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THE REGULATORS HUMBLE AOL TIME WARNER

TRAFFIC REPORT: THE SOURCES BEHIND THE MOVIE

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HOW "IT" HAPPENED: THE ANATOMY OF A HIGH TECH HYPE

SHE'S CONQUERING A FRACTIOUS PBS

PLUS: ROGER EBERT REMEMBERS MIKE ROYKO

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A leadership vacuum.
Massive layoffs.
Plummeting morale.
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The inside story of CNN's sudden slide

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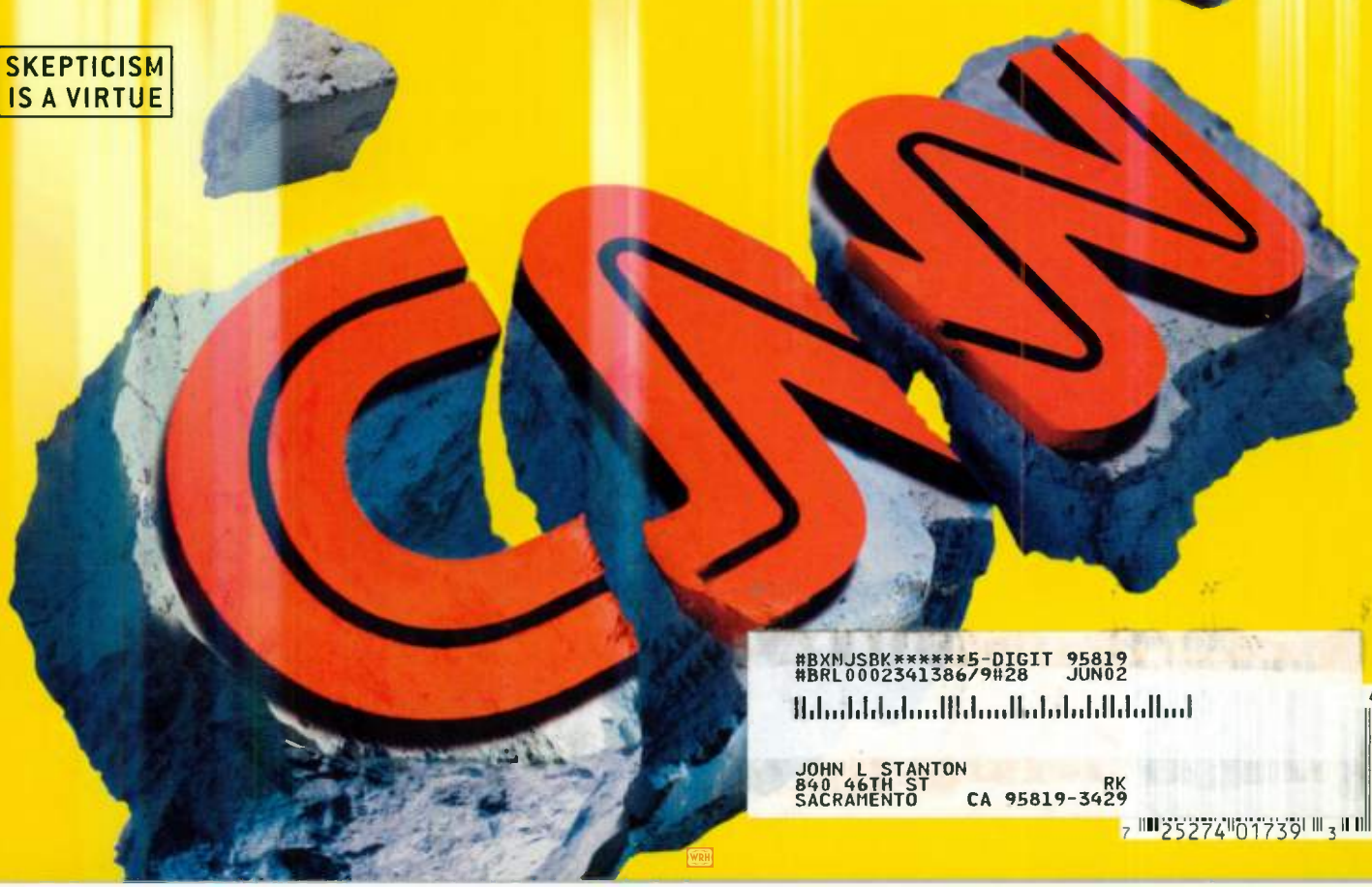

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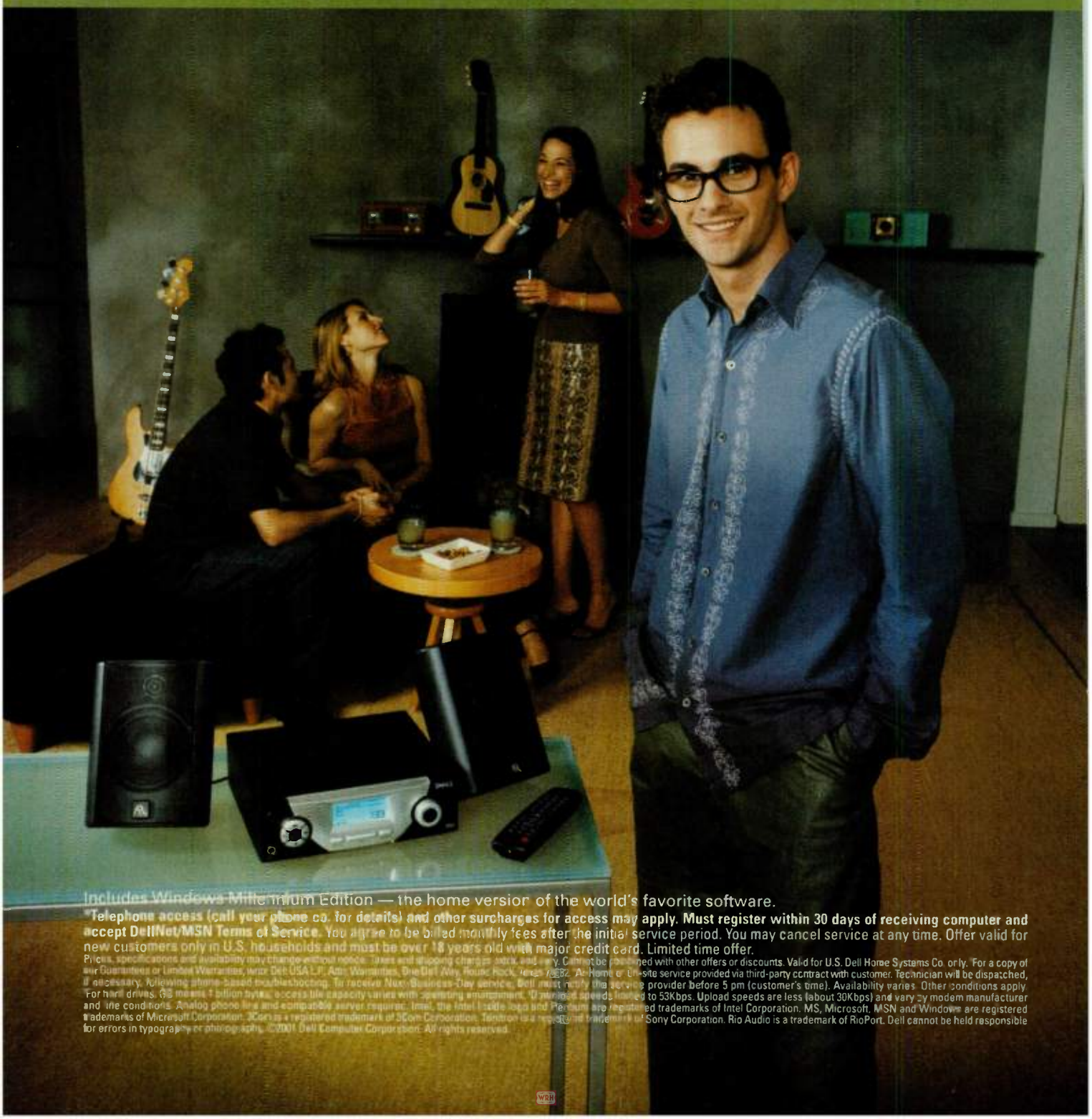

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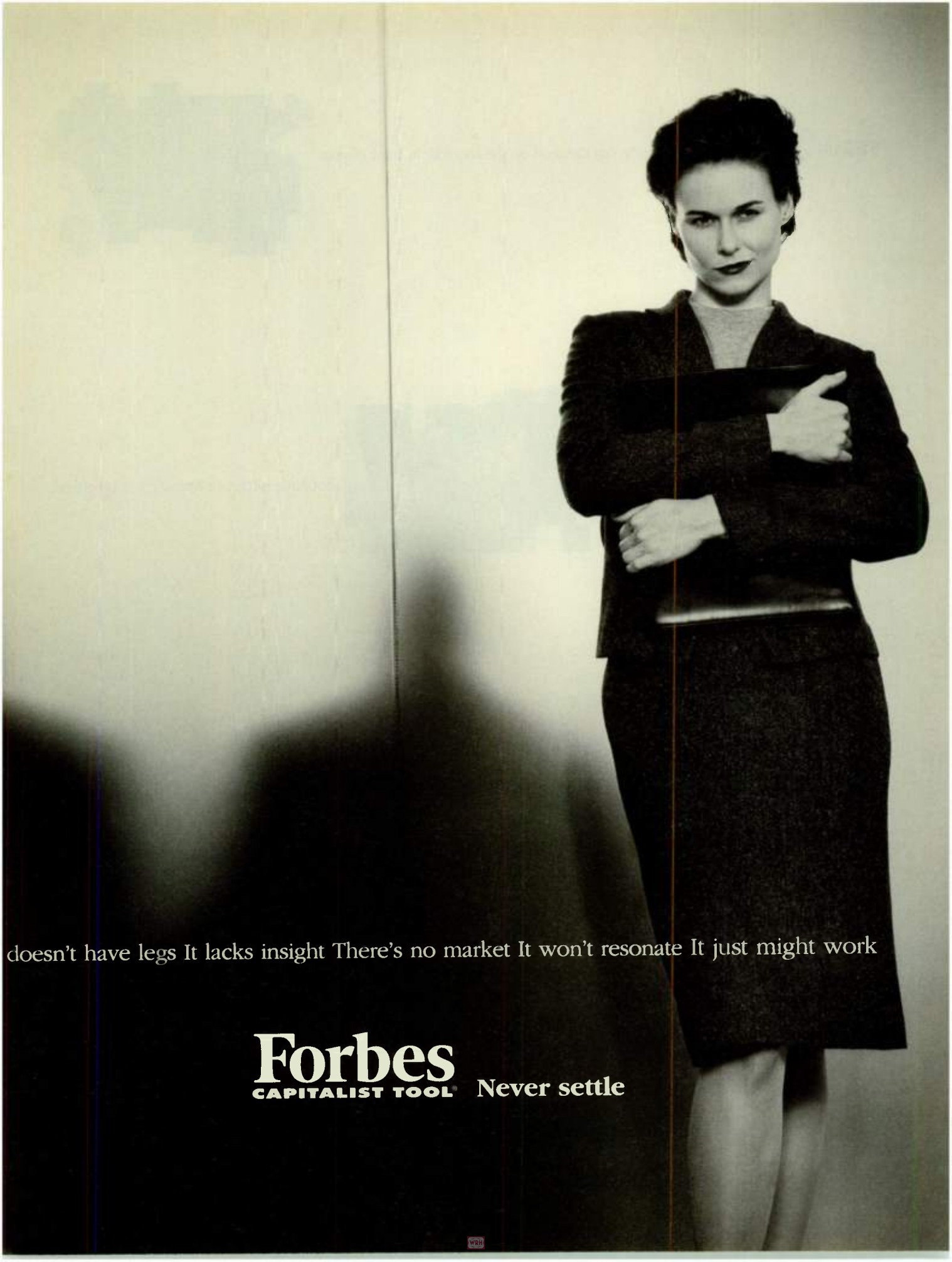
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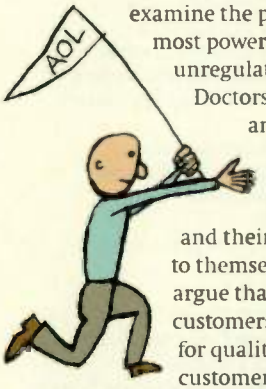
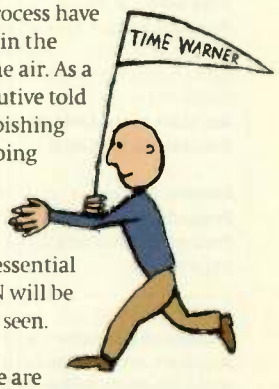
When media giants AOL and Time Warner announced on January 10, 2000, that they planned to merge, the news struck media insiders and consumers as both inevitable and incredible. Inevitable because we live in a culture of corporate consolidation, and incredible because it was hard to fathom that one company would control and deliver that much content. The mission of this magazine has always been to help consumers navigate an increasingly confusing media landscape and to examine the practices of perhaps the most powerful but largely unregulated force in society. Doctors, lawyers, stockbrokers, and beauticians must answer to some regulatory or licensing body, but journalists and their employers answer only to themselves. Though one could argue that having to satisfy customers is a powerful incentive for quality and integrity, those customers nonetheless face fewer and fewer choices as media companies become bigger and bigger.



Robert Schmidt's behind-the-scenes account (page 74) of AOL and Time Warner's yearlong struggle to get their union consecrated by the U.S. government notes that AOL's Steve Case and Time Warner's Gerald Levin began their quest by pronouncing that the merger would sail through the antitrust review because Time Warner is mainly a content producer while AOL is mainly a content deliverer. But in the end, the sacrifices they made to federal regulators are significant. The companies' competitors lobbied furiously for mechanisms that would forestall potentially monopolistic practices. During the process, each company declined in value, and the merged business faces a degree of federal scrutiny unprecedented for a media company.

Schmidt's tale is perhaps the most definitive so far of how the lawyers, lobbyists, executives, and spin doctors on all sides of the battle got what they wanted—or at least avoided what they feared most. Though AOL and Time Warner ultimately prevailed, the battle left them bruised and humbled.

Which brings us to John Cook's riveting snapshot (page 66) of the turmoil at CNN, Ted Turner's 20-year-old all-news cable station, which in 1996 became a Time Warner company. CNN needed to redefine itself in an increasingly competitive news market even before the AOL Time Warner deal was announced, but the merger raised the stakes considerably. As an ever smaller division of an ever bigger corporation, CNN has, over the past few months, had to prove to its corporate masters that it could earn its keep in both dollars and viewers. The results of that process have wrought havoc both in the newsroom and on the air. As a high-level news executive told Cook, "It's like refurbishing the train while it's going 150 miles per hour and still taking on passengers." Whether or not the essential news mission of CNN will be derailed remains to be seen.



Among the other offerings in this issue are three pieces that explore the sometimes blurry border between fact and fiction. Amy Wilentz's memoir (page 63) of how her work as a foreign correspondent informed the writing of her first novel illustrates how reality-inspired fiction can achieve its own heightened reality. In Luke Barr's telling of a story behind the story of the hit movie *Traffic* (page 70), he reveals how a *New York Times* journalist helped to make the fictional world of Mexican drug dealers more realistic and therefore all the more compelling. As director Steven Soderbergh says, "I wanted people to walk away thinking, 'That was real.'"

And last, a cautionary tale. On page 97, Blake Eskin anatomizes a nonfiction hoax—Binjamin Wilkomirski's acclaimed but fake Holocaust memoir, *Fragments*, in which the author, a gentile named Bruno Grosjean, posed as a Jew. This month, the book's American publisher repackages it with a thorough investigation of the shocking deception. And in doing so takes responsibility for what can happen when fiction masquerades as fact.

DAVID KUHN

CONTRIBUTORS

LUKE BARR ("Traffic Cop," page 70), a senior associate editor for *Brill's Content*, was a contributing editor to *Spy* and has written for *GQ* and *Civilization* magazines.

MARK BOAL ("Overdoing IT," page 86), a senior writer for *Brill's Content*, profiled *Politically Incorrect* host Bill Maher in the February issue.

JOHN COOK ("CNN's Free Fall," page 66, and "A Blueprint for Conflict," page 102), a senior associate editor for *Brill's Content*, has contributed to *The New York Times Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, and *Feed*.

ROGER EBERT ("Royko Recalled," page 46), a Pulitzer Prize–winning film critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, cohosts *Ebert & Roeper and the Movies*. His latest book is *Roger Ebert's Movie Yearbook 2001*.

BLAKE ESKIN ("The End of the Affair," page 97) was the arts editor at the *Forward*. His book about the Binjamin Wilkomirski hoax and his own family will be published next year.

EVE GERBER ("Looking for a Miracle," page 112), a staff writer for *Brill's Content*, wrote the "In Other Magazines" column for *Slate*.

GAY JERVEY ("The Reinvention of PBS," page 90), a senior correspondent for *Brill's Content*, wrote January's cover story about George Stephanopoulos.

ROBERT SCHMIDT ("Battle Royal," page 74), a Washington, D.C.–based senior writer for *Brill's Content*, covered federal courts for *Legal Times* and was a national legal correspondent for Court TV.

CALVIN TRILLIN ("My Paper Trail," page 43), a *Brill's Content* contributing editor, is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, a columnist for *Time*, and the author of *Family Man*.

AV WESTIN ("The Color of Ratings," page 82) has worked in broadcast journalism since 1949, at CBS, public television, and ABC. He has won six Emmys and four Peabody Awards.

AMY WILENTZ ("Fact to Fiction," page 63) is the author of *The Rainy Season*, a book on Haiti, and was the Jerusalem correspondent for *The New Yorker*. Her first novel, *Martyrs' Crossing*, was published in March.

SCOTT MENCHIN

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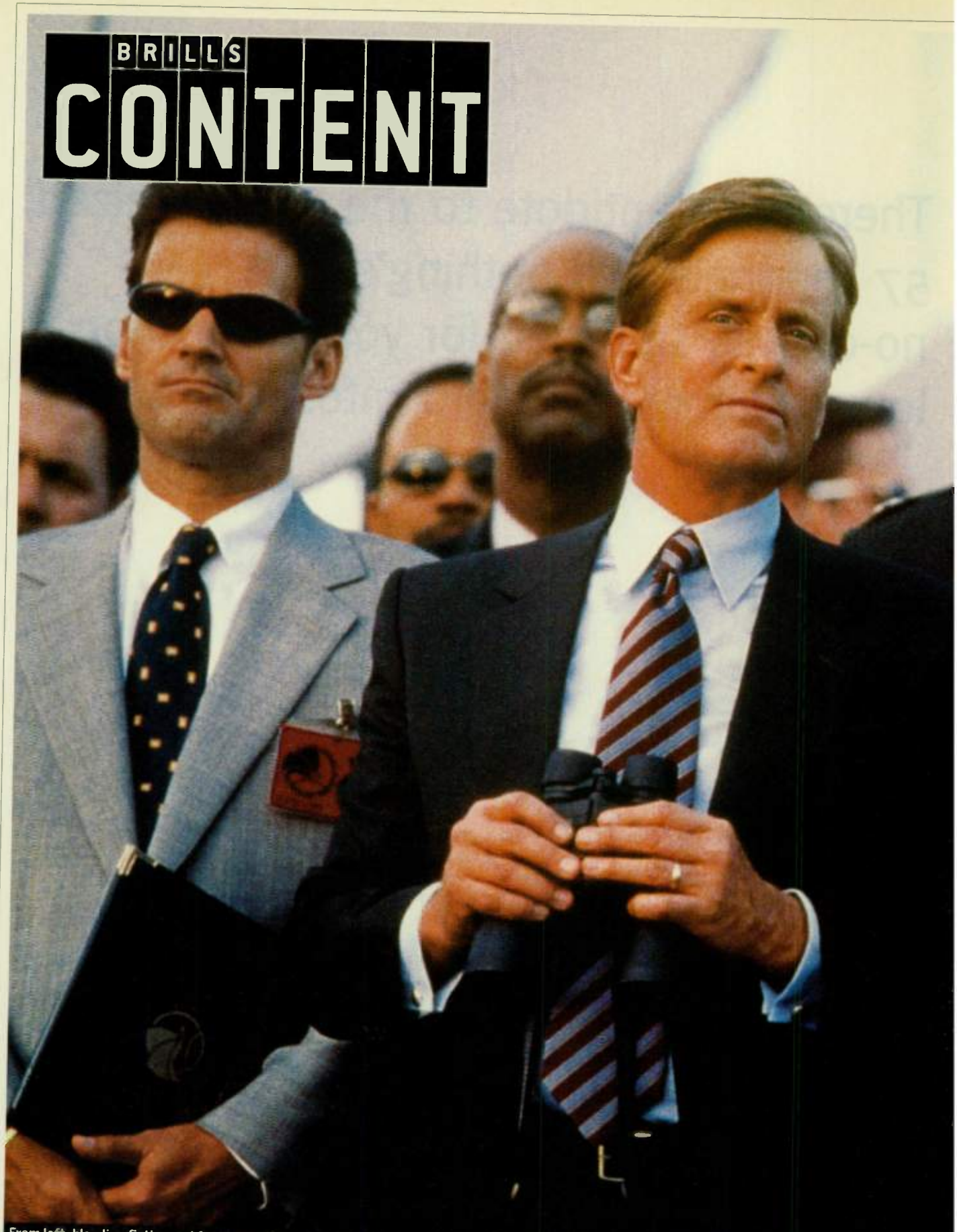

From left, blending fiction and fact in *Traffic*: Actors D.W. Moffett and Michael Douglas, who plays a federal drug czar, film a scene with real-life customs

BOB MARSHAK

APRIL 2001
VOLUME 4
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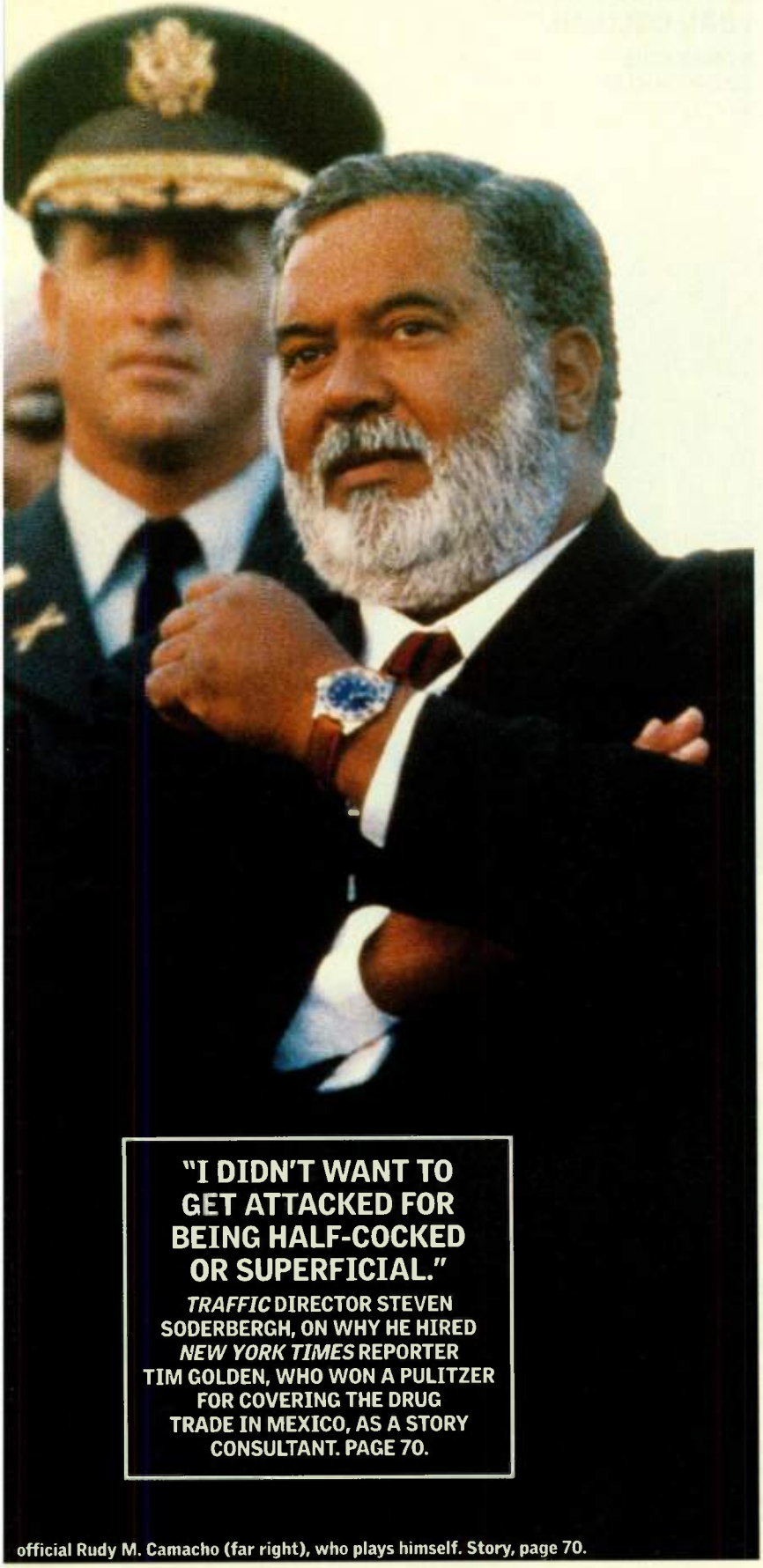


"I DIDN'T WANT TO GET ATTACKED FOR BEING HALF-COCKED OR SUPERFICIAL."

TRAFFIC **DIRECTOR STEVEN SODERBERGH, ON WHY HE HIRED *NEW YORK TIMES* REPORTER TIM GOLDEN, WHO WON A PULITZER FOR COVERING THE DRUG TRADE IN MEXICO, AS A STORY CONSULTANT. PAGE 70.**

official Rudy M. Camacho (far right), who plays himself. Story, page 70.

