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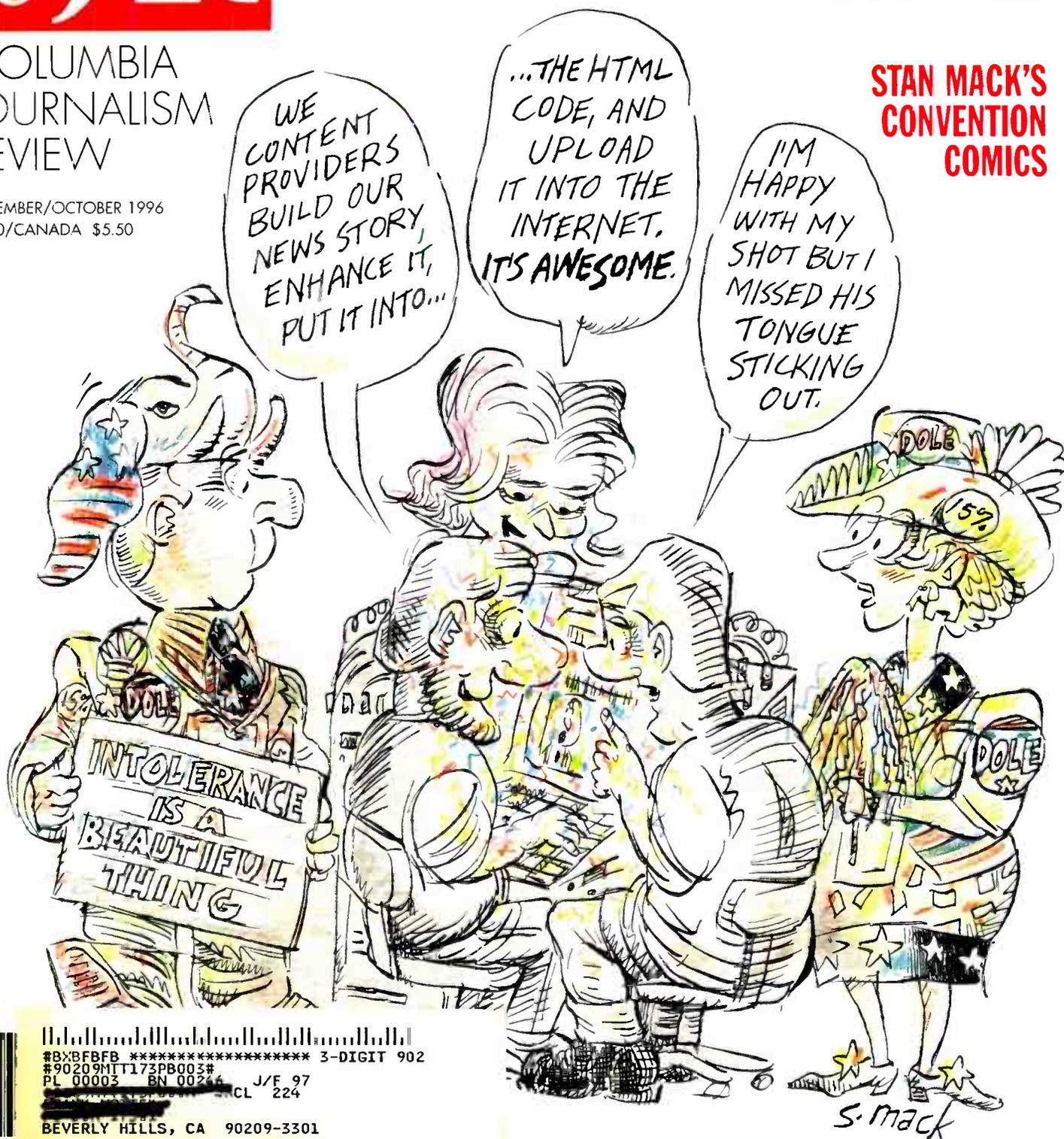
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WHY THE CYBERMOGULS ARE GETTING NERVOUS

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1996
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DEPARTMENTS

WWW.....11

- The media lords of Wall Street*
- What's still scary about the Alar scare*
- Critique: policy wonks get an e-zine*
- How newspapers answer the phone*
- Barring access to prisoners*
- The open mike: let those sound-bites shrink*
- Feiffer: the victims*

CAPITAL LETTER.....47

- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Klein*
by Christopher Hanson

ABOUT BOOKS.....53

- When Books Make News:**
- Unlimited Access: An FBI Agent Inside the Clinton White House*
by Gary Aldrich
- The Choice*
by Bob Woodward
- Partners in Power: The Clintons and Their America*
by Roger Morris
- Essay by Walter Goodman*
- Fools for Scandal: How the Media Invented Whitewater**
by Gene Lyons and the editors of Harper's Magazine
Reviewed by James Boylan
- Women Politicians and the Media**
by Maria Braden
Reviewed by Patricia O'Brien

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.....4

LETTERS.....5

DARTS & LAURELS.....23

SHORT TAKES.....63

THE LOWER CASE.....65

COVER: STAN MACK

FEATURES

Who Was Burning the Black Churches? 26

The anatomy of a story that got out of hand
by Joe Holley

Where is Race in the Presidential Race? 34
by Sig Gissler



26

Stan Mack's Convention Comics 35

Real life with MSNBC@GOP

A Theme Park for the News 38

The Newseum takes shape
by Philip Burnham

Reality Bytes 40

We listen in on the new media moguls — and they're nervous
by Todd Oppenheimer

What's Age Got to Do With It? 43

The stereotype that stalks Dole
by Edwin Diamond and Jennie D'Amato

47

41



"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM . . . TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT" — *From the founding editorial, 1961*

From Rural Ramblin' to a Bunker in Hue

Gene Roberts, managing editor of The New York Times, was this year's recipient of the Columbia Journalism Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Graduate School of Journalism. In his remarks to the graduates in the school's class of '96, he urged them to look for jobs at small daily newspapers, on the ground that "there's no better place" to learn to report fully and write vividly. And he talked a bit about his own start.

My first newspaper job was with the *Goldsboro News-Argus*, which, to the under-informed, is the leading newspaper in Wayne County, North Carolina. It then had a circulation of 9,000. I wrote its farm column. It was called "Ramblin' in Rural Wayne." I wrote about the first farmer of the season to transplant tobacco plants from the seedbed to the field; about the season's first cotton blossom. I wrote about picnic tables sagging at family reunions under the weight of banana sandwiches, banana pudding, chicken pastry, sage sausage, fried chicken, and collard greens. I wrote of hailstorms and drought. I once wrote about a sweet potato that looked like General Charles DeGaulle.

The editor of the paper was Henry Belk. He was then in his sixties, and he was blind — he was sightless. This was in the 1950s. But he wore battered fedora hats like newsmen wore in the movies in the 1930s and '40s, when he could still see. He was tall — no, towering. There were no ready-made canes to fit his six-foot seven-inch form, so he tapped with a stretched cane made especially for him out of aluminum. He cared passionately about the paper. And it was read to him, word for word, over the years by a succession of high-school students. And in the mornings, his wife, Lucille, once a journalist herself, read him the newspaper published in the state capital, *The Raleigh News and Observer*.

He was awesomely informed. Most days at the office, he would call out from his cubicle, and say such things as, "On page seventeen of the *News and Observer*, in column three, halfway down the fold, there is a three-inch story about Goldsboro, under an 18-point head." Then he would demand, "Why didn't we have it?" Mr. Belk was nothing if not demanding. Often when he heard my footfall in the morning, he would summon me to his cubicle and criticize the "Ramblin' in Rural Wayne" column I had written the day before. On too many days, alas, my writing was insuffi-

ciently descriptive. "You aren't making me see." Mr. Belk would say, "Make me see."

In an effort to force me to be graphic and vivid, he made me end every column with a paragraph labeled, "Today's Prettiest Sight." Let me tell you, it's tough to go into a poolroom in your hometown for an end-of-the-work-day beer, known as the guy who writes "Today's Prettiest Sight." But I persevered. It took me years to appreciate it, but there is no better admonition to the writer than "make me see." There is no truer blueprint for successful writing than making your reader see. It is the essence of great writing and great reporting.

If you write vividly, you'll stay in the minds of readers, sometimes in unexpected ways. I learned this in the Vietnam War when I was a correspondent for *The New York Times*. It was 1968, during the Tet Offensive, more than a decade after I had left the *Goldsboro News-Argus* and the "Ramblin' in Rural Wayne" column. I had heard vague reports of trouble in Hue, the capital city of the Nam's puppet emperors during the French colonial era. I made my way there by truck and helicopter, and found that the marines were surrounded, and held only two blocks of the city. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese forces held onto the rest. Each day, after the marines were reinforced by fresh units, they retook two or three blocks of the city, only to lose it again during the night to enemy troops who had infiltrated into houses during the darkness.

It took about ten days for the marines to get ten blocks or so from their headquarters compound. When they did, they found several American advisers, who had been hiding under a house since the night the enemy overran the city. They had little water, even less food, and were hanging by their nerve ends when the marines broke through.

The marines took the survivors to the headquarters compound, and to give them a sense of security, put them in the safest place they could find — a bunker, dug deep into the center of the compound. I heard about the survivors and went to interview them. I snaked over some sandbags and I entered a tunnel. I crawled a bit, I rounded the bend, and dimly made out some human forms in the darkness. "My name is Gene Roberts," I said. "I'm with *The New York Times*, and I've come to get your story." And out of the darkness came a voice, and it said, "Hey, did you ever write the 'Ramblin' in Rural Wayne' column for the *Goldsboro News-Argus*?"

LETTERS



YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE IT!

The editors of the *Columbia Journalism Review* seem to have decided, in their wisdom, that the ultimate arbiter of editorial commentary is Trudy Lieberman of *Consumer Reports*, inspired by Morton Mintz, who once used the news columns of *The Washington Post* for his Naderite crusading. They haven't noticed that the consumer movement, among other things a handmaiden to the tort liability bar, has its own axes to grind.

While the ostensible subject is me ("Bartley's Believe It or Not!," *CJR*, July/August), the burden of Ms. Lieberman's ad hominem attack falls on our writers who have been exposing the excesses of the plaintiffs' bar. She "corrects" our Max Boot, for example, who wrote that California's insurance rate regulation, Proposition 103, didn't work. Her proof is a "study" by some of its proponents that rates didn't go up as fast as before. In fact, proponents initially said rates would go down, and some of them agree with Mr. Boot about the outcome. At any rate this is a matter of judgment and arguments, not a factual error.

Similarly, Mr. Boot pointed out that Melvin Belli and others had filed class-action suits explicitly stimulated by Eileen Welsome's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Albuquerque Tribune* articles on radiation tests during the 1940s and 1950s. Ms. Lieberman cites a letter we published by

Tim Gallagher of the Albuquerque paper: "Gallagher wrote that Boot had failed to summarize Welsome's work accurately. The *Tribune* didn't claim to be the first to report that people were injected with plutonium and it credited others who had; the *Tribune* did claim to be the first media institution to identify victims and report that they had never given informed consent for the experiment. . . ."

In fact, Mr. Boot's summary of Ms. Welsome's article said, "Her stories didn't contribute much new information about the scope or nature of the testing, but they added a 'human interest' spin: She managed to identify a number of people involved in the experiments and interviewed their relatives at length." He also said, "The most troubling element of the plutonium tests was the lack of 'informed consent.'"

Similarly, she reports one side of a dispute our Gordon Crovitz had back in 1989, expressing shock that he has gone on to a distinguished career as editor and publisher of Dow Jones's *Far Eastern Economic Review*. She also says we were guilty of "a misleading half-truth at best" for writing that most Democrats and some Republicans are deeply dependent on contributions from trial lawyers. As evidence she compares a trial lawyer PAC with business PACs. But anyone of reasonable sophistication understands that the lawyers tend to give individually rather than through their PAC; the Center for Responsive Politics, scarcely an ideological ally of ours, found that in the first nine months of 1995 trial lawyers were by far the biggest donors to the Clinton campaign. Let readers judge who is guilty of a "misleading half-truth."

Now, in applying her scrutiny to years of daily journalism, Ms. Lieberman did uncover some errors. In an editorial opposing subsidies to the maritime business, we said that mariners earn \$125,000 for a six-month stint. More accurately, we should have said this was the cost to the employer of a "billet," including fringe benefits, according to a 1994 study conducted by MIT and commissioned by the Commerce Department.

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We opposed the nomination of Miami lawyer Bruce Greer to the federal bench because of his former partnerships in firms with especially close client relationships with corrupt financial institutions such as ESM Government Securities and David Paul's CenTrust bank, a satellite of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. In passing we called for investigation of Mr. Greer's limited partnership in the Cen Office building, which "public records indicate was once owned by CenTrust." Upon further investigation, namely a new title search, we find that CenTrust did not own this property, only some nearby. It somehow seems to me more central, though, that in criticizing our opposition to Mr. Greer, Ms. Lieberman managed not to mention that he was also found unqualified by an American Bar Association panel.

We did not publish letters from California lawyer Michael Aguirre, or his client, Mr. Aguirre's letter threatened a lawsuit, and accordingly was extensively answered by our attorney. It is not true, however, that our editorial failed to mention that Mr. Aguirre's suit against Rep. Chris Cox continues in another forum. Ms. Lieberman to the contrary, that was specifically included in the editorial about which she complains.

Finally, I did not respond to Ms. Lieberman's requests for interviews because I do not trust her not to distort whatever I say. In this department, she outdid herself by criticizing us for relying on letters to the editor to record corrections, and complimenting *The Washington Post* for doing it the right way. Then she concludes her article with a quote attributed to me by the *Post*'s Howard Kurtz. On this quote, the editors of the *Post* were kind enough to print a letter from me. To wit:

Howard Kurtz's Dec. 16 story "True Brit: the Birth of a Story; U.S. Press Follows, No Questions Asked" responded to our Dec. 14 editorial "No Style," which remarked on the difference in the reports of the sexual harassment controversy at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting that appeared in the *Post*'s Style section (Dec. 12) and in the Sunday Times of London.

Fair enough, but I would like the record to show that I deny the accuracy of the following quotation attributed to me: "We know the first lady's office had denied it. We didn't need to call to ascertain that. We meant to include that. If you've got 600 words, something has to give."

The first two and final sentences are correct. What passed between them, however, was a discussion of whether or not to list the various people covered by the sentence in our editorial that read: "The *Times* story has been met with a string of denials."

In other words, it is not that we meant to include the denial; we did include it. We can argue over whether the first lady's office should have been specifically named, but let me point out that the Kurtz article omitted any mention of the "denial" sentence in our editorial. The result is a serious distortion of what we write and, I think, of the episode as a whole.

I could have demanded a formal "correction," I suppose, or complained that the *Post* buried my letter on Christmas Day (12/25/95). But I was content that it is in the electronic databases, where a search of "Bartley" quickly discovers it. Anyone who came back to the record would know that the quote was suspect, and might even look at our original editorial to see that it included the fact of denials. Instead, Ms. Lieberman took the quote and repeated it at face value, either because she didn't do a minimal database search, or because she knew the full truth but it complicated her hatchet job.

If the Columbia School of Journalism is going to sponsor a magazine second-guessing those of us in the profession, it should also provide some adult supervision.

ROBERT L. BARTLEY
Editor
The Wall Street Journal
New York, N.Y.

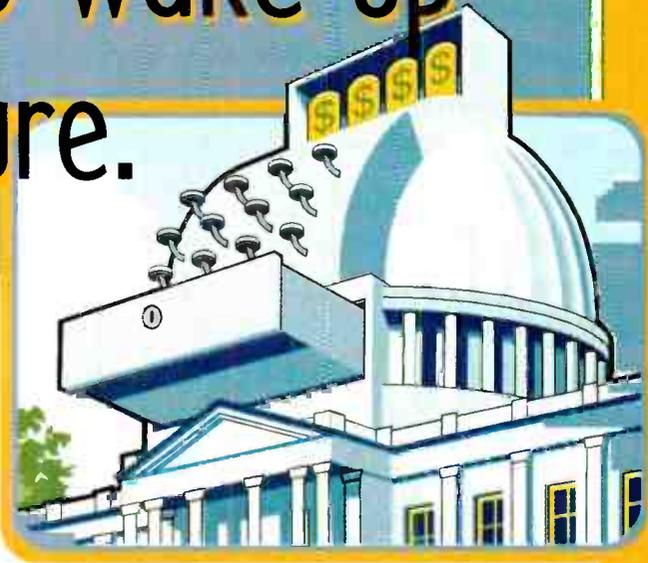
Trudy Lieberman replies: *Robert Bartley's letter is a perfect example of the convoluted arguments, omissions, and innuendo that characterize his Wall Street Journal editorial page.*

To begin, he implies that I am a mouth-piece for the "tort liability bar," commonly known as trial lawyers. In fact, over the years I have written many articles that trial lawyers objected to, particularly about the benefits of no-fault auto insurance to consumers — an approach that is anathema to the trial lawyers and to Ralph Nader.

Bartley defends Max Boot's op-ed about California's Proposition 103, which said flatly that "it didn't work." The study CJR cited, drawn from insurance-industry data, showed a dramatic turnaround that brought California's once-soaring rate increases to a point 88 percent below the nation's as a whole. Those findings were inconvenient for Boot, and now for Bartley. In his second

We've never run for office. But we did help wake up a state legislature.

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The high costs of campaigning were causing state politicians to become influenced by contributions, gifts and favors. As a result, huge corporations and lobbyists were starting to control government — in some cases, even writing bills. It was a system out of control and it caught the investigative eye of the **San Jose Mercury News**.

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point, the selection of quotes from Max Boot's op-ed about Eileen Welsome's Pulitzer Prize-winning articles are taken out of context. Boot made those points in connection with his own assertions that hype surrounding her articles' "revelations" had set off a wave of excessive public concern and litigation.

As for Bartley's attack on our comparison of contributions by a trial-lawyer PAC to those of a business PAC (the American Tort Reform Association), surely anyone of reasonable sophistication understands that members of the American Tort Reform Association, which includes some of the biggest names in the corporate world, have employees who contribute individually to candidates as well as through their PAC, just as trial lawyers do. (The rest of his argument mixes the apples of presidential contributions with the oranges of contributions to congressional candidates that were the focus of the editorial and our critique of it.)

While it is certainly magnanimous of Bartley to admit the *Journal* erred in the matter of ownership of the CenTrust building, such an admission begs the question we've been posing — where was the correction?

The *Journal*'s editorial on Michael Aguirre did note that the suit had been refiled, but instead of granting the import of that fact by explaining that the case had just been transferred to the court's complex litigation division, the editorial downplayed the whole case with a sentence saying, "the only judge to hear the case dismissed the charge against Latham & Watkins on 'demurrer' — which means that, even if all of the allegations were true, they still didn't amount to a valid cause of action." That deceptive brush-off is all we accused the *Journal* of.

Bartley saves his thickest smoke screen for last — in his aggrieved hoo-ha over our failure to mention his response to Howard Kurtz. His published letter was barely worth a mention, since in it he made no attempt to refute the most damning quote in the *Post*'s piece (which, incidentally, we left out): Bartley told Kurtz "we did not make an attempt to independently confirm" Mrs. Clinton's involvement. In his letter to the editor of the *Post*, he points to a sentence in the editorial referring to "a string of denials"; that reference is vague and its tone dismissive. To build an editorial on a piece of second-hand gossip from a British newspaper and make no mention of the subject's response is no small infraction. So, while Bartley presents the matter of "whether the first lady's office should have been specifically named" as a quibble, most careful readers will discern that it was the whole point.

Indeed, I was aware of Bartley's letter to the *Post* about Kurtz's article. I also interviewed Kurtz about it, and he denied taking any of Bartley's quotes out of context. Since Bartley refused numerous requests to talk with me, it was impossible to assess his side in the matter. Like any journalist, I weighed the credibility of my sources.

My heart soared to see Trudy Lieberman's dissection of the factually challenged and journalistically bankrupt *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. So many *Journal* essays are prima facie absurd that it's a great service to scrutinize some that are less openly false.

An element Lieberman doesn't address is the section's frequent missing-gear logic and fundamental misunderstanding of how the government works. My favorite of many examples: a May 24, 1995, editorial that decried an Arkansas Supreme Court decision that overturned a statewide vote, sneering, "It didn't much matter what the people of Arkansas thought — or voted — on this subject." No follow-up letter pointed out that, in fact, it doesn't matter — that the new law was unconstitutional and that justices aren't supposed to bend with the popular breeze. And, presumably, the writer was not sent back to high school to repeat civics.

MATTHEW BUDMAN
Highland Park, N.J.

In her article on *The Wall Street Journal*, Trudy Lieberman writes, "Delays in publishing letters of correction can undermine the correction itself." A correction is an admission of error by the publication. Unless a reader's letter alleging error is accompanied by an editorial or editor's note candidly acknowledging the error, the letter cannot suffice as a correction, and shouldn't be termed one, no matter how timely its appearance.

Many so-called letters of correction are from self-described wronged parties. These letters are an especially inadequate way to set the record straight inasmuch as readers properly can regard them as self-serving.

Lieberman indicates elsewhere in her piece a belief that a preferable way to correct editorial-page errors is via correction boxes. Whether errors are admitted in boxes, editorials, or in editor's notes, the key point is that editors must assume responsibility to play fair with readers and to not mislead them. Running letters in lieu of corrections abdicates that responsibility, for readers cannot know whether the letter signifies that the editor simply is airing "the other side" or is intending to admit

error. A cop-out then becomes compounded by confusion.

Unfortunately, misuse of the letters column to evade forthrightly correcting error is by no means confined to *The Wall Street Journal*.

GILBERT CRANBERG
Des Moines, Iowa

(Ed. note: Cranberg is a former editorial-page editor of *The Des Moines Register*.)

In describing how Robert Bartley and his *Wall Street Journal* editorial page are both sloppy with the facts and ruthless, Trudy Lieberman has performed an important service. She might have added that Bartley also has a predilection for garnishing his editorials with snide, belittling personal insinuations.

For example, a *Journal* editorial once sought to demean "cocktail party environmentalists in places like Cambridge and Sausalito." Environmentalists and consumer advocates, of course, have long been among Bartley's favorite bêtes noires. One of his techniques is to taint the legitimacy and motives of those whose opinions or politics he disapproves. Thus, a *Journal* editorial has chastised the "no-growth specialists, the safety and health fascists who try to turn real and imagined hazards to some political end."

The *Journal* has an arsenal of verbal weapons for undermining a target's integrity. People on the wrong side of Bartley are

NEW ON [HTTP://WWW.CJR.ORG](http://www.cjr.org)

- "Cybersources," a section devoted to on-line resources for journalists, continues to expand with the addition of "Covering the Culture Wars." Updated with new sources and Internet links, the guide, which originally ran in *CJR* in 1993, provides contacts to organizations on all sides of the battle for America's cultural identity.

- *CJR* introduces "In the News . . . Again," which features articles from the archives dealing with issues that have suddenly surfaced again. Currently up is "The Accidental Journalist," by *CJR* contributing editor Christopher Hanson, which ran in 1990 and examines the pitfalls of reporting on airplane crashes.

We are also introducing "Language Corner," a collection of do's and don'ts — and think-about-its — aimed at helping writers and editors untangle the language in common-sense ways. A sample from the first installment is on page 11.

likely to be “do-gooders” or to represent some “special interest” (like consumers). This approach need not be limited to people. For example, one editorial referred to “so-called acid rain.”

RICE ODELL
Washington, D.C.

Everyone would have been better served if you had simply printed a picture of Lieberman sticking out her tongue and giving Bartley the raspberry, and let it go at that. What we got instead were tendentious anecdotes collected from opponents or competitors of Bartley and the *Journal*, all labeled “research.” I have seen sophomore term papers which were not so shallow.

So many of the anecdotes in Lieberman’s article actually deal with differences of opinion or interpretation. Since when do the opinion pages of the *Journal*, or *The New York Times*, or *The Washington Post*, reflect only absolute, inviolate facts and opinions upon which everyone agrees?

I wonder if Stephen Rosenfeld of the *Post* truly believes, at least as Lieberman sets it up, that the editorial-page practices of the *Post* are more honorable than those of the *Journal*. Is all he can come up with the example of correcting in a column his mistake about “a former Democrat” (what a terrible thing to say about a person), instead of waiting for the wronged one to seek justice by writing a letter — as Lieberman says the cold and callous *Journal* did in a similar situation?

