

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Strong Press, Strong Democracy

Hot Air

Why TV weathermen are climate skeptics

CHARLES HOMANS

THE VIEW FROM OUT HERE

Four downsized reporters reconsider the news

LISA ANDERSON, JILL DREW, DON TERRY, TERRY MCDERMOTT

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, NEWSPAPER HACK

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WHY YOU CAN'T BE A RESTAURANT CRITIC

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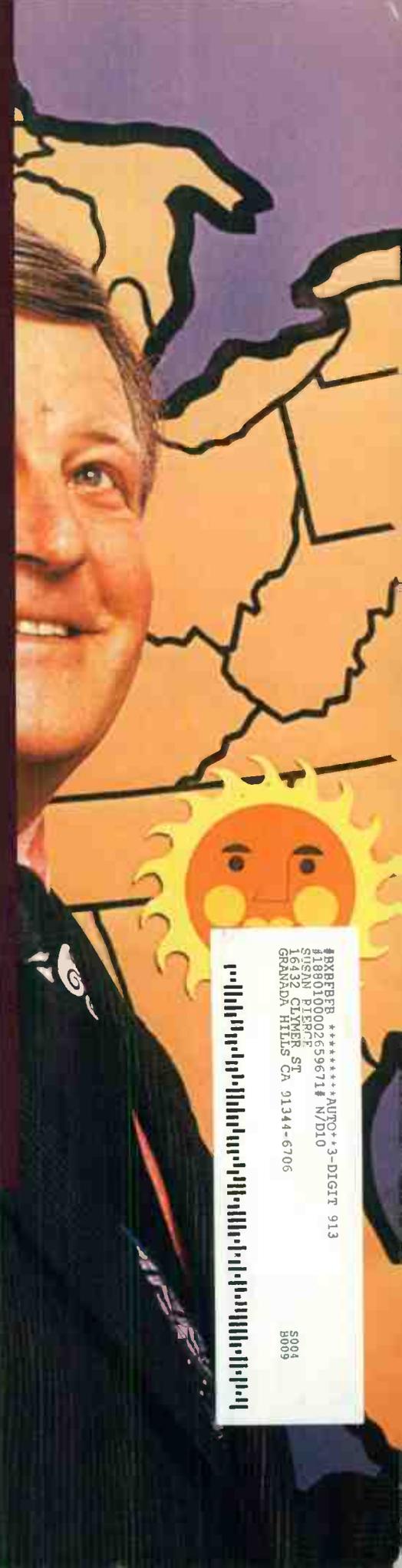
MOSCOW'S NEW RULES: ISLANDS OF FREEDOM

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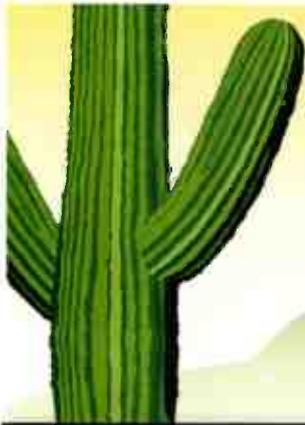
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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

January/February 2010

"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



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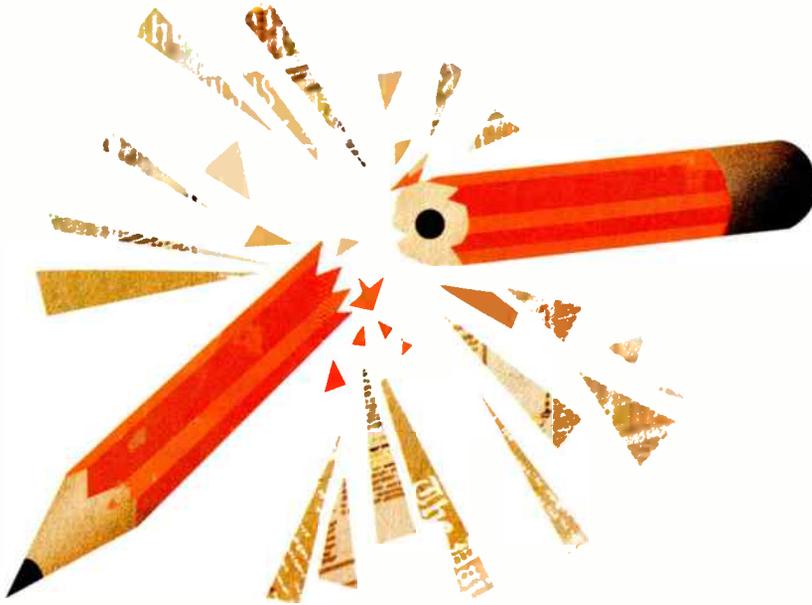
Opening Shot



In December, as the U.N. Climate Change Conference unfolded beneath the controversy over thousands of hacked e-mails from climate scientists, we learned that the first decade of the twenty-first century is on pace to be the warmest on record. Despite the skeptics' conspiracy theories, climate change is real. But beyond this basic truth, there is much that isn't known—what is the timeframe for likely consequences of warming, for instance, and what are the best strategies to counter it? Press coverage of the climate story has improved in recent years, as most outlets abandoned false balance and acknowledged the weight of evidence. But as Charles Homans explains in our cover story this month, a curious—and broadly influential—bastion of climate skepticism persists in the media: the local weathermen. Georgina Gustin, meanwhile, shows how a dearth of independent data hampers journalistic efforts to untangle another controversial facet of the climate story: genetically modified crops and their role in feeding the hungry as the planet gets hotter and drier. With major legislation simmering in Congress, the climate debate will intensify this year—and how the press covers it will be crucial. For smart, daily analysis of that coverage, check out The Observatory, our science and environment desk, at CJR.org. **CJR**

Future food? The creators of GM crops, like these rice plants at a Cornell University lab, insist they can help end hunger, even on a warmer planet.

Critics, meanwhile, worry about risks to the environment and human health.



More Than a Job

The emotional toll of journalism's 'transition'

The American Newsroom photograph in our January/February 2009 issue is of a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reporter seated at a desk that groans beneath piles of papers, files, and books. Hanging in the center of it all is a sign that reads: “You are not here to merely make a living.” With all due respect, it is not a sign likely to be found at Goldman Sachs. Or, frankly, at a lot of places where people earn a paycheck. It is a distillation of the

idealism that shapes the way many journalists—particularly those who worked at a newspaper in the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the occupational touchstone was Watergate and newsroom ambitions ran high—think about what they do and why. The job is a calling; the mission is to try to improve small corners of the world.

Sound like romantic nonsense? No doubt a healthy dose of mythology and narcissism has always been mixed up in journalism's self-image. But disturbing anecdotal evidence is emerging from among the thousands of reporters and editors who have been laid off in recent years that this sense of mission is not only real, but in some cases it is making the transition from the newsroom to whatever comes next especially difficult.

When that mission is taken away, it turns out, there are emotional costs as well as financial ones. In recent months we've heard from or about out-of-work journalists who are

struggling with everything from mild depression and anxiety to a profound sense of purposelessness and—at the most extreme—thoughts of suicide.

Bruce Shapiro, the executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, says there are parallels between the dislocation that comes from covering violence and the dislocation brought on by economic upheaval. “As I heard from more and more people who had been forced out of the newsroom, I realized that the existential crisis that conflict reporters often have—that loss of power, that loss of status that happens to all victims of trauma—is also part of what happens when you lose your job,” he says.

Losing any job can be traumatic, and we are not suggesting that this emotional toll is unique to journalism. But when one considers his job a vocation—something he was meant to do—it can be much more difficult to process the loss of that identity, and to imagine oneself filling a different role in the world. Don Terry, a veteran reporter who was laid off by the *Chicago Tribune* and is now part of CJR's inaugural Encore Fellows program (see page 34), told us of being out to dinner with his wife and some nonjournalist friends soon after he was let go. “They were trying to cheer me up, saying how exciting it was that I was free to do anything I wanted,” he says. “I sort of snapped and said, ‘Hey, give me some time to process it. This is all I ever wanted to do.’ It was so much fun to do this job. I'd never tell my bosses, of course, but I'd do it for free if I could.”

Journalism has never been good at self-care. Another piece of the journalist's self-image is that of a tough-minded observer, unaffected by what he sees and hears. When reporters began coming home from Iraq with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, news organizations were generally slow to respond with counseling and other treatment and support. And as Anthony DePalma showed in the March/April 2009 issue of CJR, newsrooms—and journalists themselves—were slow to acknowledge and address the physical and emotional problems stemming from their coverage of 9/11. This stoicism makes it even harder for someone struggling with the loss of his job—and his sense of self—to ask for help. But he shouldn't have to. News outlets owe it to these people they are pushing out the door to understand that this suffering is real and incorporate some form of optional counseling or other support strategies into their severance packages. **CJR**

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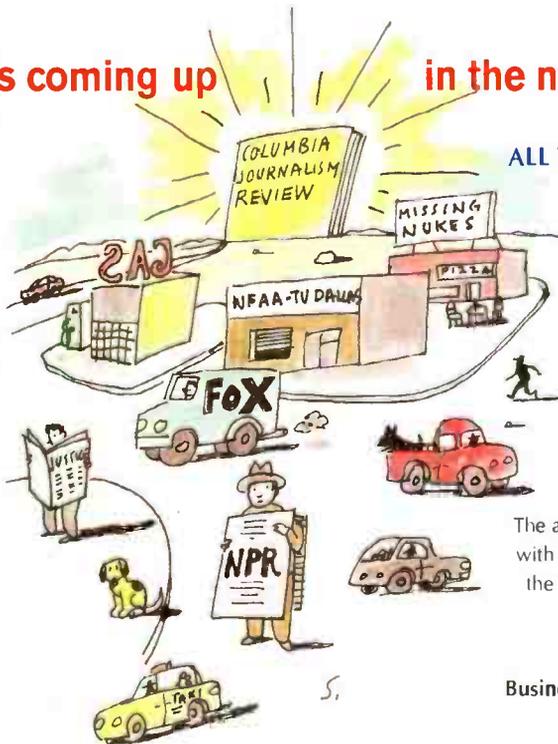
WHAT IS FOX NEWS?

A cable news network with some opinionated commentators and occasional crusades—an MSNBC for the right? Or is Fox, as the White House suggests, something altogether new?

JUSTICE

A Chicago reporter spent a decade unearthing a story of torture by the police. Finally, the ringleader faces trial; but the reporter, John Conroy, has been laid off and may not get to write the final chapter.

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ALL THINGS RECONSIDERED

Vivian Schiller, after a year as NPR's boss, must negotiate a future that speaks the language of digital media while preserving NPR's unique voice.

'BIG D' TV

How WFAA in Dallas builds excellence amid the crumbling landscape of local TV news.

MY MISSING NUKES

The author went down the rabbit hole with the Department of Energy to find the truth about a forty-year-old story.

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Recon Mission

Of the six recommendations in Leonard Downie and Michael Schudson's report, "The Reconstruction of American Journalism" (CJR, November/December), number five caused quite a ruckus:

A national Fund for Local News should be created with money the Federal Communications Commission now collects from or could impose on telecom users, television and radio broadcast licensees, or Internet service providers and which would be administered in open competition through state Local News Fund Councils.

This suggestion made the *New York Times's* David Carr's mind "reel"; Jeff Jarvis called the idea "desperate"; and Michelle McLellan, writing in the Knight Digital Media Center newsletter, found it "troubling." Each of these critiques is based on the same basic premise: public subsidies fundamentally undermine journalistic independence.

That can certainly be true, but to hold it to be true always and in all cases is a dangerous misconception that rests on a staggering ignorance about the history of journalism in the U.S. and elsewhere. As Paul Starr has shown, journalism has always been directly and indirectly supported by the federal government and many other public entities. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, for example, receives direct public support but is hardly reduced to slavish dependency by it. Many journalists around the world whom we laud for their independent scrutiny of power work for news outlets that are funded largely with public support—most notably the BBC.

Professional journalists have always had a complicated relationship with those who pay their bills (whether it's advertisers channeling consumers' money or public officials channeling citizens' tax dollars). Dependence on one source of funding—whether public or private—will almost always lead



It's unrealistic to think we can put the government in a position to determine what's 'neutral.'

to problematic situations. But to suggest that public subsidies have no role in saving American journalism from the crisis facing it today is a dangerous knee-jerk reaction. Journalists and others working in the trenches will hopefully seize on the arguments offered in the report and use this critical moment to forge alliances with outside partners to build a better journalism for tomorrow. Whether we get it is a political question as much as one of business models or professional standards, and I hope that the libertarians and free-market ideologues won't dominate the discussion. (Full disclosure: Schudson is the chair of my dissertation committee.)

*Rasmus Kleis Nielsen
Brooklyn, NY*

Leonard Downie and Michael Schudson, in their thoughtful, well-researched report, sharply criticize the failure of

much of public broadcasting to provide significant local news reporting. They charge "longstanding neglect of this responsibility" and call for public radio and television to "be substantially reoriented to provide significant local news reporting in every community served by public stations and their Web sites." They urge a big increase in funding from Congress so public broadcasters can focus on serious news at the local and state level. This is a worthy goal but it is neither practical nor realistic.

American public broadcasting is woefully underfunded. It cannot afford to pay for the addition of hundreds of local station news operations. Nor, during this time of steep federal and state deficits, is there any chance that Congress will significantly increase appropriations for publicly owned media. Any future expansion of local news reporting is likely to come not from old-line public stations but from the new digital-information technologies. These make it easier and more affordable for individuals and ad-hoc groups to report and distribute news of what is happening in their own communities. In fact, an array of local news experiments, using nonprofit and for-profit approaches and involving digital and traditional media, are under way throughout the country—among them, the Chicago News Cooperative, the New Haven Independent group, and the Bay Area Cooperative.

What NPR and PBS can do is make a much greater effort to produce and distribute in-depth, multimedia investigative reports on the major national issues. This is a vital new assignment for publicly owned media at a time of precipitous decline in the mainstream news business. It will require basic changes in how PBS and NPR set their priorities and go about their business, but this is an assignment they can afford to take on. For greater impact, they should at times join forces and pool their limited journalistic resources.

Public broadcasters figured out long ago how to coordinate fund-raising campaigns for greater impact. They should do similar planning to gain maximum audiences for thoughtful national multimedia reports on the complex issues we face. As big-city newspapers, major newsmagazines, and network news—last century’s mainstays of responsible journalism—recede and retrench in the face of withering competition from the new digital media, the nation’s public media have the opportunity and, indeed, the responsibility to fill the widening gaps in

citizens’ knowledge of public affairs.

Lawrence K. Grossman

Co-chair of the Digital Promise Project and a former president of NBC News and PBS New York, NY

Enterprise/public-service journalism began to decline long before the Internet became a force. With the rise of chains and the shift of ownership from families to Wall Street investors, newspapers and other media began “harvesting market share,” slashing budgets, newsholes, and staffs in order to pump up their profit

margins. Newspapers became less and less committed to being must-reads that dug below the surface. Readers noticed and began drifting away as other alternatives became available. Combine this weakened connection with the audience with the overleveraging of debt brought on by M&A activity and empire-building, and the news media were left in a vulnerable position as the Internet became a true monster. Had they invested in good reporting and writing and cutting-edge delivery mechanisms, news organizations would still be facing huge chal-

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

IN “TRASH COMPACTOR” (NOVEMBER 10), MEGAN GARBER looked at *The New York Times*’s crowd-funded report on a patch of garbage in the Pacific and wondered whether the piece’s funders got what they paid for. David “Digidave” Cohn, the founder of Spot.us, the Web site that partially funded the piece, was quick to respond to Garber’s criticisms:

Sorry we didn’t win a Pulitzer. How many do you have? You obviously didn’t follow or read any of her blog posts along the way. Lindsey sent back numerous photos, blog posts, and more while on the ship and since she has gotten back. A lot of the depth and human connection you are looking for are probably there. She could have (and wanted to) write a 2,000-word article, but *The N.Y. Times* limited her space. But Lindsey did *more* reporting than what made it into the *Times* piece. Did you check out the links we published on Spot.us? Did you bother to e-mail me to find out if there was more content? —*David Cohn*

Sorry—I finally got to page two of your article where you do note that Lindsey did some reporting on her blog: “It’s good stuff. It’s what the Spot.us funders paid for. It would have been nice if the *Times* article—the principal ‘deliverable’ in the Spot.us pitch—had resembled it more.” I’m glad that you think Lindsey did deliver. That the *Times* wanted a more traditional-sounding piece was their call. Spot.us obviously can’t force anything on them. —*David Cohn*

Others were more appreciative of Garber’s piece:

By my lights, the *New York Times* story deserves to be criticized, and I think Megan’s subhed catches the tone well: 1) It’s a *NYT* story; 2) Spot.us delivered it; 3) It’s disappointing. And, yes, as the piece winds down, Megan expands to make a point that Hoshaw has more material elsewhere that provides a fuller look at the subject. Megan links to it and encourages the reader to check it out. But good journalism *elsewhere* doesn’t explain lackluster journalism *here*. —*Josh Young*

I’d agree with CJR’s criticism that Hoshaw’s piece—while

informative—lacked depth, but I’m more tempted to blame the *NYT*’s space limits . . . I wonder if the writer submitted a longer story or if she pared down her own piece. If the latter, it might suggest the piece deserved more space, or that Spot.us overestimated the skill of its reporter in crafting a taut, less-than-1,000-word story. —*Barbara Drake*

I happen to believe projects like this deserve funding simply because I think other venues, including someone’s blog, can be legitimate outlets. But I hesitate when Kerry writes that getting this piece in the *Times* was a “major achievement.” How? By trimming weeks of reporting, interesting science, and ocean adventure into 900 words? (Garber’s piece is called “Trash Compactor” after all.) Or by raising visibility for Spot.us? —*Timothy Lesle*

An oceanographer offered what was perhaps the most substantive critique:

I am the chief scientist for the SEAPLEX expedition, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography cruise that visited the gyre this summer, and I have to say that I agree with the bulk of Megan Garber’s criticism of Hoshaw’s *NYT* piece—there was little new material that had not previously been covered in other pieces.

Additionally, the *NYT* article misrepresented the science, presenting broad estimates and conjecture as facts. A few examples: there is not enough data to say exactly how large (“twice the size of Texas”) or what the growth rate of the patch (“doubling every ten years”) might be. There is not enough evidence to say that all five major gyres are accumulating plastic—just measurements from two of them (North Atlantic and North Pacific). We do not know if a) significant numbers or important species of fish are ingesting plastic; b) if toxins are then passed from plastic to fish; and c) if these toxins then go up the food chain to humans.

I think this issue is in desperate need of a critical investigative reporter’s eye. Is plastic really having an impact on oceanic ecosystems or is it just ugly? Is the current research on ways to clean it up plausible? I was hoping that Hoshaw would be that voice. Unfortunately, from a science perspective, this *NYT* piece is deeply disappointing.

—*Miriam Goldstein*

lenges today. But they wouldn't be in as bad a shape as they are.

*Mike Hudson
Brooklyn, NY*

As a former small-town weekly newspaper editor who watched Main Street businesses disappear as Wal-Mart arrived, and who saw his newspaper's advertising revenue dissolve at the same time (Wal-Mart does not advertise in most small newspapers in the communities in which they thrive), I think there is merit to considering a community foundation-funded, hyperlocal newspaper. The number of small papers that have disappeared due to economic hardship is legion. The loss of these papers has rent the fabric of community life in countless small towns here in Kansas, and their deaths can be attributed directly to a lack of funding, and not, as some suggest, a lack of reader interest.

Funding from community foundations could be a lifesaver for community journalism, ensuring that citizens continue to have access to local news—and also ensuring a chronicle of local history. With the demise of the small town newspapers, the histories of our small towns vanish as well.

*Grant Overstake
Hillsboro, KS*

Listen Harder

I agree with Jan Schaffer's response to the Downie/Schudson report ("Fol-

low the Breadcrumbs," *CJR*, November/December). Journalists can't sit in silos thinking about how to fix journalism. That's a doomed approach in a culture dominated by a two-way medium, the Internet. Investment in local reporting is needed, but so is engagement with local citizens, to figure out how that reporting can be delivered in the most useful, compelling ways. And the engagement can't just be a series of focus groups—it needs to be baked into how news products are conceptualized and executed. What are the best practices for this kind of engagement? Who has proven that this approach generates sufficient revenue to sustain news operations? Those are the examples we need to be studying.

News products of the future will be niche-oriented. Now that narrow-casting has arrived, trying to market a news product "with something for everyone" is a doomed proposition. So how do citizens make sense of the world if all that's available is a sea of niche choices? That's where the buzzword du jour, "curation," comes in. Where once you had an editor, now you have a curator and a designer—people who devise user-friendly ways to create context and meaning from information pulled from a range of sources.

*Amanda Hirsch
New York, NY*

Hands Off

Re: your editorial "A Helping Hand" (*CJR*, November/December). How does gov-

ernment support of the news media, in any form, square with the First Amendment's prohibitions regarding Congress and any law restricting the freedom of the press? Favoritism of any sort clearly comes off as restriction of those who do not receive such favor. National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service are as close to the BBC or NHK as one will get—or should get—in this country. Government's camel should not be allowed to put its nose into the news tent. Eventually, the entire animal may be in there.

*Patrick Cloonan
McKeesport, PA*

I couldn't disagree more with your editorial. It's simply unrealistic to think that we can put the government in a position to determine what's "neutral" and what's "accountability journalism" without it becoming a highly politicized issue. As a perfect example, the editorial describes Paul Starr as "media historian," but when I saw his name, I thought of him as co-editor of the liberal magazine *The American Prospect*. Concepts like "balance" are highly subjective, and putting government in the position of judge would come back to haunt us all, regardless of our political leanings.

*Philip Klein
Washington Correspondent
The American Spectator
Washington, DC*

Hands On

Why would government-supported newspapers be discredited? They've been supported by state and federal governments for years via advertising. Secondly, countries like Australia and the U.K. have public broadcasters like the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and BBC. Are they criticized for being mouthpieces for the government? The opposite—they're always under fire for supposed antigovernment bias (regardless of which "side" is in power).

*Lynden Barber
Sydney, Australia*

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SHOVED OUT OF NEWSROOMS DUE TO THE ECONOMIC earthquake in the news business is deep into the thousands by now. No one can quantify the loss of talent and institutional memory or the effect of that loss on the quality of the democratic conversation.

Two points about all of those men and women. First, because journalists (accurately) tend to see the work as much more than a job, leaving it behind can lead to an existential crisis, rougher than the typical human-relations department can fathom. We have thoughts about that in our editorial on page 4.

Second, as they observe the news business from their new perspectives outside of it, they are likely to have insights that can inform journalism's effort to locate a viable future. We asked *CJR*'s four new *Encore* Fellows, all downsized from quality newspapers in the recent past, to share some of their newly acquired outsider insights about the news business, and the results start on page 34. (For an inkling of what they'll be working on for the March/April issue, see our next-issue ad on page 5.) Finding journalism's future is a collective enterprise, and will require both the wisdom of experience and the energy of youth.

—Mike Hoyt

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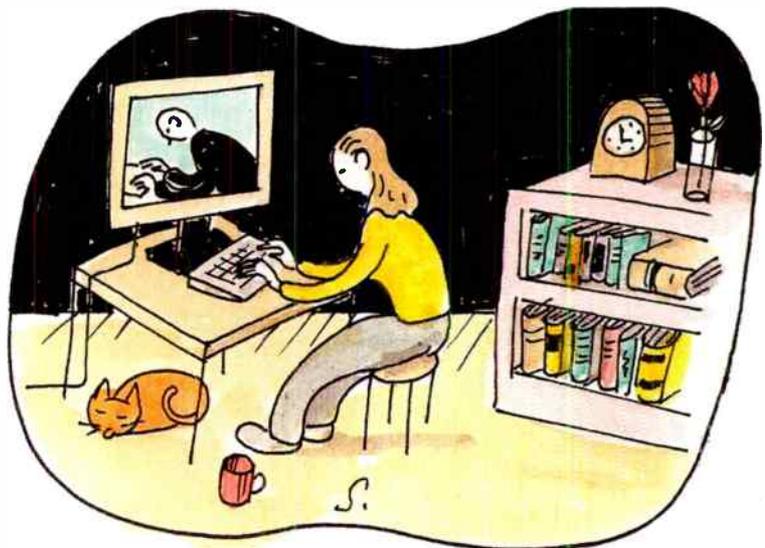
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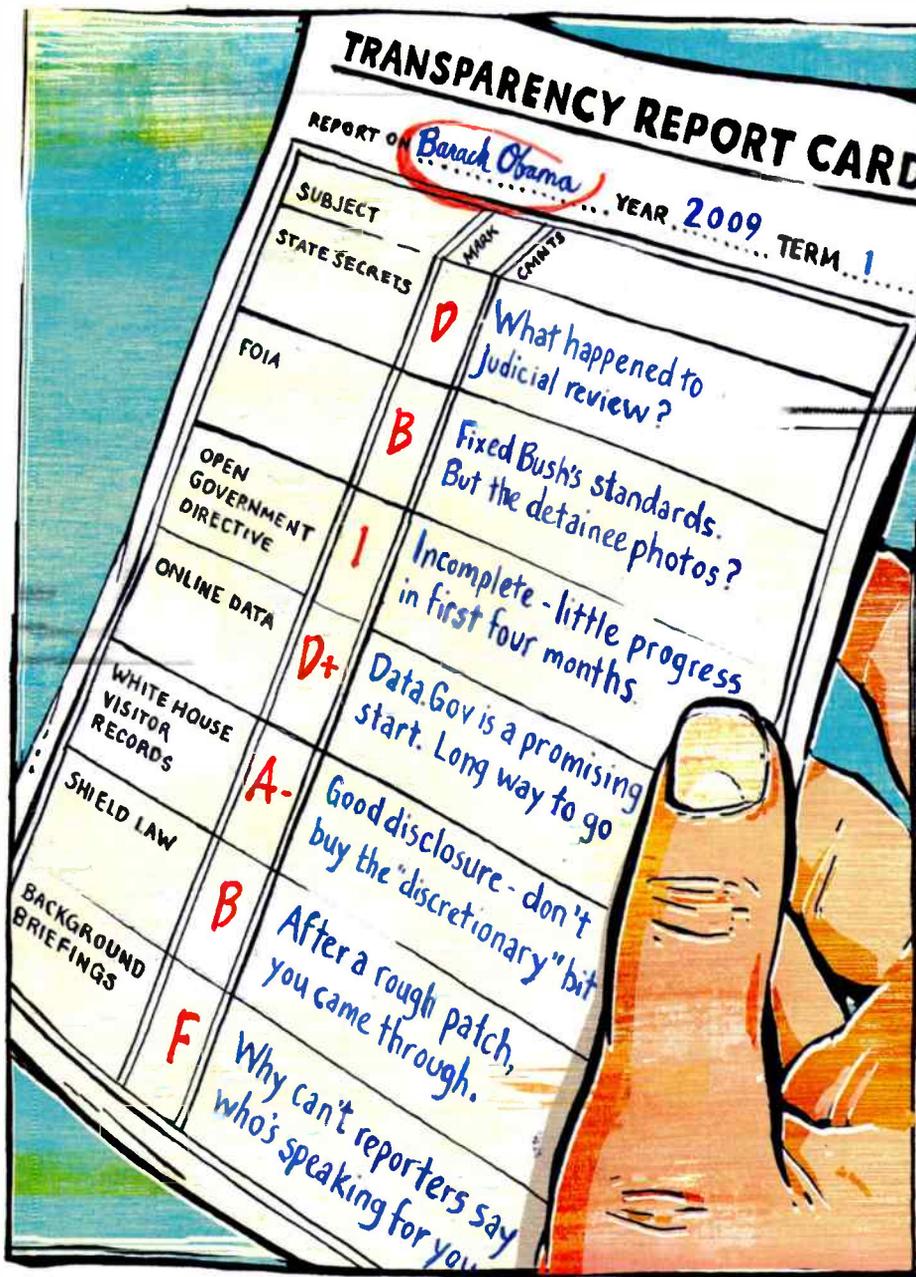
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on the **stories behind the stories**

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Currents



Obama's Marks at Transparency U.

In the year since President Obama took office, he has made significant progress on transparency and access issues. Still, there have been plenty of missed opportunities and much work still to be done. For further explanation of our grades, visit www.cjr.org/transparency/report_card.php.

Weeklies On the Rise

IN THE OFFICES OF THE weekly *Denver Business Journal* there is a bulletin board known as "The Daily Beating." On the board, staff members post stories clipped from the city's leading newspaper, *The Denver Post*—each of which plays catch-up on a story first reported by the weekly. "It's like they're using us as their tickler file for article ideas," says Wayne Hicks, managing editor at the *Business Journal*. The latest: the weekly broke the news about a proposed power line project on October 23. The *Post* followed a week later.

Welcome to the new reality of business journalism. As metro dailies have slashed the staff and space they devote to business news, business weeklies—long considered an afterthought for hardcore readers—are holding their ground and, in the process, gaining a competitive edge.

