older baby boomers increased their readership by four percent during the 1980s as they moved into their 30's and 40's. Our projections assume that younger baby boomers will increase their readership as they enter their 50's."

The study said by the year 2000 newspapers can expect a decline of 5.3 million readers in the 25-to-34 age group. But, there will be a gain of 2.9 million readers ages 35 to 44 and a gain of 7.1 million readers between 45 and 54.

And local competitors to the Boca Raton newspaper haven't pushed a panic button or really felt any dent. They seem to have watched with something less than casual interest.

"I think it is a much better newspaper (now) than it was before the changes," said Tom O'Hara, managing editor of The Palm Beach Post. "It was a pretty mediocre small paper. Now it's kind of interesting to look at."

He said his paper lost a couple hundred of its 3,000 readers in the Boca Raton area. "They were giving the paper out for free. One of them was on my lawn every morning and no one ever sent me a bill," he said.

O'Hara likes seeing the experiment unfolding in his backyard, but doesn't see a lot of dramatic success. And, he adds, much of the improvement in the paper has started to decline as extra support and staffing from Knight-Ridder is being pulled out.

"I'm glad Knight-Ridder's willing to conduct the experiment so I don't have to," he said. "I personally wouldn't want to be involved in putting out a newspaper like that."

The stress on bright and tid-bit sized news isn't getting criticism only from Boca Raton's competitors.

Miami Herald Publisher David Lawrence, while not talking only about The Boca Raton News, issued a warning about the stress on short-and-sweet reporting for the sake of convenience and at the cost of alienating readers and failing to serve communities.

"Our country's economic landscape is littered with the remains of once thriving enterprises that did not listen, that failed to remember their obliga-

tions, that lost their integrity," Lawrence said in an April speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

"We will surely suffer the same fate should we let newspapers become the print equivalent of seven-second soundbites, serving up scoops of sizzle and sex. ... Real excellence in newspapering means depth, perspective, personality and style." ■

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# 11 QUALITIES FOR WRITING BIOGRAPHIES

## The First Chapter of 'Telling the Untold Story,' the Book On Investigative Reporters' Changing the Craft

BY STEVE WEINBERG

WHEN ROBERT CARO finished his biography of Robert Moses in 1974, he marked an end to seven years of research on the man who profoundly influenced the look and feel of Twentieth-Century New York City, simultaneously influencing urban planners the world over. "The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York" won the Pulitzer Prize for biography as well as the Francis Parkman Prize, awarded by the Society of American Historians to the book that "best represents the union of the historian and the artist." It was quite an accomplishment for a former newspaper reporter turned first-time biographer.

But "The Power Broker" did more than win accolades for Caro—it also deeply influenced the modern-day craft of biography. Biographers had a new model: the nearly 1300-page book was much longer than the average biography; artfully written, sometimes using techniques from the realm of fiction, while still adhering to the chronology of Moses's life as he lived it; daring in its analysis of Moses's motives; unusual in the depth of its portrayal of Moses's times, as well as his life; heavily dependent on previously secret documents; quintessentially muckraking; and done by an investigative journalist, not a historian or urban planning professor. Caro's success opened the gates for other journalists to write biographies of controversial, contemporary subjects.

Caro's book contrasted starkly with the other biography winning a Pulitzer in 1975: Dumas Malone, a Ph.D. historian at the University of Virginia, received the prize in the history category for his six-volume, 3400-page life of Thomas Jefferson. Unlike Caro's book, with its large dollops of muckraking

about a still-living figure, Malone's admired its long-dead subject without reservation. Malone commented that after his 38 years of researching the Jefferson volumes, the former president had "withstood microscopic examination even better than I expected. This is not to claim that his judgment was always right, but no one can read his voluminous state papers without gaining increased respect for his ability." Malone was far more loath than Caro to analyze his subject's motives, noting, "I must confess that even with the benefit of hindsight, I have often found it extraordinarily difficult to arrive at a defensible judgment as to what he ought to have done."

Nothing in the long but sparsely documented history of the biographical genre predicted the emergence of Caro and other investigative reporters as authors or the impact they would have. Until the mid-1700's, biography of a single life was not even generally practiced. What some scholars have called biography before 1750 consisted largely of "putting together groups of lives, the groupings being determined by social rank and function, or by profession," as Reed Whittemore described it in "Pure Lives: The Early Biographers." He examined such scribes as Plutarch (46-120 A.D.), Aelfric (circa 1000 A.D.), and Giorgio Vasari (Sixteenth Century). "The ancient biographers found fewer warts, and did not go to Freud for help in finding them," Whittemore said. In his companion volume, "Whole Lives: Shapers of Modern Biography," Whittemore said of the early practitioners that "they did not explore the home sources of Alexander the Great's greatness, but the signs in the heavens at his birth."

James Clifford found in his survey "Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960" that "the earliest biographers in England had little curiosity about the nature of their art. They knew what they had to do, and did it. Their purpose was edification. Their justification was the glory of God, through the praise of His saints. Describing a truly holy person, their works would succeed or fail to the extent to which they taught Christian virtue and strengthened wavering faith. They had no conceivable desire to create rounded characters. Indeed, such an ideal would have horrified any self-respecting hagiographer. A saint or a king was obviously set apart from ordinary folk, and it was the duty and the prerogative of the writer to emphasize these differences."

James Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson, published in England during 1791, marked a watershed in the evolution of the genre. Boswell's massive book (1492 pages in one recent trade paperback edition) received lots of attention upon publication and has stayed in print for two centuries. Unlike many of his predecessors, Boswell gave deep thought to how to tell a life. He concentrated very definitely on a single person, fitting in psychological speculation (pre-Freudian, of course) and exposing a few warts. I find Boswell's Johnson interesting to read, yet not particularly helpful as a model in pursuing my craft. Boswell seems too uncritical, too anxious to be seen as the

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willing hagiographer of a great man. Yet many biographers, especially from academia, say Boswell's work resonates in their own.

Nineteenth-century practitioners and theorists of biography worked under Boswell's influence, sometimes extending the boundaries. They began asking new questions, many of them in the realm of ethics: for instance, how much should a biographer reveal of the subject's private life—a lot, nothing, or something in between? Biography as a profession began to take hold in the United States during the 1850's, embodied by James Parton, generally considered to be the first professional full-time biographer in the United States. Parton's subjects included Horace Greeley, Aaron Burr, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, and John Jacob Astor. Following Parton, professional biographers began to combine theory with practice, refining the mixture from book to book.

In "Whole Lives," Whittemore summarizes the theoretical progression after Boswell, explaining how his volume begins "with Thomas Carlyle's inwardly driven (but hardly sexually driven) heroes, and move[s] from them . . . to Freud's inward selves. And with Freud and his successors I come to our world of capitalism, individualism and the subconscious, where all biographers must now be diligent students of self even if not lovers of it."

Ah, Sigmund Freud. Probably few contemporary journalists turned biographers have read Freud in depth; fewer (if any) have read Freud in the original German. Despite their relative ignorance of what Freud really believed, biographers invoke his ghost often; if they fail to do so, reviewers of biographies and scholars of the genre wonder why. When Freudian theory permeates biographies of contemporary subjects by investigative journalists it is ironic, because Freud was no friend of biographers. Peter Gay, in "Freud: A Life for Our Time," quoted an 1885 letter in which the subject, explaining why he was destroying his correspondence, said he had "almost completed an undertaking which a number of people, still unborn but fated to misfortune, will feel severely. . . . Let the biographers

labor and toil, we won't make it too easy for them." In a separate letter, Freud wrote a potential biographer that anyone practicing the craft "commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to embellishments, and even to dissembling his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and, even if one had it, one could not use it."

Despite the stretched-out history of the genre from Plutarch to Freud, the direct spiritual ancestors of Caro's work were Lytton Strachey's four biographical essays, published as "Eminent Victorians" in 1918. Strachey's lives of Florence Nightingale, General Charles Gordon, Cardinal Henry Manning, and Doctor Thomas Arnold were artfully presented, with an emphasis on "the inward creature." Strachey, born in England in 1880, revolutionized mainstream biography during his 52-year life. Probably more than any other single work, "Eminent Victorians" moved biographers and publishers away from books that worshiped their subjects toward a more critical genre.

The preface to "Eminent Victorians," despite its brevity, influenced writers and critics of biography who might not have bothered to read the entire book. Strachey said, "It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict [the Victorian Age]. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undevined. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity."

When he wrote *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey was consciously trying to influence the craft. He hoped that his profiles would "prove to be of interest from the strictly biographical no less than the historical point of view. Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. . . . The art of biography seems to have fallen on evil times in England . . . the

most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeymen of letters; we do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one." In case any readers had missed his message, Strachey said in the preface's final paragraph that it is not the biographer's business "to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them. That is what I have aimed at in this book—to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions." Strachey was saying that a biography belongs to the author, not to the subject. His approach fit well with the increased skepticism and questioning of authority after World War I.

So, Strachey determinedly shattered the conventional wisdom about his four revered subjects—showing the frequent chasm between professed belief and actual behavior—as Caro did later when writing about Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson. In the five decades between Strachey's best work and Caro's debut, a few biographers and theorists could be said to have influenced the practice of the craft—but none in quite the combination of ways that Caro did.

Those introductory bows now taken, Caro comes onto center stage. The combination of his research skills, his way with words, his boldness in attributing motives, and his gutsiness in writing about powerful contemporary figures make his work topic A during any informed discussion of biography over the last quarter of the Twentieth Century.

Reviewing "The Power Broker" in *The Washington Post Book World*, normally skeptical journalist William Greider said, "When a truly exceptional achievement comes along, there are no words to praise it. Important, awesome, compelling—these no longer summon the full flourish of trumpets this book deserves. It is extraordinary on many levels and, despite its price and length, it is certain to endure." Such praise was typical.

The book had its detractors, to be sure, as Strachey's book had its detractors. It was controversial not only because of its substance, but also because

of its techniques, so it was bound to spark debate—as books that shake up the established order often do.

The disagreement among reviewers was part of a decades-old conversation, involving relatively few participants, that continues to this day: What makes for good biography? There has traditionally been little discussion about the principles of biography, because until recently it was not generally considered to be a separate discipline. It seemed to be a chameleon form, depending on the views of the commentator—maybe history, maybe literary criticism if the subject was a writer, or just something to read before falling asleep at night. After the gradual acceptance of biography as its own demanding art form, there seemed a great need to go further theoretically. The discussion, sparse in the academy, rarely reached the millions of readers who buy or borrow biographies. Reviewers of biographies for book pages wrote about how the subject had lived his or her life, rather than analyzing how well the biographer had practiced the craft of telling that life.

All of that began to change during the 1970's, as demonstrated by the controversy over Caro's efforts. Ever since the publication of Caro's biography of Moses, the debate about what constitutes responsible life-writing has been fueled by a publishing explosion: during the 1980's and early 1990's, American publishers have issued an average of about 2,000 biographies annually. Publishers Weekly, the magazine of the book industry, devoted its first special issue to biography in 1988. There is a Biography Bookshop in New York City, and separate biography sections now exist in virtually every respectable bookstore and library. Biographers themselves have become celebrities.

Readers flock to biographies today. "A good many more people are interested in reading about John Berryman or Robert Lowell than are ready to read their poems," literary critic George Garrett has said. In a similar vein, readers who will never be able to vote for Edward Kennedy during a Massachusetts senatorial race seek out books about him. Some commentators be-

lieve well-written biography has replaced fiction as the preferred art form. In the words of Jean Strouse, a Newsweek magazine editor and book critic turned biographer, novels from previous generations "provided readers with large slices of life in which questions of character, motivation, morality, social pressure and internal conflict could be explored in great depth. People read, and still read, those books for the pleasure of imagining their way into other lives, other times, other locations—and for what comes back into their own lives from those journeys. Most modern novels—all bare bones and spare parts—do not provide that kind of satisfaction. Modern biographies often do."

Biographers have even become the stuff of fiction. Virginia Woolf's satire "Orlando" set the stage with its publication in 1928. Steven Millhauser brought the satire of biography to a new generation with his 1972 novel "Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer, 1943-1954." Bernard Malamud's novel "Dubin's Lives" (1979) is one of the fullest, best-known portrayals of a biographer protagonist. Serious novelists Penelope Lively and Alison Lurie weighed in with "According to Mark" (1984) and "The Truth about Lorin Jones" (1988), respectively. Among others, mystery writer Amanda Cross published "The Players Come Again" (1990), and thriller master Tom Hyman wrote "Prussian Blue" (1991).

A. S. Byatt, in her novel "Possession" (1990), captures the widespread fascination with biography in a passage referring to scholar James Blackadder, who is unearthing the life of a long-dead poet, in competition with another scholar, Mortimer Cropper. Blackadder, Byatt writes, "had persuaded the Vicar, whom he had met at an episcopal tea party, that biography was just as much a spiritual hunger of modern man as sex or political activity. Look at the sales, he had urged, look at the column space in the Sundays, people need to know how other people lived, it helps them to live, it's human. A form of religion, said the Vicar. A form of ancestor worship, said Cropper. Or more. What are the Gospels but a series of varying attempts at

the art of biography?"

An avid reader of biography, I became aware of the debate about what makes for good life-telling many years ago. In the late 1970's, I wrote a book with my wife, Scherrie Goetsch, that did not start out to be a biography, but ended up with multiple chapters of biography as part of a larger story. As I wrestled with questions of privacy and taste, the debate over standards in biography became anything but academic. Later, I conducted seven years of research to tell the life of Armand Hammer. In the early going, I put my principles to paper and shared them with my editor, Jennifer Josephy of Little, Brown and Company. Telling somebody else's life is a big responsibility; I wanted myself and my editor to be ready to shoulder it.

If that sounds hopelessly old-fashioned, consider: Biographies influence how readers view human nature in general and certain individuals in particular. A biographer holds another's reputation in his or her hands. It has always been so. Margaret Oliphant, writing in 1883, said, "The position of the biographer carries with it a power which is almost unrestrained, the kind of power which it is doubly tyrannous to use like a giant. Not even the pulpit is so entirely master, for we all consider ourselves able to judge in respect to what the clergyman tells us and we have his materials in our hands by which to call him to account . . . but the biographer has a far more assured place, and if he is not restrained by the strictest limits of truth and honor, there is nothing else that can control him in heaven or earth. . . . He has it in his power to guide the final deliverance, like that judge whose summing up so often decides the final verdict."

Many decades later, Dumas Malone, Jefferson's biographer, commented that a reader, "when he picks up a biography, has no ready way of knowing in advance whether it contains a conventionalized portrait, a touched-up photograph, or a caricature drawn at the caprice of the artist. After he has read it he can pass judgment on it as a story; if it deals with a recent figure he may be able to check it to some extent on the

basis of his own knowledge; and if it has to do with the more distant past he can draw upon such historical information as he may happen to possess; but, to an extraordinary degree, the authenticity of the book depends upon the intellectual integrity of the writer."

Most readers of "The Power Broker," for example, had little independent knowledge of its subject; they quite likely judged Moses forever through the lens of his biographer. That can be dangerous if a hack biographer is involved. Books do not come with warning labels that they are written by incompetent authors, and are thus hazardous to mental health—as well as truth.

"The Power Broker" helped many journalists understand the vital and too often unreported connections between individual character and public policy. About the same time it appeared, two other books reinforced those connections. David Halberstam of *The New York Times* and Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* showed that daily journalists could do small-scale biography to buttress and illuminate newspapers' factual foundations. Halberstam's biographical sketches in newspapers and magazines informed his book "The Best and the Brightest" (1972), about the Establishment figures who led America into the Vietnam War. Woodward and Bernstein in their second Watergate book, "The Final Days" (1976), used journalistically generated biographical vignettes to help readers understand the fall of Richard Nixon's presidency.

As Halberstam said in the Author's Note to "The Best and the Brightest:"

I set out to study the men and their decisions. What was it about the men, their attitudes, the country, its institutions and above all the era which had allowed this tragedy to take place? The question which intrigued me the most was why, why had it happened. So it became very quickly not a book about Vietnam, but a book about America, and in particular about power and success in America, what the country was, who the leadership was, how they got ahead, what their perceptions were about themselves, about the country

and about their mission.

The men intrigued me because they were fascinating; they had been heralded as the ablest men to serve this country in this century—certainly their biographies seemed to confirm that judgment—and yet very little had been written about them; the existing journalistic definition of them and what they represented was strikingly similar to their own definition of themselves. So I felt that if I could learn something about them, I would learn something about the country, the era and about power in America.

The books by Halberstam, Woodward-Bernstein and Caro transformed journalists' assumptions about what they needed to know to explain public policy decision-making. Before, character had been left to the feature writers, most of whom were easily taken in by powerful interviewees. Now, character was the province of the investigative reporters, with Caro showing the way by writing the Moses biography.

After the Moses life, Caro labored for another 15 years on the first two volumes of a projected four-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson. The first two volumes received considerable attention and acclaim, confirming Caro as the most influential (his critics would say most controversial) biographer working during the last quarter of the Twentieth Century.

Possibly the most important post-Robert Moses biography in the Caro tradition was "Empire: The Life, Legend and Madness of Howard Hughes" by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, published in 1979. "Empire" demonstrated that Caro's work was no fluke, that other newspaper reporters could research and write massive, compelling biographies. It became a book after appearing in shorter form as an investigative series in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which employed Barlett and Steele.

With the Moses and the Hughes books as models, experienced biographers began to rethink their techniques; perhaps more significant in the long run, novices—especially those working as journalists—took heart and launched long-form biographies of their own.

Caro and Barlett-Steele contributed to an atmosphere in which publishers were paying increased sums for investigative biographies of contemporary figures that would turn out to be years in the making, reliant on documentary research, bulky when printed, and candid in their assessments.