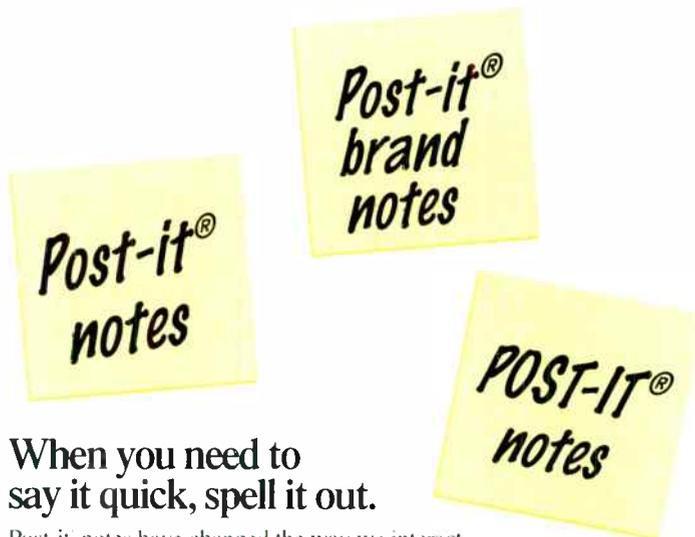
Perhaps the most egregious, and dishonest, flaw in this greatly flawed piece is the assertion that, since Bartley would not discuss *Journal* editorial practices with Lieberman “one can only conclude that affecting policy and changing the course of history matter most.” What an unprofessional thing to say. You could equally fairly conclude, based on the information given, that Bartley had a sore throat and couldn’t talk, or that perhaps he stutters and does not like to speak in public, or that in a spiritual conversation with John Peter Zenger he was told not to speak with Lieberman.

Lieberman throws up her hands and says of the *Journal*, “It’s impossible to say how many errors go uncorrected.” Would that that were not true of every newspaper in the land.

JOHN HOLS
Spokane, Wash.

CORRECTION

An article in the May/June issue, “Is There Life After Layoff?,” erroneously stated the date on which the *Houston Post* closed. The correct date is April 18.



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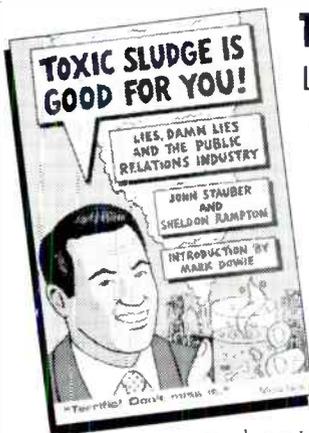
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Toxic Sludge Is Good For You:

LIES, DAMN LIES AND THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY
by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton

\$16.95 Commor. Courage Press, Monroe, ME 1-800-497-3207

Toxic Sludge blows the lid off today’s multi-billion-dollar propaganda-for-hire industry. The book names names and reveals how public relations wizards spin the news, organize phony “grassroots” front groups, spy on citizens, and conspire with political lobbyists to thwart democracy. This exposé documents the activities of secretive, little-known mega-firms

such as Hill & Knowlton, Burson-Marsteller and Ketchum PR—the “invisible men” who control our political debates and public opinion, twisting reality and protecting the powerful from scrutiny.

“A chilling analysis of the PR business.”
—*PUBLISHER’S WEEKLY*

“A book that proves these flacks are hacks!”—*GOOD MORNING AMERICA*

“Powerful.”—Ben Bagdikian, author,
The Media Monopoly

“*Toxic Sludge* should appear on the short list of anyone serious about the study of public relations in the United States.”
—*PUBLIC RELATIONS QUARTERLY*

“Some of the best investigative reporting around.”—*SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN*

“Terrific! Don’t miss it.”—Molly Ivins

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MONEY

the new media lords

why institutional investors call the shots

In a time of anguish about Wall Street's seeming dominance of the newspaper business, journalists would do well to pay more attention to the huge and growing involvement of perhaps the most powerful Wall Streeters of them all: institutional investors.

Since their fiduciary duty to their clients usually translates into seeking the highest possible rate of return, these multibillion-dollar institutions — public and private pension funds, insurance companies, banks, foundations, and endowments — focus on increases in company earnings and, thus, higher stock prices. In the case of newspaper companies, this may mean that no mat-

ter how committed the companies are to quality journalism, they face enormous pressure to cut costs, which often means cutting staff and newshole.

And recently, with changes in certain federal regulations, the institutions have increasingly thrown their weight around. They have a lot of weight to throw. For example, Gannett's board of directors and executive officers might run the \$9-billion company, but they don't own it: together, they own only 1.3 percent of Gannett's stock. The University of California, the company's



WHO
WHAT
WHEN
WHERE
WHY

Publicly Traded Newspaper Company Stock Owned by Institutional Investors

Company	Percent of stock owned by institutions	Value of stock owned by institutions
Gannett	71.94%	\$6.9 billion
Knig ht-Ridder	71.92%	\$2.6 billion
Media General	59.61%	\$607 million
New York Times	56.76%	\$1.8 billion
A. H. Belo	54.32%	\$770 million
Washington Post	51.23%	\$1.7 billion
Tribune Co.	50.42%	\$2.2 billion
Times Mirror	46.62%	\$2.1 billion
Dow Jones	43.18%	\$1.6 billion
Lee Enterprises	41.68%	\$435 million
American Media	40.90%	\$ 51 million
Harte-Hanks	31.76%	\$224 million
E. W. Scripps	25.41%	\$866 million
Pulitzer Publishing	25.15%	\$235 million
Hollinger International	22.87%	\$193 million
Central Newspapers	20.34%	\$408 million
McClatchy Newspapers	19.53%	\$142 million
Gray Communications	6.62%	\$ 6 million
Total		\$ 22 billion

LANGUAGE CORNER

YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT. Practically *everybody* in journalism writes or broadcasts it this way: "Police said Mrs. Guerin . . ." and "Police say there is little doubt . . ." Practically *nobody* in the real world talks that way. It's a good bet none of us in journalism do, either, when we're not reading a script. We say "She called *the* police," or "*The* police said." Why? Because it's natural English. Dropping "the" is unnatural, something we all had to learn as young adults — brisk writing, or something. But ain't nature grand?

For more on the language, see CJR's Web site at <http://www.cjr.org>.

ALICIA PATTERSON JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIPS

32nd Annual Competition

Applications are being accepted from print journalists with at least five years professional experience.

One-year grants of \$30,000 are awarded for the pursuit of independent projects of significant interest.

Application deadline: October 1. Fellows must be U.S. citizens.

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E-mail: apfengel@charm.net
<http://www.charm.net/~apfengel/home.html>

CJR INTERNSHIPS

Applications are now being accepted for the spring program. Interns will work closely with editors on a wide range of research, writing, and production projects.

These positions are unsalaried, but interns will be paid at customary rates for any of their writing published in CJR during their tenure. Interns may be enrolled concurrently in a college or university; they may also be unaffiliated. Positions are both part- and full-time.

Applicants should send a résumé, writing sample, two references, and a letter explaining their interest to:

Gloria Cooper, Managing Editor
 Columbia Journalism Review
 700 Journalism Building
 Columbia University
 New York, NY 10027

largest institutional investor, owns three times that much. Over all, institutions own 72 percent of Gannett stock.

Gannett is hardly alone. Institutions own about the same percentage of Knight-Ridder and more than half the publicly traded shares of Media General, The New York Times Company, A.H. Belo, The Washington Post Company, and the Tribune Company (see table). Even companies like the Times that are controlled by family trusts, and thus immune from

to influence company management. If they were really unhappy, they could vote with their feet by dumping a company's stock. But by the late 1980s institutions controlled such enormous portfolios that dumping a stock could precipitate a major market downturn affecting all their other investments.

Then in 1992 the S.E.C., under pressure from the institutions, changed the rules to make it easier for institutions to bring their power to bear. They have been quick to do so, and are credited



SYNERGY WATCH

When you notice a fifteen-mile-wide spacecraft casting ominous shadows, where do you turn to find out what's happening? CNN? ABC? MSNBC? Not if you were a character in the summer blockbuster *Independence Day*. In that world of the near future, citizens from the White House to the strip joint got their alien updates from something called Sky News, an outlet most American moviegoers doubtless took as fictional.

But Sky News is Rupert Murdoch's British-based satellite news channel, which now reaches deep into Europe, Asia, and Africa (and if everything goes according to plan, Murdoch will soon bring a new twenty-four-hour news channel to a TV set near you). *Independence Day*, meanwhile, was released by Murdoch's Twentieth Century Fox studio. Fourteen years ago another summer blockbuster about aliens pioneered the idea of "product placement" and made Reese's Pieces famous as the bait that lured E.T. *Independence Day* may be the first movie to treat a news broadcast as just another "product" to be "placed."

Synergy Watch will keep an eye on intra-corporate backscratching as it affects the news business in the age of conglomerates. Nominations to cjr@columbia.edu.

hostile takeovers as long as the family members remain united, rely on the market for capital to finance acquisitions, growth, and development. No company that raises money by selling stock can be entirely free from stockholder pressure. (Newhouse is privately held, so while it may have to please some bankers, it has no public investors to contend with.)

That institutional investors have found newspaper companies attractive since the companies began going public in the 1960s should be no surprise; newspapers have always performed better financially than most other businesses. In 1995, amid all the noise about rising newsprint prices, the value of newspaper-company stock increased an average 28 percent. Operating profit margins for many companies were in the 20 percent range, compared to 5.8 percent for the 400 industrial companies in the Standard & Poor's 500 Price Index.

Until quite recently, most institutional investors tended to be passive supporters of management. Moreover, rules of the Securities and Exchange Commission involving proxies — instruments to exercise the voting rights of shareholders — severely limited the institutions' power

with (or blamed for) wielding pressure that helped remove top management from some of the largest U.S. companies, including General Motors, IBM, Kodak, and Westinghouse.

Institutional investors prefer persuasion based on power to messy, costly proxy fights. The \$100-billion California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS), for example, regularly targets companies it considers underperforming. Representatives of CalPERS typically meet with the chairman or the c.e.o. to discuss their worries, which invariably have to do with matters affecting the stock price. CalPERS holds sizable positions in Gannett, Dow Jones, Knight-Ridder, The New York Times Company, Times Mirror, and the Tribune Company.

With the success of many institutions tied directly to their short-term performance, their priorities make it tough for newspaper companies to focus on long-term goals — and thus on quality.

John Soloski and Robert G. Picard

Soloski is professor and director of the School of Journalism at the University of Iowa. Picard is professor and chair of the Department of Communications at California State University, Fullerton.

MYTHS

the alar "scare" was for real

and so is that "veggie hate-crime" movement

The so-called Alar scare occurred more than seven years ago, but it is still very much in the news — mainly because food and chemical industry trade groups have made it their rallying cry as they lobby for "agricultural-disparagement" laws meant to blunt criticism of their products. The Alar affair also has become a favorite media symbol for a false alarm. Reporters and pundits repeatedly refer to it as a prime example of Chicken Little environmentalism and government regulation run amok.

And they are wrong.

As conventional wisdom has it, the Natural Resources Defense Council, a nonprofit environmental group, manipulated CBS's *60 Minutes* into hyping a story on the dangers of Alar, a chemical sprayed on apples to regulate their

growth and enhance their color. The February 1989 broadcast, largely based on the NRDC report "Intolerable Risk: Pesticides in Our Children's Food," told an audience of some 40 million that Alar was a dangerous carcinogen.

Then, the tale continues, NRDC's public relations firm, Fenton Communications, convinced other major news organizations to feature the story. Meryl Streep testified before Congress, and on TV talk shows, about Alar's dangers. The public panicked: school systems removed apples from their cafeterias, supermarkets took them off their shelves, and orchard owners lost millions. The maker of Alar, Uniroyal Chemical Co., was ultimately forced to take it off the market, even though, the story goes, it posed no real health risk.

Like most media myths, this one includes a fact or two. There was indeed an overreaction to the *60 Minutes* report, as viewers confused a long-term cumulative threat with imminent danger. But Alar is a potent carcinogen, and its risks far

outweigh its benefits. After extensive review, the Environmental Protection Agency decided in late 1989 to ban it because "long-term exposure to Alar poses unacceptable risks to public health."

Moreover, studies and reviews completed after the CBS story aired — including one by Uniroyal — confirmed the earlier ones the NRDC relied on, according to Jim Aidala, the EPA associate assistant administrator for pesticides. Alar, the trade name for daminozide, and its breakdown product during heating, UDMH, are animal and "probable human" carcinogens. Besides the scientific evidence, *60 Minutes* has been repeatedly vindicated in the federal courts. On April 29, the Supreme Court upheld without comment an appeals court decision dismissing a \$250-million class-action suit filed in 1990 against *60 Minutes* by a group of Washington state apple growers, alleging the show falsely disparaged their product (*Auvil v. CBS "60 Minutes"*). In October 1995, the appeals court had held that "the growers have failed to raise a genuine



IS THE PRECISION OF MATH ILLUSIONARY? CAN MATH BE WRONG EVEN IF THE COMPUTATIONS ARE CORRECT? HOW CAN WE COPE WITH MATH MANIPULATORS AND FIGURE FANTASIES, ESPECIALLY IN AN ELECTION YEAR?

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issue of material fact as to the falsity of the broadcast." A year earlier the district court had dismissed the case for essentially the same reason.

The apple industry, meanwhile, rebounded quickly. In November 1990, *The New York Times* reported that "the industry overall has suffered little fallout." And the president of the International Apple Institute told the *Times* that "the loss of Alar is not a major catastrophe for growers."

A recent database search of "Alar" and "scare" turned up more than 160 references from January 1995 through mid-July. Nearly half of those references were in

pieces on agricultural-disparagement legislation, which is designed to protect the reputation of fruits and vegetables from erroneous claims about their safety. The laws, which were triggered by the Alar controversy, make it illegal to disseminate unproven claims that perishable farm products are unsafe.

Another dozen references to the Alar

scare appear in book reviews and op-eds about *Our Stolen Future* — a recent book that contends that synthetic chemicals may be harming human endocrine and reproductive systems.

In all, of the roughly eighty articles, editorials, op-eds, and book reviews that commented directly on whether Alar actually posed a risk, all but a handful present the Alar affair as much ado about nothing. Some samples:

- A June 4 Gannett News Service article by Kyle Hughes on New York Governor George Pataki's rift with environ-

mentalists says: "The Alar scare comes to mind, when parents were told their children were at risk of being poisoned by chemically treated apples. It wasn't true."

- Lyle Niedens's March 3 *Des Moines Register* article on agriculture-industry public relations says: "Proponents of U.S. agriculture point to the Alar scare as a prime example of how misinformation can cloud

food-safety topics. A popular industry response was that children would have to eat as many as 800 apples a day for several years before feeling adverse effects of Alar." He did not challenge this false assertion. An EPA statement issued in June 1995 specifically addressed this part of the myth: "The statement that only a huge exposure would pose any risk is nonsense."

- *Arizona Republic* reporter Jonathan Sidener's April 21, 1995, news article on the state Perishable Agricultural Food False Claims Bill calls the Alar scare a "false alarm."

- An editorial on agricultural-disparagement laws in *The Providence Journal-Bulletin* on May 6 asserts that after the "Alar crisis of 1989 . . . it was soon found that there was no scientific evidence of any harm Alar had done to anyone."

- In a March 7 book review of *Our Stolen Future*, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Cynthia Crossen refers to the "1989 Alar-on-apples uproar that practically destroyed the reputation of apples as good food using questionable scientific evidence."

- John F. Ross, in a feature story on risk in *Smithsonian* magazine last November, calls the *60 Minutes* Alar piece "perhaps the most dramatic example of erroneous public perception of unnatural and involuntary risk . . ." Ross goes on, "The panic

SOUNDBITE

"I think you destroy the excitement and interest of the viewer if you disclose that an event happened earlier."

Jim Spence, a former senior vice president of ABC Sports, supporting NBC's decision to broadcast taped Olympic events as if they were live.

the victims by JUBS BATTER

THE MEDIA IS LIBERAL.



AND HATE ME. I



THE MEDIA IS ANTI-BUSINESS.



AND HATE ME. I



THE MEDIA IS PRO-ABORTION.



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CRITIQUE

IntellectualCapital.com

A bipartisan "e-zine" (on-line electronic magazine) about public policy, available at <http://www.IntellectualCapital.com>



Editor: Pete S. du Pont, governor of Delaware from 1977 to 1985, Republican presidential candidate in 1988.

Publisher: Chicago-based multimedia firm A2S2 Digital Projects. The company provides public-policy content for the Microsoft Network.

Debut date: June 19, 1996

Target audience: politicians, lobbyists, people with an interest in public policy and politics, including scholars, journalists, and students. Or, as du Pont puts it, the "C-SPAN-Lehrer NewsHour-New Republic-National Review" crowd.

Cost: free; the magazine hopes to attract advertisers in the future.

Mission: to provide a forum for the ideas and opinions of leading public-policy figures.

Content: July 11 issue focuses on "The Tax Cut Debate," with pro and con views: "Reaganomics All Over Again? Let's Hope So" says Stephen Moore, Director of Fiscal Studies at the Cato Institute, while Robert J. Shapiro, a former adviser to the Clinton campaign, answers "No" to "Would a Tax Cut Spur Growth?" Also: pieces on raising the minimum wage and the Russian election.

Wonks in Cyberspace

IntellectualCapital.com (IC) is attempting to lure policy wonks to the Internet, while bringing policy debate to a larger audience. The e-zine's logo, an image of Rodin's Thinker superimposed over a CD-ROM disc, seems appropriate, combining high-tech with high-brow. The intellectual capital in question belongs to the likes of Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser to Jimmy Carter, the Family Research Council's Gary Bauer, and the ACLU's Nadine Strossen, among others.

Making policy debate user-friendly requires some short cuts, including limiting articles to 500 words. "The attention span is shorter on the Internet," says du Pont. "Everything has to be engaging up front. If readers aren't interested in the first paragraph or two, they move on."

But can this forum's 500-words-or-less policy analyses ever be as influential — let alone as "intellectual" — as the dry journals? "To go into issues, 500 words is often not enough," says *Washington Monthly* editor-in-chief Charles Peters. "An article on reforming the American health-care system would take 5,000 words, let alone 500."

Recent subjects in *IC* have included saving America's cities, the economics of tax cuts, and medical savings accounts. Pro and con editorials paint policy proposals in broad strokes. Commentators also write monthly columns on topics ranging from chemical weapons to sportsmanship on the basketball court. Other features include links to relevant news articles on the Web. Microsoft Network subscribers get a bonus, a live on-line discussion with writers and editors every Thursday night.

So far, House and Senate staffers have been *IC*'s heaviest users, with Hill addresses and usernames dominating the site's "hit" list. But in its first week the site attracted visitors from forty-eight countries and 120 universities.

Web junkies and policy wonks can make unpredictable neighbors, as seen in some recent wandering on-line chats hosted by *IC* editors, but a bit of chaos may be a small price to pay, since reaching this brave new wired audience is what compelled the editors to publish on the Web in the first place. "The problem with public-policy journals is no one reads them," says regular contributor Laura Ingraham. "It's the same 200 academics reading the same things and debating each other."

Anny Shin

Shin is a free-lance writer who lives in Washington, D.C.

originated from a controversial report of questionable science."

Why are these misconceptions about Alar so entrenched? According to John Stauber, editor of the Madison, Wisconsin-based newsletter *PR Watch*, the erroneous reporting on Alar is largely due to a sophisticated public relations counterattack mounted shortly after the *60 Minutes* show. The controversy "scared the hell out of the agribusiness and food industries," he says. "The food industry said, 'Never again.' [and] set out to convince the news media this was a hoax." The campaign, he adds, has been "very successful."

David Rall, a physician and former director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, calls the mistaken media coverage "a triumph of publicity over science." He says the contention that there was no scientific evidence that Alar posed a substantial health risk is "preposterous. Either they haven't looked at the data or they're misinterpreting it."

Meanwhile, the libel case has not been well covered. Except for a July 1991 front-page feature on the lawsuit in *The New York Times*, the case was mentioned in only a handful of newspapers, and usually summarized in two or three paragraphs. Al Meyerhoff, an NRDC lawyer, and other critics say that the 1991 *Times* article, APPLE GROWERS BRUISED AND BITTER AFTER ALAR SCARE, played a key role in shaping public perception. The *Times*, says Meyerhoff, "reported the lawsuit filing as if it were won. Coupled with the absence of further coverage, plus a concerted disinformation campaign by industry trade groups, Alar become synonymous with a hoax."

PR Watch's Stauber, meanwhile, says the national news media are not paying enough attention to another legacy of the Alar controversy: the agricultural-disparagement laws, sometimes called "veggie hate-crime" bills.

"The laws now in at least twelve states making it illegal to disparage fruits, vegetables, and meat are part of the national campaign to intimidate anyone who raises legitimate concerns about food safety," he says. Stauber believes the laws will eventually be found unconstitutional. But until they are challenged in court, reporting on mad cow disease, E. coli bacteria, or pesticides "could bring on a multimillion-dollar lawsuit."

Elliott Negin

Negin, a former managing editor of *American Journalism Review*, is a Washington, D.C.-based writer.

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Q. What do these have in common?

- ❖ A hurricane barreling toward the East Coast
- ❖ A new strain of AIDS
- ❖ DNA crime-scene evidence

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NEWSROOMS

dialing the city desk

get human!

The more newspaper circulation declines, it seems, the fiercer rages the debate over how to reverse the trend. Should editors whittle stories into bite-sized pieces that never jump or should they attract readers with thorough examinations of significant issues? Is it time to put a window in the wall between the newsroom and the advertising department? Should newspapers think about having readers or serving customers? Behind such debates is a core question: What business are newspapers *in*?



The quick answer is: the news business. But is that the impression newspapers give the public? Imagine you are a reader with a news tip you want to tell the paper about. What happens when you call?

CJR placed calls to the twenty largest newspapers in America, using the main switchboard number provided by directory assistance. At twelve of the papers, we are happy to report, a live operator answered, and the caller, claiming to be a reader with a tip on a breaking news story, was immediately put through to the newsroom.

At the other eight papers it was a different experience entirely. They used automated operators, and six of their recorded messages might well leave callers uncertain about what business they had reached.

Four of the papers didn't even mention the news department. Here's what they *did* say:

San Francisco Chronicle (415-777-1111)
Welcome to the San Francisco Chronicle.

MARK GOTTLAUB

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For more information call: Fredrick McKissack Jr., editor, or Erin Middlewood, associate editor: (608) 257-4626. Or e-mail: pmp@peacenet.org.

Or write: *The Progressive Media Project*, 409 E. Main St., Madison, WI 53703.



Fredrick McKissack Jr.



Erin Middlewood

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HOW THESE CHILDREN, "BORN TO BE FORGOTTEN," WEREN'T.

Six years isn't long in the history of a nation. But it is forever in the lifetime of a child. And though Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was executed six years ago, his legacy of poverty and child neglect lives on.

It is into that grim world that Houston Chronicle medical writer Ruth SoRelle and photographer Smiley N. Pool traveled when they joined a child care delegation from the Texas Medical Center.

The ensuing special section, "Born to be Forgotten," detailed the struggles of thousands of Romanian

orphans and the agencies trying to help them. Though the problems seem insurmountable, there are tiny glimmers of hope.

Maybe it was best said by Houstonian Linda Wilder who, along with her husband, is considering adopting a family of abandoned Romanian children. "I can't save 104,000 children," she says, "but I can save five."

And in Romania, in Houston and across the country, that's what really counts. Hearst newspapers – where a commitment to inform can ultimately make a difference.





HARD NUMBERS

32% Share of the radio-market revenues in the top ten markets in the country to be controlled by Westinghouse/CBS if its acquisition of Infinity Broadcasting is approved by the FCC.

Source: The New York Times, "To Infinity and Beyond: Is a Radio Deal Too Big?" June 21, 1996

56% Percentage of Canadian daily newspapers owned by Conrad Black, c.e.o. of Hollinger Inc., the western world's third-largest newspaper chain. Black once cited Orson Welles's quasi-fictional character Charles Foster Kane as a role model.