Signs of this change abound. While some weeklies have also cut staff, many have picked off the best of the daily reporters. In Seattle, the *Puget Sound Business Journal* last year hired two well-known tech writers from the *Post-Intelligencer* before its print edition folded; they immediately launched a tech news site for the weekly. In Atlanta, after longtime *Journal-Constitution* columnist Maria

'Hooray that there is still enough passion left somewhere in a newsroom in America for violence to break out between colorful characters in disagreement over the quality of a story.'—
Washington Post columnist Gene Weingarten, after two Post editors came to blows

Saporta took the paper's buyout offer, she was writing her popular column for the *Atlanta Business Chronicle* within weeks. There has also been a striking shift in the quantity of coverage. While newsholes shrink at dailies, weeklies are holding steady,

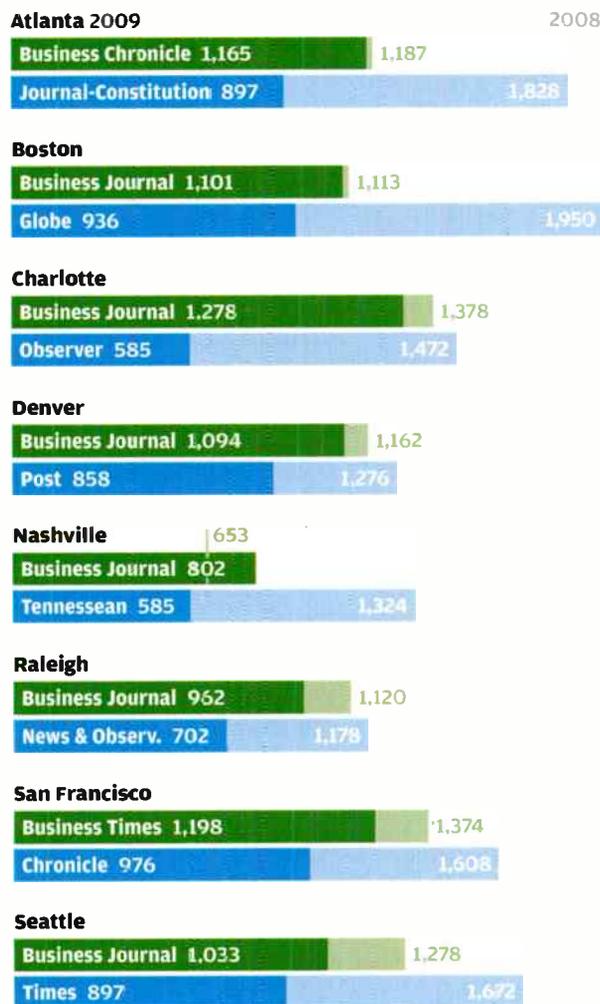
and now offer more print pages in many markets (see chart). And readers seem to be noticing. While dailies nationwide struggle with a declining subscriber base, as of late last year privately-held American City Business Journals Inc., which owns

more than forty business weeklies, was projecting annual circulation growth of 3 percent. The shift could have broad implications, because weeklies and dailies have traditionally defined their missions in different ways. Dailies have generally paid more attention to the big, public companies in most metro markets. Fewer reporters and a smaller newshole may make them weaker watchdogs—which could mean they'll miss the next Enron scandal when it occurs. Weeklies, on the other hand, have historically focused more on breaking news about smaller companies. Their new prominence could help correct the press's relative lack of attention to small and privately held companies, which account for 99.7 percent of all businesses and more than 50 percent of the non-farm private sector workforce. Weeklies have also traditionally been more aggressive in coverage of local real estate—in fact, many of them warned earlier this decade about problems in their local housing markets, though their warnings didn't reach a broad audience.

But those old mission statements may now be up for review. Whitney Shaw, the CEO of American City Business Journals, says that as dailies cede ground in coverage of transportation, education, technology, and health care, each becomes a "ripe area" for the weeklies to "enhance and expand their

A SHIFT IN WHERE BIZ NEWS IS FOUND

As dailies slash business pages, weekly papers are devoting more space to business coverage in many markets. The chart shows the business newshole over the past two years in eight cities.



Source: American City Business Journals, Talking Biz News. Editorial-page data is through September for 2008 and 2009. Daily-editorial-page data comes from the author's conversations with business editors and his reviews of newspapers from those markets

HARD NUMBERS

1.4 percent of national newshole devoted to education stories between January and September 2009

6 percent of newshole devoted to education issues during week of September 7-13, when President Obama delivered his back-to-school address to students

29 percent of cable TV "education" stories that were focused on politics between January and September 2009

2 number of top editors at the nation's 25 largest newspapers who are women, with the departure of Sandra Rowe (*Oregonian*) and Karin Winner (*San Diego Union-Tribune*)

48 percent of U.S. consumers who said they would be willing to pay for access to online news; currently, 15 percent do so

2 average monthly amount, in dollars, that consumers who currently pay less than \$5/month for print newspapers say they would be willing to pay for online news

30 number of journalists killed in a November 23 massacre in the Philippines, the deadliest event for the press on record

45 percent of the 136 journalists jailed worldwide as of 12/1/09 who had been working as freelancers; the number of freelancers in prison has nearly doubled, to sixty, in the past three years

6 consecutive years that the U.S., now holding freelance photographer Ibrahim Jassam without charge in Iraq, has been included on a list of countries jailing journalists

Brookings Institution, Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, Reflections of a Newsosaur, Boston Consulting Group, Committee to Protect Journalists

coverage.” If that’s the case, there may be more bulletin board fodder on the way.
—Chris Roush

The NFL’s Head Case

IN 2007, THE NEW YORK Times hired Alan Schwarz largely on the basis of his initial freelance reporting for the paper on the problem of head injuries in professional football. Since then, Schwarz’s persistent coverage has helped make the issue—which had been kicking around the edges of sports journalism for twenty years—part of the national conversation, prompting a congressional hearing and NFL rule changes. CJR’s Brent Cunningham spoke to Schwarz in November. A longer version of their conversation is at www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/head_cases.php.

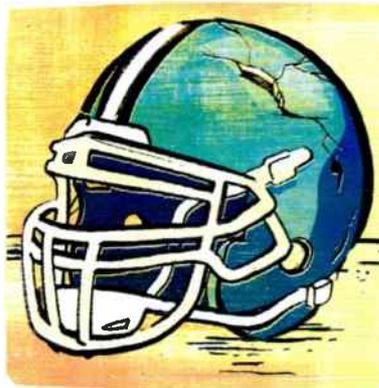
Has the NFL attempted to persuade you to drop the story? They have repeat-

edly complained to the highest levels of the editors at *The New York Times* that we should not be doing what we’re doing. The *Times* is very careful about the latitude it gives its reporters, and I have never been told that what I am doing is inappropriate. We have never once—never—even suggested that football should not be played. All we have done is say that these are the risks if you don’t play it safely, and this is how one can play the game more safely.

What have you learned about how football—from the professional level down to Pop Warner—can be made safer?

The biggest opportunity to make football safer is in the minds of the players themselves. They must respect when they sustain anything that feels like a concussion.

I don’t care how much of a warrior you want to be; I don’t care what the score is; I don’t care what the standings



are. If you get a brain injury, come out of the game and go, hopefully, to the trainer or doctor on the sideline and get checked out.

Do you think that’s realistic?

There are more opportunities for players to do that now than there were three years ago, and I think we deserve some credit for that. But far more has to be done to teach the kids that it’s

okay to put down the sword and get themselves checked out. So the question is, how do we teach them before the game starts, and how do we make them feel it is okay to act on that knowledge after the game starts? And that’s the adults’ responsibility. It’s going to take a long time to change the football culture. That doesn’t happen overnight.

Would you let your son play football? That’s like asking a political reporter before the election, “Who are you going to vote for?” It’s my job to cover the issue; it’s not my job to decide, or even discuss, how I will let the issue affect my family.

But as a human being it is difficult to avoid. Let’s assume for a minute that your son, who’s three, is ten years old and clamoring to play Pop Warner football. I would probably let him play because if I didn’t it would compromise my reporting. It would compromise the trust that others, and even the league, may have in me. Now, I would not send him out to slaughter, but getting one concussion is not that big of a deal, and to suggest otherwise is incredibly irresponsible. So if my kid gets one concussion then yeah, he probably doesn’t play anymore. But I believe the cost to others of my not being able to cover this story as well would be greater than the cost of my kid getting one concussion and never playing again. I’m a very mathematical guy. I follow certain precepts. I can’t tell my kid he can’t play, because then what am I going to tell the league? What am I going to tell my editors? It doesn’t work. It’s dissonant. CJR

LANGUAGE CORNER RIDING THE MINIBUS

Write LanguageCorner@cjr.org

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED TO ONE OF JOURNALISM’S OFT-MISPELLED WORDS (“minuscule”)—the misspelling caught on. “Minuscule” has been misspelled so frequently as “miniscule” that dictionaries have gone from ranting about the misspelling to merely turning their noses up at it.

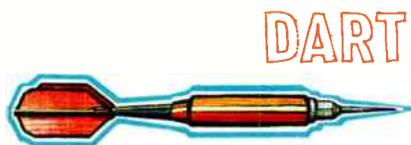
“Miniscule” doesn’t appear in the 1953 edition of *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*. But by the second edition, published in 1982, “miniscule” is listed as an “erroneous spelling” of “minuscule.” And by the fourth edition, *WNW* calls “miniscule” a “disputed variant”—it’s no longer wrong; it’s under discussion. Other dictionaries regard “miniscule” merely as a “variant”—not even disputed!—and some spell-checking programs blithely cruise by.

It’s easy to see how some would think a word meaning “tiny” would begin with the prefix “mini.” But its root is “minus,” not “mini,” and it’s a modern phenomenon. Though the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites an 1877 use (“The *miniscule* is the prevailing character in the Latin manuscript of the ninth century.”), the “mini” spelling doesn’t start to pick up steam until the 1970s.

It’s possible that “miniscule” gained traction from the swinging sixties and London, when “miniskirts” begat many other “minis.” (“Miniskirt” itself may have been begat by the Mini Minor, a car introduced in Britain in 1959.)

Despite the loosening bonds, however, only a minuscule number of careful editors, publications, and readers willingly allow “miniscule.”

—Merrill Perlman



DART In September, soon after the Times Publishing Company sold the venerable *Congressional Quarterly* to The Economist Group, the new owners fired forty-four reporters and editors—19 percent of the total newsroom staff at *CQ* and *Roll Call*, which the Economist already owned. The layoffs still left 184 reporters at the two publications to cover Congress. And no doubt the Economist bought *CQ* to help produce profits for shareholders. But are its new profit goals compatible with *CQ*'s brand of in-depth journalism?

The two Capitol Hill-focused outlets have traditionally covered the beat in very different ways. *CQ*—through its subscription-based legislative tracking services, its print magazine *CQ Weekly*, its daily print and online *CQ Today*, and its free site *CQ Politics*—has been the publication of record for policy. *Roll Call* is more about politics and personalities—who chairs what committee, who is the highest-paid staffer, etc. It is distributed free to the White House and Congress, Monday through Thursday.

CQ's former parent company is the Poynter Institute, the nonprofit journalism school and think tank that publishes the *St. Petersburg Times*. Nelson Poynter founded *CQ* in 1945 as a Washington bureau for papers that could not afford one. Later, it expanded its business model to include legislative tracking, a service that commands high subscription fees from lobbyists and others. That service helped fund watchdog journalism in *CQ Weekly*, such as Jonathan Allen's examination of disparities in earmark distribution among members of Congress, which won a 2008 Dirksen Award for congressional coverage.

Allen was a casualty of the September cuts. So were author and reporter Jeff Stein, who was brought on to launch the highly regarded *CQ Homeland Security* newsletter after September 11th, and whose *SpyTalk* blog on the intelligence community is now dormant; David Baumann, a former *National Journal* reporter with twenty years of experience in D.C.; prominent editor Chris Lehmann; respected training and recruiting director Jodi Schneider; and many others. There were redundancies, of course, but dropping decades of experience has consequences.

In a companywide memo in August, Laurie Battaglia, the *CQ-Roll Call* Group managing director, wrote that advertising accounted for 98 percent of *Roll Call*'s revenue four years ago. With the addition of *CQ* and its subscription income, the joint operation will have a diversified revenue stream, she said: "In my twenty-one-plus years at *Roll Call*, I have never seen this company better poised for success."

So newsroom staffers were caught off guard by the

depth of the cuts. Veteran editor Brian Nutting fired off an e-mail to management: "In July, when the sale of *CQ* was announced, we were told that both *Roll Call* and *CQ* are profitable," Nutting wrote. "We were told that the *Economist* and *CQ* had many shared values. We were told that 'there is a higher purpose to what we do.' We were told that the people in the company were highly valued. And now this. What possible justification can there be for throwing people out of their jobs simply to make MORE money?" His missive was leaked, and when he refused to apologize, Nutting was fired.

According to several sources, Economist Group CEO Andrew Rashbass has said that Poynter ran *CQ* like a non-profit—that is, with profits a secondary consideration. Sources familiar with the sale said that *CQ* regularly bounced between 6 and 13 percent annual operating profit—healthy for most businesses. So the layoffs were interpreted by some as the kind of cuts, designed to boost margins for the new owners, that raise questions about their commitment to quality.

Are the critics right? In fairness, it is too soon to say. But we watched for years—before the current recession—as newsrooms cut and cut in an effort to sustain the exaggerated, monopoly-driven margins that Wall Street demanded of media companies. Managers insisted the journalism wouldn't suffer, but it did, helping to set the business up for a fall.

Battaglia points out that it is difficult to extricate *CQ*'s profits from *Roll Call*'s because their fortunes are intertwined; part of the reason *CQ*'s profits can now spike, she says, is that it benefits from synergies—like sharing an ad and circulation staff with *Roll Call*. *CQ* under Poynter, she adds, "had a long running goal of 10 percent profit margins and that's what they strived for and that's what they achieved. Businesses today expect a higher profit than 10 percent. The goal then is to say, can we achieve that? And how can we achieve that without damaging the brand?" Her goal for the combined enterprise is 30 percent.

"Nelson Poynter was a ghost who walked the newsroom of *CQ*," says former *CQ* editor David Rapp, who left the company three years ago. "His legacy guided everything we did at *CQ*. The Brian Nutting episode demonstrated that the place is no longer Nelson Poynter's. Now it belongs to the Economist and their culture rules, for good or bad."

Trying to make more money is a good thing. Raising the goal to a level that demands slashing the talent that elevated the brand in the first place is not so good. So: a provisional **DART** to The Economist Group for what looks to us like a profit goal that is inconsistent with the high-quality journalism we've come to expect from *CQ*. We'd like to be proven wrong. **CJR**

Picture This

Notes from a life behind a lens

John Costello began work as a photojournalist at fifteen, bicycling to his first assignment at the McKean County Miner in northwest Pennsylvania. He has been a staff photographer for five newspapers, including The Philadelphia Inquirer, where he spent twenty-five years, and where, at age fifty-six, he was downsized this past summer. This is adapted from a memo he sent around the newsroom on his last day there.

TODAY, AFTER FORTY-SOME YEARS, I WILL SHOOT TWO ASSIGNMENTS AND ANYTHING ELSE THAT POPS UP, THEN TURN IN MY EQUIPMENT AND RETIRE FROM THE CRAFT THAT I LOVE.

Working for newspaper readers, I've seen many things. I've been inside an active volcano above the snow line in the Andes and in the sewers beneath the streets of West Philly. I've witnessed seven births and more than a hundred deaths.

From a fold-down bench attached to the wall of an almost-empty Russian cargo plane, I've sipped coffee from a porcelain cup as we flew out of Sarajevo. As the only English speaker I helped a firefighter, a U.S. volunteer in Bosnia, struggle to do dental work on himself, guiding his pliers to a broken bridge.

In a Sudan refugee camp I was stunned to see a child react with little apparent interest as an aide worker sewed shut a golf ball-sized snakebite, using string and a pin, but no anesthesia or disinfectant. I've been in an operating room as doctors removed the intestines from the gut of a drug dealer, still alive, though badly shot up. The doctors pulled the intestines through their fingers, rope-like, searching for bullet holes and bullet fragments. The dealer cried, "I'm dying," when he heard he'd been shot nine times.

I've roamed a lab in Princeton where Nobel Prize winners toiled and sat on a scaffold above a drug neighborhood with the paint-splattered muralist, Jane Golden, as she reveled in the power of people and art to build communities and save communities.

I've sat high in the Mexican mountains with cave dwellers looking down at the lights of El Paso. There, a man pointed toward the brilliant freeway and fast-food lights miles away and said he dreamed that at least once in his life, he would take his children to McDonald's.

I've seen a man take off his flak jacket, kneel on it, and pray. I've seen a soldier read a months-old letter from a girlfriend proposing marriage. The letter included a deadline, long past.

Photography is a contact sport. I've been stopped on a switchback moun-

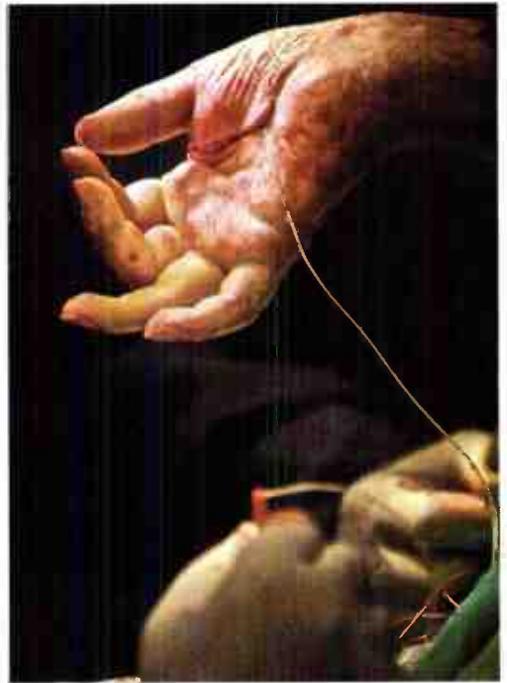
tain checkpoint to sign a U.N. waiver acknowledging that I realized snipers were shooting up ahead and that I could be killed. Then further on, I saw the transport trucks that had rolled off the mountain when bullets struck. I've felt my chest tighten when I was stopped by drunken, armed men who told me to "go back," but I refused to do so.

I've sensed the panic in a bread line. I've stood amid rioters. Bleeding profusely from a head wound (a brick to the face) and coming across the U.S./Mexico border, I was held for hours while my car was stripped. The customs officers explained that drug runners had driven up using the same M.O.—pulling up with head wounds, saying they needed to get to the hospital, all in hopes of avoiding a search.

I've met children who can tell you the caliber and direction of an artillery shell from its impact "paw print." I've seen a hillside full of rape victims.

But I've spent most of my career far from war, shooting assignments around the city. Having been where people only dream of a society at peace, I came to cherish making photos of simple events—a wedding, a high school football game, a school board meeting, a society dance, all the ordinary turns in people's lives.

I've found that at the world's worst places, you'll find killers, but the loveliest and most caring and selfless people, too.



Seeing Clockwise from top: Muslims at prayer in Sarajevo, 1994; a doctor uses electricity to elicit movement in a paralyzed man, 2001; a Kosovar child covers facial scars, 1999; a high school track meet, 2009; Kosovar refugees cooking bread, 1999. More photos at www.allphoto.us

I've learned that some people overseas can't say the word "America" without grinning. The last "a" becomes an "ah" and it ends with a smile.

I've slept under a long concussion of artillery fire, only to jump awake when it stopped. I have watched Jews and Muslims dash through a lit doorway in view of Catholic snipers to attend Christmas Midnight Mass because, they said, this is what a cosmopolitan and tolerant people do.

I've walked down a dirt road with reporter Martin Kasindorf, who wrote as he walked and conducted three interviews in two languages simultaneously. It was nothing, he told me. But it was something.

I've sipped warm beer in Northern Ireland with reporter Mike Leary, seen Jeff Fleischman start each day by sharpening his pencils, and counted the new sniper-bullet holes above Barbara Demick's Sarajevo writing table.

I've been under a single hanging light bulb as reporter Craig McCoy peeled away street talk and posturing till the room was filled with eloquence and understanding. I watched staff writer Mike

Ruane turn a mob into confidants. I've been to Graceland.

I've eaten too many beets, drank too much coffee, and downed too much beer. The butterfly-cut steak in Colombia, in the place where everybody else showed up on horses and the cook chopped and served with a pair of machetes—well, that was the best. The women in Bosnia who reached into the fire to bare-hand a steaming coffeepot—they were impressive.

The waiters in the Sarajevo Holiday Inn closed the drapes when the guests notice the illuminated sniper rounds. The shooting was on and off all morning. I stood in a blown-out storefront. An old man was shuffling head-down across an open area. Glancing up, he saw me and changed his angle to head my way. He arrived in one piece, and stood there, his head still down, wobbling on his cane. His accent was deep, his panting loud, and he said something. He was off on his way before I could process what I had heard, but then it came to me. "We are not animals in a zoo," he had said.

I've seen people strip a washing ma-

chine to build a water-powered electric generator—a generator whose sole function was to power a car's dome light, the only illumination in a home.

I've had a .45 automatic shoved in my ear. A soldier in Mexico ripped my shirt open with his gunsight, filed to a razor's edge. I've been hit with rifle butts, pipes, and a lot of other things.

I've seen wavy lights make their way across the night sky toward me, followed by a brilliant flash and a concussion... that's a missile strike.

I've mixed chemicals with the water in a toilet and processed film over a camp stove. I've seen an armed man picking breadcrumbs from the floor of a plane to eat. I've spent \$100 for a gallon of gas.

I've seen all kinds of money and machines in hospitals, but nobody was really cured until somebody reached out and touched the patient. Perhaps that's true for everything in this world.

KIDS AT A BIRTHDAY PARTY DURING war: Inside a darkened room, they brought the simplest thing wrapped in scraps of paper, and each took turns singing and playing the guitar. There was not a thing to eat. They were so happy together, laughing. I saw a woman savor a tiny scoop of ice cream for what seemed like hours, just touching the tip of her tongue to the vanilla, slowly consuming a scoop just the size of a quarter. This is how it is when people are under siege.

I've met Rosa Parks, photographed all the presidents since Gerald Ford, and line-danced the Cotton-Eyed Joe with Walter Cronkite. As for winning first place in the World Press Awards, that was for me, and I *loved* it.

I've needed to be better than I am.

It has been a privilege everyday to work for the readers of newspapers. I regret, greatly regret, that more people don't respond to newspapers.

Despite it all, I've learned that the world is very safe. The world is a safe and lovely place, and lovely people abound.

There's much that I'm forgetting. I haven't captured it all correctly. I know an editor could fix this. But it's time to go shoot. A deadline is a deadline, and it looks like this is it. **CJR**



Image lab Costello works on a shot of one of Milosevic's victims in 1999.

A Passion for Print

Why newspapers are thriving in Kenya

NOT LONG AGO, I WAS PARTY TO A MINOR SQUABBLE BETWEEN TWO GUARDS WHO work at the apartment complex where I live here in Nairobi. One of them had asked soon after I moved in two years ago whether she could have my newspapers when I'd finished with them, and I'd said yes. But recently, another guard had come around at odd hours asking if he could have the papers. At first I acquiesced, but after realizing that the first guard was annoyed, I suggested to the second one that maybe he could get the papers from his colleague after she'd finished.

Hardly the makings of World War III. But it gives you an idea of how highly prized newspapers still are here—at a time when they're dying like flies in the U.S. Kenya may be one of the poorest countries in the world (it ranked 149th in per-capita GDP in 2006) but its nearly 40 million citizens, both middle-class and otherwise, have a seemingly unquenchable passion for print.

Why that's so has something to do with culture. Patrick Quarcoo, a successful Ghanaian entrepreneur who started a new Kenyan newspaper, the *Star*, in 2007—yes, you read that right, a new daily newspaper—says it was his grandmother who taught him about the significance of print in an African context. “She had no real formal education, but she always used to say in Pidgin English ‘Book no lies,’” he recalls. “She completely believed in the power of print to shape our destiny.”

That belief continues to be widespread today all over the continent. “People want to see it to believe it,” says Joe Otin, the media research and monitoring director at the Kenyan affiliate of Synovate, a media research and watchdog firm.

Each newspaper in Kenya is typically read by fourteen people, and those who can't afford to buy a paper sometimes “rent” one. My neighborhood news vendor charges the equivalent of thirteen cents for thirty minutes with one of the major dailies, all of which are in English. That compares with fifty cents to buy one, a significant sum even to office workers earning \$20 a day, and out of reach for the far more numerous casual workers who generally earn no more than \$2.

The continuing popularity of newspapers undoubtedly also has something to do with the fact that most Kenyans can't obsessively check the Internet. According to Otin, only 5 percent of Kenyans fifteen years old and above access the Internet daily, and only a minority of those have home computers. (Some 38 percent of households own a TV.) Still, I'm not so sure that greater Internet access will make the same differences here it did in the West. “Newspapers will not die here, definitely not,” says Daniel Kasajja Orubia, a twenty-eight-year-old manager who is among the small number of Kenyans who own a mobile phone with Internet access. He

says he regularly uses it to check the BBC or other sites, but, he insists, “I'll still be reading newspapers in twenty years.”

Orubia lives in Busia, where I went recently to meet some locals who gather every morning to read newspapers and talk about current affairs. I know a lot of journalists in Nairobi, and a lot of people who follow the news closely, but I wanted to see what role newspapers play in a more rural area. Busia, a small town on Kenya's western border, serves as the commercial center for the district's farmers as well as a stopping point for trucks on their way to Uganda and Rwanda. Its central market area includes everything from banana and arrowroot sellers to the Busia Wedlock Center, which offers a one-stop wedding service.

The market also boasts several news vendors, among them Simon Ondudin, whose “shop” consists of a large board on which he tacks the front pages of several daily newspapers and an assortment of magazines as an inducement to buy. Ondudin says he sells an average of 150 papers a day, a number that surprised me given that his business operates on a muddy patch of ground near stalls selling second-hand clothes and sandals made out of old tires.

The group I'd come to see meets every morning at the home of Stephen Oti-eno Obala, a Busia photographer. Obala, who says he fell in love with newspapers in the second grade, recalls, “There was a cartoon in *Taifa Leo* [a Swahili-language daily] that I read every day. From then until today I would choose reading over eating.”

In order to provide enough reading matter for the daily gathering, which takes place in a shed-like room equipped with wooden benches, Obala buys bales of month-old newspapers at a cost of about seventy cents a bale. It doesn't matter that most of the papers are old, he says, because many of the attendees never saw them when they were first published. His motive is simple: “I wanted others to benefit from reading and to help the community.”

On the midweek morning I was there, a total of about thirty people came and went over a two-hour period. Those in attendance included several farmers, a couple of boda-boda (bicycle taxi) op-

erators, and three or four small-business owners. Most were men, but there was a sprinkling of women, and the age range appeared to go from early twenties to late sixties.

The day's main topic was what Kenya should do in response to a recent Ugandan claim that it, rather than Kenya, owns Migingo Island in nearby Lake Victoria. It's a subject that had occupied both news and op-ed columns for weeks. Some speakers, most of them speaking Swahili, urged more militancy; others said the two countries' leaders should be pushed to resolve the matter. One speaker, lamenting the fact that many fish spawn on the Kenya side of the lake but then swim into Ugandan waters, got a laugh when he suggested that Kenya find some way of keeping the fish on its side.

Leah Asiko, a quiet twenty-six-year-old who followed the discussion carefully but didn't venture any opinions herself, says she occasionally leaves someone else in charge of her hair salon so that she can come to the meetings. "Newspapers have a lot more information than radio," she says, adding that she also learns new things from the discussions.

With a citizenry this devoted to newspapers, print journalists in Kenya get treated with a level of respect that their Western counterparts would envy. Paul Ilado, who worked in radio and television before joining the *Star* (where I am an unpaid adviser), says he noticed a difference immediately when he switched to print. "People who would take a month to call me back while I was in radio began to call back right away," he says.

Patrick Quarcoo, who started several successful radio stations before launching the *Star* in partnership with William Pike, a British editor who'd previously run a Ugandan paper, agrees that Kenya's elite takes newspapers much more seriously than broadcast. "With radio, I was below the radar," he says. "Now, people wake me up at 6 a.m. to rant and rave, even about inside stories, especially on stories about state house or senior ministers."

Quarcoo says that as much as he loved his grandmother, the decision to start a new daily was based on econom-

ics, not sentiment. "You can construct a business model around print," he says. "You can aggregate the elite and you can monetize that." His thinking, he says, was that Kenya has a strong economy and a substantial cohort of educated young people whose needs were not being met. "Print is not dying. The issue is how do you make sure it has a place in the lives of people," he says. To that end, the *Star* is heavy on entertainment and lifestyle, along with large servings of politics.

The paper made a profit for the first time in September 2009, Quarcoo says. He declines to reveal circulation numbers, but others in the company say it's now above 20,000. Joe Otin of Synovate is more conservative, estimating 15,000. (Sales estimates for all the Kenyan papers vary widely, depending on whom you're talking to: anywhere

'You can construct a business model in print. You can aggregate the elite.'

from 100,000 to 300,000 for the *Daily Nation*, the country's largest paper, and from 50,000 to 180,000 for the *Standard*, its closest competitor.) While the *Nation* and the *Standard* have Web sites, neither of which offers much beyond what's in the printed version, Quarcoo says he sees no reason to start one for the *Star* unless he can find a way of making money on it.