COVER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: JOHN EDER

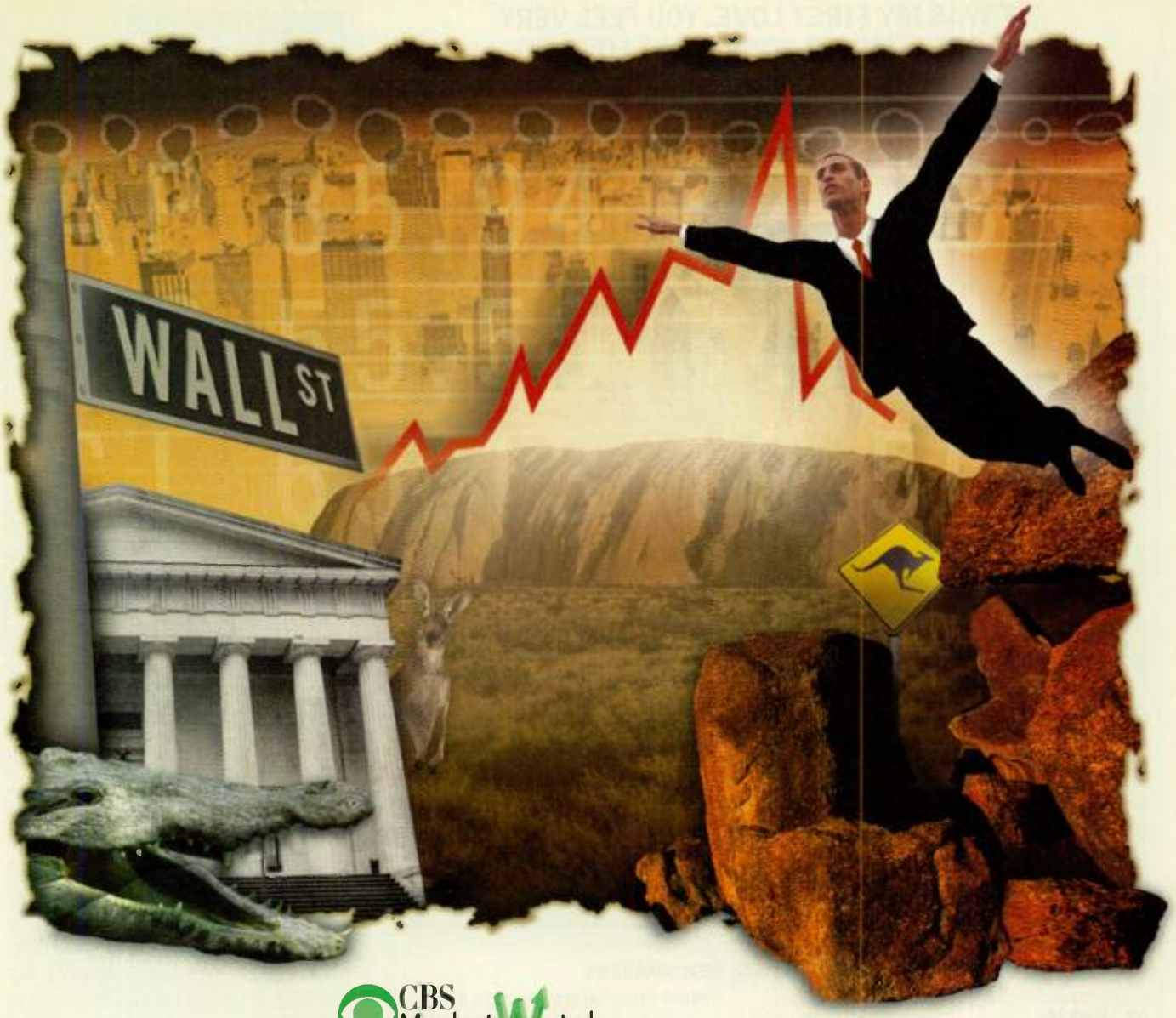
"SOMETIMES HE MADE PEOPLE MAD, SOMETIMES YOU MIGHT THINK HE WAS OUT OF HIS MIND, BUT HE NEVER WROTE A BAD COLUMN."

ROGER EBERT REMEMBERS HIS LATE COLLEAGUE MIKE ROYKO, THE LEGENDARY CHICAGO CHRONICLER. APPRECIATION, PAGE 46.

The late Pulitzer-winning columnist Mike Royko, against the early-seventies backdrop of his beloved Chicago. Roger Ebert's remembrance, page 46.

UP FRONT

COLUMNS



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ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE, WHO RESIGNED LAST DECEMBER AS CEO OF UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL. CAN THE AILING AGENCY REBOUND UNDER THE REVEREND SUN MYUNG MOON'S NEWS WORLD COMMUNICATIONS? NEWSMAKERS, PAGE 112.

Former United Press International CEO Arnaud de Borchgrave, who resigned last December. The Reverend Sun Myung Moon may now be the news wire's only hope for salvation. Page 112.

DEPTS.

NATHANIEL WELCH

BRILL'S CONTENT

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Accuracy
Brill's Content is about all that purports to be nonfiction. So it should be no surprise that our first principle is that anything that purports to be nonfiction should be true. Which means it should be accurate in fact and in context.

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Similarly, if a publisher is not certain that something is accurate, the publisher should either not publish it, or should make that uncertainty plain by clearly stating the source of his information and its possible limits and pitfalls. To take another example of making the quality of information clear, we believe that if unnamed sources must be used, they should be labeled in a way that sheds light on the limits and biases of the information they offer.

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We believe that journalists should hold themselves as accountable as any of the subjects they write about. They should be eager to receive complaints about their work, to investigate complaints diligently, and to correct mistakes of fact, context, and fairness prominently and clearly.

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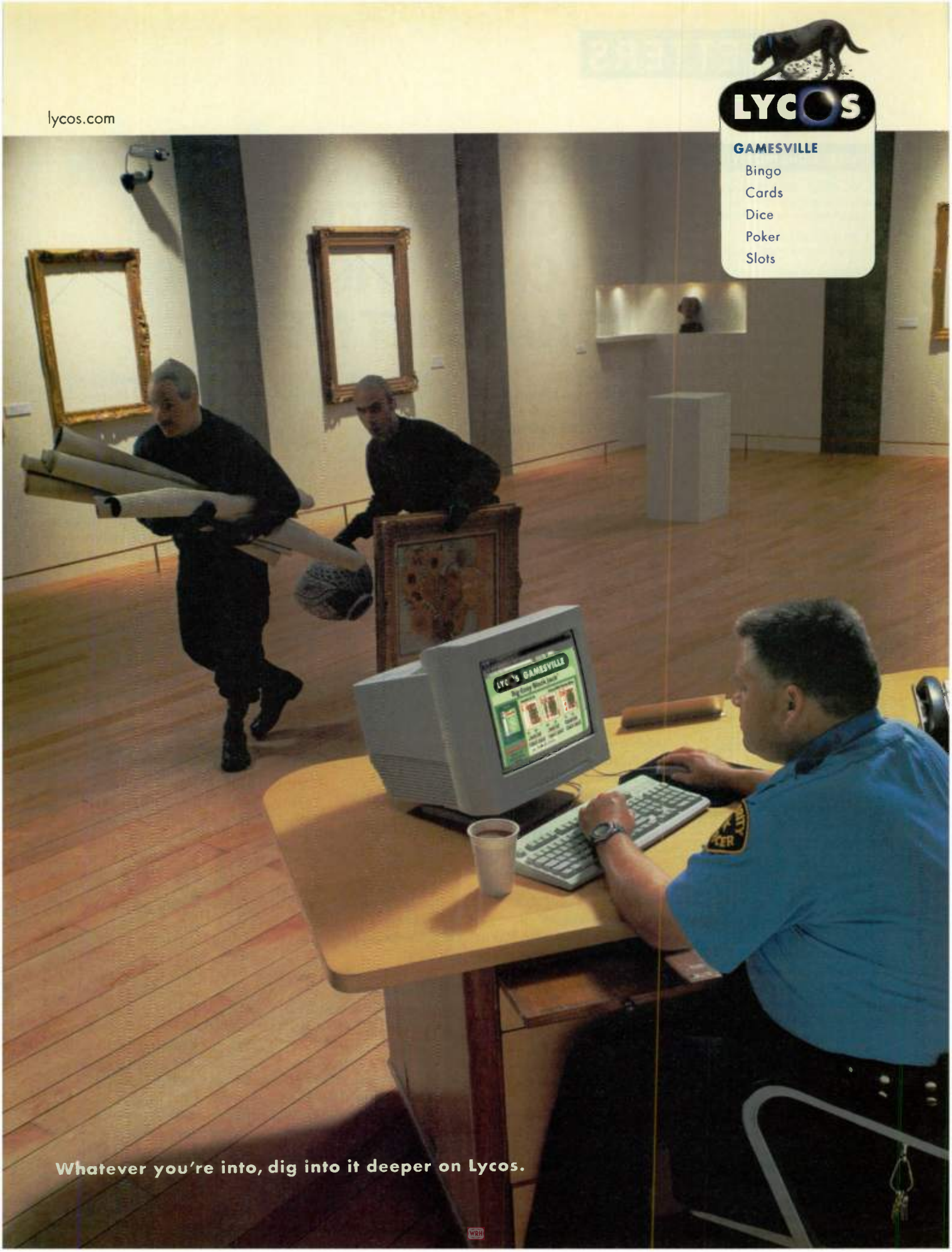
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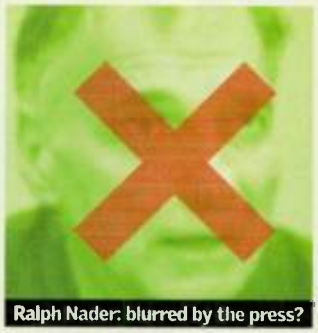
NADER AS NEWS; A *SALON* EDITOR'S DEFENSE; AND CHOPPING DOWN THE HATCHET METER

LOSING AMBITIONS

*Ralph Nader tries to turn his personal experience as a presidential candidate into a critique of the media ["My Untold Story," February]. Although some of his points about the convergence of interests between the major media outlets and the major political parties are accurate, the use of his campaign as a lens through which to examine the media undercuts his position entirely. His main point is that he was largely ignored by the mainstream media because they refused to see beyond "the two-party duopoly" that runs the country. On one hand, Nader is right: The increasing consolidation of corporate media interests and the control over ballot access by the two major parties are disconcerting. But that's not why he wasn't covered in the way he would have preferred.

If Nader really wanted to run as a serious candidate, why didn't he run for something he could win, like a congressional seat? Of course, the question answers itself: Winning and serving were never the point. Nader wasn't really running for president; he was staging a months-long press conference, and that's why he wasn't covered. The media were right to cover him only as a potential spoiler and an occasional feature, because that's all he was.

JORDAN MARSH
CHICAGO, IL



Ralph Nader: blurred by the press?

A PUNDIT PROBLEM

*I don't doubt that I made enough bad predictions to come in last in the Election 2000 "Pundit Scorecard" [February], but you were wrong to say that I predicted Rick Lazio would beat Hillary Clinton. On MSNBC and *The McLaughlin Group*, I repeatedly predicted Hillary would win, and now—in a *Brill's Content* exclusive—I predict Hillary will win re-election in 2006 if she is not back in the White House by then.

LAWRENCE O'DONNELL JR.,
MSNBC SENIOR POLITICAL ANALYST, LOS ANGELES, CA

Editor's note: See Corrections, page 18.

KNOW THY MOTIVES

*Lara Kate Cohen's article in the February *Brill's Content* "Shalit Strikes Again!" [Notebook] was a shoddy smear job—one-sided, lazily reported, and filled with crucial omissions, half-truths, and misleading statements. Considering the seriousness of the charges it contains, these journalistic errors are reprehensible. Cohen's piece reports that three sources accuse our reporter, Ruth Shalit, of fabricating quotes in her story about the naming industry, "The Name Game" (*Salon*, November 1999). As with any serious allegation, one would expect the reporter to comprehensively report both sides of the story. Cohen completely failed to do so.

First, she does not even mention the sources' possible motives or the fact that they communicated with one another. Cohen knew that one of the two sources who originally accused Shalit of misquoting them called another industry figure and tried to enlist him in a campaign to, in his words, "stir up the industry against" Shalit. That source also said that he knew Shalit had had problems in the past that could be exploited and acknowledged that he had spoken with someone from Landor Associates, the

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*Letters may be edited for clarity or length. Letters published with an asterisk have been edited for space. The full text appears at our website (brillscontent.com).

ORIGINAL NADER PHOTO BY TIM BOYLE/NEWSMAKERS

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The Chronicle of Higher Education

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LETTERS

branding company for which the second and third of the accusing sources worked at the time. Cohen does not report any of this.

Second, Cohen makes no effort to assess the credibility of the accusations. She fails to examine the actual quotations that were supposedly fabricated and credulously and uncritically parrots the sources' arguments—arguments that even a cursory examination show to be threadbare.

Third, and perhaps most outrageously, Cohen fails to report that the third source who accused Shalit of fabricating quotes came forward seven months after the piece ran, in a letter written by Landor's lawyer that bore all the earmarks of a conscious corporate strategy to discredit Shalit.

For the record, in the almost two years during which I have been Shalit's editor, I have found her to be completely professional, ethical, and credible. We have published many of her reported pieces, some more than 8,000 words long and many of which paint a less than flattering portrait of their subjects. We have never received a single complaint of misquotation, let alone quote fabrication. Shalit declined to be interviewed by Cohen, fearing from long and bitter experience that doing so would only make a hatchet job even bloodier. It gives me no pleasure to report that Cohen's grossly unfair and biased piece confirms her judgment. GARY KAMIYA,
EXECUTIVE EDITOR, *SALON*
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Lara Kate Cohen responds:
Mr. Kamiya's central argument appears to be that the piece was one-sided. As our story noted, Shalit declined to be interviewed, so the complaints against her could not be directly rebutted. Therefore, we quoted Mr. Kamiya extensively and made it clear that he stood firmly behind Shalit. One example of the one-sidedness, says Mr. Kamiya, is that the piece failed to mention the "possible motives" of the sources who criticized Shalit. But the story made it clear that Shalit's article was an unflattering portrait of the industry. Obviously the industry insiders who were the focus of the story might be upset about how their business was portrayed.

Mr. Kamiya also states that we neglected to mention that the sources talked with one another. In fact, our story noted that Landor employees met to discuss the story and consult with a lawyer. Mr. Kamiya goes on to say that some of the sources in Shalit's story tried to start a "campaign" against Shalit. But if sources believe they've been quoted inaccurately, what's wrong with their calling other sources in the story to see if they feel the same way? As for any implication that there was a campaign against Shalit, it should be noted that the aggrieved sources didn't contact *Brill's Content*. We called them after reading *Salon*'s lengthy, seven-part correction of Shalit's piece. As for Mr. Kamiya's contention that the sources' arguments were "threadbare," I'm a bit puzzled. After all, *Salon* itself modified some quotes after sources complained.

Mr. Kamiya's final point is that the complaints of Amy Becker (the third source)—that Shalit fabricated quotes—lose validity because they were made "seven months after the piece ran." But Becker didn't wait seven months to respond. Immediately after Shalit's piece ran, Becker and other Landor employees met to discuss mistakes in the story. After the meeting, David Redhill, then the company's spokesperson, wrote a letter to *Salon* on behalf of all of the company's employees quoted in the story, including Becker.


Salon contributor Ruth Shalit

CORRECTIONS

In the February "Pundit Scorecard," we assigned *The McLaughlin Group*'s Lawrence O'Donnell Jr. the lowest score among 25 political pundits and dubbed him the "wrongest man in America." A Federal News Service transcript of the show erroneously attributed to O'Donnell another panelist's prediction that Rick Lazio would win New York's Senate race, an error we repeated. In fact, O'Donnell predicted that Hillary Clinton would win. O'Donnell's corrected score places him 23rd out of 25, which moves Michael Barone, also of *The McLaughlin Group*, into the bottom slot. We regret the error (see O'Donnell's letter to the editor, page 16).

In February's "Publish and Perish?" [The Culture Business], we wrote that André Schiffrin "quit and walked away" from a forum in the online magazine *Feed* on the future of book publishing. In fact, Mr. Schiffrin was unable to participate in that part of the forum due to travel obligations.

In January's "Walking the Line," we wrote that the Starr Report was released in 1988. It was released in 1998.

In October's "Literary Racial Profiling" [Books], we misspelled the name of the artist Synthia Saint James.

Editor's note: In February's "Loaded Words" [Critical Condition], we stated that Michael Bellesiles, the author of the book critiqued by Michael Korda, did not reply to our invitation to respond. After publication, Bellesiles informed us that he never received our initial e-mailed request for a response.

NOT DOWN TO A SCIENCE

*Originally, I thought "The Hatchet Meter" (patent pending) [February] was a fairly clever Luddite antitechnology satire. However, after [reading more], I concluded it was a serious article. The stupidity of using a pseudotechno formula to quantify press coverage appears to be a laughable attempt at "science" by a journalism major. Who picked the nine variables for each candidate? God? Brill? Lot?

Why count only the approximate volume of articles without including a "quality factor," an "objectivity factor," or one of the other pretentious *Brill's Content* "What We Stand For" factors? Why not compare similar issues side by side, [such as] Bush's cocaine rumor versus Gore's marijuana rumor?

DAVID J. KOLANDER
SCOTTSDALE, AZ

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

*Your survey "Speaking in Foreign Tongues" [Notebook, February] was valuable, but you should also be asking: What kind of reporting can be done by people who do not speak or understand the language of the country where they are stationed? Imagine a foreign reporter in Washington, D.C., who cannot read *The Washington Post*, cannot interview members of Congress without an interpreter, and cannot chat with the Americans he or she meets. That's precisely the situation for far too many American foreign correspondents. The result is that much of the foreign reporting in the American media is often just plain wrong. TOM GALLY
YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

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INTO THE HOT ZONE

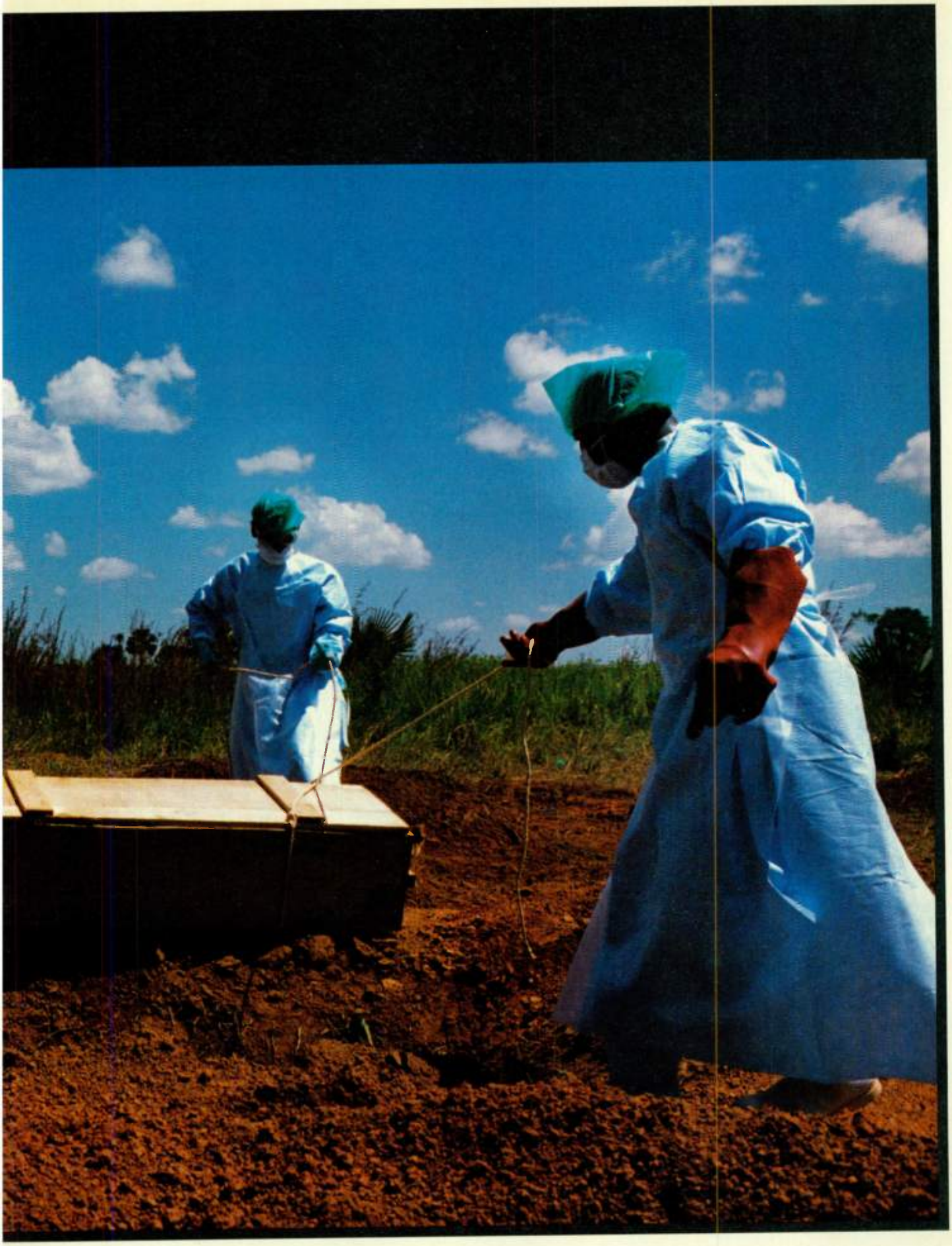
South African photographer Jodi Bieber risked her life to document an outbreak of the Ebola virus in Uganda

When the Ebola virus hit Gulu, Uganda—a small town 175 miles from the capital city of Kampala—last fall, hundreds were left dead or infected. The virus is fast-acting and usually fatal and is transmitted through even the slightest contact with bodily fluid or tissue. For Jodi Bieber, a freelance photographer documenting the disaster for *The New York Times*, this required a high degree of precaution: The day she arrived in Gulu, she recalls, a World Health Organization ambulance crew gave her medical scrubs, a surgical hat, and gloves. They also sprayed her with Jik, a bleachlike substance that slows the spread of the virus. She was ready for work.

On Bieber's first day in Gulu, she attended a funeral. "Traditionally, funerals are really big," she says, "where the family wails and the friends come." This ceremony was small: Funerals had been banned in Gulu, because the Ebola virus remains infectious even after its victim has died. The only pallbearers, in fact, were three WHO workers dressed in scrubs. Bieber's photograph of the eerie burial scene (right) appeared in the *Times*'s Sunday magazine last December.

Bieber, a South African who has won several awards for her work, remained in Uganda for three more days. She took pictures of the mortuary and watched, shaken, as infected townspeople were removed from their homes and taken to the hospital. "I used to have a few cries here and there to relieve stress," she says. But the danger of the assignment didn't fully register, Bieber says, until she herself fell ill soon after returning to Johannesburg. Was it Ebola? "It played on my mind a hell of a lot," she says. She had, after all, worked right beside the dead and the dying. "I don't use a zoom lens. I was pretty close," she adds. Fortunately, her symptoms disappeared a few days later—but the memories of Gulu will stay with her far longer. STEPHEN TOTILO

Photograph by Jodi Bieber/Network/SABA



REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

The ombudsman chides *Brill's Content* for omitting a joke about Leonid Brezhnev, for giving Bill Clinton the last word, for its "dubious" vocabulary, and for a host of other alleged infractions. BY MICHAEL GARTNER

Ten questions after reading every word—every word—in the February issue of *Brill's Content*:

1. What did Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times* think when he read the end of that meaty interview Steven Brill had with then-president Bill Clinton? Here's the exchange:

BRILL: Who [is one journalist who] generally gets it right, explains what the issues are, and what's going on in the country?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: God, I'll just kill that person.

BRILL: No, come on.

[Laughter]

PRESIDENT CLINTON [to press secretary Jake Siewert]: Don't you think I would? You don't want me to answer that do you? I will kill him. He would never get the Pulitzer Prize if I did that. But it's [*Los Angeles Times* political writer Ronald] Brownstein.

Doesn't that just cry out for a response from Mr. Brownstein? Here's what Mr. Brownstein would have said if asked: that he "built a good relationship" with President Clinton, just as he has with George W. Bush and others, by "trying to think through what they were trying to do, put it in a larger context, and take them seriously as political actors. If you portray these guys as pushing an agenda in part because they believe in it, it leads to a good relationship."

But Mr. Brownstein says that he and the former president spoke only during the eight or so interviews he had with Mr. Clinton. How do we know that? Because Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post* wrote that after following up with Mr. Brownstein and asking the question that Mr. Brill, or one of his editors, should have asked. A *Brill's Content* reader shouldn't have to read *The Washington Post* to find answers to questions raised in this magazine.

2. Why didn't *Brill's Content* tell its readers that the price of a subscription has gone up? (Or has it?) The price above the bar code on the cover of the February issue puts a single copy at $4.95, which is a dollar more than it was a month earlier. And those thick subscription cards bound or blown into the magazine put a one-year subscription at $21.95, up from $16.95 just a month earlier. (But if you read the small print at the bottom of page 159—I told you I read every word—you'll see the subscription price listed at $16.95.) It would have been nice if the editors, who tell us what's going on at other magazines, had told us about the 25 percent price rise for single copies and the 29 percent price rise for annual subscriptions. An explanation might have been nice, too.

HOW TO REACH MICHAEL GARTNER
Phone: 212-332-6381
Fax: 212-332-6350
E-mail: mgartner@brillscontent.com
Mail: 5315 Waterbury Road, Des Moines, IA 50312

3. What was the joke that Bill Maher told Johnny Carson? The story about Mr. Maher reports: "While playing the clubs in L.A., Maher was spotted by a scout for *The Tonight Show*. On his first appearance on Johnny Carson's stage, Maher told a joke about Leonid Brezhnev, and Carson loved it. 'Carson really kept him in the public eye for ten years,' says Jim Vallely, a friend who now writes for *The Geena Davis Show*." What's the joke that could launch such a great career? How could anything about Leonid Brezhnev have been funny? Perhaps Howard Kurtz will call Mr. Maher and find out for us.

4. What's a "dubious elevator"? Here's the opening paragraph on a story about *The Black Star News*: "To get to the office of *The Black Star News*, a three-year-old weekly newspaper targeted to New York's African-American community, you must enter a run-down building on Manhattan's not-yet-gentrified West 99th Street, ride a dubious elevator to the fifth floor, and walk down Milton Allimadi's musty hallway through his kitchen into his bedroom (being careful not to trip over the cat)." Why was the elevator dubious? Was it uncertain about the cat?

5. What was the "major book review" that Richard Nixon didn't like? Here's a paragraph from Michael Korda's article on bias in the media: "Richard Nixon, several of whose books I edited, once wrote me, about a book of my own, 'Join the club! As I read the sh--ty review of your book I realized again that when the editors of [a major book review] don't like the thesis of a book—fiction or nonfiction—they pick a reviewer who shares their prejudices.'"

Why did Mr. Korda pull his punches and not name the major book review? Because he's still the editor in chief of Simon & Schuster and didn't want to offend the people at the review? Some other reason? While we're at it, what was the name of Korda's book? Maybe Howard Kurtz will tell us one of these weeks.

6. Why is Marisa Wheeler called "Snuggles," not Wheeler, in the story about her fiancé, former Morgan Stanley employee Christian Curry? The article reports: "'I need to marry a lawyer,' Curry says jokingly. In fact, he's engaged to a law student, Marisa Wheeler (a.k.a. 'Snuggles')." The two subsequent references to Ms. Wheeler are simply to "Snuggles." The second reference to everyone else in the story—and there is no second reference to any other individual woman—is by last name. Aren't the references to "Snuggles" a little too cute, a little too snotty, a little too demeaning, and all too sexist?

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 120]

Michael Gartner is a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and lawyer who has edited papers large and small and headed NBC News.

John is lonely.

Mary is bored.

John's friend tells him about Nerve...

Mary's friend mentions Nerve...

...the community of thoughtful hedonists!

John posts an ad and responds to Mary's.

Mary posts an ad and responds to John's.

John is excited for his date with Mary.

John and Mary hit it off!

Mary can't wait for her date with John.

And spend the rest of their lives having mind-blowing sex together.

death row TV

"Coming Up Tonight on Fox: America's Most Eye-Popping Executions." BY STEVEN BRILL

With the execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh approaching, a long-simmering debate over whether we should televise the ultimate punishment is bound to heat up. And it's going to have a new twist: Traditionally, relatives of the victims of the criminal about to be killed are allowed to witness the execution. But because the Oklahoma bombing had so many victims with so many relatives, they all obviously can't fit into a room to watch in person. Thus, at press time federal prison officials were considering the possibility of letting the families watch the McVeigh death on closed-circuit television, an accommodation that would be similar to arrangements made to beam McVeigh's 1997 Denver trial back to a special auditorium in Oklahoma City, where relatives went to watch, even though the rules for federal criminal trials prohibit cameras in courts.