Following Caro and Barlett-Steele into biography were newspaper and magazine investigative reporters such as Kitty Kelley (writing about Frank Sinatra and Nancy Reagan, among others), Seymour Hersh (Henry Kissinger), Bob Woodward (John Belushi), Sally Bedell Smith (William Paley), Georgie Anne Geyer (Fidel Castro), Neil Sheehan (John Paul Vann), Nicholas von Hoffman (Roy Cohn), Taylor Branch (Martin Luther King, Jr.), James Neff (Jackie Presser), Charles Shepard (Jim Bakker), Robert Lenzner (J. Paul Getty), Russell Miller (Hugh Hefner and L. Ron Hubbard), Thomas Powers (Richard Helms), John Cooney (Walter Annenberg, Cardinal Spellman), Peter Maas (Edwin Wilson), Lou Cannon (Ronald Reagan), James Reston, Jr. (Jim Jones, John Connally, and Pete Rose/A. Bartlett Giamatti), Roger Morris (Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon), plus the duo of Peter Collier and David Horowitz (the Kennedys, Rockefellers, and Fords).

Surveying the field of Caro-era biographies, I have formulated opinions about what separates the good from the not-so-good biographies. These guidelines make the most sense when applied to biographies of contemporary influential figures. Books about historic personages must, to some extent, be judged by different standards. In comparing his biographies of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., Stephen Oates commented, "Biography becomes easier, I think, when you write about longer-dead historical figures. You don't encounter problems with family, problems with lawsuits, problems with trying to get access to letters and archival materials. . . . Writing about the man 100 years dead was by far the easier of the two projects."

Michael Scammell, the biographer of the very much alive Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, further explained the distinction: "Writing the biography of a

living man is sufficiently hazardous an undertaking as to call for some explanation. The very word 'biography' provokes expectations of candor and disclosure that are often precluded when one writes about a contemporary. . . . It is a story that is still continuing and therefore incomplete."

Deciding to tackle the life of somebody still living ought to be done only after deep thought, says James Walter, who has written such a biography. There is a strong presumption in Western culture that decency forbids prying into the lives of those still living. Allied to that presumption is the difficulty of telling the full story until all the facts are in. "On such grounds many scholars, and some biographers, have denied the utility of contemporary biography," Walter says. "This has had the effect of leaving the field clear for journalists who have written most of the incisive books on contemporary politics." Those journalists turned biographers find many advantages in dealing with contemporary figures, including first-hand understanding of the social contexts in which their subjects operate, access to broadcasts of the subjects that might not be preserved for long (if at all), the opportunity to view their subjects live in debates or other public appearances, and the chance to interview those around their subjects, some of whom will cooperate even when the principals will not because they believe they are part of something significant, and want to tell what they have observed.

Any life-writer wrestling with the question of whether to tackle a contemporary subject must also decide what status to seek—that of authorized, designated, or independent biographer. A small portion of the best contemporary biographies are authorized. But the access to information that comes with authorization often can sabotage good biography. Ronald Steel, the authorized biographer of the then-living Walter Lippmann, commented that even though he had Lippmann's sanction, there were difficult times: "If certain things perplexed me, why didn't I just ask him? Sometimes I did, but the answers weren't always illuminating. Though he had volunteered to cooper-

ate fully . . . he had not anticipated that I would ask anything 'personal' I soon learned that his definition of personal was quite broad."

An authorized biography can be as close to definitive as humanly possible. Deirdre Bair, who has written biographies with cooperation of the subjects, says readers in the not-so-distant past "tended to give the authorized biography the most respect and credence simply because the biographer has had the trust of the subject or those who were closest to the subject, and also because this biographer has had the access—which can range from unrestricted to severely limited—to whatever written or oral testimony exists. In many cases, the authorized biography is indeed the most complete work, because it has been written with access to the subject's private papers, correspondence, journals, diaries, interviews with his family, friends and professional associates, and whatever else may exist."

Bair is aware that many authorized biographies do take the form of, as she put it, "Mr. Great Person, as seen by his nearest and dearest, who are all intent, if not on his aggrandizement, at least to preserve his reputation." To guard readers against swallowing such a biography whole, Bair suggests asking "whether or not the biography had to be subjected to the approval of the subject, the heirs, the literary executors, before it was published; did the biographer have limited or unlimited access to documentation and oral testimony; did the biographer have any literary, personal, theoretical or metaphorical axes to grind through the writing of this particular life."

After publication of her biography of Samuel Beckett, Bair received requests to become an authorized biographer. She was dismayed when the requesters would "make such statements as 'but of course you won't discuss' or 'you would not want to talk about' and then they would name aspects of their lives of which they did not approve but which were absolutely vital for a complete understanding of the biographical subject."

Bair has found a middle ground as a "designated biographer," a status she

attained on the Beckett book and for her biography of Simone de Beauvoir. She and the subject or the subject's heirs agree that she is the appropriate person to write the life; they grant her access to materials, but retain no authority over the final manuscript.

Today, there is a dearth of high-quality authorized biographies; as for designated biographies, high quality or otherwise, they tend to be rare. Many of the best biographies, and certainly many of the biggest-selling biographies, are unauthorized, that is, researched and written independently of their subject, who might or might not choose to cooperate a little bit or a lot. Most investigative journalists turned biographers would never think of doing an authorized book and would not be inclined to seek designated status.

The unauthorized biographer almost never starts with nothing, having at the very least the subject's autobiographical writings to check for anecdotes, discrepancies, significant omissions, and psychological insights. Some authors and their publishers revel in doing a biography in the face of the subject's outright hostility, as evidenced by the case of Kitty Kelley's "His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra." Biographies that trumpet their illicitness often contain large doses of poorly documented sensationalism, but Kelley's life of Sinatra was a happy exception—unlike her unauthorized biographies of Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor and Nancy Reagan.

The debate about who is best suited to write a particular biography never will be resolved. Samuel Johnson said that only somebody who had eaten and drunk with a subject was fit to write that person's biography. Certainly there is no substitute for first-hand observation, but such proximity is a mixed blessing; it can produce all manner of biases. Dumas Malone has summarized the conundrum: "We could select some person who knew the subject well and run the risk of a biased interpretation; or we could select somebody who did not know him intimately, and perhaps did not know him at all, but who at least could be depended upon to view him critically. Assuming familiarity with the

field in which he labored, which was the more important, personal knowledge or what we call objective judgment?"

Each type of contemporary biography—authorized and unauthorized, by a friend or a total outsider—has its advantages and disadvantages; there is nothing inherently better in either kind. So, authorized or otherwise, what qualities ought to be present in a good biography? I will suggest eleven.

First, a life should be told chronologically. Biographers as different as Caro and Malone agree on this. Caro said of Johnson, and Malone said of Jefferson, that actions of the protagonists often make little sense if viewed as isolated decisions. But those same actions become clear when viewed as the outgrowth of a previous action. In other words, a biographer owes it to readers to follow a life as it was lived—chronologically.

Leon Edel, a biographer of Henry James as well as a prolific writer on biographical theory, has been the leading opponent of strict chronology. Edel and his disciples say that most readers know about a subject's life before starting the book, so why sacrifice artistry to observe the convention of chronology? Given the artfulness of Caro and others in telling lives chronologically, I find Edel's case unconvincing.

The most sensible place to depart from chronology, if at all, is in the opening chapter, when the biographer is trying to establish themes that will provide the reader with a framework for better understanding. The introductory chapter of my Armand Hammer biography is set in a Los Angeles courtroom during 1976, when Hammer was nearly 78 years old. After that chapter, the biography is pretty much relentlessly chronological. Robert Caro's opening scene in the Moses biography is a masterpiece of such a departure.

Biographers sometimes depart from chronology when the material seems to cry out for a topical treatment. That usually cheats and confuses the reader. Stephen Ambrose, a biographer of Richard Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower, said that while working on the second volume of the Eisenhower biography,

he "was sorely tempted to do the book by subjects, breaking it down into chapters on Eisenhower and McCarthy, or Eisenhower and civil rights, or Eisenhower and Vietnam, thereby relating Eisenhower's relations with McCarthy, or his approach to civil rights, or his policies in Vietnam, from beginning to end. But I eventually decided that such an organization would make the individual subjects easier to understand at the expense of understanding Eisenhower. What I wanted to convey was the magnitude and multitude of problems that come marching up to the president for solution, and the way in which each event relates to and influences others. . . . I decided that the only way to make the relationship between events and actions understandable, and the only way to get some sense of the factors Eisenhower had to take into account in making a single decision, was to tell the story chronologically. This method of organization has one invaluable advantage—chronologically is the way it happened."

Second, a good biography should provide the context of the times to help explain the life. As Milton Lomask tells fledgling biographers in his how-to book, you "cannot catch your hero simply by confining your search to what he did and said and thought. You must read all around him, poke into every niche and cranny of his life and times." Likewise, William Abrahams, a biographer of George Orwell, says, "One cannot leave the world out. Orwell was a product of his time. There is a direct relationship there that cannot be overlooked. He was deeply conscious of the world in which he lived. The Spanish Civil War was the centerpiece of his life."

Writing about the context of the life can be overdone. Anthony Edmonds notes that responsible biographers "walk a middle ground, placing their subjects within a historical context and emphasizing individuality. For example, it is legitimate in a George Washington biography to describe Indian tactics, but only to the extent Washington knew them and dealt with them." Biographer Elizabeth Longford says it is not so easy as it sounds to find the proper balance.

She tries to keep the narrative moving while relating events of the times by avoiding argument with prior biographers and historians and by never losing sight of the protagonist for more than a page at a time.

Another part of relating the context meaningfully is for the biographer to transport herself or himself, and readers, back to the appropriate decade. Adam Ulam in his biography of Joseph Stalin expresses the need to understand the protagonist in his time as seen at that time: "We are dealing with social and political developments but also with the development of one man's personality . . . much of the Russia of the 1930's and 1940's is explained by Joseph Djugashvili's personality, but not all. We may find in Stalin's personality some clues as to why he dealt with his closest friends and associates in the way he did, but not why he was served unquestioningly by men whose brothers had been tortured and executed, whose wives had been exiled, whose sons were imprisoned, all at his orders, and why none of them felt he could express his anguish by raising his hand or his voice against the dictator . . . if one studies Stalin's life dispassionately (admittedly not an easy task) one sees how it was affected not only by the natural rhythm of human existence, but by the politics of the time and the movement."

Third, a biographer must refrain from using hindsight to intrude into the chronology. Paul Murray Kendall, in "The Art of Biography," rightly says that biographers "are sometimes tempted to comment overtly on the decision itself, before it is made, after it is made, even as it is being made. They shout at Napoleon that he must not send Grouchy in pursuit of Blucher, at Hamilton that he had better steer clear of Burr, at James that it is idle for him to attempt the drama . . . and the deafened reader cannot hear what is actually going on, is jerked away from the subject by the biographer; indeed, the deafened reader is likely to conclude, perhaps unfairly, that the biographer is arrogantly pluming himself on a prescience that has no more merit than the good luck of being born considerably later than his subject. If the biographer is to create a

sense of a life being lived, he cannot leap from his own time into his subject's time to nudge the poor man in the ribs or make faces at his deliberations, like Faustus playing tricks on the pope. The grand dimension of every man's life is the opacity of the future. The biographer, if he has foresight, will exercise the willing suspension of hindsight."

Ludicrousness often results when a biographer intrudes with commentary based on hindsight. As one biographer of Theodore Dreiser introduced the author's mistress (later to be wife) into the story, the passage began, "However, fate was preparing for [Dreiser] the most protracted, searing and significant romantic attachment of his life."

Fourth, a biographer should have sympathy or empathy for the protagonist, or should at least recognize the consequences of antipathy. The warning of Bernard Crick is apt for biographers from the investigative journalism tradition, who are trained to dig up the dirt: "Sympathy must be present in a biographer; otherwise one would grow sour living for so long with someone one disliked."

Being sympathetic is not the same as being in love. Nobody would expect biographers of Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin to love their subjects. William Shirer, a Hitler biographer, commented with remarkable restraint, "I detest totalitarian dictatorships in principle and came to loathe this one the more I lived through it and watched its ugly assault upon the human spirit. Nevertheless, in this book I have tried to be severely objective, letting the facts speak for themselves and noting the source for each."

Robert Tucker, one Stalin biographer, found him to be "a loathsome man," with a "bottomless depth of . . . villainy." Yet it was important to explain that villainy to the world. Tucker said it was his task to penetrate Stalin's thoughts. "Now that I have been living through the 1930's with Stalin, trying to reconstruct his acts as they first took shape in his mind, I believe that I know him well enough to be able to think things out as he did and, in that sense, to be Stalin in the process of reaching key decisions and acting to implement

them." Tucker said he tried to avoid attributing to Stalin "a consciousness of his own villainy. In the effort to reenact the villain's thought, [the biographer] must attempt to understand, and if possible to show, how the villain managed to reconcile his duplicities and atrocities with his inner picture of himself as a righteous man and a good and noble ruler. This takes a bit of doing, but the whole meaning and worth of the scholarly enterprise rest upon it."

That many biographers send contradictory messages to readers is no surprise: The feelings of a biographer toward a subject understandably become complicated after he or she has spent every day for years researching a life. Some biographers have undergone psychoanalysis to better decipher their relationships with those they are writing about. The experiences of such biographers have been published as "Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness," edited by Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch. The major questions they explore include how and why a biographer chooses a subject; how a biographer gains knowledge of the subject's inner life; how a biographer puts a personal stamp on the published portrait; and how a biographer is influenced by the protagonist after protracted involvement. The jury is out on the experiment. Mark Schwehn, a biographer of Henry Adams, said, "Though I can promise that such an experiment will yield self-knowledge, I cannot predict with any certainty that it will make a bad biographer a good one or a good biographer a better one."

Many biographers who have not been part of the grand experiment nonetheless intuit the wisdom of the effort. Ronald Steel, the biographer of Walter Lippmann, has commented that it is "impossible for the biographer to avoid superimposing himself on the subject, not because of his failings as a biographer but because of his qualities as a human being. There is no way in which we can perceive another person, or even an object such as a bridge or painting, except by imposing that object on our psyche. . . . Biography is not the assembling of a jigsaw puzzle—with each piece filling one spot only and the

ultimate design predetermined. Rather it is the creation (re-creation if you will) of a human character. In that act of re-creation the biographer inevitably imposes his values, the values of his culture, upon the character he is interpreting."

Allan Nevins has commented, "Nearly all human acts and traits have a significance that varies with the sympathy or antipathy of the observer. Is Jones a shifty, wavering, uncertain man? Or does he simply see both sides of an issue, so that his apparent vacillations are simply proof of openmindedness and tolerance?"

Fifth, psychological analysis of the subject by the biographer, while allowable, should be practiced sparingly. It is a tricky matter. Freud, analyzing former President Woodrow Wilson, commented, "So frequently does great achievement accompany psychic abnormality that one is tempted to believe that they are inseparable from each other. This assumption is, however, contradicted by the fact that in all fields of human endeavor great men are to be found who fulfill the demands of normality."

Katharine Anthony's "Margaret Fuller: A Psychological Biography" (1920), was one of the first works to determinedly delve into motives, to emphasize the "why" with some success. Her contemporaries were commenting about the potential pitfalls before Freudianism became so ingrained in the culture, before investigative journalists turned biographers began delving into their subjects' minds as well as the outer evidence of their actions. Gamaliel Bradford, writing in 1917, popularized the term psychography, which he said had this aim: "Out of the perpetual flux of actions and circumstances that constitutes a man's whole life, it seeks to extract what is essential, what is permanent and so vitally characteristic. . . . From this vast and necessary [chronological] material of biography, psychography selects only that which is indispensable for its particular purpose."

Bradford understood the dangers, and addressed them: "It must be admitted that psychography is always in dan-

ger of degenerating into gossip. The difference between the two is simply that gossip springs from the desire to saturate our own emptiness with the lives of others, from a mere idle curiosity about things and persons. . . . Gossip makes no distinction of significance between different facts. . . . Psychography picks, chooses and rejects; in a bushel of chaff finds only a grain or two of wheat, but treasures that wheat as . . . invaluable."

A biographer has an obligation to present more than the facts, to make judgments about normality or the lack of it. Readers want to know the why as well as the who, what, when, and where. But, like a novelist, a biographer should show instead of tell, letting readers arrive at their own realizations about character, about causation and motive. Academics who write biographies tend to rely more heavily on the psychobiographical approach than do journalists turned biographers, probably because academics receive more exposure to Freudianism as they pursue their doctorates.

Stephen Oates, an academic who has worked assiduously to master the art of writing accessible biography, puts the middle-ground position well: "The key to a successful biography is a consistent and convincing interpretation of character. Sorting through his piles of information, the biographer asks what was my subject like as a human being? What was his emotional, intellectual and spiritual makeup? How did it evolve? How much was he shaped by environmental influences? How did his personality affect his reactions to other people, to events, to luck and chance? How did his personality affect his career, his impact on history? The biographer's interpretation of character is the analytical premise upon which the entire biography will depend. Even if the biographer elects to tell his story strictly as narrative, it proceeds from this analytical base. . . . To understand character and personality, does a biographer need training in psychology? Some biographers have turned to psychology and psychoanalysis for help in comprehending the inner world of their subjects. That can help, but most biographers, I

think, would agree that it is not imperative. What is imperative is that the biographer have insight into character. Such insight is psychological, but it doesn't have to derive from psychoanalytical training."

Leon Edel, almost certainly the most widely read, prolific theorist of biography, would go further than either Oates or I would. He encourages telling lives through the lens of psychoanalysis: "The biographer needs to discover human self-deceptions, or defenses, which they usually are. Such deceptions may become a covert life-myth out of which lives—and biographies—are fashioned."

It appears to me that the non-Freudians are the more convincing, as they struggle against the simplistic, uncertain explanations of behavior that too frequently take over psychoanalytic biographies. It can be argued that we fail to know the character of our own spouse or our parents, that any biographer would be hard-pressed to predict what his or her mother was thinking at a particular moment, much less what the subject of a biography was thinking.