Advertisers seem as certain as Quarcoo that newspapers still play a central role in the country. "Politics is all-consuming in Kenya," says Michael Joseph, the CEO of Safaricom, the country's largest mobile-phone company. And Kenyans, he says, "do read papers. Politics drives it." Joseph, a native of South Africa, says Safaricom spends 35 percent of its advertising budget on print. Similarly, Thiagarajan Ramamurthy, the operations director of Nakumatt Holdings, the country's largest supermarket chain,

says his company spends about 40 percent of its ad budget on print. While Nakumatt is experimenting with online and mobile-phone advertising, he says, "Print advertising in this region will still remain a key plank as most consumers still prefer to read."

Can this last? Can newspapers in Kenya defy worldwide trends and even prosper? Michael Joseph thinks not. Pointing to the success of Safaricom's M-Pesa mobile banking service, which now has eight million Kenyan subscribers, he predicts that Kenyans will increasingly find new uses for their mobile phones, including streaming radio and accessing online news sites. Joe Otin of Synovate says that while "culture is working in favor of print, new technology is working in favor of online."

But perhaps the experts are focusing too much on what's happening in the rest of the world and not enough on what's happening close to home. I remember a time in 2005, as Kenyans were about to vote on a proposed new constitution—as they will do again later this year—when everywhere I went I saw people intently reading free copies of the constitution that had been inserted in the major dailies. And I also remember the role that newspapers played in early 2008, when the country was being torn apart by violence after a highly suspect presidential election. At that moment, there was no legitimate government; the courts were regarded as fatally tainted by politics; only the country's newspapers remained as a functioning and trusted national institution.

So perhaps those Busia residents sitting around in Stephen Obala's house represent not the tail-end of an era but rather the vanguard of a new, more democratic one in which technology has a place but print newspapers continue to play a crucial role. Maybe Patrick Quarcoo's grandmother knew something that the experts don't. Whatever the case, American print journalists can take comfort from knowing that somewhere in the world, at least for now, print is still king. **CJR**

KAREN ROTHMYER (*karen.rothmyer@gmail.com*), a former managing editor of *The Nation*, was a Peace Corps teacher in Kenya in the 1960s and has lived in Kenya full-time since 2007.

Banned in Britain

Across the pond, new perils—and possibilities—for press freedom

THE DOCUMENTS ARE UGLY AND EMBARRASSING. IN E-MAILS RIDDLED WITH terms like “gasoline slops” and “caustic washing,” officials with Trafigura, a major global commodities trading firm, described plans to clean and re-sell contaminated oil from Mexico and deposit the wastes in Africa, since they were too toxic for regulators in Europe or the U.S. In one 2005 e-mail discussing oil-cleaning profits, Trafigura staffer James McNicol wrote, “This is as cheap as anyone can imagine and should make serious dollars.”

But what made it so “bloody” cheap, as another e-mail put it, was Trafigura’s decision to wash the oil on its own rather than pay for a full-fledged cleaning, and then pay a trucking outfit to dump the waste. The consequences were dire. Written throughout 2005 and 2006, the e-mails were part of a paper trail that Trafigura would later seek to hide from public view with help from British courts, which have become increasingly unkind to press freedoms—until a social-media protest of tweets and blogs forced the company to cease its efforts to keep the material secret.

Trafigura touts itself as one of the largest independent commodity traders on the planet—and the third-largest oil trader—with operations in forty-two countries. The corporation’s charitable arm, the Trafigura Foundation, prides itself on “making a real difference by creating genuine, positive and lasting changes in the societies, communities and projects it supports.”

Not in Abidjan, however. En route to its eventual home in the capital of Ivory Coast in 2006, the waste—a putrid black slurry of oil refuse containing caustic soda, sulfur, and hydrogen sulfide—traversed the globe. It started in Houston, Texas, and stopped in Estonia and later Amsterdam, where port officials insisted the mix was too toxic for dumping and would have to undergo cleansing. But Trafigura “balked” at the \$300,000 cost, according to an October 2, 2006, story in *The New York Times*. The company then sought an easier regulatory climate in Africa. An Amsterdam port official would tell the *Times*, “We have never handed back or refused waste before. But the crux was that Trafigura refused to pay. If they had, the material would have been treated and there would have been no problem.”

As Trafigura officials hashed out the easiest way to dispose of the slops, an employee named Naeem Ahmed noted, “caustic washes are banned by most countries due to the hazardous nature of the waste.” Solution? McNicol would soon propose that Trafigura hire an outside firm and “pay these guys to take the shit away.” In March 2006, staffer Leon Christophilopoulos suggested, “I don’t know

how we dispose of the slops and I don’t imply we would dump them, but for sure, there must be some way to pay someone to take them.”

And there was. In the middle of an August night in 2006, a trucking outfit hired by Trafigura dumped about a dozen tanker truckloads—roughly 400 to 500 tons—of the stinking waste in sites throughout Abidjan, a city with some 4 million people. Soon, local clinics swelled with tens of thousands of Ivorians complaining of nausea, vomiting, skin sores, nosebleeds, and other ailments. A report by U.N. investigators documented more than a dozen deaths that it alleges were connected to fumes from the waste. Trafigura has consistently rejected claims that the waste dumped by the trucker caused illnesses or deaths.

FAST-FORWARD TO 2009, WHEN A MORE metaphorical odor surfaces. In September, as Trafigura negotiates settlements with the Ivory Coast government and Ivorian attorneys to compensate for the illnesses (it later agreed to pay nearly \$50 million to some 31,000 Ivorian plaintiffs), the BBC’s *Newsnight* and *The Guardian* reveal internal e-mails—first obtained by Greenpeace—showing that Trafigura knew the waste was toxic enough to be banned in many countries. Trafigura’s lawyers, the powerhouse U.K. firm of Carter-Ruck, quickly convince the British High Court, in a secret September 11, 2009, injunction, to prohibit any public mention of the most revealing document, a scientific analysis of the waste, bleakly titled, “RE: Caustic Tank Washings, Abidjan, Ivory Coast.” Among other revelations, the draft analysis, commissioned by Trafigura, states that the chemical compounds in Trafigura’s waste “are capable of causing severe human health effects,” such as “headaches, breathing difficulties, nausea, eye irritation, skin ulceration, unconsciousness and death.... All of these effects were as reported in this incident.”

The court’s “super-injunction,” an increasingly popular device used in the United Kingdom’s litigator-friendly libel cases, prohibited naming Trafigura. The order even prevented mentioning the report in British Parliament. When

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The Guardian wrote that a member of Parliament, despite the ban, mentioned the report on the floor of Parliament, Trafigura threatened to sue and demanded the story be deleted from the *Guardian's* Web site. "There was lots of legal bluster on the way," *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger told CJR, but "we never took anything down."

Throughout press coverage of the dumping story, according to a September 16 *Guardian* report, Trafigura "launched a libel case against BBC *Newsnight*, forced an alleged correction from the [London] *Times*, demanded the *Guardian* delete articles, and yesterday tried to gag journalists in the Netherlands and Norway with legal threats." But rather than enforcing quiet, Trafigura's maneuvers unleashed a viral social media protest across the globe, via Twitter.

At 9:05 p.m. on October 12, Rusbridger sent out an initial tweet: "Now *Guardian* prevented from reporting Parliament for unreportable reasons." After that, Rusbridger recalls, "The story built and built on Twitter, feeding back into mainstream media and Parliament itself. If Trafigura had hoped to use libel laws and PR firms to keep a low profile, this had spectacularly backfired." On October 16, under a blizzard of tweets and blogs, Trafigura withdrew its injunction. As Trafigura's lead attorney on the case, Adam Tudor, explained in an e-mail to CJR: "the injunction was lifted (by consent) because the report had entered the public domain elsewhere and there was no longer any purpose in continuing with it." What the media have called a cover-up was simply a routine injunction to protect a document that was "confidential, legally privileged, and which had been obtained unlawfully," Tudor said.

Trafigura's initial success, and subsequent failure, in preventing media coverage cuts both ways on press freedom. It clearly shows the increasing power of corporate litigants to use legal action and threats to stifle unfavorable reporting in Great Britain. "I think it's a remarkable case," says Mark Stephens, a prominent U.K. attorney who represents nongovernmental organizations and media outlets. Trafigura

"used and abused our libel laws; they made it clear to anyone that wants to cover Trafigura that they'll have a fight on their hands. It's clearly going to have a chilling effect."

Yet the Trafigura case may lead to a widening rather than a winnowing of press freedoms in the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Jus-

'If Trafigura had hoped to use libel laws to keep a low profile, it backfired.'

stice Secretary Jack Straw are leading a movement to rein in secretive super-injunctions, which Brown called "an unfortunate area of the law."

And the Twitter revolt and resistance by media outlets such as *The Guardian* and the BBC suggest a new brand of response to media suppression. The ubiquitous nature of emerging technology makes it increasingly difficult to prevent information from getting out. As the *Guardian's* Rusbridger put it, "The story had been grumbling away in newspapers and on TV for months... without really catching fire. The backlash from Twitter engaged a very large public. I'm guessing an audience of two to three million. I would say it had a significant effect."

In the U.K. now, says U.S. press freedom specialist Peter Scheer, executive director of the First Amendment Coalition, "Whenever they say you can't print, you can still put it online," and it's hard to trace back to the individual. "They can still make somebody very uncomfortable," he adds, "but there's nothing they can do to prevent it getting out." CJR

CHRISTOPHER D. COOK is an independent journalist in the United Kingdom and the author of *Diet for a Dead Planet: Big Business and the Coming Food Crisis*, published in 2004 (www.christophercook.com).

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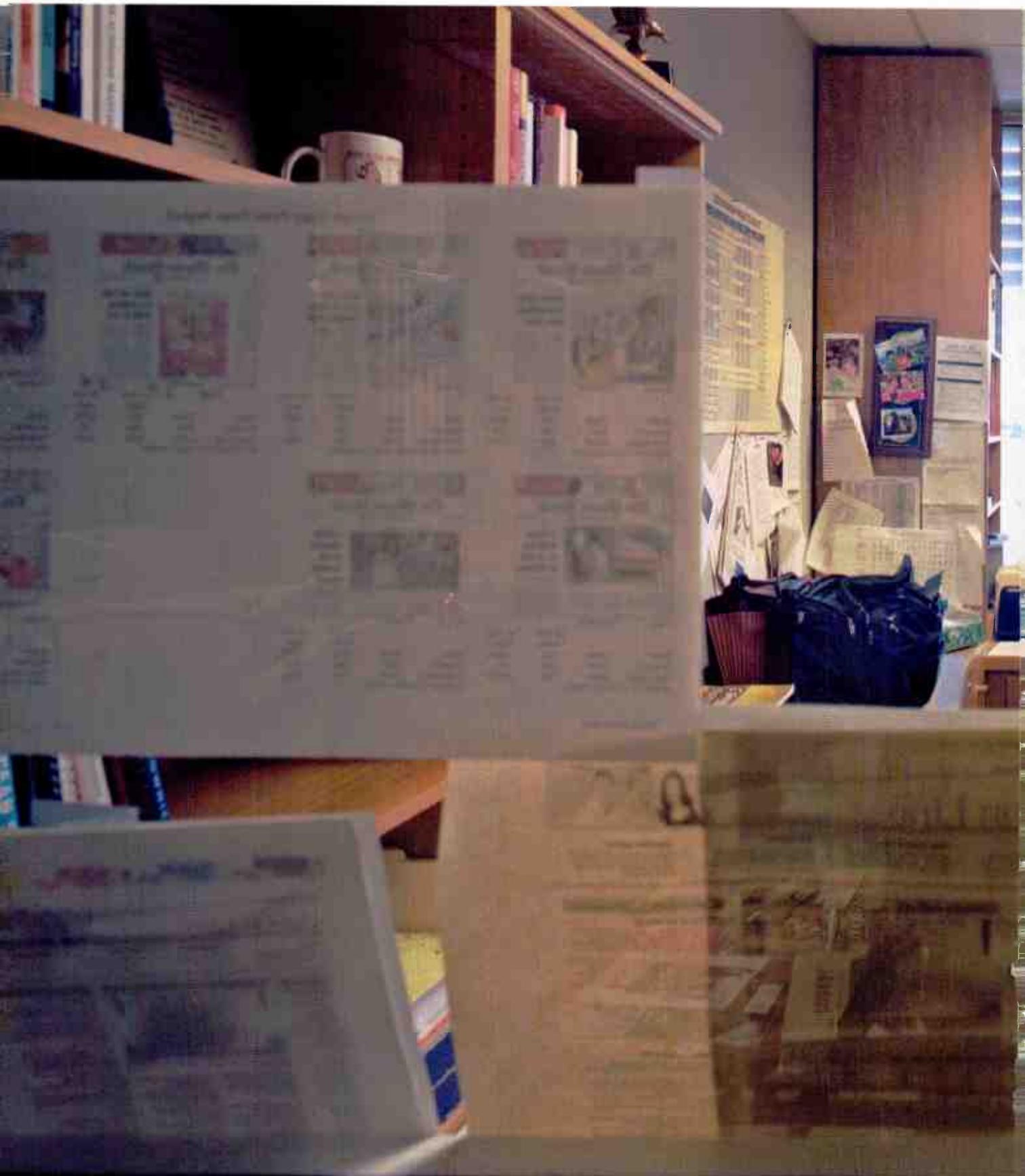
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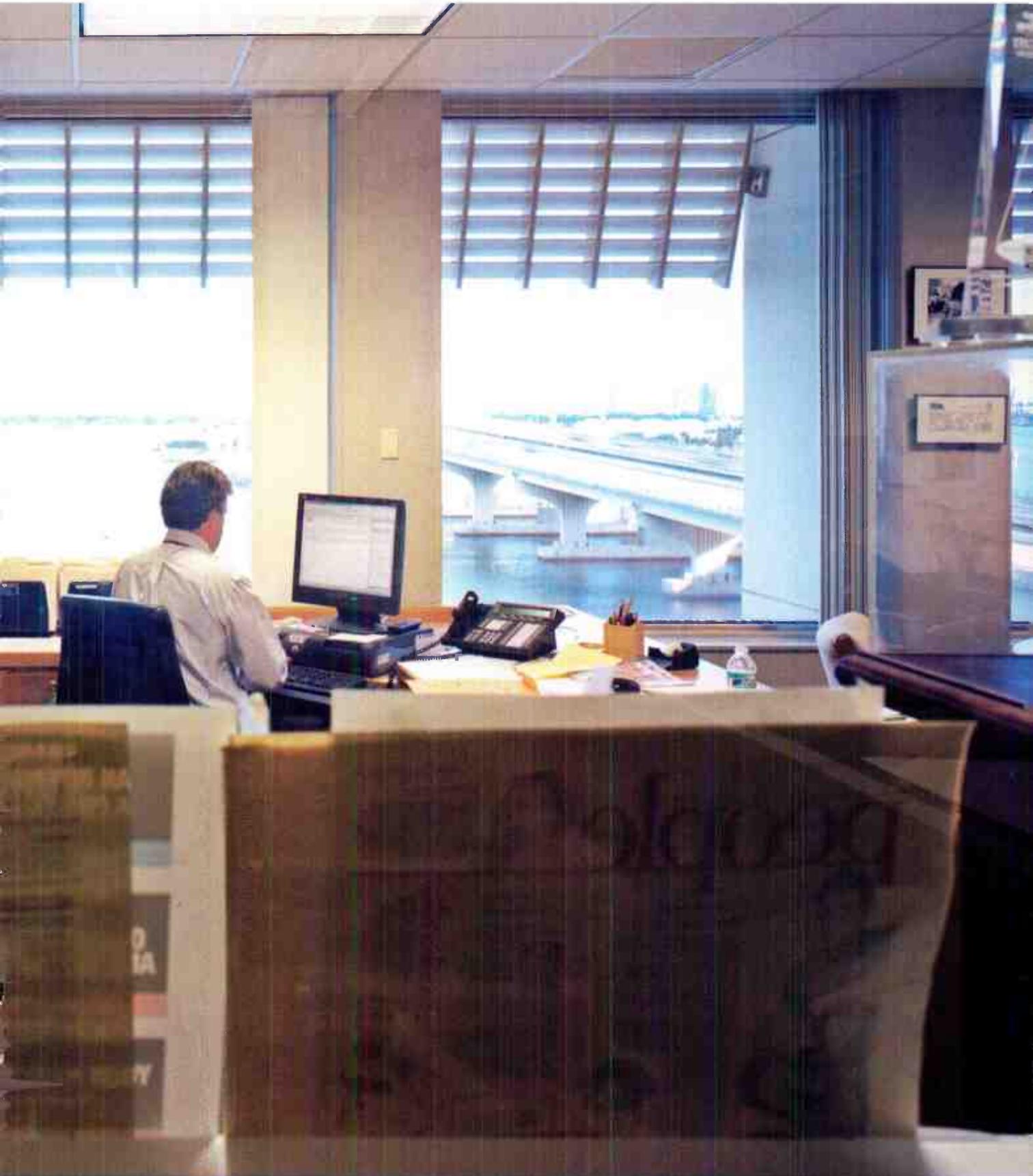
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Hot Air

Why don't TV weathermen believe in climate change?

BY CHARLES HOMANS

The small makeup room off the main floor of KUSI's studios, in a suburban canyon on the north end of San Diego, has seen better days. The carpet is stained; the couch sags. John Coleman, KUSI's weatherman, pulls off the brown sweatshirt he has been wearing over his shirt and tie all day and appraises himself in the mirror, smoothing back his white hair and opening a makeup kit. "I kid that I have to use a trowel, to fill the crevasses of age," he says, swiping

powder under one eye and then the other. "People have tried to convince me to use more advanced makeup, but I don't. I don't try to fool anyone."

Coleman is seventy-five years old, and looks it, which is refreshing in the Dorian Gray-like environs of television news. He refers to his position at KUSI, a modestly eccentric independent station in San Diego whose evening newscast usually runs fifth out of five in the local market, as his retirement job. When he steps in front of the green screen, it's clear why he has chosen it over actual retirement; in front of the camera he moves, if not quite like a man half his age, then at least like a man three quarters of it. His eyes light up, and the slight stoop with which he otherwise carries himself disappears. His rumble of a voice evens out into a theatrical baritone, full of the practiced jocularly of someone who has spent all but the first nineteen years of his life on TV.

By his own rough estimate, John Coleman has performed

more than a quarter million weathercasts. It is not a stretch to say that he is largely responsible for the shape of the modern weather report. As the first weatherman on ABC's *Good Morning America* in the late 1970s and early '80s, Coleman pioneered the use of the on-screen satellite technology and computer graphics that are now standard nearly everywhere. In 1982, chafing at the limitations of his daily slot on *GMA*, Coleman used his spare time—and media mogul Frank Batten's money—to launch The Weather Channel. The idea seemed quixotic then, and his tenure as president ended a year later after an acrimonious split with Batten. But time proved Coleman to be something of a genius—the channel was turning a profit within four years, and by the time NBC-Universal bought it in 2008 it had 85 million viewers and a \$3.5 billion price tag.

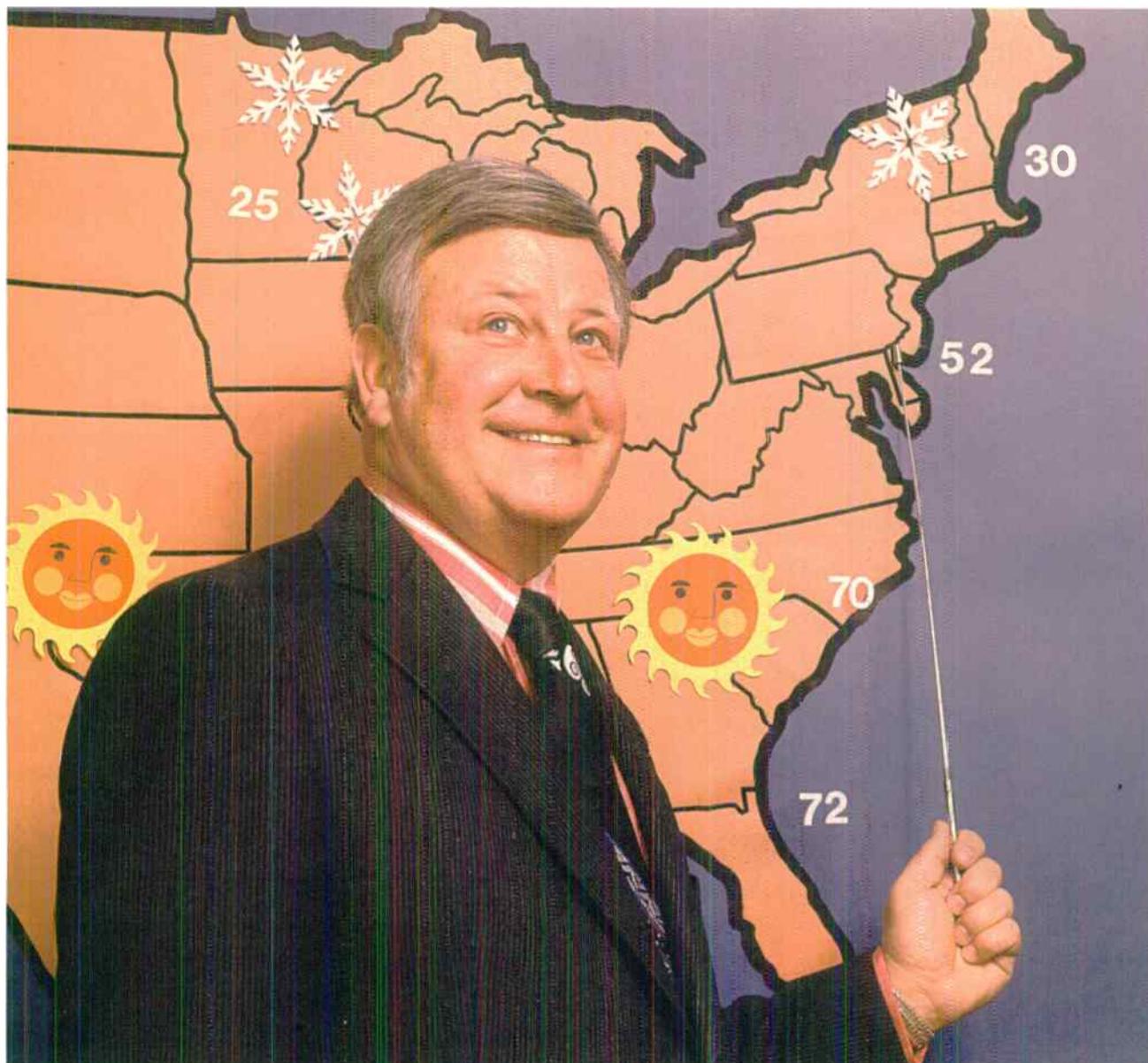
Those were the first two acts of Coleman's career. On a Sunday night in early November 2007, Coleman sat down at his home computer and started to write the 967 words that would launch the third. "It is the greatest scam in history," he began. "I am amazed, appalled and highly offended by it. Global Warming: It is a SCAM."

What had set him off was a football game. The Eagles were playing the Cowboys in Philadelphia on *Sunday Night Football*, and as a gesture of environmental awareness—it was "Green is Universal" week at NBC-Universal—the studio lights were cut for portions of the pre-game and half-time shows. Coleman, who had been growing increas-

ingly skeptical about global warming for more than a decade, finally snapped. "I couldn't take it anymore," he told me. "I did a Howard Beale."

Skepticism is, of course, the core value of scientific inquiry. But the essay that Coleman published that week, on the Web site ICECAP, would have more properly been termed rejectionism. Coleman wasn't arguing against the integrity of a particular conclusion based on careful original research—something that would have constituted useful scientific skepticism. Instead, he went after the motives of the scientists themselves. Climate researchers, he wrote, "look askance at the rest of us, certain of their superiority. They respect government and disrespect business, particularly big business. They are environmentalists above all else."

The Drudge Report picked up Coleman's essay, and within days its author was a cause célèbre on right-wing talk radio and cable television, beaming into Glenn Beck's TV show via



satellite from the KUSI studios to elaborate on the scientists' conspiracy. "They all have an agenda," Coleman told Beck, "an environmental and political agenda that said, 'Let's pile on here, we're all going to make a lot of money, we're going to get research grants, we're going to get awards, we're going to become famous.'"

Along with the appearances on Beck's and Rush Limbaugh's programs came speaking offers, and soon Coleman was on the conference circuit, a newly minted member of the loose-knit confederation of professional skeptics. (Coleman insists his views on climate change are apolitical, and says he has turned down offers to speak at Tea Parties and other conservative events.) His interviews and speeches that have been posted to YouTube have, in some cases, been viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

None of it would have had much of an impact, but for Coleman's résumé. For the many Americans who don't

understand the difference between weather—the short-term behavior of the atmosphere—and climate—the broader system in which weather happens—Coleman's professional background made him a genuine authority on global warming. It was an impression that Coleman encouraged. Global warming "is not something you 'believe in,'" he wrote in his essay. "It is science; the science of meteorology. This is my field of life-long expertise."

Except that it wasn't. Coleman had spent half a century in the trenches of TV weathercasting; he had once been an accredited meteorologist, and remained a virtuoso forecaster. But his work was more a highly technical art than a science. His degree, received fifty years earlier at the University of Illinois, was in journalism. And then there was the fact that the research that Coleman was rejecting wasn't "the science of meteorology" at all—it was the science of climatology, a field in which Coleman had spent no time whatsoever.

COLEMAN'S CRUSADE CAUGHT THE EYE OF KRIS WILSON, an Emory University journalism lecturer and a former TV news director and weatherman himself, and Wilson got to wondering. He surveyed a group of TV meteorologists, asking them to respond to Coleman's claim that global warming was "the greatest scam in history." The responses stunned him. Twenty-nine percent of the 121 meteorologists who replied agreed with Coleman—not that global warming was unproven, or unlikely, but that it was *the greatest scam in history*. Just 24 percent of them believed that humans were responsible for most of the change in climate over the past half century—half were sure this wasn't true, and another quarter were "neutral" on the issue. "I think it scares and disturbs a lot of people in the science community," Wilson told me recently. This was the most important scientific question of the twenty-first century thus far, and a matter on which more than eight out of ten climate researchers were thoroughly convinced. And three quarters of the TV meteorologists Wilson surveyed believe the climatologists were wrong.

In fact, anecdotal evidence of this disconnect had been accruing for several years. When a freakish snowstorm hit Las Vegas in December 2008, CNN meteorologist Chad Myers, appearing on *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, used the occasion to expound on his own doubts about global warming. "You know, to think that we could affect weather all that much is pretty arrogant," he told Dobbs. "Mother Nature is so big, the world is so big, the oceans are so big." Today's most oft-quoted and influential skeptics include Joseph D'Aleo, The Weather Channel's first director of meteorology, and Anthony Watts, a former Chico, California, TV meteorologist and prolific blogger who is leading a volunteer effort to document irregularities among the twelve hundred weather stations the National Weather Service maintains across the country (a concern that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration considers negligible, and in any case has factored into its calculations since the '90s). When Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, Congress's most reliable opponent of climate-change legislation, presented a list of more than four hundred "science authorities" who disagreed with the prevailing scientific opinion on climate change in 2008, forty-four of them were TV weathercasters. And after the signature of Mike Fairbourne, the weatherman for Minneapolis's CBS affiliate, turned up on a similar petition that year, reporters for the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* called around and found that hardly *any* of the city's TV weathercasters believed in climate change; one had recently called the idea "crazy" on a local talk-radio show.

More striking is the fact that the weathercasters became outspoken in their rejection of climate science right around the time the rest of the media began to abandon the on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand approach that had dominated their coverage of the issue for years, and started to acknowledge that the preponderance of evidence lay with those who believed climate change was both real and man-made. If anything, that shift radicalized the weathermen. "I think the media is almost sleeping with the enemy," one meteorologist told me. "The way it is now, there is just such a bias as to what gets out."

Free-market think tanks like the Heartland Institute, knowing an opportunity when they see one, now woo weathercasters with invitations to skeptics' conferences. The National Science Foundation and the Congress-funded National Environmental Education Foundation, meanwhile, are pouring money into efforts to figure out where exactly the climate scientists lost the meteorologists, and how to win them back. The American Meteorological Society (AMS)—which formally endorsed the scientific consensus on climate change years ago, but counts many of the skeptics among its members, to its chagrin—has started including climate-change workshops for weathercasters in its conferences. For all of their differing agendas, the outfits have one thing in common: they have all realized that, however improbably, the future of climate-change policy in the United States rests to a not-insubstantial degree on the well-tailored shoulders of the local weatherman.

IN THE FALL OF 2008, RESEARCHERS FROM GEORGE MASON and Yale universities conducted the most fine-grained survey to date about what Americans know and think about climate change. The short answer, unsurprisingly, was not very much. "Climate change is an incredibly complicated subject," says Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change and one of the study's co-authors. "Most people are not interested in digging through the scientific literature, and in that situation trust becomes an enormous factor. We rely on people and organizations to guide us through this incredibly complicated and risky landscape."

That was where the survey's findings got interesting. When asked whom they trusted for information about global warming, 66 percent of the respondents named television weather reporters. That was well above what the media as a whole got, and higher than the percentage who trusted Vice-President-turned-climate-activist Al Gore, either of the 2008 presidential nominees, religious leaders, or corporations. Scientists commanded greater credibility, but only 18 percent of Americans actually know one personally; 99 percent, by contrast, own a television. "Meteorology benefits from the fact that we're just about the only science that has an individual in people's living rooms every night," says Keith Seitter, the executive director of the American Meteorological Society. "For many people, it's the only scientist whose name they know."