IF THE RELATIVES OF TIMOTHY MCVEIGH'S VICTIMS HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEE HIM EXECUTED, SHOULD WE?

Beyond the practical problems of deciding just what kind of relatives (next of kin? cousins? in-laws? fiancés?) would be allowed in, that closed-circuit arrangement for televising the trial raised the wider issue of why the rest of us—who also presumably had an interest in "attending" this public trial—couldn't watch. That debate, about cameras in the courts, is one that I was in the middle of for six years, beginning in 1991, when I founded and ran Court TV. It's an issue that's often a hot topic somewhere, because so many states now allow cameras in court, while other states and the federal courts don't and are constantly being petitioned to open up. With this closed-circuit arrangement for the execution now a strong probability, it's sure to raise to a new level what had previously been a more muted debate about televising executions so that all of us, not just the victims' relatives, can watch. No jurisdiction in the United States has ever allowed death row cameras, but it's something that a few in the legal establishment and others, notably former talk-show host Phil Donahue, have long advocated. Indeed, in February, McVeigh himself helped to stir up the debate by declaring in a letter to an Oklahoma newspaper that a public broadcast of his death was the best way to deal with who would and who wouldn't get to watch a closed-circuit telecast.

Many of the cameras-in-the-death-chamber arguments will be the same as those about cameras in the courts. People will line up either on the side of the public's right to see their government in action or on the side of those who believe that television will, as usual, turn a solemn tragedy into a gory spectacle that robs all involved of their dignity while allowing money-hungry media corporations to cross the next frontier of bad taste.

What makes the cameras-in-the-courts and the cameras-in-the death-chamber debates so interesting, so difficult, and so different from all other debates about media and taste is that these are two rare instances in our First Amendment society where the government gets to make decisions based on content and on the purpose of purveying that content. In these two instances, the government—because it has the power to allow the cameras in or to exclude them—enjoys leverage it rarely has to prevent or control content. At Court TV, I tried making a constitutional argument that the courts or the legislature can't keep cameras out because the founding fathers made public trials a constitutional requirement. Yet except for a few judges in a few places, the argument has not yet gained traction, and courts and legislatures seem still to have the power to keep cameras out. As for executions, prison officials, too, have so far been given the discretion to exclude cameras.

This means that the debate and the way the government purports to make its decision will be based on whether the content—in the government's view, anyway—has a good purpose and will produce a good result.

For example, if the only purpose of telecasting an execution was so that medical students could watch the process by which the lethal injection works its course, I'd bet that sentiment would lean in favor of the camera. (That's one reason I always stressed the educational value of Court TV, even though as a First Amendment purist, I hated the idea of having to justify the "value" of my content.) Similarly, if the only purpose was that the victims of a criminal could see justice being done, sentiment would favor the telecast. (That's why I always stressed the value to society of people seeing their justice system at work on Court TV.)

But when it is also argued that another purpose, or result, of the camera is that media corporations will make money off of other people's misery, then the people are likely to push their government in the other direction of forbidding the

ALISON SEIFFER

camera—despite the fact that no one objected or should have objected, much less could have objected (which is the real point), when Ted Koppel and ABC launched the extremely profitable *Nightline* during the Iranian hostage crisis. And when it is pointed out that one result of televising executions will be that the bottom-feeders in the media create shows with gory close-ups and horrible sound bites, then the government almost surely won't want to do it, and the public will probably support that. This is why the closed-circuit telecast of McVeigh's death to the families of his victims will seem like just the right compromise: The families get to see justice done, but no media people make money off of it.

When I ran Court TV, I'd argue that we didn't show the goriest evidence: that we did long-form trials, not out-of-context sound bites of a witness's worst moments; and that we showed as many nonsensational public-interest cases (such as the Bosnian war crimes tribunal at The Hague) as we did the O.J. or Menendez brothers trials. But I could never quite overcome the argument that other television organizations would use the camera access we gained—indeed, use the feed from the pool cameras that we typically operated in high-profile trials—for exactly those "bad," sound-bite purposes. Nor was I ever comfortable making that argument to the government that we were "better" media with "better" content and that, therefore, we deserved a break—because I don't think the government should be in the business of deciding which content, or content provider, is "better." The government should take the "good" with the "bad." It should ignore issues of purpose and taste and let as much content as possible be out there, especially when it's content having to do with governmental functions. The founding fathers wanted trials to be public, I'd argue. And if anything else was even clearer than that about their original intent, it was that they also wanted the government completely out of the taste or motive business when it came to speech.

On the other hand, I started this magazine based on the proposition that if the government wasn't going to make those decisions, then the speakers and publishers who do ought to make them with far more sense of responsibility and accountability to the public than they now have.

So, where does that leave me on the subject of televised executions?

As with public trials, there is a deeply embedded history behind executions that suggests that they be public. For two of the underpinnings of criminal punishment in the common law and in American law—deterrence and retribution—depend on that punishment being public. Aside from where one comes out on the question of how much of a deterrent capital punishment actually is, there cannot be any doubt that the more public a punishment, the more likely it is to have whatever deterrent effect it has. Similarly, the more public the punishment is, the more likely it is to give society the sense of justice having been done and the rule of law having been redeemed, which is what retribution in the common law is all about.

And then there's the Court TV–like issue of people seeing their government in action. There is no more serious action the government takes than putting someone to death. And watching it is not irrelevant, because a huge part of the debate over capital punishment is whether this action is so extreme or so cruel that the government shouldn't do it. That watching it will make lots of people uncomfortable and maybe even turn against the

death penalty (Phil Donahue's reason for favoring televised killings) is not an argument against it but an argument for it; if the public can't stand what it sees, then maybe it should change the law rather than keep the enforcement of it out of sight. (This part of the debate is roughly parallel to the arguments I got from judges after the O.J. Simpson trial; they said that televising it had undermined confidence in the legal system, and I said that that was like saying that the solution to the Vietnam War was that all would have been okay if only the press had not reported that the war wasn't going well.)

So, yes, on policy grounds, the government ought to allow public televising of trials.

But if I were still running a network, I know I wouldn't show an execution except under the tightest restrictions, among them:

- airing it late at night;
- accompanying the showing of the actual execution with a discussion of the crime, the sentence, and the law;
- being careful about what the promotional spots said and showed, and how often and at what times of the day they ran; and
- not showing any close-ups. (If I didn't control the pool camera deciding on issues like close-ups, then I would edit or time-delay my show so that I could block that stuff out. But here, too, the government could intervene, by placing restrictions on the shots the pool camera can take, just as the House of Representatives does, because it owns and controls the camera that provides the C-SPAN footage.)

Yes, a camera on death row would allow others to cash in and bring our popular culture down still another peg with shows like "America's Most Eye-Popping Executions." To be sure, this time maybe they'd have crossed the line so far that the debate about what they were doing would be productive and embarrass many of them out of it. Yet nothing about the continual cycling down of television's standards suggests that we should count on that.

What we should count on instead is the bedrock idea that freedom is better than restriction when it comes to the government setting taste standards in the cause of hiding government from those who are governed. For we should not let the "bad" acts of those whose taste we don't share give our government the excuse to keep us from watching, if we want to, the single most significant activity any government can undertake. That's not what a First Amendment democracy is all about. ◘

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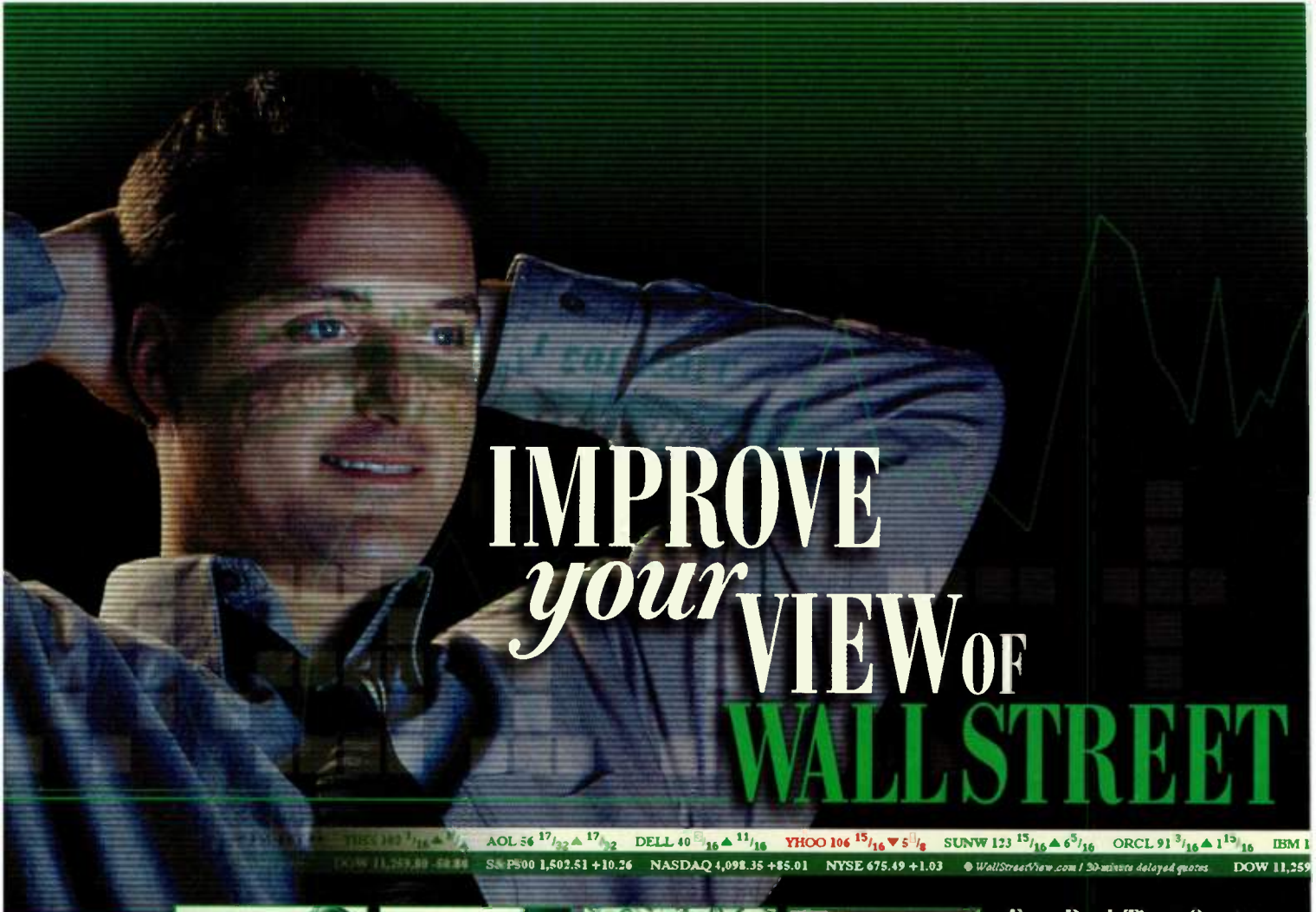

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propaganda alert

When can a local newspaper become an organ of spin and self-promotion? When it reports on something it cares deeply about—like itself. BY ERIC EFFRON

The people of Pittsburgh experienced quite a blast in February when dynamite leveled the storied Three Rivers Stadium, once the proud home of the Pirates and Steelers. The city also witnessed a media eruption of sorts—touched off when this magazine published a piece by staff writer Kimberly Conniff that examined how Richard Scaife, the eccentric conservative billionaire, exerts unusual and at times troubling influence at the Pittsburgh daily newspaper he owns, the *Tribune-Review*.

The article in our March issue, not surprisingly, was of great interest in Pittsburgh and prompted much discussion on local television and talk radio. But what was most...illuminating, let's say, was how the *Tribune-Review*, along with its competitor, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, handled a story that could not have hit closer to home.

Pittsburgh is unusual in at least one respect: It is served not by one but two dailies, both owned by independent publishers. And they really dislike each other. Depending on which newspaper a reader happened to see, he or she would have quite different notions about what *Brill's Content* reported. The episode provides a case study in why we are well advised to read skeptically, especially when the subject relates directly to the interests of the media outlet providing the report.

Dueling papers, dueling versions of the facts

The article showed that in ways that are hardly typical for a big-city daily, the *Tribune-Review* owner's political and personal interests directly affect the newspaper's content, sometimes damaging its journalism. For instance, because Scaife doesn't like Senator Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican, mentions of Specter are sometimes stricken from reporter's drafts. Scaife funds many right-wing groups, which in turn are often quoted in the newspaper without any hint of the connection. And Scaife once had a reporter write a piece about opposition to a project in his own neighborhood—opposition that appeared to come mainly from Scaife. At the same time, our story noted that the *Tribune-Review* has done some good work, has grown in circulation, and provides the *Post-Gazette* with much-needed competition.

Immediately after we released our piece to the press, the *Post-Gazette* pounced with a story headlined "Scaife's whims influenced stories in Tribune-Review, magazine says." The article began: "*Tribune-Review* Publisher Richard Mellon Scaife ordered editors to keep coverage involving the Pittsburgh Pirates off the front page and once dispatched a reporter to northern Pennsylvania to follow up a tip that the Russian military had invaded Allegheny National Forest...." The story did a decent job summarizing our article—it even mentioned (barely) some of the positive stuff—but there was a hint of glee in its tone.

The next day the *Tribune-Review* fired back in what can be described as a skillful work of propaganda. Under the aggressively bland headline "National media magazine takes look at Trib," the article wrings every drop out of what was positive in the *Brill's Content* piece and skims over the rest (which is to say the bulk of it). Like propaganda, it is true in the small ways but adds up to deception.

"The Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review*'s expanding role as an influential media outlet is a subject of an upcoming issue of *Brill's Content*...," the piece starts. (Notice that by saying "a" subject, not "the" subject, the sentence is technically accurate.) "*Brill's* says the newspaper's circulation continues to grow," the article continues, "that the *Tribune-Review* is winning an increasing number of industry awards and that even the paper's critics acknowledge the breadth of its coverage." (All of this is true, but again, the article leaves the impression that the paper's strengths were the focus of our article.) I was interviewed for the piece, and the *Tribune-Review* reporter quotes me saying something nice about the paper—a perfectly accurate quote, although it happened to be the most positive thing I said during a ten-minute conversation in which I stressed Scaife's troubling role.

The *Tribune-Review* did show that it could find the critical material in our piece—of a certain sort. It quoted a passage in the *Brill's Content* article about how some *Post-Gazette* staffers were concerned about their editor's service on a mayoral task force. It also helpfully pointed out that the *Post-Gazette* piece that had appeared the day before had neglected to mention that the *Post-Gazette* is part-owner of the Pirates.

The lesson: Newspaper wars can be entertaining, but you'd better read both papers—and more—if you want the whole picture. ■

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NOTEBOOK

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From left: Climbers Caldwell, Rodden, Smith, and Dickey on the day of their rescue

A KILLING IN QUESTION

Outside magazine was lauded last winter for its account of four American rock climbers who had been kidnapped by Islamic militants in Kyrgyzstan and then escaped by throwing one of their guards off a 1,500-foot cliff. "Exclusive," announced the magazine's November cover, "Kidnapped in Kyrgyzstan: The climbers tell their story." The article was the latest entry in the booming outdoor-adventure-writing genre, in the vein of Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, a best-seller that began as an *Outside* assignment. But just as *Outside*'s Kyrgyzstan story hit newsstands, a different—and far less dramatic—version emerged, raising questions about what happens when those who lay claim to a definitive, exclusive story have a financial interest in keeping it action-packed.

ACTION/ADVENTURE

Last August, freelance writer and veteran climber Greg Child received a chilling e-mail message from the mother of 22-year-old Jason Smith, one of the climbing world's biggest stars. The e-mail described how Smith and three other young Americans—Tommy Caldwell, Beth Rodden, and John Dickey—had been held hostage for six days by Islamic guerrillas in remote Central Asia, finally escaping when they pushed a kidnapper over a towering cliff and ran 18 miles to safety. Child was a contributing editor to *Climbing*, a small magazine based in Carbondale, Colorado; he also occasionally wrote for the more established *Outside*. The e-mail Child received about Smith had been circulated within the mountaineering community, and when it reached the editors at *Climbing*, they immediately asked Child to write about the saga. Child knew there would be stiff competition for the climbers' account, and at the magazine's urging, he e-mailed Smith, who was still in Kyrgyzstan. Smith and Child had long shared a corporate sponsor in The North Face, a sporting-gear manufacturer. Based on their acquaintance, Child secured the climbers' cooperation on the definitive account of their ordeal. At this point, realizing he had a major story in the making, he called his agent, Susan Golomb, whose Susan Golomb Literary Agency specializes in adventure-travel writers.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 32]

L: AP TV/AP; R: SHAWN BALDWIN/AP

THE OTHER TRANSITION

PRESS RELATIONS

On January 20, Bill Clinton began what many are calling a less-than-graceful transition from leader of the free world to ex-president. But even as he continues to endure a high degree of press scrutiny, he does not have the public-relations support he once did: Along with all the other trappings of office, Clinton lost his 20-person press operation when he moved from Washington to Westchester. (Under the Former Presidents Act, Clinton will receive about $100,000 a year in federal funds to pay his staff's salaries for the rest of his life.) Perhaps as a result, during the early days of the transition his press office was not a model of efficiency or foresight.

For the first week of Bill Clinton's life as a private citizen, the phones in his transition offices in Washington were being answered by temp workers. One, who would identify herself only as Carrie, said she felt beleaguered by press inquiries: "Look, I'm just helping out answering the phones here. I have no idea what's going on." Within a week, Jake Siewert, who had served as Clinton's final presidential spokesman, was called back into battle. "The reality is, he wasn't planning on doing a whole lot of press," says Siewert. "But the media's obsession with him hasn't abated, and so we're recalibrating accordingly." By early February, Siewert was gone, replaced by Julia Payne, who had served as a spokeswoman for both Clinton and former vice-president Al Gore. Payne is also a short-term hire, however: She says she plans on leaving the job this summer.

SETH MNOOKIN

Bill Clinton, out of office

NOTEBOOK

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31] Child and his agent quickly jettisoned *Climbing* and approached the glossier *Outside*. Golomb negotiated a $17,500 payment for Child's story, far more than *Climbing* could offer. Next, Golomb secured the climbers themselves as clients and began working on book and movie deals. She discouraged her clients from talking to the press: The climbers, who had been the focus of much media attention, agreed they would give no further interviews.

In September, Golomb negotiated a book deal with Villard worth a reported $350,000. Child would write the climbers' story, to be titled *Over the Edge*; all five would share the proceeds. Golomb then sold the film rights to Universal Pictures—money also to be shared by Child and the four climbers. Everyone had reason to hope for a successor to Krakauer's best-seller about a disastrous expedition to the peak of Mt. Everest.

The November 2000 issue

Child wrote a 7,000-word story for *Outside*, which is narrated in breathless present tense and builds to a desperate, grim finale as three of the climbers—Smith, Dickey, and Caldwell—conclude that their only hope is to kill their kidnapper. "Caldwell scrambles across the ledge and up the cliff," wrote Child. "He reaches up, grabs the rifle slung over [the rebel's] back, and pulls....The rebel arcs through the circle of the moon, pedaling air. The climbers see him hit a ledge 30 feet down with a crack. Then [the rebel] rolls off into the darkness, over the 1,500-foot cliff to the river below." The killing is central to the article's life-or-death drama and lends it moral weight.

As soon as *Outside* published the account, which arrived at newsstands in October, journalists familiar with the events in Kyrgyzstan began to question the climbers' story. Andrew Zharov, a director of the Central Asia division of Interfax, an international news service, says via e-mail that "when these Americans were in Kyrgyzstan they didn't say anything about pushing their guard off a cliff....I communicated with people in Kyrgyzstan: they don't believe the pushing story." In fact, the day the climbers were rescued in August, Interfax and two other news services reported that the American climbers said they had been *abandoned* by their captors and had wandered lost for five days before finding help.

THE KILLING IS CENTRAL TO THE ARTICLE'S DRAMA AND LENDS IT MORAL WEIGHT.

Meanwhile, Nancy Prichard, an Oregon-based journalist denied access to the climbers by Golomb, turned to sources in Kyrgyzstan and discovered that the rebel kidnapper, Rafshan Sharipov, was alive and well and in jail in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Greg Child and *Outside* editor Hal Espen say they were astounded by this twist, as were the climbers. *Outside* quickly posted an update on its website explaining that the magazine had been "unable to confirm" that the prisoner was in fact the kidnapper and that the climbers, upon viewing his picture, were unsure whether he had been their captor. The accompanying photograph depicts a young man—who does not appear to be seriously injured—staring intently into the camera.

In its March issue, *Outside* published a brief report by Child describing a videotaped interrogation of Sharipov, the kidnapper. According to *Outside*, he had been captured by the Kyrgyzstani military and could be seen discussing the kidnapping on a videotape, which was obtained by Child. *Outside* editor Espen would not discuss the tape's provenance or elaborate beyond Child's update in the magazine: "All four climbers saw Sharipov go over the edge and believed that he could not have survived the fall. However, much to the surprise of his former prisoners, he apparently did." Child writes that the tape shows Sharipov looking "dejected but surprisingly healthy, considering the fall he apparently took." He reports that Sharipov himself does not discuss on the tape the specifics of the kidnapping or the Americans' escape, but that "a Kyrgyzstani official on the video says that, according to Sharipov, the Americans fled after he fell asleep. John Dickey, [one of the climbers] who has seen the tape, believes that Sharipov was their captor, and all four climbers stand by their account of their escape."

Espen and Child also stand by the original story. That Child's definitive account failed to bring Sharipov's survival to light does not reflect rushed or compromised reporting, says Espen, but rather the difficulty of reporting events in a remote region. "I don't think we were hasty," he says. "The careful reader will see that we do not assert that the guy was killed." He goes on to say that he believes the climbers are "incapable of the Machiavellian dishonesty" needed for such a dramatic lie. Child also emphasizes his trust in the four climbers and is dismissive of the idea that his financial interest in the story affected his judgment. "If that were true, that's what I'd write," he says of the possibility the climbers embellished their story. Child's editor at Villard had no comment about the Sharipov controversy, and a spokesman for Universal says the film version is not yet in development. "It's interesting enough that they were kidnapped," says Susan Golomb, the agent. "I think it's great that they didn't kill anyone."

KAJA PERINA

QUIZ

SECRET IDENTITIES

A pseudonym is a handy device for a writer, sometimes a shield to hide behind and other times an alter ego that allows experimentation and parody. Here are some of the magazine world's most prominent noms de plume, along with their true identities. Can you unmask them?

Match the pseudonym, left, with the writer who uses it, right

1. **Lucy Thomas,** *McSweeney's*
2. **Stanley Bing,** *Fortune*
3. **Libby Gelman-Waxner,** *Premiere*
4. **Nan Darien,** *Vanity Fair*
5. **Louise J. Esterhazy,** *W*
6. **Jake,** *Glamour*

A. John B. Fairchild (former chairman of Fairchild Publications)
B. Paul Rudnick (novelist and screenwriter)
C. various writers on staff
D. Gil Schwartz (spokesman for CBS)
E. Henry Alford (magazine journalist and author)
F. Dave Eggers (author)

RESEARCH: LARA KATE COHEN

ANSWERS: 1-F (Lucy Thomas/Dave Eggers). 2-D (Stanley Bing/Gil Schwartz). 3-B (Libby Gelman-Waxner/Paul Rudnick). 4-E (Nan Darien/Henry Alford). 5-A (Louise J. Esterhazy/John B. Fairchild). 6-C (Jake/various writers)

THE DAWN OF A BOLD NEW ERA

PUNDIT SCORECARD

George W. Bush wants so badly to change the culture in Washington that it would seem almost churlish not to help out. So here at Pundit Scorecard—where we track the accuracy of political pundits' pontification—we're doing our part, wiping our clairvoyant competitors' slates clean after last month and letting them start building their records anew.

STILL NO. 1 Margaret Carlson

Well, letting most of them, at least. This month we bid a sad adieu to Sam, Cokie & Co. at ABC's *This Week*, who, we found, were far too calm, judicious, and—whatever were they thinking?—restrained for our purposes. (Which is to say they simply made too few predictions.) We've put them on indefinite hiatus and brought in the delightfully less sober-minded folks at *Fox News Sunday*.

Amid all this slate-cleaning and slate-shifting, however, it's nice to know some things didn't change: *Capital Gang*ster Margaret Carlson is once again our monthly winner, topping this edition of the Scorecard with a dominating 4-for-4 record. Equally impressive is newcomer *Fox News Sunday*, which, like Carlson, batted a thousand. (The *Foxes* got all their predictions correct, but they made only five that we could check. The second-place *Capital Gang*, by contrast, made three times as many verifiable calls while still pulling out an impressive .813 average.)

