

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Strong Press, Strong Democracy

Dumb Like a Fox

How Fox News masters the narrow confines of cable

TERRY MCDERMOTT

NPR: VIVIAN SCHILLER CRANKS UP THE VOLUME

JILL DREW

TOO BIG TO FAIL IS TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

DEAN STARKMAN

CAN EBONY RISE AGAIN?

DON TERRY

A TANGLED WEB: SPECIAL REPORT

A CJR survey finds that magazines allow their Web sites to erode journalistic standards

VICTOR NAVASKY with EVAN LERNER

MAR / APR 2010 • CJR.ORG



#####AUTO#3-DIGIT 913
#BXBFB#
#1880100002699671# M/D/D/O
309N PIERCE ST
16432 CLYMER ST
GRANADA HILLS CA 91344-6706



S009
B009

GLOBALIZATION. NEW MEDIA. SHIFTING ATTITUDES.

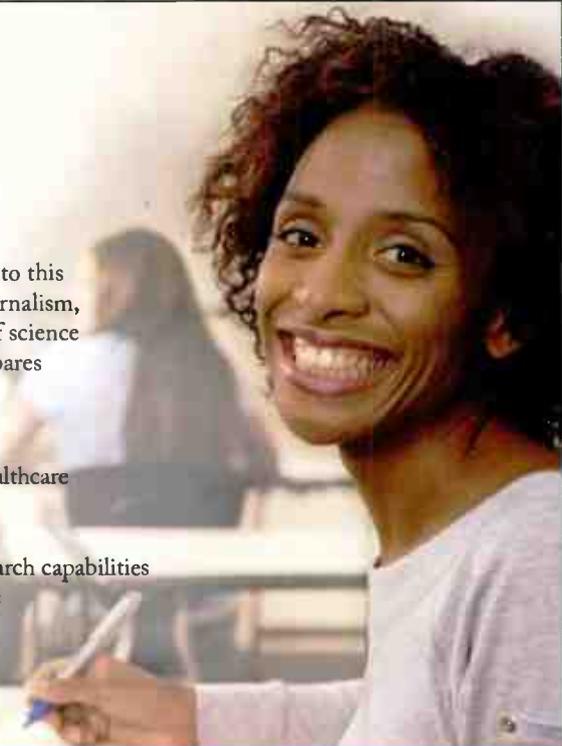
THE FIELD OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IS ADVANCING. NOW YOU CAN TOO.

Would you like to advance your career in public relations? Transition into this exciting and expanding field from another profession such as finance, journalism, law or marketing? Then discover Quinnipiac University's new master of science in public relations. This full-time program with a part-time option prepares graduates for jobs in the corporate, nonprofit and government worlds.

Highlights include:

- The ability to specialize in specific areas like international, investor or healthcare
- Highly qualified full-time faculty
- Networking and professional development opportunities
- State-of-the-art facilities with access to the latest technologies and research capabilities
- A unique curriculum focused on professional practice in public relations

To find out more about this exciting opportunity to advance your career, visit www.quinnipiac.edu/gradadmission.



QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY

1-800-462-1944 | Hamden, Connecticut

i!nnovation!

The Knight-Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism

\$10,000 Grand Prize
\$6,000 in Special Distinction Awards

Rewarding new ideas that help to engage people in community life

WANTED: Digital Engagement Entries!

Details:
j-lab.org/awards

Due:
June 11, 2010

APPLY NOW

Funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation



How would you CHANGE journalism?

J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism will award **four** women-led projects **\$12,000 each** in start-up funding.

We will fund individuals with original ideas to create new Web sites, mobile news services or other journalistic ideas that offer interactive opportunities to **engage, inspire and improve** news and information in a geographic community or a community of interest.

For more information visit:
www.newmediawomen.org

Funded by the McCormick Foundation

Deadline:
April 12, 2010



COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

March/April 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



Clockwise from top left:
Checkpoint **page 12**
Radio waves **page 33**
Fractured **page 50**

Articles

22 AN ICON FADES

Ebony shaped the black middle class, then missed its digital moment
By Don Terry

COVER STORY

26 DUMB LIKE A FOX

Fox News isn't a branch of the GOP; it has simply (and shamelessly) mastered the narrow confines of cable
By Terry McDermott

33 NPR AMPS UP

Can Vivian Schiller build a journalism juggernaut?
By Jill Drew

40 THE EDUCATION OF HERB AND MARION SANDLER

When two patrons of aggressive journalism became its target, they cried foul. They have a point.
By Jeff Horwitz

SPECIAL REPORT

45 A TANGLED WEB

A CJR survey finds that magazines allow their Web sites to erode journalistic standards
By Victor Navasky with Evan Lerner

3 OPENING SHOT

4 EDITORIAL

A grassroots effort to sustain journalism's mission

6 LETTERS

7 EDITOR'S NOTE

8 CURRENTS

11 DARTS & LAURELS

By Alexandra Fenwick

Reports

12 PRESS-FREEDOM WATCH

The Internet becomes a chokepoint for repressive regimes
By Joel Simon

15 LEARNING CURVE

How yesterday's reporting strategies failed on today's health-care story
By Trudy Lieberman

17 MAINE POSTCARD

A success story: the Web is the star, but print is the unsung hero
By Murray Carpenter

20 THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

Photograph by Sean Hemmerle

Ideas + Reviews

50 SECOND READ

David L. Ulin
on why Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* remains a cautionary tale for our times

55 REVIEW

Andrew Ross Sorkin's big book points up the promise and peril of access journalism
By Dean Starkman

59 BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

By James Boylan

60 ESSAY

Is The Barnes & Noble Review the future of book reviewing?
By Jordan Michael Smith

63 THE RESEARCH REPORT

By Michael Schudson and Julia Sonnevend

64 THE LOWER CASE

ASTEROIDS SOLAR SYSTEMS EXOPLANETS
DARK MATTER GALAXIES HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT BLACK HOLES

THE UNIVERSE

The Kavli Science Journalism Workshop

An intensive course for journalists, presented by:
KNIGHT SCIENCE JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIPS at MIT
June 23–25, 2010 • Cambridge, Massachusetts

Application deadline: April 15
Apply now for Fellowships covering up to \$750 of travel, plus hotel and most meals.
More information at: web.mit.edu/knight-science/

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Published by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

DEAN Nicholas Lemann:

CHAIRMAN Victor Navasky

VICE CHAIRMAN Peter Osnos

EXECUTIVE EDITOR Mike Hoyt

MANAGING EDITOR/PRINT Brent Cunningham

MANAGING EDITOR/WEB Justin Peters

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/COPY MANAGER Tom O'Neill

EDITOR AT LARGE James Marcus

STAFF WRITERS Liz Cox Barrett, Curtis Brainard (Science), Megan Garber, Clint Hendler

THE AUDIT Dean Starkman (Kingsford Capital Fellow), Ryan Chittum, Holly Yeager

ASSISTANT EDITORS Alexandra Fenwick, Greg Marx

WEST COAST EDITOR Tom Goldstein

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS James Boylan,

Julia M. Klein, Charles Lewis, Trudy Lieberman, Robert Love, Judith Matloff, Michael Massing, Douglas McCollam, Alissa Quart, Cristine Russell, Michael Shapiro, Scott Sherman

INTERNS Kimberly Chou, Sara Germano, Thomas K. Zellers

DESIGN Point Five, NY:

Alissa Levin, Benjamin Levine, Nathan Eames

WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT Michael Murphy

DEPUTY PUBLISHER Dennis Giza

DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Janine Jaquet

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR Louisa Kearney

BOOK ADVERTISING Allston-Cherry, Ltd.:

Perry Janoski

CONTACT US Columbia Journalism Review

Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway

Columbia University, New York, NY 10027

EDITORIAL 212-854-1881

E-MAIL cjr@columbia.edu

ADVERTISING 516-883-2828

BOOK ADVERTISING 212-665-9885

BUSINESS 212-854-2718

SUBSCRIBE www.cjr.org/subscriptions

888-425-7782, or mail \$27.95 for one year,

\$41.95 for two years to: CJR, P.O. Box 422492,

Palm Coast, FL 32142-8974

cjr.org

Parking lot floods when man bursts
The Herald-Sun, Durham, N.C. 02/04/94

EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES ...
... and this hilarious book of newspaper bloopers has the headlines to prove it! "Correct Me If I'm Wrong" is the uproarious collection of outlandish and unexpected journalistic blunders as seen in CJR and the popular display at the Newseum in Washington, D.C.

collected by Columbia Journalism Review
edited by Gloria Cooper

NEWSEUM
Must See in D.C.!

WRONG
\$9.95 plus tax and shipping.
On sale now in the Newseum Store or at newseum.org.

Columbia Journalism Review (USPS 0804-780)

(ISSN 0010-194X) is published bimonthly. Vol. XLVIII, No. 6 March/April 2010. Copyright © 2010 Columbia University.

Subscription rates: one year \$27.95; two years \$41.95.

Periodical postage paid at NY, NY, and at additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: send form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, P.O. Box 422492, Palm Coast, FL 32142.

Opening Shot



The worried man in the raincoat above is one of some 15.3 million Americans who were out of work in December, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That number fell in January, but not far enough. The army of the unemployed weighs down an economy straining to put a terrible recession in the rearview mirror. That recession was given birth in the housing crisis on the watch of a previous president, but after a year in office, the Obama administration owns it, giving rise to complex policy challenges that are further complicated by the upcoming political season. We don't need a mediocre press at this juncture; we need a great one, capable of clarifying the complexities. So far, not so good. We point, for example, to the weak job done in so many quarters on the health-care-reform debate, which CJR's Trudy Lieberman explores on page 15. And we also point to a business press that too often delivers detailed action without the context required to give it meaning. In a review of *Too Big to Fail* by *New York Times* reporter Andrew Ross Sorkin on page 55, CJR's Dean Starkman touches on the price of access journalism. This is a kind of reporting that can have value, but in times like these, the cost can be high. We hope you enjoy the issue. **CJR**

Tough times Eric Lipps, fifty-two, waits in line at a job fair in New York City in December 2009.



The Unconquered

A grassroots effort to keep journalism's mission alive

In late October 2005, Dan Grech returned home to Miami after two months spent covering the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina for public radio's *Marketplace*—just in time for Hurricane Wilma's arrival in south Florida. He slept on the floor of his office, and when he finally reached his apartment it was uninhabitable—an industrial air-conditioner from an adjacent building had been blown through his roof. It was eighteen months before he could move

back in. Grech went from covering the storm victims to being a victim himself. “That transformed me, professionally and personally,” he says.

Grech, who is now radio-news director for *The Miami Herald's* broadcast operation, felt a profound sense of powerlessness, and struggled with the notion that, compared to the people he'd met who had lost everything, he had little to complain about. In December of that year, he attended a conference in New Orleans, organized by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, for journalists who were victims of Katrina. There, he says, he discovered a “vocabulary” for what he was experiencing. In 2008, he got an Ochberg Fellowship at the Dart Center, which is a think tank for journalists who cover violence and tragedy, and heard an expert from the Yale medical school on the neurobiology of post-traumatic stress disorder discuss how one way people who have suffered a trauma can build resilience is through a peer group. “I

realized I had been lacking that,” Grech says. “I was a one-man bureau; I was professionally isolated.”

Grech wanted a way to sustain the peer group he found at the center, and he also saw similarities between the trauma that reporters experience covering disasters and the broader, financial and mission-related trauma that ravages the news business. In December 2008, Grech gathered twenty-five journalists from the Miami area at a friend's condo to, as Grech put it, “talk about why we got into journalism in the first place, and how we can get back in touch with that.” It was the start of Project Invictus.

Since then, there have been six other meetings around the country, and a seventh is planned for the spring. Invictus was brought under the auspices of the Dart Society, a network of Ochberg alums, which provides modest funding.

These are not bitch sessions. They are structured conversations that draw on the principles of “appreciative inquiry,” a philosophy of organizational development that uses inquiry to help people and their organizations strengthen the most essential and effective aspects of what they do. Invictus meetings are organized around three lines of questioning: What in the past have you read or seen or done that moved you? How do you maintain your sense of mission and purpose when the industry is in turmoil? How can you imagine a better future? “The goal,” says Grech, “is to renew our sense of strength and mission so that we can sustain ourselves in this time of transition and be open to the new opportunities that are emerging.”

Those opportunities may not include journalism. At a meeting in Atlanta, for instance, the group heard a veteran investigative reporter who'd been laid off describe his situation, then brainstormed about what he might do. “In five minutes this guy got 150 ideas,” says Grech. “He was hurting, and I watched what it felt like for him. It was the ideas, but also the realization that fifteen people had his back.”

The significance of Invictus extends beyond support for beaten-down members of a tribe that has never been good at self-care. It has the potential to be an important tool in the effort to ensure that the mission of public-service journalism survives the transition. That, says Bruce Shapiro, the Dart Center's executive director, is perhaps more important than getting the revenue model right. “There has been great journalism done in the past that didn't make money,” he says, “but there has never been great journalism done without a conviction that what we are doing is important.” **CJR**

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Editorial and Business offices:
2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10027
phone: 212-854-2718 fax: 212-854-8367

Subscription office:
P.O. Box 422492, Palm Coast, FL 32142-8974

www.cjr.org

Dear CJR Subscriber:

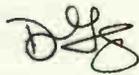
Re: **UNAUTHORIZED RENEWALS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Please be aware that a number of companies and individuals are selling subscriptions to *Columbia Journalism Review* (CJR) without authorization from us. They operate under generic names such as Magazine Payment Services, Publishers Billing Services, or Publishers Billing Emporium and request that payment be made out to their companies and sent directly to them. We have no relationship with these companies and cannot guarantee that subscriptions purchased from them will be sent to us to be fulfilled. You should not send any payment to them or respond to their subscription or renewal offers.

Please be sure to renew your subscription online at www.cjr.org or through one of our renewal notices. Our notices are printed with the *Columbia Journalism Review* or CJR logo (see the two variations above and below). We ask that payment be made out and sent directly to Columbia Journalism Review at P.O. Box 422492, Palm Coast, FL 32142-8974. If you have a question about any suspicious renewal solicitation that you receive or about any subscription agency, please feel free to contact us at 888-425-7782, or via email at dfg2@columbia.edu.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Dennis F. Giza
Deputy Publisher



NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

You Do Need a Weatherman

Charles Homans was close to explaining the adversarial relationship between the meteorological community and climatologists, and the legitimacy of meteorologists' concerns ("Hot Air," CJR, January/February).

Mathematical models are models, whether they are forecasting short- or long-term phenomena. The further into the future a time-dependent model looks, the less accurate its forecast, because errors from one iteration carry over to the next, and there are always errors. The accuracy of any model is based on two things: the soundness of the code and the quality of the inputs. Weather-forecasting software has the benefit of gathering highly accurate data from dozens of sources and using a code that is constantly revised based on known deviations from previous models. Even then, models fail regularly, and meteorologists rely on a great deal of interpretive work and forecasting intuition.

This may explain why meteorologists are so skeptical of climatologists. Meteorologists (and engineers like me) use mathematical models daily and see firsthand what the real-world limitations are. Climatologists don't.

Climatologists are trying to predict deviations in multi-thousand-year climatic cycles caused by CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. Their inputs are based (with the exception of the past 150 years) primarily on proxy data of unknown accuracy. And since their models look at time spans of tens or hundreds of years, they get very little real-work feedback to compare their results to. This means that feedback loops, essential to the completeness of the model, cannot be independently verified, and errors propagate throughout the model with an unknown level of bias.

Michael Hanson
Chicago, IL

Charles Homans responds: Hanson is right in noting the difficulty of using



Climate skeptics often conflate climate modeling with climatology as a whole.

mathematical models to predict the behavior of natural systems. Climatologists would acknowledge that the practice of modeling future climate change is less advanced than the practice of modeling the weather, and that climate modeling faces daunting constraints. But it's wrong to conflate the difficulties of modeling weather with those of modeling climate. The meteorologists' project requires predicting specific events within weather systems, a nearly impossible task given the sheer number of variables and level of chaos involved. The climatologists' aim, however, is to understand the broader contours of a system that tends toward equilibrium. Put less abstractly, it is much harder to predict the day on which an individual person will die than it is to predict the average life span of a person living in a given country.

In any case, climate skeptics often conflate climate modeling with clima-

tology as a whole. In reality, the former is just one piece of a much bigger puzzle, and the presence of uncertainty in the climate models doesn't disprove the existence of climate change any more than the uncertainty in meteorological models disproves the existence of tornadoes. While the limits of modeling make for spirited debates about the degree and manner in which climate change will affect the earth, they don't call into question the fact that the climate is changing and human activity is most likely responsible, an idea which is supported by basic physics and abundant evidence from numerous disciplines.

A Critic's Critique

Reading with much interest Robert Sietsema's article, "Everyone Eats..." I was struck by errors that should be corrected. To wit:

Andre Surmain was never the chef at Lutèce. He was the owner. The chef from day one was Andre Soltner.

The New York Times did not try to clone Gael Greene by hiring me because I wrote *The Seducer's Cookbook*. In fact, that proved a hitch. They debated about hiring me because some there thought the book unseemly.

He states that Ruth Reichl gave Chinese restaurants a status they never before enjoyed from *Times* critics. Really? Craig Claiborne gave the highest four-star rating to Shun Lee Dynasty and three to several other Chinese restaurants, to say nothing of several respectable two-star ratings. Raymond Sokolov gave four stars to Hunan with many other threes and twos. John Canaday in the 1976 guide lists four three-star Chinese restaurants, and I gave many threes as well.

Reichl was not the only one—or the first—to effect disguises. I wore wigs in 1976; Bryan Miller grew a beard, etc.

He also implies that "preview meals" have become a standard way for critics to judge. But I cannot imagine that any true critic working for a major New

York publication would do an authentic review on the basis of such an event.

Finally, the article doesn't answer the cover tease on why you can't be a restaurant critic. Indeed, in light of Sietsema's assessment of the new importance of blogs, it seems anyone can be a restaurant critic, whether good or bad.

Mimi Sheraton
New York, NY

Robert Sietsema responds: Ms. Sheraton, I'm grateful for your correction as regards Andre Surmain; he was indeed the owner of Lutèce, and not the chef-owner. With the rest of your complaints, I must politely take exception. I stand by my analysis that you were selected, in part, as *Times* restaurant critic because you'd written *The Seducer's Cookbook* and thus had a slightly risqué air about you. I do believe Ruth Reichl elevated the status of Chinese restaurants in town by seeking out ones in Chinatown rather than being content with those more assimilated examples in midtown. Bryan Miller said as much in his quote. Glad to hear that you and Miller occasionally donned wigs or facial hair, but a beard or a wig do not a disguise make—Reichl reports having undergone the hours-long application of makeup, clothes, and wigs, which altered her appearance significantly. In regard to the contemporary practices used by many bloggers and critics to get the jump on the competition, you and I are in agreement that it damages the credibility of the critics, which is the whole point of my piece.

Correction

Charles Homans's article "Hot Air" stated that 29 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement that global warming was "the greatest scam in history." The statement they agreed with was: "global warming is a scam." We regret the error.

MAJOR FUNDERS The Atlantic Philanthropies, Cabot Family Trust, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, Kingsford Capital Management LLC, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Joan Konner, David Laventhol, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Institute, James H. Ottaway Jr., Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Family Fund, Winokur Family Fund, and others. CJR also receives generous support from its readers.

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

IN JANUARY, MEGAN GARBER WROTE ABOUT PAIGE WILLIAMS'S ATTEMPT TO crowd-source the funding of a long-form magazine piece—after the piece had already been reported and written. Several commenters weighed in:

Paige Williams...set out and followed her bliss. And that's all fine and good except she wants to continue both her accumulation (of mainstream awards, recognition, etc.—and, oh, yes, money) while going commando.

Far from seeming like a progressive "solution," Williams's gambit, though practical on one level, reeks of a certain cluelessness. She went out and reported her story without a contract. Lesson learned—but don't foist bad judgment or your depleted checking account on the rest of us. The writer hasn't lost her job, isn't on the verge of (fill in current disaster), she's just a little poorer for the experience. And keen on advertising her stupidity. —Brad

Wow, quite the harsh bunch of critics here in the comments! I say bravo for Paige for giving this funding experiment a shot. I find the criticism—that since a bunch of established NY publishers rejected her story, it must not be that great—to be a false assumption. How many publishers rejected J. K. Rowling?

A couple quick points on retrospective funding:

1. It's probably a dangerous route other than for writers with very big reputations. I suspect that Thomas Friedman would make a decent living if he quit *The New York Times* and continued writing independently using the retrospective funding model (and other revenue sources like his books, speaking gigs, etc.).

2. More likely, the power of the network when applied to retrospective funding will generate more revenue for quality writers.

Traditional publishers can't afford as much for staff or freelancers these days. What the hell's wrong with trying new experiments in crowd-funding that the Internet affords us as a way to target our stories to those most interested in the topic? What would have been an absurd strategy for attracting money in pre-digital days has potential now. —Steve Outing

EDITOR'S NOTE

AS I WRITE, A \$3.83 TRILLION FEDERAL BUDGET PROPOSAL IS IN THE NEWS. Deficit hawks note it would take in \$1.27 trillion less than it spends. They see icebergs. Others say an iceberg already hit, and that in an economy with a recession-blown hole in it, a short-term deficit is proper.

The debate requires clear reporting. Indeed, the financial crisis presents an opportunity to help Americans better understand the national conversation about the economy and its nervous system, the financial sector, as well as fiscal policy and the government's role. But taking a broad view—including linking policies to long-term consequences—is hard for journalists, especially with news outlets stretched to the limit.

We'd like to help, and we're pleased to announce the appointment of Holly Yeager as CJR's first Peterson Fellow. We created the fellowship—funded by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation—to encourage that long view. Yeager is a Washington journalist who has written about policy, politics, the media, national security, and culture for nearly two decades, mostly for *The Financial Times*. Her work will appear on CJR.org—on our business desk (The Audit) and our politics and policy desk (Campaign Desk).

Speaking of Campaign Desk, we want to take a moment to salute the editor who helped launch it, Steve Lovelady, who died of cancer in January at sixty-six. Steve's editing was a key factor in the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* string of Pulitzer Prizes during his great run there, from 1972 to 1996. We hired him in 2004, hoping he'd help us use the power and speed of the Web to critique the coverage of that year's presidential race. He did a wonderful job. As Liz Cox Barrett of CJR put it, "Lovelady embraced the Campaign Desk adventure with equal parts purpose and fun, inspiring the same in his reporters." Rest in peace, Steve. —Mike Hoyt

Currents



War stories A Norwegian soldier in the skirmish that kicked up a controversy back home. To watch the 'Delicious!' video, go to http://www.cjr.org/short_takes/too_much_information.php.

Too Much Information?

It is New Year's Eve in northern Afghanistan. A small group of Norwegian soldiers is en route to meet with a village leader to chat about the local security situation, at the request of Afghan authorities. Suddenly, the soldiers are ambushed from three sides. The tense skirmish that follows lasts seven hours, finally ending when the Norwegians detonate a grenade over the enemy positions.

"Ah! Delicious!" says one of the soldiers.

To American news consumers, this episode may not seem extraordinary. But video footage of the battle, caught on tape

by helmet-mounted cameras, was journalistic gold for cash-strapped Norwegian newsrooms—and also fodder for a debate about how open the press, and the government, should be when it comes to the realities of war.

On New Year's Day, Gerhard Helskog, a correspondent for TV2, the largest private broadcast company in Norway, learned about the video from a military source and persuaded defense officials to release the uncut video. When it aired that night on the evening news,

the footage gave Norwegian viewers a rare glimpse of battle. But it proved to be too much for editors at *Dagbladet*, the nation's third-largest newspaper. In an editorial, the paper called the decision to release the footage "distasteful." Two days later, Anne Aasheim, then *Dagbladet's* editor-in-chief, repeated the argument on a talk show: "I find it uncomfortable, first of all, that the military, which controls news dissemination in Afghanistan, even let this through. I think everyone feels discomfort when they hear 'delicious' while the grenades are falling."

The critique was not widely shared in the media. "War is not a tea party," says Per Edgar Kokkvoold, secretary general of the Norwegian Press Association. While the footage may have been "uncomfortable," it presented "a realistic picture of what is going on." And in a reversal of the customary battle lines between the military and the press, Norway's new defense minister, Grete Faremo, used the episode to tout her policy of openness. "If the goal is more transparency, then people have to deal with the reality they see. People wanted more information about Norwegian efforts in Afghanistan," she said.

To some, though, this case blurs the line between transparency and propaganda. "We used to be a nation of peace, who proudly sent our troops to

'For every James O'Keefe, there are fifty serious journalists coming out of these programs.'—Sarah Longwell, speaking about initiatives that support conservative campus publications, as quoted in *The Washington Independent*

serve with blue hats under the U.N.," says Jan-Erik Smilden, senior foreign correspondent for *Dagbladet*. Both Norway's commitment of five hundred soldiers to Afghanistan and the military's readiness to share the footage of the battle, he worries, are part of a push to establish a more macho, U.S.-style image of the military. Meanwhile, *Dagbladet's* acting editor-in-chief, Lars Helle (Aasheim resigned on January 21), says the editorial was not a call for the Defense Department to censor information. But he, too, questioned Faremo's approach. "If the military wanted sympathy for the work they do in Afghanistan, this was not the way to do it."

The debate is part of a broader discussion over the media's commitment to covering the conflict. While *Dagbladet* and TV2 regularly send reporters to Afghanistan, and there's one Norwegian freelancer permanently in Kabul, none of the seven global correspondents at NRK, Norway's public broadcasting service, cover the war continuously. "Norway is fighting a war on foreign soil, and there is hardly a Norwegian reporter in sight," says Helsing. In that context, he says, the battle footage was an opportunity that couldn't be passed up. "It is not our job to window-dress something," says Helsing. "We should give a correct and comprehensive picture of the events."

—Lene Johansen

Carlson Calling

IN JANUARY, TUCKER CARLSON, the conservative former *Crossfire* host, launched *The Daily Caller*, a D.C.-based site that covers government and politics. Last month, Carlson spoke about the venture with *CJR* assistant editor Greg Marx. A longer version can be found at http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/carlson_calling.php.

What space are you filling in the journalistic ecosystem?

The space that reporters who are now working at public relations firms or for the Obama administration used to occupy. The business has been decimated, and people I know well and respect have given up. I try not to judge other people's career choices, but that says something pretty sad about the state of journalism, and we just think that it would be good to have more reporters covering government and politics.

I didn't hear the words "conservative" or "right-wing."

My politics are relatively well known, but this site is not a pure distillation of my politics. My views are not interesting enough to sustain the company we're building. This is a for-profit enterprise, and our view is that people want reliable information they're

not getting other places. If that's right-wing, the world has turned upside down.

Reporting is great, but it's expensive.

The other option is gathering lots of previously reported facts and putting them in a certain order with entertain-



ing headlines, and Drudge does that better than we will ever do it. You need to bring something different. We got three million bucks to start, and our feeling is we should spend it. We're going to go as hard as we can, and either succeed or fail. I don't want to preside over a mediocre Web site for the next ten years. And so we'll either be a success or a spectacular failure, and that will be really clear within a year or eighteen months.

Yesterday the big story was the White House budget announcement. Huffington Post ran the AP story; you had a staff-written story.

Why allocate resources for a day-one story that's available other places?

HARD NUMBERS

49 number of budget-related stories produced by *The Baltimore Sun* during a week in 1991 when Maryland lawmakers were grappling with a need for deep cuts

12 number of budget-related stories—six in print, six online—produced by the *Sun* during a comparable week in 2009 (overall, the paper produced 73 percent fewer stories in 2009 than in 1991)

16 total budget-related stories, across all Baltimore-area media, that provided "significant new information" during that same week in 2009; of those, six were produced by the *Sun*

1.97 billion

amount of subsidies, expressed in 2009 dollars, provided by the U.S. Postal Service via discounted rates to newspapers and magazines in 1967; by 2006, the figure had shrunk to \$288 million

900 million

approximate annual revenue, in current dollars, forgone by federal and state governments due to tax breaks for news publishers

35 number of Web-only subscriptions sold by *newsday.com*, at a price of \$5 a week, in the three months after the site moved behind a pay wall in October 2009

2 percent decline in unique local monthly visitors to the site, most of whom had access by virtue of their subscriptions to Cablevision or the print edition of *Newsday*, between December 2008 and December 2009

Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, *New York Observer*, *CJR.org*

Because we're three weeks old, and it's important to establish that we actually cover the news. It's important to just make that statement, that the main stories on our site are written by people who work here. And in the course of putting together that story, our reporter winds up talking to a lot of different people and deepening his pool of sources. Knowing a lot of people, knowing exactly who to talk to about what is 80 percent of journalism. So it's very much worth doing.