There is one little problem with this: most weathercasters are not really scientists. When Wilson surveyed a broader pool of weathercasters in an earlier study, barely half of them had a college degree in meteorology or another atmospheric science. Only 17 percent had received a graduate degree, effectively a prerequisite for an academic researcher in any scientific field.

This case of mistaken identity has been a source of tension throughout television's sixty-odd-year history. When TVs began to proliferate in postwar American households, the first generation of weathercasters that viewers saw on them was mostly military men, recently discharged World War II veterans who had trained in meteorology in the Navy and

the Army Air Corps. (Louis Allen, Washington, D.C.'s first TV weatherman, had drawn up the forecasts for the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.) But as broadcasting licenses multiplied and stations began to compete with each other in the '50s, meteorologist Robert Henson recounts in *Weather on the Air: A History of Broadcast Meteorology* (to be published this year), the Army men gave way to entertainers: scantily clad "weather girls" abounded, as did puppets, including one who divined the forecast with his handlebar mustache. A weatherman in Nashville read his forecast in verse. One New York station featured a "weather lion."

After a few years of this sort of thing, the American Meteorological Society decided to step in; the professional association's membership, then comprised mostly of government and academic meteorologists, had grown wary of what the weather girls were doing to their reputation. The society devised a voluntary meteorological certification system, a seal of approval that TV weathercasters could obtain with the right academic background—at least a bachelor's degree in meteorology—or demonstrated knowledge in the field. (This seal is what technically distinguishes a meteorologist from a weathercaster.) In a 1955 *TV Guide* article entitled "Weather is No Laughing Matter," AMS member Francis Davis wrote that "If TV weathermen are going to pose as experts, we feel they should *be* experts."

Although it took years, Davis's view eventually won out. By the end of the '70s, weathercasters had begun to treat their responsibilities with some seriousness. They started to see themselves as everyman (they were still mostly men) scientists, authority figures who helped viewers not only anticipate once-unpredictable events, but also comprehend them. And when you think about it, the achievement weathercasters have pulled off as science educators is remarkable—ask anyone with a television to name some meteorological terms, and odds are they will be able to rattle off half a dozen: low pressure systems, wind shear, cumulonimbus clouds. Weathercasters are usually a sort of science ambassador to their communities as well, and spend as much time talking to elementary school classes and civic groups about science as they do forecasting on the air. The work hasn't gone unappreciated; heaps of audience research have identified the weather report as the most popular segment of the local news broadcast, and the biggest factor in viewers' choice of which newscast to watch. Even as Americans' trust in the media as a whole has cratered, love for the weatherman has persisted at levels unchanged since Walter Cronkite's day.

The Clinton administration had all of this in mind in October 1997, when it gathered meteorologists from dozens of the nation's biggest television markets at the White House for a special summit on climate change. In two months, negotiators would be meeting in Kyoto to renegotiate the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the talks that would ultimately produce the Kyoto Protocol. Americans were still largely uninformed about climate change, and the White House was hoping the weathercasters could help bring them up to speed. More than one hundred of them showed up to hear speeches from Gore—an early version of the slideshow later documented in *An Inconvenient*

Truth—and President Bill Clinton, as well as leading NOAA climate researchers.

As the administration had hoped, the meteorologists used the occasion to opine about climate change—but what many of them said wasn't quite what Al Gore had in mind. "There's still a significant segment of the scientific community that's not sold on this," Harvey Leonard, then the weatherman at WHDH in Boston, told *The Washington Post*. Others loudly refused to attend the summit, including all but one of the weathercasters in the Oklahoma City market. "I'm not smart enough to know [if the earth is warming], and I don't think

The future of climate-change policy rests to a not insubstantial degree on the well-tailored shoulders of the local weatherman.

any person on the planet is," KOKH meteorologist Tim Ross told the *Daily Oklahoman*. The following month, twenty TV weather personalities added their names to the Leipzig Declaration, a petition opposing the global warming theory.

It was only a blip on the radar, but it presaged the broader rejection of climate science that would come a decade later. The question was, *why*? No doubt, some of the blame belonged to the White House. In positioning themselves as advocates for not only a policy position but also a scientific one, Clinton and Gore had conflated the political question of what to do about climate change—one that was, and remains, deeply partisan in the U.S.—with the apolitical question of whether it was happening. This put the weathermen in a tricky spot—embracing what was, even then, the majority position in the scientific community would make them look like shills for the administration. "Since the White House is behind it, it's political," Leonard told the *Post*. "I'm not a lap dog." Gary England of KWTU in Oklahoma City—now a prominent climate skeptic—told the *Daily Oklahoman*. "I think Al Gore's motives were pretty good—he saw early on the potential that these people had," Kris Wilson says. "But he was probably the wrong spokesman. As journalists, we're taught to be skeptical. right? We're taught that if your mother says she loves you, get a second source."

But the disagreement, then as now, also came down to the weathercasters themselves, and what they knew—or believed they knew. Meteorology has a deceptively close relationship with climatology: both disciplines study the same general subject, the behavior of the atmosphere, but they ask very different questions about it. Meteorologists live in the short

term, the day-to-day forecast. It's an incredibly hard thing to predict accurately, even with the best models and data; tiny discrepancies matter enormously, and can pile up quickly into giant errors. Given this level of uncertainty in their own work, meteorologist looking at long-range climate questions are predisposed to see a system doomed to terminal unpredictability. But in fact, the basic question of whether rising greenhouse gas emissions will lead to climate change hinges on mostly simple, and predictable, matters of physics. The short-term variations that throw the weathercasters' forecasts out of whack barely register at all.

This is the one explanation that everyone who has mulled the question seems to agree on—and indeed, when I spoke with meteorologists who were skeptical of or uncertain about the scientific consensus, it was the one thing they all brought up. “Meteorologists know our models,” Brian Neudorff, a meteorologist at WROC in Rochester, New York, told me. “There's a lot of error and bias. We'll use five different models and come back with five different things. So when we hear that climatological models are saying this, how accurate are they?”

But that hardly explains why so many meteorologists have disregarded the mountain of evidence of global warming that has *already* occurred—or why, in the case of the hard-line skeptics, they are so fixated on proving a few data sets' worth of tree-ring and ice core measurements wrong. “I think a lot of people have theories,” Robert Henson says, “but nobody knows for sure.”

In the absence of a clear answer, several institutions—the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), the Yale Forum on Climate Change & the Media, and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research among them—have decided that education is the problem, and have launched projects aimed at teaching the weathercasters the basics of climatology. All proceed from the assumption that unreachable skeptics like Coleman are few and far between, and that most meteorologists are more uncertain than adamant, lost amid the Internet's slurry of fact and counterfact. “While there is a group that seems to have made up their mind about climate change, there's still a substantial portion that's interested in learning more,” says Sara Espinoza, a program director at NEEF. The AMS—which finds its credibility threatened by its televised emissaries a second time—is working with NEEF on a do-it-yourself climate science education package for meteorologists that points them to government data and peer-reviewed research. It is part of the AMS's broader “station scientist” program, which aims to give meteorologists the tools they need to become the go-to authorities in their newsrooms on all scientific subjects, not just the weather. In essence, it is a doubling down on the wager that the AMS made fifty-five years ago: if viewers are going to assume weathercasters are experts anyway, we might as well try to *make* them experts.

It remains a laudable goal. But in my own conversations with skeptical meteorologists, I began to think that that earlier effort had helped create the problem in the first place. The AMS had succeeded in making many weathercasters into responsible authorities in their own wheelhouse, but

somewhere along the way that narrow professional authority had been misconstrued as a sort of all-purpose scientific legitimacy. It had bolstered meteorologists' sense of their expertise outside of their own discipline, without necessarily improving the expertise itself. Most scientists are loath to speak to subjects outside of their own field, and with good reason—you wouldn't expect a dentist to know much about, say, the geological strata of the Grand Canyon. But meteorologists, by virtue of typically being the only people with any science background at their stations, are under the opposite pressure—to be conversant in anything and everything scientific. This is a good thing if you see yourself as a science communicator, someone who sifts the good information from the bad—but it becomes a problem when you start to see scientific authority springing from your own haphazardly informed intuition, as many of the skeptic weathercasters do. Among the certified meteorologists Wilson surveyed in 2008, 79 percent considered it appropriate to educate their communities about climate change. Few of them, however, had taken the steps necessary to fully educate themselves about it. When asked which source of information on climate change they most trusted, 22 percent named the AMS. But the next most popular answer, with 16 percent, was “no one.” The third was “myself.”

The biggest difference I noticed between the meteorologists who rejected climate science and those who didn't was not how much they knew about the subject, but how much they knew *about* how much they knew—how clearly they recognized the limits of their own training. Among those in the former category was Bob Breck, the AMS-certified chief meteorologist at Fox affiliate WVUE in New Orleans and a thirty-two-year veteran of the business. Breck rejected the notion of human-driven climate change wholesale—“I just find that [idea] to be quite arrogant,” he told me. Instead, when Breck talked to local schools and Rotaries and Kiwanis clubs about climate change, he presented his own ideas: warming trends were far more dependent on the water vapor in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, he told them, and the appearance of an uptick in global temperatures was the result of the declining number of weather stations in cold rural areas.

These theories were not only contradictory of each other, but had also been considered and rejected by climate researchers years ago. But Breck didn't read much climate research; “the technical journals are controlled by the professors who run the various societies,” he told me, and those professors were hopelessly dependent on the “grave train of grants from the NSF” that required them to propagate “alarmist theories.” When I mentioned the AMS, Breck bristled. “I don't need the AMS seal—which I have,” he said. “I don't need their endorsements. The only endorsements I need are my viewers, and they like what I do.”

As Breck went on, I began to get a sense of the enormity of the challenge at hand. Convincing someone he is an expert is one thing. Actually making him one—well, that is another thing entirely. **CJR**

CHARLES HOMANS is an editor at The Washington Monthly.

Moscow's New Rules

Islands of press freedom in a country of control

BY ADAM FEDERMAN

Late last summer, Ilya Barabanov, a young Russian editor, posted a laconic message on his Web site under the heading, "A Long Story." A couple of weeks earlier, Russia's Constitutional Court had ruled, unsurprisingly, that Barabanov's wife and former colleague, Natalia Morar, could not re-enter the country. "In all honesty, I don't know and won't try to predict when Natalia will return to Russia," Barabanov wrote. It was the final chapter in a case that had

begun in 2007, when Morar was detained at a Moscow airport after a reporting trip to Israel. A Moldovan citizen who had lived in Russia since 2002, she was sent, without explanation, to Chisinau, the capital of Moldova. There she was told she had been denied entry because she was a threat to the security of the state.

Morar was deported not long after publishing a series of articles in *The New Times*, a weekly Russian newsmagazine that specializes in long-form investigative stories, and which spares little in its criticism of the Kremlin. Based on anonymous sources within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the articles portrayed an elaborate money-laundering scheme that included some of Russia's top banks, high-level officials, and the Austrian Raiffeisen Zentralbank. She also alleged that the 2006 contract killing of Andrei Kozlov, head of Russia's central bank, was tied to his ongoing investigation of the very same activities—an assertion that the Austrian

Interior Ministry later said could not be ruled out.

The story touched a nerve. Morar said that after it was published she received a warning from sources close to the FSB, Russia's security and counterintelligence service, who told her, "There is no need to end your life with an article—someone might simply wait for you at the entrance to your apartment building, and they will not find a killer afterward." This was a good summation of what has happened to several investigative reporters in Russia, including Dmitry Kholodov in 1994, Paul Klebnikov ten years later, and Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.

In a last bid to attain citizenship and return to Russia, Morar married Barabanov in Moldova and the couple flew to Moscow together in February 2008. They were detained for three days at Domodedovo airport, until Morar was again sent back to Moldova, where she still lives. On his blog, Barabanov said that they would continue to appeal the decision. He ended on a note of optimism, saying that Morar had not given up journalism and that he was certain she would return to Russia someday.

Barabanov is the twenty-four-year-old political editor of *The New Times*, which was launched in 2007, not long after the killing of Politkovskaya. It has taken on highly sensitive stories, from the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko to the murder of Kozlov, the head of the central bank, to the Russian-Georgian war. He has a barely visible goatee and blond hair that falls over his eyes, and looks more like any number of Mos-

cow's young students than the husband of an exiled dissident. A recent graduate of Moscow State University's journalism school, he'd intended to be a sports reporter. But he started working for the well-known opposition newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, during college and went on to one of Russia's largest news Web sites, *gazeta.ru*, before becoming a correspondent at *The New Times*.

When we met last year, Barabanov took me to a T.G.I. Friday's on Moscow's busy Tverskaya Street, which happens to be in the same Soviet-era building that houses the offices of *Izvestia*, a fiercely pro-government paper at the other end of the ideological spectrum. *Izvestia* was relatively independent throughout much of the 1990s and had a wide readership among the intelligentsia. It published Yeltsin's dramatic appeal to the citizens of Russia to oppose what he called the "reactionary" and "anti-constitutional" coup that removed Gorbachev from power in 1991, and was openly



critical of the government during the first Chechen war. In many ways, it followed the arc of several post-Soviet papers that went from being Communist Party organs—*Izvestia* was launched in 1917—to liberal pro-democracy newspapers.

Yet today, of Russia's many dailies, and there are more than four hundred, *Izvestia*, with its 235,000 readers, has come to symbolize the failure of the Russian press and its co-optation by the Kremlin, a kind of return to the Soviet model. It is owned by a long-time friend of Vladimir Putin and is slavishly loyal.

Barabanov's *New Times*, with 50,000 readers, in turn, is privately financed and published by Irina Lesnevsky, who made her fortune as co-founder of REN TV, one of Russia's last truly independent television stations. In 2005, though, Lesnevsky and her son (a film producer) sold their 30 percent holding, and the station has since been auctioned off to allies of the Kremlin in what many view as a gentle takeover. But Lesnevsky returned to the world of media and politics with a rather daring gamble: to invest in a highly critical media

venture at a time when most observers are lamenting the death of free speech in Russia.

This is a common refrain and not surprising, given that serious journalism in Russia faces a sobering list of challenges, not least of which are threats, assaults, and murder. One might reasonably ask why there are journalists left in Russia willing to take on investigative stories. As Thomas de Waal, who covered the first Chechen war for *The Times of London* and *The Economist*, told me, "For every journalist who gets killed there must be twenty who decide that they're not going to write the story that they might have written."

Yet important stories still do get covered. And when reporters continue to face the threat of such reprisals for their work there seems to be a paradox in the claim—made by everyone from Putin to journalists themselves—that independent newspapers and magazines have become irrelevant.

Meanwhile, a rapidly growing community of online readers has made it increasingly difficult for the Kremlin to control the flow of information, even if the Web is hardly able to

compete with state-owned TV. (Roughly 25 percent of the population used the Web as of 2007, close to 60 percent of Muscovites.) Financial reporting has also flourished lately. And stories that in the past would appear only in opposition newspapers—often on social issues such as hazing and abuse in the military, Russia’s crumbling health care system, and even reports from Chechnya and the North Caucasus—are not uncommon in Russia’s relatively new glossy magazines.

Although the last two decades have been deeply troubling for journalism in Russia, young reporters and independent media continue to pursue stories that matter. On the occasion of the one-year anniversary of *The New Times* in 2008, Lesnevsky acknowledged the almost impossible task ahead of her, and the possibilities, too. “A year has passed,” she wrote. “Everyone is alive. And we’re even celebrating.”

IN RUSSIA, CIRCULATIONS SEEM TO RISE AND FALL ALONG with political hopes. In 1990, when the reforms of the Gorbachev era reached their apex, daily newspaper circulation in Russia was 38 million. By the time Boris Yeltsin left office at the end of the decade—when press freedom was already beginning to shrink and the economy had suffered a shocking collapse—that number had fallen to just 7.5 million. Media scholars often refer to the late *perestroika* years and the early days of the Yeltsin regime as a golden age of Russian journalism. Crowds of people could be seen waiting on line every Wednesday for copies of the influential *Moscow News*.

Moreover, the public trusted journalists. They were seen as public servants and truth tellers. According to Andrei Richter, director of The Moscow Media Law and Policy Institute, many journalists were elected to national, regional, and city offices. *Argumenty i Fakty*, once the country’s largest mass circulation weekly and still popular, had fourteen staff members elected to public office. In his study of media and power in post-Soviet Russia, Ivan Zassoursky, a professor at Moscow State University’s journalism school, says that in the late 1980s the concept of a fourth estate was just beginning to take hold. “It was a very exciting period,” Richter told me.

The ebullience of that period, however, was quickly offset by skyrocketing inflation. Newspapers were forced to accept state subsidies early on, creating a dynamic that has become increasingly politicized under Putin. Meanwhile, a number of wealthy oligarchs bought media outlets during the 1990s, paying journalists well and providing a measure of independence. By the Putin era, only oligarchs close to the Kremlin could survive.

The problems Western media face—from budget cuts to the impact of the Web—exist in Russia too. But in Russia the foundation was already shaky. And there is no deep tradition of long form investigative reporting, or the institutions to support it. “We failed to create a new kind of journalism” during the 1990s, Alexey Munipov, editor of *Bolshoi Gorod*, an alternative bimonthly Moscow paper, told me. Readership declined.

And in recent years, it has declined further and advertising revenue has plummeted. In the last year alone, daily papers in Russia lost 17 percent of their readers, and a recent

TNS Gallup survey showed that less than 10 percent of the population bothered to read dailies between December 2008 and April 2009. (In most European capitals the same figure is closer to 50 percent.)

The legacy of a “pay to play” model dating from the oligarch-dominated era of the ’90s, in which newspapers and magazines accept money for “articles,” has further weakened public trust. Called *dzhinsa* (Russian for “blue jeans”), the practice has become institutionalized; newspaper managers or editorial board members are often paid directly. “Newspaper type has become the weapon of the banker and the politician,” a journalist wrote in the mid-1990s. “The journalist has been transformed into a mouthpiece.” The public has become so suspicious of placed articles that reporting or reviews are often assumed to have been paid for. Maxim Kashulinsky, the thirty-six-year-old editor of *Forbes Russia*, says he still has to persuade people that *Forbes* doesn’t sell entries to its list of Russia’s one hundred richest businessmen.

Perhaps worse has been the state’s gradual domination of print publications. First, over the course of Putin’s presidency, a number of large-circulation dailies, including *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Kommersant*, and *Izvestia* were sold to Kremlin-friendly business groups, including the state-owned gas monopoly Gazprom. At the same time, state subsidies for newspapers gradually became tied to content and ideology. Until a few years ago, Russian newspapers received uniform support from state and local budgets for print costs and distribution, regardless of size or political orientation. In 2005, however, a new law changed the funding system; money would be distributed through a competition for grants administered by the Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications. The grants were not based on objective criteria, but on the kind of stories publications printed—whether they were sufficiently sympathetic to those in power.

This has created a vicious circle: opposition papers don’t even bother to compete for state funding, so the pool of applicants has decreased; thus the loyal large-circulation dailies get an ever-larger sum of federal money, which ultimately allows them to undersell their competitors. And the resulting wider circulation means they’re more attractive to advertisers. The Kremlin’s approach to print media is simple, Richter says: “If the press wants to help us, we shall help them. If the press doesn’t want to help us or it’s against us, let them die.”

Meanwhile, access to information and sources within the government has greatly diminished. This is particularly true with the intelligence community. Andrei Soldatov, the founder of the investigative Web site agentura.ru (modeled on Steven Aftergood’s Project on Government Secrecy), has covered the FSB and national security issues for more than a decade. In the early 1990s, he says, intelligence agencies feared that they would be disbanded, as happened to the East German Stasi. In an attempt to preserve their power, they established press offices to deal with journalists and the public in the name of transparency.

But under Putin, a career intelligence officer and head of the FSB from 1998 to 1999, those fears subsided and “the FSB just decided to forget about this filter,” Soldatov said. Today, the FSB gives out an annual award for the best book or film

about the security services and has been behind the production of at least one major movie, *Countdown*, that was little more than propaganda. According to Soldatov and others, the FSB's Center for Public Communications refuses to answer media queries, despite a 2006 law that says they must.

Soldatov, who covered Beslan and the Nord-Ost theater siege for various Moscow papers, confesses that over the last couple of years he has found only a few new sources within the FSB. At the end of our interview, in a noisy café not far from the offices of *Novaya Gazeta*, where he once worked, Soldatov takes out a copy of James Bamford's *The Shadow Factory*, a 400-page history of the U.S. National Security Agency from 9/11 to the present. When he reads books like this, based on a rich archive of documents and sources, he says, it makes him jealous. Nonetheless, Soldatov and his colleague Irina Borogan are working on a book about the Russian security services to be published (in English) this year, titled *The New Nobility*, a phrase coined by former FSB director Nikolai Patrushev to describe leaders of the newly empowered security service after Putin came to power.

IN THE YEARS SINCE PATRUSHEV SPOKE OF A NEW NOBILITY, several high-profile journalists have been murdered in spectacular contract killings, none of which have been successfully prosecuted. In 2004, just three months after the first issue of *Forbes Russia* was published, its founding editor, Paul Klebnikov, was shot on a quiet street outside of the magazine's editorial offices. Two years later Anna Politkovskaya, the reporter for *Novaya Gazeta* who wrote about war crimes and human rights abuses in Chechnya, was shot in the elevator of her apartment building. During her trial, human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova, a twenty-five-year-old *Novaya Gazeta* freelancer, were gunned down in broad daylight on a busy Moscow street (in November two suspects, alleged to be members of an ultranationalist group, were apprehended in the killing).

And those are only the most well-known cases. The Committee to Protect Journalists, whose estimates tend to be somewhat conservative, has identified seventeen journalists killed because of their work in the last nine years across Russia. In only one of those cases have the killers been convicted, and the masterminds remain at large. In that same period, at least forty journalists have been deported or refused entry to the country. According to the committee, Russia is the third most dangerous country in the world for journalists, trailing only Iraq and Algeria. And it is somewhat unique. Executive Director Joel Simon says that in most countries where press freedom is deeply compromised, it is usually the result of state repression (China) or violence and impunity (Mexico). Rarely do the two merge as they have in Russia.

Yet lately the faint outlines of a new paradigm seem to be emerging. Several independent magazines and newspapers, including *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, *The New Times*, *Vedomosti*, and *Novaya Gazeta*, have survived longer than might have been expected given the circumstances. And they usually publish what they want, free of interference from the state. At the same time, Russia's president, Dmitry Medvedev, has made a point

of reaching out to critics, even granting *Novaya Gazeta* the first full-length interview of his presidency, an unimaginable gesture under Putin.

"We live on islands in Russia," Maxim Trudolyubov, the opinion-page editor of *Vedomosti* tells me in a quiet café not far from the subway entrance where Markelov and Baburova were shot last January. He's referring to the large body of state-controlled media—what he calls a continent—and the small handful of independent newspapers and magazines that publish freely. Last June, *Vedomosti* launched an investigative desk, headed by Irina Reznik, a leading expert on Gazprom, who writes frequently about Putin's circle of friends. "If you do it the right way, usually you can do it and get away with it," Trudolyubov says.

'There's nothing we can't cover. We can write about Putin's friends, thank goodness. As long as we have the evidence, we can write about it.'

Outside of Russia, the best known of these "islands" is probably *Novaya Gazeta*, a thin paper published three days a week. *Novaya Gazeta* has a small but stable readership, and focuses largely on investigations of abuses of power and human rights, as well as corruption. Since its founding in 1993 by a group of about thirty journalists who parted from *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, an influential and widely read tabloid, the paper has taken a sharply adversarial tone. Four of its reporters, including Anna Politkovskaya, have been killed.

In 2006, the paper sold 49 percent of its shares—to pay salaries and debt—to Mikhail Gorbachev and Alexander Lebedev, a former KGB spy who recently acquired the *London Evening Standard* and has served in the Duma as a member of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party. Lebedev invested \$3.6 million of his own fortune in the paper. So, like *The New Times*, *Novaya Gazeta*'s livelihood is largely tied to a single investor. In May, Lebedev announced that he was unable to pay staff salaries for a week after financial problems with his German airline venture (though he had no problem paying staff at the *Evening Standard*). At the same time, very few tycoons are willing to risk their personal fortune on highly politicized publishing ventures. For most, it would mean the end of their business careers.

The most promising venture of the past decade appears to be Trudolyubov's *Vedomosti*, launched in 1999, not long after the collapse of the ruble, with the backing of the *Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and Independent Media,

which also publishes the English-language daily, *Moscow Times*. “The appearance of *Vedomosti* has changed things and moved them forward in a way Russian journalists were not doing before,” says Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Economist*’s Moscow bureau chief. “Some of the reporting that *Vedomosti*’s done on people with Kremlin connections who have serious financial interests has been outstanding.” *Vedomosti*, he says, has achieved what few publications have been able to do in Russia: create a documentary record of the Putin years.

In addition to *Vedomosti*, several Russian Web sites have become increasingly important as both sources of information and public forums. Newsru.com and grani.ru are the pet projects of Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky, respectively, exiled oligarchs and media moguls who were early casualties of the Putin era. According to a 2008 Reuters Institute report on the Web in Russia, both sites “carry generally reliable and often critical information and comment.” Meanwhile, other large news sites—including gazeta.ru and the liberal-leaning lenta.ru—have expanded their presence.

For now the Web is a largely unregulated and open space. In 2007, when the FSB unofficially tried to force Moscow Internet providers to block access to a host of Web sites, including kasparov.ru, a political news site founded by Garry Kasparov, the chess legend, only a handful acquiesced. Oleg Panfilov, director of Moscow’s Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, who is working on a study of the Internet and freedom of speech in Russia, says that even though the authorities are starting to use legal measures, such as a relatively new law against extremism, to intimidate and even silence bloggers, it is too late for them to turn the Web into a kind of state-run media monopoly. “It is technically impossible to control the Internet in Russia,” he told me. Unlike China, Panfilov says, Internet service providers in Russia are privately owned, and have largely resisted efforts on the part of the state to manipulate content.

The Web is also becoming an increasingly important platform for print media. One of Russia’s most promising publishing ventures, both online and in print, is *Bolshoi Gorod* (Big City), a city paper devoted to art, culture, and politics. Owned and published by Afisha, a successful arts and entertainment weekly, *Bolshoi Gorod* is openly liberal but far less antagonistic than *The New Times*. When I visit, *Bolshoi Gorod*’s small, one-room office resembles the post-production space of a college newspaper or literary journal, with half-empty coffee cups on every surface and a foosball table covered with old issues. Munipov says the paper’s founders imagined *Bolshoi Gorod* as a kind of *Moscow Village Voice*: a free, black-and-white weekly. Nearly eight years later the paper, published in an oversized art-house format, comes out every two weeks, in color, and costs about forty rubles (about \$1.30), and is accompanied by a simple, appealing Web site.

Alexey Munipov, at thirty-two the oldest editor at *Bolshoi Gorod*, says that the publishers are generally supportive of what they do—long-form narrative journalism—but would prefer if they focused more on lifestyle issues. “Nobody tells you that you cannot write something,” Munipov says. “But you know that if you write about certain things, there will be problems.” Yet it has its journalistic triumphs.

In August 2008, two weeks after Russia’s war with Georgia came to an end, *Bolshoi Gorod* published a striking twenty-four-page collection of first-person accounts of the conflict that Munipov says people still reference. He doesn’t feel the issue was particularly dangerous, nor was it overtly political, but it challenged the monochromatic view of the war that the Kremlin put forward on state-run television and online through its own army of paid bloggers (a relatively new phenomenon). According to Thomas de Waal, the author of two books on Chechnya, it provided some of the best eyewitness reporting on the war.

The paper’s editor in chief, Philip Dzyadako, is twenty-seven, and its style and content reflects a youthful sensibility. Like Barabanov, Dzyadako is part of the first truly post-Soviet generation of journalists; they’ve come of age under both the rise of Vladimir Putin and the Web.

“They definitely are in conflict with the older generation. They’re in conflict with both the Soviet approach and the corrupt, paid-up-to-the-gills, nineties approach,” Michael Idov, the former *Russia!* editor and a contributor to *Bolshoi Gorod*, told me. “And this is why I’m really optimistic about magazines like *Bolshoi Gorod*. What they do is they tell individual stories instead. A mosaic of what Russian life is really like does gradually reveal itself from the stories that they tell.”

In a recent column, *Forbes Russia* editor Maxim Kashulinsky wrote that, “The dynamics of Russian media are hard for outsiders to understand.” He was referring to the dichotomy that has emerged between the increasingly powerful state-controlled media and the handful of independent newspapers, magazines, and Web sites that usually publish without interference. There is little to suggest that this imbalance will change soon, but Kashulinsky remains optimistic.

“There’s nothing we can’t cover,” he told me in his small office on the outskirts of Moscow, which he shares with two deputy editors. “We can write about Putin’s friends, thank goodness. As long as we have the evidence, we can write about it.”

The greatest obstacle journalists face, he says, is penetrating the closed worlds of business and politics in Putin’s Russia. Still, in August 2008 *Forbes Russia* published a sharply written profile of Yuri Kovalchuk, a long-time friend of Putin who has amassed a vast personal fortune through the acquisition of state-owned assets, as well as a sizable media empire that includes *Izvestia* and REN TV. Today, as head of Bank Rossiya, Kovalchuk is worth roughly \$15 billion.