Source: The New York Times, June 24, 1996

89% Percentage of Washington journalists and bureau chiefs who voted for Clinton in 1992.

43% Percentage of votes Clinton won nationwide.

Source: Freedom Forum Poll released on April 17, 1996

If you know the four-digit extension of the party you are trying to reach, you may dial it now. For newspaper subscriber services press 1. To place a retail, classified, or national advertisement press 2. To reach a live operator press 3.

The Detroit Free Press (313-222-6400)

Thank you for calling the Detroit Newspapers, agent for The Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press. If you know the four-digit extension of the person you are calling, please enter it now.

If you want circulation home delivery, please enter 3 now. If you do not have a touch-tone telephone or you choose to have an operator assist you, please hold. Please wait for assistance.

Los Angeles Times (213-237-5000)

Thank you for calling the Los Angeles Times. If you are calling from a touch-tone telephone and know the extension of the party you wish to reach, you may enter that number at any time during this recording. To subscribe to the Los Angeles Times and for all subscriber services, enter 1. For classified advertising, enter 2. For display advertising, enter 3. If you need assistance, please wait and an operator will be with you shortly.

The Miami Herald (305-350-2111)

Thank you for calling The Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald. Para Español, prima el numero uno. Our operators will be with you in a moment.

For the quickest service here are three options: If we may help you with the delivery of your newspaper, please press 2. For classified advertising, please press 3. For all other departments, press zero or simply stay on the line.

Two other papers did mention the

newsroom in their automated messages — eventually.

Newsday (516-843-2020)

Thank you for calling Newsday. If you're calling from a touch-tone phone, press 1 for further options. [Caller pressed 1.] Press 'star' now if you know the four-digit extension number of the party you are calling. If you know the last name of the party you are calling, please spell it now using the touch-tone keys on your telephone. In addition to entering the last name, it may be necessary to enter the first initial of the first name or the first name itself. If you do not know the last name or to return to the original menu, please press 'star' now. [Caller pressed 'star.'] If you know the four-digit extension number of the party you are calling, please dial that number now. For advertising press 1. For subscriptions and delivery press 2. For the newsroom press 3.

The Philadelphia Inquirer (215-854-2000)

You have reached The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News main switchboard. To reach the following departments please press the corresponding buttons on your touch-tone phone. If you are calling from a rotary phone or if you need further assistance, please stay on the line and an operator will assist you.

If you would like to use our on-line directory, spelling out the person's name and getting the number, please press 1. To place an advertisement or get information about advertising press 2. To subscribe to the paper or for questions and complaints about newspaper delivery, press 3. For the Inquirer news department, press 4.

When the caller pressed 4, another automated message responded with:

You have reached the switchboard at

The Philadelphia Inquirer. To reach our city desk press 1.

Only two of the newspapers with an automated message emphasized the news department rather than subscription or advertising services. Both *The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland and *The New York Times* directed the caller to the newsroom before the business offices.

And then there are the papers with the human touch, a live operator. Those twelve newspapers were: *The Boston Globe*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *The Star-Ledger* of Newark, the *New York Daily News*, the *New York Post*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

Here's a suggestion for CJR readers. Call the main number of the newspaper you read or work for. Take notes on what you hear. Then write a letter to the editor about what its telephone style conveys to callers about the business it is in.

David Cay Johnston

Johnston is a business reporter for The New York Times.

SOUNDBITE

"Tell the truth and run — that's what we do, and much of the time that's correct. But it's my thesis that that's a pretty uncomfortable position. You have to be ready individually, personally, to look in the face of every person you do a story on and say, 'I know who you are. I know what kind of a person you are. I know what you've accomplished. And I'm going to hurt you because this story is worth it.' But most of the time we don't make that judgment at all. We tell the truth and we run. I think it's about time that some of these seminars started talking about the moral responsibility for what we report."

Terry Anderson, speaking at the IRE conference, June 14, about Admiral Jeremy Boorda's suicide. Reporters had recently approached Boorda with questions about his combat decorations.

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SOUNDBITE

“This convention is more of an infomercial than a news event. Nothing surprising has happened. Nothing surprising is anticipated. There was a time when the national political conventions were news events of such complexity that they required the presence of thousands of journalists. But not this year.”

Ted Koppel of ABC, explaining why he and most of his Nightline staff were leaving the Republican convention early.

PRISONS

keeping prisoners from the press

Prisoners are locked in, but more and more journalists are being locked out of prison as corrections chiefs across the nation slap increasingly burdensome restrictions on how and when reporters may talk to inmates. A hot battleground is California, home to America's largest prison system — and now to some of America's toughest new media regulations. Reversing a policy in effect for more than two decades, California now allows prison officials to open inmates' correspondence with reporters and forbids journalists to schedule face-to-face interviews with specific inmates, while continuing a prohibition on bringing along paper, pens, tape recorders, or cameras during visiting hours.

Corrections officials typically say they need the restrictions to maintain security and order, or to manage what

has become an avalanche of requests from news organizations, especially the infotainment and tabloid variety. Others fear media feeding frenzies that can turn their most notorious prisoners — the Jeffrey Dahmers and John Wayne Gacys — into TV stars.

But journalists, civil libertarians, and prisoners themselves are challenging the restrictions, arguing that they smell more like censorship than security. Jenni Gainsborough of the National Prison Project at the American Civil Liberties Union says prisons “are very overcrowded and conditions are deteriorating. I think corrections [officials] don't want prisoners to get the word out.” California's action, in fact, comes at a time when it has been on the losing end of three major lawsuits over prison conditions.

If California's policy withstands its challenges, other states may soon follow suit. Even now, at least seven other states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons also impose restrictions ranging from “no pictures” to “no in-person interviews.” The Supreme Court has upheld such policies.

Here are some of the current regulations in effect:

REUTERS AMERICA AND THE REUTER FOUNDATION

invite mid-career US journalists to take an educational break by applying for a
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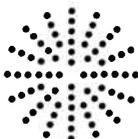
All expenses, including university fees, travel and living costs, are paid for by Reuters America.

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For details and application forms, please contact:

The Director
The Reuter Foundation
85 Fleet Street
London EC4P 4AJ, UK
Telephone 44 171 542 7015
Fax 44 171 542 8599

THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS OCTOBER 31, 1996.



The Reuter Foundation

REUTERS



CALIFORNIA: Permits interviews with inmates encountered during a random tour of the prison, but bars face-to-face interviews with specific prisoners. Permits officials to open letters to and from journalists. Adopted November 1995.

IDAHO: Bars face-to-face interviews with inmates, though exceptions may be granted by the director of the Department of Corrections. No in-person interviews permitted with death-row prisoners. No photographs permitted. Adopted December 1993.

ILLINOIS: Face-to-face interviews with death-row inmates have in the last three years been permitted at the discretion of the director of the Department of Corrections. However, the current director has said he does not plan to grant any.

INDIANA: Prohibits infotainment publications and shows from interviewing inmates without the approval of the commissioner of the Department of Corrections. Adopted July 1995.

MISSISSIPPI: Bars face-to-face interviews. Adopted January 1991.

OHIO: Restricts infotainment publications and broadcasts unless the director of the Department of Rehabilitation and

Corrections makes an exception. Interviews with death-row inmates limited to one every ninety days. Adopted July 1994.

SOUTH CAROLINA: Permits interviews only during visiting hours. Prohibits tape recording or videotaping inmates. Adopted February 1996.

VIRGINIA: Permits face-to-face interviews only at the discretion of the director of the Department of Corrections. Prohibits photos of inmates, but will provide mug shots. Took effect February 1, 1996.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS: Under a new anti-terrorism rule, may restrict in-person or phone interviews with inmates when there is "a substantial risk that a prisoner's communications or contacts with persons" could lead to deaths or injuries of people or substantial property damage. Adopted April 1996.

Sources: Association of State Correctional Administrators; interviews with selected state and federal prison officials.

Susan Freinkel

Freinkel is a writer living in San Francisco who has covered criminal justice for The American Lawyer.

? ANY QUESTIONS?

"The deal is close to completed, but one analyst, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not rule out the possibility that Mr. Perelman was still hoping to sell his company [New World Communications] to the News Corporation, which already owns a 20 percent stake in New World. This person said that Rupert Murdoch, the chairman of the News Corporation, has discussed a purchase but has been unwilling to make a deal because Mr. Perelman was seeking too much of a premium. By moving ahead on a purchase of King World, this person said, Mr. Perelman might be trying to provoke News Corporation into rushing in before the deal is completed, since New World, in taking over King World, might become too big an acquisition for the News Corporation to consider."

Geraldine Fabrikant, laboring to explain the complexities of media mergers, in The New York Times, July 15.

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In 1968, presidential candidates were given an average of forty-three seconds for uninterrupted speech on network evening newscasts. By 1988 the average soundbite had shrunk to 9.8 seconds. Four years later another 1.4 seconds had been lopped off, and the early returns for 1996, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Media and Public Affairs, show the average soundbite down once again — to 7.2 seconds.

These familiar numbers are invariably used to support grim conclusions about the state of journalism, the republic, and perhaps even our capacity for reasoned thought. I find such conclusions a bit hasty. Longer soundbites would not necessarily elevate television news or political discourse in general, and better use of short ones might.

Mine is not a widely held view. Speaking for many, former *CBS Evening News* anchor Walter Cronkite charged, "They're picking out a few words that don't even have nouns and verbs in them. That's no way to present the issues of the day." His solution was to lobby for free air time for candidates, partly as a supplement to the nightly news reports.

Cronkite's proposal is on the right track but his critique of the newscast is not. Citizens certainly deserve more opportunities to hear out the candidates — not just reporters interpreting the views of the candidates — but the evening newscasts don't have to be given over to that service.

"TV news is a whole package," notes ABC News political director Hal Bruno. "There are many other programs on television where candidates get to speak at great length." They include *Nightline*, the morning and Sunday shows, plus offerings on C-SPAN, CNN, public television, and various other cable networks. In addition, Fox, CNN, NBC, CBS, and ABC have agreed, persuaded in part by Cronkite and his confederates, to provide the major-party candidates with various additional opportunities to explain themselves. It will take some deft remote work indeed to avoid extended visits with the candidates this fall.

Certainly, it is important for the evening newscasts, too, to pitch in with some regular looks at candidates in action; however, their primary responsibility is to explore the issues of the day. Longer soundbites don't necessarily deepen those explorations. Politicians can produce four sentences of empty rhetoric as easily as one.

Nor is quoting a candidate's words during

THE OPEN MIKE



ON SHRINKING SOUNDBITES

a stump speech always the best way to present that candidate's position. "The differences between the Republican and Democratic plans for Medicare may be the most important issue in this campaign," suggests Martin Plissner, executive political director at CBS News. "To describe it, using only the mere words candidates use in their speeches, is extremely difficult."

In lieu of and in between the soundbites, the network newscasts rely to a large extent on the wordings of their reporters. For good reason: television reporters, like their counterparts in print, are trained to provide clear, concise, reasonably fair-minded explanations of the positions of candidates.

Even in print, where the reporters are not so restricted by a stopwatch, the quotes aren't much longer. Plissner once sat down and counted the words in news-magazine and newspaper quotations — "inkbites," he dubbed them — and found them to be about the same as television soundbites. Newspapers do have the space to support their inkbites with much more information, explanation, and context. But does that mean television journalists should surrender what little space they do have to longer soundbites?

Television, of course, also explores issues through images, and plenty of other enlightening visuals are available to it besides a candidate's "talking head." Videotape reports can show us where and upon whom proposals might have an impact; they can offer us glimpses of supporters and opponents, contributors and protesters, of spontaneous interactions and charged moments — not just those familiar pairs of moving lips.

Many more such images are now being squeezed into television reports, sometimes in quick-cut montages of places, faces, institutions, and activities. We're familiar with the downside of this MTV style: a frantic feeling; a tendency to fall back on effects for effects' sake, on "visual candy"; and the well-founded suspicion that these "carefully selected" images can be packaged by the campaign as calculatedly as any soundbite.

But as advertisers have long understood, fast-cut images present significant amounts of information in seemingly insignificant slivers of time. Maybe each of these pictures is not worth a thousand words, but the thousand pictures broadcast each week on each newscast certainly add up.

And television journalists now have another alternative to relying on lengthy soundbites: using computerized graphics.

"I always said the one thing television didn't report very well was lists and numbers," Bob Schieffer, CBS's chief Washington correspondent, says. "Now we can give people lists and numbers in a way they can understand." Because these computerized graphics can *move*, we can actually watch dollar-signs being distributed; we can actually watch diagrams change in response to various plans.

"If you want to get the main element of, say, a welfare proposal out to people in any reasonable amount of time," Plissner explains, "to simply have its proponent speak into a camera is nowhere near as effective as using graphics and using the economy of language you get by writing a script."

Four years ago, Dan Rather and Erik Sorenson, then executive producer of the *CBS Evening News*, decreed that no statement from a presidential candidate could be broadcast on their newscast unless it ran at least thirty seconds. By the end of the campaign, soundbites on CBS were running about the same as on ABC and NBC, an average of 8.3 seconds.

Different CBS producers and executives supply different explanations for the failure of that thirty-second rule. "It was because the candidates didn't speak in thirty-second bites," Susan Zirinsky, former head of the political unit, says. For Sorenson, "It became trickier with three major candidates in the race to find time for three thirty-second sound-bites each night."

Plissner, without disagreeing, adds another explanation that is blunter and more telling: "It was an interesting experiment, but after we tried it, we didn't really like the stories. The pieces, when you got them, weren't as good."

Television news reports will improve as their use of narration, visuals, graphics, and soundbites improves — not by plumping one element back up at the expense of the others.

Mitchell Stephens
Stephens, a professor of journalism at New York University, is completing a book called The Rise of the Image/The Fall of the Word.

Darts & Laurels

◆ **LAUREL** to the *Northwest Arkansas Times* and editor Mike Masterson, for a testament to the redemptive power of the press. After the *Times* had won a triumphant First Amendment victory in a libel suit brought by one Dan Coody, a Fayetteville mayoral candidate in 1992 who claimed that the paper's maliciously false news reports and editorials had cost him not only the election but also his good name, Masterson took a long hard look at the case. His six-week review of the stacks of documents and depositions, internal memorandums and newspaper clippings led to one unmistakable conclusion, and in a May 5 piece he spelled it out for all the world to see. Under the headline AN APOLOGY IS LONG OVERDUE, Masterson (who joined the *Times* as editor in 1995 when it was sold by its longtime owner, Thomson Publishing, to American Publishing) detailed the paper's almost pathological smear campaign — including totally unwarranted rumors, innuendoes, suggestions, and hints of drug use, bad checks, armed robbery, and prison — against a candidate perceived by the then publisher, David Stokes, to be a “left winger that has a large following of the '60s crowd.” As Masterson put it, “I hope Coody and his wife and family and this community will accept this apology and forgive the *Times* for this travesty against truth, fairness, and just good, factual journalism.” For his part, Coody told *CJR*, “Unfortunately, no one I know has ever heard of this kind of thing happening at a newspaper. I can't help but think that such commitment to what is true might actually become a contagious phenomenon within your powerful profession. And that might create a big positive from all the negative I have experienced since my campaign of 1992.”

◆ **DART** to the *El Paso Times*, for the journalistic equivalent of election fraud. In a March 9 editorial published two days before the Texas primary, the *Times* responsibly urged that all registered voters participate — “For a few to decide public issues . . . is to defeat the purpose of a free society” — then civic-mindedly proceeded to endorse those candidates that “are the best choices as seen by the editorial board of the *El Paso Times*.” That board, however — created

with no little fanfare several years ago and made up of three members of the newsroom staff and three representatives of the outside community — had, in at least one congressional district race, made an entirely different choice, only to be overruled by *Times* editor and publisher Dionicio Flores. According to the *Albuquerque Journal's* March 12 report on the organized protest that followed, Flores responded to questions thusly: “I am the board.”

◆ **DART** to Heritage Newspapers of Saline, Michigan, for professional prostitution. In a come-hither flyer aimed at enticing local building contractors to advertise in an upcoming home guide to be distributed by six of its weeklies, Heritage laid out its proposition in unmistakable terms: for a quarter-page ad the papers would respond with a staff-written, eighth-of-a-page “spotlight” about the advertiser's “business, service, or development”; a half-page ad, and the papers would come across with a quarter-page piece; a full-page ad, and the papers would go all the way — “a half-page feature story (and photo).”

◆ **DART** to the National Newspaper Publishers Association, for traveling without a moral compass. Thirteen officers and members of the NNPA, which represents some 200 black-owned papers with 11 million readers across the U.S., accepted an invitation to an all-expense-paid tour of Nigeria last fall that was underwritten by the military dictatorship in power there as part of an aggressive media campaign to counter mainstream reports of political repression, human rights abuses, and the censorship of journalists. That campaign, according to a May 20 article in *The Nation* magazine, has been furthered by a series of misguidedly reassuring editorials in NNPA papers — and, perhaps not coincidentally, by lucrative ads and advertorial inserts placed by lobbyists for Nigeria in those very same hard-pressed papers.

◆ **DART** to WJLA-TV, in Washington, D.C., for losing its street smarts. Since the closing off of Pennsylvania Avenue to vehicular traffic in the interest of White House security, the station has

presented an unusual pile-up of negative stories, series, and specials on the shutdown that is far from accidental. According to an article by Howard Kurtz in the July 10 *Washington Post*, WJLA's coverage is the result of an increasing flow of pressure from Allbritton Communications, which is the parent not only of WJLA but also of Riggs Bank. It seems that because of the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue, the bank has lost a number of customers at its Pennsylvania Avenue branch.

◆ **LAUREL** to the Palo Alto (California) High School student newspaper, *The Campanile*; and to the Blue Springs (Missouri) South High School student newspaper, the *Jaguar Journal*, for teaching the grown-ups a thing or two. In a page-one story in its March 11 edition, *The Campanile* revealed the previously unnoticed fact that, at a closed session of questionable legality earlier this year, the budget-cutting board of the financially strapped school district had voted to appoint an associate superintendent to a newly created but never advertised administrative job that gave her a retroactive salary increase of \$9,000. On April 12, the *Jaguar Journal* published the findings of its investigation into the ease with which underage students were able to buy cigarettes at certain local stores — a story that school officials originally had killed when the student editors refused to delete the names of the offending stores. Officials reversed their decision only after the *Journal* in its April 4 issue ran a large block of white space under the headline TWO AREA BUSINESSES SELL CIGARETTES TO MINORS, an act of journalistic independence that prompted a supportive page-one story on the controversy in the daily Blue Springs *Examiner* in which the stores were named.

◆ **DART** to *The Wall Street Journal*, for yet another example of mishandling the mail. On May 21, Representative Patricia Schroeder of Colorado sent to the paper a letter to the editor commenting on an op-ed piece published that day and headlined "The Navy's Enemies" by former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, in which he argued that the recent suicide of Admiral Jeremy Boorda had been triggered by the "relentless lynch mob that has hounded the U.S. Navy" since the Tailhook convention of 1991. "What should have been at most a week's story," Lehman wrote, "instead ignited a firestorm that has been consuming the Navy ever since, . . . fanned and encouraged" by, among others, "witch-hunting journalists"; by President Clinton, "who . . . brought in an administration staffed by former war protesters"; and by "Pat Schroeder and her McCarthyite slurs." Lehman, however, "missed the point," wrote

Schroeder in her letter to the editor. "The scandal dragged on because the service tried to cover it up. . . . In the interests of full disclosure, Lehman might have mentioned that while he was the Navy Secretary he condoned and participated in the Tailhook bacchanalias that even today he describes as 'the usual excesses of an annual party.'" On June 13, with her letter still not published, Schroeder wrote to the paper again, noting that "when someone is repeatedly targeted on your editorial pages, common courtesy would suggest access to your letters forum." Finally, on June 20, the editors found space for Schroeder's May 21 letter, though not in its entirety: three words — noting that Lehman had both condoned *and participated* in those Tailhook bacchanalias — were edited out. "Knowledge of Mr. Lehman's personal involvement in Tailhook's sordid occurrences is useful to your readers' understanding of why senior Navy officials have been more interested in protecting themselves and in shifting blame to junior officers," Schroeder wrote in a June 20 letter published on July 10. "I would not want to think the *Journal* was part of that protection scheme."

◆ **DART** to the *Los Angeles Times*, for barking up the wrong tree. Roving over fifty precious column inches of the front page of its second section were three four-color pictures of a staff photographer's dog.

◆ **DART** to the Fairfield, Montana, *Sun Times*, for redefining the concept of political journalism. When Gov. Marc Racicot addressed the audience at a local GOP fund-raiser this spring, the large section of paneled wall behind the speaker's podium was completely blank. But when a six-by-five-inch, above-the-fold photo of the event appeared on the *Sun Times's* front page, the wall had, through the miracle of modern technology, become conspicuously



adorned — with a campaign poster urging voters to ELECT JIM ANDERSON TETON COUNTY COMMISSIONER. The candidate also happens to be the editor and publisher of the *Fairfield Sun Times*.

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.



Announce

THE KAISER/NATIONAL PRESS FOUNDATION MEDIA MINI-FELLOWSHIPS IN HEALTH FOR 1996

Travel and Research Grants for Print or Broadcast Journalists and Editors Interested in Health Policy and Public Health

In 1996, the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program, in conjunction with the National Press Foundation, will again award up to fifteen mini-fellowships to print, television, and radio journalists to research and report on a health policy or public health issue of their choice. The purpose is to encourage in-depth reporting on public health and health policy issues, by providing journalists with travel and research support to complete a specific project for publication or broadcast. Typically, grants are \$5,000 each.

Priority is given to projects otherwise unlikely to be undertaken or completed, focusing on issues that have not been covered or are under-reported, and which have a high likelihood of being published/aired and of reaching a mass audience. Applicants must submit a brief outline of their proposed project, including an estimated budget and time-frame for completion and publication/broadcast; their resume and recent examples of their work; and letters of support from a supervising editor. ***Applications need to be submitted by October 17, 1996.***

For more information, or to apply for the 1996 awards, write to:

Penny Duckham
Executive Director of the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program
Kaiser Family Foundation
2400 Sand Hill Road
Menlo Park, California 94025

Eleven journalists were awarded Kaiser/National Press Foundation Media Mini-Fellowships in 1995/96, to research and report on the following issues:

David Baron, senior science reporter, WBUR-Radio (Boston)

AIDS issues

Edwin Chen, Washington correspondent, Los Angeles Times

The effects of medical savings accounts on individual behavior, community risk pools, and the health care system at large

Jane Erikson, medical writer, The Arizona Star

Science, politics and the breast cancer rebellion

Don Finley, medical writer, San Antonio Express-News

Diabetes and its disproportionate impact on Mexican-Americans, and other ethnic groups in the U.S.

Jon Hamilton, freelance medical and health policy reporter (Washington State)

State efforts to reshape Medicaid, and the shift to managed care

Diana Hembree, Center for Investigative Reporting (San Francisco)

Alcohol treatment and welfare reform—cutbacks in treatment for SSI recipients

Terry Schraeder, freelance contributor/former medical and health reporter/producer, WCVB-TV (Boston)

Malnutrition among children, and the implications of dismantling the WIC program

Jane Stevens, freelance syndicated health/science writer and video-journalist (San Francisco)

How public health officials are preventing violence and gun misuse

Elizabeth Stone, freelance health and mental health writer/contributor, Newark Star-Ledger

The delivery of culturally appropriate mental health care, focused on immigrant groups in the New Jersey/New York area

Mark Taylor, health and medical writer, Post-Tribune (Gary, Indiana)

Community health clinics and their impact on community health, including infant mortality and immunizations

Marjorie Whigham-Desir, Features Editor, Black Enterprise Magazine

The future of black-owned or predominately black-served hospitals—how will they succeed in the age of managed care and competition?



Anatomy of a story

Who was burning the black churches?



by Joe Holley

On Tuesday, January 2, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* reported that a fire that destroyed a rural church in the area the previous Saturday appeared to have been set intentionally. Further, the newspaper reported, the burning might be related to fires that had destroyed three other black Baptist churches in western Tennessee in early 1995, nearly a year earlier. Two of the previous fires had been ruled arson; the third was of undetermined origin but remained under investigation.

"We reported it as spot news," the *Commercial Appeal's* city editor, Jesse Bunn, recalls. Other papers throughout the South had also covered church fires as spot news, if they covered them at all.