Any early surprises?

The main surprise is how really, really nice everyone has been to us. I'm talking very specifically about the Web world—TPM, Politico, Huffington Post, Politics Daily, Slate. I'm doing a weekly debate with David Plotz at Slate. Slate's been around a long time; they don't need our help. That's what we've seen from almost everyone, including people with whom I don't share a single political belief. And I'm just grateful for that. I enjoy political debate, but I'm not interested in being at war with people.

Press Crimes?

ON NOVEMBER 20, 1991, Serbia's newspapers and TV stations picked up a startling report: forty-one Serbian children had been massacred in a school near the Croatian town of Vukovar.

The allegation was plausible; Croats and Serbs in that ethnically mixed community had been fighting since June, when Croatia moved to secede from Yugoslavia. It was also false: subsequent reporting showed that a Serbian photographer had fabricated the claim. But as the media spread the report, Serbian militias killed some 260 mostly Croatian civilians in Vukovar.

It's a pattern that played out all too often during the break-up of Yugoslavia, when the region's press outlets, affiliated with warring ethnic groups, fueled the violence rather than holding its perpetrators accountable. While Serbian forces engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing, war coverage from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo regularly dehumanized non-Serbs,

whitewashed atrocities committed by Serb forces, and lied about attacks on Serbs.

Now, Serbia is the first former Yugoslav republic to probe the link between war propaganda and war crimes. In June 2008, Serbia's war crimes prosecutor launched an investigation to determine whether any journalists should be indicted for inciting war crimes. The burden of proof is high, requiring evidence that members of the press explicitly called for the lynching of specific individuals or groups, and to date no such examples have been found on Serbian territory, where little fighting took place. But the prosecutor's office is still poring over media reports, and in July 2009 the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (IJAS) submitted its own complaint to the prosecutor, accusing unnamed individuals working for state-owned media in the 1990s of instigating war crimes.

The effort is important, proponents say, not only to hold people to account for past sins. Media thuggery remains a real threat. In February 2008, the prominent

human rights activist Natasa Kandic was attacked in various newspapers and threatened with lynching after she attended a celebration of Kosovo's independence. Later that year, the newspaper *Tabloid* branded another activist, Sonja Biserko, a traitor and published her home address.

The propaganda persists because very few Serbian journalists who engaged in warmongering have been removed from their positions, said Jelka Jovanovic, the vice president of IJAS. "Even if no indictments are made, this investigation is an opportunity to cleanse the profession and establish minimal professional standards for journalists," she says.

The effort to affix blame has its critics, though. Ljiljana Smajlovic, president of the Journalists' Association of Serbia (JAS), agreed that the wartime reporting was atrocious. "But it is not the government's place to sort good journalists from bad ones," she says. She believes journalists have been made scapegoats while politicians have been let off the hook, and the investigation—coming on the heels of new laws that make it easier for the government to shut down media outlets—is an effort to intimidate the press.

It's not yet clear what, if anything, will come of the investigation. But when it's complete, the prosecutor's office will release its findings and conclusions to the public, says Jasna Sarcevic-Jankovic, a spokeswoman for the office. "If we accomplish nothing else, we will remind the public who said what, who acted in what way, and who in the media was responsible."

—Bojana Stoparic

LANGUAGE CORNER THE TRYING GAME

Write LanguageCorner@cjr.org

TODAY, WE'RE GOING TO TRY AND SHOW YOU WHEN IT'S OKAY TO VIOLATE A RULE. For example, some would say we broke one when we used "try and" instead of "try to" in the previous sentence. They would say that the use of "try and" was nonsensical because the next verb is an infinitive and needs "to." Those are the same people, as *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* will tell you, who make "the same mistaken assumption that has caused so much trouble over the so-called split infinitive." Infinitives can be used without "to" in many circumstances, among them when "and" is used instead, as in "try and" followed by another verb.

M-W says "try and" has been used frequently enough in the past 150 years that it's now standard usage. *Garner's Modern American Usage*, though, calls it an American "casualism," not quite standard but ubiquitous. *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style* says "try and" "strikes an inappropriately conversational note in formal writing." The Associated Press style book doesn't address the matter explicitly, but condones the use of "try to" by using it exclusively over "try and" in its entries.

So if you want to strike a more formal tone, try to avoid "try and." In other contexts, you can try and use it, and see who notices.

—Merrill Perlman

LAUREL



In 1979, *Des Moines Register* reporters Mike McGraw and Margaret Engel discovered sixty mentally disabled men eviscerating turkeys at an Iowa meat plant for less

than \$70 a month. The workers were Texas natives who had aged out of state care and been sent to the meat plant to work for subminimum wages by a Texas labor broker called Henry's Turkey Service. They were housed in an old schoolhouse that was owned by the town of Atalissa and operated by Henry's, which deducted room and board from the men's meager paychecks. The low wages were legal under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, which allows disabled workers to be paid based on their productivity. But it wasn't clear that anyone had ever assessed the men's productivity at Atalissa, and there was a clear conflict of interest in Henry's acting as the men's employer, landlord, caretaker, and designated recipient of disability benefits. The whole situation raised "thorny questions about how handicapped persons should be paid for their work," according to the article that McGraw and Engel wrote. It ran on the front page of the *Sunday Register* and spurred an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Shortly after their story was published, McGraw returned to his old paper, *The Kansas City Star*, where he still works today, and Engel moved to a job at the *Register's* Washington, D.C., bureau. They had exposed an injustice and an investigation was under way—the system had worked. The Atalissa story soon fell off their respective radars. "We had reason to believe something would happen," McGraw says now.

But nothing did. The investigation stalled and eventually was dropped, and with both McGraw and Engel gone, no one at the paper followed up.

Thirty years later the Atalissa bunkhouse story resurfaced at the *Register*. In February 2009, reporter Clark Kauffman received a call from the sister of a Henry's Turkey Service employee who had started working at the Atalissa plant in 1979. She was concerned that her brother was being exploited; after three decades working for Henry's, he had amassed a life savings of just \$80. As Kauffman began digging, he unearthed the *Register's* original story from the clip file. It turned out that twenty-one of the original sixty men were still living in the same bunkhouse, still plucking turkey feathers and pulling guts at the same slaughterhouse. Their 40-cents-an-hour wage had not changed.

This time the story did not fall through the cracks. Within days of Kauffman's first calls to state officials, the century-old bunkhouse was shut down by the state fire marshal for

unsafe conditions. Kauffman wrote dozens of follow-up stories over the course of nearly a year.

This time, the state fined Henry's \$900,000 and the U.S. Department of Labor filed a lawsuit against the company for alleged payroll violations. The U.S. Senate and the Iowa state legislature both conducted hearings on the matter, and a state task force led to new laws regulating unlicensed boarding houses and the oversight of employers who qualify for special certificates to pay disabled workers less than the minimum wage.

Margaret Engel, now the director of the Alicia Patterson Foundation for investigative journalism, praises the *Register* for taking up the story again but laments that it was ever allowed to fade. "I think we all feel guilty that there wasn't a hand-off or a look-behind," she says.

McGraw followed the *Register's* resurrected investigation from his desk in Missouri. "What amazed me most was that the officials' level of outrage over the *Register's* allegations this time—which were no different than thirty years ago—seemed to be so much higher," he says. He attributes this, in part, to an evolved view of people with mental disabilities, even among their advocates. "I think people then gave it a big pass because there were few options for mentally disabled young men who aged out of the system."

Randy Brubaker, the *Register's* current managing editor, says the fact that Kauffman's series could build on a paper trail that McGraw and Engel left helped give his stories the impact that their piece lacked. "We all write things that expose potential injustices," Brubaker says, "but when news disappears from the front page, the urge for officials to act disappears."

The *Register* deserves a **LAUREL** for hammering a forgotten story until the government finally did its job, but Brubaker's statement underscores a significant problem in journalism. The fact that the tragedy of Atalissa was allowed to continue for *thirty years* after it was exposed is an indictment not just of government regulators but also of the media's propensity to move relentlessly on to the next story, to fire a single bullet at massive, complex problems and consider the job done. This tendency is exacerbated in an era of shrinking newsroom resources and ambitions that erode an outlet's institutional memory and make it even less likely that reporters will have the time and mandate to tackle these kinds of stories in the first place, let alone stick with them once they have. For that we bestow a **DART**, not to the *Register* but to the kind of ephemeral thinking and processes that infect newsrooms nationwide. We hope that this tale from Iowa—both cautionary and inspirational—prompts a thorough scouring of newspaper morgues everywhere. There are bound to be other Atalissas. **CJR**

to access blocked news sites, like the BBC Chinese service or YouTube. China is also putting pressure on the Internet Service Providers (ISPs), requiring them to serve as surrogate censors.

Iranians, too, have had broad access to the Web, a technology that has been embraced by the country's conservative leadership, many of whom host blogs and Twitter. But Iran's Internet connection to the world is in the hands of Telecommunications Company of Iran, a company in which a consortium associated with the Revolutionary Guards recently bought a 50 percent stake. Cyrus Farivar, a San Francisco-based tech journalist and Iran expert, calls control of the Internet "the biggest weapon in the government's arsenal." The number of international gateways that allow Internet traffic to enter or exit Iran is in the "single digits," according to Farivar.

Restrictions of online content are not limited to repressive countries. Germany, for example, bans Holocaust deniers and neo-Nazis and requires Internet companies like Google and Yahoo to comply with government regulations. In India, according to a recent piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, Google has been forced to remove or censor content that could

widely practiced, refers to authorizing approved Web sites and blocking the rest. Increasingly, governments also require Internet café owners to police the sites that their clients visit; some have installed software that allows the government to do this remotely.

PRESS FREEDOM GROUPS LIKE CPJ HAVE traditionally focused their attention on defending news gatherers. These strategies remain crucial, but in order to more effectively defend press freedom in the new global information environment we need to devote more resources to defending the Internet itself. CPJ, for example, is adding a full-time Internet advocacy coordinator in 2010 to do just that. Our goal is to get media organizations to understand that they have an enormous stake in the outcome.

To be effective, journalists, media organizations, and press-freedom groups need to form alliances with the ISPs and tech companies that maintain the Internet's infrastructure. These companies are coming under tremendous pressure from repressive governments to enforce government censorship. Too often they have complied and have been justly criticized for doing so.

journalism. However, these kinds of efforts will only be effective if companies agree to abide by minimum standards that prevent competitors from exploiting another's principled position. A new organization called the Global Network Initiative was set up to do just that. The organization, which expects to hire an executive director in the next few months, is made up of leading Internet companies—Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft—along with human rights organizations and socially responsible investors. Robert Mahoney, CPJ's deputy director, represents us on the initiative's board.

A united front has proved effective, as was shown last summer when international tech companies forced the Chinese government to back away from its plan to require the installation of filtering software called Green Dam/Youth Escort in every computer sold in China.

Governments, too, have a role to play in defending press freedom online. "We stand for a single Internet, where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted in a January speech at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. Turning that lofty rhetoric into effective policy will be a major challenge.

The goal of everyone fighting for press freedom on the Internet is to bring together journalists, ISPs, tech and media companies, freedom of expression and human rights groups, and even supportive governments in a broad international coalition to preserve and strengthen Internet freedom and push back against countries that seek to restrict it. The future of free journalism may depend on the success of this coalition.

Technology will play a role, but it's only one tool. Equally important is consistent public pressure on governments that employ censorship. The perception that dissident voices rather than repressive governments have benefited more from the advent of the Internet is probably correct—but only for the moment. As MacKinnon notes, "The Internet is an extension of human activity, and secret police and criminals have moved into cyberspace along with the wonderful democracy activists we all like." **CJR**

JOEL SIMON is the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

'The Internet is an extension of human activity,' says Rebecca MacKinnon, a China expert, 'and secret police and criminals have moved into cyberspace along with the wonderful democracy activists we all like.'

offend religious minorities or powerful political figures. The big fear of press-freedom advocates is creeping censorship under the guise of law enforcement or anti-pornography legislation.

Governments can also attack the third part of the information assembly line, blocking people from accessing certain kinds of information on the Web. Many repressive governments—including Iran, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and China—use filters to block critical Web sites, a process known as blacklisting. Whitelisting, which is also

That is why Google's recent stand in China is so important. Refusing to comply with Chinese government censorship "was a statement that doing the moral and ethical thing is good for business," says Rebecca MacKinnon. "When your business is transmitting, publishing, amplifying, and hosting the most intimate details of people's lives and their most sensitive political conversations, then your users have to trust that you're not going to be tossing information to the nearest dictator."

Good for business, but also good for

An Rx for Reporting

Yesterday's strategies failed on the health-reform story. Now what?

JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, A CNN POLL ASKED AMERICANS WHETHER THEY favored or opposed the health-reform bills moving through Congress. Forty-two percent favored them, 56 percent were opposed. This and other polls released last fall also suggested that most Americans lacked a basic understanding of the changes being proposed. Arguably, the two are connected. How many people were opposed to the legislation because they either didn't understand or misunderstood it? A clerk at a store in West Virginia told the *Charleston Gazette* that she tried hard to follow the twists and turns of health reform. "I know it affects me," she said, "but I can't find out what it's going to be." A friend of mine admitted that she had stopped trying to figure it out. A small business owner in Manhattan concluded: "The press has done a horrible job of translation."

Press coverage of the effort to reform health care has been largely incoherent to the man on the street. The three hundred or so posts I have written about health-care reform for CJR.org over the past two years tell the story of media coverage that failed to illuminate the crucial issues, quoted special interest groups and politicians without giving consumers enough information to judge if their claims were fact or fiction, did not dig deeply into the pros and cons of the proposals, and gave tons of ink and air time to the same handful of sources.

By now it's a familiar critique—the press did not connect the dots, there were too many he said-she said stories, not enough analysis, and so on. And yet, after a decade in which the inadequacies of traditional press strategies—objectivity, top-down coverage, the primacy of the "scoop," etc.—became ever more apparent to those of us who care about these things, those very strategies failed the country again on a story of monumental importance to every citizen.

Traditional journalism as practiced by the nation's major news outlets, even as it has been recreated on the Web, is just not good enough for a story as big and complex as health care. Such stories demand a new paradigm, and while I don't pretend to know exactly what that paradigm is or how we get there, the ways the press failed on the health-reform story provide some clues.

TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM RELIES ON OFFICIAL SOURCES TO TELL THE STORY, and on health care those sources framed the narratives they wanted the public to hear. The "stars are aligned" refrain, heard from advocacy groups like Families USA and others, conveyed the idea that the chief stakeholders all supported reform. But what those stakeholders supported was "reform" that for the most part let them continue with business as usual. From the Democrats came the narrative of

"affordable, quality health care"—empty, focus-group tested words that misled millions of Americans into thinking reform would bring health insurance to everyone and health care that was both cheaper and better. From Republicans we got the predictable fear-mongering about "government-run health care," but few alternate solutions. The president himself gave us the "you can keep what you've got" assurance that left many people wondering, "If that's the case, why should I care?"

Playing follow-the-newsmaker leads to he said-she said reporting, which does audiences a particular disservice on stories about contentious, difficult issues like health care—the truth is complicated and requires more explication than clashing quotes can deliver.

In mid-January, for instance, *USA Today* botched a piece about whether the House and Senate bills would really cut costs and generate enough savings to cover subsidies for the uninsured. The story began with a conservative economist questioning whether the projected long-term savings were realistic. Then came a quote from the director of Families USA who assured us that the projected savings were "more than realistic." There was a paragraph explaining that the Senate bill calls for \$438 billion in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid over a decade and that almost half of those cuts would come from trimming Medicare payments to doctors and hospitals. Next the paper noted that a Department of Health and Human Services report said some of the proposed cuts "may be unrealistic" and could actually *reduce* access to care. That was followed by a fellow from the Urban Institute who suggested it would be "very hard" politically to get the cuts through. Then came a comment from a fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, who said that in the past Congress had in fact adopted cuts to Medicare and that those cuts were "part and parcel of most major deficit reduction efforts in recent years."

Huh? This tangle of competing claims, without any attempt by the reporter to help the reader understand who is more and less right, is not only useless to someone trying to decide how

to think about these issues, but also utterly dispiriting.

Traditional journalism craves controversy—even if it’s manufactured or beside the point—and the health-reform story produced a doozy: the public plan. For months press coverage focused on the politics of a public plan—who wanted it, who was against it, its chances for passage. Meanwhile, with a wink to the special interests who supported him financially during the campaign, President Obama didn’t fight for a public plan, and let the insurers, doctors, hospitals, and the business community (with a crucial assist from Joe Lieberman) kill it in the Senate. Even so-called supporters of the public plan, who made a lot of noise, knew it was essentially a bargaining chip. It was a charade the press should have exposed more forcefully and then dug into the true controversy: whether the health-reform law in Massachusetts, the model for the national bill, was working as well as the state’s officials and other cheerleaders maintained. When MIT economist Jonathan Gruber, the übercheerleader for national reform, said on PBS’s *NewsHour* last fall that Massachusetts residents who must buy their own health coverage were getting lower premiums as a result of the state’s reform, he didn’t mention (and host Gwen Ifill didn’t ask) that those lower premiums were made possible because employees of small businesses were paying much *higher* premiums. Small business owners are now getting hit with increases of 20 to 45 percent or more. Indeed, red flags in Massachusetts did not fit the “its time has come” narrative the press and the newsmakers had embraced—though when Republican Scott Brown stunned Democrats by winning Ted Kennedy’s Senate seat in January, it became clear that the press should have paid more attention to those warnings.

Traditional journalism tends to be reactive, and the ill-effects of this were never more evident than with the “death-panel” debacle. Instead of bringing audiences around to a serious discussion of end-of-life care, the press let right-wing ideologues set the agenda with misinformation before eventually doing the stories that refuted the outrageous claims of Sarah Palin and others. But it was too

little, too late. More than a month after the notion surfaced, I interviewed a volunteer at a sandwich booth at a Labor Day Italian festival in Scranton, Pennsylvania, who told me he was very worried about what he called the end-of-life committee. “I have heard all the arguments,” he said, “and nobody has convinced me it doesn’t exist.”

I’VE BEEN A “TRADITIONAL” JOURNALIST for more than forty years. I understand the circumstances and logic that gave rise to these journalism strategies, even as I am frustrated by how they hinder coverage. But more than two years ago, when I began writing about the coverage of the health-care debate for CJR’s Web site, I tried to use the freedom from the strictures of traditional journalism that writing online afforded to experiment with my own coverage—to try to

Write stories for school teachers, not the wonks in Washington.

produce the kind of coverage that I was asking the mainstream press to deliver. For instance, a tenet of traditional journalism is that we write for the average citizen, but so many of the health-care stories I was reading seemed aimed more at Washington insiders or the reporter’s colleagues and competitors. I reached into my past to find a way to do it better. I’ve long thought that *Consumer Reports*, where I used to work, produced some of the clearest, most useful explanatory journalism around. Once I asked then-Editor Irwin Landau who *his* audience was, and he said he always had in mind school teachers, people who had some money but not a lot, and who needed to understand not only what to buy and why but the economic and medical forces that shaped those decisions.

With such readers in mind, I tried to give them a thorough analysis of the is-

sue at hand, but one that was grounded in deep reporting, not lightly informed opinion. Here the late Johnny Apple was my inspiration. His analyses for *The New York Times* invariably helped me understand issues I knew little about. It wasn’t simply that Apple was a talented writer, or a big enough star that he could get away with pushing opinions in the news columns; Apple was first and foremost a fine reporter, and his analyses reflected the authority and knowledge earned through that reporting.

But both Apple’s analyses and *Consumer Reports* stories tended to come in traditional, long-form doses. The trick for today’s audiences in my opinion is to take Apple’s trademark reporting and analysis and apply them to a series of shorter, pithier stories. Short shouldn’t have to mean shallow.

Last year, I tested that hypothesis with a nine-part series on health care in Massachusetts that attempted to be analytical and comprehensive, but broke the subject into more digestible segments of roughly 1,200 words each. I tried to report until I had a clear sense of what I thought about the key elements of the Massachusetts plan, then let those conclusions, and an explanation of how I arrived at them, drive my stories. The series became a running commentary on the state’s health-care system.

This approach worked in a way that a one-off, six-thousand-word piece would not have. Those blog posts got at the concerns of state residents, many of whom were not happy with the way health reform was affecting them—small business owners slapped with very high rate increases, older people paying several hundred dollars more for their coverage than younger ones, patients facing long waits to see a doctor—and allowed me to keep revisiting the issues, adding new context and new ideas as my thinking evolved with my reporting. Immediate feedback—another useful aspect of the Web—suggested that my readers benefited from this steady stream of more manageable bites, which is ultimately the point of what we do. **CJR**

TRUDY LIEBERMAN is a contributing editor to the *Columbia Journalism Review*. She writes for *CJR.org* about the coverage of the effort to overhaul America’s health-care system.

A Success Story

The Web is the star, but print is the unsung hero

IN COASTAL MAINE, COMMUNITY JOURNALISM HAS BEEN RUNNING ON PARALLEL tracks in recent years. On one track, an aspiring publisher buys a chain of community papers with a centralized printing operation. He begins sharing more content among the papers, cutting staff, even closing one of the weeklies, a paper that had been published continuously for more than a century. This is the familiar narrative of newspapers in crisis.

On the other track, an entrepreneur develops a pioneering, Web-only, small-town news site, planning to sell the template for use elsewhere. The site racks up millions of hits. The entrepreneur wins a Knight Foundation grant of nearly \$900,000 to upgrade and distribute his software, and his company is one of just five news operations described as promising by the foundation's president during a May 2009 Senate hearing on the future of journalism.

So far, so good—the dinosaurs flail and the visionaries sail. But here's the kicker: both of the above stories refer to the same operation, VillageSoup. And a closer look at the VillageSoup narrative complicates this simple story line and reveals an awkward truth about this moment in the digital media revolution: print still pays the bills.

Richard Anderson, the VillageSoup founder and CEO, says his project began in 1997 when he came to Maine flush with a fortune earned through Ligature, Inc., his innovative textbook-publishing business. He saw the future of news on the Internet and launched a hyperlocal news outlet in Camden, a small town on Penobscot Bay. Anderson hired a team of journalists and expanded into Belfast, in neighboring Waldo County. He transitioned through several names—Village Green, Ligature.com, clicK2BHere, and K2BH—and experimented with a paywall.

By 2001 Anderson had settled on VillageSoup as the name, and free access as the strategy. But he had a major problem: he was losing lots of money. Anderson saw that advertising money was still flowing to local weekly newspapers in the area. So in 2003 he launched his own print weekly, the *Knox County Times*, to compete with the *Camden Herald* and the thrice-weekly *Courier Gazette* in nearby Rockland, both owned by Courier Publications. The newspaper served as a weekly digest of VillageSoup's online news.

The next year, Anderson decided to also get into the newspaper business in Belfast, which had two competing weeklies: the 180-year-old *Republican Journal*, also part of the Courier chain, and the independently owned *Waldo Independent*. Anderson tried to buy the *Independent*, but the Courier publishers out-bid him.

So Anderson launched his own Belfast weekly, the *Waldo County Citizen*. By 2005, the five papers that had long served Knox and Waldo counties (not including the *Bangor Daily News*, with a Belfast bureau), had grown to seven.

Meanwhile, VillageSoup's online format evolved into the model it retains today, a three-column Web site that Anderson considers more than a simple news site—he calls it a “community host.” The left column is traditional news; the middle column is user-generated, including “bizBriefs” from member businesses and bloggish entries from individuals; and the right column is traditional advertising.

Businesses pay \$20 a week to post on bizBriefs, and Anderson calls this an innovation. “What we have a lot of, that no other newspapers have, is a lot of Main Street businesses paying us a little bit of money to be able to post their information on our front page, unfettered and unfiltered by us. That's not a banner or a button, this isn't display,” he says. Businesses post items on topics ranging from the menu of the day to the dental dangers of oral piercing. Anderson says, “We're giving the small business the ability to continue doing what they do best, and that's to serve.”

The business-generated content impressed the Knight Foundation. “What we found interesting was that advertisers also became part of the community,” says Marc Fest, the foundation's vice president of communications. “Advertisers were also able to use that content management system.”

In 2007, Knight awarded Anderson an \$885,000 grant to update the VillageSoup software and create an open-source version. This would allow others to launch community-host Web sites without paying a licensing fee. (The open-source software is available for download, but Anderson and Fest say they don't know if anyone has applied it, and they are not tracking its use.) Concurrently, Anderson developed a premium version of the software to market to VillageSoup franchisees, under the name VillageSoup Common.

But as Anderson was collecting kudos as an online news pioneer, VillageSoup remained in the red. And by launching two newspapers, he had made the al-

FELLOWSHIPS AVAILABLE !



Get
smart!

“Covering the
Green Economy”

June 28-30, 2010
Phoenix

ALL-EXPENSES-PAID
SEMINAR WORTH
\$2,000

Funded by McCormick Foundation

Deadline: April 26, 2010

APPLY AT
BUSINESSJOURNALISM.ORG

WHERE YOU'LL ALSO FIND:
DAILY TIPS • JOBS
FREE WORKSHOPS • FREE WEBINARS

Donald W. Reynolds
**National Center for
Business Journalism**

Twitter:
@BizJournalism

Facebook:
BizJournalism

ready competitive news market in Knox and Waldo counties even more crowded. “Even after we created the papers we still continued losing money,” says Anderson. “And that’s when we came to the realization that there were too many papers—there were seven newspapers serving 80,000 people. We had to rationalize the market, we had to get fewer papers in this market, because advertisers can’t support them all.”

Anderson’s solution was to purchase the Courier newspapers. The 2008 deal included the Rockland, Camden, and (two) Belfast papers, as well as weeklies in Augusta and Bar Harbor. Anderson cut dozens of jobs and consolidated operations. In the shakeout, the three Waldo papers became one—using the venerable name *The Republican Journal*—and the Knox County papers were rolled into the *Courier Gazette*. That paper was soon renamed the *Herald Gazette*, and dropped frequency to twice weekly, after Anderson shuttered the *Camden Herald*.

Anderson says he had not intended to close the Camden weekly, which had been published since 1869. “But then when the economy got wiped out from underneath us, we had to start scrambling,” he says.

While Anderson searches for an ideal formula, Maine weeklies with less sophisticated online operations appear to be surviving, or even thriving. Mike Lange, executive director of the Maine Press Association, says of the twenty-one weeklies he represents (the VillageSoup papers not among them), “most are doing very well.”

Alan Baker, owner and publisher of the *Ellsworth American* and *Mount Desert Islander* (Anderson’s direct competitor in Bar Harbor), says his papers remain profitable. And he says the papers have even seen modest increases in circulation in the eight months since he put most online news behind a paywall. He feels the newsprint model still works well for most weeklies. “If we do our jobs properly,” says Baker, “we have a niche that’s secure for the time being.”

But Anderson says the old newsprint business models might not last. “I’m betting long-term,” he says. “You never know when it is going to turn. GM

bet for a long time, and they lasted for a long time, without building high-quality small cars.”

While Anderson is now convinced of the value of newsprint, he also says VillageSoup earns 21 percent of its ad revenue online. “Because of our start, and our approach, we’ve achieved something nobody else has achieved, but it is still not enough,” says Anderson. “Eventually it may end being fifty-fifty, but I think, long term, that fifty percent of that ad revenue is still going to come from print. Print plays a very important role. It does something for advertisers that online will never do. And print does something for readers that is going to be hard for online to ever do.” He says his newfound devotion to newsprint is a major shift in his thinking that he did not anticipate thirteen years ago.