Mark Schorer, author of a massive Sinclair Lewis biography, resisted calls to say straight out what was wrong with Lewis: "It was precisely because I was unwilling to make such a statement that I made the book so long. I wanted to give the reader all the evidence that I coherently could which would permit him to say to himself what was wrong." Psychological theories existed to explain Lewis's actions, but Schorer said, "I don't think that the jargon of psychoanalysis would have heightened either the comedy or the pathos of that life."

In the introduction to his biography of George Orwell, Bernard Crick said the psychological insight present in so much contemporary biography "may be pleasant to read, but readers should realize that often they are being led by the nose, or the biographer is fooling himself by an affable pretense of being able to enter another person's mind. . . . We can only know an actual person by observing their behavior in a variety of different situations and through different perspectives."

Samuel Clemens said it forcefully in

his autobiographical writings a century ago: "What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself. All day long, and every day, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his thoughts, not those other things, are his history. His acts and words are merely the visible, thin crust of his world, with its scattered snow summits and its vacant wastes of water—and they are so trifling a part of his bulk, a mere skin enveloping it. The mass of him is hidden—it and its volcanic fires that toss and boil, and never rest, night nor day. These are his life, and they are not written, and cannot be written. Every day would make a whole book of 80,000 words—365 books a year. Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man—the biography of the man himself cannot be written."

Sixth, biographers must concede and then explain the complexity of the human animal when looking into the minds of protagonists. This is true whether or not the biographer subscribes to Clemens's formulation, a belief that could bring despair to the biographical enterprise if subscribed to literally.

Part of the complexity biographers must recognize is that human beings are not static. That is true for the protagonist, and also for the supporting cast. In the best biographies, the people who surround the main subject evolve as he or she evolves; they change over time, and thus affect the actions of the protagonist. A biographer must try to understand all the characters in the play, not just the one with the leading role. Complexity is the watchword; if there is such a thing as simple folk (which I doubt, having never met one), biographers and publishers rarely choose them as subjects.

If a biographer lights on a theme while attempting to make sense of a life, it must not become reductionist, must not be used to purportedly explain every thought, every action of the subject. It should be considered a cardinal sin to interpret a whole life using a single formula from Freud, or any other simple notion. Human beings simply are not simple. Joan Peyser, the biographer of

Leonard Bernstein, said, "I wrote recently that I was clearly unable to decide whether Bernstein was an angel or a monster. . . . It is not a question of either one or the other. He could be both, and within minutes."

The anomaly amid the recognition of complexity is that the lasting biographies do have a theme or, perhaps more aptly, a central tension. Often, that tension is no more, and no less, than the struggle between free will and predestination. The best biographies are word portraits of a protagonist in conflict with himself or herself, or with the surrounding society, or both. Joseph Wall, after researching his biography of Andrew Carnegie, wrote: "It seemed to me that the one thing above all else that gave Carnegie's life an inner tension and made him the interestingly complex and often contradictory figure he was was the continuing necessity he felt to reconcile the radical egalitarianism of his grandparents, his parents and his own childhood with his insatiable desire for material acquisition. . . . Carnegie finally found the answer that resolved these tensions in his gospel of wealth." Wall understood the perils involved: "I was . . . fully cognizant of the fact that as a biographer I had quite purposefully imposed a central theme upon Carnegie's long and variform life. . . . Although it seemed patently clear to me at the time I was writing the biography that this was indeed the basic theme of Carnegie's life, I nevertheless realized it was a theme I had selected and imposed upon Carnegie. It was one none of his other biographers had chosen."

A biographer must be allowed some latitude in this regard. Biographies are, after all, not life—they are an arrangement and interpretation of a life. Without a theme imposed by a biographer, a book can become chaos, a self-contradictory narration that reflects the incoherence of life. Once a plan is chosen, the biographer should be faithful to it while also maintaining as much objectivity about the contradictory evidence as humanly possible.

The biographer must concede that some actions and words will never be understood fully, and tell readers just

that. Paul Mariani, biographer of William Carlos Williams, provides a real-life illustration. Mariani had every reason to believe that Williams's wife, Floss, was totally devoted. But when she died 13 years after her husband, she chose to be cremated rather than buried beside him. "I myself chose not to speculate on the reasons for that final decision," Mariani said, "thus reminding the reader again that, in any life, no matter how long, much must remain, finally, a mystery."

Seventh, a biographer must be honest with readers about filling gaps. Every life leaves gaps in the public record, what Victoria Glendinning calls "lies and silences." Gaps can lead a biographer to overemphasize periods for which there is ample documentation and underplay important periods for which the documentation is sparse. As Bernard Crick has said, "One has only the evidence that one can find. Which papers survive and which do not is largely accidental; there is no neat proportionality between the records and periods of Orwell's life."

Paul Murray Kendall has noted, "There are no rules for handling gaps. Each paper trail is unlike any other paper trail. Each biographer is unlike any other biographer. The right way to fill gaps is unknown; the wrong ways are legion. Confronting a gap, the writer can but recognize that he is domesticated in imperfection; at the same time, he must respond to King Harry's call—'Once more into the breach!'—and, summoning his talents and honesty, struggle to suggest the life of his man during the blank, without either pretending to more knowledge than he has or breaking the reader's illusion of a life unfolding."

One point is clear. Too many contemporary biographers, when confronted with gaps, fill them with mean-spirited suggestions and unsupported allegations. Such practices are one reason social commentators have worried about contemporary biography turning into "pathography."

A responsible biographer who accepts that some gaps are forever also accepts that research is never complete. Antony Alpers published two biogra-

phies of writer Katherine Mansfield, the first in 1953, the second in 1980. He estimated that the second version was based on 20 times more material than the first. In 1988, Claire Tomalin published a new Mansfield biography that superseded some of Alpers's research. Stephen Oates said while comparing and contrasting a spate of biographies about Lyndon Johnson: "None of the volumes, of course, offers a definitive portrait of Johnson. There is no such thing as a definitive biography. The nature of life-writing and reminiscence, the process by which one human being resurrects another on the basis of human records, memories and dreams, precludes a fixed and final portrait of any figure."

New decades bring new perspective along with new information. Sometimes, different perspectives turn up virtually simultaneously. During the 1980's and early 1990's, different biographers studied the same subject at the same time—Jessica Savitch and Manuel Noriega are two cases on point. The competing books on Savitch and Noriega showed up in stores virtually simultaneously. Each time, the books contained substantial differences.

Philip Ziegler conceded this about his subject, Lord Mountbatten: "It seems to me certain that within a decade, or at most a generation, a substantial reappraisal will be necessary of at least his role in India at the time of the Suez crisis, and over the reorganization of the British defense establishment. On a personal level, more evidence will by then be available about his extramarital affairs or lack of them, and his wife's remarkable career and character will be far better documented. . . . My biography will have been overtaken." Ziegler also noted that the same facts used by earlier and later biographers "may undergo a strange sea change in the intervening years. Details that seem of transcendent importance when first bruited abroad may well appear insignificant a generation later. Mountains become molehills or molehills mountains." As an example, Ziegler cited a 1941 radio broadcast by P. G. Wodehouse, in which the Englishman failed to sound harsh enough about Hitler. If Wodehouse had

died soon thereafter, and if his biographer had begun work immediately, the radio broadcast almost surely would have been a highlight of the published book. But Wodehouse lived until 1975. During those decades, he regained his stature in society, so that his biographer was able to treat the broadcast's effects as transient.

Eighth, good biographers go the extra mile to check out everything, never settling for secondary data when additional effort might uncover primary data. Gaps or incomplete information can tempt biographers to rely on newspaper clippings, hearsay, and autobiographical writings without subjecting them to rigorous examination. A good biographer will tell readers that secret, specifying the possible overemphases and unreliable evidence: newspaper clippings frequently are factually incorrect; hearsay might be motivated by spite and fraught with ignorance; autobiographies are often more significant for what they omit than what they include.

The best biographers never use secondary sources until all leads for primary sources are exhausted. Granted, it can be difficult to know when enough is enough. As Ziegler has noted, a biographer can never know whether he has located everything of significance that might be out there. With luck spawned by persistence, the biographer might determine the subject has left behind papers both accessible and useful. That, however, even if true, is usually just a first step, providing a rough map for what often turns out to be a futile search for biographical riches. If Smith wrote regularly to Jones, Ziegler notes, then it stands to reason that Jones wrote to Smith. But is Smith alive? If she is, will she grant access to Jones's letters? If Smith is dead, who might have possession of her papers, and will they be available to a biographer? If Smith is a poet and Jones a prime minister, there might be hope that the letters back and forth will have been preserved; but poets and prime ministers are not born as public figures, so the biographer must ponder the odds that seemingly unimportant yet often revealing letters from Jones's youth have survived. According

to Ziegler, Mountbatten at age 19 seemed smitten by a woman named Peyton, whom Ziegler proved unable to trace. Ziegler reasoned that Mountbatten's letters to Peyton had been destroyed, but the slim possibility that they still existed was a nagging thought that any biographer would find enticing and unsettling.

Witnesses certainly have an impact on accuracy, an impact that sometimes is beyond a biographer's control. By choosing to remain silent, a witness might make it impossible to fill a gap or correct a misimpression. On the other hand, sometimes the talkative sources cause more trouble than the silent ones. Mark Schorer said, "When one is writing the life of a person only recently dead, living witnesses are, of course, an essential source of information. And one discovers all too soon the burden that such evidence entails. Sometimes I wished that I had 10 years more, for in that time most of those people would have gone away and I would no longer be confused by their conflicting tales and would in fact be free to say what I wanted about them. Quite as often I despaired when, just as I was about to get to an important informant, he did suddenly go away."

Ziegler related similar experiences, saying no biographer can afford to let his guard down when dealing with evidence, especially when it is in the form of verbal testimony. What a letter or diary entry seems to mean can change, to be sure, as the biographer picks up more and more information during the research process about the circumstances of composition—but at least the words themselves are immutable. Interviewees, however, frequently alter their thoughts and words. They consciously lie, or have poor memories, or repeat anecdotes they think they "know" but actually have heard secondhand, or try to please the biographer by saying what they think he or she wants to hear.

One of the diciest witnesses might be the subject. Doris Kearns, a Harvard University historian and biographer, watched the production of Lyndon Johnson's memoirs close up. What she observed was "a literary assembly line. I learned how unauthentic memoirs

can be unless one understands the stage of life in which they are written, why they are being written at that time, and what audience they aim to please."

Footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies help readers determine the quality of the evidence. That said, the responsible biographer does much of the interpreting for the reader, pointing out where information is Grade B or Grade M instead of Grade A. After all, a biographer, unlike a novelist, operates under oath to provide the whole truth as far as it can be determined, however much that oath prevents telling a better tale.

Ninth, biographers must make hard decisions about the appropriate length of the book. Sometimes, setting out a smorgasbord of verifiable facts, and enough reasoned (and maybe even alternative) hypotheses, can help make up for unreliable or uncooperative human sources. That raises the question of how long is too long for a biography?

The answer is elusive. Sometimes, short ones seem too long. When Peter Collier, an experienced biographer, reviewed the relatively slim (274-page) Adnan Khashoggi life by Washington Post investigative reporter Ronald Kessler, he commented that Kessler "seems always to be huffing and puffing to bulk out the contents of the book. Subsidiary figures who play a brief role and then disappear are always introduced by a digressive portrait that tells us far more than we need or want to know about them."

Many readers want evidence, but only what the biographer considers to be relevant evidence. A biographer who dumps everything from dozens of notebooks into the profile is failing to assume the responsibility of selectivity. Choosing the telling fact or quotation while discarding hundreds of others—yet not distorting the big picture—demands skills that some biographers lack, but must try to develop.

Being selective with masses of material to keep a biography at a readable, publishable length is its own skilled form of interpretation. The task is harder than ever in an age of presidential libraries with millions of documents, videotapes, and audiotapes, commercial

computer databases that allow a biographer to search thousands of publications in a matter of seconds, and other resources that can lead to information overload. Most readers have no desire to buy an exhaustive biography; exhaustive too often also means exhausting. Readers pay an author (by buying the book) to help interpret a life.

Tenth, a biographer must avoid traps of illogic. David Hackett Fischer says sometimes trying to answer too many questions, trying to interpret too much, ensnares biographers. In his "Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought," Fischer suggests that trying to answer the question "why?" is dangerous, given the obstacles. "A 'why' question tends to become a metaphysical question . . . it dissipates a historian's energies and interests. 'Why did the Civil War happen?' 'Why was Lincoln shot?' A working historian receives no clear signals from these woolly interrogatories as to which way to proceed. . . . He can never hope to find the inner secret, maybe because it does not exist." Fischer identifies eleven categories of logical fallacy, those of question framing, factual verification, factual significance, generalization, narration, causation, motivation, composition, false analogy, semantical distortion, and substantive distraction. Fischer's warnings, while valuable, can be frustrating. Biographers indeed fall into traps of logic from time to time, but they must look for answers—including the "why"—if the enterprise is to continue.

Eleventh, good biographers must take style as seriously as substance. Many investigative biographers writing on contemporary subjects discover fascinating new material, if only by serendipity based on sheer time spent. But precious few of those biographers have the talent to tell the tale compellingly. Interesting lives can too easily be rendered pedestrian by pedestrian prose. The best biographers not only arrange the facts logically, but also provide readers with the feel of the facts.

Some of the writing techniques they use to create the feel are borrowed from fiction. Biographies and novels are concerned with birth, death, love, hate, and moral dilemmas galore. The

techniques used in each genre might include scene-by-scene construction based on immersion in a geographic setting, physical descriptions of the key individuals, dialogue, imagery, symbolism, irony, contrast, and shifting points of view among various characters. Some novelists today write biographies; some biographers double as novelists.

Biographer Paul Murray Kendall figured this out decades ago, noting, "The obvious difference between biography and poetry-novel-drama is, if enormous, not quite so enormous as it appears. It will not do simply to say that biography is made out of fact (whatever that is) and fiction is made out of fancy (whatever that is). The writer of fiction, out of the mating of his own experience and his imagination, creates a world, to which he attempts to give the illusion of reality. The biographer, out of the mating of extrinsic experience, imperfectly recorded, and his imagination, recreates a world, to which he attempts to give something of the reality of illusion. We demand that a novel . . . be in some way true to life; we demand of biography that it be true to a life. There is a difference in meaning between the phrases; they join, however, in signifying not 'factual' but 'authentic'—and authenticity lies not only in what we are given but in what we are persuaded to accept."

The dark side of the biography boom inspired by Robert Caro has been the large number of second-rate biographies—by journalists and academics—who lack pride or skill or native talent, or all three. There have been, unhappily, a great many of them. Some are passably researched (just barely passably), but poorly written. Some are passably written, but poorly researched. Some might actually be works of art, but their omission of endnotes makes them difficult to take seriously. Some biographies in the Caro mold would have turned out fine except for external obstacles, usually legal in nature, that the biographer and publisher were unable to overcome.

Nothing should be allowed to take the place of verifiable—and verified—information. Too many biographers today dig the dirt, then forget to look

for the diamonds that might also be in the pile. They fall into a trap described by Jacques Barzun as forgetting to observe the maxim "by their fruits shall ye know them." Barzun explained, "It is the principle Lincoln used to confound Grant's enemies—if drinking whisky wins victories, let all the generals be given a pint of Scotch. But Grant was not a drunkard who happened to win battles. He was a military genius who happened to drink. Similarly, all our victims of biography are not idlers and profligates who were great artists on the side. They were artists whose characters were marred by adventitious elements precisely like certain other people that we all know."

Poorly done investigative biographies almost always fail to show whether the transgressions exposed invalidate the subject's accomplishments. Sure, Frank Sinatra as portrayed by Kitty Kelley is a sleaze, but does that mean we should stop valuing his music? How do we explain the greatness of that music? From what traits did it spring? The very worst of the genre (Kelley's Sinatra biography is not among them; Kelley's Onassis, Taylor, and Nancy Reagan biographies are) tend to expose transgressions for exposure's sake, failing to account for the successes amid the sinning.

Unfortunately, the authors of unrelieved pathographies—and hagiographies—can call themselves "biographers" along with the best practitioners of the craft. We can only hope biographer Park Honan is correct when he observes in his "Authors' Lives: On Literary Biography and the Arts of Language," "It may cynically be said that quickly written, fluent and superficial studies win literary prizes, and that the public does not know a good biography from a dreadful piece of claptrap; but even as that is said the public's winnowing out is taking place, and I know of no abominable biography that has been cited with praise long after it was first printed. Bad biographies abound, but we do not hear of them a few months after they glitter." ■

# Where Executives Get Their News

*With Technology Offering More Specialized and Quicker Sources, They Depend Less on Newspapers*

BY DAVID ANABLE AND  
JOHN MAXWELL HAMILTON

**T**ODAY'S DECISION-MAKERS are using information-age technologies to obtain news, especially foreign news, the way *they* want it. In tapping a growing array of traditional and non-traditional sources, they often are bypassing journalists or employing them as "in-house" information synthesizers. This emerging power-and-performance world, where television news (except perhaps CNN) hardly rates a passing glance, may point the way to the future of news.

- For Stephen Brayton, foreign news is more important than ever. His Back Bay Boston public relations company has a client in Scotland and his own wife is Danish. But Brayton, a former reporter with *The Quincy (MA) Patriot Ledger*, pays much less attention than in the past to the premier U.S. newspaper on foreign news, *The New York Times*; he doesn't feel the need to read a Sunday newspaper of any kind; he watches network news only once a week or so. Instead, he reads specialized magazines, such as the British-published *Economist*, and grazes over publications ranging from *Investors Daily* to *Business Week*. He also benefits from the work of a senior vice president, a former journalist, who tracks trade magazines, newspapers and newsletters and picks relevant items off computer networks and puts together the results for company executives.

- Perry Haines, executive vice president of a meat packing company in Sioux City, also cares about foreign news more. "We have doubled the export percentages of sales in the last six to seven years," he says. But his newspaper reading habits have changed too. With young children and all his other responsibilities, there just isn't enough time for much casual reading. Much more targeted these days,

he heavily relies on the computer terminals run by his staff. The terminals work all day, bringing in *Livestock Market News* and special reports from company offices in London and Tokyo.