Less than a week later, on January 8, fire broke out in Knoxville, across the state from Memphis, at the 400-member Inner City Church. According to the *Nashville Tennessean*, the Knoxville fire was the fifth fire set intentionally over the past year at Tennessee churches with black memberships. "Investigators don't believe the fires are linked, but the FBI is trying to determine if there is any evidence of civil rights violations," the Nashville paper reported.

In retrospect, the Knoxville fire appears to have been the catalyst — the incendiary element, if you will — that transformed spot news in various papers across the South into big news across the nation. Within a matter of days, the burnings at black churches became

Joe Holley is a free-lance writer who lives in Austin, Texas.

The story is a textbook example of what can happen —

one of those soaring stories that occasionally burst onto the national radar screen, seemingly out of nowhere. Like child sex abuse at day-care centers and recovered memory, to name two, they quickly command national attention, acquire immense symbolic significance, and inspire a spate of national soul-searching. Weeks, months, sometimes years later, they fade, leaving questions in their wake: Was the problem solved or did the media merely lose interest? Had the media at last discovered a phenomenon that had been going on for years, unnoticed and unreported? Or were the media so alert that, in this case, the fires attracted attention as soon as they began flaming up? Or was the whole thing a product of media hyperbole?

The story of the fires at black churches in the Southeast commanded headlines for seven months and evolved through three distinct stages. First was the trend stage, lasting less than a month, in which reporters began to see a pattern. Second was the major-story stage, in which the national media began connecting dots, raising the possibility that the phenomenon was fueled by an atmosphere of surging racial animosity, or even by a nationwide conspiracy concocted by white racist organizations, or by some awful combination of the two. This fevered second stage lasted approximately five months. The third stage, set in motion by a newspaper not known for its investigative prowess and a wire service whose *raison d'être* is spot news, was a time of sorting out and assessment.

The black-church-burning story is a textbook example of what can happen, both good and bad, when journalists are tempted to connect the dots. It's an

example of how the media can be distracted, even misled for a while, but, given time, are able to right themselves, regain their balance, and tease out the complex truth.

Reggie White is an all-pro defensive end for the Green Bay Packers. He is also the associate pastor of the Knoxville church that burned in January and the man who, more than perhaps anyone, helped boost the church-burning story to the second stage. When his multiracial church went up in flames, White was preparing for the biggest game of his eleven-year NFL career, a conference championship game against the Dallas Cowboys. Articulate and outspoken, he had the ear of news organizations around the nation, and he wasn't reluctant to see larger and sinister forces at work.

"Until this country starts dealing with organizations that do things like this," White told sportswriter Michael Madden of *The Boston Globe*, "then we're still going to have problems. I think it's time for the country to take this stuff seriously. It's time to stop sweeping this stuff under the rug because progress in race relations hasn't been made."

"When is America going to stop tolerating these groups?" White asked in a January 12 column by another sportswriter, Thomas George of *The New York Times*. "It is time for us to come together and to fight it. One of the problems is that the people financing and providing the resources for this type of activity are popular people with money who are hiding under the rug. Some of them may be policemen, doctors, lawyers, prominent people who

speak out of both sides of their mouths. That makes it difficult to stop but not impossible. Not when we come together as one force against hate."

When flames consumed three small black churches in the small town of Boligee in rural Alabama, the football player-pastor seemed prophetic, and the national media were ready to run with the ball. "The destruction of the three churches in Greene County, long recognized as one of the poorest counties in America, follows a series of attacks on black churches both in adjoining Sumter County and in nearby Tennessee," Sue Anne Pressley of *The Washington Post* reported. "It raises anew the disturbing specter of a time when the civil rights movement was at its most heated."

Pressley, based in Austin, Texas, was covering Barbara Jordan's funeral in Houston when she was dispatched to Alabama. She noted that church burnings in Alabama "have a particularly dark historical resonance. In a pivotal tragedy in the civil rights movement, four black girls were killed during Sunday School on September 15, 1963, when whites firebombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, about 100 miles east of Boligee."

The Boligee fires also attracted the attention of the *Los Angeles Times's* Eric Harrison, based in Atlanta. "Church fires are lighting up the night in this isolated corner of the state," Harrison wrote. "The echoes of civil rights-era violence they evoke have been just as shocking as they are painful to the targeted African-American congregations." Harrison quoted Jim Cavanaugh, special agent in charge of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol,

both good and bad — when reporters start connecting dots

Tobacco and Firearms, Birmingham office: "None of us wants to go back in history. Let's hope it's not that."

"But what else could it be?" Harrison asked rhetorically.

Suddenly, black-church arson was one of those stories that cause the back of a reporter's neck to prickle. It was an important story with national implications: it offered clear-cut issues of good and evil, heroes and villains, and the intriguing, unanswered questions of a criminal investigation; it resonated with the heroic tones of civil rights history, particularly when the dateline was Alabama.

Reporters covering the South know that when a story involves civil rights, poverty issues, or criminal justice, one of the most useful clearinghouses of information is the Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Montgomery, Alabama. A nonprofit agency that tracks hate groups and promotes racial harmony, the center is inevitably quoted in stories that range from black-church burnings to skinhead activities to a bomb at the Olympics. It has earned a reputation for reliability and well-researched information.

Spokespeople for the Southern Poverty Law Center were reluctant to ascribe widespread church burnings to any kind of organized, wide-ranging effort on the part of white racist groups (even though in one church arson in South Carolina the organization would later file suit against the Ku Klux Klan). On January 19, for example, the center's well-known founder and head, Morris Dees, talked about the Boligee fires to Ronald Smothers of *The New York Times's* Atlanta bureau. Dees

noted that Greene and Sumter counties, both overwhelmingly black, were not areas where white supremacist groups would thrive. He told Smothers that the incidents might be more the result of casual racism than organized racist attacks. "This is deer-hunting season, and you have a lot of hunting clubs up there and a lot of drunk white boys who might be angry at not getting a deer," Dees said. "It's still bigoted, insensitive, and intimidating," he added, "but it's not organized."

But spokespeople for another, lesser-known clearinghouse of information, the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal, were not so circumspect. The CDR, originally called the National Anti-Klan Network, held a press conference in March to release a preliminary report showing a drastic increase in black-church burnings beginning in 1990. "You're talking about a well-organized white-supremacist movement," the Rev. Mac Charles Jones, a CDR board member, told *The Christian Science Monitor*. On CNN, he called it "domestic terrorism."

Other church leaders and civil-rights spokespeople did not raise the CDR notion of an organized conspiracy by racist organizations, but some of them did view the church fires as fueled by a rising and pervasive atmosphere of racism, an atmosphere nurtured by right-wing politicians.

In its June 3 issue, *Newsweek* ran a story quoting the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who blamed a "cultural conspiracy" — a seeping intolerance fed by white politicians' attacks on affirmative action and immigration." In its July 1 issue, *Time* alluded to "the national epidemic of violence against black churches" and quoted the National

Urban League president, Hugh Price: "The flames of bigotry and intolerance are soaring higher than they have in a generation." In a column that ran in the March 18 issue of *Time*, national correspondent Jack E. White wrote that the church fires were most likely incited by the resentful, fear-driven rhetoric of Pat Buchanan and other conservative politicians.

The influential *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, who writes frequently on race, poverty, and criminal-justice issues, also saw a sinister force at work in the church fires, but a force as old as the Republic. In his May 24 column, he focused on the particularly poignant story of the St. John Baptist Church in a rural area outside Columbia, South Carolina. The little country church, founded by freed slaves, had been viciously vandalized. "KKK" carved into the front door, its pews riddled with bullet holes, its piano destroyed, its Bible and hymnals ripped apart, and the figure of Christ over the pulpit ripped down and torn apart. A brand-new sacrament cloth had been spread open and defecated upon, and graves in the nearby cemetery had been partially dug up.

That vandalism, Herbert pointed out, occurred in 1985. Vandals continued to strike periodically for the next ten years despite efforts by blacks and whites to rebuild and protect the church. Finally, in August 1995, someone burned the church to the ground. For Herbert, the St. John story was an example of how black churches throughout the South had been targeted for years, without anyone outside the affected communities taking notice.

Herbert noted that congressional hearings (convened days earlier by Representative Henry Hyde, a conservative Republican who chairs the Judiciary Committee, at the request of Representative John Conyers of Michigan, a liberal Democrat) had been helpful in giving "a little more exposure to a terrible problem that had had a difficult time catching the attention of the media, and therefore the public."

Herbert alluded to the bigger story. "The attacks are not occurring in a vacuum," he wrote. "They are the work of twisted individuals who flourish in an atmosphere that is inflamed, in Mr. Conyers's words, by 'the rhetoric of hate and blame.'"

The TV networks were also on the story. In May, ABC's *Nightline* devoted an entire week to race relations, including the latest on the black-church burnings. *Nightline's* coverage and almost every story — whether newspaper, newsmagazine, or network news — made the point that no evidence had been uncovered that would suggest a regional or nationwide conspiracy, but almost every story also included what *The New Yorker's* Michael Kelly, in a July 15 article, would call "clear conspiratorial overtones."

In some of the coverage, these two levels of conspiracy — rising hatreds fueled by right-wingers, and organized terrorism — seemed to fuse somehow, as sources, politicians, and journalists labored to explain what seemed to be a widespread epidemic of church burnings.

Newsweek noted in an article headlined "Fires in the Night" (June 24) that "many of these cases remain unsolved, and no one has evidence of any national or regional conspiracy. But the sheer number of black church arsons, which now equals the worst years of white racist terror in the 1950s and '60s, suggests a spreading virus of copycat malice."

"The fires just keep coming, one after the other, mostly in southern states. . . ." *U.S. News & World Report* observed on June 24.

An epidemic of church-burnings is a



As the story reached a crescendo in early June, ministers from some of the burned churches, along with supporters, met with federal officials, including Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, whose office (above) they are leaving. They also met with Attorney General Janet Reno and President Clinton

compelling issue for politicians, particularly in an election year, and in the House Judiciary Committee's hearings on the fires, which began on May 21, lawmakers heard testimony from officials with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Christian Coalition, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Black lawmakers and church leaders criticized the government for not taking the fires seriously enough. *The New York Times* quoted Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, a Texas Democrat: "I'm concerned at the politeness of this hearing. You've got burned churches and burned history. You have intimi-

dated communities."

The *Times* also quoted Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, president of the SCLC, and a well-known civil-rights veteran: "We're not surprised by the feeble response to the church burnings. It just represents the fifty-first state in this nation: the state of denial."

Lowery added: "We are witnessing a serious and frightening assault on African-Americans in this country. We must hold accountable the racist groups that fan the flames of intolerance."

Stage two of the church-burning story reached its crescendo in early June, as President Clinton invited a group of southern black ministers and other church officials to the White House, and then used his weekly Saturday radio address to discuss "a recent and disturbing rash of crimes that hearkens back to a dark era in our



nation's history." The president mentioned the Matthews Murkland Presbyterian Church, in Charlotte, North Carolina, which had burned to the ground two days earlier; according to the president, it was the thirtieth African-American church damaged by suspicious fire in the South over the previous eighteen months.

"We do not now have evidence of a national conspiracy, but it is clear that racial hostility is the driving force behind a number of these incidents," Clinton said.

It was a reasonable assumption and possibly true, but there were complicating factors in this particular case. Two days later, the authorities in Charlotte arrested and charged a suspect. Although the suspect was white and, according to *USA Today*, held anti-black attitudes, she was also emotionally disturbed and thirteen years old. There was apparently no connection between the fire she allegedly set and other fires.

The Charlotte incident was one of

several telling indications that the church-fire story was more complicated than much of the coverage would suggest.

Of all the news outlets covering the church burnings, it was *USA Today* that first devoted the time and attention needed to lay out the important subtleties, the complex detail, and the basic facts. As reporter Gary Fields recalls, *USA Today* started working on the church-fires story one afternoon in February when the editors, prompted by the fires in Boligee, Alabama, and western Tennessee, were about to assign the story to its nightside team. "I'd been on nightside," Fields says, "and I knew what it was like to get stuck with a story like that after five p.m., when all the offices you need to call are closed." Fields, a veteran police-beat reporter at the *Shreveport Times* and for one year at *The Washington Times*, was covering the Justice Department at the time. He persuaded editor Dennis Cauchon to let him cover the story.

On that February afternoon, Fields talked to people at Justice and got information about the three fires in Alabama and the four in western Tennessee. He remembers asking one last question: "Are you guys investigating any more fires?" He remembers a pause; they didn't seem to know. "We'll have to get back to you on that."

"By the time they got back, I had found seventeen," he says. He set to work making calls, just as if he were on the police beat back in Shreveport. Taking advantage of the different time zone in some of the southern states, he called NAACP and SCLC offices, state fire marshals, local police, and little volunteer fire departments that don't always turn in records to state authorities. Well ahead of the pack, he was able to report, in late February, that twenty-three black churches had been set afire in the previous thirty-four months.

By April, *USA Today* had run some twenty stories related to the black-church fires. At that point, Fields recalls, "the editors called in the cavalry," Fields and a dozen additional

reporters fanned out across the South. They conducted more than 500 interviews, examined fire records in every southern state, and visited the sites of forty-five church arsons. The paper published the results of its investigation in its June 28–30 weekend edition.

That initial four-page report, perhaps the longest and most comprehensive story *USA Today* has ever published, included a half-page chart listing arson or "suspicious" fires at black churches since January 1, 1995, with the number of members at each church, when it was founded, the time and date of the fire, damage, insurance, arrests, if any, and other facts. The chart included eighteen fires previously unreported by federal authorities.

WHY ARE THE CHURCHES BURNING?, the paper's lead headline asked, and its story, by Fields and fellow reporter Richard Price, demonstrated that the answer was far from simple.

In analyzing what it found to be a "surge" in black-church burnings over the last eighteen months, *USA Today* ruled out "any possibility of a national or even regional conspiracy," and went on: "The evidence, in fact, suggests the opposite: there is no one answer to the frightening collection of torched churches across the South, black and white. The crimes stem from teenage vandalism, public drunkenness, derangement, revenge, insurance or other frauds and, to be sure, open or latent racial hatred. But no single thread runs through the black church arsons."

Yet secondly, the paper's investigation did isolate "two well-defined geographic clusters or 'arson zones' where black church arsons are up sharply" and the "patterns suggest racial motives." One was a two-hundred-mile oval in the mid-South that encompasses western Tennessee and northwestern Alabama, and the other "stretches across the Carolinas, where the rate of black church arson has tripled since 1993."

Outside those two clusters, which along with possible "copycat" burnings accounted for the recent upsurge of fires, the paper said its investigation "dispels the notion that an epidemic of racially driven arsons has swept the

South the last two years. Of the sixty-four black-church fires examined, only four can conclusively be shown to be racially motivated. Fifteen others — most of them in the arson clusters — are consistent in some respects with racist burnings. Ten arsons clearly were not racist and evidence is strong that another seventeen had nothing to do with race.” Of the remaining eighteen, *USA Today* found that four appeared to have been listed erroneously and the other fourteen offered no real clues.

USA Today also presented profiles of some church arsonists. They appeared to have acted from a variety of motives, the paper reported on July 1, and most of them were poor, white, uneducated, and often drunk.

In a phone interview some weeks after the investigative report, Fields was justifiably proud of the enterprise reporting he did on the church-burning story. He strongly believes that churches have been burning for a long time and that journalists never smelled the smoke. Yet he and Price uncovered another factor that complicates any racial calculations.

“The recent concern has risen in part,” the two wrote, “because the nation stumbled upon a phenomenon that’s gone on for decades and mistook it for something new. The phenomenon: churches of every color are a traditional favorite of arsonists. Although the pace has been declining in recent years, arsonists still torch an average of 520 churches and church-owned buildings a year, a rate of ten a week.”

Another national news organization, The Associated Press, followed a week later with an equally useful and thorough piece of public-service journalism. Based on a review of six years of federal, state, and local data, AP’s report also questioned what had evolved in the preceding three months or so into the conventional wisdom about black-church burnings.

“Amid all the frightening images of churches aflame,” the wire service reported on July 5, “amid all the fears of raging racism, a surprising truth



Gary Fields
of *USA Today*



Fred Bayles of The
Associated Press

emerges: There’s little hard evidence of a sudden wave of racially motivated arsons against black churches in the South. . . . There is no evidence that most of the seventy-three black church fires recorded since 1995 can be blamed on a conspiracy or a general climate of racial hatred. Racism is the clear motivation in fewer than twenty cases.”

“If you want to know anything in regard to being counted, go to the insurance people.” AP national writer Fred Bayles, who led the investigation, advises. Bayles is part of the AP’s special assignments team, one of two new units the wire service has created in the last year and a half. The special assignments team, whose focus is computer-assisted reporting, and the twenty-six-member enterprise department both focus on the news behind the news. On the black-church story, as on most stories the teams do, there was considerable crossover between the two teams. As Bruce DeSilva, head of the enterprise department, recalls, the church-burning investigation grew out of a discussion at one of the team’s weekly meetings about how a lot of questions about church burnings had not been answered.

The investigation lasted about four weeks, with most of the reporting concentrated on state offices throughout the South.

The Associated Press spelled out its findings:

- Largely because of a few nights’ work by serial arsonists, there had been an eighteen-month jump in the number of church burnings. Such fires are relatively rare in most states, so arson sprees quickly alter the statistical picture. Louisiana, for example, had seven cases of black-church arsons all year; four of them occurred in one night in the Baton Rouge area.

- The number of white-church fires also has increased. Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Virginia have seen more fires at white churches than at black churches since 1995.

- Evidence points to racially motivated arson in twelve to eighteen of the seventy-three fires the wire service counted since 1995, while racism is unlikely in fifteen of those black-church fires. (Black suspects were named in nine of those fifteen; another six of the fifteen churches were burned as part of arson sprees that included both white and black property.)

- In the remaining dozen cases where there have been arrests, the question of racism is more subtle. The gallery of suspects includes drunken teen-agers, devil worshippers, burglars, and three separate cases where firefighters are accused of setting blazes they then helped put out.

Right-leaning commentators, both print and electronic, were quick to use the *USA Today* and AP findings as proof that the six-month-long focus on black-church burnings was a concoction of the liberal media. White churches also burn, they pointed out, and black church members have been known to start fires as well.

Under the headline **A CHURCH ARSON EPIDEMIC? IT’S SMOKE AND MIRRORS**, Michael Fumento wrote on the July 8 op-ed page of *The Wall Street Journal* that “this supposed ‘epidemic of hatred’ is a myth, probably a deliberate hoax. There is no good evidence of any

Reporting the complex truth required hurry-up journalism's missing ingredient: time

increase in black church burnings. There is, however, compelling evidence that a single activist group has taken the media and the nation on a wild ride."

That group, charged Fumento — an attorney formerly with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and now a columnist and the science correspondent for *Reason Magazine* — is the Center for Democratic Renewal. "The CDR's agenda," Fumento wrote, "goes well beyond rooting out genuine bigotry; the group tars mainstream conservatives with the same brush as racist criminals."

Fumento, who acknowledged that "arson committed against a house of worship is a heinous crime," relied on figures from the National Fire Protection Association that showed a dramatic drop in the number of incidences of church arson in recent years. He also charged the CDR and the media with encouraging copycat arsonists.

"Here lies the ultimate irony," Fumento concluded. "By claiming there has been an epidemic of black church burnings, it appears that the CDR and the media may have actually sparked one. They have also fomented tremendous racial division and caused great fear among southern black churchgoers. What the Ku Klux Klan can no longer do, a group established to fight the Klan is doing instead."

It isn't necessary to agree with all Fumento's charges to argue, as Michael Kelly did in his July 15 article in *The New Yorker*, that the media were fanning flames. Kelly, soon to be editor of *The New Republic*, wrote that black-church burnings were happening in the Southeast for many months before the mainline media and the

politicians of both parties paid any attention. "Then," he wrote, "in a case of overreaction that seems to have been inspired in roughly equal measure by genuine concern, guilt, and self-interest, they leaped on the bandwagon with a near-hysteria as misplaced as their previous indifference."

In his view, President Clinton and his administration, the congressional leadership of both parties, the national media, religious groups, and political-interest groups from both sides of the spectrum "have lent credence to the idea that the country is in the grip of what the assistant attorney general for civil rights, Deval Patrick, calls 'an epidemic of terror' — an orgy of black-church burnings, inspired by a resurgence of racial hatred and with clear conspiratorial overtones, that may properly be compared to the attacks on black churches during the civil-rights years." Kelly seemed to see almost a conspiracy to simplify.

Now that the glare of an airline explosion and a bomb at the Olympics have captured media attention, the truth we are left with about arson at black churches seems to be this: there has been an increase in the reported number of black-church burnings in the South. In some of those fires, racist hatred was the motive. But other causes also came into play, including vandalism and pyromania. White churches also burn. The Associated Press, in fact, counted seventy-five white-church fires and seventy-three black-church fires since 1995. If there are, as presumed, more white churches than black churches in the nation, the wire

service pointed out, those numbers "suggest a bias." Yet there does not seem to be a widespread organized racist conspiracy, despite the efforts of some to portray one.

Comprehending the more complex truth, as *USA Today's* Gary Fields points out, required healthy skepticism in the face of large claims, and good old-fashioned reporting. And it took hurry-up journalism's missing ingredient: time.

Claudia Smith Brinson, an editorial writer and columnist with *The State* in Columbia, South Carolina, points out another requirement for parsing out the facts: knowing the community. Brinson, who has closely followed the vandalism and fire at St. John Baptist and at other churches in the Columbia area, says that journalists, whether working on church fires or domestic violence or any other complex story, "should keep working backwards until they get to deep beginnings."

As July became August, as *USA Today's* Fields was asking questions about TWA Flight 800, and as the AP's Fred Bayles was resting up for the rigors of the Republican convention, it happened that a black teenager in Greenville, Texas, site of a cluster of fires in June, including two black-church fires, confessed to setting them. He did it, he told the police, because he was angry at his mother for not letting him stay with her, and because he claimed she used drugs.

The fires in Greenville had "deep beginnings," to use Brinson's phrase, in the experiences of a troubled youngster, experiences not unrelated to racism, perhaps, but not nearly so visible and obvious as the fires he confessed to lighting. ♦

The coverage of church burnings focused on race;
the coverage of the campaign ignores it

Where is race in the race?

by Sig Gissler

It was predictable. When Bob Dole snubbed the NAACP's annual meeting and then labeled the invitation a set-up, the news media swiftly focused on tactics and temperament. Was Dole's failure to appear a blunder, or perhaps a shrewd signal? Was he foolishly kissing off the black electorate, or reassuring the white middle class that he was no racial pushover? And of course, reporters hit the personality angle: Was the "mean" Dole again emerging?

The questions were legitimate. But once again, political reporters had neglected a fundamental issue: What, in substantive terms, do the two presidential candidates have to say about America's most enduring challenge — race relations? The coverage reflects a perplexing pattern of fumbled opportunities.

Generally, presidential candidates don't address race head-on. When a racial issue explodes, they tend to duck. The Los Angeles riots, for example, occurred early in the 1992 campaign, but after a few low-risk comments, the candidates let aching questions about racial conflict fade. More commonly, candidates deal with race indirectly through hedged statements about, say, affirmative action, or through code words about their policies on such issues as crime, welfare, or immigration.

We're accustomed to the politicians' evasions, but the media's cooperation seems odd. Journalists often note the nation's racial tension. "America is obsessed with black and white," *Newsweek* declared after the O.J. Simpson verdict and Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March. Many reporters, editors, and broadcasters echo the words of NBC anchor Tom Brokaw: "Race is probably the single most important issue we deal with." And in the last fifteen years, journalism generally has improved coverage of race and ethnicity, providing a fuller view of multicultural America's mix of hope and heartache.

Yet when it comes to the presidential campaign, talented political reporters who pride themselves on prodding candidates often fail to explore the interplay

of race and politics. In day-to-day stories, they too seldom press candidates on race-related issues. In analysis pieces, they tend to ignore the campaign's often subtle racial dimension. A few illustrations:

- When Dole eventually expressed regret at stiffing the NAACP and defended his civil-rights record as "flawless," few reporters seized the chance to analyze his thirty-year record. Most stories focused on his gift for gaffes and how aides urged him to be more "scripted."

- When President Clinton spoke to the NAACP meeting, he uttered some soothing words on racial amity and then focused on crime and gun control. The meeting apparently did not inspire reporters to ask the president to offer his own plans for narrowing America's racial splits.