VillageSoup has not yet seen a profitable year, but Anderson is hoping that

**An Internet
visionary learns
that, even now,
print pays the bills.**

2010 will be the first. He owns the company, and will not say specifically how much he has spent on the venture, but says it is millions. He remains enthusiastic about his news model. “We’re not done shaking this industry out yet,” he says.

And in the culmination of one aspect of his vision, Anderson launched the first franchise version of VillageSoup in January, in Wareham, Massachusetts. *Wareham Week* will go head to head with two established weekly newspapers. It will feature a Web site, of course—and a print newspaper. **CJR**

MURRAY CARPENTER is a freelance journalist who lives in Belfast, Maine. He was a reporter and editor at *The Republican Journal* in the late 1990s, and has contributed articles to *VillageSoup* publications. He is writing a book about caffeine.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

Professor and Department Chair for the Department of Journalism

The department of Journalism at Boston University is searching for a professor/administrative faculty to provide leadership for the department's efforts to enhance learning and performance through innovative research, teaching and service.

Established in 1947, the College of Communication (COM) at Boston University is a large college with departments specializing in Film and Television, Journalism, Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations. COM's student population exceeds 2000 students annually, including undergraduate and Master's level students. The college integrates a strong liberal arts core with a heavy focus on preparing students for careers as communication professionals. Our faculty is a blend of traditional academicians and widely experienced professionals. Located in the "hub of education" and a major media market, Boston University's College of Communication offers prospective faculty members a wealth of opportunities for collaborative efforts in academic and professional spheres.

All inquiries will be kept confidential. For specifics on the position please contact Associate Dean Vigil at rvigil@bu.edu or 617-353-3447.

Applications for consideration may be sent to Maurice Clark, Director of Administration & Finance, College of Communication, 640 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

Review of materials will begin March 15, 2010 and continue until the position is filled.

Boston University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer.

A successful candidate should have the following qualifications:

- Meets the requirements for appointment at the rank of full professor at Boston University (<http://www.bu.edu/handbook/appointments-and-promotions/classification-of-ranks-and-titles/>)
- An earned doctorate from an accredited university in one of the departmental disciplines or a discipline that closely aligns with those disciplines.
- Demonstrated record of academic management, academic planning, strategic planning, problem solving and resource allocation.
- A record of scholarly productivity that advances and/or demonstrates the field of journalism
- A long and distinguished record of professional experience
- Teaching and service experience as a university faculty member
- Demonstrated work in developing proposals for external funding
- Previous academic administrative or leadership experience in the academic community
- Experience leading a highly productive department faculty a plus.

 College of Communication



Join journalists from throughout the world to learn the latest tips, techniques and advice for digging into a huge range of topics and issues. Take advantage of dozens of panels, hands-on training sessions, our mentoring program and unparalleled opportunities to network with the best journalists in the business.

No matter what you cover, the 2010 IRE Conference has you covered.

Visit the web site at:
www.ire.org/vegas



Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting.

THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM SEAN HEMMERLE



Democracy Now!
New York, NY
January 11, 2010



An Icon Fades

*Ebony shaped the black middle class,
then misread its digital moment*

BY DON TERRY

Ebony magazine, the African-American monthly, has been a beloved institution in black America for more than sixty years. These days the love is still there, but the luster has faded. One of the few African-American-owned magazines in the country, *Ebony* is like a once-beautiful, stylish elderly relative, desperately searching for the fountain of youth. Born November 1, 1945, *Ebony* showed off her glamour and vitality for decades.

But she is tired now, debt-ridden and seriously ill, her once crystalline voice a raspy whisper. The black celebrities who once courted her now have other media suitors, thanks in no small part to the trail *Ebony* blazed. Too many readers and advertisers have followed them.

Some say her condition is critical and that she could soon die without an infusion of new ideas and the cash to back them up. Others say—sadly, always sadly—that it is too late. Those who love her should say their farewells.

Nonsense, says the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson. He can never say goodbye. “It will not shut down,” he vows. “Its form might change. But that tree will not fall. We will not let it fall. It’s beyond my imagination.”

“It’s unique to us emotionally,” he continues. “Everything the white culture said we couldn’t do, *Ebony* said we could do and do it better. You’d have Frank Sinatra. Then *Ebony* would display four pictures of Nat King Cole. You had an

all-white basketball league. We had the Globetrotters. We could play basketball and entertain at the same time.”

Back in the day, *Ebony* was the best way to keep up with the latest happenings in black America. The African-American elite—the movie stars, the singers, the ball players, the politicians, the preachers, the scholars—were all part of her flock. They were eager to talk to her about their trials and triumphs and then, if they were lucky, grace her cover for the whole nation to see. They weren’t appreciated—celebrated—anywhere else this way. To white magazines, they were invisible. *Ebony*, they knew, would treat them with R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

She was good company. She was entertaining and informative while you waited at the dentist’s office or beauty shop. Each year she listed the most eligible black bachelors and bachelorettes in the country. If they got together, she had useful advice about marriage and décor. She was a role model, a mirror for the middle-class that reflected only dreams come true. On coffee tables across black America, Bibles and issues of *Ebony* lay side by side. After all, they had the same message: look here for the promise of paradise.

Lots of people made fun of her, though, especially when the 1960s rolled around and black patience with white racism had worn thin. Her critics said *Ebony* was too moderate and soft for such momentous times. They called her bourgeois and said her head was filled with fluff. There was some truth in their harsh words. There still is.

But don’t let the glamour fool you. *Ebony* has a tough side, too. She didn’t always wear flouncy ruffles and Yves St. Laurent shoes. When she had to, she’d pull on a pair of sturdy boots and hit the freedom trail, singing “We Shall Overcome.” During the civil rights movement, *Ebony* and its petite sister publication *Jet*, the pocket-sized weekly, marched along every step of the way. Moneta Sleet Jr., the first black man to win a Pulitzer Prize for feature photography, worked for *Ebony*. He won the award for a photograph of Martin Luther King’s widow, Coretta Scott King, at the slain civil rights leader’s funeral in 1968.

For African Americans trapped in the segregated South, *Ebony* was a lifeline to the outside world. She was the chronicler of African-American firsts, source book of black pride and confidence. Growing up in Greenville, South Carolina, in the ’40s and ’50s, Jesse Jackson remembers how the magazine helped turn a dreamy black boy into the globetrotting man who twice ran for president in the 1980s, helping clear



Better days *Ebony's* founder, John H. Johnson, right, at work with daughter, Linda Johnson-Rice, in 1991.

the path for Barack Obama's history-shattering march to the White House twenty years later.

Jackson says his family had issues of *Ebony* "stacked up like furniture." Many of his teachers, he says, "used *Ebony* to teach black history. Black history wasn't in our textbooks."

In the 1960s, when the latest issue arrived in the Arizona mailbox of Dr. Clarence Laing and his wife, Laura, their young daughters, Mavis and Mercedes, would risk ripping the pages in their tug of war to see who would get to read it first. "There were just so few other black people in Phoenix in those days," Mavis Laing says. "*Ebony* was the only way we learned what was happening with African Americans."

But now *Ebony* needs money, not memories. Word is she owes her printer millions. According to media reports, there's a lien on her famous eleven-story headquarters in Chicago, overlooking Grant Park. The same park where some 200,000 people gathered to celebrate the realization of an *Ebony* reader's wildest dreams: the election of a black president.

Last year, Linda Johnson-Rice, chairman and CEO of the company and the daughter of *Ebony's* founder, John H. Johnson, was reportedly seeking a buyer—or a partner with deep pockets—to keep the magazine alive. (As this issue went to press, Bloomberg reported that NBA legend Magic Johnson was interested in buying the company.) Johnson-Rice declined to comment for this article. These are tough times

for her company, the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC), and her family. Her mother, Eunice, who came up with the name *Ebony*, died in January at age ninety-three. Her father died in 2005. In a prepared statement, Wendy E. Parks, a company spokeswoman, said that the privately held JPC does not disclose in-depth financial information. "However," she said, "I assure you that, like any conservatively managed business, we are continuing to make strategic decisions we believe are prudent to help us weather the current economy."

The malady afflicting *Ebony* is an industry-wide epidemic: not enough advertising; not enough readers. "*Ebony's* readership is dying off and it's not being replaced," says Charles Whitaker, the Helen Gurley Brown Research Chair in Magazine Journalism at the Medill School at Northwestern University and a former editor at *Ebony*. "I don't see how they are going to make it. *Ebony* really has a tough road ahead."

According to Whitaker, *Ebony's* circulation is around one million, and dropping fast. In the early 1990s, the circulation was about 1.8 million, he says. Although it has a Web site, EbonyJet.com, Whitaker says it has not done nearly enough with it to capture the young black audience. Like everyone else, these readers have many options in today's fragmented, Internet-driven media market, including the black-oriented, Time Warner-owned *Essence* magazine, *Ebony's* most direct competitor.

Ebony got the first interview with President-elect Obama, but held it for the print magazine and got scooped by *60 Minutes*.

Richard Prince, author of the online column *Journal-isms*, says *Ebony* blew a perfect opportunity to make a new-media splash. It was *Ebony* that was given the first interview with President-elect Barack Obama. But instead of putting the interview on its Web site immediately, *Ebony* waited to publish it weeks later in the magazine, apparently concerned about hurting newsstand sales. In the meantime, the new president had sat down with *60 Minutes*, which quickly put its interview on the air. “The whole effect of *Ebony* having the first interview was lost,” Prince says. “They’re so afraid of undermining the print product that they’re falling behind.”

Yet in January, when the earth shook so violently beneath Haiti that Port-Au-Prince was reduced to rubble, *Ebony*’s director of photography, Dudley Brooks, traveled to the devastated island, blogging and shooting pictures for *EbonyJet.com*:

It was close to an hour-long drive to Titayen, a village on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, where small convoys of dump trucks deposited the bodies of quake victims. I had heard stories that, earlier in the week, hundreds had been deposited there—amidst the garbage and debris. They were spread on the very field where Papa Doc Duvalier deposited the remains of his enemies years ago.... Mass graves are easy to find—you follow the smell. It’s an acrid, powerful, disturbing smell that, depending on the wind, can drift for miles. It stays in your nose hairs and saturates your clothes.

Powerful, timely, important stuff. That’s not all. In the last few months *Ebony* and *Jet* have undergone attractive face lifts, with new features and a sleek new look. But is it too little, too late? Whitaker, the Medill professor, thinks it is. Three years ago, Whitaker turned the plight of his old employer into a class project for his graduate students. The assignment was how to save and rebrand *Ebony* for the twenty-first century. Company officials allowed the students access to some of *Ebony*’s financial records, after requiring the class and the professor to sign a confidentiality agreement, Whitaker says. When the project was over, Whitaker says, he was “stunned” at how poorly *Ebony* was doing. “The bleeding we saw three years ago is hemorrhaging now,” he says. “There’s no way to stanch that.”

Whitaker hopes he is wrong. He spent a total of ten years as an editor at *Ebony* between 1985 and 2002. “I became a journalist because I wanted to work for *Ebony*,” he says. “It

will be tough to see it go. It’s an institution. But sometimes institutions become obsolete. If *Ebony* goes away, maybe it will allow someone else some room. Maybe it will give someone else incentive to replace it.”

THE FOUNDER OF *EBONY*, THE LATE JOHN H. JOHNSON, BORROWED \$500 to start his first magazine, *Negro Digest*, in 1942, putting up his mother’s furniture as collateral. He created *Ebony* weeks after World War II ended, and a few years after that he launched *Jet*. For decades, these two periodicals have been the heart and soul of his now troubled media empire.

To be sure, Johnson created the magazines to make money. That he did in abundance. His publications “formed powerful prototypes for success in black media” and “set the standard for black business in America,” writes Boyce Watkins, a finance professor at Syracuse University. But Johnson also wanted to do more than that. He wanted to change hearts and minds. Johnson wanted to show people on both sides of the color line a simple truth: black is beautiful, too.

At a time when people of color almost never made it into the pages, let alone onto the covers, of *Life* or *Look* or scores of other “mainstream”—read white—publications, Johnson sought to make African Americans and their accomplishments visible to the whole world. As Julieanna L. Richardson, an African-American archivist, puts it, “*Ebony* was a positive machine. It gave you a sense of self-worth.”

“That need still exists,” she adds. “We’re still bombarded with negative images. It affects the soul of our community. It affects the world’s perception of us.”

IF *EBONY* BELONGS TO THE PAST, THEN CHRISTOPHER RABB and Cheryl Contee belong to the future. They are among the frontiersmen and women of the increasingly expanding black blogosphere. Rabb, forty, is the founder and “chief evangelist” of the blog *Afro-Netizen*. He started the site of political and cultural commentary in 1999 as an e-mail newsletter. Within eighteen months, he says, he had 10,000 subscribers. “It filled a gap,” Rabb says. “Everywhere I’d go and there were more than a dozen black folks, someone would say, ‘Rabb, are you the *Afro-Netizen* guy?’”

He is also the great-great-grandson of John Henry Murphy Sr., who founded the *Baltimore Afro American* newspaper in 1892. Rabb was on the board of the *Afro American* for ten years but resigned in 2007 partly because he felt the paper “wasn’t moving fast enough to integrate technology into the business model.”

“Many of our institutions have fought technology because they thought it would run us out of business,” he says. “*Ebony* was one of the strongest household brands in black America for decades. It could have been a leader in social media. But family-owned businesses tend to be the most conservative businesses. No one wants to change a winning formula—until it’s too late.”

Cheryl Contee, thirty-eight, is the founder of the blog *Jack and Jill Politics: A black bourgeoisie perspective on U.S. politics*. She grew up with *Ebony* and *Jet*, but has a hard time

remembering the last time she's read an issue. *Ebony*, she says, has not updated its style or its use of the Web sufficiently to fit modern African Americans. "I think they're trying to catch up," she says. "The question is whether they have time."

Contee believes that while race still matters, it does not matter nearly as much as it did even a few years ago. "My experience in America is very different than the lives of my parents and grandparents," she says. "If it weren't for the increasing assimilation of African Americans into society, then there wouldn't be a black president. I don't know if *Ebony* and *Jet* necessarily acknowledge that reality."

Yet she says she started Jack and Jill Politics in 2006 because when she surveyed the Internet she did not "find the voice of the African-American middle class being respected and honored in any significant way."

Of course, that's the same reason John H. Johnson started *Ebony* in the 1940s.

VETERAN JOURNALIST SYLVESTER MONROE THOUGHT HE had found his dream job when he joined *Ebony* as a senior editor in 2006. He had been a journalist for thirty-seven years, twenty-seven of them at *Time* and *Newsweek*. Monroe was lured to the magazine by the publisher's promise that *Ebony* was going to be different. It was going to make a splash on the Internet and improve the writing in its print publications. "I was told we were going to bring *Ebony* into the twenty-first century," he says, "that we were going to make it more rel-

There are younger, Internet-savvy voices emerging to carry on *Ebony's* work, but these newcomers have not passed the test of time.

evant, give it some edge, bring it back to its old position as a relevant and important publication."

Monroe had visions of a combination of *Ebony*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Emerge*, the formerly hard-hitting but now defunct black monthly that once put an image of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas on the cover made up to look like a lawn jockey. "It could have been the best job I ever had," Monroe says. "But almost as soon as I got there, things went south."

Advertising revenues plummeted across the industry, and *Ebony* put its grand ambitions on the back burner. Monroe hung on for as long as he could, thinking once the economy turned around the job of remaking *Ebony* would resume.

One day in 2007, more than a dozen members of *Ebony's* editorial staff were seated around a gleaming table in the eighth-floor conference room, debating who should be included in the list of the twenty-five "coolest" black men of all time. Monroe, who is in his late fifties, and others nominated such notables as Muhammad Ali, Denzel Washington, and Billy Dee Williams. The twenty- and thirty-something staffers rolled their eyes. "Can't we have someone under fifty?" they pleaded.

Monroe says there was a generational tension between old and new over *Ebony's* future both inside and outside of the magazine. "Linda Johnson-Rice," he says, "was always very concerned about walking the fine line between bringing in new readers and not alienating its traditional base."

Monroe quit last year, "frustrated out of my mind" over a lack of money for writers and a coherent editorial direction. If *Ebony* gives up as well, Monroe says, "My generation will be saddened and will miss it. People under fifty probably won't miss it at all. They feel *Ebony* has served its purpose."

Perhaps, but many of the issues of race and discrimination that *Ebony* has addressed in the last six decades still exist, from soaring African-American unemployment rates to a widening wealth chasm between blacks and whites. Although there are younger, Internet-savvy voices emerging to carry on the fight, these newcomers have not yet passed the test of time. It would be a wasteful shame to lose *Ebony's* experience and hard-earned authority. "There is a role for *Ebony* still to play, beyond sentimental, particularly in the age of Obama," Monroe says. "I think there is a dangerously erroneous perception that now that Obama has reached the mountaintop, issues of race are no longer important. Whether it is health care, education, or housing, there are still huge gaps and a lot of work to do. To look at these problems from an African-American perspective is more important than ever."

EVERY MONTH, JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY PUTS THE covers of its magazines in the huge window of its lobby, a little old-school advertising. The other evening, as darkness fell over Chicago and a cold wind blew down South Michigan Avenue, I stood in front of JPC's building, peering through the window at four large photographs positioned there to face the street. One was a recent cover of *Jet*, featuring a smiling Michelle Obama. "Her Power of Influence," the headline read. Next to her was the February *Ebony* cover promising, among other features, "Love Stories Revealed: How 8 Couples Keep It Going," and "Demystifying Islam."

A few inches from the giant reproductions was a similar-sized photograph of John H. Johnson, the man who started it all. His photograph was placed in the window after he died. Now a portrait of his wife, Eunice, has been added.

I paid my respects to the Johnson parents but realized I'm not ready to say goodbye to their dream. I'm pulling hard for *Ebony*, the dowager, to find that fountain of youth. Not tomorrow, but today. I hear everything anyone could ever need or want can be found on the Internet. **CJR**

DON TERRY, a former reporter at the Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, and other newspapers, is an *Encore Fellow* at CJR.

Dumb Like a Fox

Fox News isn't part of the GOP; it has simply (and shamelessly) mastered the confines of cable

BY TERRY McDERMOTT

The reality of it is that Fox News often operates almost as either the research arm or the communications arm of the Republican Party. And it is not ideological.... What I think is fair to say about Fox, and the way we view it, is that it is more of a wing of the Republican Party.... They're widely viewed as a part of the Republican Party: take their talking points and put them on the air, take their opposition research and put it on the air. And that's fine. But let's not pretend they're a news organization like CNN is.

Dunn's strong talk set off a round of finger-pointing that hasn't abated since. Her statement was attacked by political professionals for its form, and by Fox adherents for its content. The pols said the form of the complaint was too overt and thereby bad political tactics, somehow raising the news channel to equal standing with President Obama. The basic advice from this quarter was a president should never stoop to conquer.

Apart from the wisdom of the White House tactics, the content of the criticism was said, mainly by Fox, to be mistaken in that it failed to differentiate between Fox's news programming and its opinion programming.

A close look at Fox's operations seemed an obvious way to examine the claims and counter-claims. When I approached Fox to gain access to their studios and staff for a story about the nature of their news operations, I was told that if I wanted to do a piece on Fox, I should do a profile of Shepard Smith, their main news anchorman. I should be careful, they told me, to distinguish

between Smith, a newsman, and their bevy of more notorious personalities—Bill O'Reilly, Neil Cavuto, Glenn Beck, and Greta Van Susteren. They aren't really news people, I was told; they are editorialists and ought to be analyzed as such. They are analogous, Fox suggested, to the editorial and op-ed opinion pages of newspapers, which ought not be confused with the straight news coverage.

The proposal to do a story on Smith was fair enough, but would not in any way address the central issue: Was Fox a political operation? I declined. A Smith profile would be a wonderful story for another time, I told Fox, but it wasn't the story we felt relevant at the moment. That being the case, Fox "declined to participate" in my reporting, which is another way of saying I should go do something to myself and possibly the horse I rode in on, too.

I've been told worse, so I wasn't offended, but this put the story in a bind. I had thought a reported story on how Fox

Last December 10 was a big news day. U.S. Senate negotiators announced they had agreed to a compromise on health care reform, final preparations were being made for a global conference on climate change, President Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, and new details emerged on five young American men who had been arrested in Pakistan on suspicion of plotting terror attacks. Not to mention that America

was involved in two wars and was still in the throes of the worst recession in eighty years.

That night, the main news programs on the three cable news networks—*CNN Tonight* on CNN, *Fox Report* on Fox, and *The Big Picture* on MSNBC—all led with approximately five minutes of coverage of Obama, cutting between video of his acceptance speech and reports from on-the-ground reporters in Oslo. CNN and MSNBC also included on-air analysis of the speech by a variety of commentators. Fox had no such commentary on its news show, just a more-or-less straightforward report on the speech.

This might seem surprising, given the charges of bias leveled against Fox by members of the Obama administration. Charges, for example, like this from Anita Dunn, then the administration's director of communications, speaking last October on Howard Kurtz's CNN program, *Reliable Sources*:



Psillos

World Radio History

assembles its daily programming would be useful. Doing a story on Fox without access and cooperation necessarily changes the nature of the story. So in lieu of talking to Fox, the main thing I did was let Fox talk to me. That is, I watched a lot of Fox News, and I must report the Fox spokeswoman was absolutely correct. Shepard Smith is an interesting guy. He is far and away the most charming personality on Fox. Not that this takes special effort. Generally speaking, Fox doesn't do charm. O'Reilly, for all of his considerable talents, blew a fuse in his charm machine years ago, and it's not clear Beck ever had one to blow. Let's not even start on Sean Hannity and Cavuto.

Smith's show—or, rather, shows; he hosts two of them every weekday—are absent much of Fox's usual cant. They are odd in Smith's own ironic, idiosyncratic way, but not so unusual that you couldn't imagine them appearing on one of the other cable news networks. In sum, they seem a perfect rebuttal to Dunn's critique.

Now Dunn is no political naïf. She's a seasoned, winning political operator. She didn't wander accidentally into this

thicket. She strode straight to it with nary a side step. Neither are Fox's leaders naïve. In particular, Fox CEO Roger Ailes is a seasoned, some might say marinated, political operator. One or the other of the two sides to this discussion about the true nature of Fox News is being disingenuous. Or perhaps both are. Shocking, I know.

There is no shortage of people eager to comment on Fox and the nature of its news. We thought it simpler and potentially more valuable to just watch its programs and see what they said. We decided to examine and compare the prime time cable news programming of a single day, and we picked December 10, a Thursday. The newscasts that day and the programming that surrounded them offer some clear testimony on the question: What is Fox News?

THE BIG EVENT OF THE DAY WAS OBAMA'S NOBEL PRIZE speech, and its coverage provides a handy schematic for the three networks' typical modus operandi. As noted above, all three led their nightly newscasts with the speech. The

On December 10, 2009, Senate leaders announced a compromise on health-care legislation that abandoned the public option but expanded Medicare. Fox News pushed the idea that this was a single-payer plan in disguise; MSNBC pushed the idea that the deal was a giveaway to insurance companies; and CNN pushed no idea, focusing on the politics and the process.

Hannity



Sean Hannity: "Is this the mother of all—is this a single-payer system? Is this worse than what we thought?"

Mike Huckabee, Fox Host: "It is exactly worse than we thought. In fact, this is the lump of coal in our Christmas stocking."

Hannity: "This man—this is crazy."

Huckabee: "Harry Houdini couldn't come up with it. This is a Houdini health care plan."

The Chris Matthews Show



Chris Matthews: "The Republican Party has not run out of attacks on the Democrats' health care bill. Proof of the pudding? Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming... says that the 2,000-plus-page bill doesn't have enough words in it... Well, maybe it would be a better bill if Senator Enzi, back when the bill was in the Finance Committee, hadn't dropped out of writing it."

The Rachel Maddow Show



Howard Dean, Former Head of DNC: "I think this bill is, as Jane pointed out, a giveaway to the insurance companies... because most of the people were never going to be in the public option. Anything but a single-payer is a giveaway to the insurance companies."

Special Report with Bret Baier



Bret Baier: "Could a Senate plan that supposedly jettisons the so-called public option pave the way for single-payer health care coverage? We report, you decide."

The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer



Wolf Blitzer: "Bottom line, Dana, is they will do whatever it takes to get a deal; is that right?"

Dana Bash, CNN Senior Congressional Correspondent: "There is a growing sense even among the most entrenched Democrats on either side of the philosophical divide on this public option that that is the case."

The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer



Dana Bash, CNN Senior Congressional Correspondent: "Now the Democrats are poised to jettison a government-run health care option from their health care bill, and the president is praising their progress. In the House, Democrats who demanded a public option now seem to be bowing to reality, that the votes simply aren't there to pass it through Congress."

speech occurred early in the day, our time, so it was a subject of comment throughout the day and into the prime-time big money shows.

CNN had, as it almost always does, by far the most diverse array of commenters, including partisans from each side as well as others regarded as centrists. Their reaction contained by far the broadest range of the three channels, ranging from Jack Cafferty—“a great speech....mesmerizing” and David Gergen—“transcendent quality”—to Alex Castellanos, a GOP consultant who thought it too self-absorbed—“It was I, I, I all the time”—and Michael Gerson, the former George W. Bush speechwriter, who termed it a “complex, intellectually rich, impressive speech.”

MSNBC offered generally effusive praise. Chris Matthews called the speech “a morally powerful speech worthy of a Jack Kennedy.” Chuck Todd labeled it “realistic idealism.” Cynthia Tucker thought it was “a very powerful speech...a speech for grown-ups...that embraced complexities.” Lawrence O’Donnell and Howard Fineman agreed it was humble. Historian Michael Beschloss said it was “elegant as always.” Rachel Maddow summarized it as “an eloquent speech on the nature and responsibilities of war.”

Fox News—in its hour-long news broadcasts—generally praised the speech or quoted others who did so. Major Garrett, the network’s White House correspondent, reporting from the scene of the award in Oslo, termed the speech a “muscular defense of war.” Others invited to comment on it during the news show were generally favorable. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the House of Representatives, termed it a “very historic speech. And the president, I think, did a very good job of representing the role of America.” Charles Krauthammer demurred somewhat, saying “it was the best speech he has ever given on foreign soil,” implying that other prior speeches were limited in their effectiveness.

It was all downhill after that. On Fox’s array of hosted opinion shows—O’Reilly, Beck, Cavuto, Hannity, and Van Susteren, the speech rode the down escalator through the evening. Said Hannity: “President Barack Obama joined the likes of Yasser Arafat, Jimmy Carter, and Al Gore earlier today when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in a ceremony in Oslo, Norway.” Hannity later said Obama, whom he called the “anointed one,” had appeased the crowd with criticism of the U.S. “Obama just can’t seem to give a speech overseas without bashing America,” he said. Stephen Hayes of *The Weekly Standard* praised the initial portion of the speech but said, “the second two-thirds was filled with typical Obama rhetorical flourishes and excesses.” John Bolton, Bush’s ambassador to the United Nations, wrapped up the night’s commentary by telling Van Susteren the speech “was a pretty bad speech—turgid, repetitive. I thought it was analytically weak, sort of at a high school level. It’s like he didn’t have any lead in his pencil left after his speeches at the U.N. and the speech on Afghanistan. So all in all, a pretty surprisingly disappointing performance.”

The same pattern repeated itself through the three networks’ coverage of the other events of the day. The formal newscasts for all three networks were fairly straightforward

but the commentary that came before and after was anything but. MSNBC, in its commentary, tended to love whatever the Democrats had done that day. CNN has so many commentators it almost can’t help but be on all sides of every issue. Fox, meanwhile, was raising an army to overthrow the government.

Here are some more representative examples. They might seem chosen to make a point; they were not. They are admittedly impressionistic, but we think a fair sampling of what was on the air that day.

On the Senate compromise on health care reform:

MSNBC—Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon called it “a godsend.” Howard Dean said “the Senate bill really does advance the ball.”

CNN—Representative Barbara Lee, a California Democrat, called it “the type of coverage that they [her constituents] deserve.”