PREDICTION-SHY Michael Barone

And John McLaughlin, named "the century's wrongest pundit" in last month's wrap-up Scorecard, pulled up to the fifth-from-last slot. But he still doesn't shy from unorthodox views: "Pandas, schmandas," he declared on January 15. "They're cute, they're cuddly, but they're killers and they're costly." Even so, we're sure John's a good man, with a good heart. JESSE OXFELD

	PLAYERS		
1	Margaret Carlson, *CG*	(4/4)	1.000
2	Robert Novak, *CG*	(3/3)	1.000
2	Juan Williams, *FNS*	(3/3)	1.000
4	Tony Blankley, *MG*	(1/1)	1.000
4	Brit Hume, *FNS*	(1/1)	1.000
4	Mara Liasson, *FNS*	(1/1)	1.000
4	Clarence Page, *MG*	(1/1)	1.000
8	Al Hunt, *CG*	(3/4)	.750
9	Morton Kondracke, *BB*	(2/3)	.667
9	Kate O'Beirne, *CG*	(2/3)	.667
11	Fred Barnes, *BB*	(2/4)	.500
12	Mark Shields, *CG*	(1/2)	.500
13	John McLaughlin, *MG*	(1/3)	.333
14	Eleanor Clift, *MG*	(0/1)	.000
15	Michael Barone, *MG*	(0/0)	.000
15	Lawrence O'Donnell, *MG*	(0/0)	.000
15	Tony Snow, *FNS*	(0/0)	.000
	TEAMS		
1	*Fox News Sunday*	(5/5)	1.000
2	*The Capital Gang*	(13/16)	.813
3	*The Beltway Boys*	(4/7)	.571
4	*The McLaughlin Group*	(3/6)	.500

BB: The Beltway Boys; CG: The Capital Gang; MG: The McLaughlin Group; FNS: Fox News Sunday. Covers predictions made between December 15, 2000, and February 4, 2001. Team scores based on total predictions made on each show.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

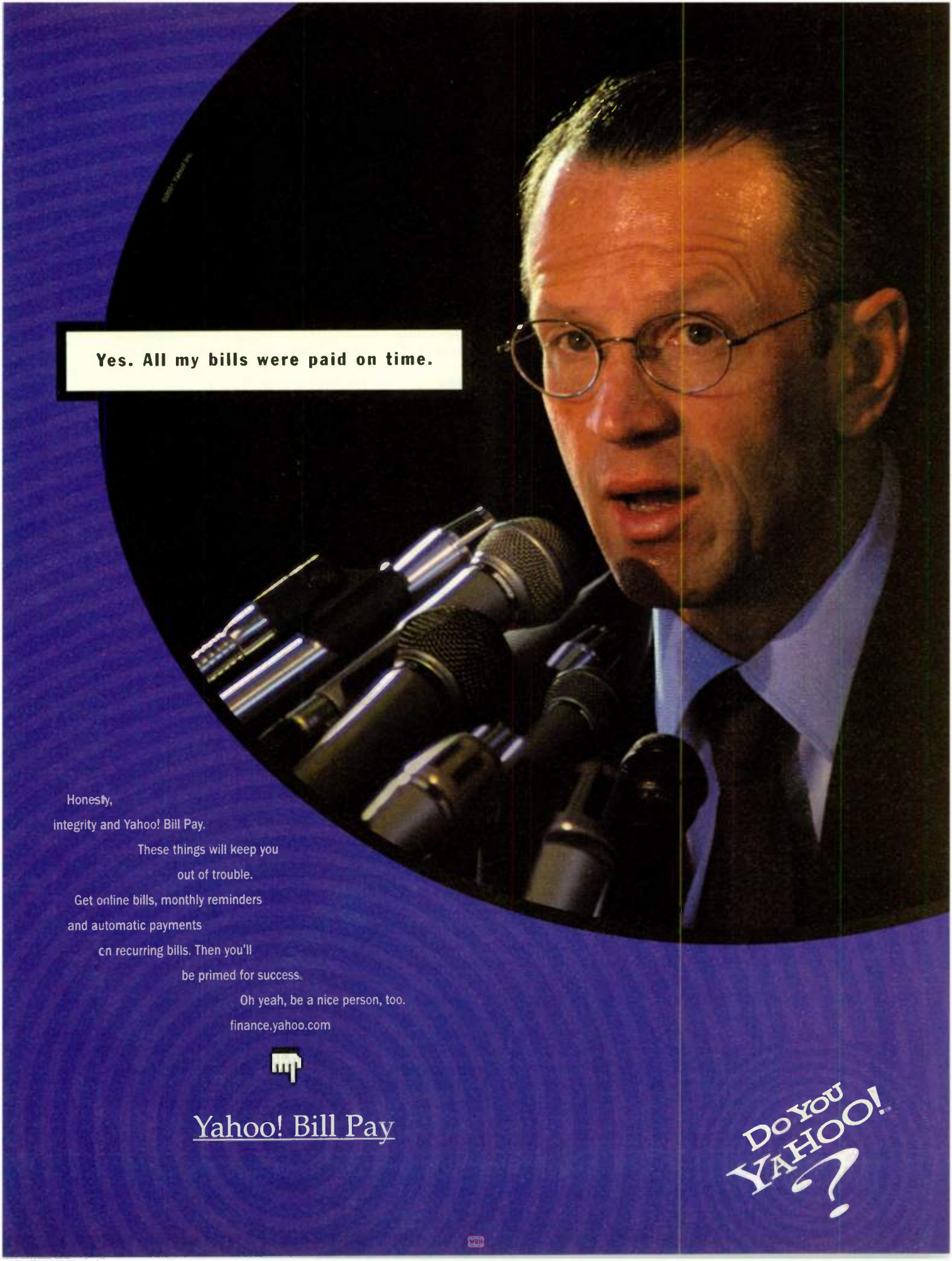
STANDARDS

Last fall, *The New York Times* corrected its corrections policy. Executive editor Joseph Lelyveld chided his staff for a surge of name misspellings and other "small stuff" and instituted a few changes meant to make the paper more responsive to readers who spot errors and to hold reporters and editors who make mistakes more accountable for them. The *Times* began publishing a toll-free number and an e-mail address every day, inviting reader input. But other changes—which involve the *Times* staff—may have a more lasting impact.

According to Allan Siegal, the paper's corrections czar since the late seventies, the *Times* is placing renewed emphasis on printing so-called "corrective articles." These are follow-up stories written by a reporter who makes a mistake that "invalidates the basic premise of the news story." The *Times* had averaged about one of these per year but has run two since late November. The first was by education writer Kate Zernike, in which she explained that she had misidentified the plaintiffs in an appeal against New York state's education department. The corrective carried the writer's byline, which was unusual: Corrections and corrective articles are normally credited to "The New York Times." The Zernike case was a mistake, says Siegal, and an "unfortunate coincidence," given that Zernike had written an article last summer (about the fallout from the Boy Scouts' banning of homosexuals) that resulted in an embarrassing five-paragraph correction. A later corrective article was not credited by name.

The *Times* has also begun to inquire more deeply into how small mistakes are made. A November Business-section memo informed reporters that editors "will formally track corrections," posting their findings (without using reporters' names) on a bulletin board for all to see. Several reporters groaned when recalling a recent obituary that misspelled the name of former *Times* publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger. That is just the sort of mistake editors are now investigating. "They learn some interesting things," says Metro columnist Clyde Haberman, "like, 'I thought the copydesk would check that' or 'I've been spelling the publisher's name that way for years.'" STEPHEN TOTILO

SCOTT MEACHIN


Yes. All my bills were paid on time.
Honesty,
integrity and Yahoo! Bill Pay.
These things will keep you
out of trouble.
Get online bills, monthly reminders
and automatic payments
on recurring bills. Then you'll
be primed for success.
Oh yeah, be a nice person, too.
finance.yahoo.com
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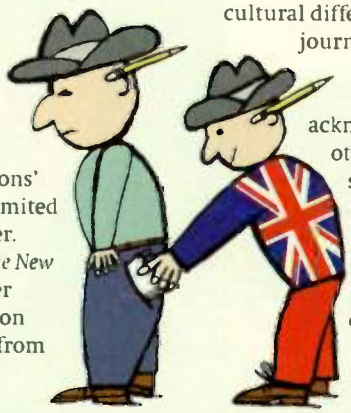
Do You YAHOO!?

INTERNATIONAL QUOTE-LIFT

FOREIGN PRESS

On January 16, *The Washington Post* ran a front-page story about how educators are looking to drop *The Catcher in the Rye* from their lesson plans. The next day, Robert Tait, a U.S.-based correspondent for *The Scotsman*, Scotland's biggest newspaper, filed a story on the same topic. Except for the lead paragraphs, Tait's article seems to have been cut and pasted from the *Post*: Tait quoted the same four sources, in the exact same order, saying exactly what they'd said in the original story. Tait had not actually spoken to any of them. "I thought that was a very good story," he says. "It was very well written, very well told. I simply lifted it."



Tait may be comfortable with the appropriation because, although this was an extreme case, lifting quotes from articles by other reporters is a common practice for correspondents posted outside their publications' home countries. This borrowing is normally limited to statements made by public officials, however. Serge Schmemann, deputy foreign editor at *The New York Times*, says that for reporters based in other countries, "there has always been a presumption that a certain amount of borrowing of quotes from officials is legitimate."

A look at the work of some U.S.-based correspondents for British newspapers reveals that Tait is not the only one bending the rules: A U.S. correspondent for *The Guardian*, Martin Kettle, passed off quotes given to the *Chicago Tribune* by Marta Mercado, the housekeeper who deep-sixed the nomination of Linda Chavez to the Bush cabinet, as his own. James Bone, a New York–based reporter for London's *Times*, lifted a quote from a small California paper about a local murder. *The Glasgow Herald*, the *Belfast News Letter*, *The Guardian*, and *The Express* all used the same quote from an Associated Press story about a proposed pardon for Wild West gunslinger Billy the Kid. None of them credited the AP.

LIFTING COPY IS SIMPLY PART OF THE JOB.

The reporters give many reasons for their liberal borrowing. Kettle, who has been based in Washington, D.C., for four years, blames the time difference. "When you are working for a British paper in the States, your deadlines are effectively 1 P.M.," he says. "I've filed 860 stories in the last two and a quarter years, and inevitably a lot of them are cut, lift, and paste." Bone, meanwhile, chalks up the occasional lack of attribution to cultural differences. "There is no convention in British journalism of attributing quotes to papers who no one has ever heard of," he says.

Some Americans reporting from abroad acknowledge that they, too, sometimes crib quotes from other papers. "We simply can't be everywhere at the same time," explains Warren Hoge, who writes from *The New York Times*'s London bureau. Agreeing with his *Times* colleague Schmemann, though, Hoge says he limits his borrowing to relaying a spokesperson's comments or a politician's speech—and won't lift quotes from exclusive interviews.

The Scotsman's Tait says that what he did with the *Catcher in the Rye* story is "a necessary evil." Says Tait, "When you're reporting in your own country you're basically doing your own legwork. When you're abroad, what you are trying to do is much more of a writing job." He says the decision about whether to credit another paper is a subtle one, and boils down to: "Does it look silly or not?" He often assumes his editors prefer that he leave credits off. Tait's editors at *The Scotsman* would not comment for this article.

Schmemann understands the pressures of reporting from abroad but disagrees with Tait's methods: "When you get the kind of quotes that are very difficult to get and take independent work, and you use those [without attribution,] then that's bordering on theft."

STEPHEN TOTILO

X-CESSIVE COVERAGE

TV SPORTS

So how seriously are TV journalists taking the XFL, the new professional football league launched in February by wrestling impresario Vince McMahon? Well, it depends on whether the station you're watching has a financial interest in the league.

In New York City, for instance, WNBC, owned by XFL co-owner NBC, has lavished coverage on the league with its local newscasts. The station, which also produces the league's weekly pregame show, has broadcast news stories on everything from the XFL's red-and-black football to the scantily clad cheerleaders to an interview about the league with Dick Ebersol, chairman of NBC Sports. Starting February 2, the evening before the inaugural kickoff, and continuing for the first two weekends of the league's play, WNBC's newscasts aired 19 XFL-related segments. The station's competitors, WABC and WCBS, limited their coverage to league scores and highlights, showing a combined total of eight segments during the same time period.

What explains the different, er, news judgments? Jim Bell, a senior producer at NBC Sports and senior producer of the XFL pregame show, says that other stations have been *underplaying* the story. "It's pretty obvious," he says. "The competition is going to go out of its way not to talk about it." Bell goes on to acknowledge that "there is going to always be more enthusiasm at a station where we have the product." That enthusiasm hasn't translated into a corporate edict to hype the league, says Bill Kistner, executive sports producer at WNBC. But he does allow that when the station is deciding what to cover, they "do what's best for WNBC."

Meanwhile, a sports producer at a CBS station says he's not about to help NBC: "We consider it a ratings arm for NBC and won't take a role in promoting that entertainment."

STEFANI LAKO BALDWIN

The XFL's Outlaws vs. Hitmen

LARRY BURTON/ZUMA PRESS; ILLUSTRATION: SCOTT MENCHIN

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TICKER

84.3 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched this year's Super Bowl

53.8 Percentage of those viewers who stayed tuned to CBS for the premiere of *Survivor: The Australian Outback*

56.3 Percentage of Super Bowl viewers in 1996 who stayed tuned to NBC for an hourlong *Friends*, the last post–Super Bowl show to retain a greater portion of its lead-in audience

SURVIVOR EDITION

19.7 Percentage of Super Bowl viewers in 1994 who stayed tuned to NBC for *The John Larroquette Show*, the post–Super Bowl show that retained the record lowest portion of its lead-in audience[1]

45.4 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched the premiere of *Survivor: The Australian Outback*

51.7 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched the final episode of the original *Survivor*

15.5 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched the premiere of the original *Survivor*[2]

57 Number of minutes NBC's *Today*, ABC's *Good Morning America*, and CBS's *The Early Show* devoted to the Super Bowl during the week after the game

54 Number of minutes these morning news shows devoted to *Survivor: The Australian Outback* during that week

41 Number of minutes CBS's *The Early Show* devoted to CBS's *Survivor: The Australian Outback* during that week[3]

$1 Amount, in millions, Richard Hatch won on the original *Survivor*

$5 Amount, in millions, *Survivor* contestant Stacey Stillman reportedly demanded from CBS—without success—before filing a lawsuit alleging a conspiracy to eliminate her from the show[4]

29.0 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched the first episode of *Survivor: The Australian Outback* shown in its regular slot of 8 P.M. on Thursdays

22.2 Number of viewers, in millions, who watched the first 40-minute episode of *Friends* to air against *Survivor: The Australian Outback*[5]

COMPILED BY JESSE OXFELD

1) Nielsen Media Research 2) Nielsen Media Research 3) The Tyndall Report 4) *The New York Times* 5) Nielsen Media Research

THE TALE OF THE TAPE

PIRACY

Last year I contacted The Walt Disney Company to order a review copy of *Toy Story 2*. As the home-video critic for *Us Weekly* magazine, I wondered how the sequel held up on the small screen. But when the package arrived the next day, I opened it to discover an unmarked tape encased in an anonymous black plastic box with the title *Liberate* written on the front. "You sent me the wrong film," I told my Disney contact over the phone. "I've never even heard of *Liberate*."

"Oh, you have *Toy Story 2*," said the publicist, her voice etched with intrigue. "*Liberate* is its code name. You know, security and all."

Having written about entertainment for 12 years, I thought I'd seen everything. I was intimately familiar with the precautions, such as the annoying warnings that occasionally scroll across the screen, that video companies take to protect their screening cassettes from illegal sale or distribution. But code names?

Then again, guarding against video piracy is as old as the industry itself. With so many publications promoting new tapes—and just as many scoundrels out there selling bootlegged copies around the globe—it would be foolish not to devise a system to discourage illegal reproduction. Major home-video distributors mark up the advance copies of these films (called screeners) so that they are unusable on the black market, can be traced to their original source, or display contact information for viewers who have unwittingly bought or rented them.

Toy Story 2: The anti-piracy edition

"Piracy remains a real concern worldwide," says Martin Blythe, vice-president of publicity for Paramount Home Entertainment. "At any given moment, there are hundreds of tapes out there. It's not that we don't trust the journalists, but accidents do happen."

For many years studios relied on a medley of warnings and messages—superimposed, scrolled, crawled, or flashed across the screen. The most popular were time stamps (running digital clocks that display the film's elapsed duration down to the one-hundredth of a second), piracy warnings, and "Property of..." identifiers.

THE FILM WAS BURIED BENEATH AN ALPHABET SOUP OF DISTRACTIONS.

But technology marches on: The music industry recently began to experiment with new ways, including digital watermarking, of protecting review copies of CDs from, say, Napster-type poachers. Video distributors are likewise getting imaginative—and sneaky.

"Bootleggers have gotten so sophisticated," says one major-studio publicist who asked to remain anonymous, "that they can now remove our warnings from the video in the editing room. Consequently, we have developed secretly encoded ID stamps—invisible to the naked eye—that reside in the lower layers of the video image. If one of our films turns up on eBay, we can find out who the screener originally went to in a heartbeat."

The extent to which these precautions disrupt the movie depends on the studio. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Home Entertainment, for instance, opts for a modest "Property of MGM," which flicks onto the bottom of the screen from time to time. Columbia TriStar Home Video trots out its warning with pride, scrolling a 32-word message over the action.

But The Walt Disney Company—whose subsidiary home-video divisions include the Disney, Buena Vista, Touchstone, Miramax, Dimension, and Hollywood Pictures labels—is by far the runaway champ of distracting piracy precautions. In addition to its black-boxed pseudonymity, my screener of *Toy Story 2* was buried beneath an alphabet soup of on-screen warnings, including a time stamp, a "burn-in" (a baffling subtitle reading "Property of BVHE-PR" that remained throughout the entire film), and a "floating number" (a roaming numeral that enables the studio to identify the original recipient of the screener). And the film itself? I enjoyed it despite all the clutter and distraction and—I promise—did not make a bootleg copy.

BRUCE KLUGER

PETER BERSON

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HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

It's not every man who has been shot at by neo-Nazis in East Germany or attacked by farmers on Bobcat tractors. But even a casual conversation with Steve Shapiro, hidden-camera producer for *Inside Edition*, provokes these sorts of tales. "It's a thrill," says Shapiro of his profession. "And to get the goods and to know you have the goods, it's just a great feeling."

MEDIA LIVES

STEVE SHAPIRO
HIDDEN CAMERA PRODUCER

Since he began working for *Inside Edition*, in 1993, Shapiro has mounted more than 100 hidden-camera sting operations. When the program wants to give viewers a peek into the world of Cuban-cigar smugglers, say, or sweatshops on U.S. soil, Shapiro is the man behind the ambush. Wearing one of several tiny cameras he hides in his clothing or has built into his accessories, he goes undercover. "You just do it," he says. "You strap on the gear, you go in, and you make it happen."

Shapiro says it's his background as a war journalist that helps steady his nerves while he's on assignment. In the late seventies, he worked as a UPI war television cameraman in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where he covered revolution and civil war. "I'd stay in the jungle, going to bed with scorpions and small arms fire all night long," he says. "For a nice little Jewish kid from Boston, I was a long way from home." Nowadays, his assignments are a bit less dangerous. Among other *Inside Edition* adventures, Shapiro has infiltrated the seedy culture that exploits underage fashion models and has exposed animal abuse in the pharmaceutical industry. After he decided to leave UPI, in 1980, Shapiro worked as a freelancer for TV stations in California and the fledgling shows *A Current Affair* and *Hard Copy*, which led to his current *Inside Edition* job. Tabloid news has its own dangers, though. "I've put cameras on everybody, and some of the people are as fearless if not more so than I am," he says, adding quickly, "If s--t ever happens, I'd be the first one out the door. I don't want to get hurt."

JOSEPH GOMES

Steve Shapiro (face obscured at his request) wearing six hidden cameras

APRIL'S FOOL

'Tis the season to be wary...of hoaxes, such as the full-page ads that Taco Bell ran in newspapers on April 1, 1996, announcing that it had bought the Liberty Bell and renamed it the Taco Liberty Bell. The ads got lots of attention and plenty of laughs, but no reporter took them seriously. That's not always the case. Here, a sampling of recent hoaxes that got past the assignment desk and into print.

ELIZABETH ANGELL

Citizens Against Breast-Feeding: At the Democratic National Convention last August, hoaxer Alan Abel and his cohorts convinced journalists, including reporters from *The Boston Globe* and UPI, that they were protesting breast-feeding. The practice, they claimed, is a "primitive ritual" and a "violation of babies' civil rights." Abel has been playing these kinds of tricks for decades. In 1990, he tried to convince reporters that the Ku Klux Klan had started an orchestra "to foster a kinder, gentler image."

"The Final Curtain": In 1999, a website appeared advertising a theme park devoted to death. Joey Skaggs, a habitual prankster, says he and his collaborators spent two years planning the joke—putting out press releases and assembling sketches for The Final Curtain's attractions (including a Heaven's Gate Cafe). The Associated Press and the New York *Daily News* believed it. Skaggs claims that his hoaxes are creative and challenging. "There's a difference between a dumb stunt that's just done for the attention and something that's meaningful."

Lost in translation: In 1997, humor website Topfive.com posted a list of the top 15 Chinese translations of English movie titles. For example, *Babe* supposedly became *The Happy Dumpling-to-be Who Talks and Solves Agricultural Problems*. An unidentified troublemaker doctored a *Wall Street Journal* article by adding the list and e-mailed it around. The scam took off. *The New York Times* published one joke title as fact, and Peter Jennings mentioned the list on ABC's *World News Tonight*. Jennings later acknowledged on air that he'd been had.

Barney the satanist: At the height of the lovable-purple-dinosaur craze in 1994, two University of South Florida graduate students posed as members of "Citizens Concerned About Barney." They claimed to be born-again Christians who were worried that Barney promoted satanism, New Age thinking, and drug abuse. The story was picked up by AP and several local newspapers and TV stations.

T: JOHN ABBOTT; B: FRANK WEBSTER

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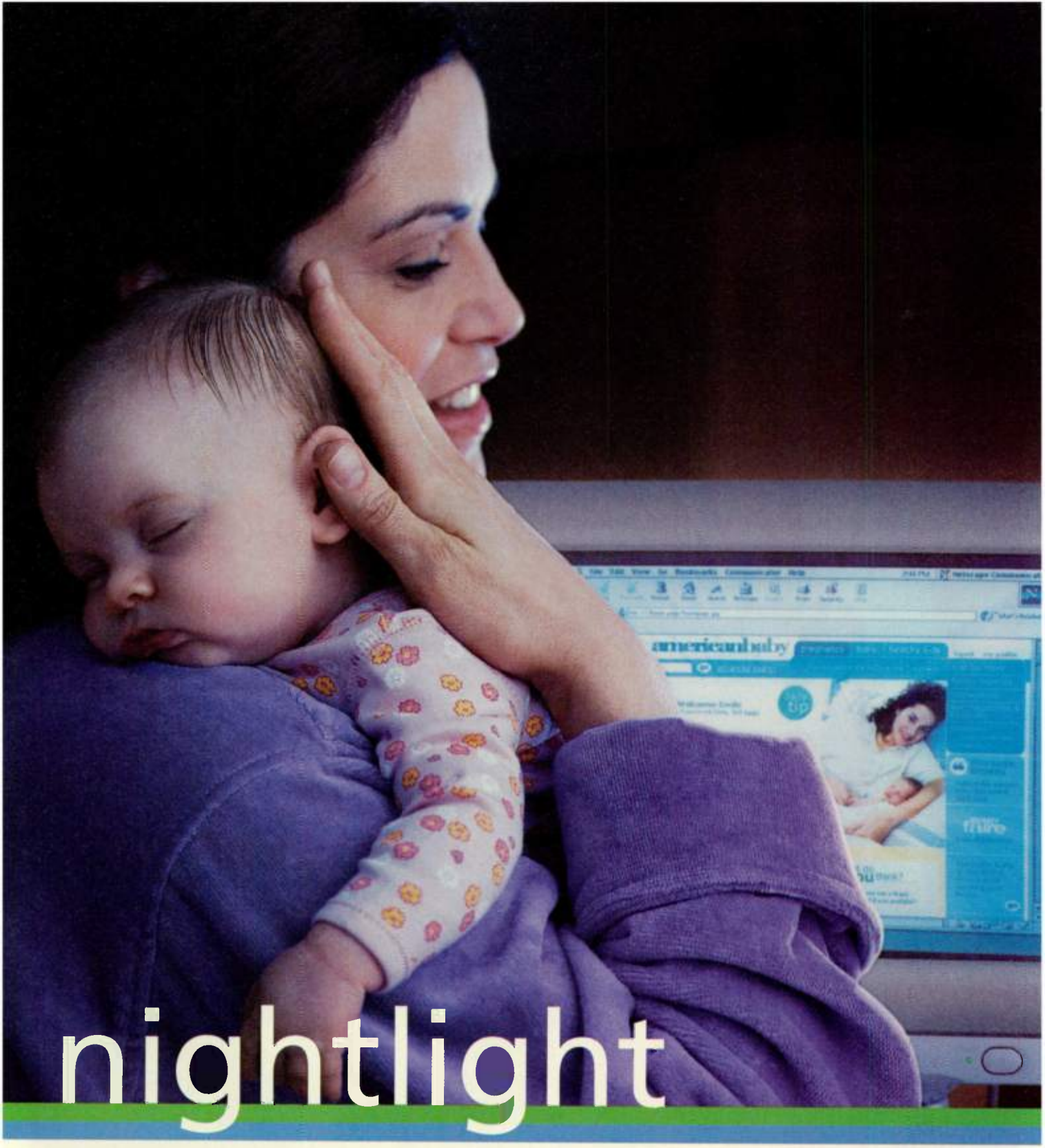

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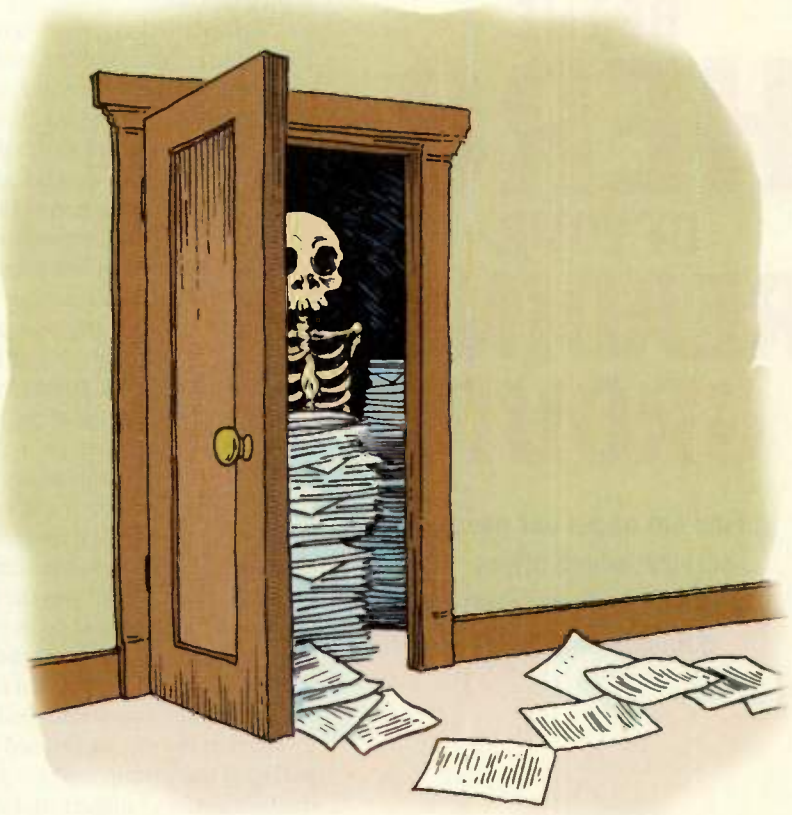
my paper trail

All writers leave unsavory clues to their pasts. Given the recent cabinet battles in the Senate, could any columnist pass the congressional confirmation test? BY CALVIN TRILLIN



For those of us in the scribbling trades, what lingers from the confirmation battles of George W. Bush's cabinet nominations is one ominous phrase: Paper Trail. The Paper Trail that we have left in our wakes is wide enough to be seen by circling astronauts. A business executive of the sort brought into government by any Republican administration can be persuasive in denying that he has in the past aired views that are inappropriate for a Deputy Secretary of Something or Other. But people who have put virtually every thought they've ever had into print—and that could serve as a definition of a columnist, unless you'd prefer "people who have put virtually every thought they've ever had into print at least twice"—are not in a position to deny anything. Sooner or later, the article would be unearthed and the damaging passage highlighted on a television graphic, looking even less prudent than it did on the slow news day that led to its composition. I realize that most of us don't have our hearts set on being, say, the Secretary of Agriculture anyway, but it's discouraging to know in advance that, in the unlikely event of a career swerve in the direction of the executive branch, our goose would probably be cooked within a few hours of nomination.

Years ago, I thought that if I faced a background check for high office, I'd just need to tidy up the archives of the Kansas City school system a bit, have a word with one or two of the people I grew up with ("Sure, it was the funniest thing that happened all eighth-grade year, Eddie, but if you told that story to people who don't happen to understand the traditional place of farm animals in the humor of this region the way you and I do..."), and hope that my sister, Sukey, was on an extended European tour that would put her out of pocket until the vetting process was over. When it comes to willingness to hand out information, there is a wide spectrum among human beings, the outer edges of which are represented by the phrases Need to Know and Total Disclosure. Sukey is Total Disclosure. Also, she doesn't confine herself to the question asked. Sukey is, as Joseph Mitchell once said of a New York street preacher, profoundly discursive.

Yes, of course, I've always lived with the knowledge that there are some embarrassing passages in the weeds out there like unexploded land mines. When my older daughter was in her first year of college, a classmate who had come to our house for dinner over Christmas break said that in thumbing through some *Yale Daily News* issues of ancient vintage he'd run across an editorial from my senior year making fun of an administrator's suggestion that consideration be given to permitting female undergraduates at Yale someday. My two feminist daughters—feminist daughters happen to be the only sort of daughters I have—stopped eating, and turned to face me. "You wrote that?" one of them said.