- "In our work there are no domestic issues any more," says Gus Speth, president of *World Resources Institute*, a nonprofit environmental organization in Washington, D.C. The WRI staff gleans information from newslet-



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ters and computer networks. They have their own in-house clipping service, which gives Speth a wider sampling of newspaper reports on events. He has learned that any one news story is "not inaccurate, just partial....There is no one newspaper that does even a half-ass job. And you can quote me on that."

When an important event is spotted, WRI staff will call key players to ask for more details, perhaps to have them fax or overnight mail documents.

"It's easier to fold the newspaper and leave it, because I know I am going to get these clippings here on this table," says Speth, pointing to the coffee table in his office.

Brayton, Haines, Speth and nearly a score of other executives whom we interviewed point to the same future: The hegemony of journalists over news for people in important positions is eroding. Impatient with inadequacies in their traditional newsfare, executives are taking more control over the information they receive. They still value newspapers; indeed, many executives read newspaper articles voraciously. But more and more often these articles are becoming sections within information digests tailored for their particular needs by the company "journalist."

To some extent executives have long relied on many sources other than newspapers—trade journals, newsletters and specialized services. The explosion of communication technology, however, has accelerated the use of non-newspaper sources. This trend is true even though newspapers have added to their news of business, science and other specialized subjects. The expansion of newspaper coverage seems most useful for the general reader.

The use of multi-source material is nowhere more clear than with foreign news. The American news tradition has given short shrift to events overseas. This has remained so even as phrases like global competition and global warming have come along, signalling the arrival of a genuinely intertwined global community. USA Today, which

has international circulation, nonetheless concentrates on national issues. Its editors argue that the public gets its foreign news from television. Public opinion surveys indeed confirm that TV is where most Americans do say they get their news. But, in fact, network TV has cut back on its plethora of foreign bureaus, and many executives aren't watching anyway.

Determined to fill the void of in-depth news, especially from overseas, the discerning public is finding out about events and trends through a more careful scouring of today's new and old media. Our sample, of course, is rarified and hardly scientific. These are senior executives, who have broader horizons than most of the public, as well as the assets to help them tap into specialized information systems. But their approach correlates to other hard data that show more and more people are taking charge of their news, plunging into the computer age and subscribing to information networks.

The pattern we see is this:

First, people have easier access to many more American and foreign news sources—and increasingly use them. In our survey, a large proportion of executives said they read either the London-based Economist or The Financial Times or both. Several commented also that American-based publications, such as The Wall Street Journal, were becoming more valuable as they become more international in scope. To this comparatively traditional diet, such news junkies add fax reports and fax newspapers, computer networks and databanks, overnight mail, teleconferencing, and so on. The growth of specialist publications has been phenomenal. These "trade" magazines and newsletters cater to specific industries or to slimmer and slimmer slices of them, to the environment, to the elderly and to innumerable other topics—often in great depth and narrow, intense focus.

Second, this tidal wave of information more and more is being channeled and filtered by users themselves, who once left that job to reporters and editors. Senior executives have staff to distill such information for them. These

staffers, frequently former journalists, effectively take the place of traditional newspaper journalists. And this change, in turn, points to a more general trend: Anyone with a computer and modem can get into computer networks, like Prodigy and Nexus, to find information for themselves or their companies. And they are often explaining that they can't wait a whole day to learn from their morning paper what is happening around the globe.

For these new-style information diggers, daily newspapers and traditional journalism are valuable but not enough. Lynn Kettleton, senior vice president in charge of information for Clarke & Co of Boston, says he reads 20 newspapers a day. But his main emphasis is on specialist electronic business "wires," trade publications and newsletters. These, he says, have more focussed, more raw, more up-to-date information—"fresher and closer to the prime source."

These information age trends have a variety of implications for journalism and for society.

- Users increasingly control the news. In tune with these times, the Turner Broadcasting System is preparing "interactive news documentaries" on CD Rom discs using CNN footage. Newspapers are beginning to open up their own databanks to outside users.
- New jobs emerge for old journalists. Executives, who cannot afford to miss out on vital information, resort to employing professional newsgatherers. These in-house "journalists" cater to company-wide audiences for very specialist "news." A. H. Sullivan, vice president of Development Associates, says his company is "hooked up to a whole mess of computer networks," and a "computer guru" on the staff—a former journalist—sorts it all out.
- The general public may be losing some of its old, warm, fuzzy regard for its daily newspaper and has a rather impersonal view

of the new information "products" it is tapping. Because more people can dip into an expanding variety of news sources, they are less likely to identify with the paper thrown on their porch. It, too, risks becoming just another source of information. For instance, many executives we spoke to could not even recall the names of the specialized newsletters they read.

Television news is becoming less valuable to many executives, with the exception of CNN (a friend and companion for the international traveller, and available at many different times of the day). More and more professionals and decision-makers like those we interviewed consider most television news a waste of their time. An increasing number never watch television news at all. "I get almost nothing from television," says Kevin Mulvaney, vice president for international operations at the Bank of Boston. "I don't have the time." Or, as Andrew Maguire, president of Appropriate Technologies International and a former U.S. Representative from New York, puts it: "I am positively repulsed by it." The problem with television news, Maguire adds, is that you have to take what it gives you; "I won't let them [television producers] make the choices for me."

- Radio appears to be becoming more important than we have traditionally understood. Several executives said they timed their drives home to coincide with a radio news program, such as NPR or the BBC (broadcast in Boston, for instance, by WBUR, one of 135 stations now carrying BBC programs). Often, a reduction in TV news watching had been accompanied by an increase in radio news listening, which can be combined with other activities (morning showers, breakfast, driving) and may be more concerned with depth than visual glamor.

What has fueled these changes?

Technology is one key. Another is the seepage of global concerns into the American mind and pocketbook. People need more information, especially foreign information. Now they can get it. Some are learning to manage it.

The conclusion?

The people who are going to make an impact in the coming century don't care less about news than they used to. The fact is that they care more, but get it in a greater variety of ways. This raises all sorts of questions, of course: If people dig out more "news" for themselves, will they know how to get it right? Will they get reliable information from non-journalists, or at least non-traditional ones? What will happen to the journalism profession? And is it being sidetracked? Newspapers are hardly passé, but how will they straddle the gulf between the broad sweep of the news and the narrow specialty in an age when a vital segment of their readers no longer is content with a daily once-over of events?

Perhaps most important of all, what happens to people who don't have the resources to sort and sift information? Are we becoming two "nations" in one country—a society ever more sharply divided between the highly informed and the uninformed, the powerful and the passive, the influential reader and the influenced TV watcher? George Orwell saw such a divided society coming. It has arrived. Now we need to worry about those who can't manage the information flood the way executives can. They're in danger of drowning—or simply tuning out altogether. (For those of us in the education field, the big challenge may be to train news "receivers" as much as news providers.)

But the up side is clear: This new era brings us closer to the old Jeffersonian ideal that people should actively inform themselves, not passively wait for information. In a sense, it is as though everyone can own his own printing press.■

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# *Raised Eyebrows*

## *For 'Raise the Red Lantern'*

BY DAI QING

I LOVE GOING TO THE MOVIES. Although I can't always tell you who was in what movie or who's hot and who's not, once a movie begins I am completely absorbed with what's happening on the screen, moved to tears or laughter as the case may be, my professional detachment long since abandoned at the door of the moviehouse. That is to say, I know nothing about film theory, cinematic techniques, auteurs, schools, whatnot—my only criterion is how I respond emotionally to a film.

Well, my only response to "Raise the Red Lantern" is a pair of raised eyebrows.

A few months ago the movie received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film—not an insignificant honor, and I couldn't help but take some pride in my compatriots' achievement. In fact, I was quite indignant when the telecast of the Academy Award ceremonies didn't include any shots or photographs of the Chinese actors involved.

Since then many of my American friends have seen this film. Afterwards, they would invariably say to me, whether sincerely or out of mere habit, "Have you seen it? What a great movie!" And I would always reply, a little stiffly, "Not yet. I haven't quite got up my nerve to go." They, of course, would stare in wide-eyed amazement and ask me what I meant. So, in order to fend off these increasingly frequent queries, I had no choice but to get up my nerve and go.

I've never had any aspirations of becoming a film critic, nor do I have any now. But, since *Raise the Red Lantern* has received such wide critical acclaim, its international cachet seemingly enhanced by the involvement of producers and financing from Hong Kong,

Taiwan, Japan and other countries, I feel that as a ticket-buying member of the audience I can now put in my two cents (seven dollars) worth. Let me say that my only credentials are the few Chinese books I have read and the basic knowledge about Chinese society and culture I have acquired during half a century's living in that society.

Let's begin with the Master of the household in the movie. I don't know whether he is old money or nouveau riche, but in traditional China, with the possible exceptions of brigands, riffraff, and others beyond the pale, anyone who comes into (or manages to hang on to) the least bit of money would do his damndest to cultivate an air of civility, refinement and breeding. Such a person would adopt all the outward manifestations of conventional morality and propriety, maintaining at all costs the ever-important quality of "face". While all those big red lanterns in the movie no doubt provide an eye-catching visual motif, I have never seen nor heard nor read in any book anything remotely resembling the high-handed and flagrant way in which this "Master" flaunted the details of his sex life. Even Ximen Qing, the protagonist of the erotic Chinese classic "Jin Ping Mei" and the archetype of the unabashedly libidinous male, saw fit to maintain a discreet demeanor in negotiating his way among his numerous wives, concubines and mistresses, and even then he had to resort occasionally to sending a servant to tender his excuses.

As for the role of Yan'er, the young maidservant who covets the status of becoming one of the Master's concubines, perhaps she was meant by the director to be an incomparably head-

strong and willful character whose behavior, no less than her ambitions, transgresses the bounds of propriety. What strikes a false note, however, is her habit of addressing her mistress as ni ("you"), not even bothering with the honorific nin whereas in traditional China servants would never have addressed their masters (or mistresses) directly, whether as ni or nin. Instead, they would have tried to avoid such situations entirely, and when they couldn't, they would have resorted to addressing their masters in the third person, with titles that indicated the latter's position in the household or using names that were generally accepted terms of respectful address, e.g., "Second Master," "Third Grandmother," "Fourth Miss," and so on. Another jarring note is struck when the first wife refers to her own home as fushang, an honorific term that is used exclusively to mean "your home".

Other false notes:

- The ancient Chinese may have had many ingenious devices for sexual stimulation and enhancement, and massaging a woman's bound feet may have been considered a form of foreplay. As far as I know, however, there has never been any mention anywhere of tapping the soles of a woman's undeformed, never-bound feet with a brass mallet as a way to induce sexual arousal.
- In the mansions and gardens of wealthy families in the old days there were often places considered haunted and therefore off limits—a well, perhaps (as in the original story from which the movie was adapted), or some

overgrown spot in a remote, desolate corner of the grounds—but never on the roof. In traditional Chinese cosmography the sky was sacred, and, by extension, so was the roof or “top” of any building. It is thus inconceivable that any family, no matter how powerful, would risk incurring the wrath of heaven by carrying out a private execution on the rooftop.

- Any actor or actress presuming to perform in Peking opera, a popular yet demanding art form, would first have to master the clear, crisp, unmistakable accents of the Peking dialect. This would be true even if he or she was an amateur, and even if the performer was not a native of Peking. And yet the actress playing the role of the third wife, a former Peking opera star, spoke in an accent that was distinctly not authentic. It would have been much more believable to refashion her character into a performer of some kind of regional opera.
- Still on the character of the third wife: generally speaking, any performer in her station and in that era who considered herself to be the least bit respectable, not to say refined, would have decorated her surroundings with such things as paintings by famous artists, valuable antiques, perhaps photographs of herself with some famous or important person, the better to show off her good taste and social standing. She would never have thought of decking her walls with those oversized masks—something that didn't come into vogue until the 1980's and even then only among certain self-styled “avant-garde” artists, eager to show off their “hipness”.
- The indiscriminate use of the image of the dragon is another item that would provoke raised eyebrows, to say the least, among any educated or not so educated

Chinese audience. In the old days, only the emperor was entitled to the use of this icon, and the taboo was enforced by severe sumptuary laws. Even after the last emperor had been dethroned, a “Master” living in the era depicted in the film (some time in the second or third decade of this century?) would not have been so extravagant in his appropriation of this icon. To be sure, by presenting the stark image of white dragons emblazoned on a black background in the sheaths used to cover the red lanterns when the heroine is cast into disgrace, the director has found a dramatic and visually striking way to convey the sense of a fearsome, draconian authority. Yet he seems to have overlooked the symbolism of those funerary colors, white and black, and the fact that dragons are representative not only of authority but are also associated exclusively with the masculine. In this context, then, the image can be taken to denote a curse, an imprecation against the Master himself—surely not something the director intended.

Writers of fiction learn early on the following incontrovertible rule: you can be as fanciful as you please in weaving the plot, but you must get the details just right. Except for novices, hopeless sluggards and outright frauds, no one calling himself a writer would dare give short shrift to this rule, not even hacks and producers of pulp fiction. I read somewhere that during the three years it took to research and complete her latest book, “The Living,” a novel set in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, the noted author Annie Dillard stopped reading anything written after 1883 in order to completely immerse herself in that era. She even read umpteen memoirs and diaries just to get every detail of clothing right, down to the last seam. When she discovered that the French word “camouflage” came into general use in the English language

only after World War I, she immediately excised it from her manuscript, even though in all other respects it was just the right word for her purposes.

I don't know to what extent the above rule also holds true in filmmaking, but I have heard that the French director Daniel Vigne, in making his critically acclaimed movie “The Return of Martin Guerre,” took great pains to ensure the historical accuracy of every detail of daily life portrayed in the film and consulted closely with Professor Natalie Zemon Davis, a world-renowned historian and author of several books on the subject and the period in question.

One more thing about “Raise the Red Lantern” that perplexes me: why is the film so circumspect, even prudish, in its depiction of sex, when sex in fact figures so importantly in the entire plot of the movie, from the heroine's winning favor with the Master initially to her eventual fall into disgrace and final dementia? It seems to me that, in keeping with the mood and meaning the film is trying to convey, it would have been entirely appropriate, even necessary, for the director to have included a few well-placed scenes of explicit lovemaking, for the purposes of advancing both plot development and character portrayal. Instead, it seems that while the director and scriptwriters did not hesitate to take outrageous liberty with such details as decor, dialogue and diction, they were unwilling to claim the more daring artistic license of filming erotic scenes.

For all these reasons, “Raise the Red Lantern” has succeeded only in raising my eyebrows and my hackles, not in touching me emotionally or esthetically. The grating inauthenticity of so many important details lends an overall tone of spuriousness to the film—hardly a desirable artistic outcome. I would like to think that all these mistakes stem from a lack of knowledge rather than a lack of scruples on the part of the filmmakers involved. Otherwise, they might as well forfeit any claims to being serious artists. ■

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*Dai Qing, editor of Echo of Chinese Folk Culture, is finishing her year at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow.*

# WINTER READING

## Buying the Kissinger Myth of the Super Diplomat

### **Kissinger: A Biography**

Walter Isaacson

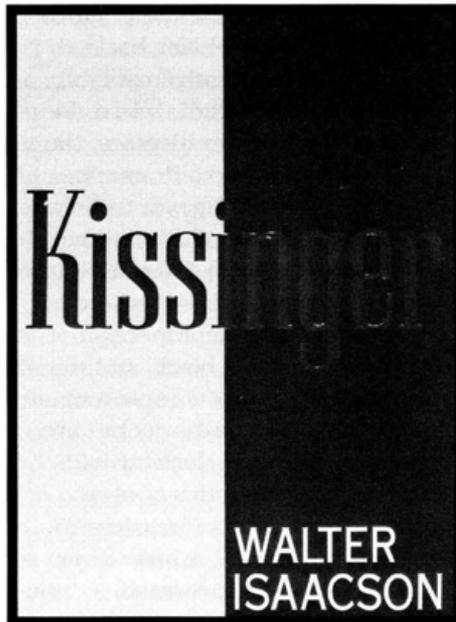
Simon & Schuster, 1992, 893 p. \$30.

BY JAMES McCARTNEY

**W**ALTER ISAACSON DESCRIBES them as "The Odd Couple," a mentally disturbed, often drunken President in Richard Nixon, and an obsequious National Security Adviser in Henry Kissinger, who flattered him to his face and mercilessly ridiculed him behind his back.

In this richly detailed, well documented narrative, "Kissinger: A Biography," they often conspired in lies. On one occasion in 1970, in seeking to slow Vietnam troop withdrawals, they lied deliberately to both Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird about plans for a presidential speech, seeking to avoid argument. On the night Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia both Nixon and Kissinger declared publicly that Cambodian sovereignty had not been violated for five years, when in fact the United States had been secretly bombing Cambodia. That same night Kissinger lied to his own staff about American plans. When Kissinger was asked about his lies years later he said "we did not focus on that."

No one who reads the book may ever be able to read or listen to any of Kissinger's ruminations again without wondering what the truth may be. Isaacson tells how he lied to friends, to his colleagues, to his superiors and to



his allies. It may be that he lied a good deal to himself and may not be aware of it, though that seems doubtful.

The book, in fact, becomes a character study, which makes it the most fascinating and credible work so far on Kissinger, already one of the most controversial public figures of his time. The book will not end the controversy, but it may serve to destroy some of the sheen and glamour that have come to be associated with this remarkably complex man.

Isaacson, an assistant managing editor of Time magazine, has written a somewhat more balanced book than Seymour M. Hersh's 1983 volume, "The Price of Power," in part because of a broader scope. Hersh concentrated solely on Kissinger's years in the White House, and did not seek to search out clues to Kissinger's behavior from his origins in Nazi Germany. And it is cer-

tainly more balanced than the paean of praise produced by the uncritical team of Marvin and Bernard Kalb in 1974.