Fox—Neil Cavuto posed this question to independent Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut: “Senator, they just didn’t put lipstick on a pig? It’s still a pig, right?” Lieberman

MSNBC tended to love whatever the Democrats had done. Fox, meanwhile, was raising an army to overthrow the government.

was noncommittal on the porcine nature of the compromise, but assured he would vote against it. Hayes of *The Weekly Standard* said, “it is absolutely insane.” Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee said, “It is the lump of coal in our Christmas stocking.”

On climate change:

MSNBC—Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek*, addressing Sarah Palin’s claim that climate change is not necessarily the result of human activity: “Her bigger problem, if she wants to be a candidate, is that she’s on the wrong side of history. She’s on the wrong side of science. She’s on the wrong side of politics here.”

CNN—Kitty Pilgrim, CNN correspondent: “The United States is falling behind the rest of the world in what some see as the cleanest energy option available, nuclear power.”

Fox—Amy Kellogg, Fox correspondent: “...stolen e-mails suggest the manipulation of trends, deleting and destroying of data, and attempts to prevent the publication of opposing views on climate change....”

We could go on, but the pattern would not change.

THE THREE NETWORKS ARE, OF COURSE, ALL IN THE SAME television business, but even apart from expressions of ideology each approaches its business differently, each seeking its own distinct niche in the modern television ecology. One large difference is apparent in their staffing structures. Of the three, CNN produces and broadcasts much more news content and has many more reporters reporting from many more places. It has a total staff of about 4,000 people, according to the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism's latest available report. On December 10, for example, it was the only one of the three networks to feature on-the-ground reporting from both Pakistan and Virginia on the case of the five Americans arrested in Pakistan. CNN's newsgathering superiority was even more striking in the aftermath of the January earthquake in Haiti.

With the exception of Larry King's interview show in the evening, it runs news programming more or less all day long. CNN includes opinion and analysis as feature inserts on its news shows, an adjunct to its news operations, but its great strength is news. The commentary often feels forced

There is one overwhelming similarity among Fox, MSNBC, and CNN: whatever it is that dominates cable news, it is largely not journalism.

and superfluous. Fox is the opposite. It includes the news operations as an adjunct to opinion and analysis. It is much more of a talk-show network than a news network. In fact, it mimics one of Ailes's first ventures into television news programming, an NBC-owned all-talk channel called America's Talking. Fox News uses this model much more than it does CNN's news model.

The perceived problem is not that Fox's straight news is relatively bias-free and its opinion programming overwhelmingly conservative. The problem is that the news portion is very small and the opinion portion very large. It would indeed be like a traditional newspaper opinion-news division if the ratios were reversed.

Fox has a reporting and editing staff about one-third the size of CNN's. Fox has many fewer bureaus, both domestic and international (again, about one-third CNN's total). From personal experience covering news around the world, you almost always run into a CNN crew or stringer. You almost never run into a Fox reporter, and never one from MSNBC.

In essence, MSNBC has no news operation whatsoever. It

has about half the total staff that Fox employs, roughly one-sixth that of CNN, but none of these people are reporters. It is almost purely a talk network. It regularly runs even less news content than Fox. In primetime, it runs none at all. At 7 p.m., when Fox and CNN are running hour-long newscasts, MSNBC airs a re-run of Chris Matthews's interview show, *Hardball*. Even when it puts news on the air, the content is almost entirely drawn from its corporate big brother, NBC, and NBC's news operation pales compared to that of CNN. From a business standpoint, MSNBC is useful as a means to amortize the costs of NBC's newsgathering. This can produce genuinely awkward moments—as it did frequently during the 2008 election campaign, when NBC's relatively straight news staff joined its more opinionated studio hosts in covering election results.

Ironically, Ailes left NBC because he was piqued that NBC in 1995 had gone into partnership with Microsoft to create MSNBC, infringing on his authority as president of CNBC, he thought. He then went to Murdoch and established Fox News. And now MSNBC, having long since divorced itself from Microsoft, has essentially copied the model Ailes established at Fox—a little news, a lot of opinion, and theatrical presentation of it all. It's no accident that one of MSNBC's most outsized personalities—Matthews—was promoted by Ailes when he was at CNBC.

Yet as striking as are the differences among the channels there is one overwhelming similarity: whatever it is that dominates cable news, it is largely not journalism.

There is, as has been remarked upon often, an awful lot going on on-screen all the time. There is the central image that is being broadcast at the time; plus a chyron, or label, identifying the scene and/or the people in it; plus the ever-present scrawl at the bottom of the screen, sometimes commenting on the scene being broadcast, sometimes referring to something utterly different. But for all of this hyperactivity cable news is surprisingly old-fashioned. There is much less use of moving pictures than one would think, and very few actual images of news events.

Mainly, what is going on instead is just talking. Studio hosts talk to reporters and sometimes to themselves. If there are multiple hosts, they talk to one another. The hosts talk to guests, either gathered in the studio or at another studio or occasionally by telephone. The guests are a familiar collection of politicians, political operatives, journalists, some experts, and a group we could call expert commentators. (What, for example, is David Gergen's expertise beyond commenting?)

Even on news shows like Wolf Blitzer's *The Situation Room* on CNN, the ratio of news to everything else is preposterously tilted toward everything else. During high news events, Blitzer will often have not one but two separate panels of analysts/commentators in the studio. The result is that even when there is news to be broadcast, more time is spent assessing it than reporting it.

Over the course of an average day, all this talking on the three channels adds up to more than half a million words spilled on cable-news air. That's a phenomenal amount of verbiage—by volume, a new *War and Peace* every single day.

It does not, as you might guess, approach anything like the art and coherence of a novel. Rarely does a single sentence rise to that level.

What are they talking about all the time? Usually, they're talking about what a particular little morsel of news means. What is that bit of news good for? Whom is it good for? Who's up, who's sideways, who's selling the country down the river? There is a very large measure of performance involved in all of this. The studio hosts typically play some amped-up, over-the-top version of themselves. They bring to mind nothing so much as one of the vibrant monologues from the Howard Beale character in the movie *Network*: "Television is a God-damned amusement park! Television is a circus, a carnival, a traveling troupe of acrobats, storytellers, dancers, singers, jugglers, sideshow freaks, lion tamers, and football players. We're in the boredom-killing business!"

If you talked all day every day you'd say some pretty stupid stuff and, no surprise, the cable talkers are no exceptions. Much of what gets said, in fact, is just barely above gibberish. On his December 10 show, O'Reilly led with an attack

on Dick Wolf, the creator of the *Law and Order* television franchise, for allowing a character on one of his shows to criticize O'Reilly by name. To buttress his rebuttal of Wolf, O'Reilly quotes—who better?—himself. Later in the show, he interviews fellow host Glenn Beck about President Obama's Peace Prize, which Beck says was given as a sort of affirmative action award.

BECK: I used to believe in a meritocracy. I used to believe you would....

O'REILLY: Earn things?

BECK: You would earn things. I have no problem with the president winning a Nobel Peace Prize.

O'REILLY: No, I agree he didn't earn it, but so what? It's Norway. You know? It's Norway. You know what I'm talking about?

BECK: Well, now that you put it in that context.

O'REILLY: Right. And I love Norway.

BECK: You're exactly right. Who doesn't love Norway?

O'REILLY: I love the fjords.

BECK: Sure.

On December 10, 2009, the global climate-change conference in Copenhagen was under way and in the news. Fox used the leaked e-mail scandal to mock the science of global warming, and Al Gore; MSNBC mocked the mockers, including Sarah Palin; and CNN had a straight discussion of nuclear power in the U.S.

Glenn Beck



Glenn Beck: "Now, the fiery flood comes."

John Stossel, Fox Host: "Greenland has melted."

Beck: "Yes. OK. I can't take it any more. I can't take it any more. OK. So this is what the world leaders are watching?"

Stossel: "This kind of irresponsibility. Look, the globe has warmed. A lot of very serious people believe that we humans are playing a part or at fault. And greenhouse gases—we've clearly increased the carbon dioxide quantity. Maybe this will raise the temperature. But to equate this with this child screaming, and death of the world..."

Beck: "Yes. Hang on just a second. You're not claiming that this is some sort of fear-mongering, are you are?"

Stossel: "Yes, this is..."

Beck: "I just love John Stossel. You're the best, man. Yes, it is fear-mongering."

Stossel: "Horrible, disgusting fear-mongering."

American Morning



Chris Pane, Natural Resources Defense Council: "In the 10 years it takes to build a nuclear plant and get it online and operating, you could have taken that \$8 billion or \$10 billion that it costs to build a nuclear plant and actually started to immediately abate carbon emissions by investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy and co-generation."

Countdown with Keith Olbermann



Lawrence O'Donnell, host: "So we have discovered yet another issue in which she [Sarah Palin] has flip-flopped."

Jonathan Alter, Newsweek: "Her bigger problem, if she wants to be a candidate, is that she's on the wrong side of history. She's on the wrong side of science. She's on the wrong side of politics here."

American Morning



Kitty Pilgrim, Correspondent: "The United States is falling behind the rest of the world in what some see as the cleanest energy option available, nuclear power."

American Morning



Jack Spencer, Heritage Foundation: "Secretary of Energy [Steven] Chu is...creating the same sort of...dependencies between industry and government that may give us a handful of reactors in the near term, but won't yield the cost-effective, long-term economic viability that nuclear energy really needs."

O'REILLY: I've been to Oslo.
BECK: I have never.
O'REILLY: Right. I believe I have some Viking blood in me.
BECK: Do you? I think you do.
O'REILLY: OK. So...
BECK: I want him to wear the hat with the horns. Don't you? Seriously.
O'REILLY: It's Norway.
BECK: Send him the hat with the horns. He'll wear it. But [singing] la la la la. [speaking] He'd do it.
O'REILLY: Easy, Mr. Fascination. Calm down.

THERE'S A LOOPY SELF-ABSORPTION TO THIS THAT IS PECULIAR to Fox and that derives from its origin narrative as the network for the unrepresented, for the outsiders. There is a strain of resentment, of put-upon-ness that pervades almost everything Fox puts on the air. Beck, in particular, was born to play this part. He would be Beale. On his own show that night, Beck spent fully two-thirds of his time in an agitated defense of himself against charges few would ever had heard of had he not spent so much time defending them.

There's a loopy self-absorption to Fox that derives from its origin narrative as the network for the unrepresented, for the outsiders.

No reasonable person would sincerely deny that Fox has a distinct bias favoring Republicans, and conservative Republicans especially. Even Fox used to admit as much. When he started the network, Ailes was straightforward in talking about his desire to redress what he saw as ideological bias in the mainstream media. He wanted to address the same "silent majority" his old boss Richard Nixon had sought to serve. This is nowhere more apparent than in the guests who appear on the network. On the day in question, other than short video clips of news conferences or other public appearances, Fox didn't put a single Democrat on the air except as a foil for Republican or Fox commentators.

This appears to be politically motivated, but that could be just an artifact—the content seems political but the primary aim is much more likely commercial. Cable news is not literally a broadcast business, but a narrowcast. At any given moment, there are a relative handful of people (in peak hours less than five million and in non-prime hours half that, out of the U.S. population of 320 million) watch-

ing all of these networks combined. *American Idol*, in contrast, routinely draws 30 million. Although cable news is a comparatively small market, it is a small market with a much larger mindshare, mainly because the media are self-reflective, creating a kind of virtual echo chamber. It is also lucrative. Advertisers want exactly the sort of educated, higher-disposable-income audience news programming tends to attract.

Ailes has proven an extraordinarily acute businessman who has, according to an excellent piece by David Carr and Tim Arango in the January 9 *New York Times*, turned a fledgling news operation that barely existed a decade ago into the runaway market leader in cable news and a profit engine that turns out more than \$500 million annually for Rupert Murdoch's global News Corporation.

Ailes's most valuable insight was that sharp opinions do not necessarily chase an audience away. In fact, they seem to have created one. There is no worry of offending a broad audience, because there is no broad audience to start with anymore.

It's worth noting that MSNBC languished in the cable news ratings competition until becoming more sharply opinionated, in that way becoming a left-leaning analog to Fox. It's highly doubtful this change was due to political considerations. In other ways, though, MSNBC is not a Fox analog at all. Although its overall operation is sharply to the left of Fox, it offers a wider array of guests and doesn't completely shut out Republicans. Matthews, for example, on the day in question conducted a friendly interview with two Tea Party Republican activists. The existence of *Morning Joe*, starring outspoken conservative Joe Scarborough, on MSNBC's morning air offers further evidence.

Ailes, by his programming choices, sees no need to have a liberal counterpart to Scarborough on Fox. Why should he? He's got the ratings, the money, and a political operation that is nearly pure in its adherence to contemporary populist Republicanism.

But is it an arm of the GOP? Not unless you think Roger Ailes would actually work for Michael Steele. It is more likely the other way around. Steele, in some broader cultural sense, works for Ailes, who is without close contest the most powerful Republican in the country today. The national Republican Party has shrunk to a narrow base with no apparent agenda other than to oppose everything the Obama administration proposes. This extends even to opposing policies Republicans either created or once supported. In explaining these reversals, Republicans frequently say that their changes of position—for example, on deficit-reduction measures that they routinely dismissed when in the majority—owes mainly to changes in national circumstances. But the main circumstance that seems to have changed is their loss of formal power in Washington. This suits Fox perfectly, and gives heft to its self-definition as an insurgency. **CJR**

TERRY McDERMOTT, a former reporter for the Los Angeles Times, is a *CJR Encore Fellow*. He is the author most recently of *101 Theory Drive: A Neuroscientist's Quest for Memory*.

NPR Amps Up

Can Vivian Schiller build a journalism juggernaut?

BY JILL DREW

If I were writing this story for *All Things Considered*, I might open with some audio: the sound of applause. The clapping would come from hundreds of employees gathered for an all-staff meeting at National Public Radio's downtown Washington headquarters in December, as they acknowledged the tenor being set by Vivian Schiller in her first year as NPR's president and chief executive. Staff members were thanking Schiller for leading them out of the

mess they had been in a year earlier, when they had gathered in the same auditorium. At that 2008 meeting, an interim chief executive and his number two had perched nervously on stools in front of the room, shocking the staff with announcements that they were canceling two NPR-produced shows and firing sixty-four people, 7 percent of the staff, in order to deal with a projected \$23 million budget gap torn open by the recession. These were the first budget-related mass layoffs to hit NPR since the early 1980s.

It wasn't just that the news was bad. The executives' impersonal and awkward manner of delivery—one fiddled with his BlackBerry while the other talked, a staff member recalls—left other managers queasy and the staff reeling. NPR's nonprofit status had not protected it from the cataclysm that was decimating commercial media, and the place felt rudderless in the storm, the NPR board having ousted the previous chief executive nine months earlier

after his aggressive maneuvers had alienated many.

Schiller arrived in January 2009 from the general manager spot at the *New York Times's* online operation, exuding an attractive combination of confidence and humility. Deteriorating finances forced her to preside over a second round of cuts in March, but the process was less painful, both because the cuts weren't as deep as in 2008, and also because of her approach to making decisions. Schiller shared detailed data with the staff about the frightful falloff in corporate sponsorships and other revenue that make up a big chunk of NPR's funding. She asked for suggestions about how to cut, eventually opting to negotiate with NPR's unions for temporary benefit cuts, furloughs, and a freeze on merit raises (top management took even deeper cuts) in order to preserve more jobs. Her open style won the trust of some of previous management's most potent critics.

Indeed, Schiller has animated the place with the energy of renewed ambition, a rededication to producing serious journalism. Her strategy rests on three pillars: expand original reporting at the national and local levels; provide free access to public media content regardless of platform; and serve audiences of all backgrounds and interests. To do all that, she wants to work in partnership with NPR's member stations as well as independent producers and some of the new nonprofit journalism units springing up around the country.

"I've never been more optimistic about NPR than I am right now," said

Ellen Weiss, a twenty-seven-year NPR veteran who is senior vice president of news. Although she mourns the destruction at traditional media like newspapers caused by shrinking revenue and fleeing readers, Weiss sees a yawning gap that can be filled with the kind of public-service journalism that is NPR's sweet spot. "We occupy a unique place in the cultural and journalistic ecosystem," she said. "It's an opportunity, and we want to seize it."

This excited buzz is not easy to maintain, especially at a time when the economy is struggling and NPR is projected to lose money again this year. Internally, some NPR journalists fear the focus on multiple content platforms will dull the concentration on NPR's radio excellence. Externally, managers of some member stations believe NPR will attempt to bypass them altogether and reach listeners directly online, potentially upsetting their base of funding.

Consequently, not everyone is happy to come on board.



Making radio waves Vivian Schiller at the Capital Public Radio studio in January 2009 on “the job of my dreams.”

“There’s a lot of talk at different conferences about how we can collaborate and all become big destinations, but I see the opposite,” said Ruth Seymour, who was scheduled to retire in February after thirty-two years as station manager of KCRW in Santa Monica. “We see it as inherently competitive. We aren’t swayed by what wave is supposed to lift all boats.”

Yet others do see a new era of collaboration on both the journalism and fundraising fronts. “We’ve finally got a relatively fear-free environment,” said Caryn G. Mathes, general manager of WAMU in Washington, D.C.

As Schiller digs into her second year as boss, she holds fiercely to the vision of NPR as a central point in a web of partnerships to build a stronger public media. “I truly believe partnership is at the center of all we do,” Schiller said. “It’s at the center of our strategic plan. I charge all division heads, your job responsibility is NPR and the system as a whole: digital, news, fundraising, diversity. Everything is about the system as a whole.”

If this were a radio script, I might write this transition: But holding everyone together won’t be easy (audio: fading applause).

NPR WAS CREATED IN 1970 AT THE URGING OF A GROUP of fiercely independent public-radio stations. Public-radio owners were committed to rules requiring them to serve their local communities, but each went about that mission in a different way, as free-spirited or as fussy as suited their pleasure and audience. Most agreed on the need for a daily news show, so National Public Radio was formed to produce and distribute that news. Eventually, an arrangement was worked out: each station would pay NPR a fee to fund that newsgathering, with the stations raising the money from listener contributions collected in local community pledge drives and grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. In forty years the system has grown to 268 public broadcasting license holders that run 784 NPR member stations reaching more than 32 million people a week, according to Arbitron, a radio-ratings company. About 26.4 million of them listen specifically to NPR programming, as of spring 2009, the most recent figures available. To this day, NPR’s board is dominated by local station heads.

But not all stations are the same. Many, like WAMU and KCRW, are run by universities. Others are run by municipali-

ties. Some are independent nonprofits. WNYC, for example, used to be operated by New York City until current president and chief executive Laura Walker raised enough money to buy the license from the city and run her own operation, governed by an independent board. Still others run both radio and television stations, like WGBH in Boston. All four of these examples, meanwhile, are NPR stations that also produce original programs that have their own national and international following—and compete with some NPR programs.

Then there are organizations like the one run by public radio giant Bill Kling, who was a founding director of NPR. Kling is now chief executive of American Public Media, a St. Paul-based independent public-radio programmer that competes with NPR in offering stations original shows, like *A Prairie Home Companion* and *Marketplace*. APM is also the parent of three NPR member station groups, including Minnesota Public Radio. Meanwhile, Kling helped found what's now called Public Radio International, which competes with both NPR and APM in distributing programs like *Fresh Air* and *This American Life*.

"Each organization plays its role," Kling said. He grants that NPR is "one of the most important news organizations in the country," but says that PRI "was necessary to broaden its outlook" after NPR rejected several stations' ideas for new programming (including *This American Life*). "APM we've kept in-house," he said, "to produce programming, to act much quicker. Each in its own way has made a significant contribution to public radio."

True, but serving the needs of such a disparate system makes for one gnarly management assignment. Public radio is "inherently anarchic," said KCRW's Ruth Seymour. Her station is known for its promotion of eclectic music; Seymour lovingly describes it as quirky. "For people who cannot abide cacophony, they cannot abide the system," she said.

The system that Schiller walked into last January, though, was a proud but sullen place, sort of like a family sulking after a Thanksgiving Day fight.

NPR itself, after an initial three decades of making "a virtue of being threadbare," as former president and chief executive Kevin Klose put it, landed a \$235 million bequest from Joan Kroc, the wife of the McDonald's founder, in 2003. This capped a decade of strong growth under Klose's management, with the number of listeners doubling—to 26 million—and a couple dozen new news bureaus opening around the country and the world. NPR was pushing out on all fronts, building NPR West, a cutting-edge production facility in Culver City, California, and funneling cash to NPR.org, its Web site. The network set its sights on becoming a mondo, multiplatform content provider.

Yet many stations felt they were being run over, not catered to. Klose retired as chief executive in 2006 and for each person who describes him as "charming," another person describes his successor, Ken Stern, as "tough." Stern stepped up from his long-time position as Klose's number two just as war was breaking out between NPR and its stations. NPR's expansion plans needed more cash and its fundraisers were making incursions into local-station territories, seek-

ing deep-pocketed donors. Ideas were bandied about to put a button on NPR.org's site to allow listeners to donate to NPR directly. At the same time, universal access to podcasts of some NPR programming on the site made it easy for online listeners to bypass their local stations. Alarmed and upset, the board dismissed Stern in March 2008 and began a search for his successor. And as if to prove that things could get worse, the recession started to bite and corporate underwriting dollars began to evaporate. Cash reserves and earnings from the endowment funded largely by the Kroc gift helped cushion the blow, but couldn't counteract its full force.

NPR's board selected Schiller out of an initial field of 150 candidates. Although she had never worked in radio, she had broadcasting cred—and the awards to prove it—from her years at CNN and the Discovery-Times Channel, a short-run partnership between suburban Washington-based Discovery Communications and The New York Times Company. And her tenure running nytimes.com, a digital news leader, capped the package, as the board sought a leader who could get public radio onto satellite and into iPhones.

"Our problem was not the quality of what we were doing on the radio," said Howard H. Stevenson, a Harvard Business School professor who chairs NPR's board. "Our problem was how to make the system more than the sum of its parts. How to build the power of public radio... as a cooperative venture rather than competitive ventures."

For her part, Schiller said she hadn't sought the job, but the more she learned about it, the more she liked it. "What

NPR's problem, says Howard Stevenson, is not its journalism, but rather 'how to build the power of public radio as a cooperative venture.'

dawned on me as I read and talked to a lot of people," Schiller said, "was that this was like the job of my dreams. By the end, I really, really wanted it."

SCHILLER CONFESSES TO SLEEPING WITH HER BLACKBERRY next to her bed. She wakes at 6 a.m. to a flood of e-mails most days, and checks some thirty Web sites even as she spends time with her two kids as they get ready for school. On the drive to the office, she uses a headset: "I never actually dial or text, except at a red light." She tries not to schedule early-morning meetings. "I need that mind-space time. I get too stressed out

if I can't get to those e-mails," she said, then added with a smile, "but that's for me to discuss with my psychiatrist."

Schiller mixes her time in the office with plenty of trips around the country to meet with foundations and other donors, as well as NPR member stations. She previews her plans and appointments for each week in a blog she posts on Sunday nights, which is available to the entire NPR staff and its board of directors. "I'm surprised by what she puts in there—'I'm meeting with this foundation' or 'I'm dealing with this issue,'" said Steven M. Bass, an NPR board member and president and chief executive of Oregon Public Broadcasting. "She has a way of dealing with people openly, honestly, and candidly."

Those who work for her describe an almost-constant bombardment of e-mails from the boss. She estimates she sends about a thousand a week. "I didn't interview with Vivian for this job, but I got an e-mail from her about fifteen minutes after I was hired," said Mark Stencel, managing editor for digital news. Then, he recalled, came the deluge. "She conducts e-mail conversations about what's happening at the executive level, at the staff level, at the station level, in the industry. We're all talking about what everyone else is doing," Stencel said he revels in this free-flowing dialogue, which obviates the need for endless meetings.

He's especially admiring of Schiller's focus on what's happening in the news business outside NPR, which helps guard against a too-insular view and keeps people thinking about how to push forward in fast-moving times. She throws out

A glossy D.C. magazine for working mothers asked Schiller 'who' she wears. 'I mean, look at me,' Schiller says. 'Who do I wear?'

ideas and asks others what they think about them. She started a "Mogul" series inside NPR, in which she invites other media chiefs to stop by when they're in Washington for an open conversation with the staff about what their organizations are doing and what NPR should be doing. The Daily Beast's Tina Brown was one guest, as were The Associated Press's Tom Curley and Craig Newmark from Craigslist. Schiller also asked Clay Shirky, the futurist (and her self-described personal guru), to talk to the staff. She delighted in a "Digital Think-In" last fall, an all-day seminar that brought together more than sixty tech leaders and others in Silicon Valley to help NPR imagine public media's digital future.

"I'm not a command-and-control person," Schiller said,

over tea at a Washington sandwich shop. "I lead by building consensus, by getting people excited." Many people I interviewed described Schiller as having little ego. She herself laughs about an interview she did with a local glossy magazine about working mothers. "They did ask me, 'So, who do you wear?'" Schiller said. "I mean, look at me. *Who do I wear?*"

SCHILLER'S STYLE HAS SUCCEEDED SOMEWHAT IN PIERCING NPR's infamous bureaucracy. NPR correspondent Adam Davidson saw this firsthand when Schiller and he accomplished in one meeting what he had been unable to do for months inside the NPR management maze.

Davidson had participated in a rare NPR collaboration with a reporter from another public-media organization—Alex Blumberg of *This American Life*, which is produced by Chicago Public Radio and distributed by PRI—and the result had been a hit. "The Giant Pool of Money," a masterfully clear and lively hour-long report on the causes of the housing crisis, aired in May 2008 on *This American Life*, the popular weekly show hosted by Ira Glass, and won an immediate outpouring of praise and several journalism awards. *All Things Considered* ran a shortened version of the story. Blumberg and Davidson proved radio could do long-form journalism about economics and finance that could excite and engage a broad, general audience. They wanted to keep doing it. But how?

Davidson and Blumberg came up with a concept for what they called Planet Money; it would be part blog, part podcast, part radio-reporting team. Davidson was NPR's global economics correspondent but Blumberg, a producer for *This American Life*, didn't work for NPR. And the multiplatform unit was neither a show, like *All Things Considered* or *Morning Edition*, nor was it a desk, like the business-news desk or the science desk. NPR is organized into shows and desks, apples and oranges. Planet Money was a kumquat.

NPR's news chief, Ellen Weiss, believed in the duo's reporting and was determined to find a place for it to flourish despite NPR's rigid structure. Weiss freed up a handful of people to join the Planet Money team and told Davidson to just start producing journalism—they would figure out how to fund it within the corporate structure later. The Planet Money site, with its blog and podcast, launched on NPR.org and its first story aired on *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition* on September 9, 2008, just as the government began bailing out financial institutions to prevent a system meltdown. Needless to say, the project took off strong and continues to grow in popularity. One of its biggest fans is Schiller.

"She liked the Planet Money content," Davidson said, "and, more importantly, she instantly understood that several things embedded in the Planet Money experiment were truly important to NPR's future"—namely, the power of collaboration and entrepreneurship that produces passionate journalism with a dual radio-Web focus. "The old broadcast model was inherently only top-down. The ideas all had to be big ideas, with huge funding and huge pressure to be a success," Davidson continued. "She saw at least one path to success here for NPR more broadly—to make everybody

Getting Planet Money's identity and role sorted out is a case study in how Schiller's style has managed to pierce NPR's infamous bureaucracy.

feel excited, that they can and should be dreaming big and exploring new ideas.”

Still, despite the good feelings and strong audience support for Planet Money, by spring 2009 unresolved issues had piled up and begun to press. Was this a permanent unit, or would Davidson and the others at some point return to their old jobs? How many stories should the unit do for *This American Life* and NPR's news shows? Was there an expansion plan? What exactly was its relationship with *This American Life*? “Even to schedule meetings with the right people was impossible. It wasn't happening,” Davidson said. He began to fear NPR's bureaucratic process could take years.

He talked to Schiller about his frustrations and she agreed that the ad-hoc nature of Planet Money's existence had to end. They set up a two-hour meeting in her office—scheduled in back-to-back, half-hour increments—with each department that needed to weigh in. For example, the finance department figured out how to move the team's funding to the permanent budget, and the general counsel committed to working out the specific legal relationship with *This American Life*.