"Well, you might say that, in a manner of speaking, although the issue at that point in time, you have to understand, to see this in its proper context, was purely hypothetical and not really serious, if you know what I mean," I said forthrightly.

TONY MILLIONAIRE

But that incident was strictly a long shot. How often is some little weasel going to go through back issues of the *Yale Daily News* and then have the ingratitude—after he'd been fed a perfectly good plate of spaghetti and, as I remember, at least one beer—to broach the subject of the offending editorial right at the offender's dinner table in front of the offender's all-female family?

For anything written in newspapers and magazines of more recent vintage, of course, it would not be a long shot. Given Nexis and search engines and digitalized newspaper morgues on the Internet, Paper Trails cannot be obscured or destroyed the way they sometimes could when they were literally made out of paper. These days, the vetters of my nomination wouldn't even need to look for Sukey. They'd assign one of their attack geeks to plug my name into the laptop he carries around in his coat pocket, and I'd be toast.

Think of the goo John Ashcroft would have had to unstick himself from if instead of just giving an interview to the wacko Confederate journal *Southern Partisan*, he had been a regular columnist. ("Senator, in your column in the November/December 1994 issue about how slaves who had found Jesus were even happier than other slaves....") Before Linda Chavez, President Bush's first nominee for Secretary of Labor, destroyed her chances by being less than candid about who pitched in around the house, the fact that she had been doing a newspaper column was mentioned as her most obvious point of vulnerability. She had a Paper Trail.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE PUT VIRTUALLY EVERY THOUGHT THEY'VE EVER HAD INTO PRINT ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO DENY ANYTHING.

Soon after Ms. Chavez was nominated, the Bush spokesman assigned to her confirmation process, Tucker Eskew, tried to mitigate the damage of the Paper Trail with what amounted to a preventive strike. He told reporters to keep in mind that columnists often try to be provocative, so that some of the controversial statements that were already being mined from the nominee's newspaper column—I suppose calling women who bring sexual harassment charges crybabies was the sort of thing he had in mind—should not be taken as predicting what she would do as Secretary of Labor. His point was not far from what an uncomfortable number of readers probably think: that columnists couldn't possibly mean anything as silly as what they write. He made writing a column sound like being a participant in professional wrestling, or maybe *The McLaughlin Group*.

A columnist who mentioned Eskew's remarks to me at the time said that she was a bit miffed by his assumption that people in our line of work make contentious statements simply for effect. I suspect that she would be willing to testify under oath that whenever she has commented disparagingly on people like Linda Chavez, she has been in deadly earnest. It did occur to me, though, that Eskew's statement is something for a scribbler to keep on file, just in case. Let's say, for example, that the Bush administration is putting together a delegation for an international writers' conference to be held in Paris during a particularly beautiful spring, and I'm up for consideration to be a member. Before you dismiss that as a notion too fanciful to be entertained, you should know that the Reagan administration sent me on a cultural exchange trip to South America, although it's true that after some consideration of what the Reagan administration might consider cultural, I eventually decided that they'd had me mixed up with Calvin Klein.

The Bush administration vetter, a sheaf of Nexis printouts in his hand, says to me, "In commenting on George W. Bush's alacrity in dropping his first choice for Attorney General, Marc Racicot, because the Christian Right considered Racicot insufficiently contemptuous of gays, did you refer to President Bush as Lapdog II?"

"I was trying to be provocative," I could answer. "It's not the sort of thing I'd say at a conference—particularly a conference in Paris." ■

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THE WELL

royko recalled

A new book of columns by Chicago's legendary chronicler prompts a former colleague to look back. BY ROGER EBERT

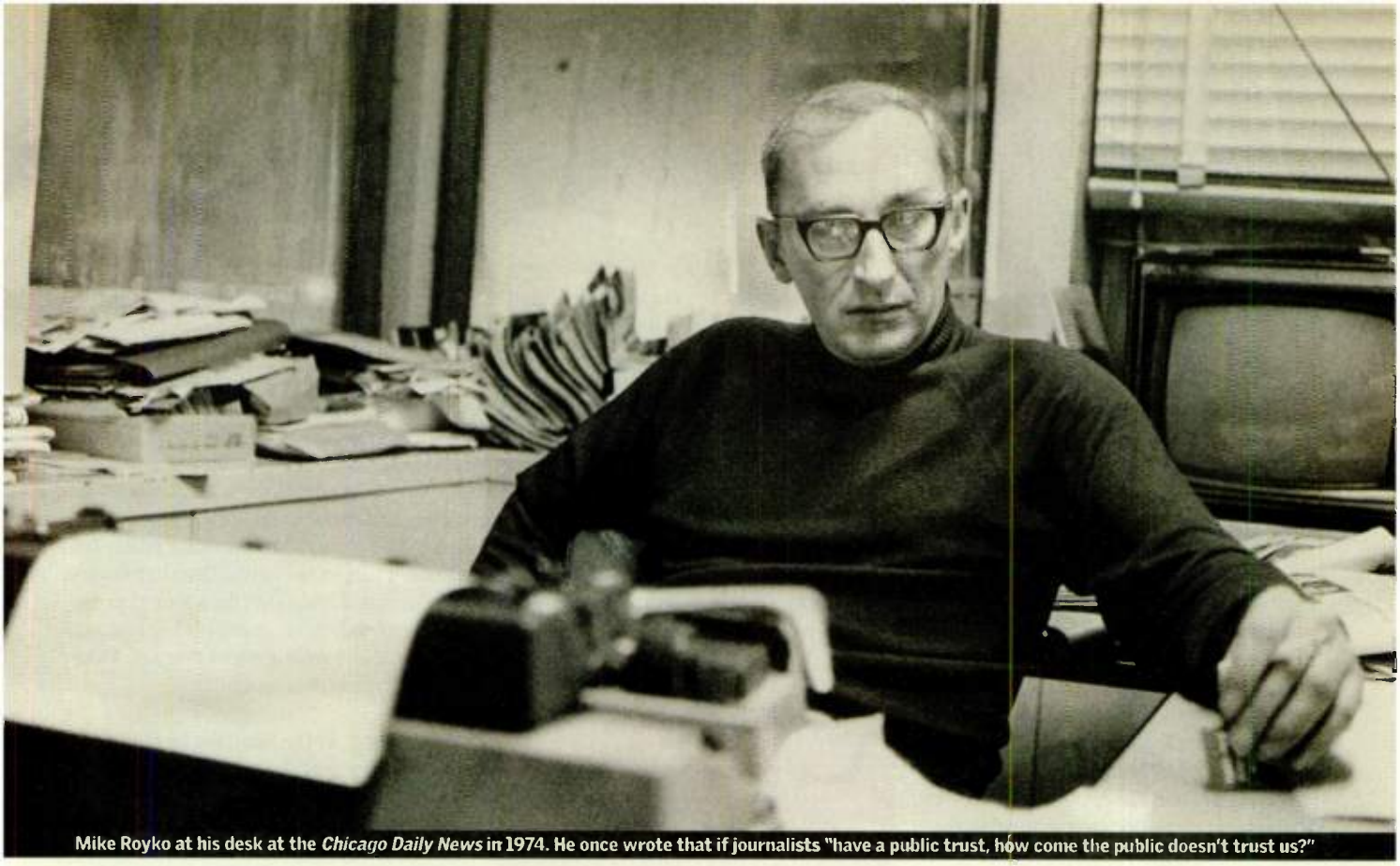
If a journalism society ever decides to put up a plaque honoring Mike Royko, the Chicago columnist who died in 1997, I know where it should go: in the southeast corner of the fourth floor of the *Chicago Sun-Times* building, at 401 N. Wabash. In that corner, behind a standard office partition—steel below, glass above, about shoulder height—was where Mike Royko penned the best newspaper columns of his time.

Royko wrote for the *Chicago Daily News* from 1963 until it folded, in 1978, and then for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The city rooms of the two papers, both owned by the Marshall Field's department-store family, shared the fourth floor at 401 N. Wabash. Royko used an old manual typewriter—not his own, just one from the office pool, with keys that stuck and ribbons that jammed. His office, which had just enough room for a desk and a couple of filing cabinets, was piled high with newspapers, books, letters, souvenirs, coffee cups, ashtrays, gimcracks, and ties that he had taken off and thrown in the corner. It also contained a holy relic: the wooden hat stand from the old *Chicago Daily News*—generations of *Daily News*-men had thrown their fedoras on this stand, back in the age when newsmen wore fedoras—which Mike had brought along when the paper moved into the *Sun-Times* building on the Chicago River. Mike sat in a swivel chair with his back to the river, and there was one straight-backed chair for his many visitors. At any time of the day, you would see someone standing in the door of his cubicle or sitting inside. It might be one of his Leg Persons, young staffers who signed on for a year or two to learn the business from the master and who had their own desks just outside. Most likely, though, it would be a fellow reporter, because Royko always had time to talk, even when he was in the middle of a column. I went to work for the *Sun-Times* as a staff writer in September 1966—I was a graduate student in English at the University of Chicago and worked part-time—not long after Royko's column, which had appeared on the *Daily News*'s op-ed page, was moved to page 3, a position of honor. Not once did I ever walk in on Mike and have him look up, with that harried look all news reporters know, and shout that he was "on deadline!" Deadlines could wait. "Whaddaya know?" he'd ask.

But of course Mike was always on deadline; he had a column to write. He was prolific, turning out five columns a week at such a high level of quality that in more than 30 years, I never once heard anybody say, "Royko wrote a bad column today." Sometimes he made people mad, sometimes you might think he was out of his mind, but he never wrote a bad column. No journalist in Chicago was more respected by his colleagues, and that was saying something, in a city with a long tradition of competitive newspapering. Mike was syndicated nationally in more than 600 papers, and with a column that was mostly about Chicago—he made the city into a microcosm of everywhere else. When *The Washington Post* offered him a job in 1973, a year after he won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary, his answer was classic Royko: "But I don't hate anyone in Washington."

THE *CHICAGO DAILY NEWS* was an upmarket afternoon broadsheet purchased by the Field family in 1959 from John S. Knight, the press baron whose kingdom eventually became Knight-Ridder. Its main competition was the *Chicago Tribune*, but by the early seventies, neither could keep up with the *Sun-Times*. The *Tribune* was mired in moribund Republicanism, and though readers still loved the *Daily News*, there were not enough of them. Meanwhile, the *Sun-Times* gained circulation quarter after quarter with its liberal politics and its snappy slogan, "The Bright One." The *Sun-Times* and *Daily News* had separate but equal facilities in the *Sun-Times* building, except that the men's room of the *Daily News* had bars of soap and the men's room of the *Sun-Times* had industrial liquid soap you tapped out of a dispenser. (Office lore had it that the bar soap was a concession wrung from Marshall Field IV when he bought the *Daily News* from Knight.) The city rooms of the two papers were separated by a glassed-in no-man's-land called the wire room, where Teletypes chattered and mysterious machines spat out wire photos. On both sides of the wire room were the copydesks of the two papers; the desks of editors and reporters receded into the distance in both directions, until

This essay is adapted from the foreword to the book For the Love of Mike: More of the Best of Mike Royko, *to be published this month by The University of Chicago Press.*



Mike Royko at his desk at the *Chicago Daily News* in 1974. He once wrote that if journalists "have a public trust, how come the public doesn't trust us?"

CHICAGO TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

you got to the far corners, where there was Royko at the *Daily News* and me at the *Sun-Times*. I was in the far southwest corner of our newsroom, not a place of importance. It was simply the desk that was empty the day I started there.

After work we would gather at the bar at Riccardo's, which was out the back door and down the street, a block from the Billy Goat Tavern, and if we hadn't already read the afternoon paper, we did now, reciting lines out loud. Newspaper reporters in those days routinely drank, often too much, sometimes starting at lunch, and didn't hurry home after work but hung out, debating the play of stories and griping about editors. I knew Royko by sight. I'd see him at Ric's or the Goat, lighting an unfiltered Pall Mall, holding court. He had already made Billy Goat's famous with his column about the Greek immigrant whose greasy spoon lurked in the cavern of lower-level Michigan Avenue. John Belushi, whose family Royko had known since Belushi was a boy, later made Billy Goat's "cheezborger" famous on *Saturday Night Live*, and a little later still, in 1981, Belushi played a character loosely based on Royko in the movie *Continental Divide*.

In those years, Mike was a young man, but like Robert Mitchum or Walter Matthau, he seemed born middle-aged, with years of poker games and last calls under his belt. He somehow seemed more *authentic* than the other guys around. He came from different roots; we knew, because he wrote about it, that his father used to run a tavern and that he came from a tough Chicago neighborhood. Mike's favorite character, Slats Grobnik, described as a childhood friend from the same neighborhood, was Royko's alter ego. We all knew that Slats was not a real person, but in a deeper sense, Slats was more real than most of the businessmen, sports heroes, and politicians who filled the paper. He was the distilled essence of the guys Mike had grown up with, hung around with, fought with, gotten in trouble with.

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY 1967, snow was falling—the curtain-raiser for the Great Snow of '67, which paralyzed the city—and the *Sun-Times* city room was almost empty, the *Daily News* emptier. It was a Sunday, and the ceiling light was on in Royko's corner. Even though I wasn't full-time yet, I came in on weekends, working on stories about hero priests and snake charmers. I was already tilting away from grad school and toward journalism as a career: Royko's strong first-person columns suggested that newspaper work could become an art form, and I became the *Sun-Times*'s film critic in September of that year.

"Hi, kid." I looked up, and it was Mike. "You got a ride?" I didn't. He said he would give me a lift. First he had to stop at the corner of North and Milwaukee to pick up a prescription. We drove through the silent streets. Chicago, having partied the night before, was lying low while the snow piled up.

The prescription was not ready. "We'll wait in the eye-opener joint under the tracks," Mike told the druggist. He led the way to a bar so small that the bartender could serve every customer without standing up from his stool. Mike and I were both a little hungover, and Mike suggested blackberry brandy, a hair of the dog that would also settle the stomach.

He told me what an eye-opener was. "This place opens early. The working guys around here, they stop in for a quick shot on their way to the L." Mike had grown up nearby and knew first-hand the life of a working man—the factory, warehouse, or packing-house worker—for whom eye-openers came in shot glasses, not paper cups from Starbucks.

The radio was tuned to a Chicago Blackhawks hockey game. I was from downstate and had never seen a hockey game. The announcer shouted about one goal after another. I started on my second blackberry brandy, and my heart soared with the moment: I was under the tracks at North and Milwaukee in an

eye-opener joint with Mike Royko, listening to the Blackhawks. I had at last penetrated to the authentic heart of Chicago.

"Jeez, they're scoring like crazy!" I said, after hearing the fourth goal in less than a minute.

"You jerk," said Royko. "That's the replay of the highlights."

Mike never let me forget that moment.

IN THE SEVENTIES Mike wrote a lot of columns about The Fox, an antipollution activist who once raced into the lobby of a giant Chicago-area corporation and emptied onto the carpet a vile-smelling jar, filled with what this corporation was dumping into Lake Michigan. Mike was asked by CBS to write a movie of the week about The Fox, and he enlisted me as his cowriter, since he knew all about The Fox and I knew all about movies. In addition to being the paper's movie critic, I had, in 1970, written the screenplay for *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, which inspired a good-natured Royko column in which he regretted my naïveté: "I believe that every young man is entitled to one big mistake," Mike wrote, "and this movie is Ebert's, and I urge you to avoid it."

MIKE ROYKO WAS ALWAYS HAPPIEST WHEN HE WAS WORKING FOR A SCRAPPY UNDERDOG.

Our collaboration on the movie about The Fox took place in Mike's corner of the *Daily News* and at Billy Goat's, where we filled up yellow pads with ideas for scenes. The villain of the story was the public-relations spokesman for a megacorporation. Mike thought it would be funny if the villain knew The Fox but didn't know he was The Fox. "They play poker together every Friday night," he said. "That's why The Fox never strikes on Friday. We need a poker scene."

I had written most of the other scenes, but Mike said he would write the poker scene. He went into the wire room and got a huge roll of paper from next to one of the AP machines. He put it on the floor behind his typewriter and threaded it through the roller. His poker scene, by my estimation, would have occupied 40 minutes of screen time. It was not usable as a movie scene, but might have made a good one-act play, especially if the audience knew a lot about poker. The movie never did get made.

Mike later used another roll of AP paper to write *Boss*, his classic book about the first Mayor Daley. *Boss*, published in 1971, was a national best-seller—compulsively readable, often very funny, saturated with Royko's firsthand knowledge of Daley and city hall. He understood local politics like nobody before or since and single-handedly turned the word "alderman" into a noun that was its own adjective. "History teaches us that when any two aldermen begin whispering, a grand jury ought to immediately issue subpoenas," he wrote in 1982. When there was a tragedy in the news, Mike's column summed up how we felt. When politicians were running for office, they ran away from Mike, who mercilessly deconstructed the banalities of their acceptance speeches and campaign slogans.

WHEN THE *DAILY NEWS* shut down, in 1978, due to low circulation, Mike's heart was broken. His column the day before the paper closed ended with a comparison of the dying *Daily News* and the last day of summer vacation: "C'mon, c'mon. Let's play one more inning. One more time at bat. One more pitch. Just one? Stick around, guys. We can't break up this team. It's too much fun. But the sun always went down. And now it's almost dark again."

The *Sun-Times* then spread out to occupy the entire fourth floor. Mike, now writing for the *Sun-Times*, stayed in his cubicle for a while, but with the extra space, he eventually got a real office. His decision to move to an office had more to do with being able to smoke than anything else. The paper's no-smoking rules, he explained, ended at his door. It was in his new office that Royko acquired his own computer terminal, although for a long time he continued to use his manual typewriter, assigning his Leg Persons to type his columns into the system. I am not sure I ever saw Mike actually typing on a computer.

MIKE WORKED AT the *Sun-Times* until Rupert Murdoch bought the paper, in late 1983. He had been involved in backstage negotiations that would have allowed James Hoge, the publisher of the *Sun-Times*, and a group of investors to buy the paper. Marshall Field (the fifth in the family line), who owned half of the paper, said he was willing to sell to them, but Murdoch offered more than $10 million beyond what the Hoge group could raise, and Marshall's half-brother, Ted, insisted they take it. This was a great blow to Mike. He went home and had a few drinks, and when the local TV stations brought their cameras into his den, he announced that "no self-respecting fish would ever want to be wrapped" in a Murdoch paper.

The next afternoon I sat with him at Billy Goat's.

"I guess I resigned, huh?" he said, with that grin.

"I don't think Murdoch cares what you say about him," I said.

"It's not what I said about him," Mike said. "It's that after describing a Murdoch paper that way, how can I stay there?"

So he went across the street to the *Chicago Tribune*, which to my way of thinking was the wrong place for him. Mike was always happiest when he was working for a scrappy underdog. The *Daily News* and *Sun-Times* readers were his allies; the *Tribune*'s readers were his targets. This was especially true after Chicago became a two-paper town; the *Trib* was the Republican establishment and the rich suburbanites, and the *Sun-Times* was Democratic, embraced by working people, intellectuals, minorities, liberals, students, artists. The *Trib* had a larger overall circulation, but the *Sun-Times* was ahead in the city. Murdoch tried to tame it, but the paper had a tenacious way of persisting in its original tone.

Whether at the *Daily News*, the *Sun-Times*, or the *Tribune*, Mike Royko wrote the best piece in town just about every day he wrote a column. I once suggested to the editors at the *Sun-Times* that since the paper owns the copyrights on a lot of his material, and because Murdoch and his fish-wrappers have long since departed the scene, the paper should just start reprinting Mike's columns, one a day. That would be the first page I would turn to. ■

VISIT THE EXPERTS

WHAT THE INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS ARE SAYING

Our 59 Independent Bookstore affiliate experts have been looking at what's hot, what's overhyped, and what's gotten the most surprising buzz lately. Here are some of their recent observations and opinions:

Dean Bakopoulos of **Canterbury Booksellers** in Madison, Wisconsin, declares *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, by Charles Johnson and Bob Adelman, an "amazing and moving chronicle of King's life and the Civil Rights movement."

David Schwartz of **Harry W. Schwartz Bookshops** in Milwaukee is surprised by Mike Davis's recent book, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, which posits that, in the 19th century, the El Niño weather system had profound worldwide effects.

If he could invite anyone in the world over for dinner, Damon Husebye of **Sam Weller's Books** in Salt Lake City would put NPR commentator Reynolds Price, author of *Feasting the Heart*, on the list.

Stanley Newman of **A Different Light** in New York looks at four new works dealing with Christopher Isherwood, the quintessential Englishman who led a liberated gay life before the days of gay liberation.

Daryl Carlson of **Goodenough Books** in Livermore, California, surveys the spate of recent *Wizard of Oz* releases, including "the Cadillac of Oz editions," *The Annotated Wizard of Oz*, edited by Michael Patrick Hearn.

Jessica Graham and Marek Laskowski of **Primrose Hill Books** in London, England, praise *Vadim*, the third in a brilliant series of futuristic police procedurals by British author Donald James.

Tosh Berman of **Book Soup** in West Hollywood, California, finds that reading Lee Server's *Robert Mitchum: "Baby I Don't Care"* is the next best thing to having Mitchum himself relate these wild stories at his favorite watering hole.

In Shelby Hearon's *Ella in Bloom*, Cheryl Barton of **Just Books** in Greenwich, Connecticut, finds "proof that beautiful writing, serious issues, and wonderful characters can coexist in harmony."

John Larson of **St. Mark's Bookshop** in New York discusses d.a. levy, one of the rare American poets whose work and life merit comparison to Rimbaud.

In the current climate, e-commerce books "have been languishing on the shelves," says Sanj Kharbanda of **WordsWorth Books** in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but an exception is *DotCom Divas: E-Business Insights from the Visionary Women Founders of 20 Net Ventures.*

Too much of P.D. Jephson's *Shadows of a Princess* is about the author's preparations for Princess Diana's visits to other countries, charities, and hospitals. Emotionally it wobbles, and it's poorly paced.

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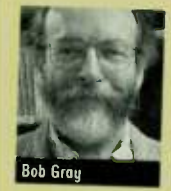
Will Peters

"CURRENT TITLES IN GENERAL INTEREST," BY WILL PETERS OF ANNIE BLOOM'S BOOKS—AN EXCERPT:

Many first novels are hyped, but few deliver. Manil Suri's *The Death of Vishnu* is one of the rare, beautiful few. Suri deftly blends comedy and tragedy, satire and sympathy, as he depicts a rich tapestry of characters. The interaction of neighbors in a Bombay apartment building serves as an analogy for the social strife and religious tensions in contemporary Indian society. The novel begins with Vishnu, an aging errand runner, lying sprawled, soiled, and presumably dying on the staircase on which he lives. As Vishnu approaches his death, he climbs the staircase in an ascent that roughly mirrors the Hindu stations of life.

***ANNIE BLOOM'S BOOKS** is located in Portland, Oregon.*


Bob Gray

"CURRENT TITLES IN CLASSIC FICTION AND LITERATURE," BY BOB GRAY OF NORTHSHIRE BOOKSTORE—AN EXCERPT:

Perhaps the best gift offered to readers by any publisher last year was *This Craft of Verse*, the transcribed recordings of six Norton lectures presented at Harvard by Jorge Luis Borges in 1967 and 1968. The tapes had been presumed lost until they were recently discovered. Now, in a welcome development that adds even more luster to this story, Harvard University Press has released a four-CD set of *This Craft of Verse*. To hear Borges's voice is a transcendent experience: His insights on a startling range of writers—from Homer to Robert Frost—blend seamlessly with observations about language, culture, and himself. As much as we admire Borges the writer, it is Borges the reader who emerges from these lectures.

***NORTHSHIRE BOOKSTORE** is located in Manchester Center, Vermont.*

WILL PETERS PHOTO BY © MARY JO DERBY

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General Interest

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Lifestyle, Fashion, and Design

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CAMBRIDGE, MA
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BEHIND THE CONTENT

A SAMPLING OF CONTENTVILLE'S LATEST EDITORIAL FEATURES

BOOKS

OPEN ON MY DESK Sally Denton and Roger Morris, authors of *The Money and the Power: The Rise and Reign of Las Vegas and Its Grip on America*, discuss the research they conducted about America's favorite gambling town.

THE MOVEABLE FEAST Our pseudonymous book-party columnist chronicles chic literary bashes for Peter Hessler, author of *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*, and Anthony Gottlieb, author of *The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance*.

DIARY OF A BOOK SLEUTH Contentville's book-industry spy discusses the mysterious book proposal for "It," the eagerly awaited secret invention, as well as upcoming new novels from authors Michael Chabon, Laura Esquivel, and Nick Hornby.

CRITICS' CHORUS A simple breakdown of who loved and who loathed Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*, and some of the other books everyone's talking about.

THE CONTENTVILLE AUTHOR Q&A Donald Bogle, author of *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television*, answers the 17 questions we always ask.

WHEN READING IS NEW Children's-book author and NPR commentator Daniel Pinkwater recommends books for young readers.

THE LAST WORD Brad Meltzer, author of the best-seller *The First Counsel*, shares his feelings about the writing process. An excerpt: I'm a firm believer that readers are smarter than the writers they read. When I am B.S.-ing on a page—if I get to a scene and the mood doesn't really strike me, but I just want to finish it—I get caught every single time by my pre-readers. They always find where it doesn't ring true, and it's good that they can, because it keeps me honest. Eventually, when it's all over, if you ask 12 people you'll get 12 different opinions, but if you ask 100 you'll get a consensus.

ONLY AT CONTENTVILLE Last year, *Dawson's Creek* executive producer Greg Berlanti wrote and directed his first feature film, *The Broken Hearts Club*. Contentville Press is publishing the screenplay, and, in a special introduction, Berlanti reveals how making this film changed his life.

BOOK NEWS Preeminent First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams assesses two competing accounts of the Microsoft trial, Ken Auletta's *World War 3.0: Microsoft and Its Enemies* and John Heilemann's *Pride Before the Fall: The Trials of Bill Gates and The End of the Microsoft Era*, and argues that Bill Gates walked the line between evasiveness and lying.

LITERARY WANDERER Author Geoff Dyer discusses the joys to be found in India's bookstores.

MAGAZINES

THE CONTENTVILLE EDITOR Q&A Editor Jim Collins takes us behind the scenes at the New England-based *Yankee* magazine.

LAUNCH OF THE MONTH Lara Cohen, a staff writer at *Brill's Content*, reviews African-American lifestyle magazine *Savoy*.

DISSERTATIONS

DISSERTATIONS DECONSTRUCTED Scott McLemee of *Lingua Franca* deconstructs Condoleezza Rice's dissertation on Soviet-Czech military relationships.

VISIT THE EXPERTS

WHAT THE CONTRIBUTING EDITORS ARE SAYING

Our Contributing Editors are accomplished, demanding readers and thinkers. Here's what some of them have been reading and thinking lately:

Sherman Alexie reads J.H. Hatfield's controversial *Fortunate Son* and says that despite questions surrounding the legitimacy of Hatfield's sources, the convicted felon did his homework on George W. Bush.

Who is Witold Gombrowicz? He's the Polish writer who, according to **Louis Begley**, was unjustly denied the Nobel Prize but might gain the recognition he deserves with the recent reissue of his masterpiece *Ferdydurke*.