Kissinger's talent for deceit emerges as the heart of a devastating personal portrait, a portrait that, curiously, however, does not seem to bother Isaacson in evaluating Kissinger's overall performance as a public servant and his place in history. In a final chapter entitled "Legacy" Isaacson tends to give Kissinger relatively high marks. He credits him with building a "structure of peace" in creating a triangular power relationship between the United States, the former Soviet Union and China and by developing what came to be called "détente" with the Soviets. Isaacson also goes so far as to credit Kissinger with starting the Middle East on a road to peace.

"The structure of peace that Kissinger designed places him with Henry Stimson, George Marshall and Dean Acheson atop the pantheon of modern American statesmen," Isaacson writes. "In addition, he was the foremost American negotiator of this century and, along with George Kennan, the most influential foreign policy intellectual."

But there is an intrinsic contradiction in the book. It is difficult to put Isaacson's sweeping and generally favorable conclusions together with the well documented year-by-year, and often day-by-day, story that he tells. His story does not fit with his conclusions.

Isaacson, for example, persists in describing Kissinger as a "genius," particularly as a strategic and conceptual genius. He credits him with grand visions far more perceptive and meaningful than those of any of his contemporaries.

ies. But the facts as related by Isaacson in detailing Kissinger's management of the great foreign policy challenges of his time in power do not lead inevitably to proof of genius. In fact, particularly in looking back now, it seems quite clear that Kissinger was more often wrong than right on great foreign policy questions, that he operated from many false premises and that he may often have done more harm than good.

The crucial parts of the book of course involve Kissinger's service from 1969 through 1976, first as White House National Security Adviser for Nixon, then as Secretary of State for Nixon and Gerald Ford. eight years, unquestionably, as the dominant figure in managing foreign affairs.

Let's start with Vietnam. Isaacson goes right to the heart of what Kissinger did and why he did it. And it is not a pretty story. Kissinger knew even before he came to power that the Vietnam war was lost and Nixon apparently understood it, too. Their policy was based entirely on the concept that America, as a great power, must save face, that American "credibility" must be preserved or the nation's world-wide role in combating communism would be weakened. "Credibility," in fact, was at the heart of Kissinger's thinking on this and every other foreign policy issue.

But the policy of preserving "credibility" in a war they knew was lost led inevitably to a continuance of the war for four more years and the deaths of more than 20,000 additional Americans, and God knows how many injured. Of course it finally ended in a shameful debacle in 1975 with American helicopters carrying American diplomats from the roof of the embassy in Saigon, with desperate South Vietnamese clinging to the landing gears.

In Isaacson's narrative the real hero of Vietnam in the Nixon administration was not Kissinger, at all, but Melvin Laird, the Secretary of Defense, with whom Kissinger constantly feuded, as he consistently did with anyone who might be perceived as his intellectual rival. Knowing that the American people understood that the war was lost, Nixon was forced in 1969 to begin withdrawing troops from Vietnam, a program

that never had Kissinger's enthusiastic support, and which he repeatedly resisted. It was Laird who engineered the withdrawals, sometimes leaking plans to the press in advance so that Kissinger and Nixon would be stuck with them.

Even at the very end, Isaacson reports, when Ford had become president and North Vietnam was closing in on Saigon, Kissinger, the reputed conceptual "genius," wanted to re-engage militarily in Vietnam, despite a vote in Congress to stop all aid. He hadn't learned a thing. The evidence is that the great conceptualist never understood the Vietnam war as the nationalist revolution that it was, and as far as can be discerned, doesn't understand it yet. He had helped to plan the senseless invasion of Cambodia, helped to engineer the disgraceful Christmas bombing of 1972 and announced publicly a week before the 1972 election that "peace is at hand," when there was no peace, and he knew it.

### **Earlier End of War Termed Possible**

The greatest tragedy of Kissinger's handling of Vietnam, however, which Isaacson describes with considerable skill, is that the war in all probability could have been ended in 1969 on substantially the same terms as those contained in the Kissinger-negotiated peace agreements of 1973. "A point-by-point comparison of Hanoi's '10-point' program of 1969 with the 1973 agreements shows that they are largely identical, even in wording," Isaacson points out. The only exception was Hanoi's dropping of a demand that the Nguyen Van Thieu government in Saigon be replaced by a communist-approved coalition before there could be a cease-fire.

Isaacson raises the right question. "Was it worth four more years of war to get a cease-fire that allowed Thieu to retain authority in Saigon?" He points out that the deal was costly indeed—"an additional 20,522 American dead, the near unraveling of America's social fabric, a breakdown in respect for government authority, the poisoning of America's reputation abroad and the spread of the war to Cambodia and

Laos." The continued effort, Isaacson says dryly, "was not justified." Isaacson concedes: "From the standpoint of American foreign policy, the war did more to deflect the nation from its important interests than it did to preserve its 'credibility.'"

Then there is the Kissinger record in the vital relationship with the Soviet Union, in seeking to establish what came to be known as "detente" and in seeking arms control agreements. The vortex of the effort to improve relations with the Soviet Union and bring some element of stability to the conflict with the communists was in arms control, and Kissinger took on the job. Regrettably, he failed. His efforts led to the SALT I agreement of 1972, heralded as a major breakthrough at the time, and to two more summit meetings with the Soviets, one in Washington in 1973 and a second in Moscow in 1974. Once again the record does not look impressive in hindsight. The statistics on the bottom line don't read well. Instead of lessening the number of nuclear warheads on the two sides, Kissinger presided over agreements that permitted them to radically increase, not by hundreds but by thousands.

The problem in working up an admiration for Kissinger's achievements is reasonably well documented by Isaacson, but even more impressively documented in Seymour Hersh's "The Price of Power." At the heart of the problem was a calculated decision by Kissinger soon after coming to power to proceed with development and deployment of that strangely named technological marvel, the "MIRV." This is a difficult subject, but it is a demonstrable fact: that Kissinger destroyed his own ability to achieve meaningful arms control with a virtually secret decision in 1969 to go ahead with the MIRV.

MIRV is an acronym for Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle. It is a way of placing several nuclear bombs on a single ballistic missile, each programmed to hit a different target. The technology to do this was just coming on stream when Nixon and Kissinger came to power. It suggested the dramatic possibility that the destructive

power of every existing or planned missile could be multiplied by simply adding more warheads.

The Soviets wanted to ban the MIRV. So did many of the best minds in the American scientific community. All saw the threat that the numbers of nuclear warheads could multiply, thus drastically increasing the threat of destroying civilization itself. Despite passionate advice from a scientific panel he himself had appointed, Kissinger went ahead. "Refusal to ban MIRVs was the key decision in the entire history of SALT," according to William Hyland, a longtime Kissinger aide. "It was a truly fateful decision that changed strategic relations and changed them to the detriment of U.S. security."

It took that arch conservative, Ronald Reagan, to point out that Kissinger's arms control agreements were phony and had in fact permitted increases in the numbers of warheads. Again, the conceptions of the great conceptualist appear to be of questionable value.

### **Role on Collapse Of Soviet Doubtful**

Isaacson's insistence that Kissinger built a great "structure of peace" is also questionable. By the time Kissinger left the scene in 1976 his "détente" policy was in shambles. In the 1976 election campaign President Ford went so far as to drop the word "détente" from his political vocabulary, much to Kissinger's consternation. Kissinger certainly deserves credit for opening the door to talks with the Soviets and to pursuing negotiations relentlessly. God know, he tried, within the framework of his premises. But it is at least debatable whether his accomplishments ultimately played a crucial role in the collapse of communism more than a decade later, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Most American scholars today—along with Mikhail Gorbachev, incidentally—scribe the collapse of communism to its own inherent weaknesses, its inability to develop competitive economic institutions. Kissinger, in fact, seems to have overestimated the capabilities of the communist system. He saw only the

raw power. He did not see the inherent weaknesses. There is little in Kissinger's writings to suggest that he understood that the communist system would eventually collapse of its own weight, as Kennan, for example, understood from the very beginning of the Cold War.

Kissinger is often credited—and Isaacson gives him substantial credit—for the opening to China in 1972. But even Isaacson concedes that Nixon should share at least equal billing. Nixon was discussing the possibility in his writings before he became president. Kissinger certainly was a brilliant executor of the revolutionary policy.

Isaacson also devotes much attention to Kissinger's diplomacy in the Middle East, particularly after the 1973 war, when he negotiated historic disengagement agreements, first on the Egyptian, then on the Syrian front. They were certainly unprecedented, but it is a long leap to say that Kissinger opened the door to Middle East peace in these efforts. It was Jimmy Carter who negotiated the far more significant Camp David agreements, and certainly if one is to credit any one single individual with breaking the ice in the Middle East that individual would have to be Anwar Sadat, not Henry Kissinger. It was Sadat who unilaterally ordered Soviet troops out of Egypt. It was Sadat who went to Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most glaring example of all of Kissinger's misguided strategic conceptions was the decision to provide more than \$20 billion in arms to the Shah of Iran on the theory that Iran would be a bulwark against Soviet expansion. The Shah, of course, was toppled and Iran became a U.S.-armed enemy. Isaacson concedes that the policy "turned out to be a disaster."

Isaacson's questionable assessment of Kissinger's place in history, however, is not the most important part of this fine book, the first effort at a full-scale biography of Kissinger. What makes it a fascinating book is his reporting and his successful effort at piecing together what actually happened in many of the high-profile crises of the Kissinger years. He has the advantage of the incredible Nixon tapes, where he can quote directly on the innermost workings of the

Nixon presidency, and from personal memoirs now of many of the participants. He has done his homework and he writes well.

Some of the wild stories of Kissinger's lying and double-crossing, his passion for secrecy, his self-promoting, his childish jealousies and his infantile tantrums when frustrated almost defy imagination. And he fully understands a major Kissinger weakness. "Kissinger never had an instinctive feel for American values and mores, such as the emphasis that a Stimson would place on honor over intrigue or on idealism over national interests," he writes.

But in the end Isaacson seems to buy Kissinger's own description of his accomplishments. He has bought the Kissinger myth, which Kissinger himself has devoted a lifetime to creating. He has described a brilliant tactician, an accomplished bureaucratic infighter and a shameless toady to those in power. He has not described a Henry Stimson, a Dean Acheson or a George Marshall. Isaacson doesn't quite seem to grasp that he has devoted prodigious time and brilliant research in writing this biography to a man whose genius is not strategic or conceptual, but self promotion.

### **His Fatal Flaw: Unable to Tell Truth**

At bottom, it is the sheer disingenuousness of Kissinger that seems to be his Achilles Heel. The dishonesty showed up in his policies as well as in his personality. He never seemed to be able to play anything quite straight. His longtime associate Helmut Sonnenfeldt once said: "Henry does not lie because it is in his interest. He lies because it is in his nature." Perhaps Nahum Goldmann, an American Jewish leader and longtime friend of the Kissinger family, said it best: "If he were 10 per cent less brilliant, and 10 per cent more honest, he would be a great man." ■

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*James McCartney, Nieman Fellow 1964, is a political and foreign affairs columnist for Knight-Ridder Newspapers in Washington and a lecturer at Georgetown University. As a Nieman he took Kissinger's defense policy seminar at Harvard.*

# Still Inscrutable: The Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi

## **Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China.**

Sterling Seagrave with the collaboration of Peggy Seagrave.

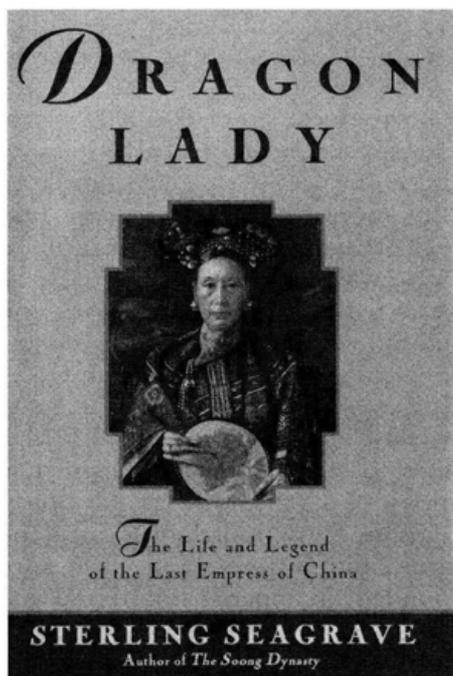
Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. 601 pp. \$30.

BY ROGER R. THOMPSON

**S**TERLING SEAGRAVE CLAIMS, in the opening pages of his new book, that readers "will be rewarded by a new understanding of why the Chinese empire collapsed." No one should turn to Seagrave's book for this purpose.

Nor should anyone believe his disingenuous claim that "an establishment of senior academicians" is unduly threatened by the revisionist studies of younger scholars like Luke Kwong and Sue Fawn Chung. Emboldened by their arguments, Seagrave decided to look again at the Western diplomatic and journalistic record of the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Combining these sources with the works of Edmund Backhouse and J. O. P. Bland, Seagrave became convinced of a Western academic conspiracy to hide the truth about the Empress Dowager and her times.

At issue in this tempest is the supposed importance of the work of Edmund Backhouse in "China Under the Empress Dowager" (1910) and "Annals and Memoirs of the Court in Peking" (1914) for understanding the history of the final decades of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Seagrave claims that Backhouse "is cited as the principal source for nearly all material written about the last years of imperial China," including Arthur Hummel's "Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period." Facts would surely inconvenience Mr. Seagrave, but Fang Chao-ying's biographical sketch of Tz'u-hsi (1835-1908) in this last-mentioned work does not even list Backhouse's works in its basic bibliography. In 1934 the eminent



scholar of Chinese history at Yale University, Kenneth Scott Latourette, wrote in the bibliography appended to his survey, "The Chinese, Their History and Culture," that Backhouse and Bland had taken "melodramatic liberties" with "improperly selected" Chinese texts.

The Bland and Backhouse edifice eventually collapsed when their most astounding document, a diary by one Ching-shan, an Assistant Secretary in the Imperial Household who reportedly compiled it during the Boxer uprising in 1900, was shown to be a forgery. Bland and Backhouse had devoted one chapter to a translation of this diary about court events in "China Under the Empress Dowager." Although many historians did use it with a surprising lack of skepticism in the first decades after

its publication, the inexorable digging of scholarly investigation slowly undermined the citadel. In 1927 George Steiger, in his landmark study of the Boxer uprising, "China and the Occident," wrote that he was "somewhat skeptical as to the historical value of the diary." By 1936 the British journalist William Lewisohn had concluded that the diary was a compilation made by more than one person years after the events in question. Although the China field was shocked, Lewisohn's arguments prevailed. The scholar who had published the first scholarly edition of the diary in 1924 finally admitted in 1937: "As an independent source for the history of the Boxer troubles the 'Diary' must in the future be disregarded. It retains value merely as a literary fiction, which, in masterly fashion, expresses the atmosphere of those days."

This judgment has not been reversed; Victor Purcell, in "The Boxer Uprising" (1963), devoted an appendix to these questions and declared, without qualification, that the document was not genuine. Understandably, Bland and Backhouse are seldom glimpsed in the works of contemporary scholars. Joseph Esherick, in his award-winning "The Origins of the Boxer Uprising" (1987) did not even include "China Under the Empress Dowager" in his bibliography, nor can we find this book listed in the bibliographies to the two volumes of "The Cambridge History of China" that deal with the late Qing. It is astounding that Seagrave should claim that Backhouse is the "principal source" for the late Qing. The statement may have still have been true in the 1930's;

it is demonstrably false in 1992. Should the reader wish to see how the history of the late Qing has been written in the post-Backhouse age, which began over half a century ago, see works by Meribeth Cameron, Mary Wright, K. C. Liu, Jonathan Spence, Lloyd Eastman, John Schrecker, Paul Cohen, Mary Rankin, William Rowe, Pamela Crossley, to name a few, and the authors and works cited above.

But why did Seagrave choose to flog this long-dead horse and unfairly impugn the scholarship of several generations of Western historians of China? Because he needed Backhouse's pornographic fantasies about Tz'u-hsi to embellish yet again the legend of the last empress of China. Before the reader has passed page 20 he or she has been told that Backhouse was a fraud and, in the same breath, is assaulted with a verbatim passage from Backhouse's fraudulent and unpublished memoirs written in the final months of his life (1873-1944).

### 'Obsessively Obscene' But Still Used

These memoirs are, in the words of Hugh Trevor-Roper, who in "The Hermit of Peking" opened the Backhousian frontier now traipsed by Seagrave, "grossly, grotesquely, obsessively obscene." Thanks to Seagrave, unfortunately, we now know how correct Trevor-Roper was. One can only wonder why Seagrave thought it necessary to expose his readers to the obscenities to be found in Backhouse's memoir of his imaginary love affair with Tz'u-hsi.

Nothing in "Dragon Lady" suggests that Seagrave found any reason to question Trevor-Roper's judgment that a more accurate title for this work is "The Imaginary Sexual Life of E. T. Backhouse in the Court of Tz'u-hsi." Presumably Seagrave was convinced he needed the hook and even at the end of the book he dips into these vivid manuscript pages once again as he describes the scene at Tz'u-hsi's desecrated grave. Seagrave chides a long-dead generation of scholars for being duped by Backhouse only to add another Big Lie—he calls it a legend—to a century of disinformation.

Had Seagrave really written a new biography of Tz'u-hsi, the damage would have been less, but the biographical aspects of this book are recycled Western materials. Seagrave never intended to write a traditional biography; he calls "Dragon Lady" an anti-biography and Tz'u-hsi a symbol of a lost era.

### Fine Discussion Of 1894-1900 Period

"Dragon Lady" does have some merit, for Seagrave has made a contribution to the study of Sino-Western relations, especially the way in which China is represented in the West. This is especially true for the years 1894-1900, which Seagrave uses almost half of his book to cover. The distortions emanating from China were enormous. Westerners saw little of Chinese society, and that which they saw was often reported in terms of projected images. Moreover, it was not difficult to embellish Western reputations at the expense of the Chinese.