- When fascinating stories appeared about multiracial Americans irked by rigid racial categories in the census, hardly anyone asked Dole and Clinton where they stood (as if they bore no responsibility for the laws of the land).

- Similarly, when candidates talk about welfare reform — far-reaching legislation that Clinton, after agonizing, decided to sign — race is implicit. Yet political reporters seldom call on candidates to address the law's racial repercussions. For example, tougher work rules have a disproportionate impact on blacks and Latinos, many in central cities long ago stripped of industrial jobs. Likewise, if reform hurls one million children into poverty, as critics allege, racial disparity looms. While one in eight American children receives welfare, roughly 60 percent of the recipients are black or Latino. Too few stories connect those dots.

The causes for this journalistic sag are multiple. Among contributing factors:

- Complexity. In the 1960s, racial segregation was a clear-cut moral issue. Today, ambiguity clouds racial concerns (affirmative action is but one example). So, race is more elusive to cover.

- Compassion fatigue. A few years ago, Howard Kurtz, the *Washington*

Post media reporter, observed: "The plain fact is that newspapers [and he could add TV news programs] reflect the mood and values of white, middle-class society, and that society by the early '90s had simply grown tired of the intractable problems of the urban underclass."

- White dominion. The two candidates are white; most political reporters are white; so are most of the producers and editors who set the news agenda. Significantly, when Dole and Vice President Albert Gore addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April, neither man was asked a single question bearing on race relations.

- Nature of campaigns. Reporters tend to report on issues that candidates raise; thus if depression-level unemployment among black and Latino urban males isn't mentioned, political reporters tend to skip it.

- Professional risk. Race reporting can be hazardous to journalists. To tackle racial issues is to court misunderstanding and criticism — both inside and outside the newsroom. Even the addition of minority reporters doesn't necessarily help, since they, too, can be reluctant to rock the racial boat.

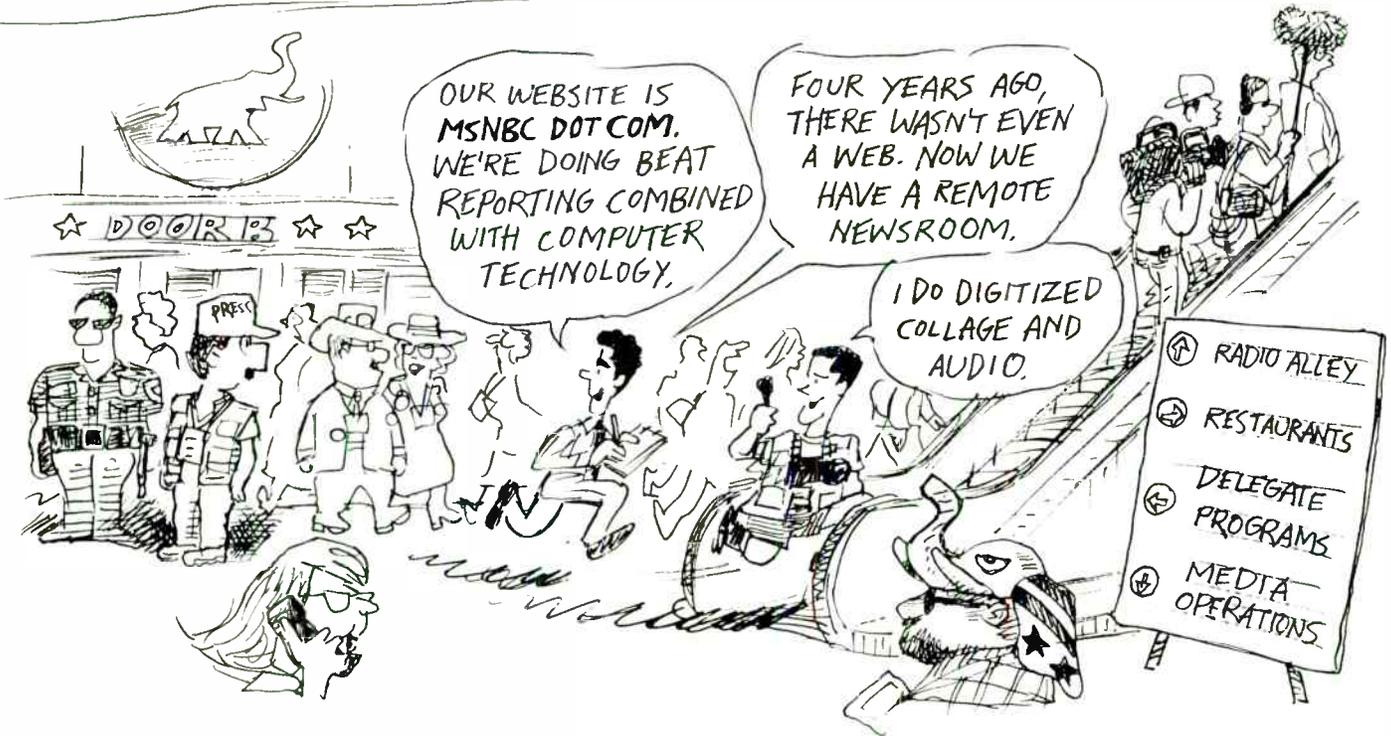
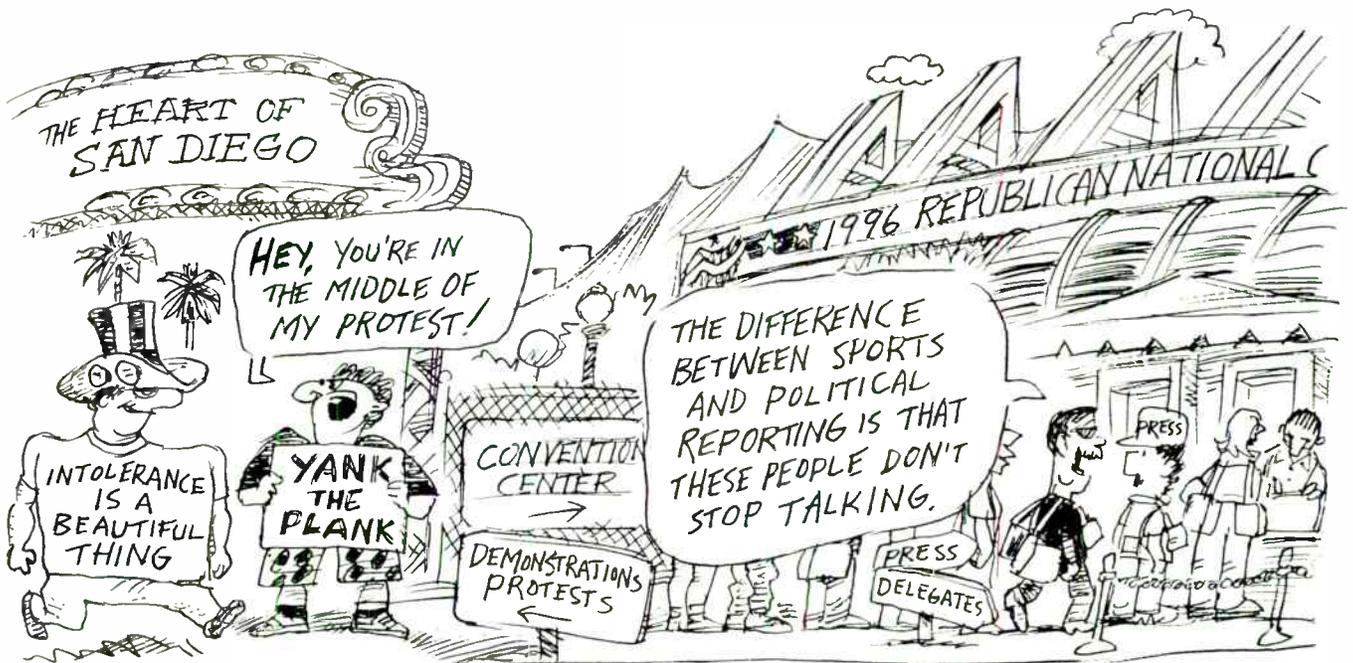
Yes, there are exceptions in campaign coverage. For example, after the NAACP flap, *The Baltimore Sun's* Karen Hosler examined Dole's congressional record on civil rights, and found it solid despite recent retreats on affirmative action. Jeanne Cummings of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* explored how Dole and Clinton have dealt with race from boyhood onward. And Jonathan Tilove, of *Newhouse News Service*, wrote about the remarkable resilience of affirmative action in an election year.

But too many political reporters fail to similarly serve voters as they ponder who should lead an often racially splintered country into the twenty-first century.

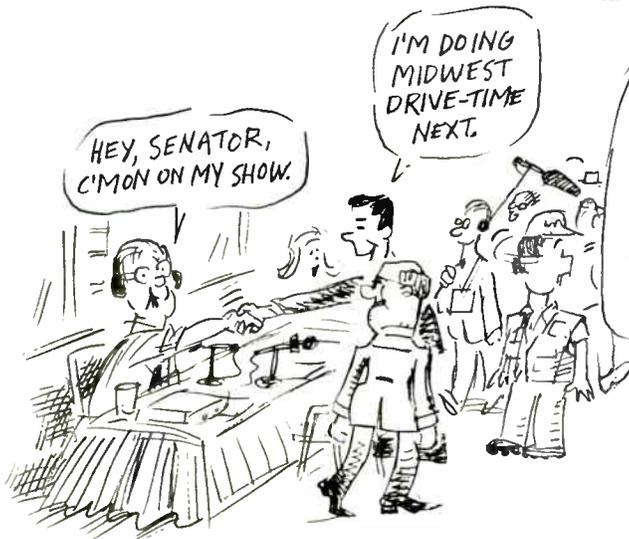
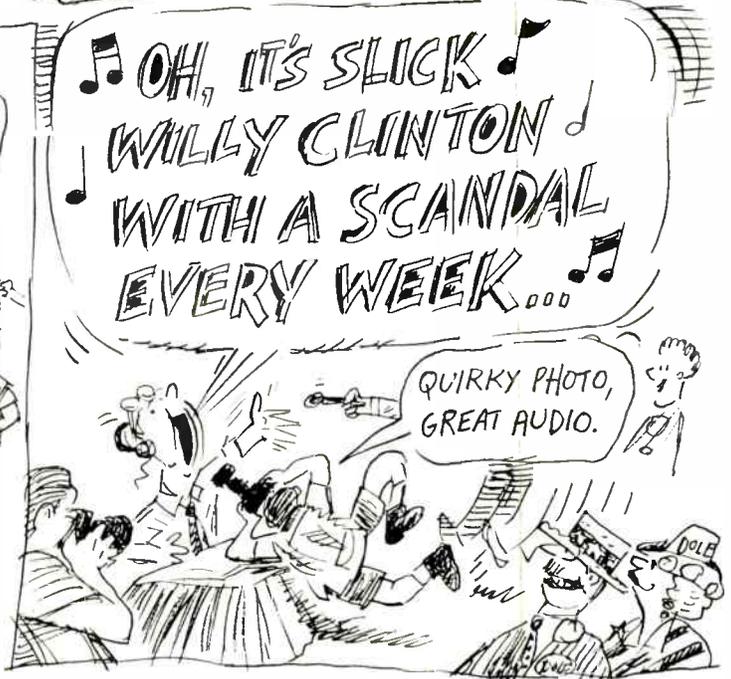
Sig Gissler, former editor of The Milwaukee Journal, is a professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

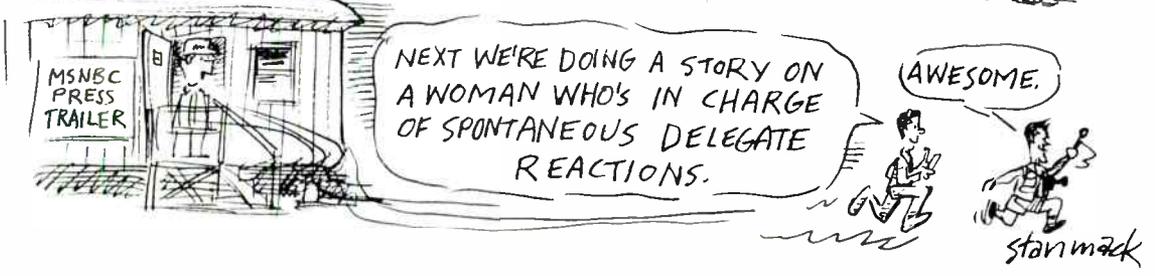
Conventional Wisdom: With MSNBC @ GOP

Real-life comics by Stan Mack



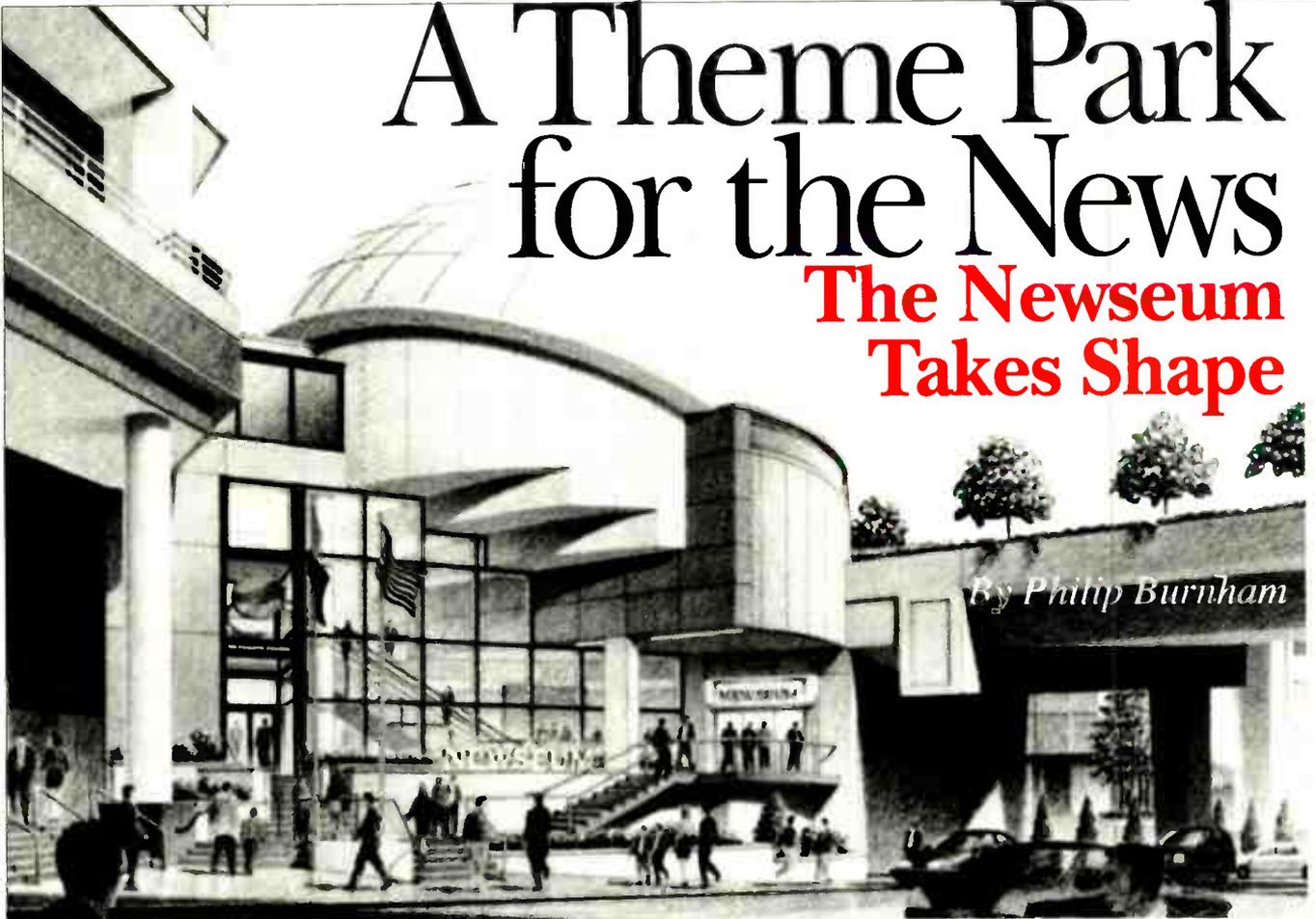
Stan Mack is the author, most recently, of a graphic history of the American Revolution





A Theme Park for the News

The Newseum Takes Shape



By Philip Burnham

You thought Washington had enough museums. But this one could be different. It's certainly trying. Budgeted at \$42 million and scheduled to open next April, the multimedia space — more a learning mall than a museum — promises to sharpen respect for the First Amendment and cultivate empathy for those who deliver the news. Underwritten by The Freedom Forum, the Newseum, as it is dubbed, in the clever argot of the age, wants to be cutting-edge on all counts, from the Internet cafe and live production studios to an impressive collection of archival data and a twenty-four-foot-high memorial to more than 900 journalists killed in the line of duty. The stainless steel and dichroic glass Freedom Forum Journalists Memorial will follow the recent resurgence in memorialization — “the sombering of America” — that has seen dedicated in Washington during the last couple of years a Korean War Memorial, a monument to American servicewomen, and a cairn in Arlington Cemetery erected for the victims of Pan Am 103.

Twenty floors above the suburban Virginia community of Rosslyn, the Newseum's executive director, Peter Prichard, and assistants pass around the brittle front pages of yesterday's newspapers sheathed in plastic: a mining accident, Amelia

Earhart lost in the Pacific. An exposé of the KKK. They're like a bunch of card dealers ogling old Mickey Mantles; they smirk at the overwritten leads, but flinch if you attempt to pull a page out of its jacket. Even with 40,000 square feet for exhibits (“sufficient for the subject,” Prichard admits), Earhart and the Klan aren't both likely to make the final cut.

Prichard, who was editor of *USA Today* from 1988 to 1994, feels he has a special knack for this job. “I came from one of the biggest single-copy circulation newspapers in the history of American journalism, and so I'm familiar with presentation techniques.” In fact, the Newseum would like to become to its peers what *USA Today* has been to traditional dailies: a play for youth market share, a warning that not everyone wants to turn to an inside page to follow a story.

On our way out the door Prichard hands me a hard hat. An elevator ride lands us in a conference room hung with blueprints and front pages blaring the O.J. verdict. We pull up a scale model of the Newseum, and he begins the Tour.

Grand gestures will be a Newseum forte. Upstairs, a domed 220-seat theater with a twenty-foot-by-forty-foot screen will show an “uplifting” film on First Amendment values — “the only place,” Prichard advises, “where we have a point of view.” Nearby, a large globe will be decked with mottoes from almost every daily newspaper in the world (about 2,000), from the *Birmingham Post Herald's* “Covering Birmingham — Like Kudzu” to the *Aspen Daily News's* “If You Don't Want It

Philip Burnham writes about public history. His book, How the Other Half Lived: A People's Guide to American Historic Sites, was published last year.

Printed, Don't Let it Happen." The mottoes will be updated as papers are founded or, as is more likely the case in the world of media mergers and corporate downsizing, go belly up.

Designed by Ralph Appelbaum and Associates, whose credits include the Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Newseum presents history in a way that riffs on a familiar commandment: "the medium is the message." As the curved News History Wall unfolds on the third floor, Prichard demonstrates, the exhibits change format so that the story of the early press will be charted in print, while audiovisuals dominate after the birth of radio and television.

The Wall is also peppered with both facts and questions, the latter answered by tour docents and educational staff. Should journalists take sides? Did W.R. Hearst help start the Spanish-American War? Should you believe something just because you read it in print? "We just take the same position that any newsperson would take," Prichard avows. "Explain the issue. Show the different points of view. And let visitors make up their minds."

Mini theaters across from the History Wall will show films on diversity, sensationalism, flaws in the press. Another will cover silver-screen reporters and the rise of the newsreel. Maintenance and promotion costs for such features are expected to run to several million dollars a year.

Prichard offers me a look at what he calls the "major 'Gee Whiz' exhibit": the News Wall, which will be a city block long dominated by a giant screen (125 feet long and twelve feet high) that can project thirty-six separate images representing "every significant satellite news feed in the world. . . . On days of big stories, like Oklahoma City or O.J., I think it will be hard to get people out of that video wall area," Prichard says. "It'll also be one of the world's best places to watch Sunday afternoon football," he adds with good-old-boy charm.

Visitors to the Interactive News Floor will also be able to play at the news: they can enter a simulated news van, choose location shots, put together a story. "They'll have deadline pressures," Prichard enthuses, and "ethical dilemmas to face." Some exhibits smack of gimmickry: "have your picture printed on a front page" (à la dime store photo booths) or "do a radio broadcast of a sports event you see on video" (reporter's karaoke). A reminder that the Newseum is going to be a place for working stiffs, too: there'll be (real) TV and radio studios for broadcasting public panels on media issues via C-SPAN, PBS, and other outlets.

For all its way-out technology, the Newseum prospectus has a pretty conservative take on journalistic issues. For example, while government censorship will be an important exhibit theme, Prichard will say only that there "might" be a reference to heavily edited press coverage of the gulf war. And labor issues — step-parent Gannett and Knight-Ridder are involved in a messy strike at *The Detroit News* and *Free Press* — would be included, he allows, "if labor disputes were some big trend in the news media." As for the influence of newspaper chains like Gannett, Prichard's response is studiously diplomatic. "The two views are that it added professionalism or that it

resulted in dollar newspapers that did less news," he says evenly. "You can have good monopoly owners and you can have bad monopoly owners."

The visionary behind all this, according to Prichard, is Allen Neuharth, the founder of *USA Today*, who hired Prichard as his personal assistant nearly twenty years ago when he was c.e.o. of Gannett Co. "Neuharth certainly has backed the [Newseum]," grants Prichard, an allusion to the fact that his former boss is now chairman of the Freedom Forum — whose trustees have pledged millions to the project — not to mention chairman of the Newseum board itself. "Most museum directors spend eighty percent of their time raising money," Prichard reflects. "And Freedom Forum doesn't even accept financial contributions."

The Forum is the offspring of the Gannett Newspaper Foundation (GNF), funded by Frank Gannett in 1935 to spread corporate good cheer in the towns served by his — then — modest newspaper chain. Neuharth, who had been c.e.o. of Gannett Co. since 1979, stepped down in 1989 to turn his full efforts to the foundation, which he had also headed since 1986. His first act was to sell back to Gannett \$670 million in company stock owned by GNF so as to create an independent foundation dedicated to media studies — with himself at the helm. Today, Neuharth's Freedom Forum has more than \$800 million in diversified assets. In 1994 it counted a net investment income of \$27 million, and last year more than triple that.

The relationship between Gannett Co. (owner of ninety-two daily newspapers, eleven radio stations, and fifteen TV stations) and the Newseum is — officially — nil. "The only link that we have," avers Prichard, "is that a lot of us used to work for Gannett — but that's it." Six of fourteen Freedom Forum trustees (not to mention Prichard himself) are former Gannett editors and executives; another, the journalist Carl Rowan, also serves on the Gannett board. (Freedom Forum owns 10,000 shares of Gannett stock, which is less than 1 percent of its total investments.)

"Flash followed by fluff," scoffs John Hartman, professor of journalism at Central Michigan University, when I ask him about the museum. Hartman has been an observer of Gannett and its offspring since researching his book, *The USA Today Way*, which appeared in 1992. Admitting that the museum is "not a bad idea," Hartman thinks he recognizes another motive behind the project: "self-aggrandizement" by Neuharth.

Prichard, naturally, focuses on the "not a bad idea" part. "There's nowhere in the world where journalism is remembered in a historical way," Prichard proclaims by the end of my visit. "It's going to be the greatest collection of newspapers, and news artifacts, and news objects anywhere." His benediction is no less stirring: "There are a lot of people here who really risked their lives and their livelihood to tell the truth. Maybe that's a tradition worth having in this country."