Peter T. Glenshaw reads Howard Kurtz's *The Fortune Tellers*, about Internet media and the stock market, and finds that you don't have to be swept away by tech stocks to succeed in today's market.

It's difficult to write a historical novel about an event barely 100 years old, but **Harold Bloom** claims that with *In Sunlight, in a Beautiful Garden*, Kathleen Cambor succeeds.

> ***The Reason Why*, by Cecil Woodham-Smith, is history written as if it was fiction. I still regard it as a model of the nonfiction genre.**
> **DAVID HALBERSTAM**


Jonathan Alter

AN EXCERPT FROM JONATHAN ALTER:

The best book to come out so far about the Clinton presidency is *POTUS Speaks: Finding the Words That Defined the Clinton Presidency*, by Michael Waldman, who was Clinton's chief speechwriter. It was published last fall and is slowly making its way into the political world. Slowly because it doesn't have any juicy details about Monica Lewinsky, it's not a kiss-and-tell, and it's not a coming-of-age story about a young aide, à la George Stephanopoulos. What it is is a readable, credible, balanced, and substantive look at what the Clinton presidency added up to.

Jonathan Alter, a senior editor at Newsweek, *has written the magazine's "Between the Lines" column since 1991 and is also a creator and author of the magazine's weekly "Conventional Wisdom Watch."*


Genevieve Field

AN EXCERPT FROM GENEVIEVE FIELD:

With *The Name of the World*, I feel as if Denis Johnson is introducing his readers to a more mature stage of his writing life. He went from first writing stories about wandering homeless junkies in *Jesus' Son* to *Already Dead: A California Gothic*, a dense novel set mostly in the area of Northern California where I grew up. I ended up being distracted to the point of not liking it, because I felt that he was trying too hard to evoke a place that wasn't his own. Whereas when he writes about places that he knows very well, like in this new novel, *The Name of the World*, it comes across as natural and easy.

Genevieve Field is the editorial director of Nerve.com.

NEWS ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Rebecca Walker's first book, *Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*, was recently published by Riverhead Books.

Christine Vachon's production company, Killer Films, had three movies—*Women in Film*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and *Series 7*—at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival.

Chocolat, a film produced by **David Brown**, received four Golden Globe nominations, including one for best musical or comedy, and five Academy Award nominations, including one for best picture.

In January, New York's Gagosian Gallery featured a solo exhibition of painter **David Salle**'s recent works, titled *Pastoral*. Salle is currently part of a group exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami.

OUR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

SHERMAN ALEXIE
Poet, screenwriter, novelist, and short-story writer

JONATHAN ALTER
Senior editor at *Newsweek*

LOUIS BEGLEY
Author and lawyer

HAROLD BLOOM
Author

ROBERT BOOKMAN
Literary agent for CAA (Creative Artists Agency)

DAVID BROWN
Film and theater producer

STEPHEN L. CARTER
Author and law professor at Yale University

FAITH CHILDS
Literary agent

JAMES CRAMER
Markets commentator for TheStreet.com

FRANK DEFORD
Author and sportswriter

RAHM EMANUEL
Managing director of Wasserstein, Perella & Co.; former Clinton adviser

GENEVIEVE FIELD
Editorial director of Nerve.com

LARRY FINK
Photographer

IRA GLASS
Public-radio program host

PETER T. GLENSHAW
Business and political strategist

DAVID HALBERSTAM
Author and journalist

LAURA INGRAHAM
Author and commentator

DAVID ISAY
Documentary producer

WENDY KAMINER
Writer and social critic

POLLY LABARRE
Senior editor at *Fast Company*

NEIL LABUTE
Writer, director, and filmmaker

CRISTINA MITTERMEIER
Marine biologist

DAVID SALLE
Painter

JOHN SCANLON
Public-relations executive

MIMI SHERATON
Food critic and writer

ILAN STAVANS
Novelist, critic, and Amherst College professor

GAY TALESE
Author

CHRISTINE VACHON
Independent-film producer

REBECCA WALKER
Author

JONATHAN ALTER PHOTO BY © DAVID HUME KENNERLY

VISIT THE EXPERTS

WHAT THE MAGAZINE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

Contentville's Magazine Experts explain what's going on each month in the magazines they cover. Here's what some of them have said recently:

Are today's kids growing up too fast? Whatever the answer, **Susan Burton** has an appealing publication appropriate for preteens: *Girls' Life* magazine.

What separates *WWD: The Magazine* from other fashion magazines is that it's the first to review the collections with a commercial slant—"Will it sell?"—rather than with the all-too-common "must-haves for this season" approach.

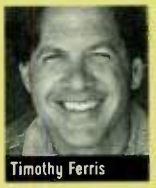
STÉPHANE HOUY-TOWNER
FASHION MAGAZINES

Michael Segell documents *Esquire*'s continuing free fall from its once-venerable status, and addresses *GQ*'s revelation that the FBI actually *is* out to get you.

Your own child is a saint, but other people's children–OPC–are a different story. **Elizabeth Crow** points to *Parents* magazine's helpful advice on what (or what not) to say when your friend's kid is a brat.

Playboy.com's "sexiest sportscaster" poll generated a firestorm of controversy. **Keith Olbermann** declares that "all of television sports, not just the women who work in it, has been set back several years."

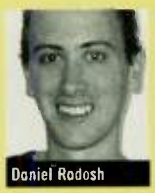
Elaina Richardson looks at the fashion–or, as editor Carrie Tuhy would have it, "clothes"–aspect of *Real Simple*, a smart publication that takes a minimalist approach to style.


Timothy Ferris

TIMOTHY FERRIS ON SCIENCE MAGAZINES—AN EXCERPT:

Too much of the existing commentary on balloting reform consists of polarizing claims pitting technophiles who promise brave new worlds against technophobes who warn that bringing computers into the polling process will make things worse. Anthony Perkins, in *Red Herring*, urges that "each state...build and maintain a comprehensive and fully interactive election Web site" where citizens can both register and vote, while Peter Neumann of *RISKS Digest* warns that "I would not trust a computerized voting system even if I had written it myself, because of the many ways in which such systems can be subverted." The trouble with such sweeping pronouncements on both sides, characterized by their use of catchphrases like "Internet voting" and "ATM voting," is that they presume we already know what a 21st-century balloting system would be like. We don't.

Timothy Ferris is the author of 10 books, among them Coming of Age in the Milky Way, The Whole Shebang, *and the forthcoming* Life Beyond Earth.


Daniel Radosh

DANIEL RADOSH ON ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINES—AN EXCERPT:

Bucking the snarky, critical trend in favor of perennial cheeriness, *Us Weekly* unleashed two year-end issues ("stories of the year" and "celebrities of the year") in which 2000 is earnestly labeled "a year when life got more interesting." This assertion is not exactly backed up by the recaps that follow it. If your life is really more interesting because Katie Couric "began dating nice-guy TV producer Tom Warner," it's safe to say you're either Katie Couric, Tom Warner, or a total loser.

Daniel Radosh is a senior editor at Modern Humorist *and writes the "Media Moments" column for* The Nation *and* McSweeney's.

TIMOTHY FERRIS PHOTO BY © SALLY HERSLBERGER

NEWS ABOUT OUR MAGAZINE EXPERTS:

Timothy Ferris's next book, *Life Beyond Earth* (Simon & Schuster), is based on the PBS program he recently narrated and wrote. He is also the editor of the forthcoming *Best American Science Writing 2001* (HarperCollins).

Chee Pearlman has launched a new monthly design column, "First Look," for *The New York Times*.

OUR MAGAZINE EXPERTS

DONALD BAER
Political Magazines

SUSAN BURTON
Teen Magazines

ELIZABETH CROW
Women's, Parenting, and Children's Magazines

KATE DE CASTELBAJAC
Beauty Magazines

DR. EZEKIEL J. EMANUEL
Health Magazines

TIMOTHY FERRIS
Science Magazines

WINIFRED GALLAGHER
Religion and Spirituality Magazines

MATTHEW GOODMAN
Cooking Magazines

STÉPHANE HOUY-TOWNER
Fashion Magazines

THE STAFF OF *MARKETPLACE*
Money and Finance Magazines

KEVIN MITNICK
Computer Magazines

KEITH OLBERMANN
Sports Magazines

CHEE PEARLMAN
Design Magazines

JOHN R. QUAIN
Technology Magazines

DANIEL RADOSH
Entertainment Magazines

ELAINA RICHARDSON
Fashion Magazines

MICHAEL SEGELL
Men's Magazines

VISIT THE EXPERTS

RECENT PROFESSOR'S PICKS

Our Academic Experts are among the foremost authorities on a broad range of subjects, from the elementary to the obscure. Four of our newest experts offer their choices:

KENNETH L. SHROPSHIRE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Professor's Picks on
ATHLETES AND RACE

NECESSITIES: RACIAL BARRIERS IN AMERICAN SPORTS (1989), by Phil Hoose
A HARD ROAD TO GLORY: A HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ATHLETE (VOLUMES 1-3) (1993), by Arthur Ashe
BASEBALL'S GREAT EXPERIMENT: JACKIE ROBINSON AND HIS LEGACY (1983), by Jules Tygiel
VIVA BASEBALL!: LATIN MAJOR LEAGUERS AND THEIR SPECIAL HUNGER (1998), by Samuel O. Regalado
THE MUHAMMAD ALI READER (1998), by Gerald Early (ed.)

DAVID J. HELLERSTEIN
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Professor's Picks on
DEPRESSION

DARKNESS VISIBLE: A MEMOIR OF MADNESS (1992), by William Styron
TOUCHED WITH FIRE: MANIC-DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS AND THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT (1993), by Kay Redfield Jamison
THE NEW PSYCHIATRY: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO STATE-OF-THE-ART THERAPY, MEDICATION, AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH (1996), by Jack Gorman, M.D.
BIOLOGICALLY INFORMED PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR DEPRESSION (1996), by Stephen R. Shuchter, Nancy Downs, and Sidney Zisook
EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHIATRY: A NEW BEGINNING (1996), by Anthony Stevens and John Price

SUSAN GUBAR
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Professor's Picks on
FEMINISM AND LITERATURE

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN (1929), by Virginia Woolf
GETTING PERSONAL (1991), by Nancy K. Miller
EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE CLOSET (1992), by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick
PLAYING IN THE DARK (1993), by Toni Morrison
THE ALCHEMY OF RACE AND RIGHTS (1992), by Patricia J. Williams

JOHN LIMON
WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Professor's Picks on
STAND-UP COMEDY

POWERS OF HORROR: AN ESSAY ON ABJECTION (1982), by Julia Kristeva
IMPLICIT MEANINGS: ESSAYS IN ANTHROPOLOGY (1975), by Mary Douglas
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—LENNY BRUCE!! (1974), by Albert Goldman
JOKES AND THEIR RELATION TO THE UNCONSCIOUS (1905), by Sigmund Freud
ON THE REAL SIDE: A HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMEDY (1994), by Mel Watkins

OUR ACADEMIC EXPERTS

C. FRED ALFORD, Evil (University of Maryland, College Park)
JOYCE APPLEBY, Early American History (University of California, Los Angeles)
PETER BROOKS, 19th-Century French Novels (Yale University)
WILLIAM CARTER, Proust (University of Alabama)
MARY ANN CAWS, Aesthetic Manifestos (City University of New York)
JAMES CHAPMAN, James Bond Studies (Open University, U.K.)
DALTON CONLEY, Urban Poverty (New York University)
ANDREW DELBANCO, Herman Melville (Columbia University)
KEITH DEVLIN, Mathematics in Life and Society (St. Mary's College)
PAULA S. FASS, History of Childhood in America (University of California, Berkeley)
JUAN FLORES, Puerto Rican Identity (Hunter College)
JAMES K. GALBRAITH, New Approaches to Economics (University of Texas, Austin)
DOUGLAS GOMERY, History of Television in the United States (University of Maryland)
RONALD L. GRIMES, Rites of Passage (Wilfrid Laurier University)
SUSAN GUBAR, Feminism and Literature (Indiana University)
HENDRIK HARTOG, History of Marriage (Princeton University)
DAVID J. HELLERSTEIN, Depression (Columbia University)
ALISON JOLLY, Primate Behavior (Princeton University)
MARK JORDAN, Homosexuality and Christianity (Emory University)
ALICE KAPLAN, France Occupied by the Nazis, 1940-1944 (Duke University)
AMITAVA KUMAR, Writing the Immigrant Experience (Penn State University)
ROBIN LAKOFF, Powerful Language (University of California, Berkeley)
CLARK SPENCER LARSEN, Bioarchaeology (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
KEN LIGHT, Documentary Photography (University of California, Berkeley)
JOHN LIMON, Stand-up Comedy (Williams College)
JOHN E. MACK, Alien Encounters (Harvard University)
KARAL ANN MARLING, Popular Culture (University of Minnesota)
DAVID MCCARTHY, Pop Art (Rhodes College)
GLENN MCGEE, Bioethics (University of Pennsylvania)
JOHN MCWHORTER, Musical Theater (University of California, Berkeley)
ESTHER NEWTON, Lesbian Memoirs (State University of New York, Purchase College)
MIMI NICHTER, Women and Dieting (University of Arizona)
MARVIN OLASKY, Compassionate Conservatism (University of Texas, Austin)
WANG PING, Women's Rituals in China (Macalester College)
ELIZABETH REIS, Witch-Hunting in Colonial America (University of Oregon)
HAL K. ROTHMAN, Las Vegas (University of Nevada)
ROBERT RYDELL, World Fairs (Montana State University, Bozeman)
ELAINE SHOWALTER, Feminist Criticism and Women's Writing (Princeton University)
KENNETH L. SHROPSHIRE, Athletes and Race (University of Pennsylvania)
PETER SINGER, Ethics and Animals (Princeton University)
JASON E. SQUIRE, The Movie Business (University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television)
DEBORAH TANNEN, Language in Daily Life (Georgetown University)
GIL TROY, First Ladies (McGill University)
MICHAEL WALZER, Jewish Political Thought (Institute for Advanced Study)
STEVEN WEINBERG, History of War (University of Texas, Austin)
G. EDWARD WHITE, History of Baseball (University of Virginia)
CRAIG STEVEN WILDER, Life in Brooklyn (Williams College)
SEAN WILENTZ, American Politics Since 1787 (Princeton University)
JACK ZIPES, Fairy Tales (University of Minnesota)
MICHAEL ZUCKERMAN, American Best-Sellers 1776 to Present (University of Pennsylvania)

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Now that our winter of discontent is over, celebrate the Bard's birthday on April 23 with a feast of Shakespearean content. We have all of the plays and sonnets—many in e-book format—plus CliffsNotes, screenplays, speeches, TV transcripts, and more. Type in "Shakespeare," click "GO," and get the following:

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The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare, William
Wisdom of the Ages: A Modern Master Brings Eternal Truths Into Everyday Life by Dyer, Wayne W.
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E-BOOKS

Complete Tragedies by Shakespeare, William
Hamlet by Shakespeare, William
Histories and Poems of William Shakespeare by Shakespeare, William
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SCREENPLAYS

A Poetics for Screenwriters by Lee, Lance
Box of Moonlight & Notes from Overboard: A Film-Maker's Diary by DiCillo, Tom
Henry V by Shakespeare, William
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SPEECHES

Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton During the 65th Anniversary of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Clinton, Hillary Rodham, Apr. 22, 1997
Annual Shakespeare Birthday Lecture, Charles, Prince of Wales, Apr. 22, 1991
A Modern Lear, Addams, Jane, 1912
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TRANSCRIPTS

World News Now, Sep. 14, 2000
Sunday Morning, Feb. 6, 2000
World News This Morning, Sep. 10, 1999
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STUDY GUIDES

CliffsComplete Hamlet
CliffsComplete King Lear
CliffsComplete Julius Caesar

ARCHIVES

All The Web's a Stage, Business Week, Dec. 11, 2000
A 'Hamlet' fit for the small screen, Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 8, 2000
Shakespeare on the German Stage (Book Review), German Quarterly, Dec. 1, 2000
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DISSERTATIONS

Compiling Authority: The Anthology and the Novel in Modern Britain (Great Britain, Samuel Richardson, George Eliot, Sir Walter Scott, Eighteenth Century, Nineteenth Century), Price, Leah
'Life,' Leavis and the Common Pursuit: Cambridge Criticism in the Age of Currency, Powers, John Richard
The Use of Narrative in Shakespeare (William Shakespeare), Wilson, Catherine
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HARD-TO-FIND BOOKS

With Fairest Flowers While Summer Lasts, Hughes, Ted, 1971
Tales from Shakespeare, Lamb, Charles, 1972
Modesty and Cunning: Shakespeare's Use of Literary Tradition, Thompson, Karl, 1971
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CONTENTVILLE EXPERT COMMENTARY*

What We Can't Wait For: Biography, Allison Hill, May 12, 2000
What We Can't Wait For: History, Tom Campbell, Dec. 21, 2000
The Contentville Author Q&A With Anthony Holden, Jul. 16, 2000
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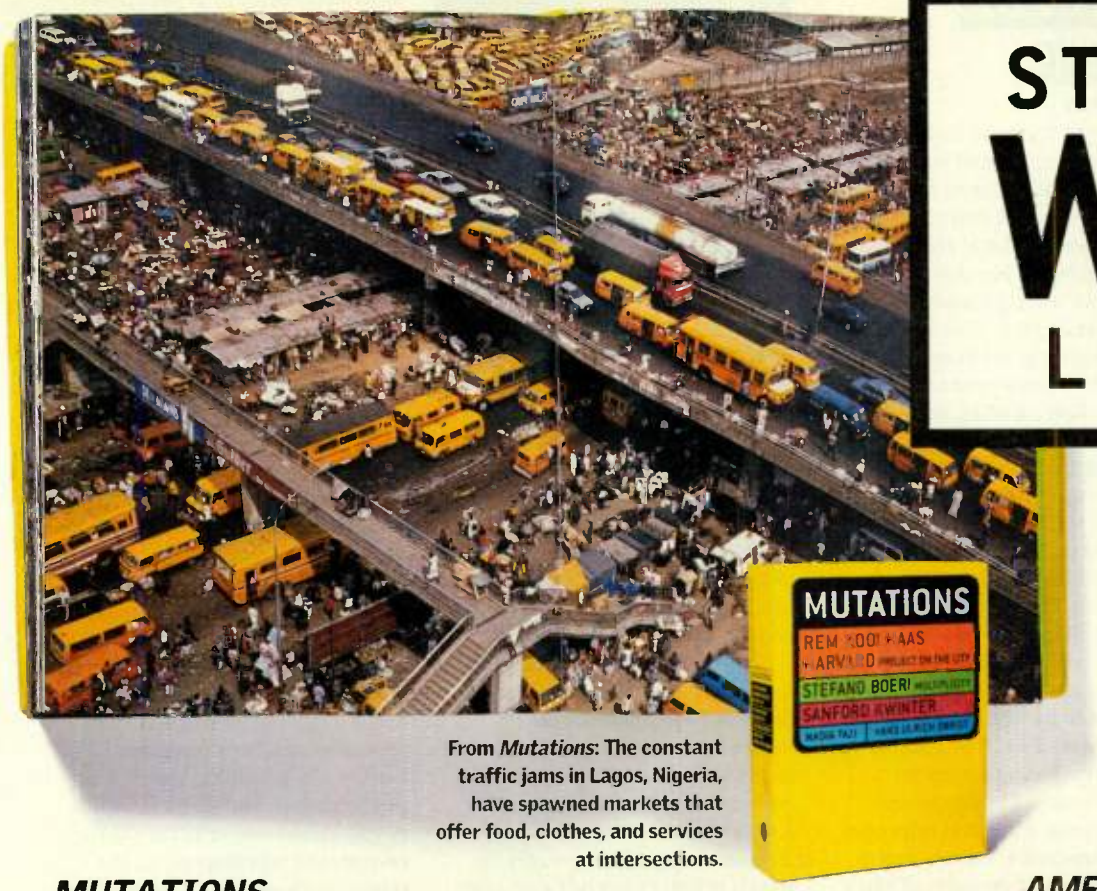


From *Mutations*: The constant traffic jams in Lagos, Nigeria, have spawned markets that offer food, clothes, and services at intersections.

MUTATIONS

BOOK ON URBANIZATION

We live in an age in which a retro town like Celebration, Florida—the Walt Disney Company's faux-Mayberry—is held up by some as a paragon of progressive planning and design. So it's a relief to find *Mutations* (Actar/D.A.P.), a book that explores the cities on the Pearl River Delta of southern China; Lagos, Nigeria; and even Houston, Texas, in all their surreal, troubled beauty. *Mutations* embodies the exuberant chaos of the cities it studies: A canary-yellow vinyl cover doubles as a mousepad, and a CD of urban sounds is tucked into the back. Described in the afterword as "keys for the comprehension of the present," *Mutations* presents essays on the urban condition from star architect Rem Koolhaas and other academic notables, whose arguments sometimes veer toward murky academese. But it's the book's startling, almost abstract photographs of man-made landscapes—massive mall parking lots, convoluted highways, offshore landing strips—that makes *Mutations* such smart fun.

ANDY YOUNG

Theodore Roosevelt, as seen in C-SPAN's *American Writers* series

AMERICAN WRITERS

C-SPAN SERIES

Beginning in March, *American Writers: A Journey Through History* will investigate the lives and works—novels, declarations, autobiographies, speeches, and histories—of authors who made a lasting mark on the nation. The TV series spans some three and a half centuries of American letters, from Benjamin Franklin to Zora Neale Hurston to David Halberstam, and the tour is guided by historians, archivists, and other experts on authors' biographies and bibliographies. "We're not saying that this is a definitive list of America's greatest writers," says executive producer Mark Farkas. "But it's one that we hope is diverse enough to represent America." Live broadcasts from authors' homes and other sites of historical significance are promised (Mark Twain's Hannibal, Missouri, for example), and viewers will be encouraged to call in with questions. "We're hoping to make history come alive," says Farkas, "if that's not too much of a cliché."

EMILY CHENOWETH

American Writers debuts March 19 on C-SPAN.

TOP: PETER BERSON; BOTTOM: C-SPAN

STUFF WE LIKE

ON HER OWN GROUND

BIOGRAPHY

The story of a former slave turned washerwoman turned wealthy businesswoman turned high-living philanthropist is likely to be a page-turner. But what truly distinguishes *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (Scribner) is the storyteller: Walker's great-great-granddaughter, former ABC News producer A'Lelia Bundles. Says Bundles, who narrates lovingly, "I was lucky to have a pack rat for a grandfather."

Born in 1867, the daughter of slaves, Madam C.J. Walker was orphaned at 7 and struggled to make ends meet as a washerwoman for $1.50 a week. Her fortunes changed, however, because, as Walker later told a reporter, in a dream a "man appeared to me and told me what to mix for my hair." The concoction, which served as a remedy for hair loss—caused by dangerous working conditions and improper diets—launched a beauty empire that employed thousands of black women and made Walker one of the wealthiest women in the country.

Bundles says that Walker's true satisfaction came not from her success as a beautician but from being a philanthropist and role model for young black women: "Her work as an entrepreneur was extraordinary—instead of just making more money, she turned things around to better the lives of other people."

LARA KATE COHEN

The hair cream that made Madam C.J. Walker a wealthy woman

The Carpet Slaves: Boys are forced to work in Indian rug factories.

THE CARPET SLAVES

DOCUMENTARY FILM

British filmmakers Brian Woods and Kate Blewett say that they made their documentary, *The Carpet Slaves: Stolen Children of India*, to eradicate child slavery in India's carpet industry. "We want people to react," says Woods. "to be angry and to want to do something about it."

The Carpet Slaves follows Chichai, a subsistence farmer in northern India, as he searches for his 11-year-old son, Huro, who disappeared in 1994. Chichai believes that the boy was kidnapped by a rugmaker and forced to work as many as 20 hours a day without wages. He travels to India's rug belt and, after a daring raid on a notorious shop, finds his son, who is malnourished and frightened and no longer speaks the same language as his family. The film's best—and most agonizing—moment comes when Chichai admits that though Huro is home, he still seems lost.

The filmmakers make clear that Huro and Chichai's story is not merely a local tragedy and that child servitude is the dark side of globalization. The rugs that child slaves make are sold in stores around the world, and the boys' work feeds a global appetite for cheap goods. Woods and Blewett's message is fairly simple: Don't buy anything without knowing its origin. Like Huro's transition to freedom, that may be easier said than done.

ELIZABETH ANGELL

The Carpet Slaves *airs on Cinemax in late March.*

THE SLOTKIN LETTER

THEATER NEWSLETTER

Lynn Slotkin had the good sense to realize that during the course of her day job as the student-affairs officer of the University of Toronto geology department, she would most likely never meet Judi Dench or Cherry Jones or any of the other thespians she has (quite literally) embraced as "theater gods." Hopelessly starstruck and a theater obsessive, Slotkin, 52, attended 235 productions in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain during 2000. She financed these adventures, in part, with subscription revenue from her night job: *The Slotkin Letter*, a deliriously opinionated and often brilliant monthly theater newsletter. The publication was born in 1975, when Slotkin, in the wily tradition of Eve Harrington, made her way backstage after what she describes as an "enthralling" Broadway production of *Hamlet*, in which Jane Alexander played Gertrude. Slotkin heaped lavish praise upon Alexander—who, upon, learning that Slotkin was heading to London to see Albert Finney assay Hamlet, politely asked her to "send a note and tell me what you think." The letter now reaches subscribers worldwide—including actors, who pay $35 a year, and theaters, which pay $100. The elegantly vernacular reviews and reportage recall the muscularity—and word count—of Pauline Kael or Walter Kerr. "It's mostly a journal of opinion," Slotkin says. "I get so tired of people liking everything."

BOB ICKES

For subscription information, contact slotkin@attglobal.net.