“I think everyone left the meeting feeling like they had been heard,” said Davidson. He recalled Schiller's words as she closed discussion on one contentious issue after another: “Done and done.” He was stunned.

Before Schiller's arrival, Davidson said, management had sent out several pronouncements on how the staff had to get on board with new initiatives, embrace technology changes, work in a different way. “We were sort of culture-change-fatigued,” he said. But in Schiller's first year, “the real culture change I've seen is amazing.”

JUST A FEW MONTHS AFTER SCHILLER'S ARRIVAL, *FAST Company* magazine dubbed NPR “the most successful hybrid of old and new media,” quite a compliment after many acrimonious starts and stops in the digital realm. NPR went from nowhere in digital media to one of the savviest users of social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, to providing apps for phones that run on the Android program, to producing the popular Web sites NPR.org and NPR.org/music, and to building a digital infrastructure that allows member stations and members of the public to pick up NPR content and weave it seamlessly into their own Web sites and playlists.

“We were slow to the game,” said Kinsey Wilson, NPR's senior vice president and general manager for digital media, who was hired in October 2008 from his position as executive editor at *USA Today*. He said NPR is not attempting to play catchup to build a portal-like news Web site; rather, it's creating digital media infused with NPR's sensibility, available on multiple devices. Using a \$1.5 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, awarded in September 2007, NPR is putting its entire newsroom of 334 journalists, plus another fifty or so staffers, through extensive digital training, ranging from two-day sessions to in-depth, five-week programs.

Wilson and others acknowledge that the tension between the traditional radio mission and the digital future still exists within the NPR newsroom, and in NPR's relationships with its stations. “One of the reasons the transition to new platforms is hard here is because of the dedication to craftsmanship. NPR online is not as perfect or honed as NPR on the radio,” said Dick Meyer, NPR's executive editor, who described the newsroom as “mostly like a giant workshop of craftsmen who are incredibly devoted to old-world values and new-world goals and visions.”

Melissa Block, co-host of *All Things Considered*, said the “workload has shifted dramatically” as NPR produces radio programs “that have tentacles in the digital realm.” Although online components of radio pieces can be fun, interesting, and helpful in producing the story, Block said, “last time I checked, no more hours have been added in a day.”

“My fear is that we neglect radio,” she added, even though it's the radio audience that has doubled in the past decade. “We can't forget what our engine is as we reach out to the new world.”

Wilson said the successful launch of NPR's iPhone app in August 2009 is easing radio-digital tensions a bit, especially because the format emphasizes listening to radio reports instead of handing off a script to a Web team to rewrite a story for a text-based site. As for stations' fears that audiences will bypass them to get to their favorite shows directly from NPR, Wilson said he has directed his development teams to keep member station needs foremost in their minds as they work on new applications. For example, Wilson estimated that at least 25 percent of mobile traffic is going to member stations' pages that offer streaming audio, so those listeners can be counted in the stations' online traffic totals. Any podcasts of flagship shows like *All Things Considered* will use the local station version of that program, including the local content. Launching those podcasts has been delayed by the need to get rights to the bits of music stitched in between each story, Schiller said.

As mobile extends public radio's traditional drive-time audience, Wilson sees opportunity for huge growth. “Mobile is the ideal platform for audio and NPR is the unquestioned leader in the news space in terms of audio,” he said. Wilson cited statistics showing that NPR's mobile traffic increased nearly tenfold after the iPhone app launched, and that mobile users spend an average of fourteen minutes each time they open the NPR app, considerably more than Web users do.

Social media has become another hot spot for NPR and

all of public radio, with its intensely loyal audiences. Scott Simon, host of *Weekend Edition Saturday*, has more than 1.3 million people following him on Twitter. He usually has a running stream of tweets on Saturday mornings. “Read the transcript of Rev. Robertson on Haiti, seeming to blame quake on pact w/ devil. Can he still be called a man of God?” he tweeted on January 15. “There’s every reason for us to be in the advance of this,” Simon said in an interview. “It’s communication. It’s what we do.”

To support member stations in building their own Web sites, NPR secured a total of \$3 million in grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Knight Foundation to fund a pilot project—involving a dozen or more stations—in which each station will create digital content on a specific topic. Wilson is spearheading the project, dubbed “Argo” for the mythological Jason and the Argonauts who searched for a golden fleece. Although final agreements with the stations aren’t yet signed, the funding should pay for one or two new hires at each station’s Web site, who will focus on creating blogs and curating content around a specific topic. Oregon Public Broadcasting, for instance, will focus on building out more content about the outdoors and the environment, said Bass, the CEO there. WAMU will focus on societal divisions over race, gender, age, education, socioeconomic status, and the like. The idea is to make each station’s Web site a center for unique and deep content that can be promoted across NPR’s platforms. The reporting from each station will both enhance national stories done by NPR reporters and also bolster local stories with national examples.

WNYC’s Walker is participating in Argo and credits Schiller with creating “new ways of partnering that are about the whole system,” and not just NPR-focused. “It’s in NPR’s interest as well as our interest to help newsrooms around the country become stronger,” Walker said. “In this world, public media should band together as partners. We’re all too small to do this alone.”

SCHILLER’S OWN ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT accomplishment of her first year has been getting NPR on firmer financial footing. The benefit givebacks, on top of the layoffs and significant expense cuts, were big parts of narrowing the budget gap. At the all-staff meeting in December, she shared numbers that showed that NPR’s deficit for fiscal 2009 was \$10.1 million, considerably less than the \$15 million deficit that the board had set as the maximum allowed. NPR’s current operations budget is \$156 million. She thanked everyone for the sacrifices they had made. “We could have been on a path to a terrible place,” she said. “These are sacrifices we needed to make.”

She said the financial situation was a little brighter for the fiscal year that started in October, in which the board has approved running NPR’s operations at a deficit of \$8.6 million. “We are on track to do better than that. How much better it is too early to tell, but we are encouraged that we are heading in the right direction,” Schiller said at the meeting. She told the staff she would restore one of the three unpaid holidays scheduled for the year as a sign that as conditions improve,

After a year, Schiller has NPR on firmer financial footing. But to make her ambitious vision a reality, she still needs to raise money—lots and lots of it.

all would share. When representatives of the two unions within NPR pressed to have more benefits restored, Schiller said the cuts were “baked into the projections.” The board has asked NPR to have zero deficit in fiscal 2011.

Keeping costs down won’t be easy. Contracts with the two unions that represent NPR employees—one for journalists and the other for engineers—both expire this year. And while Kevin Beesley, president of the NPR unit of AFTRA, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, said he’s been “blown away” by Schiller’s fresh approach, that doesn’t mean negotiations will be a cakewalk. “Her style was a huge success and was one of the reasons they got the money they needed from us” in the 2009 benefit givebacks, he said. Beesley, who is NPR’s European editor, reckons he personally gave up about \$8,000 in benefits in the form of cuts to the company’s health and retirement contributions, as well as mandatory furloughs and unpaid vacations. “For the last year, we’ve felt management has been spending our money,” he said.

The union has been disappointed by what it sees as a larding of the management ranks. Beesley cited two recent hires to underscore his point. Keith Woods, a respected diversity expert who had been dean of faculty at the Poynter Institute, was brought on as vice president of diversity, a more senior title than NPR’s previous director of diversity and thus presumably with more clout. “That’s great,” Beesley said, “but what we desperately need are more young people from diverse backgrounds to bring their experience into our journalism. We don’t need another vice president to go to meetings and recommend more diverse hires only to be told, ‘There’s no more money. We spent it hiring you.’” The other new hire is Susanne Reber, deputy managing editor for investigations. She is an award-winning journalist who headed up an investigations unit for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and will oversee NPR’s first-ever investigative unit. NPR should pursue more investigations, Beesley said, but “management did not hire more investigative reporters. They hired a manager, and she can’t even edit because she’s not in AFTRA.”

Beesley’s concern is that too much money is being spent on managers, leaving little to improve the lot of the people who create NPR’s content. And although she has promised that no one is discussing more layoffs to reduce the budget,

Schiller won't rule out more job losses over the next five years as technology advances lessen the need for some positions.

Despite her desire to run a tight budget, to meet her ambitious goals for NPR's journalism Schiller needs money. Lots of it. So one of her most significant hires has been Ron Schiller (no relation) as senior vice president for development. Fresh from the University of Chicago, where his team raised \$2.5 billion over four years, he thinks big. "I believe we can raise substantially more for NPR by raising substantially more for public radio," he told those gathered at the December all-staff meeting. He pledged to work together with member stations to meet the highest-end philanthropists. "Our givers see us as interdependent," he said.

Echoing his boss's vision, Schiller believes public radio has an opportunity and responsibility to serve the country's information needs, and that big donors and foundations will support that. He likened the public-radio system to Harvard University, with its prodigious fundraising power. Harvard doesn't beg that it needs money, he said; rather, "it produces. It's a winner. It's a place people are proud to affiliate with." NPR is in the same boat, he said, but has never approached big donors to consistently make the pitch to support the public-radio system. Now it will, he said, pursuing "game-changing" gifts—numbers with plenty of zeros behind them.

NPR was able to land such a gift once, the 2003 Kroc bequest. But some others in the public-radio world didn't see that as the start of the trend or a model to be repeated. They saw it as a fluke, the result of a personal relationship that stretched back two decades between Kroc and Stephanie Bergsma, the associate manager of KPBS in San Diego.

Kroc had been a frequent contributor to NPR, and her relationship with Bergsma deepened after the death of Bergsma's husband. When it became clear that Kroc was making major decisions about her own will, Bergsma brought in NPR's Kevin Klose, and the two of them talked to Kroc about what a gift to public radio could accomplish. Their efforts secured \$5 million for KPBS and \$235 million for NPR.

"People said, 'Don't you feel upset she didn't give more to KPBS?'" said Bergsma. "I said, 'No. That didn't make sense.' Eighty percent of our programming schedule comes from NPR. NPR isn't a threat to the stations. Helping NPR ultimately helps us all."

Not everyone thinks that way, however. American Public Media's Kling, for one, said that, "Had I been in San Diego, I would have worked hard to convince Joan that she had the opportunity to create a model public-media service in San Diego." Why not \$100 million to KPBS?

"If I found a \$10-million donor and Ron Schiller came to town and said, 'Let's split that,' I'd say no," Kling continued. "Here the most important thing to do next is to get Minnesota Public Radio up to its full potential in professional news collection and dissemination." Kling said the publisher of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* recently said he thought in five years his biggest competition would be public radio. "If he's right," Kling said, "we've got a long way to go. We'd probably have to triple the investment we make to news to get there."

Kling has a point about local public radio stations needing more money—especially if they are attempting to fill some

gaps created by the death of local newspapers. He hosted a confab in November at Minnesota Public Radio on the future of regional journalism and released a study of public-radio news resources titled "In Service of Democracy: Achieving Public Radio and Public Media's Potential." It found that Minnesota Public Radio had the biggest public-media newsroom in the country, with nearly eighty people reporting local news on a \$76 million budget. All other stations in the top twenty-five markets spent less. In Dallas, for example, the public radio station has a station budget of just \$2 million, Kling said. And many local public radio stations have no newsrooms to speak of; they run on shoestring budgets and are essentially repeater stations for content created by NPR and other national networks. They serve local communities as best they can; without them, some places would have nothing in terms of quality news services.

Thus, NPR pilot projects like Argo can only go so far in boosting local reporting. Schiller says she knows that, and in part for this reason she is also supporting other efforts at sharing resources. NPR economic editors and reporters, for example, now sometimes work with local reporters on stories about the recession's impact. And one of the tasks of the new investigative unit is to team occasionally with local station reporters. Some stations are teaming up, too. WNYC won a grant to fund transportation reporting and sends part of that money to WAMU for reporting in D.C.

WNYC's Walker is a prodigious fundraiser, having recently launched a \$15 million campaign with a \$5 million kick-off gift, on the heels of completing a \$62.9 million capital campaign in April 2009 to fund a major upgrade of its news operation, including a move to a new space. "Where and if it makes sense, we'll work with NPR," Walker said. "But not all the time."

"I personally like their approach," Walker said, referring to what she calls "The Schillers," Vivian and Ron. "They think in a different way, to raise money for the greater good." But, Walker said, she has spoken with both of them and unless Walker agrees to work with them on a case-by-case basis, "NPR has made a commitment they won't come into our area and fundraise."

WAMU's Mathes, in Washington, D.C., seems more willing to gamble on the benefits of partnership. She has shared a prospective donor list with NPR. "I'm stepping out on faith here," she said with a laugh. "So far, I haven't been burned."

Mathes recently worked with Vivian Schiller to co-host a meeting with a major WAMU donor at NPR's downtown headquarters. They met for a lunch of wrap sandwiches and salad in Schiller's office and then Ellen Weiss, the head of news, took the donor on a tour of NPR, being careful to point out production teams that were covering issues the donor cared about. "This person has a lot of personal savvy about the media and wanted to see the sausage getting made," said Mathes. "I came away from that experience thinking that it should have always been like this."

If Schiller gets her way, perhaps now it will be. **CJR**

JILL DREW, a former reporter and editor for The Washington Post, is a CJR *Encore Fellow*.

The Education of Herb And Marion Sandler

When two patrons of aggressive journalism became its targets, they cried foul. They have a point.

BY JEFF HORWITZ

In March 2008, Herb and Marion Sandler sat down with Joe Nocera of *The New York Times* to explain the creation of ProPublica, an investigative journalism startup launched with \$10 million of their money and the promise of more. Journalists weren't doing enough investigative work that mattered, they felt; work with moral force. ¶ The Sandlers are in their late seventies, billionaires who built an Oakland, California, bank, Golden West

Financial Corporation, into a respected institution with 285 branches operating under the name World Savings Bank. Over the years they earned a reputation for criticizing the banking industry's risky and predatory practices. And when they sold Golden West to Wachovia Corporation in 2006, they took the better part of \$2.4 billion and embraced a muscular brand of philanthropy full-time. Supporting serious journalism, they believed, was in keeping with their support for organizations like Oceana, Human Rights Watch, and The Center for Responsible Lending. The journalism would highlight, and maybe rectify, injustice. "It starts with outrage," Herb Sandler told Nocera. "You go a little crazy when power takes advantage of those without power."

Two years after ProPublica's launch, the Sandlers seem happy with the freestanding newsroom. Under Paul Steiger, a former editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, it has collaborated with some top news outlets and brought researched

exposés to an array of smaller ones. Its work has spurred an overhaul of California's nurse-disciplinary system, heightened the sense of the risk that natural gas hydrofracking poses to America's water supply (which won a Polk Award), and raised red flags over the dire straits of unemployment insurance funds nationwide.

The Sandlers' relationship with the rest of journalism has not fared as well. After decades of depictions of the couple as meticulous lenders, consumer advocates, and a lovable husband-and-wife team, the Sandlers' reputation was recast during the financial crisis. In the 1980s, their bank popularized the "Pick-a-Pay" loan, a subtype of the option adjustable-rate mortgage (option ARM) that would later be blamed for some of the housing boom's excesses—largely because they allowed borrowers to temporarily make payments that do not cover even the interest on the loan, meaning later payments must rise sharply. Worse, the Sandlers were accused of lowering their underwriting standards to juice loan volume, then pocketing billions by foisting the toxic mess on Wachovia—an acquisition that poisoned America's fourth-largest bank.

In *The New York Times*, the Sandlers option ARM loans were the "Typhoid Mary" of the housing crisis. *60 Minutes* featured a whistleblower who accused them of "sitting on an Enron." To cap it all off, *Time* included the Sandlers on its list of "People to Blame for the Financial Crisis" at number twelve, right after Lehman Brothers' Dick Fuld.

The case against the Sandlers appeared cut and dried. It was already a truism that other purveyors of option ARMs had been predatory and reckless; the Sandlers' Golden West wasn't being tarred with anything that hadn't been said of Angelo Mozilo's Countrywide Financial or Kerry Killinger's Washington Mutual. Nor was there any doubt that a little over two years after the Sandlers sold their portfolio, Wachovia faced billions of dollars in Pick-a-Pay losses. The Sandlers' record of support for consumer protections, when noticed at all, was recalled with dark irony.

The couple bitterly protested the stories and by early 2009 began demanding corrections, aided by an attorney. In the case of the *Times*, the article about them was eventually appended with four corrections—ranging from the removal of the word "pariah" from the headline to a half-point interest-rate error. But the Sandlers wanted more, from the *Times* and others. And they had a point.

The Sandlers' Golden West was neck deep in some of the

housing market's most overheated regions. They fought to hold market share, maintaining an uneasy relationship with the increasingly dominant independent mortgage brokerage industry, a constituency Herb Sandler deemed "whores." And when the crash finally came, the Sandlers were retired and gone, though the portfolio they created and Wachovia expanded suffered terrible losses.

But the media's insistence on conflating the Sandlers with Countrywide, New Century, Ameriquest, and other notorious lenders—who sold products with short "teaser" periods that would soon explode, made a joke of underwriting standards, and off-loaded their toxic paper into the secondary market—points up the difficulty journalists had understanding the mortgage mania and identifying the truly bad actors. The press lumped the egregious with the unlucky.

IN HINDSIGHT, WACHOVIA VASTLY OVERPAID FOR GOLDEN West when it bought the bank for \$25.5 billion in May 2006. When an analyst suggested on a conference call that month that Herb Sandler might be dumping Golden West on Wachovia at the top of the market, the seventy-six-year-old banker got testy. "That's a bunch of garbage," he said. Two years later, as the market tanked and Wachovia began to rack up losses, Sandler pointed to his continued stock holdings in the bank as evidence that he hadn't predicted the carnage. Still, on the timing, at least, the analyst had been correct.

Wachovia itself was sold in the fall of 2008, during the panic following the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and the media began to see the Sandlers in a new light. Oddly, an early broadside came in an October 4 *Saturday Night Live* skit that accused the Sandlers of corruption and joked that they "should be shot." The executive producer of *SNL*, Lorne Michaels, later apologized. He'd somehow thought the Sandlers were fictitious. "When I spoke to them, I can assure you this: they are very, very real," he told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Then, in a piece on Christmas Day 2008, originally titled ONCE TRUSTED MORTGAGE PIONEERS, NOW PARIAHs, *New York Times* reporters Michael Moss and Geraldine Fabrikant described a "broad and aggressive effort" by Golden West "to market risky loans at the height of the housing bubble." The *Times* said the couple had "embraced practices" such as using unscrupulous independent brokers and increasing loan volume at the same time they lowered the bank's lending standards. After initiating the sale to Wachovia, the *Times* reported, Golden West had dropped its minimum payment to a "rock bottom" 1 percent interest rate, luring in an inferior class of borrowers. The *Times* found a clip from a World Savings sales-training video encouraging buyers not to worry about making payments that were less than the interest due—even though it would increase the balance of their loans.

Then came the *60 Minutes* report, a thirteen-minute segment that aired February 15, 2009. It focused on a for-



Getting out Herb and Marion Sandler addressing Golden West shareholders in 2006.

mer World Savings mortgage salesman named Paul Bishop who was suing Golden West for allegedly firing him after he raised questions about the quality of the company's loans and, Bishop says, threatened to try to derail Golden West's sale to Wachovia. Wachovia had been "so badly wounded" by the Golden West portfolio losses, Scott Pelley reported, that it had to be sold to Wells Fargo in October 2008.

The heart of both stories was that Golden West had intentionally sacrificed its lending standards to boost sales of a predatory product. Both pieces generally defined Golden West's Pick-a-Pay loans as option ARMs with a "cheerful name," as *60 Minutes* put it. "Over all, analysts expect the option ARM fallout to be brutal," the *Times* wrote. "Fitch Ratings, a leading credit rating agency, recently reported that payments on nearly half of the \$200 billion worth of option ARMs it tracks will jump 63 percent in the next two years—causing mortgage delinquencies to rise sharply."

That point was problematic. Golden West's loans weren't among the soon-to-implode option ARMs that Fitch tracks. Fitch rates securitized loans, not whole mortgages held on banks' books. The detail highlights a contradiction in the notion that the Sandler's intentionally lowered Golden West's underwriting standards. For a portfolio lender like Golden West—one that holds on to its loans rather than sell them in the securities markets—issuing loans to borrowers who can't afford to pay them would be suicidal. The skin in the game, as the phrase goes, was Golden West's own.

Being a portfolio lender also meant that a high volume of loans wasn't as essential to earnings as it was to companies like New Century and Countrywide Financial. Those companies made money by producing a constant stream of mortgages for investors, whereas Golden West earned most of its revenue from interest on loans. While some growth in lending volume was good—and in the years leading up to the bust the bank did grow at a faster pace than its historical average—Golden West's business wasn't dependent on it.

Setting aside the question of motive, however, there is limited evidence that Golden West went out of its way to ramp up volume in the months before its sale to Wachovia. While new mortgages grew from \$21 billion to \$49 billion annually between 2001 and 2004, they barely changed for the eighteen months before the Wachovia deal was consummated. The percentage of loan applications that the bank approved during the boom, in fact, was lower than it had been for most of the 1990s. And between 2004 and 2005 the bank raised the minimum payments on new loans it issued, making it harder for borrowers to get a Golden West loan. At the bank's annual retreats, documents that the Sandler's provided to CJR show, its managers were asked to debate whether high loan growth could compensate for an increased risk of loan losses. The correct answer was no.

That's not to say that Golden West was immune to the competitive pressures of the mortgage market during the bubble. Both the *Times* and *60 Minutes* reported that the average credit scores of new Golden West borrowers slipped in the bank's final years of independence. And a few months after the Wachovia buyout was announced—but while the Sandler's were still in charge—Golden West did lower its

minimum payment rates from 2.85 percent to 1.5 percent, a step that would have brought in more marginal borrowers.

A similar point can be made about Golden West's use of independent mortgage brokers. The Sandler's were indeed publicly critical of the industry for low quality controls, but such brokers accounted for the majority of the market. To protect the quality of its portfolio, the Golden West staff often independently reviewed the income of borrowers before approving brokered loans. But not always, and as *60 Minutes* showed with the case of Betty Townes, an elderly widow who took out a series of brokered Golden West loans based on her deceased husband's income, some bad loans got through.

WHILE THE OPTION ARM HAS BECOME IMPLICATED IN THE housing crisis, its origins weren't sinister. The loan was created in the early 1980s to address interest-rate risk. With the prime rate hovering around 20 percent, banks were paying more to borrow money than they were earning from their lending and, not surprisingly, going broke. The adjustable-rate mortgage offered a solution, in that it tied the rates a bank charged to its own interest costs.

For a lender who holds loans rather than sells them, issuing loans to people who can't afford them is suicidal.

That protection came at a price, however: ARMs transferred interest-rate risk to borrowers who sometimes weren't equipped to absorb it. To avoid a rash of defaults when interest rates, and thus payments, rose, the Sandler's and others designed payment "option" ARMs. The borrower could shift between several monthly payments, which ranged from high ones that speedily reduced principal to low ones that covered only a portion of the interest due. In the latter option, the loan would negatively amortize, meaning its balance (and the size of future payments) would grow. Interest couldn't be deferred forever, and after either ten years or the balance growing to 125 percent of its original size, the option ARM would be "recast" into a standard, fixed-rate mortgage.

This obviously could get dangerous, but "Neg Am" never accounted for more than a few percentage points of the Sandler's total Pick-a-Pay portfolio. Over decades, they developed a reputation for only underwriting loans to borrowers with the ability to pay down principal, and then closely monitoring for signs of distress. In the 1990s, the bank weathered a seven-year trough in national home prices with losses that peaked at 0.18 percent. Other portfolio lenders went bust. In

order to figure out how the portfolio would perform under varying scenarios, Golden West ran thousands of simulations, “but never one where it declined 50-70 percent,” Herb Sandler says. “If you operated under the assumption that home prices could have gone down 50 percent, all lending would stop.”

Negative amortization wasn’t the main risk to borrowers, as the Sandlers saw it; shoddy underwriting and excessively high loan-to-value ratios were. Golden West’s financial statements show it almost never underwrote loans with less than a 20 percent down payment.

In the early 2000s, a new wave of option ARMs entered the market. Generally marketed to borrowers with subprime credit scores, the loans shared the Pick-a-Pay characteristics of allowing the borrowers to choose their payment for a period of time, run up some degree of negative amortization, and then recast to a fixed-rate mortgage. But that was where their resemblance to Golden West’s product ended.

While Golden West’s minimum payments were designed to rise gradually over a decade, the “option” period in this new wave of loans was often no more than a few years, guaranteeing a massive jump in payments when the loan recast. Instead of cushioning borrowers against interest-rate hikes, the teaser rates just let them temporarily make payments on homes they couldn’t afford.

Meanwhile, entities like New Century and Countrywide had no stake in the loans after they wrote them. When investment banks opened a new market by securitizing the first option ARMs in the 1990s, the Sandlers were horrified. Golden West’s business model was premised on the idea that option ARMs required meticulous underwriting and monitoring. By packaging and selling such loans as securities to investors, its rivals dispensed with the obligation to do either.

How badly did the Sandlers’ portfolio do? Any portfolio of loans written in Golden West’s key markets—the less costly areas of California, Nevada, and Florida, where the current percentage of foreclosed-on and delinquent mortgages is far in excess of the national average of 14 percent—would take massive losses when the market began its deep crash in 2006. Still, it is hard to tell how much was lost under Golden West, because the Pick-a-Pay portfolio Wells Fargo now holds includes loans that Wachovia wrote for a year and a half after it bought Golden West, sometimes at the rate of more than \$3 billion a month. What is apparent from Wells Fargo data and the bank’s public statements is that the Pick-a-Pay portfolio is in much better shape than securitized option ARMs, and that Golden West’s loans performed better than the ones subsequently written by Wachovia.

Upon taking possession of the portfolio, Wells Fargo divided it between similarly sized “impaired” and “unimpaired” categories after Wachovia’s purchase. The average age of the unimpaired loans that Wells expects to perform well is five and a half years, squarely in the period when Golden West was writing them.

The impaired loans, meanwhile, skew significantly toward Wachovia’s tenure, with an average age of just over three and a half years. “Half of the problem loans had been generated after” the Pick-a-Pay portfolio was purchased by Wachovia, says one former Wachovia executive who had

access to bank statistics. To entirely blame the Sandlers, he says, is “a bit unfair.”

THE SANDLERS’ REQUESTS FOR CORRECTIONS FROM *THE New York Times* began with the headline that labeled them “pariahs.” In a December 30 letter to executive editor Bill Keller, they cited that wording as one of “at least forty statements in the story that were inaccurate, misleading, and/or at best, confusing” and requested an editors’ note. In a letter dated a week later, Keller wrote that the headline was regrettable and would be corrected. The new headline would be: ONCE TRUSTED MORTGAGE PIONEERS, NOW SCRUTINIZED.

The letter was gracious, but the correction that accompanied it was not fulsome. Herb Sandler wrote back the same day requesting five specific corrections, including one correcting that day’s correction. What followed was protracted negotiation between the Sandlers and the *Times*, in letters, phone calls, and an attorney-chaperoned meeting between Herb Sandler and Tim O’Brien, who edited the original piece. Yet as adamant as the Sandlers were that the *Times* had essentially gotten the story wrong, most of the alleged errors they cited were matters of framing or emphasis, not unambiguous fact. Aside from excising “pariah” from the headline, the *Times*’s corrections were limited to adjusting a numerical error, adding context to a former regulator’s quote, and fixing a misstatement regarding the Center for Responsible Lending’s position on loan prepayment penalties. None of these things significantly altered the story’s central contention: that the Sandlers, after decades of being known for reputable and cautious lending, had sold junk loans at the height of the housing bubble. The Sandlers failed to convince the *Times* that their company had not changed.

The corrections saga ended in August, eight months after the *Times* story ran, when a twenty-two page letter from the Sandlers and the response by Keller were appended to the original article. There were many things about which the *Times* and the Sandlers would continue to disagree, Keller wrote, but he hoped they did not view the story as an attack on their reputations. “It was, on the contrary, a story about how even bankers who were recognized as the gold standard of integrity in that industry could not remain untouched by the exploding mortgage crisis,” Keller wrote.