But will the Newseum be able to celebrate an industry and give it a serious working-over at the same time? ♦

by Todd Oppenheimer

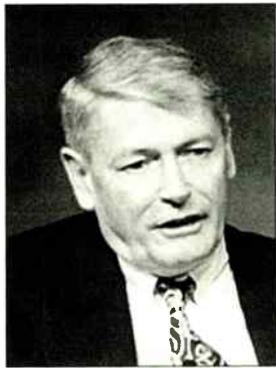
Is the new electronic media industry booming or going bust? For readers of the news it's hard to tell. One day, high-tech businesses are faltering and the Internet's choking on its own traffic; the next day, business pages are fawning over yet another "interactive media" offering. In fact, as this issue goes to press, several of new media's biggest players (including Microsoft, Yahoo!, and America Online) are blitzing the countryside with on-line regional "publications." These are now running or soon will be in thirty-plus cities, including New York, Washington, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, even Paris, Madrid, and Sydney. So far, these regional ventures are trying little more than an old media trick — entertainment and service guides that skim the cream from their print newspaper competitors. As they jostle for position, many are expected to die.

In the meantime, what's a poor journalist to do? If you're in management, should you commit big money to a risky venture of your own? If you're a reporter, should you rush to build electronic skills, even jump ship to a growing new media venture?

I'll argue that it's time for a collective deep breath. Despite their boosters' claims to the contrary, most players in electronic media seem to be nervously treading water right now. This was evident at a recent two-day conference on the "interactive media world" — a pricey, private, and unusually exclusive gathering of technology leaders, one which offered that rare glimpse of an industry candidly talking to itself. The conference (called "Spotlight") focused on the need to build "community" in the electronic world — and on the challenges of "creating, distributing, and selling new media products." It was produced by Denise Caruso, a *New York Times* new-media columnist, for InfoWorld Conference & Media Group, which organizes conferences for executives in the computer industry. The speakers, and the sold-out crowd of more than 300, were top names in the interactive media business. Yet much of what was shown was surprisingly thin and much of what was said was discouraging.

The conference opened with a presentation by Bran Ferren, chief scientist and creative R&D

Todd Oppenheimer, associate editor of Newsweek Interactive, covered the Spotlight conference for its producer, Denise Caruso. His complete report can be found on Spotlight's Website at <http://www.conferences.infoworld.com>.



"I keep hearing lines like 'I can't believe it cost \$10 million to make this,'" observed Bran Ferren of Walt Disney Imagineering

REAL BYTE

vice president at Walt Disney Imagineering. Ferren, known for his deliciously acerbic humor, began by recalling how much he used to hear fellow new-media drinkers at after-hours bars talking about making a killing with various upcoming ventures. This year, he kept hearing terms like "shake-out," and lines like "I can't believe it cost \$10 million to make this." Ferren called most of the current forms of new media "terrible," in both design and organization. They're particularly insensitive to people's time and money, he said, and the qualities that will get people to part with both those assets.

Even with design improvements, Ferren noted that a serious roadblock remains — for both small goals, like cooler digital gadgets, and big ideas as well, about news or other information. The culprit: limited "bandwidth," the techno-term for the phone and TV wires that run to homes and businesses, and which are far too thin to carry the industry's ambitious dreams. Ferren's concern is widely echoed by leaders such as Microsoft czar Bill Gates.

In the meantime, Ferren begged, "Please, don't try to solve problems we don't have. Don't try to replace the book. The book works very well. If you've ever tried to read one on a screen, you'll find it doesn't work very well."

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*We listen in on the
new-media moguls —
and they're nervous*

Linda Stone, director of Microsoft's "Virtual Worlds Group," then talked about the relationship "between the computer and you." Stone believes "the soul of cyberspace is people-to-people communication." She pursues this vision by trying to improve the world of "chat" — live on-line conversation, mostly through typing, which often produces dialogue that is stunningly inane. During the questions that followed her ten-minute talk, Stone was asked not about people's relationships to their machines, but how to make money at this. "Everyone is trying to figure that out," was her reply.

Throughout these sessions, the audience remained unimpressed — until shown a CD-ROM of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches and notes. The old Italian manuscripts are nearly illegible, so, the CD's developer (Curtis Wong of Corbis Corp.) said, "We created something called the codascope." He then clicked his computer mouse, and a wide bar opened on the screen, instantly translating the Italian between the bar lines into English in a readable modern typeface. As the bar moved up and down the page, or across, it seamlessly translated the text. Throughout the room there was instant applause.

This led to a session on "the latest, greatest creative tools," which turned out to be a little less than that. There was a new approach to chat,

which lets people represent themselves by choosing a moving icon called an "avatar" (a skull, for example, or a bird or demon). Sound, while fuzzy, is included, letting you talk with your chatting partner through the computers' microphones and speakers. Hmmm. We also saw an Internet cartoon show, proving that, for the average user, video is still jerky on the Web; some rich sound demonstrations by RealAudio; and, finally, a graphic method of organizing Web sites called "Project X," created by Apple Computer. The program converts your choices into little floating bubbles, arranged in colors and sizes that illustrate their descending order of priority. Wow.

Finally came a speaker who was supposed to answer the question people kept asking: "Can Anyone Make Money in Interactive Media?" According to the program, Mike Slade, president and c.e.o. of Starwave Corp., a broad-based interactive media company, would say "yes" and tell how. But on the podium, he wasn't particularly optimistic. First, he said, we have to define the interactive market. His answer: "Geeks rule — so far." Nearly two-thirds of Web ad revenue is computer-related, he said. Yet computers and office equipment generate only 2 percent of advertising expenditures nationwide, with on-line advertising comprising a mere 0.1 percent. Is Slade's firm making money? Denise Caruso asked. Slade swallowed, looked down, then said, "I can't talk about my company, but I would be surprised if there was a profit-making content venture in this room."

Day one closed with an energetic industry critique by Nick Donatiello, president and c.e.o. of Odyssey, a market research firm. Donatiello offered two principles for new media: first, technology must be much easier to use than the Internet is now. "A television is easy to use. You plug it in, you turn it on and it works." Second, it must be driven by the market (i.e., readers), not by the producers. "I am so tired," Donatiello said, "of hearing people say, 'At our company, we produce products that we ourselves like to use.' Well, that's great. I hope you and your five friends have a wonderful business."

On the final day, four leaders gathered to discuss "Experimentation and Collaboration in New Media." And, once again, what emerged were surprisingly tiny ideas. One panelist showed how people can use his site to share information on-line (this is new?); a representative from a digital photo shop talked about the legal and copyright support they offer photographers; someone from a venture capital firm claimed to invest earlier in the creative process than most.



Linda Stone of Microsoft spoke about how "the soul of cyberspace is people-to-people communication" but was asked about how to make money

The last session of the conference was called “Creating Addiction: Where Plot and Games Converge” — a discussion hinting that still more radical changes are coming to the hallowed art of storytelling. What counts in “creating addiction” is experience, not plot, argued Mike Sellers of the 3DO Company. The best experiences, he said, emphasize “interpersonal interaction” (the “meaningful” sort, not just shooting people) and the environment (activities and themes) rather than the plot. Sellers’s ultimate goal was noteworthy: after people have played 3DO’s games, he hopes they’ll have learned something about their place in society and who they are, and something about a larger history and culture.

The question is whether new media will consistently meet this standard anytime soon. Norman Pearlstine, editor-in-chief of Time Warner Inc., the lone traditional journalist who spoke at Spotlight, noted that “There are larger and larger numbers of players in new media for whom journalism isn’t a particular interest,” adding, “I hardly ever hear discussion of the public interest when I’m at gatherings of people in new media.”

But Barry Diller, former head of Fox, Paramount Pictures, and QVC, and now chairman of Silver King Communications, in the closing speech of the conference, did address the public interest. “Archivists estimate that the collective sum of all printed knowledge is doubling every four years. More information has been produced in the last thirty years than in the previous five thousand,” he said. “And it’s only getting faster and more out of control.

“Information without knowledge. On the surface it provides convenience and promises new possibilities. But without discipline, it is more destructive than progressive. Since 1978, capital investment in information technology has increased 10,000 percent. In that same time, net productivity hasn’t much changed. ATMs have increased bank fees, electronic filing has led to fraud, Jiffy Lube has replaced the relationship with a trusted mechanic, and twenty-four-hour customer service only works in a world of diminished service expectations.

“Then there’s the media,” he continued. “It used to be that there was a cadence, a rhythm to things. It would take a reasonable length of time for an event not only to get known, but to play out — for the consequences and the analysis and the understanding to incubate. Today, everything is available instantly. It’s all about being on the scene, in real time. The problem is, getting to the scene quicker doesn’t make us smarter. Information is not synonymous with knowledge. One is about facts, the other about understanding.”

Diller urged the industry to take chances again,

and try to create a truly new medium instead of just filling the Internet with old ones — books, magazines, TV, maybe movies, stuffed on-line or into CD-ROMs and thereby made “‘interactive,’ whatever that means.” Instead, Diller urged media makers to “subordinate your media expertise instead of imposing it,” to let old and new media mix as they will. “The new world order of convergence will demand it. And those who are willing to play in it, on its own wildly unique terms, fortunes won or lost, will have a great and joyous time being present at the creation.”

Looking back over the three years that I’ve been attending such conferences, I was shocked at how extensively the energy and goals in new media seemed to have shrunk.

In 1993, when this industry had just caught hold, what drove events like this were big visions like Diller’s, full of creativity and social redemption. Yes, those notions were largely unproven; in fact, in the early days, technologists seemed to draw funding and customers largely by selling people on what was in their own imaginations. By now, most of those visions have become symbols of an embarrassingly elusive utopia.

Conference producer Caruso, interviewed afterwards, was not discouraged by the industry’s struggles. “It’s an industry in its infancy,” now suffering from “premature commercialism,” she said. “Everyone knows there’s not a business model yet. People are trying to find their way.” What happened to yesterday’s energy and vision? “That was the hype. Now the reality has begun to settle in. People are realizing it isn’t a magazine on-line, it’s not a book on-line, it’s not a movie on-line. It’s its own thing. People are still trying to figure out what it is.”

How does a journalist fit into something that isn’t yet a coherent “it”? If you’re a news executive, particularly of a newspaper, you may have little choice. Hordes of journalists manqué are busy eating your lunch. You have to belly up to the table, ready or not, if only to save your side dishes (a.k.a., classifieds, entertainment information, display advertising). If you’re a reporter, however, maybe it’s time to sit down and remember who you are.

Journalists might benefit from beginning to think about how to tell stories differently someday — with audio, with video, with Internet links or animations. But for the coming few years, our old values seem more necessary than ever: namely, a sense of what’s news, a commitment to the public interest, and an eye for the truth. The new-media industry won’t be truly ready for us for a while. ◆



“The problem is, getting to the scene quicker doesn’t make us smarter. Information is not synonymous with knowledge,” warned industry bigwig Barry Diller

**Block
that
stereotype!**

WHAT'S AGE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

by Edwin Diamond
and Jennie D'Amato

Edwin Diamond, seventy-one, is director of the News Study Group at NYU. Jennie D'Amato, thirty-six, is a member of the group. Diamond's latest book is *White House to Your House: Media and Politics in Virtual America*.

In the editions of *The Washington Post* that appeared the day after Bob Dole's seventy-third birthday on July 22, a *Post* editorial considered the "issue of age" in the 1996 presidential campaign. Although Dole's annual physical showed him to be, in the *Post*'s words, "exceptionally fit," some voters were nevertheless telling pollsters that perhaps Dole was "too old for the job." Such worries, the *Post* observed, may in fact be reflections of Dole's "demeanor" and his social attitudes. Consequently, the paper suggested, it might be better to focus on the candidate's "cultural sensibility rather than his chronological age."

Such a discussion would be a step forward for campaign journalism, but not many news organizations have heeded it. In the *Post* itself two days before, a page-one article on the results of Dole's medical check-up carried the headline DOLE'S BIRTHDAY RENEWS AGE-OLD OLD-AGE DEBATE. While the reporting showed Dole to be in excellent health by any standards, the article repeatedly measured his test results against less reassuring statistics of average men his age. To further emphasize chronology, the piece was followed by a nostalgic look at the quaint world of Babe Ruth and the Charleston into which he had been born, so long ago, in 1923. (In contrast, *The New York Times* presented a detailed and straightforward report headlined DOCTORS CALL DOLE'S HEALTH EXCELLENT.)

Age has been a "story" on Bob Dole's non-birthday campaign days as well. Attention to Dole's physical energy, and to his abilities to perform as president, have become as much a part of the campaign coverage as the tape recorders, boom mikes, and other equipment the press corps totes along. It's a particularly irritating kind of baggage — knee-jerk, reductive, unspoken assumptions about age, behavior, and stamina. "Ageism" is not a word that comes quickly to the tongue; this campaign year, however, the subject cries for attention.

Stereotypical attitudes about age routinely appear in coverage, putting "Old Dole" in a no-win situation. It's news when he appears full of energy in

spite of his age, and it's news when he seems to be flagging or fumbling, because of his age.

On June 1, for example, Edwin Chen, forty-seven, of the *Los Angeles Times* filed an upbeat story of Dole's fifteen-hour day beginning in Los Angeles and ending in Chicago; the candidate, Chen wrote, "erect as always . . . chatted easily . . . utterly committed to a full and even punishing campaign pace." But reporter Burt Solomon, forty-seven, in the *National Journal* described Dole at one of the Chicago stops as "tired and poorly briefed," giving an "awkward response" to a questioner. One Dole; two captions. Or perhaps Dole at slightly different times. Either way, age and performance were the subtext.

This fixation often produces discontinuities in what's reported and what isn't. Dole's staff, as one Washington-based reporter told *CJR*, "cannot afford to let it be known that he takes naps." But Clinton, the reporter adds, "is well known to be a napper, though that's not considered 'news.'"

Sure enough, in Dole stories, we found regular references to the fact that he must catnap on the campaign plane, or take morning helicopter rides to the airport instead of motorcades, to squeeze in an extra hour's sleep. By contrast, when Todd Purdum, thirty-seven, described the Clintonian style of sleep earlier this year in *The New York Times*, the tone was endearing. Because Clinton naps, he is "clearly more relaxed . . . His White House runs better, and so does he." Old Dole naps to survive; Clinton's nap-time story is, in Purdum's own words, "sweet, human, real."

Ageism was also in evidence in the coverage of Dole's highly publicized "disastrous" appearance on NBC's *Today* show in early July when, in response to Katie Couric's questions about cigarettes and health, he jumped all over her, seemingly minimizing the effects of nicotine and accusing her of playing the Democrats' game. In the resulting media hoo-ha, Howard Fineman, forty-seven, described Dole in *Newsweek* as "a throwback to an earlier era, when World War II soldiers lived for their next Lucky Strike"; the

Charleston, West Virginia, *Gazette* said Dole was “out of date . . . cranky” — characteristics, clearly, of Grumpy Old Men. Indeed, when *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich, forty-seven, wrote about the Couric encounter, the headline was “Grumpiest Old Man.” A more thoughtful analysis might have pointed out that Dole’s position was shaped more by his conservative ideology than by his age. Half the Republican House freshman class — a group young enough to be Dole’s sons and daughters — hold the same attitudes about smoking (private behavior should not be legislated by government, even if people make bad choices). These right-thinking representatives also harbor “cranky” opinions about the liberal media. But when Texas’s Steve Stockman, thirty-nine, or Idaho’s Helen Chenoweth, fifty-eight, rant and rave, their style is described as “aggressive,” or “in your face.”

Similarly, when covering Dole’s spring vacation in Bal Harbour, Florida, reporters found it hard to resist the usual stereotypes. In his *New York Times* account of April 2, for example, Adam Nagourney, forty-one, felt compelled to note that at the luxury condominium where the Doles have been vacationing for the past fourteen years, there were “more people with canes or in wheelchairs than children” in the area around the pool. In *The Washington Post*, William Booth, thirty-seven, observed that Dole “loves to bask in the sun . . . supine and inert for hours.” Nagourney drew comparisons between the sedentary Dole and such action-loving presidents as Clinton and Bush; Booth drew a comparison between Dole and, among others, JFK; neither bothered to recall Kennedy’s debilitating chronic medical problems — or, for that matter, his Dr. Feelgood solutions to them.

Even in straight accounts of routine campaign news, reporters invariably drop in the obligatory sentence, “Dole could become the oldest newly inaugurated president in American history if he wins the election” (*The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, also favored in some sixty other newspaper and magazine stories accessed through Nexis). The same database search also discloses this slight variation: “If elected, Dole would be the

Dole’s naps must be kept secret; Clinton’s are endearing

oldest president to take office. President Clinton will turn 50 on Aug. 19” (Lynn Sweet, forty-five, *Chicago Sun-Times*). The numbers are “true,” but they’re not the whole “truth.”

Some clock-watching is inevitable in a campaign; the candidates’ birthdays, obviously, provided a natural peg for coverage of the “age issue.” Dole’s July 22 birthday this year fell, importantly for the campaign and the media, just before his party’s convention. In mid-July, the Dole people, knowing “Dole — How Healthy?” takeouts timed to his birthday were in the works at major news organizations, leveraged that media peg by releasing the results of his annual “birthday physical” to selected news organizations (the examination was actually conducted in June).

In July 1995, then Senator Dole had released a similarly detailed, nine-page package of medical records covering much the same information, including the names of the medicines he took. That seventy-second birthday script produced one of the enduring “Old Dole” subtexts: the photograph, taken by Tim Dillon for *USA Today*, of Dole on his apartment treadmill, a formal-looking fellow in a dress shirt and boxer shorts, dutifully performing his three-times-a-week routine. A year later, *Newsday* dug it out of the files to run with its 1996 birthday-health report. “Too Old to Be President?” asked the head over the treadmill photo. The year-old picture also showed up this May in *The New York Times*, splashed across three columns and down two-thirds of the front page of the Week In Review section accompanying a piece on whether the Democrats (!) were using the “age issue” against Dole.

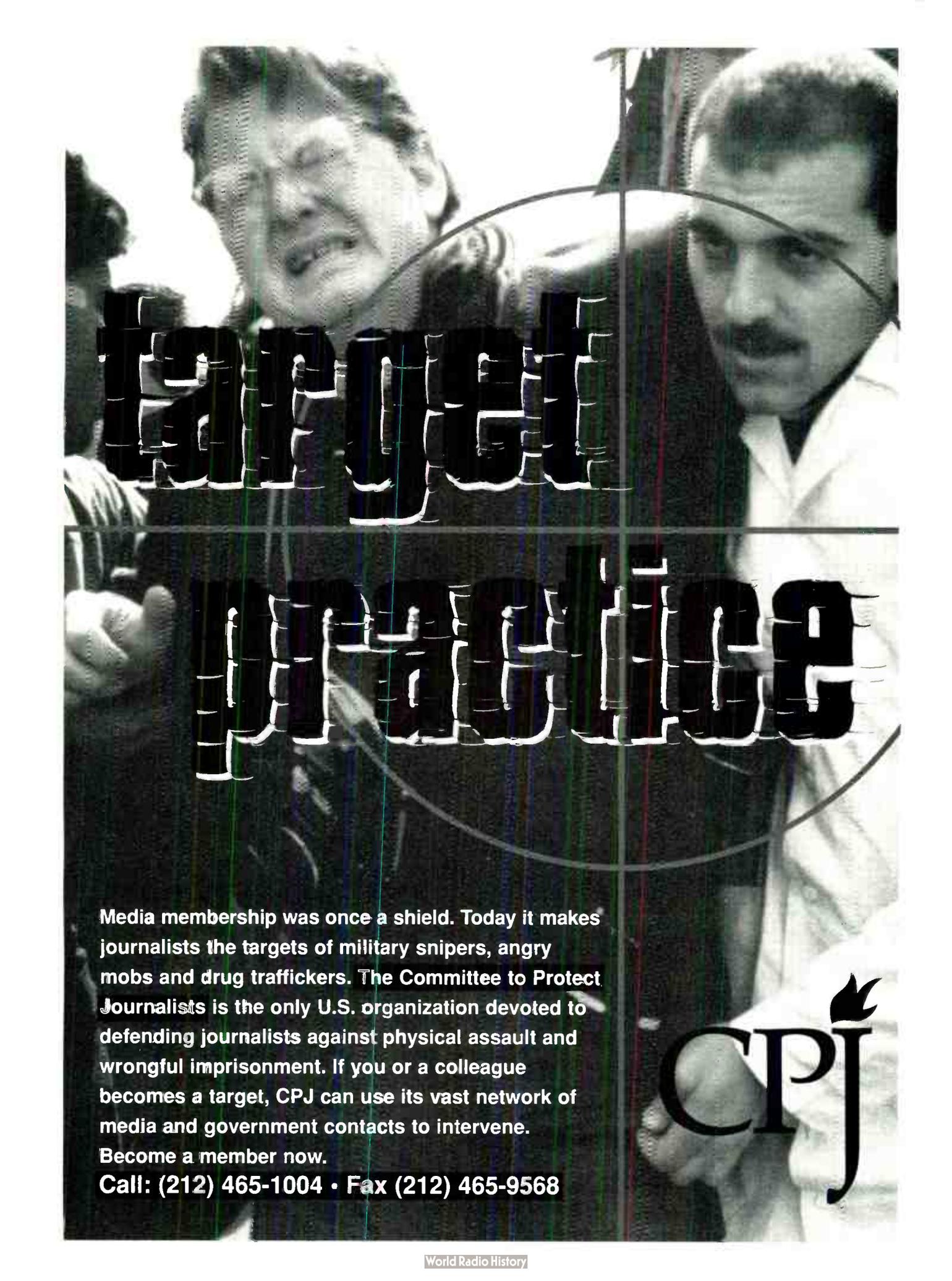
But while coverage of “age” is nominally pegged to what’s being said by newsmakers, it’s not all that clear that the subject is weighing heavily in vot-

ers’ minds. The public opinion polls, in fact, send a mixed message.

When “typical” voters in their seventies are interviewed, they say they are influenced by the way they themselves feel, physically and mentally. When CBS News did its Dole Birthday story on July 23, the first two seniors heard on camera talked about how tired and down they felt; two other seniors were more upbeat, stressing the “wisdom” that comes with years. CBS, however, had the last, dour word: as supporters sang “Happy Birthday,” the voiceover intoned, “Dole’s facing the music” — a wordplay suggestive of any number of bad things: facing senility, defeat, death, or just seventy-three.

As we’ve read repeatedly in the “Old Dole” stories over the last six months, the average seventy-two-year-old white male has a 27 percent chance of dying in five years — a statistic that is meant to carry weight in the context of Dole’s choice of running mate. But Dole, of course, is not average; he’s in good shape, and seriously health-conscious as well, by the testimony of his medical records. For a time, around the release of those medical records, it looked like the campaign press had rebounded from its dim prognoses about Dole’s age. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* piece, for example, quoted Dole in the lead: “I feel about fifty-five.” *Newsweek*’s August 19 chart comparing the vital medical statistics on Dole and Clinton (“In Shape for the Big Run?”) concluded that Dole “may qualify for Medicare but his stats suggest he has the body of a sixty-one-year-old.” (Clinton’s physiological age is forty-seven.) And the *Washington Post* birthday story took note of the new geriatric realities. “A generation ago, somebody doing well over the age of sixty-five would have been seen as exceptional,” a gerontologist was quoted as saying. “Not so today. What is developing . . . is a separation of the young old from the old old, meaning those over eighty-five.”

That doesn’t sound like too subtle an idea for campaign ’96 to grasp. But don’t count on it. If “Old Dole” wants to get elected, he’d better not get a head cold, act cranky, miss a campaign event, or look seventy-three. ♦



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Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Klein

As Olympians were scoring gold last summer, *Newsweek* columnist Joe Klein was reaching for a medal of his own — as The Kindest, Warmest, Most Considerate, Reliable, and Blameless Journalist Ever to Falsely Deny Authorship of a \$6 Million Book. It was a rather audacious bid. *The*

Washington Post had just confirmed suspicions that he was the famously faceless Anonymous, author of *Primary Colors*, a roman à clef skewering the Clintons. (The paper had discovered Klein's telltale handwriting on an original manuscript.) The scorp, as Klein calls reporters in the novel, were in a biting mood because of Klein's brazen, on-the-record denials of authorship in such major news outlets as CBS, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*. ("For God's sake, definitely, I didn't write it.") Klein tried to make light of the episode in a coming-out press conference in New York, showing up with an impish smile and a Groucho Marx disguise. But when the scorp's lashed out with angry questions, Klein immediately transmuted himself from prankster to misunderstood altruist. He argued that he had only told white lies, like those used to shield a news source; that he had lied to protect his family and himself from the fishbowl celebrity life; that he wanted to protect his publisher.