ALLAN SLOAN

PUBLIC-RADIO COMMENTATOR

There's nothing easy about explaining business or finance to a radio audience—Allan Sloan just makes it sound that way. Sloan's short radio columns, the "Sloan Sessions," air once a week on the *Marketplace Morning Report*, the early installment of public radio's popular business show. Sloan, a *Newsweek* columnist, doesn't sound anything like his smooth contemporaries on NPR's *Morning Edition*. (He has, by his own admission, a "voice that goes through six inches of cement.") In twangy Brooklynese, Sloan dispels myths and debunks misconceptions with casual conviction. Business

Radio host Allan Sloan

L TO R: A'LELIA BUNDLES/WALKER FAMILY COLLECTION; HBO; JAMES LYNSE/CORBIS SABA

journalists often get caught up in the complexities of stock-market numbers and economic indicators, but Sloan doesn't have much patience for hype. He offered his opinion of major problems looming on the economic horizon, for instance, and added: "Those are the things I'd really worry about if I were paid to worry instead of paid to have opinions." Sloan has no plans to give up his *Newsweek* gig, but he does enjoy his weekly excuse to cut loose on the radio. "All you have to do is talk," says Sloan. "That's my natural state. All I have to do is open my mouth." ELIZABETH ANGELL

CLAYMATH.ORG

ONLINE MATHEMATICS

Fermat's last theorem may have been proved, but there are still similarly solution-resistant math problems to tackle. The Clay Mathematics Institute of Cambridge, Massachusetts, lists seven of them on its website (claymath.org) and offers $1 million per problem for their solutions. CMI, which aims "to further the beauty, the power, and the universality of mathematical thought," announced the "Millennium Prize Problems" last May. The seven problems constitute the most elusive of math's unsolved mysteries. Amateurs should take note, however: It took Andrew Wiles seven years of nearly exclusive work to solve Fermat's last theorem. But already Richard Kaye of the University of Birmingham, England, has established a correlation between one Millennium Prize Problem and pop culture by linking the famous P versus NP problem to the computer game Minesweeper. "If one of their questions is answered, it's going to make a big change," says Arthur Jaffe, the director of CMI. "That's getting to the top of Mount Everest and being able to have a 360-degree view of mathematics." JECA TAUDTE

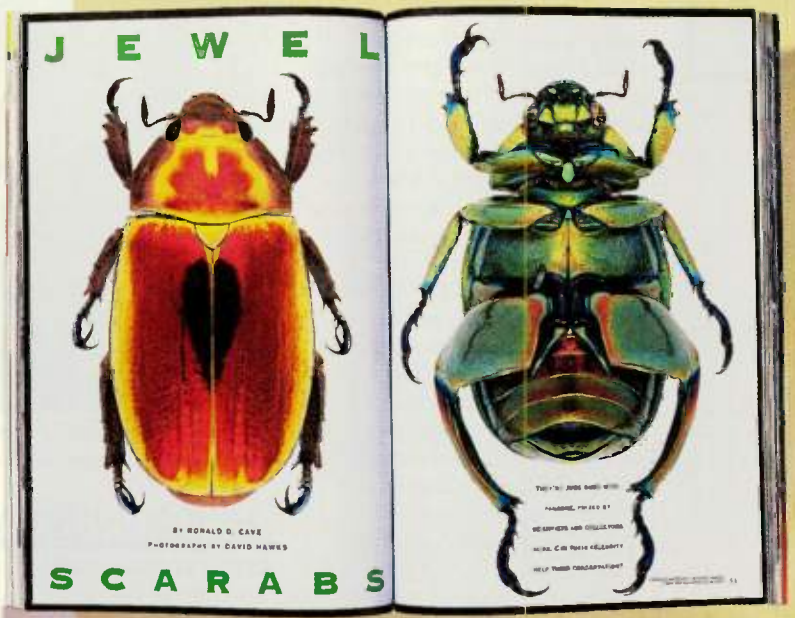
NEWSWORLD INTERNATIONAL

NEWS NETWORK

At first glance, Newsworld International seems to have gotten it all wrong. The 24-hour news network—on Time Warner digital service and DirecTV—barely

PETER BERSON

REDESIGNS WE LIKE



Two scarab beetles pictured in the recently redesigned *National Geographic*

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

113-YEAR-OLD NATURE MAGAZINE

Like the dinosaurs and the ancient peoples it often covers, the 113-year-old *National Geographic* has evolved slowly. In the sixties, editors removed the designs around the magazine's famous yellow cover piece by piece: It was years before the border was bare. Last fall the editors decided it was time for faster change.

"We were looking for a slightly bolder and more contemporary look," says managing editor Robert Booth. Last summer, for the first time, *National Geographic* used varying font sizes for cover headlines—some of them in fluorescent pink. Inside, the magazine unveiled more daring layouts, adding a touch of adventure to its old-world, natural-history-museum look. The photography, always stellar, remains so, and the editors have recently brought in some high-profile writers to round out the package: Garrison Keillor, Peter Benchley, and Arthur C. Clarke wrote for *Geographic* this past year. The magazine's new look strikes an elegant balance of old and new, and fear not: Those beautiful maps are still regularly inserted. STEPHEN TOTILO

The new *Atlantic Monthly*

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

143-YEAR-OLD LITERARY MAGAZINE

A year in the making, *The Atlantic Monthly*'s much-anticipated redesign finally hit the newsstands in January. "It was something that I knew I wanted to do from the beginning," says Michael Kelly, who took over as editor last year. "The magazine had started out with a fairly spare, elegant, and uncluttered design, but over the years it got somewhat cluttered." The redesign is an attempt to return to the magazine's roots; the covers hark back to the fifties and sixties, but they'll be "brawnier and friendlier and a little less austere," says Kelly. The redesign encompasses everything from the paper stock to the use of a new typeface, which Kelly says is "friendly, and to some degree witty and elegant."

The trappings of the modern magazine—the charts and boxes and lists—are nowhere to be found in the 143-year-old monthly. Emphasizing long-form nonfiction and a look inspired by book design, the package is graceful and stands out on the newsstand. "We want our magazine to sell," says Kelly. "This is not a vanity publication." JOSEPH GOMES

STUFF WE LIKE

mentions the White House, the Nasdaq, or football. Make that American football. As the only foreign-news cable channel in the United States, NWI devotes its airtime to newscasts from around the world. There's nightly news from Russian, Chinese, Mexican, and French Canadian stations—dubbed into English—as well as English-language news shows from Germany and Japan. Where else can you get the Russian take on the Middle East? "Not only does [NWI] provide a perspective, but it gives you stories, news which you otherwise might not have known about," says Louis Cooper, vice-president of programming. "NWI provides those kinds of stories that not even *The New York Times* gets into sometimes." NWI's global, on-the-ground perspectives provide a welcome balance to U.S.-centered news.

ANNA SCHNEIDER-MAYERSON

A schedule is available at nwitv.com.

THE ECOLOGIST

ENVIRONMENTAL MAGAZINE

It's hard not to admire *The Ecologist* magazine: Small, zealous, and defiant, this British environmental glossy calls big business—Monsanto, Wal-Mart, even cancer charities—onto the mat each month. Although skeptics have questioned the environmental and editorial chops of editor in chief Zac Goldsmith, son of billionaire tycoon Sir James Goldsmith, and although some companies whose practices the magazine has decried have, he says, threatened legal action, *The Ecologist* keeps picking worthy fights, and Goldsmith is nothing if not dedicated. "Our primary goal is that of raising awareness," he writes. "If that has meant our product is unsaleable, then so be it." The magazine offers digests on the anti-McDonald's movement, critiques of the monopoly strategies of superstores, and impassioned commentary about genetically modified foods. If the contents are unsettling, well, that's what they're supposed to be. EMILY CHENOWETH

For subscription information, visit theecologist.org.

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Aaron Donovan (right) conducts an interview with Gilma Bonet (left) and nurse Lavern Franklin for *The New York Times*'s "Neediest Cases" column.

AARON DONOVAN

"NEEDIEST CASES" REPORTER

The New York Times—and New York City itself—owes a lot to Aaron Donovan. Donovan, a news assistant, made a name for himself last year, when, on January 1, the *Times* printed a striking correction: It seems that someone in 1898 had misnumbered the day's edition, throwing off the issue number that appears on the newspaper's upper-left-hand corner for more than a century. Donovan was the first to catch the error, cementing his place in *Times* history. Donovan now writes the "Neediest Cases" column in the Metro section. For 89 years, The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund—constituted by readers' contributions—has been donating money to New York's most respected charities. To publicize its efforts, the *Times* publishes daily articles—from Thanksgiving Day through February—that highlight the people the fund benefits. "I try to get people in their own homes," says Donovan, "because you get to find out a lot more about the person." His current work, moreover, has helped to raise a record amount of contributions—over $2 million more than this time last year. ALLISON BENEDIKT

STUFF *YOU* LIKE

ONLINE FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Rotten Tomatoes (rottentomatoes.com) organizes current film and video information in a format that doesn't overwhelm the viewer. Although rising ticket prices are reason enough to learn more about what's showing, there is simply nothing worse than losing two hours of your life watching a bad movie.

RT's format is ingenious and simple: It groups reviews, sets up a page of blurbs that link to the full review, and places a ripe (red) or rotten (green) tomato icon next to each review. Then RT writes a synopsis and a consensus of what the majority of reviewers think, gathers the major reviewers in a "cream of the crop" box, and illustrates it with the "tomatometer," a simple bar graph that tells the viewer the percentage of reviewers who liked (or disliked) the film.

RT also links to the movie's official site, articles about film, a forum to discuss movies, trailers, and a "tomato-fied" cast and crew filmography. Everybody's opinion is different, but you'll definitely come away with more than the glowing testimonials often seen in your town's newspaper. FROM SEAN BALKWILL, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

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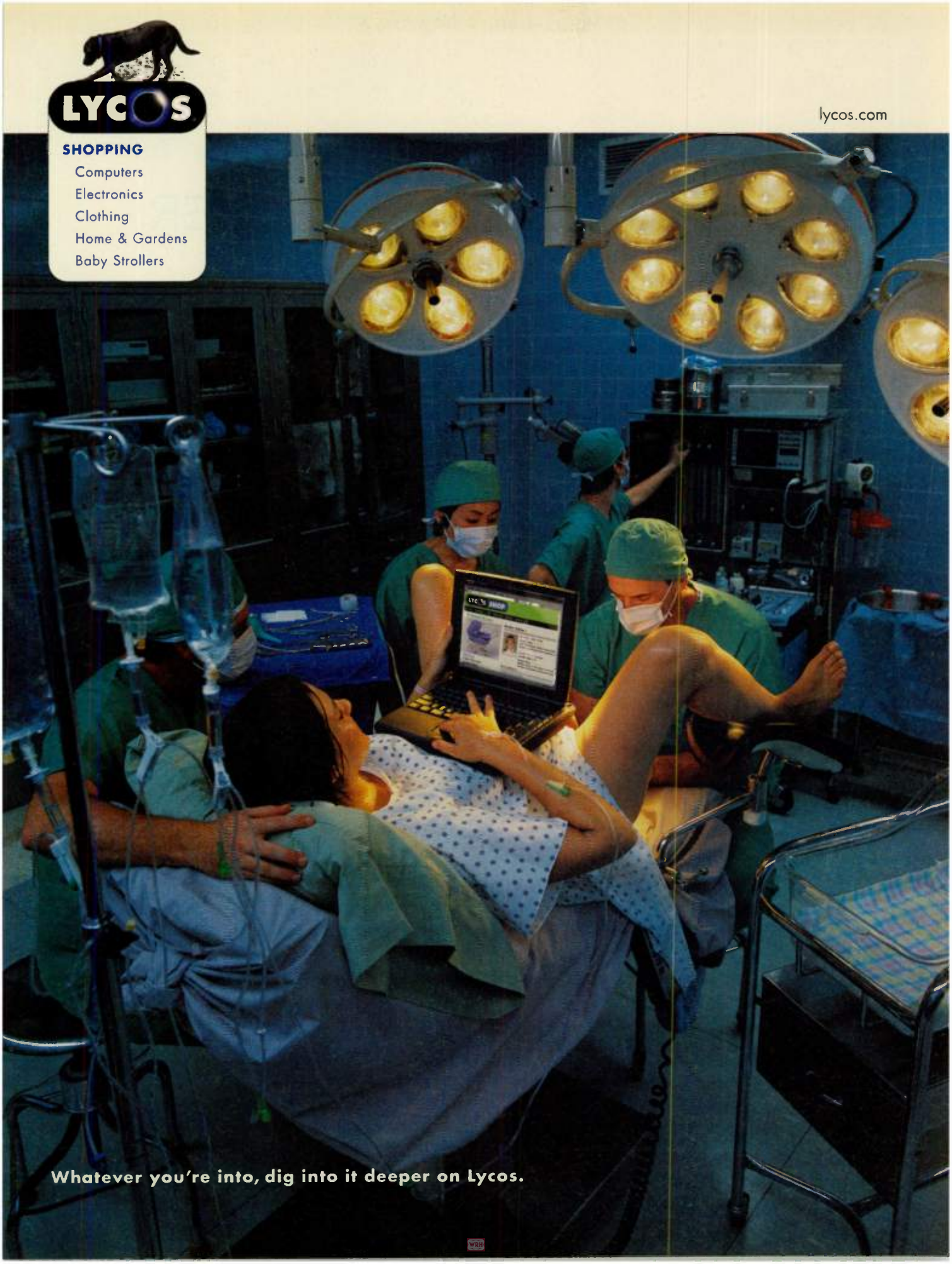
L. PETER BERSON; R. COURTESY OF SUSAN B. MARKISZ WITH KEVYN BONET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fact to fiction

The Middle East gave a journalist a rich and unpredictable backdrop for her first novel. Here, the author describes her professional and personal transition. BY AMY WILENTZ

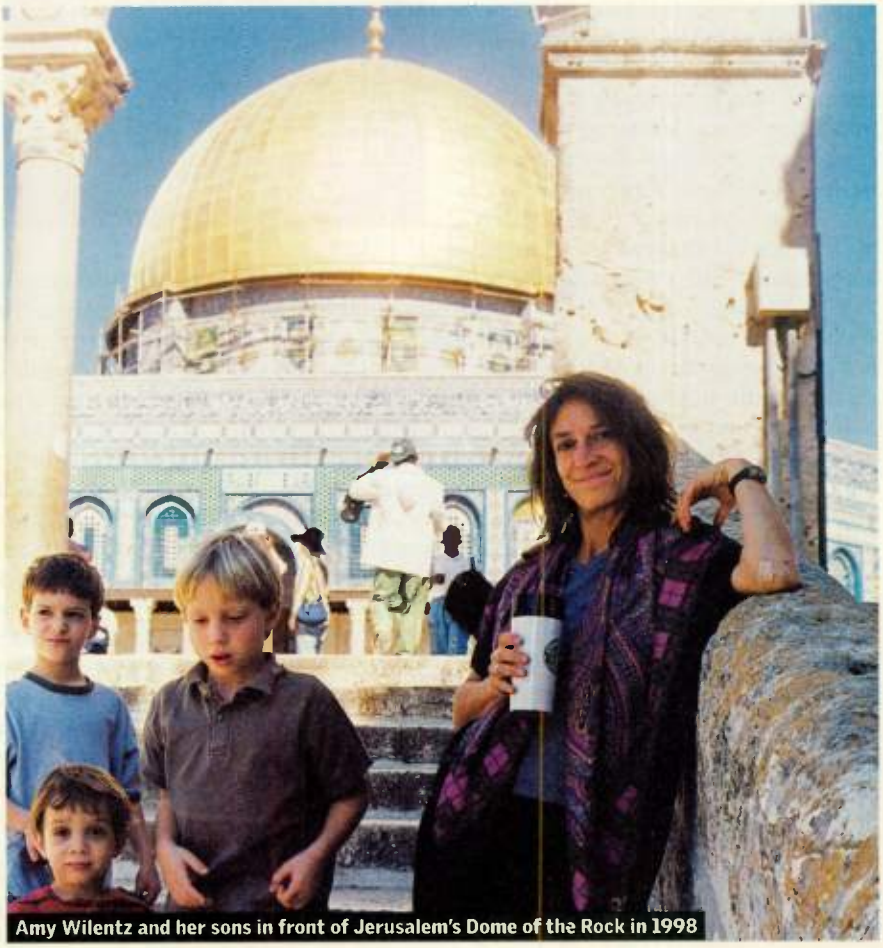
It was probably when the Israeli helicopters began exploding percussion weapons and firing into the crowd in which I was standing that I decided writing fiction was better than reporting fact.

I actually made the switch that day, at the checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. The Israelis had opened up a previously blocked tunnel near the sacred Dome of the Rock, and there was a sudden renewal of Palestinian unrest at the checkpoints that divide Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. At the time, in September 1996, I was the Jerusalem correspondent for *The New Yorker*. I covered unrest in Hebron and watched the Israeli army sweep rubble-strewn buildings for snipers and rock-tossers. I ate hummus in the sprawling Mahane Yehuda market with Ehud Barak, then Israel's foreign minister. I interviewed Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the seemingly angelic quadriplegic spiritual leader of Hamas, only days after his release from an Israeli prison. In Hebron, the Israeli army shot my guide in the head when they fired into a protesting crowd (he survived). But nothing was like the violence in Ramallah.

As we hopped out of our car and joined the crowd, little did my colleagues and I know that this day was to mark a real change in the way the Palestinians handled checkpoint demonstrations. In the past, they had been stone-hurling Davids flailing away and being shot at by Uzi-toting Israeli Goliaths. As long as reporters stood well out of the line of fire or behind the Israeli army, they were pretty safe, because only one side was shooting.

But now Palestinian security forces began returning fire for the first time, as if they were an opposing army, which meant that now demonstrators, bystanders, and reporters were caught in the crossfire. Palestinian gunfire upped the ante, and that's why the Israelis sent in their gunships and that's why I cowered with others—mostly radio reporters and human-rights workers—in a photocopy shop near the checkpoint, venturing out only during lulls in the shooting.

I was standing against a back wall in the copy shop, hoping the Israelis were not going to bomb us, and I worried about my 1-year-old son, whom I'd left at home with his sitter. As I listened to the explosions from my hideout, I was reminded of something that my husband, also a Jerusalem correspondent at the time, had mentioned to me often: that, not infrequently, Palestinian mothers and their sick babies had been stopped at checkpoints



COURTESY AMY WILENTZ

Amy Wilentz and her sons in front of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock in 1998

when seeking medical care, with sometimes dire, even fatal, consequences. This possibility, and how it touched my own life, gave me an idea for a work of fiction. I began fiddling in my mind with a Palestinian-American mother, whom I called Marina, and her boy, Ibrahim—who became the central characters in my first novel. A few days after that episode in Ramallah, I sat down and wrote the opening scene and what would become the first chapter of *Martyrs' Crossing*, which was published last month.

It wasn't easy switching from fact to fiction, although I'm hardly the first journalist to try it. Charles Dickens, Graham Greene, and Tom Wolfe—all these great writers realized that the stories they were covering were just too good, too broad, to remain within the bounds of nonfiction. Dickens worked grueling hours in a shoe-blacking factory as a child and later turned to journalism, and he saw firsthand much of the misery of Victorian London that he would use as a backdrop for his fiction. Greene, too, toured as a reporter, publishing journals and reportage from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, at the same time taking notes for his great novels about the Third World. And Wolfe reports his novels—does interviews and background reading, attends events, goes to the library—to invent his own reality.

I found all of this more than a little intimidating. As a reporter, you can count on facts to carry you, but the leap into fiction means letting go and relying completely on yourself—something these writers clearly could do but I wasn't so sure I could do myself. I had written a book before, so I already knew something about structuring a narrative. *The Rainy Season*, published in 1989, was a nonfiction account of the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti. In that book I'd taken the methods of fiction—choose a protagonist, establish a sense of place, keep the plotline tight, use dialogue, do not overload the story with extraneous material—and applied them to nonfiction. This time, I had to take reality, with all of its pointless excesses, unpredictability, random timing, unnecessary characters, and mistakes, and streamline it, make it move with a steady inevitability that is so satisfying in fiction, so unusual in life.

AS A REPORTER, YOU CAN COUNT ON FACTS TO CARRY YOU, BUT THE LEAP INTO FICTION MEANS LETTING GO AND RELYING COMPLETELY ON YOURSELF.

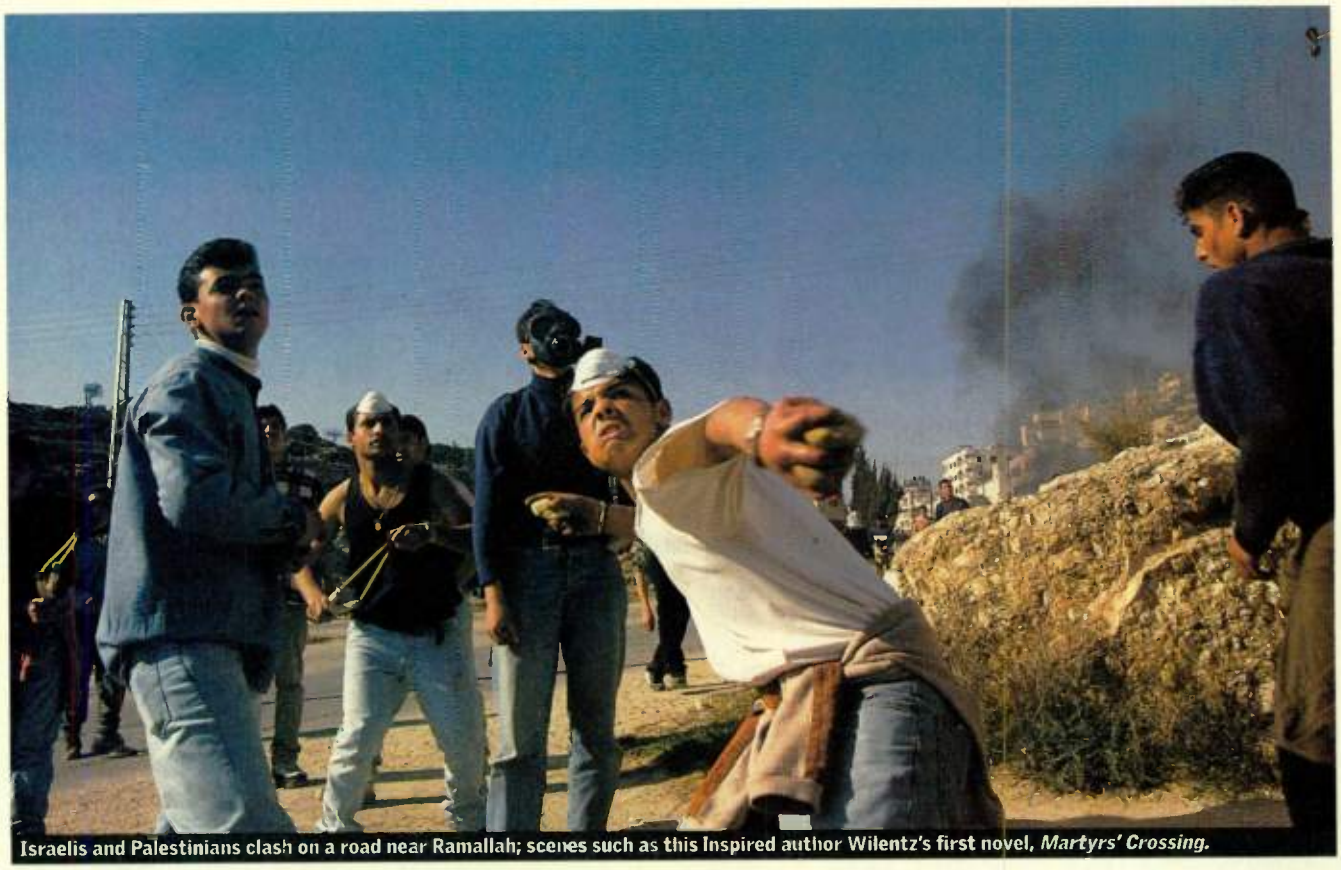
So I took that scene at the checkpoint and put Marina and the 2½-year-old Ibrahim in it. I used the real gunfire from that day, as well as the tear gas, percussion weapons, and helicopters. I used the dusty roadbed from that checkpoint and planted some cypress trees on the crest of a nearby hill for my invented characters—and my readers—to look at. I didn't know the name of the checkpoint, but I gave it one in Arabic that was plausible, and it became the title of my book. I made up the nicest, most conscience-ridden Israeli soldier ever to be allowed on the job, and I made him the commanding officer at the checkpoint that day. I didn't mention the guy from Oxfam and the one from NPR, both of whom really were with me in the copy shop, and, of course, I didn't mention me, but I put in the shop and festooned its roof with flags, decorated with pictures of dead Palestinian commandos. I created a second-in-command for my Israeli soldier, a guy who wasn't so nice. The rest of the plot and all the other characters spun out from other real experiences and reporting and also from those events I'd created.

I tried hard to tell a human story while not forgetting the drumbeat of cynical regional politics that pounded ceaselessly in the background. (In reporting, politics is at the foreground, but this cannot be the case in fiction—you'll lose too many readers.) Many other incidents from my reporting made it into my novel, though not directly. The five days I spent in the Balata refugee camp outside Nablus, on assignment for *The New Yorker*, became an offhand, passing reference by an Israeli security officer who laments, as he says in the novel, the time he has spent "hunting for prey among the sad tin and cinder-block houses, stuck till the light turned blue in the refugee camps, wasting his time on layabout terrorists and two-bit fanatics." (Five days for that one line—seems inefficient.)

The daily lives of my Palestinian guide, Nael, in Hebron, and of an Arafat security guard from Nablus—whom I met covering two different stories—became models for my two freelance militants, a boy and his uncle, from Ramallah. When I was reporting a piece for *The Nation* on the Israeli withdrawal from the city of Hebron, the Palestinian Authority set off black, red, and green smoke bombs, shrouding Yasser Arafat's arriving helicopter from potential ground-level gunfire. I used this as part of the characterization for "the Chairman" in my book. One political figure in the novel is loosely based on Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated three weeks into my reporting stint in the Middle East.

In other words, I used everything that was useful from my work as a journalist, many of the little things I couldn't really fit into my reportage. And everything else in the book (psychological understanding, personal interrelations, the internal mechanism of what my Israeli investigator calls "the human beast") comes from my real life with my real family and friends, and from everyday life as I lived it in Jerusalem.

Journalists in places like the Middle East are constantly ducking fire and running through tear gas and shielding themselves from hurled rocks usually meant for someone else. There is not a lot of time or psychological leisure to brood about what you've seen and let it ferment into something new. By the time you've recovered from what happened in last week's riot, you're writing about this week's election, and everything is over faster than you can record it. Reporters have to give news and analysis—quickly. Sometimes, for a feature story, say, they will work on locale, culture, and atmosphere; sometimes, in a profile, they will pay attention to providing background, motivation, and the subject's emotions. But in general, the organizing principles in journalism are fact and objectivity, and journalists are



Israelis and Palestinians clash on a road near Ramallah; scenes such as this inspired author Wilentz's first novel, *Martyrs' Crossing.*

RON HAVIV/CORBIS SABA

trying to provide the broad contours of a situation, confrontation, controversy, or personage to people who read their newspapers over coffee and Cheerios.

But the fiction writer's motivation is different from a reporter's, because the readers' motivation is different: They are in bed or sprawled over a sofa, they have a little time, they want escape and entertainment, seductive characters, a good plot—and maybe to learn something on the side. Reading journalism, they want to know, but not necessarily to strain or stretch: They want to be told.