Take, for example, the famous story of the Siege of the Legations. In the midst of a rural insurrection in the spring of 1900 known as the Boxer uprising, Western diplomats, missionaries, and businessmen were surrounded by Imperial troops and entrapped in the legations. In July 1900 an enormous untruth was telegraphed to the West and believed: all the foreigners in Beijing had been massacred. Since the besieged foreigners could communicate only through the efforts of brave messengers, there was no way this report could be confirmed. Many feared the worst, but the news was false; no one had been massacred but rescue efforts continued and five weeks later an allied force of 20,000 troops relieved the siege. This time the Forbidden City itself was occupied while the Qing imperial court, the Guangxu emperor, and the famous and feared Empress Dowager, fled westward toward Xi'an.

The Times of London reporter, Dr. George Ernest Morrison, was, in Seagrave's retelling of the Siege of the Legations in 1900, a perfect example of culpability. Through his study of Morrison's diary, Seagrave shows that Morrison's published account of the

siege was a combustible mixture of truth and untruth that Morrison was well aware of. The siege was not the event imagined by the West in the summer of 1900 nor was it the event described in countless memoirs published in later years. Seagrave's research into these events, which included careful correlation of the chronology as represented in Western accounts, shows much more clearly what was happening and not happening.

### Again, Only West's Side Is Presented

Unfortunately, we still get little sense of the Chinese version of the drama. Seagrave insists that this is the only way this particular history can be written, for he has mistakenly convinced himself that most of the Chinese documents were destroyed. We are being given, yet again, just the Western side of the story. Seagrave chose to ignore two relevant compilations of Qing government documents, one published in 1959 and one in 1990, which have added over 3,000 pages to the record. A better sense of the narrowness of Seagrave's documentation comes from a 95-page bibliography published in 1957 of Chinese, Japanese and Western accounts of the Boxer uprising. The listing of Western language material, which is at the center of "Dragon Lady," comprises only 25 pages.

In the end Seagrave's study is worthwhile for readers interested in the Western experience in China. By assiduous use of the published and unpublished Western record, he has documented how Western images of China often tell us more about the observer than the subject. ■

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# The Foreign Correspondent Who Went From Here to Obscurity

## The Reporter Who Would Be King A Biography of Richard Harding Davis

Arthur Lubow

438 pgs. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992  
\$25.

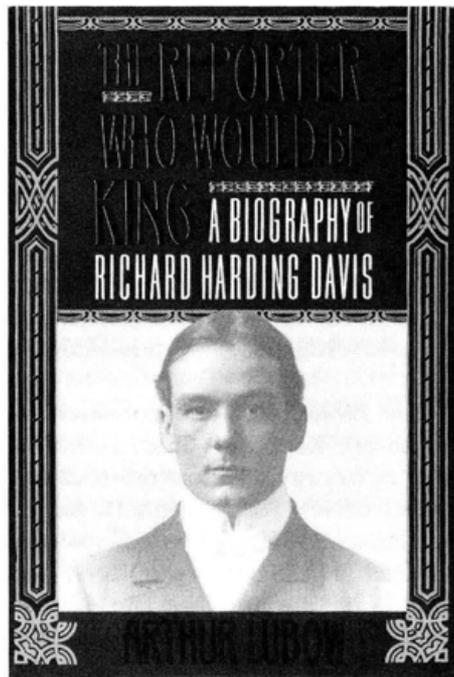
BY MARCUS BRAUCHLI

FOR JOURNALISTS WHO hold any illusions about their historical longevity, the story of Richard Harding Davis is sobering.

A dandy, a gentleman, a journalist and leading writer of his time, friend to presidents and royalty, witness to wars and coronations, Richard Harding Davis was all, and more, than any journalist could aspire to. And yet today he is largely forgotten, a fading glimmer at the dawn of the American Century.

He was born to journalism, just at the end of the Civil War that ensconced the trade in modern America. His mother, Rebecca Harding, wrote for the *Atlantic* under a pseudonym. His father, L. Clarke Davis, was a lawyer turned Philadelphia newspaper publisher. Richard Harding Davis had a taste for fame from the start; his grandest moment, he often said, was scoring the first touchdown for Lehigh University's fledgling football team.

From his earliest reporting assignments, Davis's bravado and determination ensured the fame he craved. Covering the great Johnstown flood in 1889, Davis earned a lasting reputation for fastidiousness when he asked other reporters in the ravaged town where he might buy a fresh white shirt. In his early 20's, he moved to New York. There, he made a name for himself with his first-person reporting—once impersonating a thief to infiltrate a gang of street hoodlums—and with lively short stories of life in the city. He befriended many of the city's socially powerful—or perhaps by this time they befriended



him—who later provided him with introductions to their counterparts across the Atlantic. At the age of 28, he was named editor of *Harper's Weekly*, capping his brilliant early career.

But maintaining that success wasn't easy. He feuded constantly with the magazine's owners. He so resented what he considered the slipshod work of the magazine that in one piece he wrote he deliberately misspelled Rio de Janeiro to see if anyone would catch it. Nobody did.

Davis found greater happiness writing for the Harper brothers' major rival, Scribner's. When he finally left Harper's, he traveled to Europe with contracts from various publications and discovered a new life as a globe-traveling correspondent and author. His work appeared in newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst and James Gordon Bennett Jr., sometimes with his name and picture splashed as big as his stories across their infamous front pages. Davis covered, fairly, it seems, the marriage of Czar Nicholas, Teddy Roosevelt's

rather unglamorous charge up a mound adjacent to San Juan Hill in Cuba (the facts of this episode, like many others Davis witnessed, have been skewed somewhat by the pressures of popular history), the Boer War in Southern Africa and even the Russo-Japanese war. But unlike some of his rivals of the time, notably Stephen Crane, Davis has largely disappeared from historical memory.

In this book, Arthur Lubow, who has written for magazines, ascribes the failure of Davis's reputation to much outlast his death in 1917 to the romantic, idealized tenor of Davis's journalism and story-telling. While Crane and some other contemporaries were exploring the hard, clean realism that marked American literature in the first half of the century, Davis was perpetually embellishing his tales and relying on the romance of an idea to carry his writing. As his style of journalism faded, Davis turned increasingly to playwriting and quick novels to make a living and support the Mount Kisco estate he had acquired.

Lubow does an earnest job of depicting Davis. Unfortunately, instead of learning from Davis's literary failures, Lubow to some extent copies them. In "The Reporter Who Would Be King," Arthur Lubow tries to resurrect the full, colorful sweep of Richard Harding Davis's remarkable life. He tries, but ultimately it is the life Davis led that carries this book, not Lubow. The writing is heavy, flat and over-dependent on the presumed romance of Davis's life.

Still, that shouldn't dissuade journalism aficionados. Davis was a major figure in American journalism for nearly three decades, and his experiences capture brilliantly the styles and visions of newspapers of the time. This book is a hard, but sometimes fascinating, slog.

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*Marcus Brauchli, Nieman Fellow 1992, is a Hong Kong-based correspondent for The Wall Street Journal.*

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# Journalists as the New Biographers

## Telling the Untold Story: How Investigative Reporters Are Changing the Craft of Biography

Steve Weinberg.

University of Missouri Press. 253 pages  
\$29.95.

BY MARY PEROT NICHOLS

IT IS EVERY BIOGRAPHER'S nightmare that he or she will spend seven to 10 years researching and writing a life and along comes a rival biographer a few years later whose work is immediately acclaimed as the best. This is one of the few hazards for biographers that journalism professor Steve Weinberg does not tell us about in his new book.

Professor Weinberg's own biographical work "Armand Hammer: The Untold Story," has stood the test of time. According to Publishers Weekly, Professor Weinberg's 1989 biography "remains the standard."

Now comes this experienced and successful biographer's new work with these announced ambitious goals: to "give biographers new ideas for telling lives more powerfully, give reviewers an increased understanding they can bring to writing about biographies, give publishers the motivation to commission more quality biographies of living subjects, and give readers a consumer's guide for better evaluating the lives they have chosen to examine."

Professor Weinberg came up with an important subject for a book. I know of no other that fulfills his goals. An Associate Professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, he narrows the aim of his book in the following way: he says he intends to hone in "on quality biography as practiced by inves-

tigative journalists" in the hope that "this book will add to the knowledge about the craft."

This is a subject in which Professor Weinberg has a special interest because has been Executive Director of the organization of investigative journalists called Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE).

The biographers he considers at length are Robert A. Caro, author of "The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York"; Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, two Philadelphia Inquirer investigative reporters, and authors of "Empire: The Life, Legend and Madness of Howard Hughes", and Weinberg himself.

## Academic Writers And Journalists

In his first chapter, Weinberg quotes Nicholas Lemann's review in The New York Times Book Review, which contrasts Caro's Lyndon Johnson biographies with that of Robert A. Dallek, an academic historian. Lemann, as quoted by Weinberg, wrote that "there is a substantial difference in feel between Mr. Dallek's Johnson and Mr. Caro's, but it springs from the way in which the two authors handle their material, not from a great disparity in the basic information they have at their disposal." Weinberg says Lemann wrote that he is looking forward to contrasting the next volumes of each writer's Johnson, but that Lemann has predicted that Caro "will surely make the fascinating cast memorable in a way that is beyond Mr. Dallek's literary capabilities."

With all that having been said, I was looking forward to an analysis of what investigative journalists can bring to the biographical table as opposed to academic biographers. But that was not to

be. Professor Dallek was quickly dropped after Weinberg has him demolished by Lemann.

A recurring theme in Weinberg's "Untold Story" is snide assertions about academics. For example, in discussing one of the three categories of books about biography, he writes that "the third category is the academic study; these rarely include even a paragraph about contemporary biography. Such books usually have limited distribution through university presses, and thus can be difficult to find in bookstores or in public libraries." Weinberg seems to imply that the limited distribution of such books is a measure of their worth.

It would have been interesting if Weinberg, instead of dropping the hapless Professor Dallek and his work, had contrasted Dallek's sources with Caro's and shown the reader, through his own analysis, why one biographer's research produced better results than the other. After Weinberg takes up Caro's work in his second chapter called "Up From the Newsroom," he publishes a full 32 pages of Caro's own notes on his sources for his three biographies (one of Moses and two of Johnson). It would have been fascinating to read Dallek's notes on his sources and read Weinberg's analysis about how the two writers from different disciplines work.

Is Caro simply a better writer than Dallek or is his method of research, his thoroughness and his innovative ways of finding out the truth what makes his Johnson volumes superior to Dallek's? Or both? It's too bad Weinberg missed this opportunity.

Nevertheless, Weinberg has opened up an important discussion about the new kind of biographer who came upon the scene in the mid-Seventies. Before that, says Professor Weinberg, "most biographers considered to be at the

apex of the craft were academics—specialist university professors, think-tank residents, or unaffiliated scholars with advanced degrees, often doctorates.”

Weinberg asserts that Caro's biography of Robert Moses “deeply influenced the modern-day craft of biography,” but doesn't, except for mentioning his own inspiration by Caro, demonstrate that Caro inspired others. Was it Caro or Watergate and Woodward and Bernstein that inspired a flock of investigative biographies that were to come?

What made Caro's work so different from biographies of the past? According to Weinberg, who is describing here Caro's biography of Moses, “the nearly 1,300 page book was much longer than the average biography; artfully written, sometimes using techniques from the realm of fiction, while still adhering to the chronology of Moses's life as he lived it; daring in its analysis of Moses's motives; unusual in its portrayal of Moses's times, as well as his life; heavily dependent on previously secret documents; quintessential muckraking; and done by an investigative journalist, not a historian or urban planning professor.”

Weinberg continues to search for the roots of the Caro phenomenon. The easiest way would have been to ask Caro himself whether any previous biographers inspired him. But Weinberg chose to reach back to 1918 and another precedent-breaking biographer, Lytton Strachey, to find Caro's “spiritual” ancestor.

Strachey published “Eminent Victorians,” in 1918 and in quoting the preface to this work. Professor Weinberg says it “influenced writers and critics of biography who might not have bothered to read the entire book.”

### **Strachey Break With Strict Narrative**

Strachey, as quoted by Weinberg, wrote: “It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narrative that the explorer of the past can hope to depict [the Victorian Age]. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he

will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undeveloped. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity.”

What makes Strachey's work “the direct spiritual” ancestor of Caro's work, according to Weinberg, is Strachey's understanding that it is the duty of a biographer, and again he is quoting Strachey's preface, not “to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them. That is what I have aimed at in this book—to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions.”

Weinberg makes it clear that Strachey back in 1918 represented a break with the biography as hagiography and that “Strachey was saying that a biography belongs to the author, not to the subject.”

### **Shattering Beliefs On Revered Subjects**

“So,” Weinberg writes, “Strachey determinedly shattered the conventional wisdom about his four revered subjects—showing the frequent chasm between professed belief and actual behavior—as Caro did later when writing about Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson. In the five decades between Strachey's best work and Caro's debut, a few biographies and theorists could be said to have influenced the practice of the craft—but none in quite the combination of ways that Caro did,” writes Weinberg.

I would still like to know whether Caro read Strachey's preface.

When Robert Caro burst upon the scene in 1975 with his biography of Moses, it was his delineation of Moses's character that was new. As Weinberg notes, “‘The Power Broker’ helped many journalists understand the vital and too often unreported connections between individual character and public policy.”

### **An Indiscriminate List Of Biographers**

Two other books appearing about the same time, David Halberstam's “The Best and the Brightest,” and Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's “The Final Days,” according to Weinberg, “reinforced those connections.” Here Professor Weinberg misses an opportunity to point out what made Caro's achievement superior to these three authors.

Weinberg thinks that another writing team, Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele whose Howard Hughes biography was published in 1979, is “possibly the most important post-Robert Moses biography in the Caro tradition.” This may be true, but he gets himself into deep water as he gives an indiscriminate list of biographers that this new tradition has hatched. Leading the list is Kitty Kelley (biographer of Frank Sinatra and Nancy Reagan), and on it are the likes of Lou Cannon (Ronald Reagan), Seymour Hersh (Henry Kissinger), and Peter Collier and David Horowitz (the Kennedys, Rockefellers, and Fords). Weinberg describes these biographers as “novices—especially those working as journalists” who “took heart and launched long-form biographies of their own.”

If I were Caro or Barlett or Steele and thought I had hatched Kitty Kelley, I'd go out and shoot myself. True, Kitty Kelley is criticized by Weinberg later on, but why does she even need to be mentioned in a list of serious biographers? Just to be sure that Kitty Kelley remains on our minds, Weinberg later on in his book prints a put-down of her by Washington Post writer Gerri Hirshey, and in the last chapter, among the 10 hazards for biographers, he lists the problem of the biographer's becoming the story. What is Kitty Kelley doing in a book that purports to be about “quality biography?”

In the beginning of “The Untold Story,” Weinberg tells us it is not going to be a how-to book, but he soon launches an 11-point list of how-to's starting with how a life “should be told chronologically.”

After plodding through this list we get to the chapter on Robert Caro. Weinberg quite rightly calls Caro's "The Power Broker" "one of the best-reported, best-written nonfiction books ever." But when he writes of the criticism of the book by The New York Times critic Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, he ought to let the reader know that the leit-motif of Caro's monumental work was how The New York Times shilled for Moses, covered up for him and propped him up even as scandalous acts were revealed by other newspapers. The Times patronage of Robert Moses is distilled in one courageous phrase where Caro writes that The Times "repeated without qualification the following lie...."

If he is to quote a Times critic on the Moses book, Professor Weinberg needs to give us that perspective.

In having the courage to take on the most powerful newspaper in the world, Robert Caro is *sui generis*.

## Secondary Sources Raised, Discounted

Weinberg is critical of Caro for using secondary sources too much on his controversial second volume on Lyndon Johnson, but, as far as I can see, he never asked Caro why he did that. Caro's response would have been illuminating. But, after having brought it up, Weinberg suddenly says, "But the use of secondary sources never shakes confidence in Caro's overall picture." Why then did Weinberg bring it up?

Weinberg does do an excellent job of showing how Caro pursued the truth about Johnson; how he went behind the myths Johnson had generated about himself even to the point of finding out that Johnson himself had supervised "a razorblade brigade" to take items out of his college year book that were unflattering to himself.

Weinberg is less convincing when he defends Caro from critics such as New Republic writer Sidney Blumenthal who criticized Caro's characterization of a Texas politician named Coke Stevenson. Caro had gone against the accepted portrait of Stevenson, a Johnson political rival, as a crook and a politician who

stole elections. Caro made Coke Stevenson the hero in the 1948 Senate campaign against Johnson. Weinberg is not convincing because he defends Caro with the assertion that "I found Blumenthal's sources no better than—and in most cases inferior to—Caro's."

Which sources? What independent investigation did Weinberg undertake to find Blumenthal's sources inferior? Why were they inferior? The reader needs to know.

## Notes on Sources Fascinating Reading

The 32 pages of Caro's notes on his sources makes for terrific reading for an inveterate footnote freak like me. I am glad to have a chance to read them again. But I am beginning to wonder if "The Untold Story" is an anthology, rather than a study of a new kind of biography.

That thought is reinforced as I go on further and find 87 pages of Barlett and Steele's biographical portrait of one Frederick P. Beierle, whom they call "the supersalesman of low-level nuclear waste," which appeared in a book called "Forevermore: Nuclear Waste in America." The book was not a full length biography as was Caro's and for the life of me I can't figure out why it was included here. Already, Weinberg is comparing apples and oranges, the full-length investigative biographies of Caro to a biographical fragment in another kind of book.

To add to the crazy salad of this book, Weinberg throws in a few grapes: two of what he calls "short-form biography" as opposed to the "long-form biography" of Caro. These are by the aforementioned Gerri Hirshey of The Washington Post which effectively skewers Kitty Kelley for 24 pages and by The New Yorker's Calvin Trillin for another 17 pages of excellent prose about The Miami Herald crime reporter Edna Buchanan.

Those who may have already read "The Untold Story" may wonder why I have skipped over Professor Weinberg's chapter about his own book. The reason is that I recoiled at his immodesty in including himself with Caro and Barlett

and Steele. However, having forced myself to read it with this prejudice intact, I found it to be the second most useful chapter in the book.