But Klein's most delicious self-justification came earlier, in the May 19 *New York Times Book Review*, before he had been unmasked, when he spun anonymously: "... I have ... saved (friends) from ... the burden of listening to me strut and brag, feigning modesty while citing the latest sales figures. ... Anonymity imposes a strict discipline and an almost religious humility. I am a better person for having kept my



mouth shut" He was bragging about not bragging! Later, at his press conference, he was able to brag about the book ("It just wrote itself I was shocked by how easy it was") and to brag again about not having bragged about it! "I enjoyed my humility," he said. "I was protecting the integrity of this project."

Of course, that "integrity" entailed keeping alive speculation that the book was written by a White House insider — a notion that intensified the guessing game over which fictional salacious incidents involving the Clintons were rooted in reality. Such speculation sold more books. So when Klein fell under suspicion as a possible author, he did his best to quell it, even voicing consternation to colleagues about an unflattering portrait of the Joe Klein-type character in the novel.

Klein's story unfolded as if he had taken the plot of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Victorian scientist is set on fatal course through discovery of magic potion that splits him into two beings, one seemingly upright, seeking truth, the other bent, doing dark midnight deeds) and played it out as farce rather than tragedy.

Like Dr. Henry Jekyll, Klein tried to divide himself into two beings. He took his compartmentalization effort almost literally, describing in his *Book Review* essay how he had achieved a kind of spiritual bifurcation: "There are two of us now. There is 'me' and there is 'Anonymous' A. was funnier than I am. A. was more demure. A. was more dignified. . . ." (Full disclosure: I was obliged to acknowledge to a snoopy gossip columnist in 1981 that I was the pseudonymous CJR writer "William Boot," who, coincidentally enough, was funnier, more demure, and more dignified than I am. Also smarter, and more "together," with a clearer sense of self.)

Like Jekyll — who described the initial sensation of being Hyde as "incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in



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Columbia Journalism Review. The presses can run but they can't hide.

World Radio History

body” — Klein found being Anonymous an arousing experience. He reported in the *Book Review*, under the sheet of anonymity: “As publication approached, and the first, surprisingly favorable reviews began to appear, my spouse nuzzled my ear one evening and asked, ‘Can I, y’know, do it with . . . Anonymous tonight?’ It proved a distressingly memorable experience, although there was a metaphysical hang-over: had I been unfaithful to myself? . . . The answer is no.” Thank God.

Once his Anonymous gambit took shape, Klein’s life, like Jekyll’s, became dangerously schizophrenic. Outwardly, he was the journalist-pundit, exuding moral rectitude, culling fact from rumor, reporting truth as he saw it — the man who once denounced as “despicable” those who were spreading charges about Clinton’s private life “to make money.” Yet secretly he worked to breathe life into the most scandalous suspicions about the Clintons in the course of making a pile. (Klein’s denial of any connection between the Clintons and his fictional “Stantons” is, of course, transparent nonsense.)

As the *Newsweek* pundit, he had written a scathing column (“The Politics of Promiscuity,” May 9, 1994) faulting Clinton for having a fragmented identity “composed of all sorts of persons”; for “always living on the edge, as if he were begging to get caught”; for “lawyering the truth . . . petty fudges, retreats, compromises, denials.” Sounds like a description of Klein himself.

He may have thought he could keep His professional duality concealed indefinitely. But ultimately he went the way of Jekyll, who lost control of his experiment and started turning into Hyde spontaneously, without warning, against his will, and was found out by suspicious colleagues. By the same token, Klein began wondering whether he was losing a grip on his original self (“I asked my agent: ‘Have I changed . . . ? Am I becoming Anonymous? Am I different now?’” he wrote in the *Book Review* piece.) Meanwhile, the relentless scorps closed in until, at last, *The Washington Post* hit pay dirt. The game was up.

Needless to say, in the frenzy that

followed his unmasking (more than 500 articles and editorials, dozens of TV segments), Klein came under intense moralistic assault. *The New York Times*, for one, stung him in a lead editorial: “People interested in preserving the core of serious journalism have to view his actions and words as corrupt and — if they become an example to others — corrupting.” Meanwhile, *Newsweek* editor Maynard Parker was being lashed as well. He had known all along that Klein was Anonymous but allowed items to

appear in the magazine which suggested that writers other than Klein were plausible suspects. *The Dallas Morning News* called this “a gross violation of journalistic ethics.”

Klein had his defenders, who said too much was being made of a trivial matter, but it was hardly trivial for his *Newsweek* colleagues. As one put it: “Every day I call somebody and leave my name, Mike Isikoff of *Newsweek*, and that calling card meant less after this incident.”

The Klein affair pointed up schizoid



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divisions not only within Klein but within *Newsweek*. One was between the newsmagazine star system, which showcases hotshots like Klein, and others who toil in relative obscurity. Some *Newsweek* staffers are convinced Parker played along with Klein's ruse because he was more interested in pampering an in-house celebrity than in putting out the most accurate magazine possible. A related fissure was between those who saw the Klein affair as a major ethical issue (i.e., many of the reporters) and those who viewed it as a p.r. problem to be managed with the right spin. In a memo to staff, Parker appeared to take the latter view, declaring: ". . . in retrospect I misjudged the *impact* of this story" (emphasis mine).

Within The Washington Post Company, there were other signs of a multiple-personality disorder. While *Newsweek*, a Post Company subsidiary, sanctioned Klein's ruse and helped perpetuate it, the *Post* was playing gotcha. After the Klein exposé hit the paper's front page, *Post* editors pursued the matter as a major issue while *Newsweek's* editors belittled it ("This is more a matter of who shot J.R. . . . Everybody should get a life," was Parker's initial reaction). Only on August 12 was the split sutured up, when *Newsweek* president Richard Smith issued a note to readers: "*Newsweek* made a serious mistake in going along with the deception. . . . We will never allow ourselves to be put in that situation again."

The affair also reflects a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde quality in the news business as a whole. The incident was bizarre enough to be memorable to nonjournalists and confirmed a widespread impression that we play a two-faced ethical game. That's too sweeping, but not entirely off the mark.

As Jekyll, we decry deception and expose secrets. As Hyde, we thrive on both, protecting secret sources who often have axes to grind. Some of us mislead informants to get information, tape people clandestinely, don disguises, even pose as grieving relatives to get access to plane-crash victims (a *New York Post* reporter allegedly did this during the aftermath of the TWA

Flight 800 explosion). In a recent column on such contradictions, former *Washington Post* ombudsman Richard Harwood noted that Mike Wallace (who has acknowledged lying when necessary to nail down a story) only got into trouble when he secretly filmed an interview with a journalist after assuring her that she would not be on camera: "Journalists, he learned, were not fair game for lying. But other deceptions by CBS met with the approval of the network."

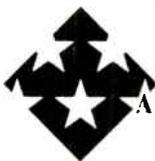
When things finally settled, Klein had resigned, under pressure, from a CBS consultancy and been shorn of *Newsweek* reporting duties. But after a two-week suspension, during which he toned down his self-defense and apologized for causing distress to his colleagues, Klein returned to his column in high dudgeon, blasting Clinton for "monumental callousness" on welfare policy. Klein is back and America's got him. You can't keep a good man down. ♦

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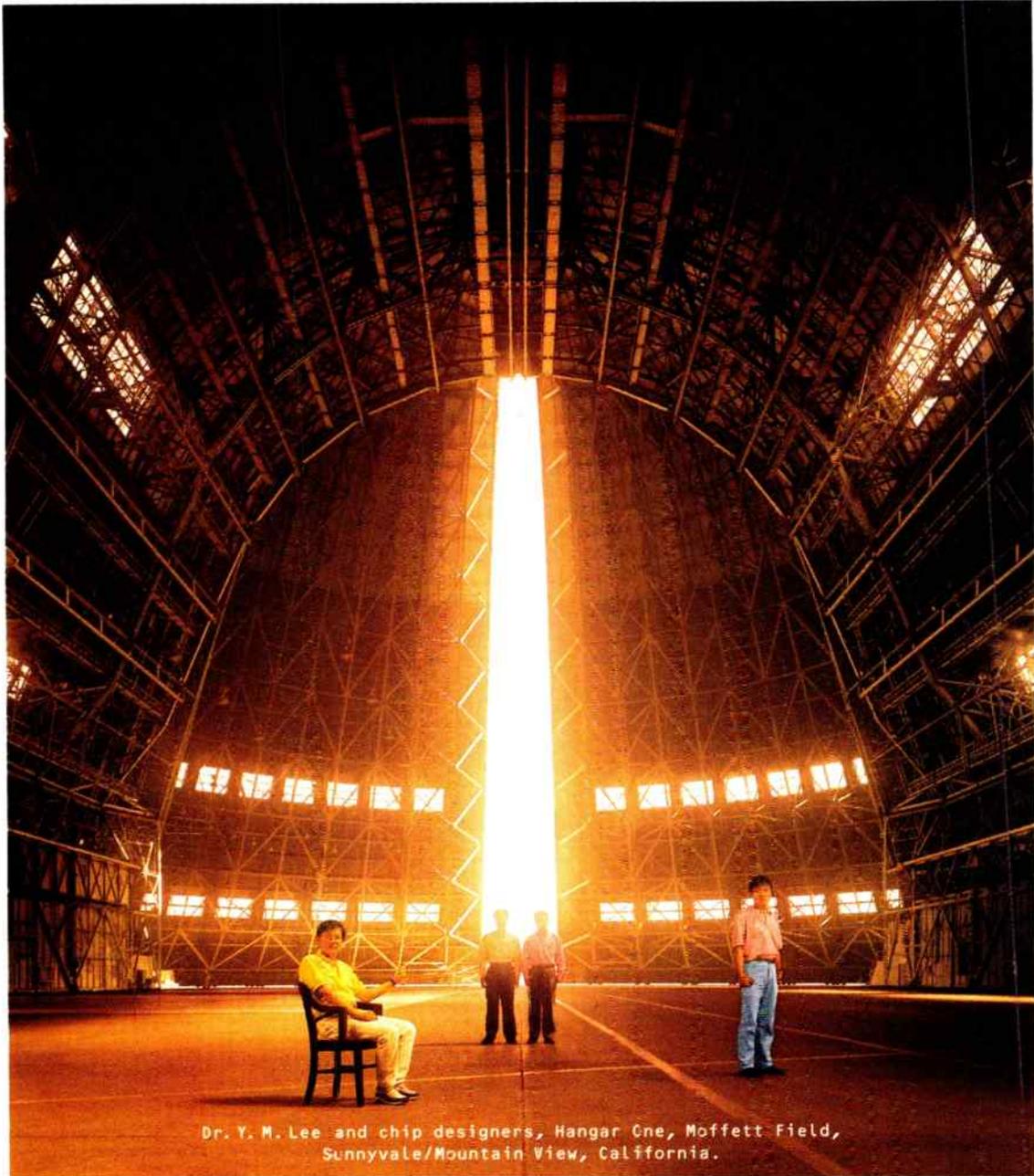
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World Radio History

Campaign Journalism: When Books Make News

by Walter Goodman

The convergence as campaign summer began of three sets of headline-making glimpses into the private life of Bill and Hillary Clinton (insofar as the First Couple retains any semblance of one) also revealed some of the perils and perplexities of the journalistic endeavor, that politically fraught form of public enlightenment and entertainment.

The tantalizing items emerged from best-selling books, any of which might be safely carried on the bus unclothed by an old dust jacket from *Middlemarch*. In the order of their place on the best-seller lists at this writing:

Unlimited Access: An FBI Agent Inside the Clinton White House by Gary Aldrich (No. 1 at the moment), a quickie of the sort that dismissed valets have been known to do on their former masters.

The Choice, the latest product of the Bob Woodward machine.

And *Partners in Power: The Clintons and Their America*, a portrait of the First Couple as personifications of a corrupt political system, by Roger Morris, author of *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician*.

Though differing in significant ways, these works offered the lure of the higher titillation. What is an editor to do when presented with charges of dubious provenance about the private peccadilloes of public officials? As these three case histories demonstrate, it all depends.

Unlimited Access

Aldrich made the list with the news or rumor or surmise that the president is wont to sneak from the White House in the small hours to check out the talent at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Washington. The smoking paragraphs are thick with warnings to the discerning reader: "I have been informed by a well-placed White House source" . . . "I have been informed" . . . "It appears" . . . "some information indicates" . . . "is believed to be."

The nocturnal-roaming story was soon admitted to be third- or fourth-hand gossip, the sort of stuff that FBI agents are supposed to keep to themselves. Prudence aside, *Unlimited Access* is a farrago of complaints about the unbuttoned Clinton White House by a buttoned-down security specialist. Comfortable with the manners of the Bush White House, he appears to have been traumatized by the disorderly young Clintonites with their messy ways and disregard for the sanctity of his duties.

Aldrich's payback might have been consigned to the detritus of the political season had it not been powered by anti-Clinton partisans. Put out by the right-wing Regnery Publishing, Inc., the book provided zesty headlines for newspapers like *The Washington Times* and *The New York Post* (IT'S 4 A.M. AND THE PRESIDENT IS MISSING).

More imposing, if less amusing, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an op-ed

Walter Goodman is a television critic for The New York Times.

UNLIMITED ACCESS



AN FBI AGENT INSIDE THE CLINTON WHITE HOUSE

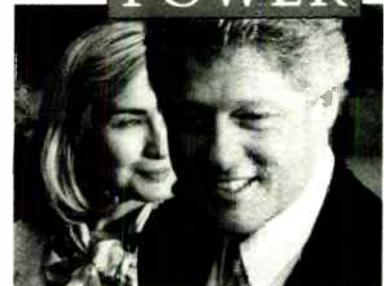
GARY ALDRICH

THE CHOICE



BOB WOODWARD

PARTNERS in POWER



The Clintons and Their America

ROGER MORRIS

Author of *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician*

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The award will honor the individual whose work best exemplifies the integrity and insight that characterized John Chancellor's career. The awardee will receive a check for \$25,000 and a commemorative medal.

Selection of the winner will be made by a distinguished panel of individuals familiar with Chancellor's work. The panel will nominate individuals for consideration. A representative of the Annenberg Public Policy Center will contact nominees to obtain samples of their work.

The establishment of the award was announced at a dinner honoring John Chancellor that was held on Thursday, December 14, 1995. To obtain a tape of the speeches honoring Chancellor and his work, call:
(215) 898-7041.

piece by Aldrich on the administration's use of FBI files that did not mention his book but lent him an insider credibility. That was followed by an excerpt, along with an article about author and book by John H. Fund of the *Journal* editorial board, which passed along the hearsay about Clinton's nocturnal tomcatting. The faithful *Journal* reader must have concluded from the book's unlimited access to the paper's op-ed pages that a work of import was coming.

Ironically, it was fellow conservatives David Brock (who, having done his own much-publicized job on Anita Hill, has lately produced *The Seduction of Hillary Rodham*) and George Will who turned the tide on *Unlimited Access*. Brock, who turned out to be the source for the Marriott story, said he had cautioned Aldrich that it was unverified. And Will left the perpetrator with scarcely a shred of credibility on ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley*.

So what are editors with more respect for the rules of reporting and less of an ideological mission than those on *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial page to do about such a work, nicely retitled by Bill Press, a former chairman of the California Democratic Party and co-host of CNN's *Crossfire*, as "Old Fart Meets Young Freaks"?

Much as they may dislike the odor, editors and news directors are in duty bound to try to detect some nuggets amid the rubbish. Once, through the attentions of junk television and the tabloids, a product like *Unlimited Access* itself becomes a story, it is ever more difficult to ignore.

The *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* settled initially for reporting only the claim that Ms. Clinton had picked Craig Livingstone to run the White House personnel security office. It was not a particularly salacious piece of gossip. As for the book's juicier items, which had already seen print elsewhere, *The New York Times* referred to them in passing only as "a series of unflattering allegations."

The shredding of Aldrich on the ABC program was followed by cancellations of scheduled interviews with NBC's *Dateline* and CNN's

Larry King Live, rebuffs that seem to have spurred his book's sales, along with providing a new sort of story. In these matters there are few tidy endings. For in reporting the author's embarrassment on network television, the press couldn't help drawing attention to charges that might otherwise have been given short shrift.

As was widely reported, the networks had been under pressure from the White House to ban Aldrich altogether. The healthy journalistic reaction to a demand from any official not to cover a story is, of course, to cover it, and that evidently is what ABC's Brinkley show, whatever its other motives, did to good effect: viewers must have come away from the Aldrich debacle with a better sense of the sort of stuff the man was peddling.

Maybe, aside from the night-out gossip, Aldrich's investigating is up to J-school standards, but news editors have to base their decisions in part on what they know about the suppliers. We can only hope that the decisions by NBC and CNN to pass on Aldrich were made despite the White House intervention, simply on the demerits, which were ample.

The Choice

In his free moments between writing books mostly about Washington's mighty (seven best sellers in twenty-two years), Bob Woodward is said to work as an assistant managing editor at *The Washington Post*. The association with the nation's most successful inside-the-capital author sheds reflected glory on the paper, which it repaid this time round with rarely equalled page-one attention, not to mention a cover story in *Newsweek*, which is owned by the same company.

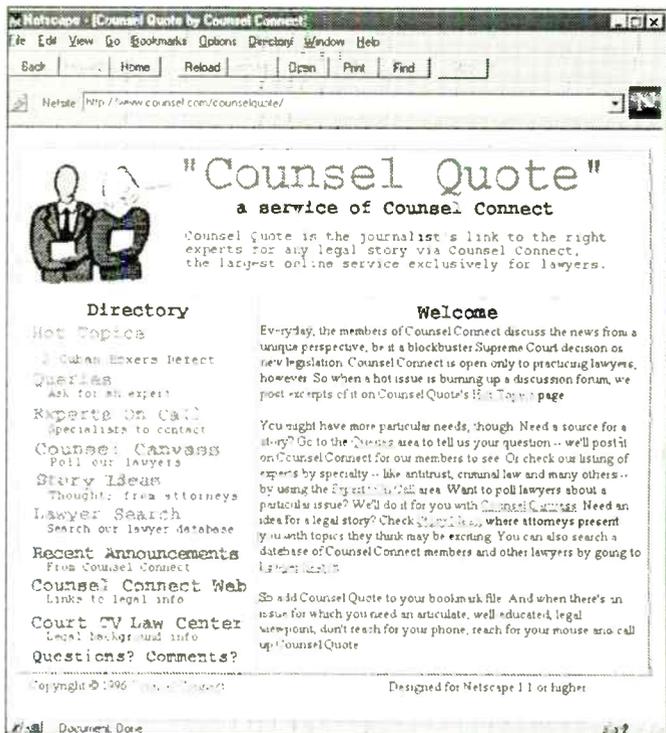
The show of affection for one of its own did nothing to enhance the *Post's* reputation for editorial objectivity, but it did demonstrate the usefulness of an ombudsman. In an op-ed column, titled "We Asked For It," Geneva Overholser noted that readers had not failed to detect the reek of promotion. One asked, "Does the term 'conflict of interest' have no meaning at the *Post*?"

Overholser said what needed to be said about her employer's hypocrisy:

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national spay/neuter program and stop the endless cycle of unwanted animals starving in the streets, why not just attack the problem with a hot skillet and a dash of garlic?

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Not to worry, the reprimand did not discourage the book's sales, which can only have been stimulated by the *Post*'s page-one report, in the first of four excerpts, that Hillary Rodham Clinton had been consorting with New Age self-helpers. In particular, there was Jean Houston, on whose prescription the First Lady had conferred with Eleanor Roosevelt and Mohandas K. Gandhi. (She turned down a suggested encounter with Jesus.)

Given Ms. Clinton's reputation for tough-mindedness and intelligence, this was delectable stuff, and much of the press and television had a grand time with it. "Guru" was their description of choice.

Woodward, who does not bother with attributions, much less footnotes that might interrupt his narrative flow or detract from his fly-on-the-White-House-wall persona, has been chided by journalistic sticklers for allowing imagination to play a part in his accounts of meetings he did not attend and conversations he did not hear. Still, relatively serious talk shows, including Jim Lehrer's *NewsHour*, decided his book was important enough, his opinions valuable enough to warrant an interview. Maybe they were carried away by his celebrity or maybe it was just a demonstration of Beltway palsiness.

It is not hard to figure out from the account of the Jean-Hillary affair that it came mainly from Houston herself, although you can't be sure about every adjective. Woodward writes: "Houston was struck," "Houston believed," "Houston thought," "Houston had

found," "Houston recalled," "Houston was amazed." He tells us what Houston felt and wanted and anticipated.

Whatever laughs it may bring from wiseacres who aren't about to seek guidance from the likes of anybody who calls herself a "sacred psychologist" and a "global midwife," Houston's prominence in such a book and her appearance on page one of a major newspaper were a gift from the gods of publicity. With Bob Woodward at her service, Houston did not need Mahatma Gandhi. For a while, you couldn't turn on the set without seeing her.

The New York Times led off its first report with the White House's interpretation of the relationship, in Michael McCurry's carefully framed words, as that of "a graceful First Lady . . . listening to women with ideas and perspectives that differ from her own." Was even this story, though nowhere near page one, overplayed? If the criterion is its significance to the nation's condition, no doubt. But the combination of Woodward's credentials, Ms. Clinton's place in affairs of state, and the White House efforts at spin control made it hard to skip even for editors and news directors not employed by *The Washington Post*.

Overholser is certainly right that the story should not have been fronted, but once advertised, it could hardly have been ignored. Houston seems to have slept over several times, and although the public may have no business poking into who is sleeping with whom in Washington, it surely has a right to know who is spending the night at the White House. More to the point, anything that sheds light on the operations of this particular First Lady's mind, the quality or quirks of her intellect, her emotional needs and resources has a serious side even if it is also, or even mainly, entertaining.

Partners in Power

Roger Morris is as profligate with assessments as Woodward is miserly, and in his new book, they are all negative. It's a prosecutor's brief about the careers and extracurricular

activities of Bill and Hillary Clinton before they ascended to the White House.

By this account, Little Rock in the 1980s was a stew of corruption in which the young pair romped for fun and gain. Among the allegations: Clinton used his brother Roger to supply an Olympic-sized craving for drugs and women, while selling out to monied interests in the pursuit of power. For her part, Ms. Clinton is described as owing her career to her proximity to her husband and receiving favors from favor-seekers that enriched the family and, along the way, having a kissy-squeezy something going with Vincent Foster.

The, pardon the expression, mainstream editor faced with *Partners in Power* will find many "confidential interviews" among its pages of notes about sources. Defenders of the Clintons, like Gene Lyons, a columnist for the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, note that Morris borrowed some of his more lurid charges from local Clinton bashers not known for their reliability in matters regarding the administration. Many editors seem to have come to a similar judgment.

Morris, who quit the National Security Council in protest over the Vietnam War, may be annoyed that his book has been useful to right-wingers operating on the principle that the enemy of my enemy, etc. *The Washington Times* decided that Morris's conclusion that the young Clinton was a CIA informant while at Oxford was worthy of a six-column spread at the top of page one.

The liberal establishment has been attacked for not giving *Partners in Power* the attention it warrants in this election year. Howie Carr, a Boston radio-show host, observed in the *Boston Herald* about two weeks after the book's publication: "Haven't yet heard it mentioned on any of the Sunday-morning chattering skull shows, have you?"

Morris himself told *The New York Post* he saw a double standard in the way his Nixon critique was played up and his Clinton critique played down. In her *New York Post* media column, Maureen O'Brien said CBS's 60

Minutes had “backed off” from the Morris book because “the content was apparently so explosive,” and went on to air Morris’s charges. Mike Wallace, who investigated the charge that Clinton was involved in a guns-and-drugs smuggling operation, says he was not able to find independent confirmation.

I wish that the suggestion that ideology played a part in the scant attention given to *Partners in Power* was beyond belief. Alas, it’s not only journalists on the right who play favorites. Yet Morris’s barrage against the Clintons is so relentless that you don’t have to be a down-and-dirty liberal to approach with care.

Morris himself is tough on the “cappuccino journalism” of the mainstream media. From his post on the left, he accuses reporters, producers, and editors of intellectual shallowness, class pandering, cronyism, shrunken sensibility, and conformity.