There are stories *Forbes* won’t pursue, but that has more to do with a lack of resources—they have roughly twenty editors and reporters—and access to information than to the sensitivity of the subject matter itself. Kashulinsky says he’s had to turn promising stories down simply because he knows they’d stretch the magazine’s limited budget and he doesn’t have the resources for projects that would likely only lead to dead ends. When I ask him if he can provide me with some examples he pauses and says, “There are several, but someday we’ll do them.” **CJR**

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The View From Out Here

Four downsized reporters look at journalism from their new angle of vision

On the theory that the news business appears different from outside than from inside the newsroom, we asked our Encore Fellows—Lisa Anderson (ex-*Chicago Tribune*), Jill Drew (ex-*Washington Post*), Don Terry (ex-*Chicago Tribune*), and Terry McDermott (ex-*Los Angeles Times*)—to write about the insights they’ve gained from their new perspectives.



Circa 1980 At the *Chicago Defender*

Lou and Me

‘We work at a newspaper, a real newspaper’

BY DON TERRY

LATE INTO ANOTHER SLEEPLESS CHICAGO NIGHT, I DRAG A blue-blooded widow and a balding curmudgeon under the covers with me, hoping they can help restore my faith. Mrs. Pynchon and Lou Grant are old friends of mine and I am happy to see them. But I make them whisper into my ear so we don’t disturb my wife. A few nights later, despite my best stealthy efforts, my wife catches us.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“Mourning,” I say.

Since getting laid-off/axed/downsized/right-sized/fired last February from the *Chicago Tribune*, where I worked as a staff writer for eight years, I’ve downloaded and watched

almost every episode of the first three seasons of the old *Lou Grant* television show on my iPod Touch. It helps me sleep. But the tiny iPod casts a big glow, so I pull the covers over my head like a little boy reading a comic book by flashlight way past his bedtime.

This thing with Lou, I assure my wife, is just a stage I’m going through. I’ll get over it. But right now I need a little help in getting past the anger, fear, and sense of loss that keep me up at night. It was watching Lou and the gang at the fictional *Los Angeles Tribune* that originally helped to convince me that a life in journalism was what I wanted—that it was fun and honorable and important. I’m surprised and happy after every episode at how good it feels to be back in a newsroom, even if it is only make-believe. Once I watched three episodes in a row before emerging from under the covers. There’s something comforting about the grouch’s gruff voice. But it is the premiere episode—September 20, 1977—that speaks to me the most these days.

AFTER TEN YEARS, LOU HAS JUST BEEN LAID-OFF/AXED/downsized/right-sized/fired from his TV news job in Minneapolis. He heads to L.A. to interview with his old newspaper buddy, Charlie Hume, the managing editor of the *Tribune*. Lou arrives a few minutes early and pokes his head into a newspaper newsroom for the first time in a long time. The room is filled with editors, reporters, photographers, and the kind of music that only an orchestra of typewriters can make. (Is there an app for that sound?)

As Lou looks around the room, a grin spreads across his face. He’s home. Lou sits down across from Charlie. “The old *Call Bulletin* we worked for doesn’t even exist anymore,” he says. “That kind of makes you feel a little strange.”

Charlie nods. He knows what Lou is talking about. But what are you going to do? Adapt or die, that’s what. Then Charlie asks Lou, “What makes you think you should have the job?”

Lou smiles. "That's easy," he says. "I'm fifty years old and I have \$285 in the bank."

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN CHICAGO THERE WERE FOUR major dailies in town—the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *Chicago Today*. There was also the *Chicago Defender*, the African-American newspaper that helped spark the Great Migration, bringing tens of thousands of fresh newspaper readers to the city. *The Defender* was published five days a week. By the time I graduated in 1980 with a master's degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, only the *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, and *The Defender* were still standing of the major papers.

The Defender's was my first newsroom. The managing editor was the blond grandniece of Clarence Darrow, the legendary Chicago lawyer. The city editor was a gay black man. Little did I know at the time how rare such racial and gender diversity was at the top of American journalism, or in its ranks for that matter. Newsroom diversity or lack thereof is a sore point for my friend Brenda Butler. A veteran editor with thirty years at the *Chicago Tribune*, Brenda was laid off, along with fifty-two colleagues, two months after a wave of twenty was washed out of the Tower with me.

I recently asked Brenda and several other journalist friends for their impressions of the state of the business and the state of their hearts now that they are on the outside of the newsroom looking in. "I would not choose journalism as a field again," she says. "There are smatterings of people of color. But the double scrutiny can be stifling. In fact, even though newsrooms have advanced technically, socially and demographically they have stagnated."

When Brenda first started at the *Tribune* in the 1970s, she tells me, you could count the number of black staffers on one hand. Not much has changed. When I left it didn't take more than two hands and a few extra fingers to do the counting, especially when it came to tallying African-American men.

Brenda was as loyal an employee as you will find. She bled *Tribune* blue. She still does. Every morning the paper is waiting for her at her front door. Every time we talk, however, she complains about how skimpy it is. I, on the other hand, cancelled my subscription the morning after I was terminated. Bitterness and budget compelled me to do it. Now I read the *Trib* for free on the Internet. I have become part of the problem.

Please don't tell Lou.

CHARLIE TAKES LOU TO THE TOWER TO SEE MRS. PYNCHON, the widowed owner of the *Los Angeles Tribune*. She has to sign off on hiring him. "Don't mention you were working in television," Charlie advises Lou. "She hates it."

"What should I tell her I've been doing the past ten years?"

"Tell her you were in jail."

I'M WITH MRS. PYNCHON. WITHOUT NEWSPAPERS, LOCAL TV reporters couldn't get out of bed in the morning. Without *The New York Times*, the network news divisions wouldn't know

what was important and Bill O'Reilly wouldn't have so much fun—or make so much money—howling at the moon. At least, that's how I used to feel. Now I'm trying to learn everything I can about how to shoot and edit video for the Internet.

My buddy, Tom Hundley, is trying to learn new tricks, too. He spent nearly two decades risking his life for the *Chicago Tribune* as a foreign correspondent before coming back to the main office a couple of years ago. He and I worked on the Sunday magazine together before the ax fell on us both. He was laid off with Brenda. He is freelancing and teaching journalism in Dubai. "I'm enjoying it," he says, "now that the temperatures have dipped below a hundred degrees."

So, Tom, you have one foot in and one foot out. What do you think?

"The core audience for newspapers," he tells me via e-mail, "is getting smaller and older, but also smarter and more selective—they are more knowledgeable about how the media works (or should work), and through the Internet they have access to a lot of quality stuff for free. Most of the big metro dailies, meanwhile, are getting dumber in every respect—dumb in the content they put in the paper, dumb in trying to appeal to the wrong audience, dumb in the way they market themselves, and dumb (and noncompetitive) on the Internet. Their time has passed."

Man, Tom used to be a fun dude.

He calls the Internet a beast that no one in journalism has figured out how to tame or make money off of. "We have to design a new business model, they tell us," he says. "Right. I figure that happens about the same time the Cubs win the World Series."

Suddenly, I feel hopeful. I'm a White Sox fan. They won it all in 2005. That means anything is possible.

LOU CONFRONTS HIS STAR REPORTER, JOE ROSSI, ABOUT his demeaning attitude toward an older colleague, a veteran cop reporter desperately trying to stay on the wagon and in the business. "You don't like Driscoll, do you?"

"He's a dinosaur," Rossi says. "It's all over. Whatever happened for him was over a long time ago."

"I'm a dinosaur," Lou says.

Rossi doesn't say anything.

"It would be nice if you argued the point," Lou says.

More silence from Rossi.

Lou grabs his arm.

"It would be smart if you argued the point," he says, pointedly.

MY OLD FRIEND CURTIS LAWRENCE, FROM MY EARLY reporting days in the Twin Cities, did not get laid off. He quit the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 2004 to teach journalism full time at Columbia College in Chicago. I ask him the same question I asked of Tom and Brenda. How's the newsroom look from the outside?

"I'm not that encouraged by the current state of the media, but I don't think it's hopeless," he says. "I'm discouraged that there is less and less public affairs reporting on government and close-to-the-bone neighborhood issues. The argument has always been that the media gives

people what they want. There's some often-repeated saying that if all someone gets is hamburger and never gets steak, they'll think hamburger is pretty good. That's the direction the business seems to be going. You could even substitute bologna for steak."

LOU AND DRISCOLL ARE HAVING LUNCH IN A BAR FILLED with cops and reporters. "This could be the old days almost," Lou says.

"Almost," Driscoll agrees.

"It's good to be part of it again," Lou says. "I feel I'm in touch with things. Getting back on a newspaper is like being with a woman who doesn't shave her legs."

"That's beautiful," Driscoll says.

"Yeah," Lou says. "Reality. Maybe you don't like it but it's real."

Driscoll spots Rossi taking a seat at the bar.

"I don't like that kid," he says.

"I'm not nuts about him either," Lou says. "But he's good. Real good."

"Maybe," Driscoll concedes. "But he's got no idea about humanity. He doesn't care."

I'M AT MEDILL ON A GRAY FALL MORNING NOT LONG AGO to talk to a graduate-level feature writing class. It is taught by another ex-*Tribune* staffer, Alan Solomon, who took a buyout about a year ago. I think there's more dignity in jumping rather than waiting around to be pushed, but Solomon tells me the landing hurts either way.

There are about a dozen students, sitting at a twenty-foot-long table, listening to me talk about a five-thousand-word profile I did of Reverend Jesse Jackson. I spent a summer with him, flying across the country and to the mountains

of Venezuela, where Jackson had the villagers chanting in English, "I am somebody." I tell the students that those days are over. It's hard to find a five-thousand-word newspaper story these days. The *Trib's* Sunday magazine was killed and most of the staff let go.

But I don't want to discourage the kids. As one points out, they've paid good money to come to Medill and the university has already cashed their checks. So I tell them what is in my heart rather than my brain: being a journalist is fun and honorable and important and I'd do anything to get back into the newsroom. I still want to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I still care.

Solomon has the students write stories about my talk as a class assignment. "It would be too harsh to call Don Terry a cautionary tale," one begins. "He's closer to a warning—and a gentle reminder—that in the twenty-first century, the business of journalism, the careers of newspapermen, are too fleeting and fickle."

DRISCOLL COMES THROUGH. THE OLD PRO FALLS OFF THE wagon but climbs back on long enough to write a story that could blow the lid off a police scandal. But Mrs. Pynchon is worried about the impact on the paper. It looks like she's going to kill it. Driscoll joins Lou to commiserate at a newspaper hangout. Rossi comes in with the early edition. Driscoll's story is page one.

"Oh my God," he says. "She ran my story."

Lou pulls the paper across the table for a better look. "Well, well," he says. "We work on a newspaper. A real newspaper."

The credits roll. I turn off my iPod and go to sleep with a smile on my face. Maybe in the morning, I'll start a blog.

DON TERRY left the Chicago Tribune in February 2009.

Time the Conquerer

Three newspapers in thirty-nine minutes. Uh, oh.

BY JILL DREW

I SAT THROUGH PLENTY OF OFFICIAL FOCUS GROUPS IN my years as a *Washington Post* assistant managing editor, watching people on the other side of a one-way mirror read and comment on my newspaper. The sessions were often excruciating, as participants eagerly picked apart our carefully calibrated content.

Now that I am no longer a part of "my newspaper," I conducted a focus group of one to observe how I read newspapers. I was curious about whether I could set aside the typical reactions of an egomaniacal journalist—"I could have done such a better story!"; "Ack! Have they no editors!?!"; etc.—and just be a reader. This was easier to do than I had anticipated. I am a CJR Encore Fellow exploring the future of news, and I realize I don't want to be in a newsroom right now, slugging it out for a share of shrinking resources. I like the distance



2008 In China for *The Washington Post*

and the time I have to consider what is working for me in journalism and what is not.

Like the observations of any focus group, my reactions are

idiosyncratic and their value debatable. Some data points: I'm a married, forty-seven-year-old mom. We live in Washington, D.C., in a time-pressed household where both parents are self-employed. My husband and teenage son get 90 percent of their news online. I get 90 percent of mine from newspapers. And I am a lover of newspapers, not just the news in them, but also the inky, smelly paper itself. I rejoice in the immediacy, the interactivity, and the visual potential of Web journalism, but I see it as something separate, not as a substitute for print. If everyone were like me, newspapers would be thriving. Clearly, they are not. Still, there may be lessons from my reactions—as well as warnings—for newspaper executives looking to rebuild their businesses with their dedicated readers at the core.

MY NEWS CONSUMPTION FOLLOWS A BASIC RHYTHM. I start most days as I have for years: I am the first up to drag my son off to school. I begin cooking breakfast and then pad out the front door to scoop up my *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. I scan the headlines, photos, and section fronts before putting them all aside to finish a somewhat chaotic morning routine. At some point I flip on National Public Radio, but unlike when I was working, I rarely feel any need to go online to survey the latest breaking news and blogs. (I do check for urgent e-mails and texts on my BlackBerry, so I'm not totally unplugged.) Then, when everyone in the family is where they need to be, I turn off all distractions—bliss!—and settle in to read. I check the Web around lunchtime and again after dinner for news updates and oddities, and also scan a few blogs. Increasingly, in my after-dinner computer session, I check out links sent by Facebook friends. (I don't Tweet.)

Probably the biggest change in my news-reading habits since leaving the *Post* involves taking early reads on stories. I find today that I rarely read full stories planned for the next day's newspaper that are posted online early, and I never read features online—I prefer to read these in print. That makes the spread of my morning papers particularly lush.

Despite industry-wide newsroom cutbacks, the three newspapers to which I subscribe still offer stories to get lost in, to read for the joy of a good yarn or to gain insight into a complicated topic. True, there are fewer of these kinds of pieces than there used to be, and more that miss the mark (a likely result of rushed editing), but I still find far more to read than I have time for.

My habits support three of the most basic tenets of newspaper journalism:

1. Good headlines are golden. LEAVING IRAQ IS A FEAT THAT REQUIRES AN ARMY (A-1, *New York Times*, October 9). I read that and was hooked. The story delivered on the hed's promise, and I read to the end, satisfied I'd learned something. Contrast that with A SLOW MARCH TO CHANGE; VMI IS STEEPED IN TRADITIONS DATING TO 1839. UNTIL 1997, FEMALE CADETS WEREN'T PART OF THEM (A-1, *Washington Post*, October 15). This screamed "don't read me." Not that the hed is terrible; rather, it nicely previews the story, a deeply reported piece by a journalist I admire who got inside a tough-to-report-on, transitioning institution. But

why this story now? The A-1 portion had no news hook and the full-page spread inside looked like a time sink. I skipped it.

2. Good reporting is essential. I am drawn into stories by their precision, detail, authority, and the introduction of facts I didn't previously know. Generalizations, especially overly broad nut graphs not immediately supported, annoy me. When I sense an editor-driven story, I breeze right on by. I am finding I particularly don't like "how we live" stories, such as the daily bombardment of anecdotal pieces on people trying to get the swine flu vaccine. Ditto faux-trend

I positively, absolutely hate it when I have just thirty-nine minutes to read the paper. The whole experience changes in an ugly way.

stories, like BREAKFAST CAN WAIT. THE DAY'S FIRST STOP IS ONLINE (A-1, *New York Times*, August 10). It relied on too-thin evidence for its broad conclusions, according to the *Times's* own public editor, Clark Hoyt, in his August 16 column. I used to assign these kinds of stories when I was an editor; now, I often find them wastes of space as writers stretch to make something new out of very little.

3. Good writing is born of good reporting. This is the reason why I subscribe to newspapers, the glory spot: the stories most worth telling, well told. They are the best expression of our free-speech democracy. The truly impressive story may appear only once a week or once a month. But they are there, making the paper a bargain at twice the price or more. Examples are too numerous to count. The most recent: I read every word of a two-part series, THE DAMAGE DONE: WHEN HEROIN HITS HOME, published in *The Washington Post's* Style section November 3 and 4. It wasn't news—the paper had covered in detail the deaths of four high school students who overdosed on heroin—but the narrative captured the terrifying reality and made a visceral connection with me and, I suspect, with every parent of a teenager who read it. It never generalized. It wasn't larded with quotes from "experts." No fancy prose. It let its reporting speak.

SO, WITH ALL THIS GOOD STUFF, WHY ARE NEWSPAPERS nose-diving?

Time.

Time is their greatest enemy.

At least it is in my house. If I miss that 8 a.m. window to read the papers, it's likely they'll never get read. And then I feel guilty. And when I feel guilty I think about all the wasted trees and I ponder cutting back to just one paper. I find I'm

guiltier still when I have only a short amount of time available to read, as I flip through the pages getting only a taste of the feast, a glance at all I'm leaving on the plate.

The average U.S. newspaper reader spends thirty-nine minutes a day with newspapers, according to the most recent biennial news-consumption study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, published in August 2008. There are figures showing that the average person spends just thirteen minutes a day with newspapers, but those include the growing contingent of non-newspaper readers. Those non-newspaper readers? I believe

Few people have the time to really experience the wonders of a newspaper. You have to commit to it, to devote the time, which gets harder and harder to do in our fractured, distracted, multimedia world.

they won't come back. For the dailies to thrive they need people like me.

And there's a problem with that. I positively, absolutely hate it when I have just thirty-nine minutes or fewer to read the papers. My whole experience changes in an ugly way. I kind of wish I hadn't even taken them out of the wrappers.

To try to quantify this pressure, I timed myself on October 15. My goal was to read my three papers in thirty-nine minutes. I started at 7:57 a.m. Took a deep breath and opened *The Washington Post*.

Luckily, it wasn't a day for big news. The lead story was about the Dow Jones Industrial Average cracking 10,000. As a former business editor, I'm familiar with that non-story, the market breaking through an essentially meaningless if round number. Skip. The aforementioned VMI feature, with big art: read to jump and stop. The Obama administration proposes \$250 cost-of-living increase for Social Security recipients, even though living expenses actually dropped year-over-year. Interesting story, well-handled; a quick read. An analytical feature on the Medicare Advantage program. Skip. A faux-trend story about people who don't use Twitter. Skip. I read all the keys to the inside stories and paused on one for a home-section story offering tips for how to furnish a newborn's nursery; that one took me back fifteen years. I smiled and turned the page.

I covered the whole of the A section in eighteen minutes. I had to read favorite columnists: Dana Milbank's Washington Sketch, David Ignatius on the op-ed page. In between I surveyed heds and photos. I read the first five graphs of a story about the Justice Department, the entirety of a piece about the U.S. strengthening its ties with the Chinese military (a special interest, since I covered China), and an analysis of North Korea's then-recent spate of friendly gestures. Tom Toles's editorial cartoon was dessert.

On to the next course: Metro. That got four minutes. Read to the jump of a section-front story about a fifteen-year-old boy killed in a gun battle, sped through an obit for Bruce Wasserstein, the Wall Street dealmaker, and glanced, as I always do, at the photos in the paid obits. I frowned at the weather page. It's printed so small it's useless, a sure sign I am getting older. (Apparently, others felt the same way, prompting *Post* editors to restore the weather info to its former, larger footprint. It had gotten squeezed in a recent redesign.)

Style and Sports got four minutes each. Style often has a long feature that catches my attention, but not today. Sports had a column by one of my favorites, Thomas Boswell, so I was miffed that I had to rush. Lucky for me, my other favorite sports columnist, Tracee Hamilton, wasn't writing that day. Home and the District Extra got three minutes apiece.

Despite feeling like I'd run through the *Post* at a sprint, I had only three minutes left of my thirty-nine-minute allotment. I skimmed headlines in *The Wall Street Journal*, taking mental notes on a few stories I wanted to go back to. That took four minutes. I was already over time and hadn't even looked at *The New York Times*. Well, I couldn't help myself. I speed-read my way through in fifteen minutes, feeling wholly unsatisfied and defeated. How do people do this?, I wondered.

On October 16, a much better newspaper day, I gave myself no time limit. I started the *Post* at 8 a.m. and finished one hour and seventeen minutes later. I polished the other two papers off in an additional hour, skipping their versions of stories I'd already read and concentrating on their enterprise offerings. I felt informed, entertained, and in touch. In celebration, I attempted *The New York Times* crossword right then, instead of waiting until after dinner.

My experience leaves me in a quandary about the future of newspapers. I believe in mass-market, big-city journalism; it's what I grew up in, both at *New York Newsday* and at *The Washington Post*. It's all that I know. But few people have the time to really experience the wonders of a newspaper. You have to commit to it, to devote the time, which gets harder and harder to do in our fractured, distracted, multimedia world.

The only future I can see clearly is one in which newspapers cater to their loyal core. In my future they serve up superior journalism and charge readers the full freight, no longer relying so heavily on advertisers that are deserting in droves. If people pay more, perhaps they'll place a higher value on what's delivered, and spend more time with it. There is a market—I hope, I pray—and I'll bet it's larger than just me.

JILL DREW was an associate editor at *The Washington Post* when she left the paper in August 2009.



2001 In Egypt for the *Los Angeles Times*

A Thousand Cuts

As long as the monopoly money rolled in, who noticed?

BY TERRY MCDERMOTT

SPENCER ACKERMAN, WHO REPORTS ON NATIONAL SECURITY issues for *The Washington Independent* and blogs about the same—and does both at a consistently high level of quality, which is not a simple task—last year posted an item on his blog, *Attackerman*, explaining how to deconstruct a typical piece by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*. He said Hersh was ill-served by the conventional journalistic habit of shaping reporting into stories that needed to signify their importance. Lots of Hersh's reporting, Ackerman argued, would be better understood as pure reporting and read simply because it was what Hersh had learned, whatever it portended. Shaping it into traditional journalism structures warped it.

One day, journalistic convention will decide that placing reporters like Hersh within the box of a lede (the intentional misspelling of “lead” is yet another journalistic convention that makes little sense) *for a piece that needs no lede* is a silly idea. Then, my friends, we will finally have the free play of notebook material. But until then, we have to read Hersh with a bit of a knowing eye. You can hate all you like, but GOD'S SON is across the belly and he'll prove you lost already. [Parenthesis mine, italics and capitalization his.]

I have no idea what that last sentence about God's son and the belly means, but it's a blog post so I don't have to understand it and Ackerman doesn't have to care that I don't. This is part of the nature of blogging. The writer can assume I know exactly what he means, or not care that I don't. Somebody else will get it. This kind of writing is directed at a very particular, almost personal, audience. It's like writing in dialect and as far from a mass medium as you can get. While it happens to be available via the Internet to millions of people, it is certainly not aimed at them.

What Ackerman is advocating is that Hersh be liberated from the formal conventions of journalism, and the

constraints that accompany them. Then he can simply say, “Here, look what I found.” Ackerman is asking, implicitly, that Hersh be regarded as a blogger. I think he's right. I think blogging would suit Hersh. I also think blogging is saving journalism.

I worked at newspapers for thirty years and loved every day of it. Wait. It's more complicated than that. Much more. In fact, to say I loved newspapering wholeheartedly is a bald-faced lie. I hated at least half of those three decades worth of days and swore at the end of many that it would be the last. I carried out these vows to quit several times, never for very promising prospects. I left to write speeches, to write fiction, to pound nails—none of which was I as good at as pounding a beat. So what was I fighting for or against? Sometimes, those who knew me would suggest that it was nothing more than myself. Sometimes, though, I actually had a point.

I hated the conventions that bound daily journalism, the stilted, odd language in which it was written as well as the contrived structures into which that odd language was shaped. The common newspaper style is so heavily codified you need a Berlitz course to interpret it. More than formal, the style is abstract and artificial. I once (on the very first day at a new job) got into a frighteningly intense argument with a city editor who had objected to my use of the word “slumbered” to describe the behavior of two political candidates during a debate. They didn't really sleep through it, did they? he asked. Of course not, I said. I meant it figuratively, not literally. We don't use figurative language here, he told me. Then he changed the word to “lumbered.”

That was one benighted guy, but the problem was nearly universal. Until recently, you couldn't escape it. Now you can. The advent of the Web and the proliferation of smart, aggressive bloggers around the globe have torn journalism loose from its hinges. The hounds have been unleashed.

While disliking it intensely, it is easy to forget there was a reason for the soporific style of newspaper writing. Newspapers were actually trying to do something good. They recognized that they held powerful, uncontested positions as conveyors of news to their communities. After much coaxing, they took it upon themselves to shed their partisan pasts and don a cloak of social responsibility—a practice that they called objectivity. They did it in part to sell papers—they thought if they made fewer people angry they would have more readers—but mainly they did it because they thought it was the right thing to do.

I never worked in a newsroom where these responsibilities were seriously questioned. I also never worked in one where they were seriously honored. I don't mean that people didn't think they were being honored. And they were, but only in the most formulaic way imaginable. A balanced story about a political debate, for example, would carefully include the points of view on both sides of whatever issue was being examined. Never mind that there might actually be three-dozen points of view, not two. The bigger problem was that this removed the newspaper from its function as a seeker of truth. That's not our job, we said. Instead, we wrote what we were told.

The net result was that even the best newspapers became

predictable and stultifying. Color and flourish in the writing were banished. Curiosity was discouraged. At one job, there was a respected senior reporter who routinely wrote his stories before doing much if any reporting. Then he would go out to find people to tell him what he had already written. He was an extreme case—almost literally filling in the blanks—but hardly alone. I can't tell you the number of times I've been asked what a particular story would say before I had done a lick of reporting on it.

Stories were edited with the idea that every reader was going to read every word and therefore the words and, more damagingly, the ideas had to be of a certain simplicity. This is such a crackpot notion it barely seems fair to critique it. No one reads the entire paper; few read most of it.

The point is that newspapers have been killing themselves slowly for a long time. So long as the monopoly profits rolled in, the death by a thousand cuts wasn't paid any attention. When the Internet arrived to eliminate the advertising monopolies, the newspapers already had a foot in the grave.

That said, it wouldn't hurt the Web triumphalists to acknowledge that there is something more than jobs being lost in the process of newspapers dying. Whether you liked the way they did it or not, monopoly newspapers often performed civic functions.

The real power of a big paper is most apparent in a couple of specific circumstances. The first is when something really big happens, usually a disaster, causing huge portions of the paper's resources to be thrown at the story. This is a sort of a reserve power, there when you need it but invisible when you don't. I often was assigned to rewrite on these stories. It was a frustrating, exhilarating job. I could sit at my desk for the whole day, watching the inanity of cable news and waiting for reporters in the field to file. Then, as deadline for the day's first edition approached, I would suddenly be overwhelmed with more great reporting than I could possibly use. Reporters I'd never heard of were giving me incredible stuff.

The second circumstance is when breathtaking stories you knew nothing about, but that people had been working on for months or years, suddenly appear in the paper. The depth of the newspaper's staff allows for this relative luxury.

These two quite different kinds of reporting power are both threatened as newspapers decline. Because of their irregular, episodic nature, readers will not necessarily know they are gone, but their absence will make a community's news culture considerably poorer.

I once gave a talk to a group of business executives about coverage of 9/11. My assignment back then was to profile the hijackers. My editor's instructions were to go wherever I needed to go and stay as long as I needed to stay. Neither of us imagined the reporting would take three years and require travel to twenty countries on four continents. But it did. In the middle of my talk one of the executives interrupted. "This is fascinating," he said, "but I can't help asking: How does it cost out?" It doesn't, of course. There isn't much a newspaper does that pays for itself. I suppose you could think about this sort of reporting as brand management, reminding your read-

ers you're a serious organization. But without the subsidy of the monopoly profits, there will be less and less of this kind of coverage, if any at all.

Ours is a newspaper family. My wife and I met in a newsroom. She takes her BlackBerry to bed so she can read the next day's *New York Times* the night before. We have three papers delivered every morning. I read them in thirty minutes, thirty-five if there are box scores to scrutinize. Clearly, there's much more looking than reading going on.

Which isn't to say I don't read. I read a lot, but selectively. When I'm working on an extended reporting project, I tend to read exclusively on that subject. This does not a well-rounded person make. Or a well-rounded news consumer. In truth, though, I've never much liked reading news, even when I was reporting it. I've written a couple, but haven't read a murder story in years, or a campaign-trail dispatch in many more. I'm a big sports fan but almost never read newspaper sports stories. Here's why:

Cliff Lee looked like Neo on top of the building at the end of the Matrix. Like the game slowed down just for him and he could see everything in ten different ways while the Yankees were stuck in their little three dimension [sic] world.

This was Craig Calcaterra, a lawyer with too much time on his hands, blogging on *The Hardball Times* about the first game of last year's World Series. This is almost the perfect beginning for a blog post. It assumed you knew what had happened. It cast its subject into pop culture and it was dead-on smart. Compare it to any newspaper game story and tell me which you would rather read. Yeah, me too.

Even when I still worked for a newspaper, I was already spending more time reading things that were connected to the news, driven by it, but that weren't newspapers. This has only been exacerbated since I left the newsroom. I used to argue that newspapers ought to return to their mass-medium roots—the high-voltage days of the penny press. That now seems silly. Newspapers have a product that is mismatched to their audience, but becoming more of a mass medium is no longer possible. There is increasingly no mass to be mediated. Everything's been blown apart. It's as if somebody set off a bomb in a crystal museum; there are shards of audience scattered from here to kingdom come.