It was useful because Professor Weinberg told in his own words how he put together the Hammer biography. I was particularly interested in his account of how he promised sources that they could review the portions of his manuscript in which they were quoted. I would never, up until now, have done that. But the results he says he got made it worth it.

"Most journalists," Weinberg writes, "shy away from such a procedure, for reasons I fail to understand. I never lost control: if I did not want to make a change because I knew I was correct, I retained my own phrasing. Because I have confidence in my carefulness, I expect few demands for revisions or deletions. I sent manuscript pages to about 300 sources. About half responded. Of those 150 or so, only three pointed out inaccuracies. I fixed those inaccuracies. Another 10 asked for changes to save face: in the majority of instances, I said no. But—and here is the advantage to my practice—fully 50 of those responding provided additional useful information when their memories were jogged by the manuscript trail."

## Showing Galleys Could Help

I knew as I read it that Professor Weinberg was right, having been interviewed recently by a writer who was doing a memoir about Greenwich Village in the Fifties. When I got the galleys and it was too late, I knew that if I had seen what he was writing about earlier, I would have come up with a lot more useful reminiscences for him.

I wish Professor Weinberg had given us even more of his own experience about what worked for him as a biographer instead of ending this chapter with a six-page article about his biography, "The Los Angeles Times." In spite of that this is a valuable chapter for fellow biographers.

Weinberg's last chapter, "The Promise and Peril of Investigative Biography," is the most interesting of all. But.

it certainly runs contrary to one of Weinberg's goals stated at the outset: his desire to "give publishers the motivation to commission more quality biographies of living subjects." If I were a publisher, after reading this chapter, I'd be scared to death to put money on such a biography.

"Those of us who write about the living or the recently deceased, especially the influential, famous or wealthy, increasingly do so at our peril," Weinberg writes in the introduction to that last chapter. He then recounts his own experience—the threat of a law suit by Armand Hammer in Britain where libel laws are stricter, and various other "unpleasant tactics" which Weinberg says were halted only by Hammer's death in December 1990.

Weinberg tells of the travails of Ian Hamilton, the British biographer of J. D. Salinger, who was prevented by Salinger from using his unpublished letters. A Federal Appeals Court decision for Salinger had a chilling effect on Weinberg's publisher, Little Brown, and Company, when Weinberg was writing his book on Hammer. Weinberg writes, "I had to paraphrase Hammer's words, rather than share his own language with readers."

Unpleasant, time-consuming and expensive law suits are not all that the would-be biographer has to worry about, according to Professor Weinberg. There are nine more (Weinberg likes lists) which include a bullet through the window of Albert Goldman, biographer of Elvis Presley and John Lennon, and federal government footdragging on Freedom of Information decisions.

Since he was so ready to mention Kitty Kelley, Professor Weinberg might well have included another hazard contemporary unauthorized biographers now face: being suspected by their subjects of wanting to do a "Kitty Kelley" on them.

There is a lot of useful information in "The Untold Story" for the would-be biographer. But had Professor Weinberg billed his book as an anthology (more than half of the pages out of a slim volume of 223 pages are not his own)

he would have been more accurate. Instead, he wanders about till the reader is not sure what kind of book it is.

The book Professor Weinberg thought he was writing, and which was a very good idea, still needs to be written. ■

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*Mary Perot Nichols started her journalism career at The Village Voice when Robert Moses was attempting to drive a four-lane depressed highway through Washington Square Park. As an investigative columnist and city editor of The Voice, she covered Mr. Moses through the end of his career. She has been Director of Communication for the Mayor of Boston, Kevin White; an investigative columnist for The Boston Herald American; and President of WNYC. She is currently teaching a course at NYU on the Kennedy assassination and working on an unauthorized biography of Gloria Steinem.*

### Correction

A replay of the videotape of the Critics & Criticism conference shows that Sylvie Drake, The Los Angeles Times theatre critic, referred to the "eurocentric," not the "egocentric" tradition of theater, as printed in the Nieman Reports fall edition. The replay also shows that Drake attributed the "No Golden Rule" of the theater to Louis Jouvet, the great French actor/manager and director, and not to the unidentified Louis Revere, as published in the transcript. Nieman Reports regrets the errors.

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## About Journalism

**Expanding Free Expression in the Marketplace:** Broadcasting and the Public Forum, by Dom Caristi, Greenwood Press, 192 pages, \$45.

**Horace Greeley:** A Bio-Bibliography, by Suzanne Schulze, Greenwood Press, 240 pages, \$45.

**Reflections on Vietnam,** by editor Jethro K. Lieberman, Dialogue Press, 56 pages.

**Gold-Plated Politics:** Running for Congress in the 1990s, by Sara Fritz and Dwight Morris, Congressional Quarterly Inc., 203 pages, \$19.95.

**Press Gallery:** Congress and the Washington Correspondents, by Donald A. Ritchie, Harvard University Press, 296 pages, \$14.95.

**The Reporter and the Law:** Techniques of Covering the Courts, by Lyle W. Denniston, Columbia University Press, 292 pages, \$14.95.

**In My Place,** by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Farrar Straus Giroux, 260 pages, \$19.00.

**The Heart is an Instrument:** Portraits in Journalism, by Madeleine Blais, The University of Massachusetts Press, 346 pages. \$24.95.

**Corporate Magazines of the United States,** edited by Sam G. Riley, Greenwood Press, 277 pages. \$75

**Media and Apocalypse:** News Coverage of the Yellowstone Forest Fires, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, and Loma Prieta Earthquake, by Conrad Smith, Greenwood Press, 228 pages \$45.

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# Free Trade or a Free Ride for Foreigners?

## **Selling Our Security—The Erosion of America's Assets**

Martin and Susan J. Tolchin  
Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher;  
427 pages, \$25.

BY LEWIS C. CLAPP

**T**HIS IS A GOOD book about an important subject, but after the Democrats' stunning election victory, I wonder if it will also turn out to be an important book. The Tolchins have done an excellent job of pulling together a wealth of material which documents how the technological strength of the United States has been sapped and exploited by foreign companies and governments for decades. Clearly worried by the results of their research, the authors of SOS (the title's abbreviation) spin one tale after another to detail how a vital American company or even an entire national industry was lost to foreign interests.

"Gone is the last major U.S. producer of robots, sold to overseas investors. Foreign investors have also purchased the last major U.S. producer of silicon wafers, vital to the production of semiconductors, along with the crown jewel of American biotechnology companies. Lost is the nation's lead in semiconductors super computers, optoelectronics, and digital imaging, among dozens of other critical technologies."

In the face of governmental apathy, the results are poor even if a company attempts to save itself, as did Goodyear when Sir James Goldsmith sought to raid the tire maker and defense contractor. Goodyear was the last of the five major U.S. tire companies; the other four were acquired by Japanese, French, German and Italian competitors. Then Goodyear came under siege, with bastions of American capitalism such as the financial giant Merrill Lynch ironically on the side of the foreign raiders. When

the federal government refused to help, Goodyear launched a \$2.6 billion defense, which included the cost of repurchasing its stock at inflated prices, legal fees and green mail to Goldsmith. In the aftermath of the rescue, Goodyear was forced to "restructure"—a euphemism for firing 4,000 employees, closing three plants and assuming a debt of over \$4 billion. As the Tolchins point out, all this occurred without any debate about the importance of Goodyear's tire-making and aerospace activities to the national defense, or whether a U.S. position in world tire production was important to the country. In contrast, the authors show how the British Government rallied to support its national interests when Kuwait threatened to purchase control of British Petroleum in 1988.

### **A Detailed Tale Of Ineptness**

Nothing in SOS is covered lightly. As a prize-winning correspondent with the Washington bureau of The New York Times, Martin Tolchin is trained to cover a story in all its detail. His wife, Susan Tolchin, a professor in the School of Business and Public Administration at George Washington University, is trained to deal with business and government matters in depth. Depth and detail do not always make for easy reading as they weave their complicated and often repetitious stories. Nevertheless the results of their collaborative effort, told in 323 pages of text, 8 appendices, 378 footnotes, 16 pages of bibliography

and a very complete index, is a compendium of the ways government has moved ineptly to protect and promote American industry and technology.

One of their most detailed accounts deals with the negotiations between the United States and Japan to jointly produce the FSX, an advanced fighter plane. The deal by which Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and General Dynamics would produce the plane for the Japanese Self Defense forces had been quietly negotiated during the era of friendship between President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone. The American aims had been to prevent the Japanese from producing an advanced fighter plane on their own and to save R&D money. It was only as President Bush was assuming office that the agreement came under fire from those who feared that important American aircraft and computer technology were going to be handed over to the Japanese. Even so, the Bush administration felt that it was locked into the agreement and was prepared to go ahead with it, when criticism suddenly appeared from an unexpected direction. Clyde Prestowitz, who had been a key trade negotiator in the Reagan administration, wrote an op-ed article in The Washington Post, pointing out that under the proposed agreement Japan would gain \$7 billion in U.S. technology, while the U.S. would get little in return. Then other critics quickly appeared and the administration was forced to halt action on the agreement and then to renegotiate it in spite of bitter feelings in Japan. There were many sharply drawn fights in the

House and Senate and even the presidential veto of a crippling amendment before a new agreement was finally passed. Today, there are still many who believe that the U.S. has really made it easier for the Japanese to enter the commercial aircraft industry before the turn of the century. In terms of the global balance of trade, airplanes are the most successful American manufacturing enterprise and vital to the manufacturing job base of the future.

It is rather remarkable that the United States should have such trouble with its technology and industrial policy considering the national experience. It was a managed industrial capacity and superior technology that enabled the U.S. to mobilize quickly after Pearl Harbor and ultimately to win the war. Then, in the wake of the Sputnik shock, the U.S. learned that no nation has a lock on technology and President Kennedy announced a crash project to catch up in space and put a man on the moon within the decade. Finally, it was the U.S. military-industrial policy that enabled the United States and its allies to ward off the perceived threats from the Soviet Union and ultimately to win the Cold War. For nearly 50 years defense preparedness has been the industrial policy of the nation and if one ignores the debt burden that was generated, largely a policy that worked.

It is curious then that just as the Republican right gained control of the government it should not only fail to recognize the benefits of an industrial policy to the private sector, but should also reject any thought of one with such vehemence. Republican administrations have placed almost total blind faith in the invisible hand of free markets. One explanation might lie in the definition or at least in the perception of what constitutes free markets and fair trade. To the owners and executives of big business, the traditional power base of the Republican party, free markets meant one thing—non-interference. In many cases, they did not even notice the erosion of their domestic industrial base as the free markets worked. It was not until they had lost much of their markets that some of these same in-

dustrialists wanted government action, and then only if it could be directed at foreign competitors.

If we couldn't make progress in formulating a national industrial policy, why did we not at least follow the DOD model and improve the way research and development is sponsored? According to the Tolchins, ideology and the antipathy of politicians choosing among winners and losers again got in the way. Take the case of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. In the past DARPA has been successful in promoting the research needed to develop Stealth aircraft, advanced computers, and all manner of micro-electronics.

### **Trouble Develops Over HDTV**

But once the agency's success became apparent to the White House, trouble developed. In 1990 Dr. Craig I. Fields, was fired because of his efforts to promote high definition television and other commercially important U.S. technologies. Already Japanese researchers, backed by strong government support, are experimenting with public broadcasting of eight hours of photographic quality TV every day; America's FCC is still trying to figure out which of several competing High Definition Television it should select. The U.S. challengers hope that even though they started late, their digital approach will lead to a superior HDTV product.

If the government will not finance the commercialization of advanced research, can't we depend on our great universities, which operate the best graduate research programs in the world? The Tolchins demonstrate how foreign capital is influencing university research. The Japanese are by far the largest among foreign donors to American universities, contributing about half a billion dollars a year. While this is only a fraction of the cost (the U.S. government supports over 80 percent of all university research) it does enable the Japanese to maintain close working relationships. Meanwhile in Japan, where universities are generally not the important centers of research, closed government and corporate research

laboratories present a formidable barrier to the free exchange of ideas. As the Tolchins lament, one area where the United States enjoys a huge export surplus is in the exchange of technical ideas.

SOS is not merely a recitation of history. It is an attempt to prescribe remedies. After they reveal how each segment of the society, whether it be industry, the university, our capital markets, or our government institutions has contributed to the erosion of America's intellectual property, the authors offer suggestions for improvement. Given their extensive research, this could have been their most important contribution, but somehow it does not come off. While their suggestions are good, they are too abbreviated and argued with little passion. For example after discussing the importance of the Presidency in rejuvenating America's capacity for dealing with critical technologies, the Tolchins offer just a few weak suggestions: lead from the top, appoint a better (less political) science advisor, replace a Committee on Foreign Investment with a commission, and augment the government apparatus for shaping U.S.-Japan policy. This is hardly the strong medicine that is going to reverse decades of neglect.

Perhaps voters realized that bolder changes at the top were in order. The assumption of power by younger, more technically aware leaders can radically affect technology policy. But it remains to be seen how these new Democrats will organize national priorities and whether they can reverse the historical fact that "free trade" has often meant a "free ride" for our global competitors. If these new managers do seize the initiative then "Selling Our Security" will be an important documentary reminder of how easily America squandered its technological riches in the past and what must be done for the future. If these new leaders fail to heed the call for help, SOS will just be another forgotten warning. ■

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*Lewis C. Clapp is a consultant who specializes in Japanese computer technology. He is technology adviser to Nieman Reports.*

# RESPONSE

## Perot and Chicago Tribune

Jim Squires, in his article "How the Press Savaged Perot" [Nieman Reports, Fall, 1992], tells us he worked side-by-side with an Iranian EDS employee named Rashid who if only asked could have told reporters the true story of how he joined a pro-Khomeini mob and urged it to storm a prison and free two EDS employees.

The Iranian national has the only account Ross Perot accepts and it provides Perot's only link to the release of the men. It caused Perot to hold a news conference in which he described how his men scaled a prison wall and ran under a hail of gunfire.

Rashid's account is well known from Ken Follett's book over which Perot had control, and his version along with others was stated as part of our story.

Squires would have us ignore reports of journalists and U.S. State Department officials who tell of a revolutionary council order that resulted in mobs entering all prisons that day and guards and prisoners walking away together.

The Chicago Tribune story traced Perot's contract in Iran from its start. It was based on sworn and unrefuted testimony, and the comments of a senior State Department official were included. Because the facts could not be disputed, not again listening to Rashid's account is the only fault Squires could find.

We were told by EDS officials that participants in the "rescue" had agreed as a group not to talk to the press, and certainly I would have wanted to track down the Iranian Rashid if not to talk about Iran, to trade stories about how much fun it is to work for Squires, who used to be the editor here.

But that search reaches beyond questions of reality to the supernatural as Squires says he works with a man named Rashid while Follet states in his book that Rashid is a fictitious name created for his character.

William Gaines  
Reporter  
The Chicago Tribune

Jim Squires responds as follows:

*I did not challenge the accuracy of William Gaines's story in The Tribune. Nor did I champion the accuracy of Rashid's version of the rescue. My only point was that sworn and unrefuted accounts of Gaines's State Department sources are not materially different from the versions of Perot and Rashid on the main point—Iranian rebels, not Perot's rescue team, freed the hostages. And since when does an investigative reporter put so much stock in "senior" State Department officials' accounts of their own embarrassment?*

## Preventing Perception Gap

Aside from "Japan bashing" protesting the huge foreign trade imbalance, there is another perception gap concerning Japan's role in contributing to world peace. This latter conflict of views may appear less acrimonious on the surface but it nevertheless merits serious attention.

It is my contention that the mass media have so far failed to attain a proper level of awareness of the significance of the matter and hold out a well-balanced picture of the situation.

Commenting on "German assumption of normal U.N. responsibilities" in reply to the Bonn correspondent of

Time magazine, Defense Minister Volker Rühle said, "We hope to have blue-helmet missions by next year, but we have to sort that out in the Bundestag. Combat missions for the U. N. will come in the second half of the Nineties but that will have to be decided on the basis of individual cases."

The problem with Japan is basically the same as Germany's but combat missions are out of the question for Japan because of the country's "no-war" constitution. Furthermore, both Beijing and Seoul expressed apprehensions about Japan's participation in the peace-keeping operations (PKO). Even under United Nations control, they have some gut feelings against the stationing of Japanese soldiers on Asian soil.

In Japan, there is internal opposition to the proposed PKO participation, which also was at issue in the upper-house elections in July. At least one influential daily with a nationwide circulation is inclined toward opposition. The opponents say that the PKO participation is unconstitutional because Japan's Self-Defense Force would overstep the bounds of strict self-defense by going out of Japan. It should also be noted, however, that the Japanese, largely content with the status quo, do not want to forfeit their modest well-being by permitting what they perceive to be the first step toward militarism resurgent.

This may sound a bit too hypothetical but I am convinced that Japanese attitudes, whether in favor of or against PKO participation, would be much different if the sense of acute human sufferings in Somalia, Bosnia or even Cambodia could be struck home by the mass media.

Major Japanese newspapers offer a pretty extensive coverage of foreign news but they have not overcome the traditional Japanese mentality of considering foreigners as *gaijin* (outside people). Consequently, foreign news is a domain of intellectual curiosity and analysis rather than one of immediate human values.

U.S. news magazines are now entering Japan one after another by publishing Japanese-language versions but commercialism determines them to re-edit and rehash the content so as to put up the appearance of being just another Japanese magazine. Even Nieman Reports, which is certainly much concerned about journalistic standards, gives the impression that its interest is mainly domestic and technical. A more cosmopolitan outlook may be desirable.

Japan is now No. 1 in the world in terms of the absolute amount of annual foreign aid offered. In the words of Minister Rühle, however, it is no longer sufficient to be just "the pay-check country," and Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's government has managed to pass a set of minimal PKO bills through the Diet.

Some foreign press comments in the past have criticized Japan's 'free-rider' attitude on matters of security, although the combination of the 'no-war' constitution and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was once virtually dictated to Japan by the U.S. and its WWII Allies.