“In retrospect, any story could be done differently and perhaps none are ever as perfect as you would like them to be,” the *Times* wrote in an e-mail to CJR. “But we still stand by our Golden West story and believe it was a very strong piece to pursue and that we framed it fairly.” The Sandlers remain unsatisfied, but say they have put the matter to rest.

The story of the Sandlers’ discussions with CBS is simpler. The Sandlers had background contacts with *60 Minutes* producer Graham Messick before the segment aired, and quarreled strongly with *60 Minutes*’s decision to use Paul Bishop as a key whistleblower source. Bishop, who is still pursuing a wrongful termination suit against Golden West (it’s in mediation), left behind clear records of his discomfort with lending practices in Golden West’s San Francisco office, where he worked as a loan salesman. But other former employees

disagreed, and scores of them wrote letters vouching for the integrity of Golden West's lending, which were posted on the Sandlers' GoldenWestWorld.com Web site.

Following the airing of the *60 Minutes* story, "A World of Trouble," the couple went to the top, writing a March 20 letter to Les Moonves, the CEO of CBS. *60 Minutes* has steadfastly declined to discuss its reporting or the Sandlers' response, and the newsroom has never revisited the piece. Yet the Sandlers eventually did get a letter from management that praised their ethical standards but did not apologize: "Based on the information you shared with us subsequent to the broadcast, we now better understand your position that at no time did you change your historic focus on the quality of your lending to a focus on volume," a February letter from Moonves and CBS General Counsel Lou Briskman said. It concluded, in language remarkably similar to the letter from the *Times*, that Briskman and Moonves had "come to appreciate why your ethics and integrity have been recognized as the gold standard in the industry."

Five months after the *Times's* "pariah" story ran, the paper's Floyd Norris wrote a column about Golden West's loans. The business columnist had entirely missed the original piece on the Sandlers, he says, and knew little about their bank's history. Like other option ARMs, Norris wrote, Pick-a-Pay loans were racking up big losses. But when reading Wells Fargo's first-quarter earnings report, he noticed that less than one-third of 1 percent of Golden West's loans were expected to recast before the end of 2012, meaning that borrowers wouldn't see large payment increases for many years. "That struck me as an amazing number," he says. "How the hell could that be?"

It was the ten-year option at work. Over the next few days, Norris researched the terms of Pick-a-Pay loans, and concluded that the loans' ten-year option and high loan-to-value cap were remarkably generous, and an attempt to do right by borrowers. Yet in a catastrophic market decline, those terms stripped the bank of leverage. Homeowners could pay less than interest-only in the hope that the market would recover, restoring their equity. If prices stayed depressed, however, they didn't have much to lose, as their payments "could well be less than the cost of a comparable rental," Norris wrote.

"I understand it makes some people feel better to know that they have identified someone who acted outrageously," Norris says. "But sometimes it's more interesting when nobody acted particularly outrageously and things blew up anyway."

BACK WHEN THE *TIMES* PUBLISHED THE SANDLERS' INSTALLMENT in "The Reckoning," the generally excellent series in which it appeared, ProPublica was working closely with *The New York Times Magazine* on an exhaustive, 12,000-word investigation of alleged euthanasia in a New Orleans hospital during Hurricane Katrina, written by freelancer Sheri Fink over two years. ProPublica picked up much of the story's estimated \$400,000 cost.

The Sandlers say they were unaware of the joint project. Still, this had the makings of an awkward situation, touching on a central fear about foundation-funded journalism: that a

news organization would feel indebted to the sponsors of its work. Both ProPublica and the *Times* said the Sandlers' feud with the paper had no bearing on the collaboration. According to the *Times*, the ProPublica relationship is "with Paul Steiger and Steve Engelberg, both well known to us, and with their reporters—not with the Sandlers." This is, of course, exactly what the *Times* would be expected to say. What lends it credibility is that the Sandlers are still irate about what they characterized as the *Times's* "vicious" wording on several corrections, and that Bill Keller's letters to the couple accuse them of splitting hairs.

"Keller did not back down," says Clark Hoyt, the *Times's* public editor. "I think you could look at this and suggest that what has happened here worked the way it should work."

While ProPublica kept its relationship with the Sandlers separate from its dealings with the *Times*, Steiger occasionally addressed the attention ProPublica's patrons were receiving in other forums. Following the *Saturday Night Live* skit, for instance, Steiger wrote to Lorne Michaels to say that he thought the skit was off the mark.

A potentially awkward moment arrived last April, at a symposium at the University of California, Berkeley. Both Steiger and Bill Keller were among those asked to discuss the future of investigative journalism. The Sandlers were in the audience. When the panel took questions, PBS's Mark Glaser raised the issue of nonprofit journalism's relationship with its backers. Would ProPublica write a story that was critical of its founders? According to Glaser, Steiger said: "We would report on them if we found anything worth reporting on, and we haven't found anything." The conversation moved on.

Back in December of 2008, just weeks before the *Times* story on the Sandlers was published, Steiger flew to California to talk money. Under ProPublica's original deal with the Sandlers, the couple had committed to rolling, three-year payments of \$10 million annually. At each year's end, they can either recommit to three years or tell the newsroom that it's being cut off in two.

The Sandlers will not discuss ProPublica's funding beyond saying that they're extremely proud of ProPublica's staff and its work, and that ProPublica's funding will become more diversified, as is typical for the Sandlers' other nonprofits. "It's not healthy for ProPublica or any nonprofit to be dependent on one or two funders," Herb said.

As chairman of ProPublica's board, Herb Sandler says he regularly talks with Steiger and general manager Richard Tofel. By strict agreement, though, the Sandlers and the board have no control over editorial decisions and are not told about ProPublica's investigations before they are published.

But they can make suggestions. Herb Sandler pushed for hiring more financial reporters early on, and it's no secret that he's partial to stories about the issue of money in politics. Sitting in a conference room at the Sandler Family Foundation headquarters overlooking the San Francisco Bay, he says he remains a believer in meticulously researched, crusading journalism. "Keep the story alive, pressure people, shame them," he says. **CJR**

JEFF HORWITZ is a reporter in New York.

SPECIAL REPORT

Tangled Web

A CJR survey finds that magazines are allowing their Web sites to erode journalistic standards

BY VICTOR NAVASKY with EVAN LERNER

Speaking as a card-carrying member of the old media, it has been my observation that virtually every magazine (old media) now has a Web site (new media, a.k.a. digital media), and that the proprietors of these sites don't, for the most part, know what one another are doing; that there are no generally accepted standards and practices; that each magazine's Web site is making it up as it goes along; that, as CJR put it in our proposal to the MacArthur foundation (which funded this survey), it is like the Wild West out there.

For example, who makes the final decisions about what goes on the site, the editor of the magazine or, if there is one, the Web editor? Are Web sites fact-checked and copy-edited, if at all, with the same care as their parent magazines? On the business side, how much material is free, and how much is behind a paywall? What about archives—are they marketed, monetized, and curated in ways that differ from current content?

The idea was to conduct a survey, publish the results for all to see, and try to identify best (and worst) practices. And to see if, at a moment when the future of journalism in general and magazines in particular is thought to be in doubt, anything we learned could help fix a business model said to be broken, not to mention improve the flow of information on which our democratic society is predicated.

I'm not going to bore you here with our methodology, the validity of our sample and such, other than to say that after signing on Evan Lerner, home-page editor of Seedmagazine.com, as project director, and Danielle Haas, a member of Columbia's Communications Ph.D. program, as a research assistant, we recruited a board of advisers¹ and retained a professional survey research firm.² After conducting a series of interviews with industry specialists and old- and new-media experts, some of whom are quoted here, we worked up a questionnaire that our survey research firm administered.

Assuring anonymity and offering a year's subscription to CJR as an incentive, we ended up with 665 responses from a sample of about three thousand consumer magazines (including weeklies, biweeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies, with circulations large and small). A full description of those demographics and the survey process—as well as a report detailing the responses we received on advertising techniques, archiving practices, content-management systems, traffic analysis tools, and many other topics not covered here—may be found at www.cjr.org/resources/. And the full survey questionnaire and tabulated answers for all questions asked are available there as well.

Although many of our findings might seem predictable (e.g., that Web site missions are “evolving,” that many sites are unprofitable,³ that advertising is by far the largest revenue source), many are not, and in any case, to see them documented can be sobering, and in some

cases depressing.

For example:

- 59 percent of those surveyed said that either there was no copy editing whatsoever online (11 percent), or that copy editing is less rigorous than in the print edition.

1 Our board, as well as others who read and commented on our questionnaire, is listed in the full report, which may be found at www.cjr.org/resources/.

2 ABT SRBI is a major national public-opinion and market-research firm in operation since 1981. It specializes in designing and implementing public-opinion research for media organizations, and previous clients have included The Associated Press, *Time*, and *Fortune*. Its methodology report can also be found at www.cjr.org/resources/.

3 Executives across the industry have varying ways of defining and assessing profitability. While providing a technical definition of profitability is a highly complex matter, our working definition is “taking in more money than is required to sustain the operation.”

- 40 percent said that when Web editors, as opposed to print editors, are in charge of content decisions, fact-checking is less rigorous (17 percent said there was no fact-checking online when Web editors made the content decisions).
- 54 percent said that when errors were eventually pointed out, on sites where the Web editor made content decisions the errors were corrected, but without any indication to the reader that there had been an error in the first place.

And that's taking respondents at their word!

Does this mean that Web people care less about traditional journalistic standards than print people? Well, let's put it this way: in the online world, speed is the name of the game. Web sites are interested in maximizing traffic on the theory that that's the way to attract advertisers, and quantity often trumps quality when it comes to that. Thus, given the prevailing business model (advertising is still king), the question arises: Is online content, with its rapid turnaround requirements, held to the same standards as its print equivalents? Survey says no! We conclude that while Web people don't always favor speed over accuracy or elegance of style, they nevertheless seem to factor speed (i.e., who is first with the news, or the controversial views, as the case may be) into the equation in a way that tends to undermine traditional journalistic standards.

And it's no surprise that there's still something of what one respondent called a cultural "chasm" between Web and print people. For example, Web folks tend to want to give the audience what it wants (a former ESPN Web editor said, "The number one thing that's drilled into every employee on a daily basis is serving your fan, serving your fan, serving your fan"), not what "a bunch of smart editors" think is a good idea.

Another survey respondent observed that his magazine doesn't regard its Web site as a competitor, because even though the site's readership is five times the circulation of the print magazine, "it's largely seen as an inferior product, compared to what runs in the magazine, in part because we play for audience more, and I think there's a vestigial elitism as to its being more important if it runs in print."

Perhaps the least-expected finding, at least for a latecomer to the digital world like me, was the 180-degree reversal in the purpose of some of the Web sites themselves. I'll get to what we learned about Web site missions below, but here let me confess how uninformed I was. I had naïvely assumed that the purpose of most sites as originally conceived was still the case: to promote the print publication (and/or create new revenue streams) by electronically cashing in on the print publication's brand, and to use the unlimited capacity of cyberspace to publish material that couldn't fit into the print version. Yet more than a few respondents reported, as one put it, that "instead of developing stories for print and then republishing them online, we now do the opposite—develop for online, and [at the end of the month] pick the strongest articles to appear in print." Or, to quote another, "We migrated from a print publication supplemented with online articles to an online publication supplemented with print editions." The logical (or is it illogical?) conclusion

of this kind of thinking may have been summed up by the respondent who proclaimed, "It is our mission to be Web only. Drop the print edition entirely."

Not to keep you in suspense: as it turned out, our modest survey did not result in a consensus on best practices. At a time when magazines are facing increasing pressures to reduce costs, print readership is shrinking, ad revenues declining, and the young, when not watching Jon Stewart, seem to rely more and more on the Internet for news and information, we don't claim that our survey holds the answer to how digital technology can be put to work to serve, let alone save, democracy.

The survey does, however, for the first time put in one place some of the prejudices and practices of those in the world of magazines charged with reconciling the world and culture of print with the world and culture of digital media.

Here is some of what we learned in four critical areas: the matter of mission; the prevailing business models; the question of who decides what; and last but not least, how well these magazine Web sites are exploiting the potential of social media.

On the Matter of Mission

Since what you are and who you are lie at the foundation of any organization or enterprise, it's interesting that so many respondents to our open-ended question—"What do you see as being the mission of your Web site?"—answered by saying, "We are still figuring it out." Or that their mission is "constantly evolving." Comparatively few mission statements identify and set (for all, including their staff, to see) their organization's "true north," as one former publisher said a real mission statement should do. Mission ambivalence, if that's what we're seeing here, is demonstrated by responses like, "The mission is to enhance the print magazine, but it could also become a replacement for the print magazine."

Does the Web site's mission differ from that of the print edition?

- "The Web site is an extension of the print magazine, although it reaches far more people."
- "I see four missions for the Web site: to build community; to allow us to do things, such as interactive lists and video, that we can't do in print; to speed news to the reader faster than the print product; and ultimately, of course, to make money..."
- Editors who said the missions of their print product and Web site were the same outnumbered those who said they were different three to one.
- 16 percent of all respondents said their Web sites' missions involved community-building with readers.
- Only 5 percent mentioned creating new or unique content as being integral to the site's mission, whereas 96 percent said they use content from the print magazine online.

The Business Model

These days, the most frequently asked question about journalism (online and off) is whether there is a business model that can sustain it. The conventional wisdom is that newspa-

pers and magazines are dying because advertisers are fleeing to the Web and that most sites are not yet paying their own way because advertisers pay less for online ads than for print ads.

The one thing that is clear is that advertising still plays a dominant role in supporting magazine Web sites. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said that advertising was their primary revenue source, and that number climbs to 83 percent when speaking only of profitable sites. But the prospects for profitability are mixed. About a third of the respondents said their site was profitable, another third said it wasn't, and the remaining third didn't know or couldn't tell.

How the profitability of a magazine's Web site affects the overall health of the publication was beyond the scope of this survey, but it's clear that advertising is still an effective way to help keep Web sites afloat. The means by which these sites attempt to generate traffic and/or revenue are worth noting:

- Just over half of all magazines surveyed (52 percent) provide all of their print content free online. Thirty-one percent said they provide some free print-edition content online. Ten percent say some of that content is free online and some is behind a paywall; only 4 percent have all or almost all print content behind one.
- Offering free content does not necessarily hurt profitability: 49 percent of the sites that say they don't make a profit offer all significant content from the print edition free, while 65 percent of the sites that do make a profit offer their content for free.
- Just over one in ten respondents (11 percent) said that print-subscription sales were the largest revenue source.
- Besides advertising and print-subscription sales, all other revenue sources scored 3 percent or less. Other options included donations, membership dues, sale of merchandise, and a catch-all "other."
- Only fifteen respondents (2 percent) said that charging for online content was their largest revenue source.
- One respondent said, "We aspire to... attract additional revenue from... advertisers who cannot afford the print edition."

Who Decides What?

While some of the findings above seem abstract, when it comes to the matter of who's in charge, the findings suggest concrete differences in practice. Barring outliers like Wired.com, which began its life as Hotwired, a Web-only, independent entity, most respondents reflected a common and fundamental overlap between the print and Web operations.

- In most cases, an upper-level editor or publisher of the print magazine is also in charge of the publication's Web site. For the three areas of decision-making we examined—those concerning the budget, content, and look and feel of a site—independent Web editors were in charge 11 percent, 19 percent, and 33 percent of the time, respectively.
- This despite the fact that editors-in-chief are twice as likely to be in charge of the budgets of unprofitable sites as profitable ones. Conversely, independent Web editors

are more than twice as likely to be in charge of profitable magazine sites as unprofitable ones.

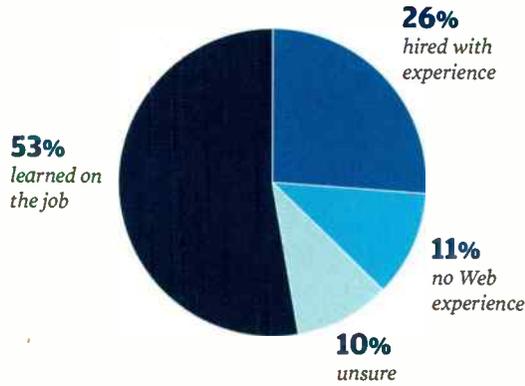
Of course, given tight budgets and small staffs, many editors wear more than one hat. And where magazine circulation and Web traffic rose, so did the authority granted to an independent Web editor. But even at a big magazine—one of the newsweeklies—an editor told us, "We don't have separate editorial at all. Our Web staff is all production and design. We have separate Web editors, but not writers, because you want continuity between the brands."

- In 72 percent of the cases, the editor-in-chief of the print publication (or another print editor) makes content decisions.
- Between print editors, Web editors, and publishers, publishers are the most likely to oversee the Web budget, but they do so at less than half (44 percent) of the respondents' magazines. Of the three, Web editors are most likely to make "look and feel" choices (33 percent).
- For magazines under 100,000 circulation, Web editors were in charge of budget decisions only 6 percent of the time. Above that threshold, they were in charge 17 percent of the time.
- The same relationship held true for content decisions: the percentage of Web editors in charge jumps to 27 percent from 12 percent after crossing the 100,000-circulation mark.
- Magazine Web sites are most likely to be profitable when budget decisions are made by the publisher or an independent Web editor.
- We asked respondents to give their best estimate of the percentage of their staff that work in print, on the Web, or on both. Averaging their responses, 25 percent work only on the print edition, 5 percent work only on the Web site, and 61 percent are expected to work on both the print and Web editions.
- Despite the fact that two-thirds of respondents' staff are expected to work on the Web at least some of the time, only 26 percent of those staffers were hired with Web experience.

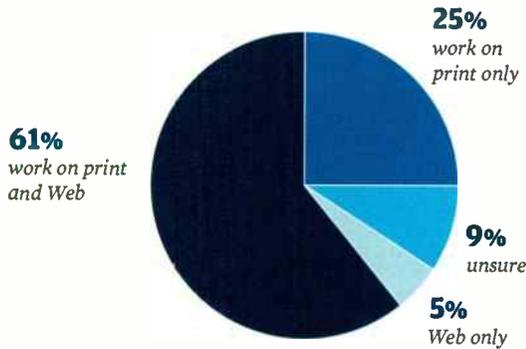
Technology and Social Media

The transition to the Web is often couched in negative terms (as one respondent said, "Go figure—you can't get rich giving stuff away"). But of course, decision-makers at magazines should not underestimate the unique opportunities afforded by the new technology. Given some of the survey's findings, however, many of those in the business still seem to do so. Most magazine Web sites are beginning to adopt some of the tools and techniques that are only possible on the Web—84 percent produce Web-exclusive content, most have blogs, and about half are active on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. However, these efforts seem to be in the basement when it comes to priorities. Only 10 percent of respondents mentioned multimedia content as a positive aspect of their site, and only 8 percent said they wanted to improve it. In the same spirit, only 16 percent said community-building

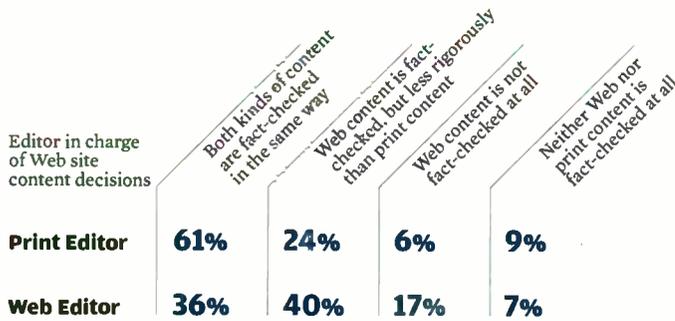
Staff trained on the Web



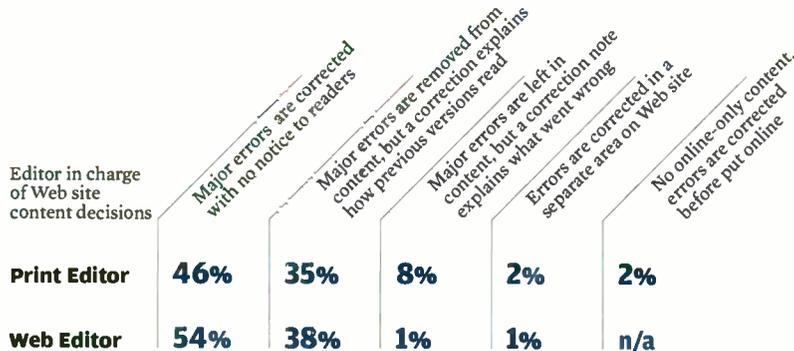
Staff expected to work on the Web



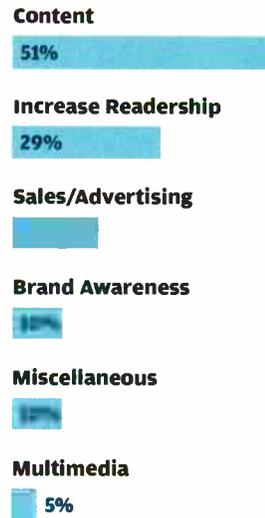
Describe how fact-checking differs between your print and online content



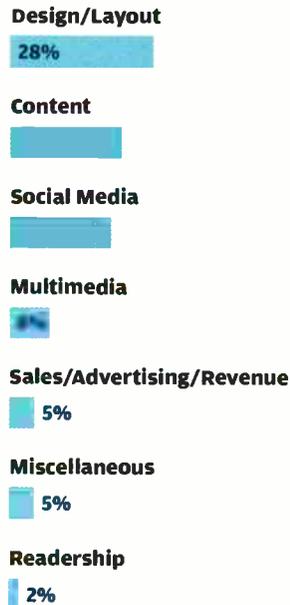
Describe how errors are corrected and noted on your Web site



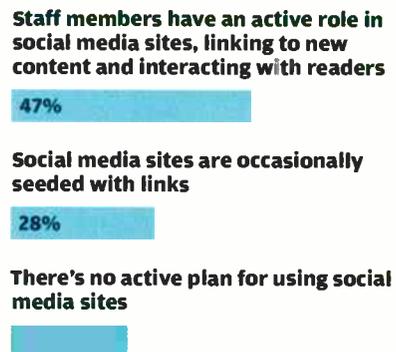
What do you consider to be the mission of your Web site?



What aspect of your Web site needs most improvement?



What is your social media usage?



Due to the multiple-choice nature of some questions, not all numbers add up to 100 percent.

or social networking was a part of their site's mission, and only 20 percent wanted to improve that.

Other social media stats of interest:

- 64 percent of respondents said their Web sites featured blogs, although not everybody can agree on exactly what a blog is. One definition: it's a Web-based location where an author or authors routinely add content with an eye to engaging directly with readers. One editor says if it's copy-edited, "it wouldn't be a blog." (And he adds, "We probably couldn't afford [copy editing]. But you know, we hire [bloggers] for their skill as journalists so it's almost like we're pre-editing them by who we hire. [Blogging is] more high wire than print, where everything gets edited.")
- 64 percent of magazines surveyed have blogs on their Web site. Eighty-seven percent of those magazines have blogs that are maintained by staff members, and 39 percent have blogs written by freelancers or contractors.
- Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the sample publications permit comments to be posted either on blogs or on magazine content.
- Social media are used by three-quarters of magazines surveyed and close to half (47 percent) of respondents have an "active presence" on social media sites.
- Of the social media sites we specifically asked about, 60 percent of respondents described both Facebook and Twitter as "effective" or "very effective" for driving traffic. The majority of respondents said that the other sites we asked about (including MySpace, Digg, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Delicious, and LinkedIn) either were ineffective or they did not know enough to pass judgment.
- Four out of five magazine sites (80 percent) do at least some e-mail marketing.
- Display technology is not keeping up with mobile technology. According to our respondents, less than one in five design their content to be read on smart phones, and only 4 percent have content that can be read on e-book readers like the Kindle.

Although many respondents were proud of their Web sites, the sentiment was far from unanimous. Example: "The site is soooo 1990." Asked what the Web site's best feature was, another respondent replied: "Nothing. By any realistic standard, it stinks." Still others said, "Our Web site is a disaster." "Our Web site is a mess!" "Our Web site sucks." Nevertheless, for many, the site is where the significant action is, and the responses to this survey are chock full of insights and valuable information:

- "The Web site is more search-oriented. Print readers tend to enjoy a more serendipitous experience, whereas readers come looking for specific information online."
- "The Web site is designed to do what the print magazine can't—deliver breaking news as it happens."
- "The Web site makes available business tools that cannot be offered via print, such as spreadsheets, interactive calculation applications, Webinars, and educational video."
- One newsweekly has added a full-time traffic analyst

(with a master's in statistics) to help it figure out how to increase traffic.

- Those who can afford it are hiring high-priced "content-strategy" consultants, "information architects," and "usability" experts to design and redesign their sites. The results are generally based on how the eye moves (i.e. vertically), which is "why so many sites look the same," one editor helpfully explains.

The bottom line: although CJR's survey establishes that many print people still regard Web people as second-class citizens, that sites founded solely to promote print magazines are outmoded to say the least, that profitability is up but standards (i.e., fact-checking and copy editing) are down where Web editors are in charge of the site, the survey nevertheless reveals no consensus on best practices. It is, rather, the beginning of a long-overdue conversation. Among the issues to be explored:

What does it mean that when a Web editor is in charge of both budget and content decisions, traffic and revenue increase but quality and ethical standards decrease? (Not to mention what are the lessons to be learned from studying profitable sites where quality has not decreased?)

If it is indeed true, as the statistics about staffing seem to suggest, that most magazines don't really take the distinction between Web and print seriously, what follows, short of making Marshall McLuhan mandatory reading? For example, if, as one respondent reported, material that has already appeared in the print magazine is never re-edited for the Web, shouldn't that practice be revisited? On the surface it seems that one ignores the cultural consequences of the new technologies at one's peril.

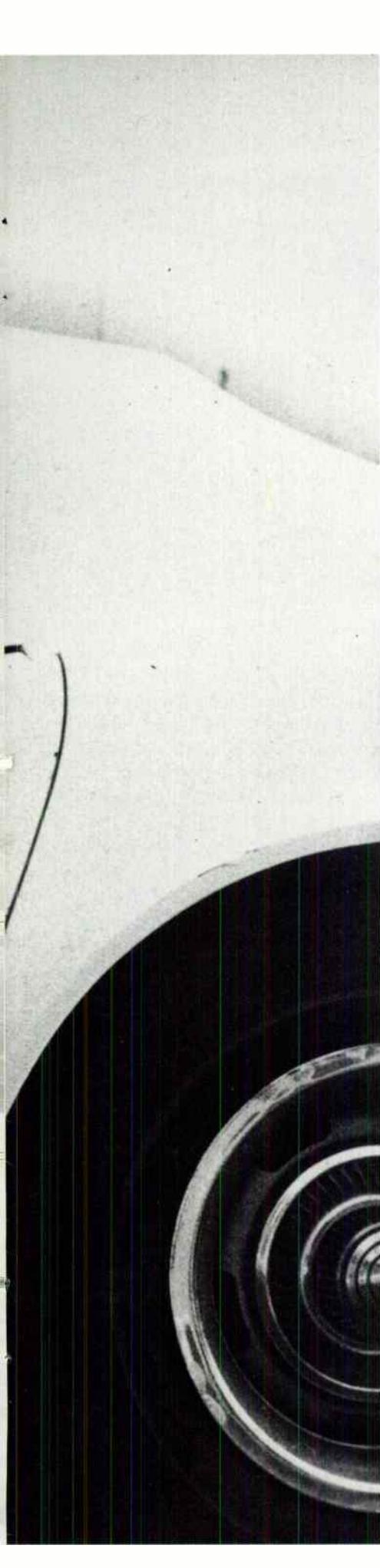
In light of the high percentage of profitable magazine Web sites that offer all their content for free (65 percent), should *The New York Times* rethink its recent announcement that it intends to charge for content? Or conversely, at a moment when Apple's iPad and new iPhone apps may make the very idea of someone called a "Web editor" something of an anachronism, do we need to conduct yet another survey?

And finally, how do these findings relate to the issue of the free flow of information required by our democracy as explored recently by the Knight Commission, the Schudson/Downie paper published in the November/December 2009 issue of CJR, and other recent attempts to grapple with information availability and public engagement?