The shards, though, are empowered to reassemble outside the museum. I and thousands of others have built our own newspapers out of RSS feeds. I subscribe to about a hundred different Web sites and have organized them in Google Reader. The material is automatically fed into a system of folders that I designate. Think of the folders as newspaper sections. My A section is science news. My B section is sports, baseball and professional basketball only. The C section is politics. D is books and movies.

After I spend my half hour reading the three newspapers, I spend a solid two hours reading through my subscription list. It's customizable, specific, highly organized, idiosyncratic, and immediate. How can a newspaper compete with that?

TERRY McDERMOTT left the Los Angeles Times in 2008.



2001 In Afghanistan for the *Chicago Tribune*.

Less Is Not More

Why do newspapers alienate their most loyal readers?

BY LISA ANDERSON

WHEN MY SON'S FIRST COLLEGE ROOMMATE TURNED OUT to be from Chicago, I was delighted. His family had long subscribed to the *Chicago Tribune*, where I worked. I thought it gave us an immediate connection. Less than two months later, they unsubscribed. This was shortly after a drastic redesign at the paper in September 2008. The roommate's family said there was nothing in the *Tribune* to read anymore.

That wasn't quite true. There was still plenty of information in the paper. But there were fewer stories, produced by fewer reporters. The stories were relentlessly local and, increasingly, came in the form of charts, graphs, maps, statistics, large fonts, and large photos—a sort of newspaper-Internet-TV amalgam that seemed more like something to be absorbed than read. For the roommate's family—professional people who wanted sophisticated stories that included the world beyond Chicago—it wasn't enough.

I understood. During the calamitous year of 2008—as many of us at the *Tribune* dutifully learned to create “dispatches” at Twitter-esque lengths, and localize national stories through pretzel-like contortions—I increasingly suspected that this approach wasn't going to save newspapers in particular, or journalism in general. Nor would the sweeping reductions in the work force.

Here in 2010, I am even more convinced of that. I have no idea what the business plan for newspapers should be or how to monetize the Web. What I do know is that tailoring newspapers to the interests of people who never read them is futile. The magic formula, whatever it is, is not the lowest common denominator. That will be true no matter how simple and shiny and service-oriented we make them.

So why do the dailies continue to alienate the loyal readers that they still have? The figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations for the six months that ended September 2009 make the case that, for readers, less is not more. Some

of the biggest weekday losers—the *Los Angeles Times* (-11.05 percent), the *San Francisco Chronicle* (-25.8 percent), the *Newark Star-Ledger*, (-22.22 percent), *The Boston Globe* (-18.48 percent), and *The Dallas Morning News* (-22.16 percent) to name a few—are among those who have made some of the biggest contributions to the pool of laid off, fired, or bought out journalists, some 30,000 since the start of 2008. People who buy newspapers are people who want more context, more information, more analysis—not less. So I am convinced that part of these losses stems from once-loyal subscribers who cut loose from dailies with diminished firepower and ambitions.

Less is less. It has been sobering for me to see how much my former newspaper has changed in the past year. It's now a tabloid for street sales and a broadsheet for home delivery, and Chicago friends complain that they can zip through the tabloid version in minutes, and the broadsheet doesn't require much more. Some 30 million people still pay for daily newspapers. Many of these readers are older, but they also tend to be affluent and loyal—the kind of people advertisers like to reach. And they aren't afraid to take their business elsewhere if they're not happy.

Daily ink-on-paper news may not last forever, but while we've still got it, we might as well leverage it to keep the business afloat until we figure out what comes next. We can no longer do that by offering something for everyone. Growth appears to go to those who exploit niches.

So here's a niche: Instead of dumbing down the news, why not consider selectively smartening it up? This would involve hard choices, as we can't do everything. But as newspapers cut staff and newsholes, and as they barrel down-market, they leave opportunities for people offering news expertise in areas like politics, sports, foreign affairs.

That includes Texas, where the nonprofit, online Texas Tribune, which made its debut in November, is targeting voids in politics and policy coverage left by the contractions of the big Texas dailies.

It includes San Francisco, where the *Chronicle* recently lost the most daily circulation in the nation. Both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* recently launched Bay Area editions featuring San Francisco-oriented news.

And it includes Chicago, where both local papers slashed staff and content, and where, to take advantage of the resulting void, *The New York Times* partnered with the Chicago News Cooperative, a young nonprofit run by the *Tribune's* former managing editor, James O'Shea. The cooperative provides the *Times* with local coverage two days a week focused on city and state politics, policy, and culture. The *Journal* is considering similar metro coverage in Chicago as well as Los Angeles.

No matter the platform, what all these ventures have in common is that they're betting on smart news that gives more to the people who want it, need it, and are willing to pay for it. It's certainly not clear that smartening up the news will work. But it's clear that dumbing it down will not. **CJR**

Until December 2008, LISA ANDERSON was New York bureau chief and a national correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*.

Everyone Eats...

But that doesn't make you a restaurant critic

BY ROBERT SIETSEMA

When I arrived in New York City fresh out of graduate school in 1977, the city's food scene couldn't have been more different than it is today. Even calling it a scene would have been absurd: the farmers-market movement had barely begun, few liquor stores sold anything like an international selection of wines, and only a handful of restaurants had names widely recognizable to the general public—and those were mainly French. Indeed, during the

late 1970s, fine dining at such places as Lutece and La Grenouille was generally acknowledged to be the exclusive province of businessmen with expense accounts and the idle rich. There would be no published Zagat guide for six more years, and the only chef whose name my friends and I recognized was Chef Boyardee.

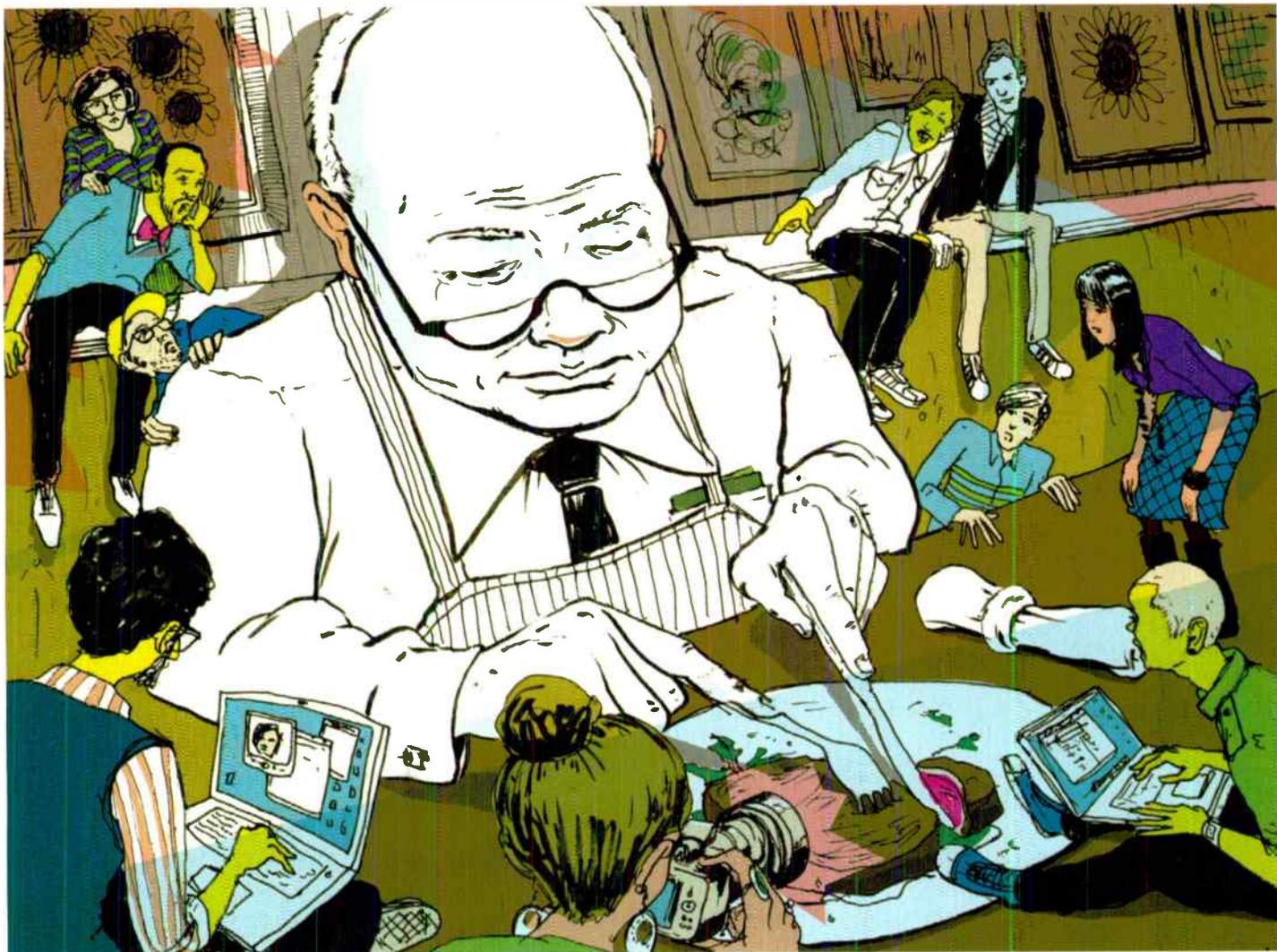
Most of the verbiage devoted to food in local newspapers concerned easy-to-make recipes, human interest stories, food travel writing, kitchen advice to housewives, and the occasional piece that sought to get you interested in wine. Every Friday, there would be a restaurant review in *The New York Times*. The *Times* restaurant critic was Craig Claiborne, who did the job intermittently during a tenure of nearly three decades. He was also the food editor, the recipe developer, and the author—along with longtime collaborator Pierre Franey—of cookbooks that bore the *Times* imprint. Claiborne was born in Sunflower, Mississippi, where he grew up in a

boardinghouse run by his mother. Upon moving to New York after two stints in the Navy and a cooking-school education in Switzerland, he began his career inauspiciously as a receptionist at *Gourmet* magazine. In 1957, he became the food editor at the *Times*, thought to be the first male to hold that position, in a section that was officially known as “Food Fashions Family Furnishings” but colloquially referred to as the Women's Section. In that capacity, he's generally credited with being the inventor of the modern restaurant review.

Prior to Claiborne's tenure at the *Times*, reviews in newspapers and elsewhere had often been looked upon suspiciously by the dining public, seen more as a reflection of a publication's advertising aspirations than a straightforward analysis of a restaurant's virtues. Published regularly from 1935 through the mid-1950s, the Duncan Hines guides, known as *Adventures in Good Eating*, had been something of a national standard. They were at least partly the work of Hines, a traveling salesman of printing paper and ink, who undertook to tell other travelers where to eat, using prose that verged on puffery. Of the Oregon Caves Chateau in Oregon Caves, Oregon, the guide reads, in its 1944 edition, “Without the hospitality of the Sabins, this place would still be nice indeed. When you add their personalities, it makes it ‘tops.’ The Chateau is lovely, and unusual.” This is the totality of the review, and quite typical. One can only imagine how the hosts had fawned over the reviewer.

Hines's guide incorporated recommendations from other travelers, so that you had no idea who wrote each individual entry. Other contemporary dining guides were also many-hands productions. Early in the 1970s, *Forbes Magazine's Restaurant Guide* established itself as a major reference for New York diners. Though it was carefully supervised by Malcolm Forbes himself, the actual writing was the work of the magazine's staff, and displayed no consistency of perspective. One of its stranger features is an almost dyspeptic distaste for dining. In the introduction, Forbes describes his experience of compiling the volume as “more ulcerous than enjoyable.”

Enter Claiborne, who, approaching the task with evident enthusiasm, established an ethical and procedural framework for restaurant reviewing: reviews would be done by a single individual. The reviewer would set his own name to the work. He'd visit a restaurant at least three times, and each visit would involve a table of at least three or four diners,



with an eye to covering the menu as completely as possible, eating some dishes more than once to test for consistency. The publication would pay for the meals, and no free meals would be accepted. Most important, perhaps, was the stricture that the restaurant critic remain anonymous. Thus, the reservation would be made under a false name, and the critic and his party would do nothing to call attention to the fact that a review was in progress.

Accounts vary as to how anonymous Claiborne—who was apparently a rather flamboyant fellow—was able to be. But he reassures us on this point in the introduction to his *Guide to Dining Out in New York* (1968):

One of the questions that is most frequently asked of me in this wildly hedonistic occupation is whether or not I am recognized when I visit restaurants. The answer is—with rare exceptions—a firm no.... I have waited in line with the best of them, been abused by headwaiters and busboys, placed in the dim corners of restaurants, corners that the help ignores and calls Siberia, had my toes stepped on and jacket drenched with black bean soup (in lieu of apology the waiter said, "Watch out!").

Claiborne also provided a further reason for anonymity: "I do not like being fawned over, with or without the

circumstances of my job." He recognized that the result of a critic's being recognized was the appearance at the table of unordered dishes, comped bottles of expensive wine, and a fuss being made by the staff, all of it anathema to both the enjoyment of a meal and an unbiased analysis of the food's merits. He realized that the acceptance of free food creates a classic journalistic conflict of interest. If reviews were to be trusted by the dining public, the reviewer must adhere to rules that conferred credibility on his conclusions.

As with most of his colleagues during that era, Claiborne tended to write his reviews in short declarative sentences, explaining dishes as if he were a very articulate high school teacher, and we his enthralled students. In an early review of the Japanese restaurant Kabuki, published in 1961 and running just seven hundred words, he explains, "Chopsticks are available and recommended. It is a curious fact that the physical manner of eating has a positive effect on flavor."

Although we remember him as a gourmet and bon vivant (near the end of his career, he was reviled for a \$4,000 charity dinner for two he ate in Paris, after winning it at an auction), he harbored no prejudice against inexpensive restaurants. Certainly there were many fewer places to be reviewed at that time, and people dined out far less regularly than they do today, but I prefer to believe that he covered lower-end places

out of a democratic spirit. Indeed, in one book he awards a simultaneous single star to both Lutece and Chock Full O' Nuts. Clearly, his star system—another Claiborne innovation that has endured—acknowledged the comparative worth of a very cheap dinner over a very expensive one.

In 1968, Gael Greene made a splash as the newly appointed restaurant critic for newcomer *New York* magazine. Her previous experience was writing for such fashion magazines as *Cosmopolitan* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, and she introduced a flamboyance of prose to restaurant reviewing. Nevertheless, the strictures she inherited from Claiborne were maintained. In her collection of reviews called *Bite* (1972 edition), she notes: "I have been fed ambrosia flaming and slops in bordelaise. I am almost never recognized on these investigatory rounds. Though I would adore being fawned over and am a fool for pampering... anonymity is crucial to a restaurant observer. How else can I judge what joys or abuses await the average unknown everyday guest?"

Indeed, in her memoir *Insatiable*, published twenty-four years later, Greene maintains that she insisted to *New York* founder Clay Felker, "We have to do it like Craig Claiborne does at the *Times*. Anonymously. I'll have to eat a minimum of three times before judging a restaurant—with friends—like he does. And pay the check."

While Greene inherited Claiborne's reviewing rubrics, her style of writing was strikingly different. She brought hyperbolic language to a medium that had once been merely informational. Describing André Surmain, the owner and chef at Lutece, she observed, "... he is your host, a zany country squire with his fat lapels, the bluff blend of pinstripe, tattersall, stripe and Art Deco abstract. It is a highly aristocratic vulgarity, especially those crepe-soled rust suede Hush Puppies. It suits."

After Gael Greene, the restaurant review would never be the same. When Mimi Sheraton succeeded Claiborne as the *Times* critic in 1975, it was clear that the paper was at least partly trying to clone Greene. Handy in the kitchen, she'd earlier published *The Seducer's Cookbook*, which had a sexual zing never before seen in a book of recipes. Sheraton's reviews for the *Times* were jam-packed with colorful dish descriptions and she adopted a confidential tone of voice that put us right at the table with her. In this emphasis she presaged what has come to be known as "food porn"—writing that is intended to stimulate the salivary glands through its primary focus on the appearance and flavor of food.

The length of the *Times* review had swelled from Claiborne's time to approximately one thousand words, much of that devoted to glowing adjectives, as in this review of Le Cherche Midi, which appeared in Sheraton's 1982 collection, *Guide to New York Restaurants*:

Among the most successful efforts are appetizers such as the mild and gently smoked trout, the cold leeks or asparagus mellowed by a vinaigrette dressing made with an excellent olive oil, and the salad of the ruby-red lettuce, trevisse, given crunch with walnuts and scented with walnut oil.

Clearly, the larders of restaurants were bursting with new

To Danyelle Freeman,
a.k.a. Restaurant Girl,
anonymity for restaurant
reviewers was a
disingenuous burden.

and unfamiliar ingredients, and Mimi was there to praise them—not like a didactic schoolteacher but as one "foodie" to another (though that term would not come into common usage for several more years).

Sheraton's book provides an index of restaurant types by ethnicity, and it's obvious that by the early 1980s the restaurant landscape had become far more varied and international than it was when her predecessor listed a meager five categories. There were now forty-five types in New York City, including Brazilian, Russian, Indonesian, and Vietnamese. (To show how this trend has continued, by 2004 I was able to identify 145 cuisines in the fourth edition of my guidebook, *Best Ethnic Eating in New York City*.) By Sheraton's time, it was no longer enough to simply describe a dish. Now the reader expected the reviewer, reference books at the ready, to explain its context, as well as make it sound delicious.

So Craig Claiborne built the foundation of professionalism. Gael Greene and Mimi Sheraton gussied it up and infused it with sensuality. And when Ruth Reichl, a Greenwich Village native, came to the *Times* in 1993 after a nine-year stint as food editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, three of them spent as restaurant critic, she turned the restaurant review into a bona fide literary form. Reichl brought a dramatist's sensibilities to the restaurant critique, reproducing snatches of dialogue and describing fellow diners as if she were a travel writer in a foreign capital. Reichl covered a broader range of restaurants than Bryan Miller, her immediate predecessor at the *Times*, conferring on Chinese restaurants, in particular, a status they'd never enjoyed before, and causing Miller to complain in a memo to his former boss at the paper, which was gleefully intercepted by the *New York Post*: "How do you think she comes off giving SoHo noodle shops 2 and 3 stars?... SHE HAS DESTROYED THE SYSTEM that Craig, Mimi, and I upheld."

Even as Reichl was shaking up the demimonde of restaurant criticism, she upheld Claiborne's tenets. Famously, in an early assessment of Le Cirque, she wrote a duplex review. The first part was an account of how she had been shabbily treated as an unrecognized diner, the second detailed the drastic improvements in service and food once she was identified:

Over the course of five months I ate five meals at the restaurant; it was not until the fourth that the owner, Sirio Maccioni, figured out who I was. When I was discovered, the change was startling. Everything improved: the seating, the service, the size of the portions. We had already reached dessert, but

our little plate of petit fours was whisked away to be replaced by a larger, more ostentatious one.

Reichl struggled with anonymity during her time at the *Times*. Competition among restaurants was becoming fiercer, and a *Times* review could be a make-or-break matter. At an early point, someone got a photo of her, and it was reportedly plastered in the kitchen of every restaurant in town. Sometimes she wore wigs and other disguises, but increasingly she was forced to dine as a recognized celebrity.

Around the time Reichl started at the *Times*, I was hired as part-time restaurant critic at *The Village Voice*, alternating columns with my predecessor Jeff Weinstein. My qualifications were limited to having written *Down the Hatch* since 1989, a foodzine created in emulation of rock newsletters known as “fanzines.” *Down the Hatch* came out quarterly, and sought to review what I calculated to be the 99 percent of city restaurants ignored by critics. These were often small ethnic places in the so-called outer boroughs. In doing so, my obvious precursors were Calvin Trillin and Jane and Michael Stern, who’d made a point of celebrating vernacular food. While my *Down the Hatch* critiques tended to be slapdash affairs, more on-the-spot reportage than formal reviews, when I began working at the *Voice* I adhered to Claiborne’s standards, and the publication supported me with an almost unlimited eating budget.

I’d also been influenced by the consumerist movement of the previous decade, and felt that my mission was to represent the interests of the typical restaurant diner, who ate in plebian places most of the time and went to expensive restaurants mainly for special occasions.

The *Voice* started posting my reviews online late in 1998, but little did I suspect the profound effect the Internet was to have on restaurant reviewing. Around 2003 food blogs began to appear, and quickly became a predominant feature of the food-writing landscape. The prose is often spontaneous and unedited, and its quality can run from barely readable to brilliant and innovative. The Web site Food Blog Blog counts nearly two thousand of these blogs today, but I suspect there are many times that number. Though commercial versions featuring a paid staff have been launched (*New York* magazine’s Grub Street, for example) the majority of bloggers remain unpaid and unedited.

Food blogs cover all aspects of the city’s food scene. Some concentrate on recipes, some on chef interviews, some on greenmarkets and community-based food issues. But many are concerned, partly or fully, with reviewing restaurants. From their inception, these restaurant-reviewing blogs saw no point in adhering to the rules established by Claiborne, nor did they, in most cases, announce what the substitute rules were. Most rejected anonymity, accepting or even soliciting free food in the restaurants under review.

Writing a blog called Restaurant Girl, Harvard graduate Danyelle Freeman was typical of the new crop of restaurant-reviewing bloggers. She distinguished herself from the others by including an ethical statement in her blog, under the heading “Review Policy.” To Freeman, anonymity for restaurant reviewers was a disingenuous burden:

Why not conceal my identity: That would go against everything Restaurant Girl has stood for since the inception of my blog. I have no reason to hide behind a false identity, hats, sunglasses and any other disguise. Afterall [sic], I aspire to be as personable as humanly possible to my reader as well as to chefs & restaurateurs alike.

Freeman emphatically rejected the idea that a critic should wait for a restaurant to stabilize before publishing a review, though she seems somewhat defensive on that point:

If you are open for business and charging your clientele full price, you are open to review.... With the advent of blogs and instantaneous gratification & news, there has been much controversy over the fairness of such practices. I’m quite sure the debate will continue to be a dominant [sic] issue of debate. Therefore, I feel compelled to reiterate my policy of review once again: if you are open for business and charging your clientele full price, you are open to judgement.

This penchant for early reviews affected print publications, too, so that a critique written months after a place opened, no matter how much fairer and more complete, now seemed anachronistic. Gradually, the lag time between when a restaurant opened and when a review appeared shortened, and today publications like *New York* and *Time Out New York* often publish reviews within a matter of weeks. Shorter reviews could appear on their Web sites in days or even hours. Frank Bruni, the reviewer at the *Times* beginning in 2004, was one of the few to resist this trend. He could afford to, since his review, no matter how tardy, continued to be the most influential. In the *Times*’s Diner’s Journal blog, however, restaurants were critiqued after a shorter lag time.

Bruni clearly understood that early reviewing had profoundly changed the restaurant industry, forcing places to put a lot of effort into food and service at the outset, then allowing them to slack off once the dust has settled. In a re-review of Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s Spice Market, a restaurant that the *Times* had awarded three stars several years earlier, he noted, “Today it suggests the steepness of many a restaurant’s decline once it has made its first, glowing impression....”

When Bruni left the *Times* job in August 2009, he was replaced by Sam Sifton, who had worked at the paper since 2001 and been its cultural news editor since 2005. In the 1990s, Sifton had been the restaurant critic at *New York Press*. Reporting on Sifton’s new appointment, the *New York Observer* sounded the death knell for critic anonymity: “He’ll have to negotiate a foodie-obsessed atmosphere, and a new media environment that will end The Times’ quaint idea of anonymity for its restaurant critic (it’s not so hard to find an image of Mr. Sifton).”

To accommodate the mania for quick reviews, restaurants started hosting press dinners prior to opening, called “preview meals.” Organized by publicists, and including introductions of chefs and staffs along with free food, these events were typically attended by a broad range of food writers. Eventually, professional reviewers came to attend

these meals. These previews also represented a sort of subsidy by the restaurants for the publications, since the meals wouldn't be expensed. Hosting preview dinners allowed restaurants to control the circumstances in which reviews were written.

The preview dinner became the stock-in-trade of food bloggers. Many had ambitions to make the jump to the professional ranks, and the preview dinner made a more complete review possible. Restaurants sometimes tried to forestall early reviews by declaring "soft openings" or "in previews" periods, much like Broadway plays. Restaurants also began to host "friends and family" weeks prior to opening as a way of perfecting the menu before the bloggers arrived. These gatherings, too, soon became thronged with food bloggers.

Eater, a Web site spun off by the real-estate blog Curbed, has become a clearinghouse for professional and amateur reviews, along with restaurant gossip and periodic reports on the progress of coming restaurants. The site legitimized instantaneous reviews published by bloggers under auspices that were opaque to the reader, giving them equal billing with professional reviews. Whether a meal was eaten for free by a reviewer who'd announced his presence beforehand, or according to principles of professionalism and anonymity, is of no concern to Eater. The site captures the culinary zeitgeist of our era, with its mixture of lively gossip and real-estate reporting.

There were faint stirrings of discomfort over the new ethics—or lack thereof. The Web site FoodEthics, launched by veteran bloggers Brooke Burton and Leah Greenstein in May 2009, published a Food Blog Code of Ethics that hedged on many of Claiborne's principles, but still sought to partly maintain them: "We will try to visit a restaurant more than once (more than twice, if possible) before passing a final judgment.... We will sample the full range of items on menu. We will be fair to new restaurants.... We will wait at least one month after the restaurant opens, allowing them to work out some kinks, before writing a full-fledged review." The code also urges bloggers to reveal when free food has been accepted, but a scan of blogs that review New York restaurants suggests that this is virtually never done.

In 2007, underneath a photograph showing her grinning face above a lavish quantity of cleavage, Danyelle Freeman (a.k.a. Restaurant Girl) became the first review blogger in the city to vault into a full-time professional position, as the principal reviewer at the New York *Daily News*. In an article announcing her new position, the newspaper reiterated her ideas about reviewing and anonymity: "The choice not to write incognito is one that is likely to raise eyebrows and debates. Must a critic dine like a spy? If not, will they get preferential service or dishes? Freeman doesn't think so."

The contrast between old ethics and new was brought deliciously home soon after Freeman's appointment, in an interview conducted by Gael Greene, who had started her own review blog called *The Insatiable Critic*. Greene and Restaurant Girl met at a midtown restaurant, where eventually Freeman got around to complaining about the cavaliers who had objected to her lack of anonymity, and the following conversation ensued:

"They say I can't be a critic because my photograph is out there. I don't think you need to be anonymous."

"I think you do," said Greene.

"They can't bring in a new chef," Freeman argued.

"But they can insist the chef come in if he's on his day off."

About the time Frank Bruni departed the *Times*, Danyelle Freeman was fired by the *Daily News*, apparently as a result of cost-cutting considerations. She retreated into her blog, where the only acknowledgement of her newspaper years was a terse note in the Gossip section: "I had a wonderful two years at the Daily News. It's unfortunate such a great newspaper will no longer be reviewing restaurants. But Restaurant Girl is alive and well right here."

In the half century since Craig Claiborne developed his reviewing system, the nation's attitude toward food has changed profoundly. Eating in restaurants has gone from being an infrequent occurrence for most people to being a primary form of entertainment. The marketplace is filled with new food, more food, and more-expensive food, and eating has become a preoccupation for the millions who consider themselves foodies. Many patrons no longer want to become regulars at one or two restaurants—they'd rather sample the vast smorgasbord the city offers, and many consider being the first to reach a new place a preferment. This behavior is creating a boom-and-bust cycle for restaurants, in which novelty and buzz is valued above excellence.

More than ever, diners could use a reliable critical guide. But where once there were a few dependable voices who reviewed restaurants based on a common set of professional standards and strategies, there is now a digital free-for-all. As with many things on the Web, this profusion of voices is often touted as a wondrous blow for democracy, a long-overdue rising up of the masses against the elitist overlords of the culinary realm. Thus the runaway popularity of sites like Chowhound and Yelp, which publishes city-specific reviews by anyone who cares to weigh in on everything from restaurants to churches, and whose motto is "Real People. Real Reviews." I'm all for everyone having his or her say, but when it comes to cultural criticism there is a strong case to be made for professionalism and expertise. As the eminent film critic Richard Schickel wrote in 2007, in response to a *New York Times* article on the decline of professional book-reviewing and the rise of review-bloggers: "Criticism—and its humble cousin, reviewing—is not a democratic activity. It is, or should be, an elite enterprise, ideally undertaken by individuals who bring something to the party beyond their hasty, instinctive opinions.... It is work that requires disciplined taste, historical and theoretical knowledge and a fairly deep sense of the author's (or filmmaker's or painter's) entire body of work, among other qualities."

Craig Claiborne, and those who followed him, lifted the restaurant review out of the realm of marketing and made it a public service—a job defined by professional standards and expertise. Today, despite whatever benefits come with the every-man-a-critic ethos, we are in danger of losing that public service. **CJR**

ROBERT SIETSEMA is the restaurant critic at *The Village Voice*.

Seeds of Change?

Why we need independent data on genetically modified crops

BY GEORGINA GUSTIN

Some time early this year a group called the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications will issue a report, and a ritual of sorts will ensue. The report will probably say, as it has for the past dozen years, that more countries are growing more genetically engineered crops on more acres. Then, on cue, watchdog groups, most visibly Friends of the Earth International, will issue press releases questioning the report

and its claims. The press will report on this, first addressing the ISAAA's report, then turning to Friends of the Earth and other groups for critical comment in an effort to create a semblance of balance. Then we'll move on to other things until the annual report emerges the next year.