Let's remind ourselves at this juncture that the press is responsible for preventing the development of any serious perception gap by offering adequate and sufficient coverage of foreign news.

Joe Kazuo Kuroda,  
Nieman Fellow 1957  
Tokyo

## Lyons Award Winner Urges Action on Haiti

Haitian journalist Jean Mario Paul received the 1992 Louis Lyons Award at a Harvard Faculty Club luncheon ceremony September 29. The award, created by the Nieman class of 1964, is named in honor of the late Louis L. Lyons, who was for 25 years curator of the Nieman Foundation.

Paul, a correspondent for Radio Antilles Internationale, was awarded the Lyons for his courage in the face of intimidation by the military regime, which overthrew the democratically elected government of Jean Paul Aristide in September 1991.

Melissa Ludtke, chairperson of the Class of '92 Lyons Award Committee, said before she presented the award that "Paul faced adversity and he stood firm against the brutality of the military coup one year ago, when his home was burned, his mother's home was burned and his radio station shut down. He withstood great pain when he was beaten in prison, yet he emerged from the experience stoic in his determination to carry on."

Jean Mario Paul spoke in French. Here are excerpts translated into English:

Once again, at the international level, those who want to see people live as human beings have joined in solidarity with the Haitian people who are struggling to bring change to Haiti.

This award arrives at a moment when the press is being silenced, freedom of speech doesn't exist, people are being arrested, tortured and newspapers being shut down. In a year's time three journalists have been killed and one has been disappeared.

This award gives us strength, it stimulates us to go forward on the road to free speech and freedom of press.

The Haitian reality is different than the reality of people living abroad, its a reality where the majority of the people are unemployed, the majority of children are homeless, where 80 to 90 percent of the people are illiterate. Haitian journalists, particularly those from the radio, had a role to bring our support toward the country's development. Hence, a journalist in Haitian society is not just a journalist. We are service providers, documentarians, we are advisors. All these reasons led to the plot against us by the enemy.

Out of 31 radio stations operating in Port-au-Prince during the Aristide government, today only four are in operation and among these are the government's radio. Progressive journalists still working in the different radio stations cannot report, they are intimidated. The government's radio is broadcasting people's names so that they can be assassinated or arrested.

Since we're nearing the end of the Twentieth Century, the international community cannot accept that these things go on in Haiti.

I think one of the roles of the international media is to [provide] this information to the rest of the world. Those in power, even though they are involved in acts of repression still would like to maintain a democratic front. They'd like the international community to believe that they are a democratic government. It is [therefore] terrible that there are international journalists who agree with this and more or less lend the government credibility. ■

# NIEMAN NOTES

## Nieman Directory Available

Over the past few years we have received many requests for a current Nieman Directory. We have now completed a compact (5-1/2 X 8-1/2) directory, which we are making available for \$10 a copy, plus \$2 postage and handling for U.S. and \$5 for international mailing. Please send your request and check to the Nieman Foundation, One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 by January 15, 1993. Please allow 4-8 weeks for delivery.

## Attention Nieman Fellows:

The address to which your copy of Nieman Reports is mailed will be the address used in the directory. Please contact the Nieman office at (617) 495-2237 or the above mentioned address if you would like to change or update your address. Please keep the Nieman office updated regarding any address changes so that we can keep our records up-to-date.

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1950

William German, Executive Editor of The San Francisco Chronicle, finds himself in the center of a dispute involving The Chronicle and the possible move of the San Francisco Giants baseball team to St. Petersburg, FL. Some Chronicle staff members charge that the publication, which has come out in support of the team's remaining in San Francisco, has changed or killed copy which does not agree with the Chronicle's "pro-Giants policy."

German commented that "It is not true that we are using puffery to keep the Giants here. We report the news, even when it doesn't go the way we like it. We are not manipulating stories to fit Chronicle policy." German added, "Writers have been getting mad at me for 75 years. It goes with the territory."

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1956

The Nieman Foundation has received notice of the death of Priscilla Duscha, wife of Julius Duscha.

Priscilla died the evening of September 14, in Hamburg, Germany, as she and Julius were preparing to return home from a seven-week vacation in Europe. She died suddenly but peacefully of a heart attack. She was 67 years old. Her ashes were scattered at sea by the San Francisco Neptune Society on Oct. 17. That same day family and friends gathered at the Duscha home, 2200 Pacific Ave, Apt. D, in San Francisco, to celebrate Priscilla's life.

Priscilla was wonderful with children. If you would like to honor her, a fund has been established in her memory at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, a hands-on children's science museum. The address is: Development Office, Exploratorium, 3601 Lyon Street, San Francisco, California, 94123."

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1956

Donald Sterling, Jr. has informed the Nieman office of an honor bestowed on one of his classmates, Don Marsh. A scholarship has been established in honor of Marsh, former editor of The Charleston Gazette, for journalism students at West Virginia University. The Daily Gazette Co., owner of The Gazette, has contributed \$10,000 to the West Virginia University Foundation to establish the scholarship. Don Marsh, a graduate of West Virginia, retired in September after 40 years with the Gazette, which included 16 years as editor.

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1962

Between writing his nationally syndicated column and being Director of the International Media Studies Program at Brigham

Young University, John Hughes squeezed in the chairmanship of The Commission on Broadcasting to the People's Republic of China.

Established by the US Senate in October 1991 as an independent commission within the Executive Branch, the 11-member body presented its report September 1992.

Hughes and his team found that "Though the cold war is over, many millions around the world, particularly in Asia, remain under repressive rule." Therefore "increased broadcasting to the communist countries of Asia and others in the region where repression hobbles the operation of full and free domestic news media...is desirable, feasible and in the national interest."

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1966

Robert Maynard, editor and publisher of The Oakland (CA) Tribune, announced the sale of the 118-year-old publication on October 15 to Alameda Newspaper Group (ANG) pending completion of negotiations between the current owners and approval by the Justice Department. The Tribune's last day of publication under the Maynard family will be November 30. Maynard purchased The Tribune in 1983. ANG expects to retain approximately 250 of The Tribune's 620 employees.

Maynard, who has been battling prostate cancer for five years, will begin additional radiation treatments in the near future.

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1968

Michael J. Green has retired as Editor-in-Chief of The Daily News in Durban, South Africa.

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## 1977

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M.G.G. Pillai and Kathryn Johnson had a brief Class of '77 reunion when they met for lunch in Atlanta recently. Pillai, a freelance foreign correspondent from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was in Atlanta for a conference. He writes regularly on Southeast Asian affairs. Kathryn Johnson writes anchor news for CNN in Atlanta. She is the 1989 winner of the Distinguished Career Award from Agnes Scott College.

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## 1979

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Katherine Harting Travers is enrolled in a Masters Program at George Washington University via distance education. Mind Extension University in Englewood, Colorado, distributes the signal, which she receives with a small satellite dish in her Princess Anne, Maryland, backyard.

"Opportunities for obtaining advanced degrees are limited here on the Eastern Shore," Kat says, "and watching television in the family room while the sitter tends the kids upstairs is infinitely preferable to driving three hours each way into D.C."

While Kat was a Fellow, she was on leave from her job as a producer with ABC News. She feels that working on this degree in Educational Technology Leadership is a continuation of her interest in technology as a tool for learning. "Students and instructors communicate by computer and modem on a toll-free bulletin board system, and 25 per cent of the classes are live and interactive. This means that I sit at home talking back to my television set...and it answers!"

Kat continues part-time as Media Specialist for the School of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

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## 1980

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Jan Collins Stucker writes that the column which she co-authors, "Flying Solo," has been put on the Knight-Ridder/Chicago Tribune wire and is available to some 260 newspapers nationwide. The weekly column gives practical financial and "life management" advice to people who are newly separated, divorced, or widowed. Jan was in Cambridge recently "hanging out" with daughter Jennifer, who is a senior at Tufts University. Son Sean (remember the fat baby?) is now a wiry 13-

year-old. Jan is still editor of *Business & Economic Review*, a quarterly magazine at the University of South Carolina, and she also free-lances extensively. Jennifer, by the way, is doing an internship for the fall semester with WGBH in Boston. She's doing research for a program on weaponry for "NOVA", working for executive editor Bill Grant, Nieman Fellow 1980.

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## 1982

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Alex Jones, of *The New York Times*, and his wife, Susan Tiff, formerly an associate editor of *Time* magazine, will write a biography of the Ochs-Sulzberger family, principal owners of *The New York Times Co.* The book, due in 1996, will be published by Little, Brown & Co. Jones and Tiff previously collaborated on "The Patriarch: The Rise and Fall of the Bingham Dynasty," owners of *The Louisville (KY) Courier Journal* and *Times*. Alex Jones won a Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for a series of articles he did for *The Times* on the Bingham.

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## 1983

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"The judges were unanimous in their decision to give to Eli Reed the W. Eugene Smith Award for 1992. In his work, his subject matter, and the content and scope of his proposal, Reed powerfully fulfilled the requirements for this grant." So reads the press release announcing that Eli has received the grant for a project in humanistic photography, given by the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund at the International Center of Photography.

Eli writes that his project, "Going Home: Black America in Crisis," is an attempt to "fill the very large holes in my long-term black-America photo project across the United States....The black middle class is a neglected section of the black American populace that needs to be addressed in a forthright manner that goes beyond the narrow clichés that comprise the polished images that continue to be published for the most part in main-stream American publications. There is little shown of the interior of the black faces that reveal the evidence of the daily struggle for dignified life. The black middle class is not the clear and defined entity that remains the same equally across the United States.

...Nearly every day and certainly every week, I will find statistics in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television concern-

ing the black community at large that make my heart cry. My black America book is not about statistics but perhaps about the effect of the statistics. It is about one branch of human being trying as everyone does at their best to be human kind while living in an intemperate place."

Early in his career, Eli had the chance to work briefly with W. Eugene Smith as an assistant. It was an experience, he said, that "makes you come out different than you were when you went in."

The award was presented on November 2 in New York City.

Callie Crossley, news producer and writer for ABC-TV, was named to the National Advisory Board of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida. In the late 1980's Crossley served as a member of a Broadcast Advisory Group that helped develop the Institute's present Broadcast program. She has also served as a visiting faculty member who addressed diversity issues in the newsroom to news managers from around the country.

Crossley has received many awards, including an Oscar nomination for her work as a producer on the sixth hour of the "Eyes on the Prize" documentary series and a National Emmy for the writing on the series.

Crossley is currently a medical producer for the ABC-News program "20/20" working to develop and research stories for ABC News Medical Editor Dr. Timothy Johnson. Crossley is a founding member of the Boston Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the former Vice President for Broadcast for the National Association of Black journalists. She currently works in New York and Boston and lives in Cambridge, MA.

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## 1984

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Jacqueline Thomas, formerly associate editor of *The Detroit Free Press*, is now news editor for *The Detroit News*.

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## 1985

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In September, Mike Pride, Editor of the *Concord Monitor*, welcomed the *Monitor's* readership to the first edition of the *Sunday Monitor*. In his welcoming editorial, Mike wrote:

But first a word about philosophy. We are primarily a local and state paper.

Sunday is a day we know readers have more time, and we're editing the Sunday Monitor with that in mind. We'll dig into issues and be a little more statewide in scope than the daily Monitor. We'll try to satisfy readers' needs for information about leisure activities and family concerns.

And we'll involve readers as much as possible in the paper. The Sunday Monitor is a forum not just for editors and reporters to write for readers but also for readers to share their experiences and opinions with other readers.

In a recent phone conversation, Mike referred to the creation of The Sunday Monitor as presenting a unique opportunity to step back from the daily crush and to be creative, using ideas developed over time and a sense of what one would like to do—starting with a blank front page and open discussions and putting together a plan. The Sunday Monitor, which includes a lot of writing by readers and exchanges of ideas, has been well received and Mike is gratified by the positive start.

Mike's family is doing well. His wife, Monique, is teaching French at a local middle school. As for his three sons: Sven graduated in June from the University of Chicago with a degree in mathematics; Yuri is a high school junior and back-up goalie on the soccer team at Concord High; and Misha, who is in the fourth grade, is planning to be a musician.

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## 1986

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Gustavo Gorriti, currently at the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C., will be honored with the presentation of the Maria Moors Cabot Awards-1992 on October 28 by Columbia University's School of Journalism in New York. The editor and publisher of the Montevideo weekly newspaper *Busqueda*, Danillo Arbilla, will also be honored.

The Cabot Awards were established in 1938 by Dr. Godfrey Lowell Cabot, now deceased, in memory of his wife. They have been bestowed on journalists from the American continent who have contributed to the development of inter-American relations and freedom of information.

According to an article in *Editora El Sol*, Gustavo "studied philosophy in San Marcos University in Lima and Hebraic University in Jerusalem. ...Gorriti worked in an olive plantation for eight years and trained in judo, winning the Peruvian championship title seven times. He wrote

sporadically for several publications in early 1972. Finally, in 1981 he decided to dedicate himself to journalism on a full-time basis."

Gustavo worked as a reporter and then editor of *Caretas*, the Peruvian weekly, from 1981-87. After his Nieman year, he received a Guggenheim Foundation scholarship to research and write his book about the Shining Path, *Sendero Luminoso*.

He still writes for *Caretas* and has been a correspondent for the Madrid daily, *El Pais*, and he is published in English in the United States. He also has given conferences about the Shining Path and other subjects concerning democracy, terrorism, and world drug trafficking. Last April, Gustavo was detained by Peruvian authorities and shortly thereafter released unharmed.

Carmen Fields was appointed press secretary for the office of the Suffolk county (MA) District Attorney on September 14. For 5 years Ms. Fields had been co-anchor of *The Ten O'Clock News* on Boston's PBS station, WGBH-TV, until the program was cancelled last year. She had previously been a reporter for *The Boston Globe*, WBZ-TV and WHDH-TV in Boston. Ms. Fields has also taught journalism at Northeastern University in Boston.

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## 1990

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Yossi and Billie Melman will each have new books published this year. Yossi writes:

My new book, "The New Israelis: An Intimate View of a Changing People," is coming out in November by Birch Lane Press. It offers an informed glimpse inside the troubling and complex reality of Israel today, supplemented by personal and autobiographical anecdotes with a revisionist interpretation of historical events. The Israeli people are torn. Modern secularism vies with a historical religious tendency that is manifested in a new and powerful fundamentalism and a widespread obsession with mystical cults. Israelis are weary from a half century of fighting wars—becoming more and more unwilling to sacrifice their children. Israel's social, cultural and economic institutions, built expressly to insure the survival of the young and fragile state, no longer pertain to a nation whose existence is an established fact. Along with the decline of the Kibbutz movement, Israel's

socialist democracy is confronted with the chaos of an emerging and obsessive consumerism.

Billie's book, "Women's Orients, English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918" (Macmillan, London, and The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor), written during our stay in Cambridge, appeared in the early summer. It looks at the way in which Europeans, especially women, looked at oriental people and places, during the age of imperialism. The book recovers the writings of travellers, pilgrims, missionaries and scientists and re-examines the relationship between colonial politics, culture and sexual politics. The book got Billie a resident professorship at the Center for the Humanities, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where we shall spend at least part of 1993-94.

Brett Alexander, Producer, CBS News/48 Hours, is producing a prime-time special on Malcom X which is scheduled to air in December. In correspondence to our office a while back, Brett wrote: "...I'm really excited about it. It's a lot of work. But I love it because I'm getting a chance to make use of my film making skills as well as my journalistic abilities. Unlike 48 hours I'm producing and directing every segment in the broadcast. It's essentially an oral history making use of old film, letters, documents and interviews with people who knew him during different phases of his life. It's the kind of television that commercial networks do too infrequently, and public broadcasting does so well."

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## 1992

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Elizabeth Leland married Luke Largess on October 10, 1992. The wedding and festivities took place on Sullivan's Island in South Carolina. Stan Grossfeld was the only member of Elizabeth's class able to attend, and she says that he showed up fashionably late (three hours) as usual. The celebration included an oyster roast the night before the wedding as well as sailing, swimming and volleyball on the day of the event. A bonfire held that evening ended the festivities. Elizabeth and Luke took their honeymoon on a 33-foot sailboat, sailing for a week along the coast of South Carolina.

After nine months of a difficult pregnancy, a daughter, Charlenne, was born to Patricia Onyango and Charles Onyango-

Obbo September 13 at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Since the baby came Charles, who worked as an assistant editor of Nieman Reports this summer and fall, has been busy fending off charges that the choice of Charlene was a selfish way to get a name sounding like his. He hotly denies this charge, saying it was Patricia's choice. He has also been told that the baby's name is spelt (that's Charles's English background coming through) wrong; it is supposed to be with one "n" not two. Charles blames Patricia, who (he says) told him she preferred the double "n," which is the French version. Patricia could not be reached for comment.

Now back in Uganda, Charles has left Weekly Topic to join The Monitor. The Monitor is a new newspaper owned by seven journalists, Charles being the seventh. Even though he is one of the owners Charles denies that he is a publisher. If he is sounding evasive about all this, he says it is the fault of being in the U.S. during the presidential campaigns—you catch the flip-flop disease.

Rui Araujo faxed us November 6:

My life has changed since my year at the Nieman Foundation. I got a promotion at RTP (Portuguese Broadcasting Corporation). I am now editor of the special assignment team. Six young journalists and a producer work with me and we are making headlines—stories on Orania, the capital city of white South Africa, or the lost dream of some Afrikaners; the story of the Portuguese secret police agent who killed Humberto Delgado, the Portuguese democratic candidate in 1965 in Spain; kids on the street working for a prostitution network in Lisbon, illegal immigrants from Africa, etc.

I received another national journalism award for my story about American Indians, "The Sioux, 100 years of silence."

Euronews, CNN's potential competition in Europe, will start to broadcast its news service in January. They have invited me to be an editor. RTP counter-offered and it is probable that I will be their next European correspondent, based in Brussels. Hopefully, before I go to Brussels I will be able to make another trip to East Timor, the island where more than 200,000 people have died since the Indonesian Army occupied it 1975. ■

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