Now the respondents need to get offline and gather in a room, define a list of best practices, agree on such matters as how to define profitability and all the rest, and where they can't agree, cross swords face to face. But first they should go to www.cjr.org/resources/, read the study, and tell us the questions we forgot to ask, not to mention the answers. **CJR**

VICTOR NAVASKY is the chairman of CJR, the Delacorte Professor of Magazine Journalism, and the director of the Delacorte Center for Magazine Journalism at Columbia University. He is the author of, among other books, *A Matter of Opinion*. EVAN LERNER is the home-page editor of *Seedmagazine.com*. The survey on which this special report is based was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.





Ideas + Reviews

SECOND READ

What Happened Here?

Joan Didion's forty-year-old cautionary tale still fits America

BY DAVID L. ULIN

It was my mother, of all people, who introduced me to Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. This was in the early summer of 1980, when I was not quite nineteen and living, first with two friends and later by myself, in a studio apartment on Haight Street in San Francisco. My next-door neighbor was a jovial ex-biker turned dope dealer who shared his studio with a (very) young wife and a fifteen-year-old runaway. Downstairs lived a guitar player who had once jammed with the Grateful Dead. I was taking a year off between high school and college, and Haight Street was my own little slice of hippie paradise, rundown and edgy in ways that seemed glamorous to me.

Then as now, the streets of the District were populated by a motley crew of burnouts: street kids with rucksacks and rasta caps, and squatters living in the abandoned buildings on Masonic who came down to panhandle in front of Uganda Liquors. I was an outsider—a kind of cultural tourist, living in San Francisco for six months before returning to the regulated world I'd always known—and there was something about their hand-to-mouth existence that I allowed myself to believe was authentic, even free.

For my mother, I see now, this was a dangerous narrative. That the Haight was already dead, in the early summer of 1980, was beside the point; it was not the present that interested me. I was more concerned with the idea of recapturing something. It wasn't that I was ignorant. I understood what I thought to be the larger story, the way a romantic movement—the Haight of the early-to-mid-1960s—had been co-opted by the mainstream, a corruption so profound it had inspired the Diggers to stage a “Death of Hippie” funeral procession on Haight Street in October 1967.

I had read Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson. I knew the revolution had failed. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, published in 1971, Thompson offered his own elegy for the era: “So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.”

And yet I observed the scene around me with no sense of context, no idea of what it meant. It was during my time in San Francisco that Ronald Reagan won the Republican nomination for president, and I can still recall watching his acceptance speech on television in a friend's apartment near the Marina, reacting as if it had not been the obvious outcome all along. When I think back on the moment, it is always with a pinprick of self-loathing for not having recognized Reagan as the inevitable reaction, the symbolic counterweight, to the hippie myth. That, of

course, is another story. What's important is that I didn't *know* enough.

As it happens, this is precisely the point of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*—both the collection and the long title piece, which recounts the author's experience in Haight-Ashbury in the weeks and months leading up to the Summer of Love. Published in 1968, this collection of magazine pieces is, on the most basic level, a reaction to its moment. Yet that is no longer where its power resides. Now we are drawn to its peculiar sense of cultural dissolution, which Didion weaves relentlessly through every piece.

Even at eighteen, I knew the Yeats poem from which she takes her title, and which she quotes in its entirety as an epigraph. "Things fall apart," Yeats writes, "the centre cannot hold." And, a few lines down: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." This is what caused my mother to press *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* on me. "Read the Haight-Ashbury essay," she repeated, her voice a little urgent over the long-distance wires, as if conveying a cautionary tale. And why not? For her, that's exactly what it was: a portrait not just of the dangerous territory in which, she feared, her son was treading, but also of the breakdown of a certain set of shared assumptions, a certain narrative.

Didion's collection opens with a searing essay called "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream." It has become one of the author's iconic pieces, a model of the form. Still, for all that's been said about the essay, it's worth looking at again, both for how it sets up the rest of the book and how it establishes the key elements of Didion's authorial stance. It is a story about a murder in which the crime and its protagonists are not even described until four pages have passed. At its heart is a tawdry domestic drama—the marriage of Gordon and Lucille Miller, a San Bernardino couple awash in debt and acrimony, which ends with Gordon being burned up in the back of the family Volkswagen, in a fire Lucille may or may not have set. For Didion, this is nothing short of a master metaphor, one rooted not only in the actual events but in the Southern California noir tradition, "in which

Didion always found ways to explore the yawning gap between who we are and who we think we are, between those stories we tell ourselves and the ways we actually live.

violence and threats and blackmail are made to seem commonplaces of middle-class life."

Didion is always attuned to the role landscape plays in human agency, to the exigencies and influences of place. And for her, place has everything to do with weather—or more broadly, what we might call the elements. Growing up in Sacramento, a delta city sustained by farming and protected from the adjacent river by a complex, New Orleans-style network of levees, she knows the risks of nature in her bones. That's clear from the opening lines of "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream," with their invocation of the Santa Ana winds:

This is a story about love and death in the golden land, and begins with the country. The San Bernardino Valley lies only an hour east of Los Angeles by the San Bernardino Freeway but is in certain ways an alien place: not the coastal California of the subtropical twilights and the soft westerlies off the Pacific but a harsher California, haunted by the Mojave just beyond the mountains, devastated by the hot dry Santa Ana wind that comes down through the passes at 100 miles an hour and whines through the eucalyptus windbreaks and works on the nerves. October is the bad month for the wind, the month when breathing is difficult and the hills blaze up spontaneously. There has been no rain since April. Every voice seems a scream. It is the season of suicide and divorce and prickly dread, wherever the wind blows.

What we're seeing is the creation of a narrative. It's a narrative of conditionality, of breakdown, in which the physical environment and the human environment can't help but reflect each other. Lucille and Gordon Miller are the perfect protagonists for such a tale:

rootless, grasping, unable to believe in much of anything, not even (or especially) themselves. They have come to California looking for something. But as these opening lines make explicit, it is the wrong California, "the last stop for all those who come from somewhere else."

Here Didion exposes the underside of the great Golden State myth: that it is a land of reinvention, in which we escape the past to find ourselves. For the Millers (and by implication, countless others), it is a land of disconnection, in which we are not reborn but lost. Such a theme colors the whole of *Slouching*. It is there in "Where the Kissing Never Stops," a biting portrait of Joan Baez's Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in the Carmel Valley ("a place where the sun shines and the ambiguities can be set aside a little while longer, a place where everyone can be warm and loving and share confidences"). And it is there in the bleak, fulminating title essay, with its vision of Haight-Ashbury as the epicenter of a children's revolution:

The center was not holding. It was a country of bankruptcy notices and public-auction announcements and commonplace reports of casual killings and misplaced children and abandoned homes and vandals who misspelled even the four-letter words they scrawled. It was a country in which families routinely disappeared, trailing bad checks and repossession papers. Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that had held the society together. People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing. Those left behind filed desultory missing-persons reports, then moved on themselves.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JULIAN WASSER / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

There is here a strong whiff of class consciousness, or an innate conservatism—or more accurately, a bit of both. It makes sense, given Didion's status as a former Goldwater Republican (she started out writing for the *National Review*) turned social observer in a culture collapsing inward on itself. This is the source of her cool, ironic distance: what she called, in a 2006 interview, her air of "triangulation."

She addresses the same topic in her preface to *Slouching*. "My only advantage as a reporter," she declares, "is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: *writers are always selling somebody out.*" This is, you could argue, the basic rule of journalism; like any reporter, Didion has to negotiate access, which she then uses to her own ends. But she is also talking about the larger picture, the round-robin of chaos and self-deception which permeates the book down to its smallest details.

Sometimes the chaos is explicitly political. In "Comrade Laski, C.P.U.S.A. (M.L.)"—the very title of which makes trenchant sport of the tortured fragmentation of the 1960s radical left—she profiles the twenty-six-year-old "General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party U.S.A. (Marxist-Leninist), a splinter group of Stalinist-Maoists who divide their energies between Watts and Harlem." Despite this tongue-twister of a title, Michael Laski strikes Didion as a boy terrified of chaos, living in "an immutably ordered world." Comrade Laski, she observes, "had with him a small red book of Mao's poems, and as he talked he squared it on the table, aligned it with the table edge first vertically and then horizontally. To understand who Laski is you must have a feeling for that kind of compulsion. One does not think of him eating, or in bed."

There's no mistaking the judgment in that description, just as there is no mistaking the sense that Lucille Miller's greatest sin isn't that she may have murdered her husband (Didion remains remarkably nuanced on that issue), but that she comes from the wrong side of the tracks. Yet the author recognizes

something of herself—something of her inner weather—in the young apparatchik:

As it happens I am comfortable with the Michael Laskis of this world, with those who live outside rather than in, those in whom the sense of dread is so acute that they turn to extreme and doomed commitments: I know something about dread myself, and appreciate the elaborate systems with which some people manage to fill the void, appreciate all the opiates of the people, whether they are as accessible as alcohol and heroin and promiscuity or as hard to come by as faith in God or History.

I know something about dread myself. The phrase reverberates throughout her entire body of work. "You are getting a woman who somewhere along the line misplaced whatever slight faith she ever had in the social contract, in the ameliorative principle, in the whole grand pattern of human endeavor." Didion writes in her 1979 essay collection *The White Album*. She continues: "I have trouble making certain connections. I have trouble maintaining the basic notion that keeping promises matters in a world where everything I was taught

line from *The White Album*: "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." But even that lovely sentiment doesn't tell the entire story, as Didion clarifies in the next, less quotable paragraph: "Or at least we do for a while."

Indeed, this tension between the need for narrative and the narrative-resistant "atomization" of our culture is the engine that drives *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Again and again we sense Didion's subjects clinging to a shred of story, to some idea of the way things *ought* to be done.

When, late in "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream," Lucille Miller is convicted of killing her husband, her confidante Sandy Slagle starts to scream in the courtroom. "Sandy, for God's sake please *don't*," Lucille pleads, as if there were a decorum for her situation—as if the worst thing imaginable would be to make a scene. "Marrying Absurd" highlights a different sort of disassociation, between the tinselled banality of the Las Vegas marriage mill and the desire, still prevalent in the America of the mid-1960s, to get married in "a candlelight satin Priscilla of Boston wedding dress with Chantilly lace insets, tapered sleeves and a detachable modified train." At first glance, this essay seems to be

I remember telling myself in 1980, 'Yes, that's the story of our time. The center does not hold, bad things happen to good people, and the consolations of narrative are shaky at best.'

seems beside the point. The point itself seems increasingly obscure."

I remember reading those sentences in that early summer of 1980, just days after devouring *Slouching* (I read the two books back to back, which may be why I think of them as companion volumes), and telling myself, *Yes, that's it precisely, that's the story of our time.* The center does not hold, bad things happen to good people, and the consolations of narrative are shaky at best. This would seem to contradict Didion's signature

no more than an anthropological fluff piece. For Didion, though, it's another chance to explore the yawning gap between who we are and who we think we are, between those stories we tell ourselves and the ways we actually live.

Is there a way to resolve this? *Slouching* doesn't offer much in the way of hope. One can always surrender to nostalgia for a kinder, gentler, less fragmented era. Didion herself is not immune to this impulse, even as she recognizes the fleeting nature of its charms.

“John Wayne: A Love Song,” ostensibly a report from the set of *The Sons of Katie Elder*, becomes an unlikely evocation of her own feelings of loss and longing. “As it happened,” she writes, “I did not grow up to be the kind of woman who is the heroine in a Western, and although the men I have known have had many virtues and have taken me to live in many

Today, the birthers exemplify our lack of common narrative.

places I have come to love, they have never been John Wayne, and they have never taken me to the bend in the river where the cottonwoods grow. Deep in that part of my heart where the artificial rain forever falls, that is still the line I wait to hear.”

The tone in the Wayne piece is reminiscent of “Goodbye to All That,” the collection’s closing effort, and its most personal: a scabrous account of how the author fell out of love with New York. “It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends,” she insists, then catalogues all the ways her dream (that favorite Didion word) of the city as a kind of cosmopolitan fantasy fell apart. “That was the year, my twenty-eighth,” she writes later in the piece, “when I was discovering that not all of the promises would be kept, that some things are in fact irrevocable and that it had counted after all, every evasion and every procrastination, every mistake, every word, all of it.”

It’s impossible, reading that, not to think about the Haight-Ashbury essay my mother so wanted me to absorb. It is an account from ground zero of the splintering of *everything*, of the atomization that Didion finds both fascinating and dreadful. Constructed as a series of fragments that don’t so much build as circle around each other, like planets around a dead sun, the piece makes narrative out of the absence of narrative. “He came up from Los Angeles some

number of weeks ago, he doesn’t remember what number,” she writes about “a kid, sixteen, seventeen,” who has been shooting speed for three days, “and now he’ll take off for New York, if he can find a ride. I show him a sign offering a ride to Chicago. He wonders where Chicago is.” Even four decades later, the moment leaves us with a feeling of discomfort, an almost physical sense of just how badly things have gone wrong.

This is the story Didion tells throughout the essay, even as she appears to tell no story at all. There are a handful of principals to whom she periodically returns: Max, who “drops a 250- or 350-microgram tab [of acid] every six or seven days,” and his teenage girlfriend, Sharon; Arthur Lisch, one of the leaders of the Diggers, who worries that the influx of runaways to the District will lead to a full-blown humanitarian crisis; Chet Helms, of the Family Dog, who in one of the essay’s most revealing asides informs Didion that “fifty percent of the population is or will be under twenty-five” and “they got twenty billion irresponsible dollars to spend.” (Long live the revolution, indeed.) The structure is loose, even rambling. Yet the chance encounters prompt some of Didion’s most incisive commentary. At one point, she meets a pair of teenage runaways, Jeff and Debbie, and eventually notes:

We were seeing the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum. Once we had seen these children, we could no longer overlook the vacuum, no longer pretend that the society’s atomization could be reversed. At some point between 1945 and 1967, we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing. Maybe we had stopped believing in the rules ourselves, maybe we were having a failure of nerve about the game. Maybe there were just too few people around to do the telling.

This is the warning my mother meant to give me, although it was unnecessary in the end. As much as I wanted to think of myself as a stepchild of the revolution, I was not wired for a nihilism so profound. In the penultimate scene of “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” Didion

meets a five-year-old named Susan who “lives with her mother and some other people, just got over the measles, wants a bicycle for Christmas, and particularly likes Coca-Cola, ice cream, Marty in the Jefferson Airplane, Bob in the Grateful Dead, and the beach.” Susan is also tripping on LSD.

“For a year now her mother has given her both acid and peyote,” Didion writes, in her usual tone of sun-bleached neutrality. “Susan describes it as getting stoned.” Then, for the only time in the essay—in the collection—her mask of cool detachment drops. “I start to ask if any of the other children in High Kindergarten get stoned, but I falter at the key words.” It’s a simple moment. All these years later, however, it evokes the depth of the breakdown, the cost of the fragmentation, the loss of the narrative.

Slouching Towards Bethlehem is undoubtedly a document of its time, but it also has a lot to say about the present, by telling us how we got to where we are. Barack Obama is one descendant of the cultural shift Didion traces in these pages, with his patchwork story, self-constructed and stitched together by sheer intention. Sarah Palin, with her blatant disregard for history, her cynical faith in her constituency’s willingness to forget, is another. The birthers and the 9/11 conspiracy theorists exemplify our lack of common narrative, as well as the notion that belief alone is now enough, in certain quarters, to make something true. “How much of it actually happened?” Didion asks at one point. “Did any of it? Why do I keep a notebook at all? It is easy to deceive oneself on all those scores.” If *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* has anything to tell us, it’s that these questions remain as elusive as when Didion first posed them, in an era much like this one, when, as Yeats would have it, we no longer know “what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.” **CJR**

DAVID L. ULIN is book editor of the Los Angeles Times. He is the author of *The Myth of Solid Ground: Earthquakes, Prediction, and the Fault Line Between Reason and Faith*, and editor of *Another City: Writing from Los Angeles and Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*, which won a 2002 California Book Award.

The Price of Admission

Andrew Ross Sorkin's debut and the limits of access journalism

BY DEAN STARKMAN

"I must admit," Sorkin wrote us this morning, "I was completely bowled over by the turnout. It was quite incredible to reassemble so many characters from the book in one room all together. For a book that shows so many of these characters with their warts and all in the midst of the greatest panic of their lives, I am tremendously grateful that they came out to support me."— "Andrew Ross Sorkin's Book Party Was Filled With CEOs, Warts and All," New York magazine's Daily Intel blog, an item on a book party for Too Big to Fail at the Monkey Bar, October 21, 2009

**Too Big to Fail:
The Inside Story of How
Wall Street and Washington
Fought to Save the Financial
System—and Themselves**

By Andrew Ross Sorkin
Viking
600 pages, \$32.95

ANDREW ROSS SORKIN'S *TOO BIG TO FAIL* IS AN EXTRAORDINARY WORK OF REPORTAGE by a once-in-a-generation journalist. It is also something else: an example of access journalism par excellence. That's not a flaw, necessarily, but it is a fact that colors nearly every paragraph of this sprawling book. As such, *Too Big To Fail* demonstrates both the potential and the limits of the form.

Anyone who finds *TBTF* less than satisfying as a work of nonfiction, and I'm among them, must first acknowledge that this book places vast amounts of new information into the public record, information that probably only Sorkin could have gathered in such quantity. When it comes to fact-gathering virtuosity, *TBTF* is in a class by itself. What's more, the facts have held up. What more do you want from a journalist? It is a fair question.

A thirty-two-year-old *New York Times* columnist and editor, Sorkin burst onto the scene earlier in the decade via a series of blockbuster scoops on mergers and acquisitions. He followed that up with the creation of DealBook, a franchise within a franchise at the *Times* that breaks and aggregates financial news, amassing more than 200,000 loyal e-mail subscribers and many more regular readers.

For his first book, Sorkin and his team interviewed more than two hundred people, gathering anecdotes on most of the key players in the financial crisis: Paulson, Bernanke, Geithner, Fuld, Blankfein, Dimon (especially Dimon), and many more. The scenes are woven deftly together with previously reported and properly attributed material to form a streamlined chronology of the months leading

up to Lehman's failure and AIG's rescue, as viewed from the executive suite. An instant best-seller, Sorkin's is the breakout book of the crisis. Early reviews in the financial press start at euphoric and go up from there. And there's a reason for that. Without *TBTF* there would be many things we did not know. Who, for example, leaked the June 4, 2008, story about Lehman's last-ditch talks with a Korean government entity, imperiling a deal that could have been a critical lifeline? (Sorkin says Lehman brass believe it was Erin Callan, the company's CFO.) What does financial Armageddon look like? (Sorkin provides a deadly snapshot: "The Lehman board had already begun its meeting when the bankruptcy lawyers from Weil Gotshal, towing wheeled suitcases stuffed with documents, finally arrived.") And what did Goldman CEO Lloyd Blankfein say during a critical meeting at the New York Fed, on the very day the government decided to bail out AIG, sending billions of dollars to his own company? ("So, when is the money going to be paid out?")

(Disclosure time: Goldman gave the business-press section I run at the *Columbia Journalism Review*, known as The Audit, \$25,000 last year. Sorkin was a big help in creating The Audit as one of several advisers to CJR before I arrived in the spring of 2007, and has since attended private breakfasts of funders and journalists hosted by The Audit to discuss journalism and financial issues. End of disclosure. Void where prohibited. See box top for details.)

The book even includes glimpses into the thoughts of various big shots. Want to know what Tim Geithner was thinking during a particularly tense 6 a.m. jog along the river in lower Manhattan?

This is what it was all about, he thought to himself, the people who rise at dawn to get in to their jobs, all of whom rely to some extent on the financial industry to help power the economy. Never mind the staggering numbers. Never mind the ruthless complexity of structured finance and derivatives, nor the million-dollar bonuses of those who made bad bets. This is what the saving the financial industry is really about, he reminded himself, protecting ordinary people with ordinary jobs.

Okay, so not all anecdotes are created equal. And yes, the book is packed with selective accounts of media-savvy individuals bent on preserving their reputations—no surprise, in a work that relies so heavily on access to private conversations and thoughts.

The book's ultimate value is the window it provides into how leading figures of the financial system behaved under the pressure of the greatest professional crisis of their lives, and the role played by ego and face-saving during those historic times. We knew that things in the final months were chaotic and out of control. What Sorkin illustrates, and in vivid journalistic detail, is the madcap confusion as frantic government officials try to engineer one merger after another between long-standing rivals while trying to avoid the appearance of doing just that. This

exploration of the roots of the financial crisis, primers on synthetic collateralized debt obligations, ruminations on the nature of greed, muckraking, moralizing, or thumbsucking of any kind. Any historical context here exists simply to get readers to the next tense conversation in the next glamorous location (the St. Regis, Sun Valley, Dick Fuld's limo, and so on).

When Sorkin does take a step back from his fly-on-the-wall reportage, his analysis and conclusions are unoriginal and middle of the road. The prose is pure newspaper-ese ("Wearing one of his trademark off-the-rack, no-fuss suits and tortoise-rimmed glasses, Bufett..."). There are no characters to speak of. The protagonists are mostly stick figures, square-jawed types running around with their hair on fire, uttering dialogue straight out of an action

is a man who has sat through one too many conference calls:

"Look into the whites of my eyes," he said. "There isn't enough room for both of us at the top here. We both know that." He paused and stared at Diamond intently. "I'm willing to step aside to make this work for the firm."

For all that, Sorkin's account gives the impression that egomania and personality clashes were rarely, if ever, decisive in the end; if deals crashed, it was because the numbers were what they were. In one good scene, a Chase banker named Tim Main embarrasses his boss, Jamie Dimon, during a sales call by telling a roomful of AIG executives that it is important for clients to "recognize their own problems and shortcomings." On Wall Street, this is considered a major faux pas. Main was taken off the deal. AIG failed anyway.

There wasn't much anybody could do at this point. Of course, that's the problem with this book.

Access reporting aims to tell readers what the players *said*; accountability reporting aims to tell readers what they *did*. By themselves, neither will give you the full picture.

leads to some real voyeuristic pleasures. In one memorable passage, Geithner plays matchmaker with Lehman's Dick Fuld and Barclay's Bob Diamond:

"He knows you'll be calling," Geithner assured [Fuld]. "I understand I'm supposed to call you," Fuld said when he later reached Diamond. Diamond, however, was clearly flustered, as he thought he had been explicit with Geithner that he didn't want to talk directly to Fuld about a deal. A deal would have to be brokered by the U.S. government. "I think we should talk," Fuld said, trying to engage with him. "I don't see an opportunity for us here," Diamond answered.

Such scenes, which evoke Harold Pinter or maybe Abbott and Costello, are thick on the ground in *TBTF*. They are its reason for being.

What readers should not expect is an

movie. Three specimens should give you the idea:

McGee shot a nervous glance at McDade, as if to say, "We're fucked."

For fuck's sake, Wilkinson thought.

"Why didn't we know this earlier? This is fucking crazy."

Basically, *TBTF* is the 24 of financial-crisis books. The world is about to blow up, and everybody is Jack Bauer. Interestingly, the only figure to emerge with at least a shred of personality is Dick Fuld. Sorkin has assembled so much material on the Lehman lifer that the reader is able to witness the unraveling of his personality as months of stress and sleepless nights take their toll. After a while, the only person who doesn't know he's finished as CEO of Lehman is Fuld himself. This, Sorkin makes clear,

AT FIRST GLANCE, *TBTF* IS A SIMPLY THE latest book to gain entrée to the executive suites where important decisions are made and recreate key scenes in a novelistic fashion. It has drawn comparisons to classics such as Bryan Burrough and John Helyar's *Barbarians at the Gate* (1990), but such comparisons are unfair to all sides. Indeed, rereading *Barbarians*, which is richer by an order of magnitude, shows just how much power relations have shifted between journalists and Wall Street. Back then, access brought a lot more.

Sorkin's book is something different. It was written in a hurry and in quasi-real time. Its reliance on gaining access to key players is nearly total, and those big shots are much more media-savvy than their predecessors. This throws the limits of the form into high relief.

All this is important because there's a great battle going on right now over the narrative of the financial crisis—its causes, its costs, its meaning, and its implications. More than one reviewer has called *TBTF* the defining book of the financial crisis, but that cannot be true. The book itself makes no such claims. And common sense tells us that

an account of the last few months before the crash as seen by elites (even two hundred of them) can't hope to encompass a crisis of this scope. This perspective would naturally generate a narrative about these elites' heroic efforts to save the system, not one about why the system needed saving in the first place.

Meanwhile, there's also a mini-struggle going on within business journalism itself over how best to cover the crisis. Sorkin's book helps draw a bright line between deal journalism and the work of accountability-oriented reporters. In the former, the reporter-source relationship is more transactional, with a focus on securing insider access; the latter maintain greater distance from their subjects and rely for their material on financial filings, lawsuits, whistleblowers, short sellers, nonprofit groups, and dissidents of all stripes—not insiders, but outsiders. As it happens, their sources were right about this crisis, while Sorkin's insiders were part of the problem.

In a sharp profile of the author in *New York* magazine last November, Gabriel Sherman recounts a dispute between Sorkin and two *Times* colleagues, Don Van Natta Jr. and Gretchen Morgenson. The two investigative reporters suggested that Sorkin's book had "piggy-backed" on critical information they had obtained about a secret ethics waiver that allowed Henry Paulson to negotiate with his old firm, Goldman. The dispute isn't important in itself. Yet it vividly juxtaposes Sorkin, whose stock-in-trade is gaining the trust of the powerful, with two reporters who adopt a more confrontational approach.

Bill Keller, the *Times's* executive editor, defended his young star by papering over the differences between the two reporting strategies. At heart, Keller wrote in an e-mail to Sherman, Sorkin is "a classic beat reporter." From Keller's point of view, apparently, this is an acceptable bit of newsroom diplomacy. But readers, at least those eager to understand exactly what they're reading, don't benefit from this blurring of distinctions.

Of course, there is more than one approach to business reporting. Take, for example, Bloomberg's Mark Pittman, a

Virtually all the institutions cited, not to mention several of the individuals barking out forceful commands, played key roles in causing the very crisis they are shown here seeking to ameliorate.

noted investigator who wrote muckraking exposés about Goldman's issuance of defective CDOs and the like. Pittman, who died unexpectedly last November, was known in some circles as "the man who sued the Fed," the reporter behind a Bloomberg LP suit to pry loose details about the central bank's trillion-dollar emergency lending programs.

While Pittman's adversarial style paid major dividends, it should be obvious that his approach would not gain him the kind of telepathic rapport that Sorkin seems to have developed with the Fed chairman ("...the towering white peaks of the Tetons offered a majestic view, but one that no longer took Ben Bernanke's breath away the way it once had.")

Readers should be aware of the differences in reporting styles and understand them for what they are: a division of labor. Neither will give you the full picture; one aims to tell you what the players *said*, while the other tells you what they *did*.

But even with that caveat, *TBTF* does show some of the downside of relying so heavily on Wall Street insiders. For one thing, in six hundred pages, there's surprisingly little news here. As noted, there is a torrent of previously unreported facts—but most of them amount to historical footnotes, not major revelations that alter our fundamental understanding of events. One notable exception: Sorkin demonstrates that Goldman executives' bluster about the firm's viability was just that—bluster. They were terrified. On most of the big questions, Sorkin's details tend to support official versions of events (which is not necessarily a bad thing). The revisionist charge that the decision to let Lehman fail was made in bad faith is contradicted by the book's depiction of Paulson (a "straight-shooting Midwesterner") as selflessly and tirelessly trying

to do the right thing, despite ankle-biting from the press and Congress. Likewise, Sorkin helps to debunk the theory that Goldman engineered the AIG bailout with a scene that shows Geithner himself floating the idea.

It's worth remembering at this point that it was Gretchen Morgenson, followed closely by Pittman, who first uncovered the story about Goldman's interest in the AIG bailout back in September 2008. In a sense, the rest of the business press has been following them ever since, acting as though the information had popped up out of a toaster.

I would go so far as to say that despite the quote at the top of this story, *TBTF* doesn't even deliver many warts. The catty zingers, embarrassing screw-ups, and devious maneuvers are surprisingly few and far between, though Lehman's number two, Joe Gregory, does take it on the chin more than once.