Any reporter covering any beat knows the drill: digest new report, find opposing data or claims, write story. But having engaged in this ISAAA/watchdog ritual last year myself, I stumbled into a dilemma: I couldn't find any opposing or alternative data because no group other than the ISAAA—an industry-funded, pro-biotech organization—collects it. And while this may seem like a narrow problem, it's an especially important one right now. Roughly one billion people around the world suffer from chronic hunger or malnutrition, and as global population rises to an expected 9.1 billion by 2050, the problem of how to feed everyone will grow even more acute. This expected population growth, along with the compli-

cating factors of climate change, means farmers will have to grow more food on less land and under more extreme weather conditions.

Biotech companies are open about the fact that this scenario creates a huge business opportunity for them—that they can capitalize on this looming crisis through their technologies, which will, they insist, produce more food, using less water, fertilizer, and pesticides, on less land. From their perspective the only thing standing in the way of a biotech solution to world hunger is the acceptance by government and the public that will put more GM crops in the ground in more places.

Controversy, in the form of health and environmental concerns, has swirled around GM crops from the beginning, and countries around the world have been cautious in adopting GM technologies. Given this reality, the biotech industry has an interest not just in increasing global acceptance, but in the *appearance* of diminishing resistance to its technology. As more farmers in more countries grow GM crops, the industry thinking goes, the less opposition there will be in the future to their products—something the annual ISAAA report seems to demonstrate. Ask any spokesman in the biotech industry about negative notions of biotech, and he'll say: Look at all the countries adopting our technology. Look at all the farmers benefiting from GM seed. How bad can it be?

For journalists who cover this story, however, getting a reliable answer to that question is anything but simple.

WHEN THE FIRST GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS WERE commercialized in 1996, opponents, advocacy groups, and some in the media immediately seized on the term “Frankenfood” to characterize the new crops. The foundational science is owned by three companies—DuPont, Syngenta, and Monsanto—and association with a scary monster was clearly not their idea of good PR. But, much to the companies' irritation, the name has persisted in the public consciousness ever since. In fact, thirteen years later, the debate over GM crops is even more entrenched than ever, and the press has been largely unable to tease apart the competing claims and bring some measure of clarity to the issue.

The initial skepticism about the technology focused on food safety, with GM critics questioning the long-term consequences of eating GM food. They continue to say there is no evidence that GM food is safe, and some believe there is

enough evidence—such as studies that connect GM foods to allergic reactions—to support more rigorous regulation and safety testing. The industry counters that there is no evidence demonstrating the food is *unsafe*, and says testing the long-term safety of GM crops, which are functionally the same as a non-GM crops, is virtually impossible. Indeed, even the anti-GM camp admits that there is no solid evidence linking GM food to human illness.

Critics in the United States repeatedly point out that food safety testing is not required by regulators and accuse the Food and Drug Administration of being too lenient. Though the administration says all companies marketing GM food submit to a voluntary review, what that means is that companies conduct their own safety reviews and provide the results to

In an increasingly crowded, hot, and dry world, will genetically modified crops be part of the answer to our food problem?

the FDA. “The FDA posts the [company’s] review on its Web site. Typically just two or three pages, basically just abbreviating what the company said in its submission about the safety of the crop,” said Doug Gurian-Sherman, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, a group critical of biotech regulations. “Then the FDA sends them a letter saying it’s their responsibility to maintain the safety of the product. All they put up is the review, not the data. As somebody who’s done risk assessments, that’s practically useless.”

In other words, the only information that’s made public is the industry’s own conclusions about its products’ safety, not the data supporting those conclusions. The industry says the science behind its products is proprietary.

Another controversy around GM crops stems from concern over environmental contamination and possible “gene flow”—the transference of genetically modified material between plants, which could diminish biodiversity and destabilize ecosystems. Once this happens, some critics say, it would be impossible to track or stop. But the biotech industry says, again, that there is little evidence that gene flow has led to adverse contamination or to a reduction in biodiversity. They point instead to the environmental benefits of GM crops—less soil tillage and fewer pesticides.

Finally, critics wonder if the promise of higher yield through biotech crops—the promise the industry makes when it says it can help feed the world’s hungry—is attainable. So far, the studies on improved yield are mixed, and because the companies won’t allow independent research on their seeds, it is impossible to test their performance.

IN AN ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THESE QUESTIONS, FOUR HUNDRED scientists and researchers from around the world banded together to form the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, or IAASTD. In 2004, the group launched a sweeping project, involving the World Bank, the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, private-sector companies, academics, and governments, to, among other things, evaluate the role biotechnology could play in alleviating hunger and poverty. After four years, fifty-eight countries (the U.S. not among them) signed on to an executive summary that issued a blow to the biotech industry:

Biotechnology has always been on the cutting edge of change. Change is rapid, the domains involved are numerous, and there is a significant lack of transparent communication among actors. Hence assessment of modern biotechnology is lagging behind development; information can be anecdotal and contradictory, and uncertainty on benefits and harms is unavoidable. There is a wide range of perspectives on the environmental, human health and economic risks and benefits of modern biotechnology; many of these risks are as yet unknown.

But the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), representing the industry’s position, published a response that said quite the opposite:

The science is very clear. However, a massive international anti-GMO campaign by many NGO’s has planted the seeds of doubt in the public. There is no evidence to support these “perceived risks” and therefore they have no place in the “evidence-based” IAASTD report.

Amid the conflicting claims and contradictory studies, the biotech industry has consistently relied on one, easily digestible message: Look at all the farmers who use our seeds. Look at all the countries using our technology. This message has, in effect, become a stand-in for the more complicated arguments for GM technology. For example, even before *Food, Inc.*, a documentary highly critical of biotech giant Monsanto, hit theaters last summer, Monsanto posted on its Web site a refutation of several of the film’s claims. The post included this bit of boilerplate: “The sheer numbers of countries, not to mention farmers, who have embraced agricultural biotechnology, suggest that it’s not undue influence but instead useful technology and sound science that have been the deciding factors.”

A reporter working on a story about the controversies might then reasonably ask these questions: How many countries grow biotech crops, which crops, and on how many acres? Getting that information in the biotech-friendly U.S. is easy. The Department of Agriculture keeps data—self-reported by farmers—on what GM crops with which traits are grown and (roughly) where. But to get a global snapshot there is only one place to go: the pro-biotech, industry-funded ISAAA. (A Canadian company called AGBIOS has a searchable database that allows you to insert a country’s name and see which crops and traits have been approved there. But the list is limited to

data that individual countries voluntarily make available, and it does not indicate which crops have been commercialized.)

This doesn't necessarily make the ISAAA data wrong, but any journalist listening to Clive James, the author of the ISAAA report, should feel a little queasy about relying on it as an ironclad source. In a video that accompanied the release of the 2008 report, James said:

I believe that the question that we've asked of biotechnology and the question that society has asked... over the last twelve years is whether in fact there is a risk associated with this. Is there a risk in terms of food safety? Is there a risk in terms of the environment? Now we have the opportunity to look at a very rich database that has been generated over a twelve-year period, and what that database tells you is that this technology is as safe as conventional technology, or sometimes safer. So therefore the question that we must ask now: What is the risk in not using this technology? And it is clear from the evidence that has been generated that, if in fact you do not use this technology you will not be able to provide for a secure world tomorrow in terms of food.

Putting aside James's vaguely threatening tone, critics argue that the report has methodological flaws and isn't peer reviewed. "The ISAAA data are not reproducible, and they don't cite their sources," says Greg Jaffe, the biotechnology director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, referring to some of the adoption data. "Is the acreage correct? Is the number of farmers correct?"

The data source in the report is often listed simply as "Clive James," leading some readers to question how he gathered the material. "It's hard to believe that in Africa, with roads the way they are, with communications barriers, transportation barriers, that it would be easy to get those numbers," Jaffe adds.

Melinda Smale, a senior researcher at the aid group Oxfam and formerly of the International Food Policy Research Institute, has studied whether biotech crops benefit small farmers. "If you want to do objective research, you need a census, a reliable list, to do your sampling," Smale says. "If the only source of that list is Monsanto, people can question that data."

Ask the industry where to go for information on the global adoption of biotech and it will point you to ISAAA. Ask the industry where to go for the benefits that biotech crops have delivered to farmers and it will point you to Graham Brookes and Peter Barfoot's studies done for PG Economics, a U.K.-based enterprise, or to studies by the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy, both funded by Monsanto.

One of the key benefits of GM crops, according to the industry and its supporters, is higher yields through plants engineered to tolerate herbicides or resist pests. The industry is now working on crops that can better tolerate heat and drought—key attributes in a hotter, drier world. But recently, a couple of studies have cast doubt on the actual and potential ability of some GM crops to increase yield. One study, by Barney Gordon, a professor of agronomy at Kansas State University, caught the eye of Geoffrey Lean, the environmental editor at *The Independent* in London. Lean's story, which ran under the headline EXPOSED: THE GREAT GM CROPS MYTH,

began: "Genetic modification actually cuts the productivity of crops, an authoritative new study shows." Professor Gordon called the story a "gross misrepresentation" of his research, which looked specifically at soybeans' response to manganese in very high-yielding conditions.

Another study, called "Failure to Yield," released by the Union of Concerned Scientists in April 2009, concluded that yields of herbicide-tolerant GM corn and soybeans in the U.S. had not gone up in the thirteen years those crops have been grown commercially. (This study was based on Department of Agriculture data and looked only at yield in U.S. crops.)

Monsanto posted a refutation of both Lean's story and the Union of Concerned Scientists' study on its Web site. The refutation contained a link to a response by Gordon, which sent readers to a page on the Web site of the International Plant Nutrition Institute—which is associated with the Nutrients for Life Foundation, which is supported by Monsanto.

"If you don't trust the industry, and you don't want to use the Brookes and Barfoot study because it was commissioned by the industry, you could look at their sources or look at what emerged from independent academics," said Robert Paarlberg, author of *Starved for Science: How Biotechnology is Being Kept Out of Africa*. "But you'd almost have to go country by country."

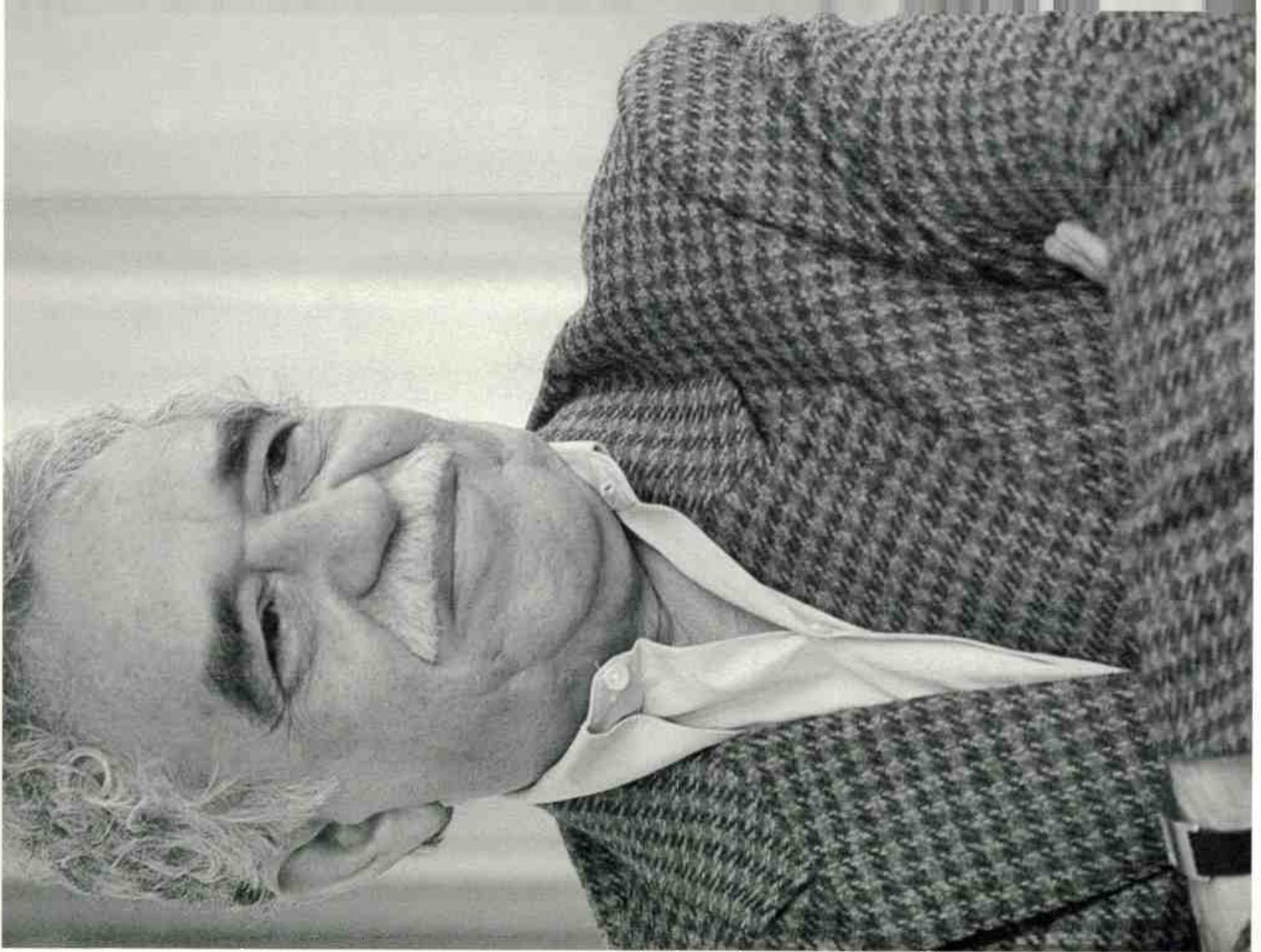
The problem is that the industry sources tend to be industry-funded, while the independent science on these matters is limited and focuses mostly on cotton, not on food crops. To get a full picture of global adoption, a reporter would have to go—as Paarlberg says—"country by country." Such an undertaking would be nearly impossible.

EARLY LAST YEAR, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED Nations, Ban Ki-moon, visited St. Louis. He gave a speech at a local university, which was billed as discussion on food but meandered into the various places where food intersects with energy, climate, and the economy. St. Louis might seem like an odd locale for such a talk, but it happens to be Monsanto's hometown. On his daylong visit to Missouri, the company's suburban headquarters was Ban's first stop.

The United Nations and its Food and Agriculture Organization have no formal position on biotech crops, nor do they keep data on global adoption. But after the global food crisis of 2008 sparked riots around the world, Ban became especially interested in biotech's potential. Last fall he convened a retreat on Long Island, inviting representatives from the biotech industry, government, and academia to discuss the role biotech crops might play in feeding the world's growing population—and what role, if any, the U.N. could have. One of the projects the group explored was the creation of a global "information hub" that would list the policies and guidelines that individual countries have implemented. But it wouldn't include anything on global adoption. For that, "there's no one go-to place," Eva Busza, a principal officer in Ban's strategic planning unit, said at the time.

Just the ISAAA. **CJR**

GEORGINA GUSTIN writes about food for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



Ideas + Reviews

SECOND READ

The Hack

The journalistic education of Gabriel García Márquez

BY MILES CORWIN

In 1955, eight crew members of a Colombian naval destroyer in the Caribbean were swept overboard by a giant wave. Luis Alejandro Velasco, a sailor who spent ten days on a life raft without food or water, was the only survivor. The editor of the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* assigned the story to a twenty-seven-year-old reporter who had been dabbling in fiction and had a reputation as a gifted feature writer: Gabriel García Márquez.

The young journalist quickly uncovered a military scandal. As his fourteen-part series revealed, the sailors owed their deaths not to a storm, as Colombia's military dictatorship had claimed, but to naval negligence. The decks of the *Caldas* had been stacked high with television sets, washing machines, and refrigerators purchased in the U.S. These appliances, which were being ferried to Colombia against military regulations, had caused the ship to list dangerously. And because the *Caldas* was so overloaded, it was unable to maneuver and rescue the sailors.

In addition, the life rafts on board were too small and carried no supplies, and the Navy called off the search for survivors after only four days.

By the time the series ended, *El Espectador's* circulation had almost doubled. The public always likes an exposé, but what made the stories so popular was not simply the explosive revelations of military incompetence. García Márquez had managed to transform Velasco's account into a narrative so dramatic and compelling that readers lined up in front of the newspaper's offices, waiting to buy copies.

After the series ran, the government denied that the destroyer had been loaded with contraband merchandise. García Márquez turned up the investigative heat: he tracked down crewmen who owned cameras and purchased their photographs from the voyage, in which the illicit cargo, with factory labels, could be easily seen.

The series marked a turning point in García Márquez's life and writing career. The government was so incensed that the newspaper's editors, who feared for the young reporter's safety, sent him to Paris as its foreign correspondent. A few months later the government shut *El Espectador* down. The disappearance of his meal ticket forced García Márquez into the role of an itinerant journalist who sold freelance stories to pay the bills—and, crucially, continued to write fiction.

The relatively spare prose of the Velasco series bears little resemblance to the poetic, multilayered, sometimes hallucinatory language that would mark García Márquez's maturity as a novelist. Still, the articles—which were published in book form as *The Story of A Shipwrecked Sailor* in 1970, and translated into English sixteen years later—represent a milestone in his literary evolution. “This is where his gifted storytelling emerges,” says Raymond Williams, a professor of Latin

American literature at the University of California, Riverside, who has written two books about the author. Prior to the series, he suggests, García Márquez had been writing somewhat amateurish short stories. Now, says Williams, he was rising to the challenge of constructing a lengthy narrative: “The ability he has to maintain a level of suspense throughout is something that later became a powerful element of his novels.”

IN FACT, IT WAS THE REPORTER’S CAPACITY to anatomize human behavior—rather than simply pass along the facts—that first drew García Márquez to the newsroom. He was a young law student with little interest in journalism when an acquaintance named Elvira Mendoza, who edited the women’s section of a Bogotá newspaper, was assigned to interview the Argentinean actress Berta Singerman. The diva was so arrogant and supercilious that she refused to answer any questions. Finally, her husband intervened and salvaged the interview.

For García Márquez, this was a revelation about the possibilities of journalism. As he wrote in his autobiography, *Living to Tell the Tale*, which appeared in English in 2003:

Elvira did not write the dialogue she had foreseen, based on the diva’s responses, but instead wrote an article about her difficulties with Berta Singerman. She took advantage of the providential intervention of the husband and turned him into the real protagonist of the meeting.... The sangfroid and ingenuity with which Elvira...used Singerman’s foolishness to reveal her true personality set me to thinking for the first time about the possibilities of journalism, not as a primary source of information but as much more: a literary genre. Before many years passed I would prove this in my own flesh, until I came to believe, as I believe today more than ever, that the novel and journalism are children of the same mother.... Elvira’s article made me aware of the reporter I carried sleeping in my heart and I resolved to wake him. I began to read newspapers in a different way.

García Márquez ended up leaving law school and working for a series of Colombian newspapers. He spent most of his early career writing movie reviews, hu-

García Márquez specialized in the *refrito* (refried), a detailed reconstruction of a dramatic news event, published weeks or months later with élan and great narrative skill.

man-interest stories, and a daily, unsigned column he shared with other reporters that resembled *The New Yorker’s* “Talk of the Town”—a common feature of South American newspapers. Yet he aspired to cover more substantive issues, including politics and government corruption, and to pursue investigative projects.

When he was first hired at *El Espectador*, García Márquez hoped to impress an editor by the name of Jose Salgar. “It seems to me that Salgar had his eye on me to be a reporter,” he later recounted in his autobiography, “while the others had relegated me to films, editorials, and cultural matters because I had always been designated a short-story writer. But my dream was to be a reporter... and I knew that Salgar was the best teacher.” The editor taught him to how to communicate his ideas clearly and pare down his florid prose. Every time Salgar read one of García Márquez’s stories, he made “the strenuous gesture of forcing a cork out of a bottle and said, ‘Wring the neck of the swan.’”

Soon, García Márquez was assigned the kinds of projects he had dreamed of pursuing. He wrote numerous in-depth stories, including pieces about the corruption surrounding the construction of a port on the Caribbean coast, the neglect of war veterans by the government, and landslides that killed dozens of people in a slum neighborhood. He specialized in what Latin American newspapers called the *refrito* (“refried”): a detailed reconstruction of a dramatic news event, published weeks or months later with élan and great narrative skill. And then something new landed on his desk: the Velasco series.

AFTER LUIS ALEJANDRO VELASCO washed ashore, he was lionized by the press, decorated by the Colombian president, and became a national hero. García

Márquez thought it was absurd the way the government held up Velasco as an example of patriotic morality. What’s more, he believed the sailor had sold out in a most unseemly manner—advertising the brand of watch he wore at sea (because it had not stopped) and the shoes on his feet (because they were too sturdy for him to tear apart and eat during his ordeal).

A month after his rescue, Velasco walked into *El Espectador’s* newsroom and offered the exclusive rights to his story. He had already told his tale to innumerable reporters as well as government officials, and the staff doubted he had anything new to add to the record. “We sent him away,” García Márquez recalls in his autobiography. “But on a hunch, [Salgar] caught up with him on the stairway, accepted the deal, and placed him in my hands. It was as if he had given me a time bomb.”

At first, though, García Márquez declined the assignment. He believed the story was not only a “dead fish,” as he later wrote, but “a rotten one”—which is to say, both dated and dubious. Salgar persisted. “I informed him,” García Márquez recounts, “that I would write the article out of obedience as his employee but would not put my name to it. Without having thought about it first, this was a fortuitous but on-target determination regarding the story, for it obliged me to tell it in the first-person voice of the protagonist.”

García Márquez proved the newspaper adage that there can’t be great writing without great reporting. Over the course of twenty consecutive days, he interviewed Velasco for six hours each day. To make sure his subject was telling the truth, he frequently interjected trick questions, hoping to expose any contradictions in Velasco’s tale. “I sincerely believe that interviewing is a kind of fictional genre and that it must be re-

garded in this light,” García Márquez wrote after his interviews with the sailor. He added:

The majority of journalists let the tape recorder do the work, and they think that they are respecting the wishes of the person they are interviewing by retranscribing word for word what he says. They do not realize that this work method is really quite disrespectful: whenever someone speaks, he hesitates, goes off on tangents, does not finish his sentences, and he makes trifling remarks. For me the tape recorder must only be used to record material that the journalist will decide to use later on, that he will interpret and will choose to present in his own way. In this sense it is possible to interview someone in the same way that you write a novel or poetry.

After 120 hours, García Márquez had a detailed, comprehensive account of Velasco’s ordeal. The challenge was how to involve the reader in a saga that featured a single character who was alone for ten days, floating aimlessly in a small raft.

THE ANSWER WAS A STEADY HEIGHTENING of dramatic tension. In the first few pages of the book, he notes that before the destroyer shipped out of Mobile, Alabama, Velasco and some of his shipmates watched *The Caine Mutiny*, foreshadowing the disaster to come. The best part of the movie, Velasco tells García Márquez, was the storm. And the sheer realism of the sequence inevitably made some of the crew uneasy: “I don’t mean to say that from that moment I began to anticipate the catastrophe,” Velasco says, “but I had never been so apprehensive before a voyage.”

Not overly subtle, perhaps, but certainly effective. García Márquez concludes each section with a Dickensian cliffhanger. He ends chapter two, for example, with a dramatic description that compels the reader onward:

I started to raise my arm to look at my watch, but at that moment I couldn’t see my arm, or my watch either. I didn’t see the wave.... I swam upward for one, two, three seconds. I tried to reach the surface. I needed air. I was suffocating.... A second later, about a hundred meters away, the ship surged up between the waves, gushing water

from all sides like a submarine. It was only then that I realized I had fallen overboard.

The next chapter begins with Velasco alone in the middle of the ocean. While García Márquez keeps his language relatively spare—he was writing for a newspaper, after all—there are frequent glimmers of the great descriptive powers that would later animate his novels. “Soon the sky turned red, and I continued to search the horizon,” recalls Velasco (or at least Velasco being channeled by the young reporter). “Then it turned a deep violet as I kept watching. To one side of the life raft, like a yellow diamond in a wine-colored sky, the first star appeared, immobile and perfect.”

THROUGHOUT THE SAILOR’S ORDEAL, García Márquez touches on themes that would consistently interest him for the rest of his career. In his early short stories, he had already explored the interior life of his characters, probing their dreams and sometimes surreal reveries. Yet these explorations felt anomalous—youthful stabs at insight without any real connection to the plot. In the Velasco series, he felt free to reconstruct his subject’s interior monologues, and for the first time, they were actually integral to the narrative. And when the sailor sees mirages, or converses with imaginary companions, or struggles with the distortions of time, these passages presage the author’s mature fiction.

Here, as he did later on, García Márquez also affirms his belief that narrative plays a significant role in people’s lives. When Velasco finally washes ashore, after ten days in the open sea, a man wearing a straw hat comes upon him, with a donkey and an emaciated dog in tow. García Márquez relates the exchange between the two:

“Help me,” I repeated desperately, worried that the man hadn’t understood me.

“What happened to you?” he asked in a friendly tone of voice.

When I heard him speak I realized that, more than thirst, hunger, and despair, what tormented me most was

the need to tell someone what had happened to me.

Countless literary critics have written about how Ernest Hemingway’s prose emerged from his journalism. Scholars have looked for a similar stylistic genealogy in the case of García Márquez. There are, of course, major differences between the two: García Márquez’s language is more complex and poetic. Yet even his inimitable passages of magic realism are influenced by his years as a reporter, says Robert Sims, a professor of Spanish literature at Virginia Commonwealth University and the author of *The First García Márquez: A Study of His Journalistic Writing from 1948 to 1955*. The most surrealistic events are believable, Sims argues, because they are recounted in an objective, journalistic tone. And García Márquez first mastered this tone—in which magic always pays heed to realism—when he described Ve-

He never forgot the obligation to hook readers with the first sentence.

lasco’s ordeal. “It’s never melodramatic,” Sims says. “He never lets Velasco get overwrought or maudlin or sink into total despair. García Márquez always cuts it off before it reaches that point. The tone is even and neutral, just like in *A Hundred Years of Solitude*.”

Nor did he ever forget the reporter’s obligation to hook readers with the very first sentence. Some of García Márquez’s early newspaper leads read like fiction, and point directly to his later work. For example, he wrote a series for *El Espectador* about a swampy, disease-ridden area of Colombia near the coast, and opened with a lead guaranteed to intrigue any reader: “Several years ago a ghostly, glassy-looking man, with a big stomach as taut as a drum, came to a doctor’s office in the city. He said, ‘Doctor, I have come to have you remove a monkey that was put in my belly.’”

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The reverse is true as well. In his novels and short stories, he often opens with indelible lines about death, many of which read like dramatic newspaper leads. Here he cuts to the chase and ensnares the reader with an elegant composure:

Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. (*A Hundred Years of Solitude*)

On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at five-thirty in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on. (*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*)

Since it's Sunday and it's stopped raining, I think I'll take a bouquet of roses to my grave. (*Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses*)

When Jose Montiel died, everyone felt avenged except his widow; but it took several hours for everyone to believe that he had indeed died. (*Montiel's Widow*)

Senator Onesimo Sanchez had six months and eleven days to go before his death when he found the woman of his life. (*Death Constant Beyond Love*)

Hemingway and García Márquez also differed on how lasting ones' journalistic apprenticeship should be. The former admitted that journalism was good training for a young novelist, but contended that it was important to get out in time, because newspapers could ruin a writer. García Márquez felt otherwise. "That supposedly bad influence that journalism has on literature isn't so certain," he has said. "First of all, because I don't think anything destroys the writer, not even hunger. Secondly, because journalism helps you stay in touch with reality, which is essential for working in literature."

García Márquez put this belief into practice: even after he attained great success as a novelist, he never abandoned journalism. He used the money

from his 1982 Nobel Prize to purchase *Cambio*, a failing weekly newsmagazine in Colombia. He established the Foundation for New Ibero-American Journalism, where veteran reporters give workshops for young Latin American journalists. And during the past few decades, while writing novels, he has kept reality at close quarters, publishing numerous essays, opinion pieces, articles, and a masterful book of reconstructive journalism, *News of a Kidnapping*. In the latter, he chronicled the abduction of ten prominent Colombians by Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellín drug cartel, and his painstaking account of their eight-month ordeal might strike some readers as a protracted ensemble version of *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*.

In any case, his breakthrough series went on to be one of his most popular books, selling about 10 million copies, the majority of them in the original Spanish. To his readers, this apprentice work, with its early and exquisite balance of magic and realism, fit very comfortably into the author's canon. The fact that it was told in the first person may have actually made it feel more literary rather than less—a feat of modernist ventriloquism.

As for García Márquez himself, he had mixed feelings about the transformation of his newspaper series into a bona fide work of art—or at least a hardcover book. And in a new introduction he wrote, he seemed to betray some nostalgia for the days when he was simply a semi-anonymous reporter rather than an international brand name. "I have not reread this story in fifteen years," he wrote. "It seems worthy of publication, but I have never quite understood the usefulness of publishing it. I find it depressing that the publishers are not so much interested in the merit of the story as in the name of the author, which, much to my sorrow, is also that of a fashionable writer. If it is now published in the form of a book, that is because I agreed without thinking about it very much, and I am not a man to go back on his word." **CJR**

MILES CORWIN, a former reporter for the Los Angeles Times, teaches literary journalism at the University of California, Irvine. His novel, *Kind of Blue*, will be released in November.