As an employee of one of the mainstream institutions under indictment, nothing I say on that subject can avoid seeming defensive. And who can fault his unoriginal complaint that “In commercial television, journalists’ reporting was shrunk to soundbites and reality to a hackneyed rendition read off by vacant ‘talent’”? Amen, but there is more than that to even television news. Since he holds that the pretense of fairness is merely fancy-dress for a compliant press, don’t waste time looking for that quality in his book.

What these three works have in common, what has contributed to their duration on the best-seller list and has given other publications and television programs grist for their own mills is, of course, the flavorsome stuff like womanizing and guruizing. Nothing in the latest Woodward exercise has drawn anything close to the amusement stirred by Ms. Clinton’s consorting with the inspirationalist crowd. I think I know which pages are the best thumbed of the 526 of *Partners in Power*. And what other attraction can

readers be finding in *Unlimited Access*?

Setting forth rules on correct behavior for editors and news directors is about as inviting as putting together a journalism-school primer. Nobody is likely to argue with the principle that ideology or publicity should play no part in editorial decisions — or argue that it is possible to keep them altogether out.

As for calling on the press to follow up on every charge that comes its way, that overestimates the resources of even *The New York Times*: there are some charges that conspicuously don’t bear checking. Day by day, editors and news directors have to make decisions based on the seriousness of the material, the credibility of the sources, and their own experience and instinct. The rules are simple: it’s the specific circumstances that complicate matters.

At the heart of today’s journalistic soul-searching (where is Jean Houston when we need her?) is how much readers and viewers need to know about the recreational tastes of their leaders. It is not a new issue, but fastidious editors have never been harder put to resist rear-window reporting than they are in this bottom-line age.

Tabloid frankness has its appeal, but nowadays peeking into the bedroom is defended even by the high-minded as an effort to reveal Character. Insofar as these examples of election-year literature have much to do with issues, it is the famous Character Issue.

H.L. Mencken lamented in 1914, “There has never been a large political or social question before the American people which did not quickly resolve itself into a moral question.” The Character Issue is today’s moral question. You don’t have to know anything about, say, welfare or immigration or Bosnia to make a judgment about Character. All you need is to know what’s right, and which of us doesn’t know that?

Mencken noted that the moralizers “at least offer good sport to the populace here on earth. They keep the newspapers supplied with hot stuff.” So it is with The Character Issue, that gift to pop politics from the virtual journalism industry.

Whitewater: The Case Against the Press

by James Boylan

Two years ago, Gene Lyons, a professional writer and semi-professional Arkansan, tried to throw retardant on the great Whitewater conflagration by contending that the scandal was a non-scandal — a concoction created by tendentious reporting, inflated and prolonged by partisanship. His article, in the October 1994 *Harper’s Magazine*, generated a flurry of interest: *Harper’s* arranged a symposium, there was muttering on the Internet, and *The New York Times*, Lyons’s chief target, responded by saying, essentially, “See here, old chap, we don’t do that sort of thing.” But the fire smoldered on, fueled by new rounds of congressional hearings, by

FOOLS FOR SCANDAL: HOW THE MEDIA INVENTED WHITewater

BY GENE LYONS AND THE EDITORS OF
HARPER’S MAGAZINE
FRANKLIN SQUARE PRESS
224 PP. \$9.95.

the explorations of two successive special prosecutors, by two long trials in Little Rock, and above all by generous attention in the news media, even when polls showed that the public had wearied.

Lyons’s new tract is a reworking of his 1994 article, expanded to incorporate developments through the first third of 1996 and to scrutinize other segments of the national press. His message remains the same: “Far from being the result of muckraking reporting by a vigorous and

James Boylan was CJR’s founding editor. His previous reviews on Whitewater and the press appeared in the January/February 1995 and the May/June 1996 issues of CJR.

independent press, what 'the Clinton scandals' amount to is possibly the most politically charged case of journalistic malpractice in recent American history." The news media (see his subtitle) "invented" Whitewater.

This is far too ambitious a proposition to sustain by Lyons's methods, which rely a great deal on counterassertion. The reader will no doubt accept or reject the larger thesis according to previous beliefs and convictions. But setting the grander contentions aside, the essay is worth reading as a simple critique of the press.

The *Times* remains Exhibit A. Its

labors on Whitewater began with Jeff Gerth's now-fabled story of March 8, 1992, in which he revealed the Clintons' involvement in the Whitewater land investment and asked "whether a governor should be involved in a business deal with the owner of a business regulated by the state and whether, having done so, the governor's wife through her law firm should be receiving legal fees for work done for the business." Gerth was eventually joined by a crew of other Whitewater-parsers — notably Stephen Engelberg, Dean Baquet, and Stephen Labaton. (Gerth's story and three later items are reprinted as an

appendix, with other supporting materials.)

A representative example of Lyons's approach is his critique of the *Times*'s coverage of the reports prepared by the law firm of Pillsbury Madison & Sutro for the Resolution Trust Corporation to determine whether anybody should be sued as a result of Whitewater or the troubles of the two institutions with which it was entangled, Madison Guaranty Savings & Loan and the Rose Law Firm. The findings turned out to be so unexpectedly favorable to the Clintons that the administration has seized on the reports as exoneration.

The first of these reports, made available in the summer of 1995, was seen in *The Wall Street Journal*'s news columns as "corroborat[ing] most of the President and Mrs. Clinton's assertions about their Whitewater real estate investment." No such thing in the *Times*, where a story of 1,762 words, signed by Gerth and Engelberg, found that the major point of the report was not exoneration but the disparity of investment in Whitewater between the Clintons and their partner, James B. McDougal, a difference of some \$116,000 in a total outlay of \$200,000 that the headline writer called a "Vast Benefit." Only somewhere past the twentieth paragraph did the story say that the report supported the Clintons' claim that they were "passive investors" in Whitewater, and by implication McDougal's victims.

A supplemental Pillsbury report issued in December 1995 received similar treatment. The *Times* story, by Stephen Labaton, said that the RTC had decided not to sue to recover losses caused by Madison Guaranty, but it conspicuously omitted the report's conclusion that the Clintons had little or no control over the Whitewater enterprise.

When he comes to the final Pillsbury report, issued in February 1996, Lyons is guilty of an omission. He does not seem to be aware of the reasonably well-balanced story by Neil A. Lewis in the *Times* of March 1. Moreover, Lyons wrongly states that there was no mention in any newspaper of the

Material Evidence

A really astounding bit of journalistic malpractice occurred on *Nightline* on December 19, 1995. In introducing Whitewater as a topic, host Ted Koppel dutifully cited "the reluctance of the Clinton White House to be as forthcoming with documents as it promised to be" and the "appalling memory lapses" of Susan Thomases. Then he turned to reporter Jeff Greenfield, who posed a rhetorical question and answered it. "Hillary Clinton did some legal work for Madison Guaranty at the Rose Law Firm, at a time when her husband was governor of Arkansas," he said. "How much work? Not much at all, she has said."

On the screen came file footage of the First Lady from her Whitewater press conference in April 1994. "The young attorney, the young bank officer, did all the work," she said. "It was not an area that I practiced in. It was not an area that I know anything, to speak of, about." The camera cut to a close-up of Thomases's handwritten notes, blown up onscreen. "She did all the billing," they read. Greenfield treated it as a damning revelation. No wonder, he concluded, that "the White House was so worried about what was in Vince Foster's office when he killed himself."

What viewers didn't know, however, was that the *Nightline* story had been greatly enhanced by the magic of computerized editing. Greenfield had removed exactly thirty-nine words from what the First Lady had actually said. The transcript of her April 22, 1994, press conference reads as follows: "The young attorney [and] the young bank officer did all the work, and the letter was sent. But because I was what we called the billing attorney — in other words, I had to send the bill to get the payment sent — my name was put on the bottom of the letter. It was not an area that I practiced in." [My emphasis]

The simple fact is that Hillary Clinton hadn't been asked how much work she'd done for Madison. Her answer referred to a specific incident — the S&L's unsuccessful May 1985 proposal to issue preferred stock. She's answered in copious detail, but Greenfield had yanked a video clip out of context, tampered with its meaning, stuck a different question in front of it, and used it to portray the First Lady as a prevaricating harpy. Even by Whitewater standards, it was a shameless act.

Within days, the doctored quote was everywhere.

— From *Fools for Scandal*

report's conclusion that Hillary Clinton earned at best \$20 a month from representing Madison Guaranty. Lewis included this fact.

Not until June 1996 — too late for Lyons to include — did a *Times* news story, under the byline of Stephen Labaton, unambiguously state that the "report found no evidence that President Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton or others had been involved in improperly diverting money from an ailing savings association into the Whitewater land venture." But that statement was tucked into a story that was designed largely to undermine the findings of the report. Labaton quoted a letter from Kenneth W. Starr, the Whitewater special prosecutor, to an unnamed person quoting an unnamed deputy as saying, "We would not agree with all their conclusions. We do have some facts that they apparently did not have." Labaton found in this "a tantalizing new clue about the direction of [Starr's] secretive inquiry." Overall, Lyons is persuasive on this topic, and he makes a convincing case as well that *Times* coverage of the Senate Whitewater hearings was unbalanced in favor of the accusers.

Well and good; he scores points. But the problem with Lyons, still, is that he damages himself by claiming too much and then bolstering his case with bluster. To compare a *Times* story to "a Pravda article on the Hitler-Stalin pact" is not only excessive but distasteful. However deserving of criticism, James B. Stewart, author of *Blood Sport*, should not be called, with cheap sarcasm, "Mr. Pulitzer Prize." Most disturbing, there is an undertone in Lyons's criticism that hints at willful wrongdoing — that the newspapers and the reporters are not merely misguided but corrupt.

Setting aside the grander theses, there is a humbler essay buried within, a lesson in how strongly the investigative mode sways even the grandest institutions of journalism, how the hope of scoring a coup leads journalists to feed on tidbits from the prosecutorial side and to neglect the rights of the accused, how long the press can maintain an exposé stance without revealing anything particularly new or significant.

The Ladies Auxiliary Is Alive and Well

by Patricia O'Brien

For all the gains women have made in politics, the relationship between women politicians and the media remains as bumpy as a ride over the pothole-filled streets of Washington. In the nation's capital, a driver loses hubcaps; in politics, a woman loses credibility if she has the wrong hairdo. By now you'd think media stereotyping of political women in America might have ceased to be the springboard for fluff reporting and sitcom laughter. But as Maria Braden points out in her new book, stereotypes and trivialization are still hogging the highway. And it's no laughing matter.

"When the news media imply that women are anomalies in high public office, the public is likely to regard them as bench warmers rather than as an integral part of government. . . . More women than ever hold high-level government positions, yet they are still portrayed by the media as novelties," Braden writes.

In a book that alternates not always successfully between a chronology and an analysis, it is Braden's series of snapshots of political women in this century that give her work juice and life. She tells the stories and traces the histories of several dozen women who have made their marks on the political scene over many years: Jeanette Rankin, for example, the first woman elected to Congress; Claire Booth Luce and Helen Gahagan Douglas (dubbed the "glamour girls" of Congress in the 1940s); and the combative Dixie Lee Ray, who in 1976 at the age of sixty-three became governor of Washington. ("Just about everyone predicted the state was not ready for an unmarried woman who gave herself a chainsaw for Christmas," *Newsweek* reported at

Patricia O'Brien is a journalist and former press secretary for the Dukakis campaign. Her third novel, Good Intentions, will be published next June.

the time.) There's also good coverage of such contemporary groundbreakers as Geraldine Ferraro, Walter Mondale's running mate on the 1984 Democratic presidential ticket, and New Jersey's Republican governor, Christine Todd Whitman. (Besieged by reporters repeatedly asking her how it feels to be a woman governor, an exasperated Whitman developed a stock answer: "I am a governor who happens to be a woman.")

Braden relies on news clips for much of her material. But her original interviews with such people as Ferraro and former Texas governor Ann Richards (who warns women in politics never to change their hairstyles if they don't want to risk being seen as indecisive and capricious) add freshness. Whatever the source, the women who've

WOMEN POLITICIANS AND THE MEDIA

BY MARIA BRADEN
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
235 PP. \$29.95.

walked the walk describe best how quickly the media move to lock them into an image — and their chronicles of how they've fought back show the perils they face. Dianne Feinstein (who was caught in newspaper photos trying not to cry during the 1983 effort to recall her as mayor of San Francisco) is quoted as saying: "Do not cry. Ever. If you've got to bite off your tongue or close your eyes so tight that nobody can see what's in them, do it. Because a man can cry and somehow it doesn't bother anybody. If a woman cries, it's an immediate, destructive thing that goes out and that everybody seems to remember."

Braden raises a number of issues: the skepticism among reporters over whether women politicians can make tough decisions, the uneasy relationship between women politicians and women reporters, and the consistency with which political women are penalized for their marital status. An example of this last point is the case of Mary Sue Terry, who was openly attacked for being single by Oliver North (who pointedly lauded her opponent, Republican George Allen, as a "family man") when she opposed Allen in the 1993 Virginia

gubernatorial race. Then there is the cautionary tale of Ferraro, the first woman ever to be placed on a national presidential ticket. She was attacked for everything from her short-sleeved dresses on the campaign trail (her middle-aged upper arms wobbled when she waved) to the minute details of her parents' financial lives and her husband's alleged professional dealings with the Mafia. Nothing was ever proven. As one reporter who covered that brutal campaign, I am impressed that she survived.

they were still so unusual." Braden states.

Disappointingly, many of the most provocative issues raised by Braden, who teaches journalism at the University of Kentucky, leave the reader thirsting for more analysis. For example, although she gives a detailed and forthright chronology of Elizabeth Holtzman's ferocious attack on Geraldine Ferraro during their battle for the Democratic nomination for a New York Senate seat in 1992, she does not delve deeply into why in this

journalism. It is indeed disheartening to see women running for high political office still denied gender-equal treatment by the media. Why isn't this changing faster? It is virtually impossible to think of a single political woman today who would be taken seriously as a candidate for the U.S. presidency — and that's not because the talent and ambition aren't out there.

Another point that deserves more examination is the frequently conflicted relationships between women journalists and women politicians. Women in politics continue to wish for a (perhaps sublimated) natural bond here, but they shouldn't count on it. No one knows this better than our non-elected, very political First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose nastiest surprise in her uneasy dance with the media has been the ferocity of women reporters, who she originally expected would give her a break or two once in a while. Forget sisterhood — they've been unrelentingly tough. "There's just something about her that pisses people off," author Sally Quinn told *The New Yorker*. Part of Hillary's problems come from the bubbling pot of local Washington gossip, which has its own whoppingly trivial nature. (Rumor has it that Quinn felt insulted by the Clintons' lack of attention to her when they came to town. Less trivial was her concern that a friend who labored with Hillary on her book, *It Takes a Village*, never got credit for her work.)

Strong women are automatic targets in our culture. But should women be doing the shooting? Are women journalists who pillory Hillary doing it to show they're as tough as men? Or are they actually striking a blow (albeit painful) for the kind of gender equality women in politics say they want?

And should women reporters take the lead in changing female stereotypes? Yes, and they do. I recall the great satisfaction I felt as a reporter at the *Chicago Sun-Times* when, along with a couple of other women working city-side at the time, we sent petitions through the newsroom demanding the end of bathing-beauty photos on the front page. We succeeded by shaming our male colleagues into signing (and by having an editor willing to be



Near the end of her term as governor of Washington, Dixy Lee Ray named a litter of eleven pigs after members of the press corps

Things are not all bad for women in politics, which Braden takes pains to point out. Television has vastly increased women's visibility; politicians like Governor Whitman and Representative Patricia Schroeder of Colorado built national reputations through exposure on the tube.

Braden also points out that the media can hype progress while ignoring the larger picture. Consider, for example, the breathless media reports during 1992, the much-touted "Year of the Woman." Women were elected that year to the House in record numbers and the number of women in the Senate tripled. But when the 103rd Congress convened, women made up only 11 percent of the House and 7 percent of the Senate. Unfortunately, this was not nearly as colorful a story as the "Year of the Woman" and it was not reported with anything like the energy. "The political success of these women was news precisely because

day and age the media still salivate when one feminist attacks another. ("A cat fight," crowed *The Washington Times*; a "feminist paradox," harrumphed *The New York Times*.) Braden rightly scorns reporters for their behavior, but summarizes thusly: "The answer is not for journalists to ask women to stay above the fray while the news media continue their no-holds-barred coverage. Journalists must become partners in media coverage that focuses on issues, that has humor, and that discerns differences between candidates based on more than gender and appearance."

All I can say to that is: good luck. Having been on both sides, I predict it will be a mighty cold day in hell before journalists become "partners in media coverage" with either each other or with women politicians. Braden would have drawn a little more blood if she had thrust deeper into examining the systemic problems of male-dominated

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enlightened), which was big stuff at the time. But it's not that simple now. The pressures on women political reporters to prove themselves as tough as men are particularly severe. "Toughness and gutsiness are rewarded in journalism with promotions and choice assignments, and peers tend to razz a reporter who writes a story perceived as fluff," Braden notes. This is all too true. And it feeds into the "herd" coverage that good reporters say they deplore. So who dares to break ranks? Not a woman wary of being co-opted by her sympathies, that's for sure.

Not all of the problems raised in this book can be laid at the door of the media, obviously, which raises the old question: to what extent do journalists reflect the prevailing culture and to what extent do they form it? It's a question that keeps circling around without resolution. Journalists who still claim they don't "make" news ignore their own power, but they are also caught up in the stereotypes and prejudices of their era. What is not true is that they are helpless to change them.

Underneath much of the prejudice against women is the larger, also troubling problem of media hostility toward *all* politicians. We've all heard it: the good people don't want to go into politics these days because they'll have their lives ripped apart by the media. It's increasingly hard to see why anyone, man or woman, would want to run for high public office. But as I ran through the stories of the many fine women profiled in this book I felt a sense of pride in what they have accomplished. Perhaps the sheer number of them will make further inroads into the media's habit of treating them as phenomena or novelties. Can this country accept the idea of women as powerful people? I'd like to think so. But critical to that is an understanding that women are as different from each other as men, and deserve to be evaluated on the basis of what they are trying to do in politics — not on whether a tear smears their mascara or how low or high they wear their skirts. ♦

LIFE GOES TO A HATE RALLY

The volatile anti-Semitism in New York City in early 1939 involved more than the street confrontations between supporters and opponents of Father Coughlin. An organization that had become the very symbol of Nazism in America, the Friends of the New Germany, commonly known as the German-American Bund, staged a massive rally in Madison Square Garden on February 20, billed as "George Washington Birthday exercises. . . . [A] Mass Demonstration for True Americanism." With a dramatic backdrop of a huge banner with the likeness of Washington opposite the Nazi-like Bund flag, this event was a frightening indication of the invasion of America by Hitlerism. . . .

Newspaper and magazine coverage of the rally emphasized its blatant hostility



UPI/CORBIS/BETTMANN

toward Jews. Its most startling moment was recorded on film, which *Life* magazine treated as a feature photo spread. The caption described "a 26-year-old plumber's helper named Isador Greenbaum who rushed Fritz Kuhn, Bund head, as he was vilifying Jews. . . . Newsreel shots of this violent scene were withdrawn from theatres after two

days when managers complained they incited audiences to riot." The photo sequence shows speaker Kuhn hearing a noise, "turning to his right as Greenbaum is tackled by a uniformed Bund member. He then falls over the rostrum railing and then four 'storm troopers' jump on him and then start pulling his legs."

This melee, and the Bund meeting, became the stuff of journalistic legend. At one point, the rally was interrupted by nationally syndicated columnist Dorothy Thompson, who broke out laughing. Her removal by Bund officials only underscored the sense that the organization was a danger to the country.

FROM **RADIO PRIEST: CHARLES COUGHLIN, THE FATHER OF HATE RADIO** BY DONALD WARREN. THE FREE PRESS. 376 PP. \$27.50.

WAR STORY

He was wondering whether to move a little higher the government's offer to let the rebels open a liaison office in the capital, when his thoughts were jangled by the frantic rings that signaled a telephone call from overseas. It must be his foreign desk, asking how soon he would be filing.

But no, the caller identified himself as an assistant professor at some journalism school whose whereabouts in the United States T.K. could not place.

"I'm feeding the goat," T.K. said.

There was a pause. "I'm calling Farrow, the foreign correspondent," said the caller, "not the goatherd."

"That's me, on deadline. Can you call back?"

"Our journalism review has deadlines too, and you're in it. The media can't duck its responsibilities."

"Media's plural," T.K. suggested.

"My computer analyzed the media's coverage of C.I.A. meddling in your country," said the professor. "I fed twenty-five articles into my computer and crunched them, factoring in story position, length, impact, focus."

"That's nice," said T.K., "but I need to file —"

"*Los Angeles Times* mentioned the C.I.A. in the context of Equatoria six times in February, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* did it five times, yet my computer readout shows nothing about the C.I.A. under your byline. Why are you covering this up?"

"I wrote something on the C.I.A. in late January," T.K. tried to recollect. "Or was it early March?"

"So my statistical analysis doesn't lie — you ignored the C.I.A. in February. You're not looking so professional, Mr. Farrow."

"I wrote my takeout in February, but my paper didn't have room till March because of a big scandal at city hall."

"So my correlation coefficients prove that you didn't exist, February-wise."

T.K. asked how January or March looked.

"Statistically, we've done February," the professor said. "If I did January and March, I wouldn't have time to teach my journalism courses."

"A promising option," T.K. said.

"Don't sneer at we who mold tomorrow's journalists. The media isn't well served by you."

"Aren't well served."

"What's your null hypothesis?" the professor asked.

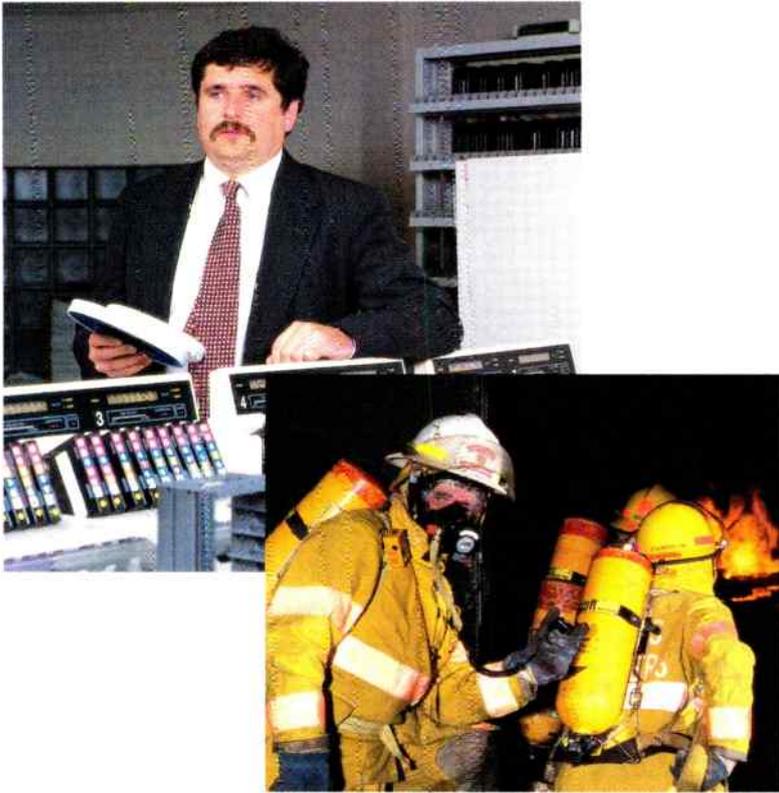
"My null what?"

"Null hypothesis, your bias, your point of view, your motive for writing."

"My null hypothesis," T.K. said, "is that if I keep telling my editors what happens here, they'll keep paying me."

But the professor had hung up.

FROM **HACKS**, A NOVEL BY CHRISTOPHER S. WREN. SIMON & SCHUSTER. 276 PP. \$23.



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The New York Times 6/13/96

Smitten teen goes on journey



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The New York Times 6/11/96

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The Star-Bulletin (Honolulu, Hawaii) 7/19/96

Dad's sudden death vexes his family

The Oakland Tribune 7/2/96



Elvis Presley on a train, going home to Memphis in July 1996.

The Gainesville (Fla.) Sun 1/14/96

Soldier's trial starts in deadly sniper attack

Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal 6/10/96

John Lips services

The Daily Times (Rawlins, Wyo.) 6/18/96

Unpaid subway fare led police to murder suspect

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