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM, OF COURSE, IS not the shortage of dirt. It is that the book requires readers to forget that virtually all of the institutions cited, not to mention several of the individuals barking out forceful commands, played key roles in causing the very crisis they are shown here seeking to ameliorate.

To say that this book suffers from its narrow focus is a wild understatement. History here begins with the collapse of Bear Stearns in the spring of 2008 and ends with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the fall. Everybody's scrambling, but it's never clear exactly what caused the problems in the first place.

A Martian reading *TBTF* would have no inkling that Fuld, Paulson, Citigroup, and the like were essentially cleaning up their own mess. This creates a sense of disconnect you can drive a Town Car through. Take this scene at a 2008 dinner for the G7 Summit in Washington,

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

THE
B
R
O
S
S
S

to order:

by phone:
1-888-4-CJR-SUB
(1-888-425-7782)

online: www.cjr.org

in which Paulson shares his anxieties about leverage with Fuld:

"I'm worried about a lot of things," Paulson now told Fuld, singling out a new IMF report estimating that mortgage- and real-estate related writedowns could total \$945 billion in the next two years. He said he was also anxious about the staggering amount of leverage—the amount of debt to equity—that the investment banks were still using to juice their returns. That only added enormous risk to the system, he complained.

But it was Goldman, with Paulson at the helm, that strenuously lobbied for looser capital requirements in 2004, unleashing the sort of leverage that Paulson is seen fretting about. And it was Paulson's Goldman (as Pittman's reporting revealed back in 2007) that did more than its share to create the defective securities that are seen melting down in *TBTF*. Sorkin explains none of this.

As for Fuld, surely some passing mention of Lehman's role in fueling predatory lending and toxic underwriting would have helped readers put the mad-cap events of 2008 in context. It was the *Times* itself, after all, that revealed how deeply intertwined Lehman was in predatory lending with a seminal 2000 exposé by Diana Henriques and Lowell Bergman, work that was amplified by other reporters, including *The Wall Street Journal's* Mike Hudson in 2007. Lehman's (and Wall Street's) neck-deep involvement in subprime is hardly a secret at this point.

And it's not only backstory that gets tossed off the private plane. An exposé by *The Wall Street Journal* in October 2008 made a devastating case that in the weeks before the fall—which is to say, right in the middle of Sorkin's timeline—Fuld and his team had grossly misrepresented Lehman's financial position. Do we get any hint of this from *TBTF*? No. Instead, we are offered a glance at Fuld's morale-building techniques:

To encourage teamwork, he adopted a point system similar to the one that he used to reward his son, Richie, when he played hockey. Fuld taped his son's game and would inform him: "You get one point for a goal, but two points for an assist."

Fuld clearly cooperated fully for this book. As it happens, he is the only figure whose motives are explicitly characterized—as someone who is "driven less by greed than by an overpowering desire to preserve the firm he loved."

To some degree, *TBTF* suffers from what I call the *Avatar* problem. In the movie, a youthful outsider immerses himself in an exotic culture of larger-than-life figures, and ultimately begins to see things from their point of view. Indeed, he winds up riding the big red Banshee.

In the book's final paragraphs Sorkin finally drops the mask of objectivity and offers his own view of the protagonists. He reports that Jamie Dimon sent a note of encouragement to Hank Paulson, in which the JPMorgan Chase CEO quoted Teddy Roosevelt's famous "man in the arena" passage ("It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena..."). Sorkin writes:

It was a remarkable quote for Dimon to have chosen. While Roosevelt's words describe a hero, they were deeply ambiguous about whether that hero succeeded or failed. And so it is with Paulson, Geithner, Bernanke and the dozens of public and private-sector figures who populate this drama. It will be left to history to judge how they fared during their own time "in the arena."

This is, in a sense, Wall Street's view of itself: well-intentioned men who dare to take risks while timid souls (the press, politicians, investors, borrowers, taxpayers) carp and complain. It doesn't take much critical distance to realize that this is not the whole story, not by a long shot.

For all its flaws, *TBTF* remains a work of extraordinary reportage that gives readers access to some of the nation's most powerful financial figures. It's also a reminder, however, that on Wall Street, nothing is ever free. **CJR**

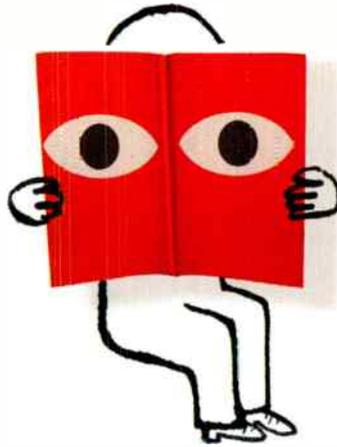
DEAN STARKMAN is CJR's Kingsford Capital Fellow. He runs *The Audit*, our online critique of business and economic journalism.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again
By Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols
Nation Books
334 pages, \$26.95

OBSERVING THE QUICKENING deterioration of journalism as we have known it, two media reformers—Robert W. McChesney of the University of Illinois and John Nichols, Washington correspondent for *The Nation*—have rushed forward with this tract, which contains their prescriptions for the reinvigoration of journalism as the lubricant of democracy. They conclude that the decline of the advertiser-supported mass news industry is irreversible. It must be said that history supports their view, at least as it concerns the newspaper. For at least sixty years, Americans have become less and less a newsprint-reading nation. The inevitable result has been the decline and possible fall of our most long-lived news institutions. Not pausing to mourn, McChesney and Nichols address themselves to what institutions might rise to succeed the old, and how. They mention a range of ideas for news organizations that might survive by means other than advertising, and eventually conclude that there must be government support, even at the cost of breaching the wall that allegedly separates government from journalism.



Forget the clichéd view of the First Amendment, they say—the idea that any relationship with government is anathema and leads to censorship. The U.S. government has already offered many forms of support to the crumbling old media, ranging from postal subsidies to special antitrust arrangements. McChesney and Nichols, however, want something different: government funding that would support the creation of new and more democratic institutions, especially local ones. They particularly like the opportunities offered by L3Cs (low-profit limited liability companies), an innovative structure that allows access to a greater variety of resources than the standard nonprofit setup. The authors are careful to say that theirs are not the only proposals possible, and they credit others already working on the same problems, notably Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson, authors of “The Reconstruction of American

Journalism” (issued by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism last fall), a paper that overlaps with this book in many respects. It all sounds splendidly promising. However, these proposed innovations have yet to encounter the real test—that is, convincing both the

public and the government that must bring them into being.

God and the Editor: My Search for Meaning at The New York Times

By Robert H. Phelps
Syracuse University Press
284 pages, \$29.95

THIS NEW MEMOIR BY Robert Phelps boasts a curious title, especially since the author is a nonbeliever. But Phelps asserts that journalism was his only religion, a position that softened only after the death of his wife of fifty-six years. The heart of the book involves the two decades the author spent working for his deity of choice, *The New York Times*. (Disclosure: he was a colleague of my spouse, and supported the discrimination suit that she and others filed.) Phelps served almost entirely in-house as a supervising editor rather than as a reporter. His great ambition was to reach a major inside position, that of national editor. But during his years at the paper, the tide turned against desk

people, and it was the famed former reporters who rose to the top: Abe Rosenthal, Harrison Salisbury, Max Frankel, Tom Wicker, Gene Roberts. Phelps abhorred Rosenthal’s imperial style, which kept reporters on a tight leash. Instead, he sought to be what he calls a “Partnership Editor,” with a lighter, more laissez-faire approach. “My operating philosophy,” he recalls, “was to let the reporter write the story in his or her own fashion as long as it told the news with clarity and didn’t violate *Times* standards.” Self-effacement, it turned out, did not earn him promotions. Phelps ultimately moved to *The Boston Globe*, in the days before it was bought by the *Times*, and there ended his journalism career. The author provides a valuable window into the paper’s great feuds and crises (his retelling of the *Times*’s near-miss on Watergate is a particular treat) without making himself the center of the drama. Indeed, he frequently concedes that those who soared past him did a better job than he would have. *God and the Editor* is an afterthought to a long and honorable working life; the book came out as Phelps was on the cusp of ninety years old. **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.

Critical Condition

Can a retailer-sponsored book review keep its critical hands clean?

BY JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH

CHRISTOPHER HAYES IS A EUROPEAN-STYLE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT, WHO WORKED at the left-leaning *In These Times* before assuming his current job at the equally left-leaning *Nation*. Not too many decades ago, this exemplary progressive would likely have reviewed books for such highbrow bastions as *Commentary* or *Dissent* or (if he got lucky) *The New York Review of Books*. But this is 2010. So instead Hayes covers books for a promotional Web site run by the world's largest book chain.

The art-and-commerce hybrid in question is The Barnes & Noble Review, which launched in October 2007. It came about when CEO Steve Riggio teamed up with James Mustich, publisher of *A Common Reader*, which had expired the previous year. In a sense, the *Common Reader* was a precursor to Mustich's current project: a literate, highly respected catalogue of little-known titles, which *CR* not only sold but sometimes republished under its own imprint. But BNR, with its prominent placement on the Barnes & Noble site, arguably elevates corporate sponsorship of a literary publication to new levels.

One might think that independent-minded writers would be cold to the idea of reviewing books for a massive corporate entity. Yet respected names have flocked to BNR. Along with Hayes, such heavyweights as philosopher A. C. Grayling, music critic Robert Christgau, and cartoonist Ward Sutton are all regular contributors. So are Ezra Klein and Michael Dirda, both of *The Washington Post*, as well as prominent critics like Brooke Allen, Laura Miller, and Adam Kirsch. In an era when each week brings word of a collapsing literary magazine or shrinking newspaper section, BNR just may be the future of American book reviewing. And surprisingly, few authors, critics, or editors seem troubled by that.

Of course, it is difficult to find anybody pleased with the state of book reviewing (at least the newspaper variety) in the United States. The list of casualties is depressingly familiar. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Orlando Sentinel*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, and the *Raleigh News & Observer* all have drastically scaled back their coverage of books. Both *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* collapsed their freestanding Sunday sections into the body of the paper.

The damage has been even deeper at smaller papers and regional magazines. Sam Tanenhaus, the editor of what arguably remains this country's most prestigious reviewing medium, *The New York Times Book Review*, believes that "what is most in danger of being lost are the smaller, local papers that give authors direct, reader-friendly connections" to their audience. National outlets like *The New Republic* or *The New Yorker*, which survive on the strength of their political or

cultural coverage, are unlikely to throw book criticism overboard. But it is the local newspapers that are hemorrhaging, argues Tanenhaus.

For newspaper owners, the standard defense is that they're acceding to the realities of the market. A struggling business will cut where it can, goes the argument, and book coverage is no longer popular enough with readers or advertisers to justify its cost. Newspapers are simply giving the public what it wants.

Some critics, however, see a more ominous development. They view the book review's demise as an index of cultural decline. Either the public no longer likes to read, or has grown accustomed to getting its literary intelligence online—and for free. Both scenarios amount to bad news, Tanenhaus says. "People's attention spans are shorter," he says. "And the sense of the value of literature as a whole has been diminished."

Others are not so sure. "It's not a decline," insists Louis Menand, a frequent book reviewer for *The New Yorker*. "It's a shift." He points to what he calls the "Zagatization" of book reviewing—a process spearheaded by Amazon, where a prospective reader may be offered thousands of capsule assessments of a particular title. Assigned a book review not long ago, Menand logged on to the e-commerce site to find twenty-five customer reviews already posted. "I suddenly felt very unnecessary," he laughs. The days when figures like Edmund Wilson and Walter Lippmann ruled the critical (or political) roost are long gone, Menand says. "And that's good in principle," he adds, "because it means that more people are writing on more products."

Purists might blanch at this demotion of books to mere product, but Mustich takes the argument a step further, asserting that the success of BNR turns the dire prophecies on their heads. "It's a sign of cultural energy that a book chain is supporting a venture with credibility," he says.

Mustich suggests that print reviews have assisted in digging their own graves. A major reason that they're dying, he believes, is that they're boring. "They didn't engage readers in a fresh way," he says. "Many [print] reviews are formulaic, focusing more on assessments than on replicating the excitement of

reading a book.” Mustich also faults the analytical slant taken by many reviewers, which may cause them to overlook the fact that readers love books even when they’re not perfect.

Whether the print review makes a comeback or slinks off to oblivion, Mustich thinks the act of reading itself is in healthy shape. “There is a tendency in the book industry to see the decline of print as due to people reading less,” he says. “But I think people are reading more.”

The numbers seem to belie Mustich’s optimism. A 2007 report by the National Endowment for the Arts found that despite rising education levels and the ubiquity of *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*, citizens are reading less—in almost every age group. More and more Americans are declining to read even a single book per year. If we are to believe these statistics, book reviews may be dying simply because people read less of everything.

True, the NEA report was criticized for what some considered its flawed methodology. In particular, noted Steven Johnson in the *Guardian*, the report was “heavily biased towards words on a printed page,” versus their online counterparts. The NEA fired back, pointing out that the study was careful to measure online reading habits as well as consumption of the printed page—the trends were still disturbing. At the same time, the authors cited a British Library study highlighting the shallow analytical and critical skills associated with Web reading. “Society is dumbing down,” that report had bluntly concluded.

Score one for the pessimists! Or maybe not: fans of BNR would argue that merely by existing, it is a rebuke to those who fret that the book will soon be as obsolete as the phonograph. The online publication is not only surviving, it is growing, even flourishing. Mustich will not give specific figures, but in December 2009 the site reached 50,000 unique visitors, its highest number so far, according to Compete.com, a site that measures Web traffic. And Mustich is determined to tinker with the book-review form itself. “We’re going to experiment with slide shows and illustrated reviews,” he says, although it’s not clear how these multimedia accoutrements will revolutionize a supposedly moribund genre.

In an era when each week brings word of a collapsing literary magazine or shrinking newspaper section, The Barnes & Noble Review just may be the future of American book reviewing.

Indeed, what’s notable about BNR is how traditional the writing is. “The reviews [at BNR] work the same as anywhere else,” says Laura Miller, a staff writer at Salon who has also written for Mustich’s site. Miller says the tone and length of the pieces in BNR evoke *The New York Times Book Review* rather than the relative informality of Salon. So even if Mustich finds print reviewing dull, it’s not clear that his own site is doing anything differently when it comes down to actual prose.

Nor is it clear how BNR will ultimately cope with its overt commercialism, which is embodied in its very name. Mustich admits that he expects some initial skepticism from readers, who might well suspect the site to be a public relations gambit on the part of its parent company. “We counter that skepticism with quality,” he argues. “If people read the site, they can determine that we are doing what we purport to do.” He draws a sharp distinction between reviewing and selling, and is adamant about his independence. “They have never tried to influence my judgment. The first attempt would have been the last,” he declares, sounding like a nerdy Dirty Harry.

Not everyone is convinced. “Criticism’s content should be free of any commercialism,” says Art Winslow, a former literary editor at *The Nation*. Barnes & Noble is a brand name, and BNR contributors are in effect endorsing it, he says: “Barnes & Noble has found another way to sell books, and that’s the Review.” Winslow says the motivations that go into the site inevitably taint its integrity. “I wouldn’t write there.”

Even Winslow, however, concedes that BNR retains a strong measure of editorial independence from its corporate overlords. Reviewers (who are, not incidentally, paid more than they would receive at a print publication, thanks

to the largesse of Steve Riggio) are permitted to blast away at the product without any thought given to lost sales. Christopher Hayes, for example, took on Ralph Nader’s recent novel, *Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!*, and delivered a devastating verdict. “As a novel it is a dismal affair: gracelessly written, ploddingly plotted, and long,” he wrote. “Oh God so long. And as a political tract it advances a conception of politics both grossly condescending and depressingly elitist.” Surely that is about as far from a breathless blurb as one could imagine—it’s more like a warning from the surgeon general.

On the other hand, there is an “Add to Cart” button next to Hayes’s takedown: a reminder that all those deflationary adjectives are sponsored by a retailer. But Mustich reiterates his claim of editorial autonomy, which he says has been the rule from the very beginning. Hayes and Miller both corroborate this claim, with the latter declaring that the site may be “blue-chip soon,” so high is its quality.

Mustich’s undertaking hardly marks the first fusion of commerce and criticism. There is Amazon’s experimentation with both in-house and customer reviews, and *The Reader’s Catalog* (a 1,382-page behemoth floated by Random House in 1989, like *A Common Reader* on steroids). Even *The New York Review of Books* has its own line of books, relentlessly hawked in the magazine’s pages. BNR may take this collusion a step further, but it is a difference in degree, not kind. As Hayes put it, “It’s like the lines from the Bob Dylan song: ‘It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.’” **CJR**

JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH is a writer living in Washington, D.C. He has written in print or online for *Foreign Policy*, *The New Republic*, *Dissent*, *The American Prospect*, *The Huffington Post*, and other publications.

REQUIRED READING FOR YOUR STUDENTS

Columbia Journalism Review brings real-life insights about the complexities of the media world to your journalism and communications students. Published by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, *CJR* also brings practical advice and inspiration to help young reporters become better at their craft, like how to make their writing more precise and pertinent. No other publication is as committed to encouraging a strong press and developing capable new journalists.



Sign up for the *CJR* Classroom Program to receive:

- **Discounted subscriptions for your students**
We have two terms of subscriptions available - **half year (3 issues for \$6.95)**, or **full year (6 issues for \$11.95)** -- each at a significant discount from our general subscription rate.
- **FREE subscription for the teacher**
- **FREE *CJR* Student Study Guide** of each issue that will help you incorporate *CJR* into your classroom discussion and lesson plans. For previous guides see <http://cjr.org/tools/studyguides>.

**COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW**
Strong Press, Strong Democracy

To ORDER:
Visit cjr.org/classroom
Or call 1-888-425-7782
Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of first issue.

True to Form

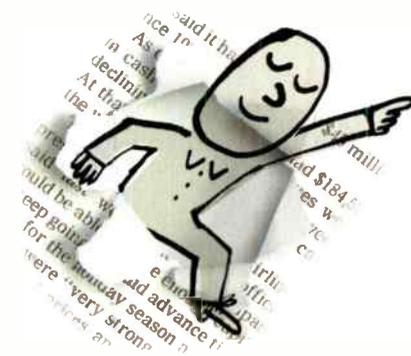
BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND JULIA SONNEVEND

EVEN THE WAYS WE THINK ABOUT REVOLUTIONARY forces shape our revolutions. Revolutions are products of multiple institutional and personal decisions, inventions, and adaptations. This is as true of what we commonly call technological revolutions—including the digital revolution—as of others. Technology matters, of course, but the technology itself, be it a pencil or the Internet, is hard to separate from the economics and politics of its use, and harder still to isolate from the ways of thinking embedded in the very design of the technology’s hardware and software.

There’s a nice illustration of this phenomenon in “Rethinking Hard and Soft News Production: From Common Ground to Divergent Paths” (*Journal of Communication*, March 2009) by Pablo J. Boczkowski. Boczkowski is an associate professor of communication studies at Northwestern and the author of *Digitizing the News* (2004), one of the first book-length studies of the online operations of U.S. newspapers. Here he focuses on his native Argentina with an ethnographic study of “hard” and “soft” news production at Clarin.com, the largest online news operation—operated by the largest newspaper—in the country.

In 2004, Clarin.com (launched in 1996) went through a major organizational redesign: both the Web site and the newsroom producing it were divided into two units. Ultimo Momento was meant to disseminate up-to-date “hard” news content, while Conexiones provided “soft” or “feature” news. This reflected the print-centered assumption that hard and soft news have different relationships to time: the former is breaking news whose value is in part its immediacy; the latter’s value is a more time-independent quality of interesting-ness rather than newness.

The two departments shared the same fifth-floor newsroom in a working-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Only a hallway separated them, but their workspaces were very different. The Ultimo Momento area was crowded with people and objects—three rows of desks, each with six workstations, some desks with many screens. Journalists scanned multiple screens while talking and often shouting to one another. The several television sets were almost always on. In contrast to this lively if frenetic environment, the Conexiones group was quiet and calm. There were only two rows



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

of workstations, and one television that was almost never on. People rarely shared desks or computers and often listened to music with headphones on. Talk among colleagues was much less frequent or boisterous than across the hall.

Ultimo Momento journalists produced most of their stories in less than two hours (each person was expected to write six or seven stories a day). These journalists largely drew their stories from wire stories, Clarin’s print edition, and other online news sources. Conexiones journalists, required to produce just two or three stories a week, took hours or several days on articles. They used many more original sources and were required to include at least three sources of new (not recycled) information per story. Ultimo Momento journalists regularly updated their stories—working mostly on the headlines and the leads while making only slight adjustments to the body of the stories. Their soft-news peers at Conexiones focused their efforts on the body of the story and rarely updated a story once it was posted. And while Ultimo Momento journalists mixed fast information-sharing technologies with voiced or shouted negotiation, blurring the boundaries between “virtual” and “real” news production, Conexiones journalists relied much less on the speed-enhancing features of the digital newsroom than on more traditional interview-based newsgathering.

This close, over-the-shoulder look at one online news operation in Argentina was conducted in 2005. The online site has been redesigned twice since then, and the print and online operations have merged into an integrated newsroom. Still, Boczkowski tells us, his recent examinations of Clarin.com suggest that the diverging workplace logic of hard and soft news has left its imprint. The next time you read that “online journalism is...” or “or:line journalism does...” such and such, it’s worth recalling the Boczkowski rule: online journalism, like print journalism, can be a variety of things. Print-based distinctions in types and modes of storytelling survive online. **CJR**

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

The Lower Case

Robert Degen, 104, Dies; Had Hand in Hokey Pokey

The New York Times 12/3/09

Grits attack on man ends in one arrest

The (Baton Rouge) Advocate 12/11/09

Professor's death won't interrupt classes

(Mt. Pleasant, MI) *Central Michigan Life* 1/11/10

Drugs, booze main reasons for medical board's discipline

Columbus Dispatch 1/11/10

Program offers mentally ill homeless hope

The Fresno Bee 12/29/09

Bruins sign Satan to 1-year deal

www.cbc.ca 1/2/10

Guatemala will pay \$3 million to massacre victims

washingtonpost.com 12/22/09

Study Increases Prevalence of Autism

nytimes.com 12/19/09

Man Lights Himself On Fire Trying To Keep Warm

The Hartford Courant 1/23/10

WWE, Mattel seek world domination

(Bridgeport) *Connecticut Post* 1/7/10

cjr offers a one-year subscription or gift subscription for items published in The Lower Case. Please send original clippings of print items (to cjr, Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway, Columbia Univ., NY, NY 10027) or a link for Web items (to cjr@columbia.edu). Please include address, phone, and e-mail.

Reporting Iraq

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WAR BY THE JOURNALISTS WHO COVERED IT

EDITED BY MIKE HOYT, JOHN PALATTELLA, AND THE STAFF OF THE
COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

"Never in the fifty years that I have been in or around the news business have I read a better record of a historic event than this."

—REESE SCHONFELD,
FOUNDING PRESIDENT, CNN

"This should be required reading in every journalism class from high school to graduate school."

—JAMES W. CRAWLEY,
PRESIDENT, MILITARY
REPORTERS AND EDITORS

"A searing document, one of the most revealing chronicles of the war yet published. It is as though correspondents are talking late into the night, trying to explain what it was like, what sights and smells haunt them, what they're proud of and what they regret, what they saw coming and what they didn't." —ANTHONY SWOFFORD, *THE WASHINGTON POST*

A new history of the Iraq war and the way it was reported—including contributions from over forty international reporters, photographers, translators, editors and stringers. Rich with anecdote and illustrated with color photographs—including many never before published in U.S. newspapers—*REPORTING IRAQ* is a major event.

Includes 21 Color Photos

EDITED BY MIKE HOYT, JOHN PALATTELLA,
AND THE STAFF OF THE *COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW*



Reporting Iraq

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WAR BY THE JOURNALISTS WHO COVERED IT

HANNAH ALLAM, KNIGHT RIDDER
CHRISTOPHER ALLBRITTON, FREELANCE WRITER
GHAITH ABDUL-AHAD, *THE GUARDIAN*
DEBORAH AMOS, NPR
JON LEE ANDERSON, *THE NEW YORKER*
JANE ARRAF, CNN
LUKE BAKER, REUTERS
ANNE BARNARD, *THE BOSTON GLOBE*
YOUSIF MOHAMMED BASIL, STRINGER
JOHN BURNS, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*
ANDREW LEE BUTTERS, FREELANCE WRITER
THANASSIS CAMBANIS, *THE BOSTON GLOBE*
RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN, *THE WASHINGTON POST*
PATRICK COCKBURN, *THE INDEPENDENT* (LONDON)
BORZOU DARAGHI, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

WILLIAM DARLEY, *MILITARY REVIEW*
THOMAS DWORZAK, MAGNUM PHOTO
RICHARD ENGEL, NBC NEWS
ALI FADHIL, TRANSLATOR
FARNAZ FASSIHI, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*
DEXTER FILKINS, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*
ANNE GARRELS, NPR
MARCELA GAVIRIA, FRONTLINE
PATRICK GRAHAM, FREELANCE WRITER
CAROLINE HAWLEY, BBC
JAMES HIDER, *THE TIMES* (LONDON)
PAUL HOLMES, REUTERS
CHRIS HONDROS, GETTY IMAGES
LARRY KAPLOW, COX NEWSPAPERS
TOM LASSETER, KNIGHT RIDDER

PETER MAASS, *THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*
GEORGES MALBRUNOT, *LE FIGARO*
DAN MURPHY, *THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*
ROBERT NICKELSBURG, *TIME*
ELIZABETH PALMER, CBS NEWS
SCOTT PETERSON, *THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*
MITCH PROTHERO, UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
NIR ROSEN, FREELANCE WRITER
ALISSA RUBIN, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*
ANTHONY SHADID, *THE WASHINGTON POST*
LIZ SLY, *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*
MARTIN SMITH, FRONTLINE
VIVIENNE WALT, FREELANCE WRITER
NANCY YOUSSEF, KNIGHT RIDDER



MELVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING

WWW.MHPBOOKS.COM

AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD

World Radio History

CHECK OUT THE NEW & IMPROVED



Reynolds Center at BusinessJournalism.org

OUR REVAMPED WEB SITE INCLUDES

News | Free training | Story ideas | Help with stories
Chat with business journalists | Job listings | & More

FREE WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS

MAR 10 | INDIANAPOLIS

"Investigating the Business of College Athletics" with Pulitzer winner and best-selling author Buzz Bissinger.

MAR 18 | PHOENIX

"Produce a Business News Video in a Day" with ASU instructor Brian Snyder. Pre-SABEW event.

MAR 19 | PHOENIX

"How to Look Natural On Air" with ASU professor Sue Green. Pre-SABEW event.

MAR 20 | PHOENIX

"Produce a Business News Podcast" with Mark Moran, news director for NPR's KJZZ station. SABEW event.

MAR 21 | PHOENIX

"Take Compelling Business News Photos" with Arizona Republic deputy photo editor Carlos Chavez. Post-SABEW.

APR 19-20 | ONLINE

"Using Social Media to Cover Business Better" with Robin J. Phillips, Web ME of BusinessJournalism.org.

MAY 7 | PORTLAND, ORE.

"Investigative Business Journalism on a Beat" with Alec Klein and Pulitzer winner Gary Cohn.

MAY 10-14 | ONLINE

"Show Them the Money — Finding Personal Finance Angles on Any Beat" with BusinessJournalism.org blogger Melissa Preddy.

JUN 9 | LAS VEGAS

"Investigative Business Journalism on a Beat" with former Washington Post reporter Alec Klein. Pre-IRE event.

JUL 19-23 | ONLINE

"Unlocking Financial Statements" with University of Kansas journalism professor Jimmy Gentry

AUG 9-13 | ONLINE

"How to be an Entrepreneur as a Business Journalist" with freelancer Maya Smart and "Ask the Recruiter" blogger Joe Grimm.

REGISTER TODAY AT
BUSINESSJOURNALISM.ORG

FOLLOW
US ON



TWITTER
@BIZJOURNALISM



FACEBOOK
BIZJOURNALISM