A Distant Echo

What Father Coughlin tells us about Glenn Beck

BY DOUGLAS MCCOLLAM

THROUGHOUT THE INITIAL YEAR OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S TERM, THERE HAS BEEN much consternation over the administration's "war" with the conservative press. With commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Laura Ingraham taking to the airwaves to label the president everything from a stealth socialist to a crypto-fascist, there is a feeling that an unprecedented, and possibly even dangerous, level of vitriol has entered our political discourse. Yet these right-wing stalwarts seem meek compared to Glenn Beck. The Fox News host, who famously accused the president of being a racist, has won millions of viewers with a mix of conspiracy theories, doomsday scenarios, and chalkboard diagrams of how radical subversives are boring their way into the supporting timbers of American government.

Beck's influence has not been confined to the studio. To the tens of thousands of "Tea Party" protesters who descended on Washington last September, Beck was a hero—as well as a potential presidential candidate. At a November rally in Florida, he announced plans to use his "9/12" foundation to foster political activism. Beck's ratings and his folk-hero status have led some to anoint him, along with former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, as the true leaders of the conservative movement and a possible dream ticket for 2012.

Whether Beck will succeed in translating his television fame into genuine political clout remains an open question. The long plastic hallway of modern media is littered with examples of commentators who mistook high ratings for electoral prospects. Then again, these are hardly normal times. As the president is fond of reminding us, America is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And in that era, Franklin D. Roosevelt observed that, under normal circumstances, many of his more outlandish detractors would not have gained traction with the public. "However, these are not normal times," said Roosevelt. "People are jumpy and very ready to run after strange gods."

One strange god in particular bedeviled Roosevelt—a media figure who, despite wide condemnation in official precincts, balky network sponsors, and White House opposition, managed to not only build a national following but to found a viable political movement. His name was Charles E. Coughlin, and maybe his story has some lessons for today.

Father Coughlin, as he was known to his adoring listeners, was without question the most powerful broadcasting force America has ever known. Working from his home parish at the Shrine of the Little Flower in suburban Detroit, the "Radio Priest" built an audience estimated as high as forty million listeners for his Sunday broadcasts—at a time when America's population was less than half of what it is

today. At the apex of his popularity, he received around 10,000 letters a day and employed a staff of more than a hundred clerks and four private secretaries just to answer his mail. His church eventually had to establish its own post office branch to cope with the deluge, along with its own motel and gas station to service the thousands of tourists who visited the shrine every Sunday.

And like his latter-day successors, Coughlin's influence extended far beyond the confines of the studio. The first edition of his radio speeches, published in 1933 during the depths of the Depression, sold nearly a million copies. One Hollywood studio offered him \$500,000 to appear as himself in the film *The Fighting Priest* (he turned it down). Out on the stump he regularly drew crowds of twenty or thirty thousand, packing venues like Chicago's Soldier Field and New York's Madison Square Garden.

His support was sought by congressmen, senators, and governors. Celebrities like Bing Crosby and General Douglas MacArthur made pilgrimages to meet Coughlin, as did foreign dignitaries visiting the United States. When Roosevelt decided to make his bid for the White House in 1932, one of his first moves was to seek (and receive) Coughlin's blessing. Little wonder. A poll conducted in 1931 found Americans already considered Coughlin the most important public figure in the country after the president.

Remarkably, Coughlin had arrived in America a complete unknown less than a decade earlier. Raised in a religious family just across the Canadian border in Hamilton, Ontario, he was ordained in 1916 at the age of twenty-five. Coughlin was associated with the Basilian Order, which was sharply critical of the excesses of modern capitalism, particularly the sin of usury. The Basilian distaste for high finance stuck with him even after he left the order to become a parish priest in 1923.

Three years later, Coughlin took over a small congregation in the Royal Oak suburb of Detroit, and promptly built a new church. Deeply in debt to the diocese, he tried a variety of ways to raise money for his congregation. Nearing the end of his financial tether, he agreed to broadcast his sermons on WJR, a local station that was in equally dire straits.

Reading Coughlin's sermons at a remove of eighty years, it's difficult to see what all the fuss was about. His prose is stilted, repetitious, a bit leaden. But from the beginning Coughlin connected to listeners in an electric way. Part of his appeal, of course, was pure novelty. He was among the first to offer regular religious services over the air, and despite criticism from some within the church, he built the first true radio congregation.

Coughlin was also a master at identifying with the concerns and anxieties of his audience. He was emotional, dramatic, and evocative: the mother of a kidnapped child was having her heart crushed "in a great press, making her bleed the wine of sorrow." The "purple poison of Bolshevism" was like "a great red serpent" winding its sinews around the American soul. And those who closed their eyes to these mounting dangers dwelled in "the smiling acres of Lotus Land where it is always afternoon, always spring-time...dulled by the opiate of their own contentedness to such a degree that they possess no prospect of what the future years hold in store for our nation."

But most of all, there was the voice. The novelist Wallace Stegner described it as a "voice of such mellow richness, such manly, heart-warming confidential intimacy, such emotional and ingratiating charm, that anyone tuning past it almost automatically returned to hear it again." It was, Stegner wrote, "a voice made for promises."

Though history now remembers Coughlin as among Roosevelt's fiercest political foes, they began as close, if uneasy, allies. Having assailed Herbert Hoover and his gang of "international financiers" during the onset of the Great Depression, the priest looked more kindly upon Hoover's successor. Throughout 1932 and 1933, he lavished fulsome praise upon FDR in his broadcasts and encouraged his listeners to do the same. It was "Roosevelt or ruin," Coughlin declared on more than one occasion.

Yet Roosevelt remained wary of Coughlin. As he did with Huey Long, another potential threat to his presidency, Roosevelt maintained an outward cordiality with the priest, meeting with him occasionally and directing his staff to reply to the voluminous tips, suggestions, and notes Coughlin communicated to

the White House. But Roosevelt's private papers make clear that he saw the Detroit broadcaster as a demagogue, whom he genuinely disliked.

There was never a single decisive moment that shifted their relationship, but in the year following FDR's election it became increasingly clear that Coughlin, despite his ratings clout, was not going to be invited into the president's inner circle. By 1934 the frustrated priest's ardor for the New Deal cooled, and anti-Roosevelt jibes began to creep into his broadcasts, as did an even more apocalyptic tone.

"Capitalism is doomed and is not worth trying to save," he exhorted the flock in February 1934, calling it a "Siamese twin" of Marxist socialism. In November of that year, Coughlin announced he was forming a new group called the National Union for Social Justice. This independent organiza-

Coughlin used radio to divide and atomize society. Sound familiar?

tion would be based upon "16 Principles" identified by its founder—including abolition of the Federal Reserve, simplification of government, and liberty of conscience. The aim of the group, said Coughlin, was to "drive out of public life" those who had betrayed these principles and broken their promises to the people. He boasted that the union would soon recruit five million members.

Coughlin's first opportunity to flex his new political muscle came just a few months later. In January 1935, Roosevelt sent a long-delayed treaty to the heavily Democratic Senate, which would make the United States a participant in the World Court. The administration was confident of gaining ratification. Less than forty-eight hours before the vote, however, Coughlin took to the air to denounce the treaty as an affront to American sovereignty. In a voice filled with manly indignation, he urged his listeners to "keep America safe for Americans

and not the hunting grounds for international plutocrats!"

Within hours of Coughlin's broadcast, tens of thousands of telegrams flooded the Senate, and the treaty was rejected by a wide margin. "I regard this a decisive defeat of the administration," Harold Ickes, Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, recorded in his diary of the vote. One Democratic party official warned that Coughlin had become "a bigger menace to the President and our government than ever." The Fighting Priest, of course, was jubilant.

But through the rest of 1935, Coughlin had trouble replicating his success on the World Court vote. His audience had never been larger, and his radio network had grown to twenty-eight stations covering every major city in the Midwest and Northeast (as a Catholic, Coughlin's influence was always limited in the heavily Protestant South). He maintained his own full-time lobbyist in D.C. Nevertheless, Coughlin's assaults on the Federal Reserve, the gold standard, and his support for a bonus bill for war veterans were all stymied through deft political maneuvering by Roosevelt and his allies on Capitol Hill.

Though Coughlin would repeatedly deny it, it seems clear that he had harbored some idea of the National Union as a potential third party in American politics from its inception. In typical apocalyptic fashion, he had been forecasting the demise of the two-party system for some time, telling *Collier's Magazine* he thought both parties would disappear within a decade.

Seeking to fill this impending political vacuum, Coughlin embarked on a speaking tour that he hoped would recruit millions of new members for the National Union. Those who attended his thunderous rallies came away impressed by the passionate devotion of the crowd. And at first, Coughlin had some modest success. In 1936, candidates endorsed by the National Union won congressional primaries in several large states, including Michigan, Ohio, and New York.

Coughlin never believed that a third-party candidate could directly challenge Roosevelt. Yet he was convinced that the millions of voters organized under the National Union banner could weaken FDR and potentially put a Republican

in the White House. As the 1936 election approached, Coughlin joined forces with the remnants of Long's organization (the Louisiana senator had been murdered in the summer of 1935) and other third-party splinter groups to form the Union Party, which chose North Dakota Congressman William Lemke as its presidential candidate.

At the party's convention in August, Coughlin stripped away whatever had been left of his relationship with Roosevelt, literally peeling off his vestments during a stem-winding speech that labeled FDR as the "great betrayer" and a "liar." On the stump, Coughlin was even more graphic, telling supporters that "when an upstart dictator in the United States succeeds in making this a one-party form of government, when the ballot is useless, I shall have the courage to stand up and advocate the use of bullets." The priest swore that if he could not deliver nine million votes for Lemke, he would retire from the radio.

He couldn't. In fact, Lemke garnered less than a million votes, and not a single one of the Union Party's congressional candidates won election. True to his word, Coughlin did briefly "retire" from the radio—only to allow his faithful flock to woo him back on the air early the next year.

For a while, he seemed disconsolate, saying that Roosevelt's landslide win made him a de facto dictator and that conventional political resistance was useless. But although his influence was diminished, Coughlin was far from a spent force. When Roosevelt, in the midst of another economic slippage during his second term, attempted to reorganize the government bureaucracy, the priest regained his old form, blasting the legislation as a "dictator bill" and urging his listeners to telegram Congress.

The response was so overwhelming the wire services had to shut down all other traffic to handle the volume. The reform bill flopped. And though others opposed the legislation, FDR acknowledged that "the gentleman from near Detroit" was primarily responsible for its demise. "Demagoguery and stupidity," the president wrote to an aide after the vote, "are the natural enemies of democracy."

The final act of Coughlin's conflict with Roosevelt hinged on America's

looming involvement in World War II. From the beginning, his repeated lambasting of "international bankers," "money lenders in the temple," and his harping on the supposed prominence of Jews in communist intrigues had generated charges of anti-Semitism. With his alienation from the New Deal and the threat of war in Europe, Coughlin's rants took on a darker tone. His weekly newspaper, *Social Justice*, serialized *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a paranoid fantasia about Jewish intrigues long since debunked by scholars. His speeches began to draw comparisons to Adolf Hitler's—and in one instance, his newspaper appeared to reprint remarks made in Berlin by Joseph Goebbels without identifying their origin. Coughlin indignantly denied the charges of anti-Semitism, even as critics began to refer to his church as the "Shrine of the Little Führer."

Coughlin's reputation was further damaged when he announced a successor to the National Union called the Christian Front. The group quickly developed a reputation for thuggery, brawling on the streets, and roughing up people they suspected of being Jewish. They also picketed those radio stations that were beginning to shun Coughlin's broadcasts.

In January 1940, eighteen members of the Christian Front were arrested for conspiracy to assassinate members of Congress. Police found weapons and bomb-making materials. Coughlin distanced himself from the group, but his exile to the political fringe was accelerating. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war, Coughlin's harping on international conspiracies ran afoul of both wartime sentiment and the Justice Department's tolerance for criticism of the government.

Threatened with prosecution under the Espionage Act, Coughlin and his superiors in the church agreed that he should retire from radio and close his newspaper. He returned to being a parish priest, serving quietly (for the most part) for the next quarter-century. He died in 1979, and was buried at the church in Royal Oak, whose construction had launched his career.

Viewed against the backdrop of Coughlin's clout during the Roosevelt years, the influence of today's cadre of conservative critics seem tame. The

priest was too hot to handle. Even as FDR privately fumed about Coughlin's invective and influence, he studiously avoided discussing him in public. Roosevelt never returned fire directly, and was careful not to make Coughlin a martyr or play to his already well-developed sense of persecution. This was not only principle but realpolitik in action: FDR legitimately feared alienating Coughlin's Catholic following, some of whom already harbored suspicions about the New Deal.

As for the ultimate root of Coughlin's appeal, perhaps no one summed it up better than the philosopher John Dewey. Writing in the 1920s at the dawn of electronic mass communication, Dewey foresaw that the new technology carried with it the power to divide and "atomize" society, with individual constituencies increasingly replacing the shared sense of community. As Coughlin's biographer Donald Warren observed, the broadcaster thrived by "projecting qualities of populist sincerity and trustworthiness while providing a forum for violence-provoking political expressions."

Reading or listening to Coughlin's speeches, it is clear that entire chunks of text could be transposed to the present day almost without alteration; his extended laments about "the uncrowned princes of Wall Street," for instance, and the influence of "banksters," whose interests the government protects while the great masses look for work; or his calls to abolish the Federal Reserve and his claims that radicals had infiltrated the government. Even his strident attacks on Roosevelt as a "liar," a "radical," a "Communist," and an "upstart dictator" are strikingly similar to the rhetorical assaults on Barack Obama.

In the end, though, the greatest lesson of Coughlin's career may actually be its limitations. His fiery broadcasts could generate huge ratings, fill cavernous stadiums, and flood Washington with protestors and irate telegrams. At times, he was able to stop major pieces of New Deal legislation in their tracks. But when it came to swaying elections, his influence was practically nil. Perhaps that fact is the Fighting Priest's most enduring legacy. **CJR**

DOUGLAS MCGOLIAM is a contributing editor to the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

BY JAMES BOYLAN

**Enemies of the People:
My Family's Journey to
America**

By Kati Marton
Simon & Schuster
272 pages, \$26

FOR KATI MARTON'S PARENTS, living well seemed the best defense—while it lasted. Both of Jewish descent, the Martons managed to survive Adolf Eichmann's brutal roundup of Hungarian Jews during the waning years of World War II. After the war, they protected themselves from the communist regime by flaunting their visibility, even to the point of driving an ostentatious white Studebaker convertible. Endre Marton became the Associated Press correspondent in Budapest; with a little help from her husband, Ilona Marton served in a similar capacity for United Press. They cultivated their ties with the American legation, availed themselves of the extra glamour and privilege these ties earned them, and persistently reported the news, good and bad. Not surprisingly, given this connection to the West, they and their two daughters (Kati was the younger) came under scrutiny by the AVO, the secret police. But only in 2007-2008, when the massive AVO files on her family were released to her, did Kati learn how intense this scrutiny had been, or how little she really knew about her parents' travails. They all had been watched relentlessly. A mole in the American legation filed regular reports, as did the girls' French nanny.



Endre was the chief target, as he continued to produce bold, even reckless stories for the AP. When he helped himself to a government budget document without authorization, the trap closed, and he went to prison, as did Ilona. The daughters were passed to a household of strangers. A few years before, there might have been a devastating end to the story. But Eastern Europe was going through its post-Stalin softening, and to bolster relations with the West both Martons were released. This allowed Endre to cover the memorable Hungarian revolution in the fall of 1956—the achievement for which he is remembered in the AP's official history, *Breaking News*. Which isn't to say that Endre's employer was always in his corner: when Kati, who grew up to be an eminent journalist herself, looked into the AP archives as part of her research, she was dismayed by the coldness with which the organization regarded her family's troubles. The general manager, Frank Starzel, was lukewarm, resisting the idea that the Martons

might come to the United States on the vague grounds that Endre might be “a problem.” In the end, the family got the State Department to sponsor its move to America. Endre was able to enter a new career as the AP's diplomatic correspondent, much respected

by colleagues. But even in Washington the surveillance did not end; it actually multiplied, since the Martons were tracked by both the AVO and then the FBI, which must have suspected that they were communist plants. Ultimately, both American and Hungarian files were closed for lack of substance. The elder Martons went on to lead long lives, having encountered and survived many of the perils of the mid-twentieth century. Their daughter, who has come to know them much better, has narrated their existence in nuanced and vivid terms. “How ironic,” she observes, “to owe to one of the most brutal twentieth-century institutions... a priceless window into my parents.”

**Hillary Clinton's Race for
the White House: Gender
Politics and the Media on
the Campaign Trail**

By Regina G. Lawrence and
Melody Rose
Lynne Reinner Publishers
277 pages, \$26.50

THE SCHOLARS WHO produced this analysis of the 2008 campaign are a picture of ambivalence: Rose, a

political scientist, is a fervent Clinton supporter, while Lawrence, a specialist in political communication, is considerably more skeptical about the current Secretary of State. Yet they emerge from their investigations in a state of complex agreement. And oddly enough, given their title, they don't pin Clinton's defeat on gender and the media. Instead they give greater weight to other circumstances: the peculiarities of Democratic Party primary rules, strategic failures by the Clinton campaign, the unexpected rise of an unexpectedly attractive rival candidate. To the extent that they credit the media at all, they pay less heed to sexism and more to the concentrated, almost crazed efforts by commentators and pundits to bring the primary campaign to an end by forcing Clinton's withdrawal. There were of course traces of sexism in the mainstream coverage, most notably by a few offenders on MSNBC. But the more important phenomenon Lawrence and Rose uncover is the extent to which the uncivil, even uncouth discourse on the Internet and blogosphere began to pollute the more decorous media, suggesting that in future campaigns, the ruffians may end up running the entire show. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.

Illustration by Serge Bloch

Friend and Faux

The sublime fakery of Armando Iannucci

BY RICHARD GEHR

“BLIMEY,” TWEETED ARMANDO IANNUCCI ON NOVEMBER 20. “CAMERON SAYS Thick is his favourite prog, and Health Sec quotes Malcolm in H of C. I feel queasy and uneasy.”

Allow me to unpack this tweet for you.

First, for the leader of the United Kingdom’s Conservative Party to declare Iannucci’s *The Thick of It* his favorite TV program is equivalent to Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell claiming he’d rather watch *The Daily Show* than anything on Fox News. It’s only slightly less surprising to read that Labour MP and Cabinet Health Secretary Andrew Burnham has characterized the Conservatives’ health policies in the House of Commons as an “omnishambles.” The term is a direct pinch from Malcolm Tucker, the foul-mouthed, serpentine political enforcer and virtual star of Iannucci’s weekly imbroglia.

Just who are these real-life politicians trying to impress with their TV taste? No wonder Britain’s preeminent political satirist feels squeamish.

Although Iannucci is best known over here for last year’s *In the Loop*—a feature-length-film spin-off of *The Thick of It*, with Peter Capaldi playing Malcolm Tucker to Mephistophelean perfection—he has spent nearly two decades mining the unholy alliance of politics and the media for humor. Born in 1963 to a Scottish mother and Neapolitan immigrant father, Iannucci survived a Jesuit education in Glasgow and later attended Oxford, where he studied English and began practicing the art of comedy. He likes to say he saw the beginning of the end of his academic career when he noticed that the opening line of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (“Of Man’s First Disobedience, and the Fruit of that Forbidden Tree”) echoed *The Flintstones* theme song.

Abandoning his graduate studies, Iannucci became a producer for BBC Radio. There he began what would be a long and hyphenated series of writer-director-producer endeavors, cranking out a mixture of sketch-comedy shows and news-influenced quiz and panel programs.

But his first radio success was *On the Hour*, which he developed with another great British comedy hyphenate, Chris Morris. The show didn’t make jokes about the news; it lampooned the newsmagazine medium itself. And Iannucci merely upped the ante when *On the Hour* leapt from radio to television in 1994.

Rechristened *The Day Today*, this was arguably the medium’s first authentic fake news show (take that, Jon Stewart). It starred Morris as a volatile newsreader who, at the end of one episode, can be seen in silhouette tying off and shooting up. *The Day Today* mercilessly parodied other TV channels, includ-

ing MTV, and featured segments such as “Enviromation” (“I’m Rosie May, and this is my planet”), “Speak Your Brains” (on-the-street interviews), and reports from the United States focusing exclusively on the execution of serial killers.

“I’m part of the generation that grew up on the media,” says Iannucci, whom I spoke with during his Los Angeles publicity trip for the *In the Loop* DVD. “There was never an attempt to say all media’s shallow and false. It’s more like, ‘I’m used to the media.’ I liked the idea of doing something where the style of the program was itself part of the joke; saying madder and madder things, and somehow being able to carry it off because you were saying it with utter conviction and exactly in the style of authority. I was just trying to think of a different way of telling jokes, basically.”

Steve Coogan played the incompetent and abrasive sports reporter Alan Partridge on *The Day Today*. Coogan and Iannucci spun off the character into a popular fake talk show, *Knowing Me, Knowing You With Alan Partridge* and an equally cringey sequel, *I’m Alan Partridge*, in which the protagonist is demoted to a rural late-night radio slot.

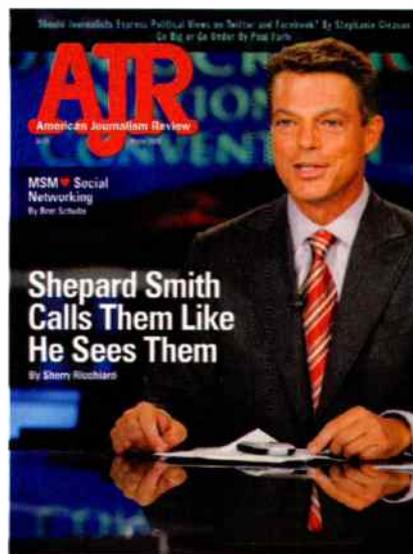
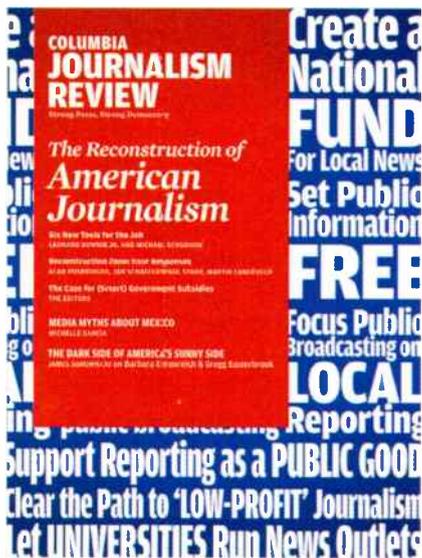
If it’s not already obvious, the prolific plundering of TV formats is one of Iannucci’s trademarks. His 1998 one-off, *Clinton: His Struggle With Dirt*, satirized the Lewinsky debacle by means of a fake documentary made at some point in the future, with actors playing older versions of the principals. Iannucci used a similar technique in his 2006 series *Time Trumpet*, stitching together sound bites into surreal, Burroughs-like travesties of themselves.

“I like the notion of taking all these shots of reality you’re presented with on television and doing a completely new edit to make them be something else,” he says. “It kind of reminds you that what you’ve been told is real on television isn’t necessarily real. And there’s nothing more unreal than reality television.”

Which brings us back to *The Thick of It*. The first two seasons of the show aired in 2005 and 2007. A third season aired last year after a bridge of two hour-long “Christmas Specials” (that, trust me, have nothing to do with the holidays).

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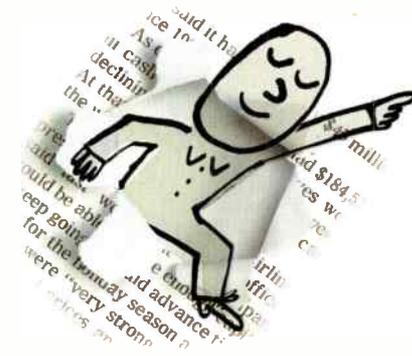
Beyond Transparency

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND JULIA SONNEVEND

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND words—but to whom? To the people who see it? Or to those who present it as their carefully orchestrated version of reality? More readily accessible visualization of data does not necessarily translate into greater understanding, nor is more information more wisdom.

Such observations are leading some thinkers to question the virtues of the increased availability and visuality of government information. In “Mapping City Crime and the New Aesthetic of Danger” (April 2009 *Journal of Visual Culture*), New York University media scholar Aurora Wallace draws attention to the ever-growing use of crime-mapping software applications. Local police departments, county agencies, state governments, and private crime-mapping firms that use police-department data have been providing crime maps of cities, enabling citizens to assess both the efficiency of their local police and the dangers their fellow citizens pose to them. Implied in the availability of the maps is the expectation that people should actively participate in the maintenance of their own personal safety. They can do so by looking at the crime maps of their neighborhoods and searching for citizens with deviant behaviors (such as sex offenders).

There are no common standards for producing these maps. Certain colors signify different crimes in different cities. Simple icons such as shopping carts can mean shoplifting in one city, vagrancy in another. Some crimes are relatively easy to depict—a tiny gun stands for shooting (but not always), a flame for arson—but what about an icon for rape? Crime maps also confusingly represent space: each icon appears in front of a simplified street-map background, but because the geo-coding of crimes relies on street addresses, maps are unable to show crimes in parks, wilderness areas, and even shopping malls that have no street numbers. If the spatial representation of incidents reported to police is problematic, the representation of time is even more troubling. How many days or weeks of crime are overlaid on a single map? The more days represented, the higher the perceived crime rate.



In this column, the authors cull current scholarly writing about journalism for fresh ideas. Suggestions for possible mention are welcome at theresearchreport@cjr.org

Crime maps, Wallace argues, have many preconceptions built in. They imply that managing crime is simply a matter of combining police work with individual responsibility. But what about employment levels and jobs policy, the quality of public transportation, or the repair and replacement of defective street lights? Why are these factors not made visual? What maps omit is as important as what they include.

The same principle is true, argues distinguished legal scholar Lawrence Lessig in “Against Transparency” (*The New Republic*, October 21, 2009), even with the most evidently well-meaning “good government” features of the transparency movement that, Lessig acknowledges, he is himself a part of. Lessig is especially concerned by the lack of context in the online efforts to link campaign contributions to legislators’ voting records. If people read, for example, that Representative Smith voted to bail out failing Moneybags Bank, and that Moneybags made a contribution to Smith’s campaign, casual readers will conclude that Moneybags bought Smith’s vote. But, as any Statistics 101 student will tell you, correlation is not causation. The more likely alternative is that in the past Smith voted for government policy that helped banks, which motivated Moneybags to make its contribution in the first place. The transparency movement thus unintentionally promotes civic cynicism because people with limited time and attention will make inferences the data do not justify.

Visual and textual databases are not good or bad in themselves—people are capable of looking for a multiplicity of causes instead of settling prematurely on one simple cause—but because of what Lessig calls the attention-span problem, data are sure to be misread and misused.

Both of these stimulating articles call attention to a problem for which they have no solutions to propose. But both assert, in different ways and from different frameworks, that it is time to see through transparency. **CJR**

MICHAEL SCHUDSON teaches at Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism. JULIA SONNEVEND is a Ph.D. student in Communications at Columbia.

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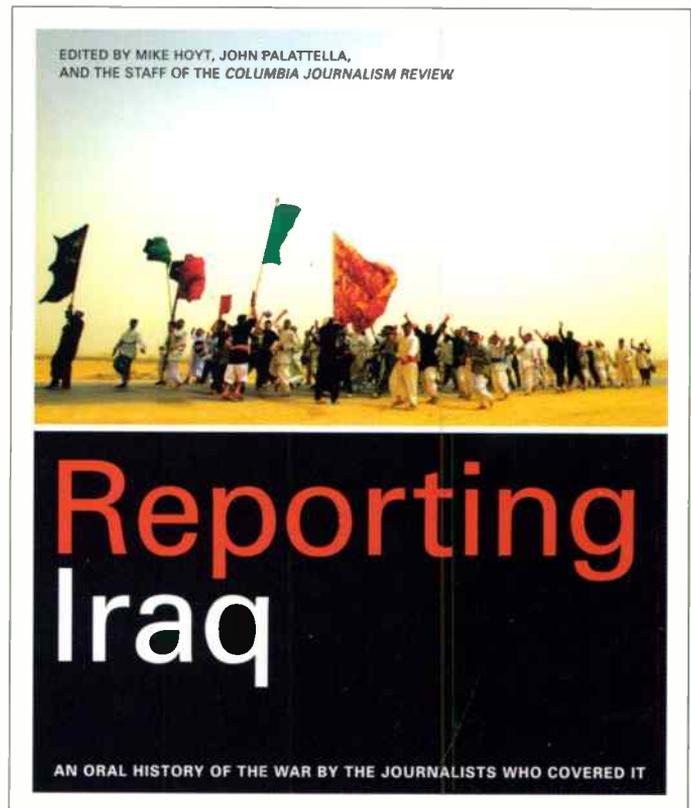
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