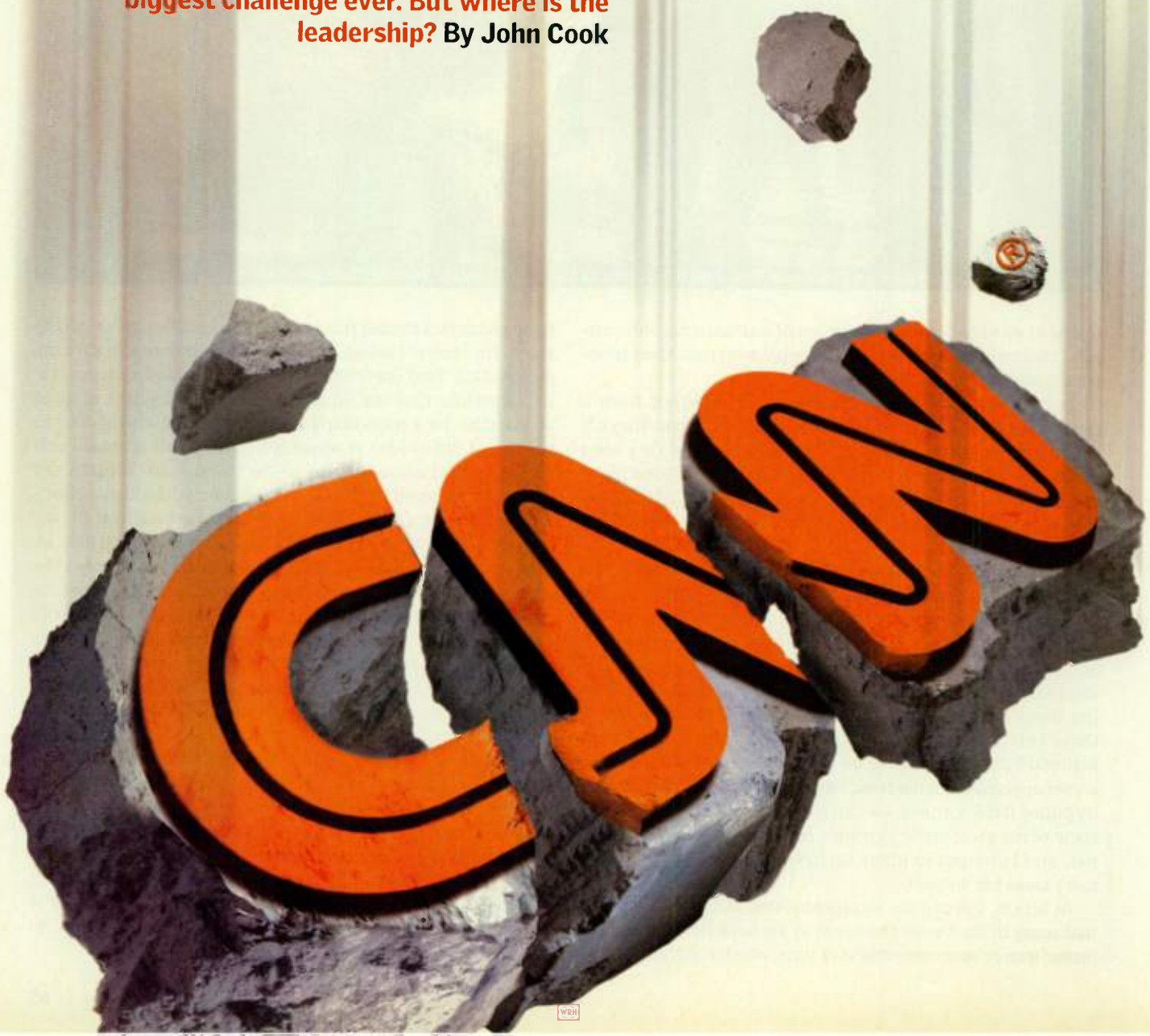
Since readers know what to expect from newspapers and magazines, they sometimes assume that all writers use the same methods, but this is not true. A reporter writing about Arafat, for example, is limited to writing only about Arafat: about his face, his tremor, his infuriatingly obscure and self-involved politics, and maybe his wardrobe; a fiction writer, writing about a figure who is similar to Arafat, is not confined to these things, though she can use them, and I did. For my fictional Palestinian Chairman, who makes only a behind-the-scenes appearance in the book, I used Arafat's headdress, his gravity-pulled facial features, and his rivalrous nature. Then I added some of my great-uncle Morton's endearingly irritating qualities, and I also put in many small things about Arafat that I don't know but suspect.

In fiction, you can use intuition as well as certainty. I found that many of the things I invented in my book have either been proved true or have come true over time, which is extremely satisfying and makes me feel that perhaps I do know what I'm talking about. For *Martyrs' Crossing*, I invented a Palestinian political campaign called "Find the Soldier," in which the Palestinian Authority demands that an Israeli soldier be caught and held accountable for a particularly tragic death at his checkpoint. In the fall of 2000—four years after I created this scenario and months after I named my book—the Palestinians actually did demand that Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint who killed a cowering child during a firefight (an image that was broadcast all over the world) be brought to justice. The soldiers never were; instead, nine days after the boy was shot the Israeli army bulldozed the spot, which it turns out was called Mafraq al-Shuhada, which translates as "Martyrs' Crossing." I invented many stages in the peace process—a backdrop for the events in my book—that later came to pass in a surprisingly similar fashion and in the same order. More prosaically, I invented an inlaid Damascene table in a reception room at Orient House, the unofficial headquarters of the Palestinian Authority. Then one day I visited Orient House to do an interview and saw that there actually was such a table. In fact, this kind of coincidence happens with such frequency in writing fiction that I've already forgotten, in many instances, what I invented and what was true. It feels a little weird when life imitates art, like an inverted déjà vu, but you also feel validated.

On the other hand, while you can single-handedly accept all praise for what is good in your novel, every last thing that is wrong or bad is your fault. It's all on you—and there can be no corrections in the next day's paper. ■

CNN's Free Fall

With ratings slipping and morale sinking, the pioneer in all-news TV is facing its biggest challenge ever. But where is the leadership? By John Cook



CNN White House correspondent John King is no talking head. He may look like one—at 37, King has the chiseled jaw and handsome physique that viewers are accustomed to seeing on television—but he is above all a reporter. He spent 12 years at The Associated Press, six as the wire service's chief political correspondent, before making the jump to CNN. His focus on breaking news throughout the day and night—exemplified by his performance during the Florida recount, when, from his text pager, he read live on the air the Gore team's first reaction to the Supreme Court's final decision—is ideally suited to the mission of no-nonsense, hard-news coverage upon which CNN was founded, in 1980. King is tireless. He begins making calls to sources at 6:30 each morning. He incurs the largest cell-phone bills of any reporter in the network's White House unit. He is one of CNN's greatest assets.

On January 18, King e-mailed the following message to four of the top executives at CNN, as well as to his supervisor, Washington bureau chief Frank Sesno: "Today I watched in shame and horror as Larry King not only was master of ceremonies at a Bush inaugural event but also as we put him live on the air, first introducing some entertainment, then as he shamelessly rushed on stage to hug the president-elect and entertainer Ricky Martin." The message referred to the opening ceremony of the 54th presidential inauguration, held at the Lincoln Memorial the day before President Bush's swearing-in. Larry King, the on-air personality perhaps most closely identified with CNN, was indeed the master of ceremonies, and the event was indeed broadcast live on the network's venerable political newscast *Inside Politics*. And Larry King did indeed hug the incoming president. "I have for 15 years worked as a reporter," John King's message continued, "worked pretty damn hard, had a few good days along the way. Objectivity and credibility are the coins of the realm. Period....Decisions have consequences, and send signals. People in the newsroom are grumbling; people around the town I have to work in every day are laughing." The e-mail's subject header read: "Some of us have jobs to do."

John King may have had a job to do on January 18, but many of his colleagues no longer did. The previous day, CNN News Group chairman and CEO Tom Johnson had announced in a staffwide internal memo that the network was undertaking "regrettable, yet unavoidable short term adjustments to the size of our work force." Those adjustments, which were implemented over the next two weeks—and accomplished in some instances by having guards escort employees immediately out of the building because, Johnson told *Brill's Content*, he feared they might "go postal"—rattled the company. CNN laid off 400 staffers, roughly one in ten of its 4,000-plus employees. Many of those who were dismissed had, like on-air correspondent Carl Rochelle, been with CNN since its infancy and invested more than a decade in Ted Turner's vision of a 24-hour news channel where, as the network's oft-repeated mantra puts it, "the news is the star."

The frustration evident in John King's internal e-mail, which was obtained by *Brill's Content*, is shared by an overwhelming majority of the more than 40 former and current CNN correspondents, anchors, producers, executives, and talk-show hosts interviewed for this article. And that frustration is by no means limited to what most consider an extraordinary lapse in judgment—Johnson himself now concedes it was "a mistake"— on the part of CNN's senior management to allow Larry King to accept an invitation to emcee the opening ceremonies of the Bush inauguration. CNN is in the midst of the most turbulent and demoralizing period in its history. Aside from the layoffs, and the persistent rumors that another round is on the way, CNN staffers face declining ratings, increasingly stiff competition, a pronounced leadership vacuum, a drastic programming shift, and a new corporate parent, in the form of a merged AOL and Time Warner, that many fear cares more about the bottom line than quality journalism. Indeed, there is a growing concern—internally, at least—that CNN's corporate executives are jeopardizing the network's 21-year-old hard-won brand identity as "America's most trusted news source." As one longtime CNN staffer says, "If Ted Turner were dead, he'd be rolling over in his grave."

To be sure, CNN is not imploding. It still leads the three major all-news networks in overall viewership, and it remains the most impressive newsgathering operation on cable television. As many of the employees interviewed for this article pointed out, CNN's 150 correspondents outnumber all of the reporters at all of the other networks combined; CNN's international operation, with 42 bureaus worldwide, is unrivaled in television news. Although many who work at the network are concerned that it is shifting away from hard-news coverage, few question CNN's fundamental journalistic soundness.

CNN's Larry King (in brown overcoat) greets and hugs President George W. Bush at the inaugural celebration as singer Ricky Martin looks on.

The media market, however, is vastly more competitive and fractured than it was when Turner founded the network, and cumbersome companies like CNN are easy targets for upstart competitors. What's more, shareholders don't reward competence or even profits—they reward continued growth. CNN's leadership came to that realization last year and, in a dramatic repositioning, unveiled in January what

Photo illustration by John Eder

Johnson calls a "new CNN for a new era." But the changes have fostered discontent and disillusionment among the rank and file, many of whom were perfectly happy with the old CNN. As Washington bureau chief Frank Sesno puts it, "It's like refurbishing the train while it's going 150 miles per hour and still taking on passengers."

Faces of the politburo (from top): Tom Johnson, Eason Jordan, Sid Bedingfield

According to many CNN producers and correspondents, the turmoil raises questions about CNN's very identity. Can a 24-hour all-news network survive commercially in today's media environment? Sure, CNN is profitable—Johnson says last year was its most profitable ever. But how can CNN continue to boost profits while ratings and market share decline? Can thoughtful, hard-hitting reporting remain CNN's core mission when viewers reward shouting over substance? It's a long way from CNN's Bernard Shaw in Baghdad to Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly in New York City, and many CNN insiders fear that management is directing the network away from its commitment to delivering hard, breaking news—in a programming shift that has dramatically reduced the amount of traditional, prime-time news—and imitating Fox and MSNBC in a desperate grab for ratings.

CNN staffers also worry about a trend toward softer coverage throughout the day, citing long segments on heroic dogs and puffy pieces on the Atlanta Boat Show. Most troubling, perhaps, is the strong sense among CNN staffers that nobody is in charge of the network, that the layoffs and restructuring stem not from a larger journalistic sensibility but from budgetary concerns in anticipation of Time Warner's merger with AOL. (The layoffs were announced five days after the merger was approved by regulatory authorities.)

John King declined to comment for this article, as did many of his colleagues at CNN, most of whom cited a clause in the CNN contract that forbids unauthorized discussions with the press. (Because of that clause and because CNN's standard severance clause with those who were recently laid off contains a nondisclosure agreement, this article relies on many who agreed to speak only on the condition of anonymity.) But it is widely rumored, and has been reported in the New York *Daily News* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, that King is unhappy at CNN and intends to leave the network, possibly for ABC, when his contract expires in April. King won't confirm those reports, but his supervisor, Sesno, says the network is trying hard to keep him. That CNN may be on the verge of losing such a high-profile reporter is not a promising sign.

Nor is the Larry King episode. "When people saw Larry King embrace the president," says a Washington bureau insider, "there were screams." If John King and his colleagues were shocked by Larry King's appearance at the event, CNN executives weren't. "We considered the offer to have Larry King emcee at length," says Sid Bedingfield, the executive vice-president and general manager of CNN/U.S. "The management team decided that because King would be introducing the entertainment only, it could go forward." Tom Johnson, who is, in CNN's byzantine corporate structure, the man to whom Larry King reports, says the decision was "a bad call," adding that John King's e-mail "reflected [the thoughts] of many people within the news group." Bedingfield says CNN's ethics committee, which customarily signs off on this sort of speaking engagement, never considered the request.

"It is beyond scandalous—the way they handled this," says a former CNN executive. Another source, a producer based in Atlanta, says he had been warned that King would emcee the affair but was subsequently told that the deal was off. Such confusion isn't unheard of in organizations as large as CNN, but according to a network insider, it illustrates a larger obstacle: a lack of leadership from the top. "It is fair to say," the source says carefully of the Larry King episode, "that a number of the senior executives had been so consumed by the larger reorganization that whether they were focusing on important editorial aspects is a legitimate question. This is a 24-7 operation, and it requires 24-7 adult supervision."

At CNN, supervision is in short supply. "They don't know what they want to be, and there's no clear leader," says one source in the Atlanta headquarters, referring to the senior management. "They're going to keep going along and try not to spend too much money. It's accidental journalism." CNN's accidental approach dates from last September, when Rick Kaplan, then president of CNN/U.S., was ousted. Kaplan, who had been hired in 1997 from ABC, where he had produced news programs for 17 years, was, by many accounts, an imperious and divisive figure. But he had, all agree, a clear vision: CNN should move toward highly polished, expensively produced programming that would attract "appointment viewing," as opposed to the constant daily news flow that had characterized the network. Kaplan launched a slate of costly programs such as the recently canceled *CNN & Time*; though they offered in-depth coverage of stories you wouldn't find on the networks, the shows were ratings disasters. Between 1998, Kaplan's first full year at the network, and his departure last year, CNN's prime-time household viewership declined by

Is America's news leader in jeopardy? As one longtime CNN staffer put it: "If Ted Turner were dead, he'd be rolling over in his grave."

more than 20 percent, according to Nielsen Media Research. (Kaplan declined to comment for this article.)

Today, CNN remains ahead in total viewership compared with Fox News Channel and MSNBC, but that's largely because it's available in more U.S. homes than its competitors are; 81 million households have access to CNN, versus 57 million for Fox and 61 million for MSNBC. CNN's average household viewership has fallen by 5 percent over the past year, as Fox and MSNBC have attracted new viewers at an astonishing rate—according to Nielsen figures supplied by Fox, Fox's average January household viewership increased by 132 percent over last year's figure and MSNBC's by 51 percent. Among households that get all three channels, the contrast is even more severe: A Nielsen study commissioned by CNN cofounder Reese Schonfeld (who left CNN in 1982 and recently wrote a book criticizing the network) shows that CNN lost viewers among such households during the Florida recount coverage, while Fox's and MSNBC's viewership exploded. Similarly, in households where Fox and CNN compete head-to-head, Fox's popular *The O'Reilly Factor*, an hourlong program that airs at 8 P.M., beats CNN stars Wolf Blitzer's and Greta Van Susteren's new half-hour programs in that time slot two to one.

After removing Kaplan late last summer, CNN Broadcasting CEO and president Terence McGuirk told *Brill's Content*, "Rick ran CNN/U.S., an analog television business. The future of that job is going to be hugely interwoven with the digital activities" of the merged AOL Time Warner, suggesting that a post-Kaplan CNN would be organized to deliver news across multiple platforms, from wireless to instant messaging. Indeed, correspondents and producers describe a move away from packaged reports, which involve taped footage and don't lend themselves to "repurposing" in other formats, and toward constant, news-ticker-style live coverage and updates.

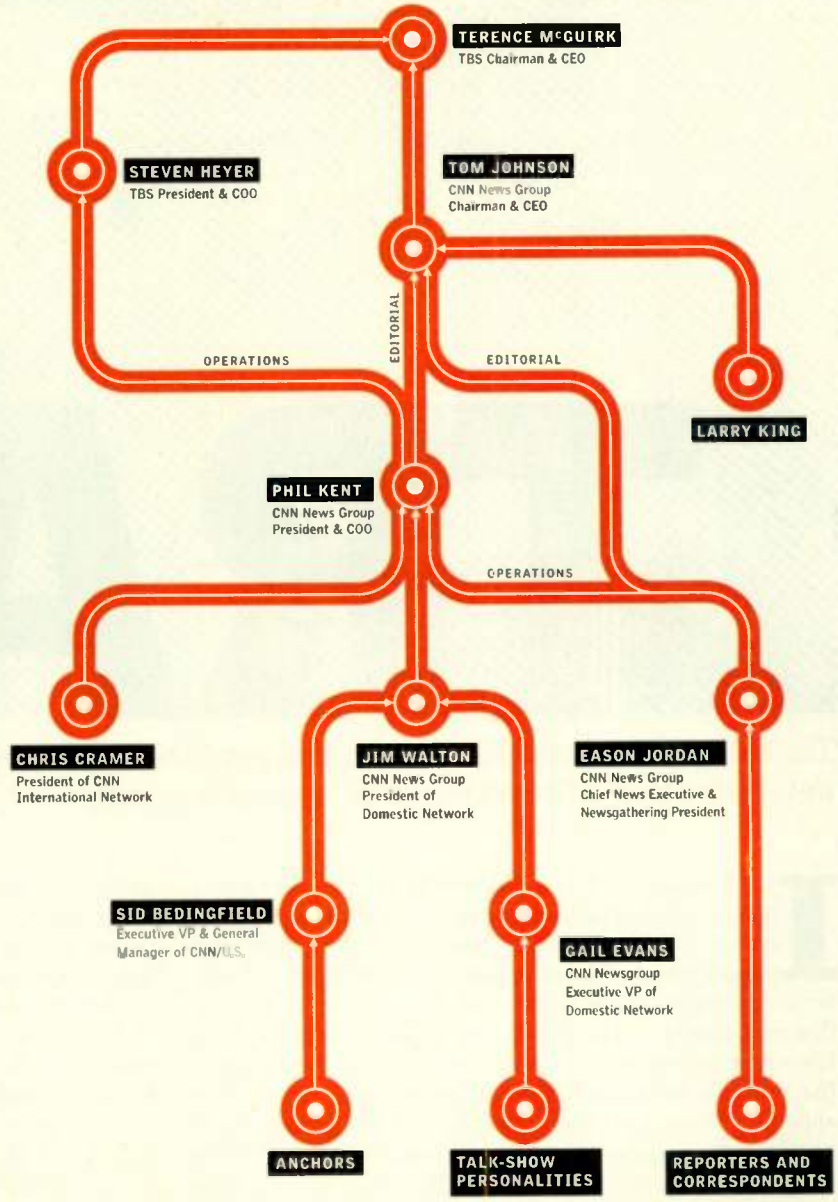
Still, in many ways, the post-Kaplan CNN isn't organized at all. Kaplan wasn't replaced per se; in the management restructuring that attended his dismissal, the position of president of CNN/U.S. was eliminated. Even for CNN veterans, deciphering what remains requires patience and understanding of Talmudic proportions. When told that this reporter had attempted to draw a flowchart of who reported to whom among CNN's top management, one high-level insider replied, "It probably looks like Hillary Clinton's 1993 health-care plan."

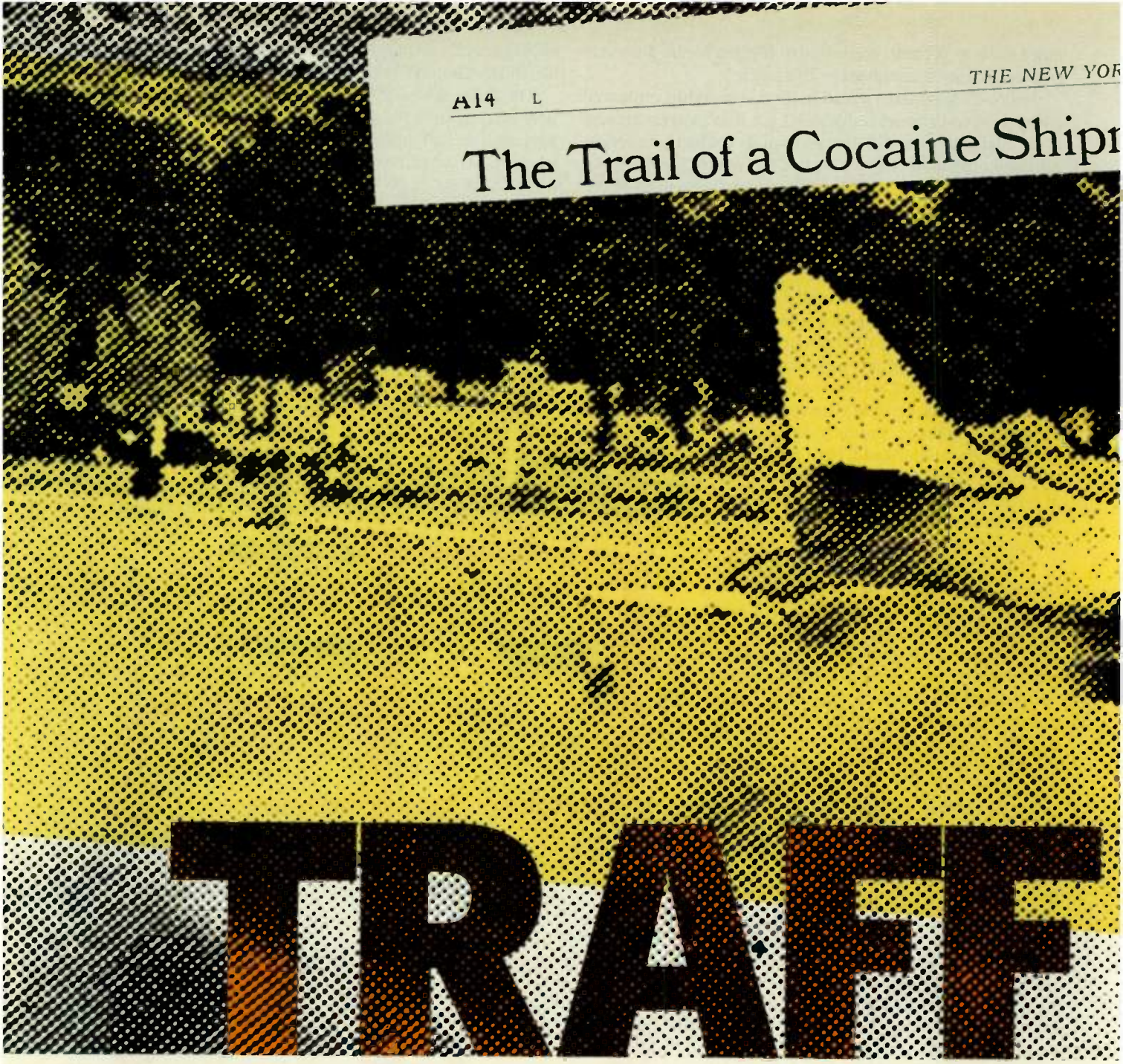
The closest figure CNN/U.S. has to a leader is Sid Bedingfield, who was Kaplan's No. 2 and is responsible for the day-to-day operation and all programming decisions at CNN. Gail Evans, who also has the title executive vice-president, is responsible for all of CNN's talk shows, such as *Crossfire* and *The Capital Gang*. And Eason Jordan, the chief news executive and newsgathering president for the CNN News Group, presides over CNN's reporters and correspondents. In CNN's labyrinthine hierarchy, anchors such as Wolf Blitzer report to Bedingfield, talk-show personalities such as Greta Van Susteren report to Evans, and correspondents such as John King report to Jordan.

So who, exactly, is in charge? "That question gets asked a lot, internally and externally," says chief operating officer Phil Kent, who confirms that Bedingfield is in charge of CNN/U.S. "What we tried to do with this reorganization is to get maximum collaboration across everybody [CONTINUED ON PAGE 121]

WHO'S IN CHARGE AT CNN?

Below, our chart of who reports to whom among the ranks of CNN's top executives. Says one source of CNN's management structure: "It probably looks like Hillary Clinton's 1993 health-care plan."





The Oscar-nominated film *Traffic* has been lauded for its honest and unflinching depiction determination to be as realistic as possible, one *New York Times* reporter's expertise

In the summer of 1999, a curious tour took place in Tijuana, Mexico. Leading the expedition was Tim Golden, 39, a veteran reporter for *The New York Times*. Accompanying him was a small group from Hollywood: film director Steven Soderbergh, producer Laura Bickford, and screenwriter Stephen Gaghan. Golden was introducing them to his contacts, people he knew from having covered the drug war in Mexico throughout the nineties. In a rented Ford Explorer, they drove from appointment to appointment, meeting with Drug Enforcement Administration agents and other government officials, Mexican police officers, and members of the Tijuana drug-trafficking underworld and their families and defense lawyers. Soderbergh was preparing to direct *Traffic*, an intricate, sweeping film about the war on drugs, and one of its three story lines was to be set in Tijuana, a primary trade route for illegal drugs heading into the U.S. Soderbergh and his colleagues were on a fact-finding mission.

Traffic's impact depends largely on its realism—and it has made an impact. Gaghan won a Golden Globe for *Traffic*'s screenplay, and the movie is nominated for five Oscars, including best picture and

The headline and photo from an article by Tim Golden about a Mexican drug bust, which inspired a memorable scene in *Traffic*

IMES INTERNATIONAL WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 1995

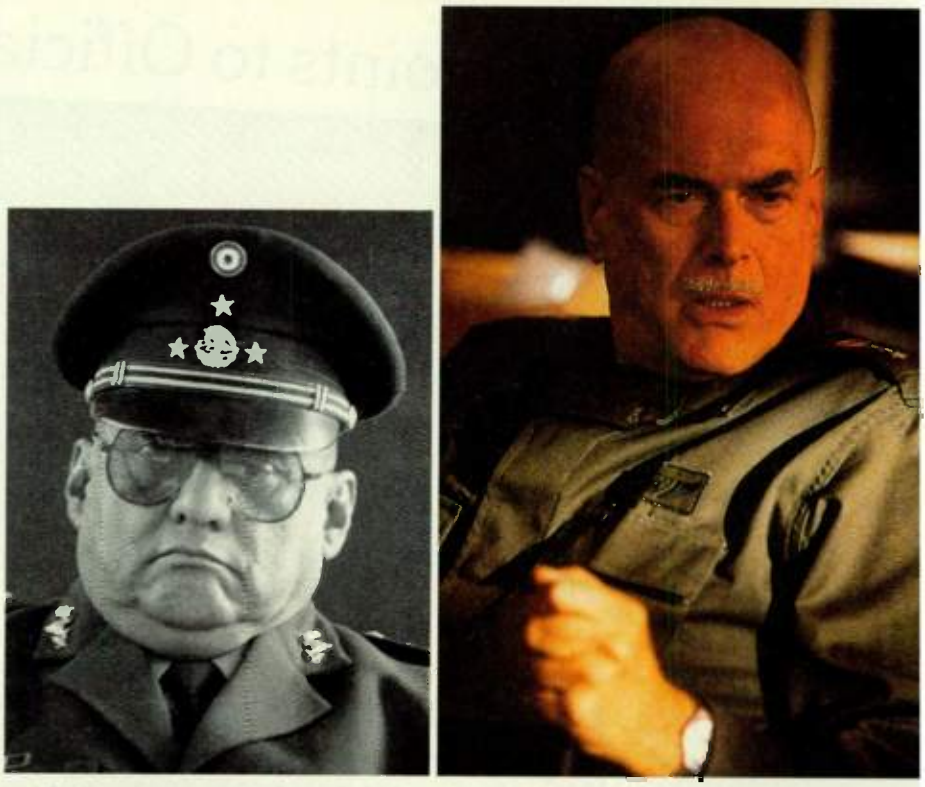
ent in Mexico Points to Official Corruption

of America's eternal drug war. And in the filmmakers' proved invaluable. By Luke Barr

best adapted screenplay. The movie (which is distributed by USA Films, a division of USA Networks, Inc., whose chairman and CEO, Barry Diller, is a limited partner in this magazine's parent company) has also sparked op-ed pieces on drug policy, the attention of a Washington think tank, and comment from people such as Mexico's foreign minister, whose aide said he found the movie "balanced." Critics have lauded the film's pseudo-documentary style, achieved with a large and diverse cast, foreign locations, and cameo appearances by politicians, all shot with handheld cameras. Says Soderbergh, "I wanted people to walk away thinking, 'That was real.'"

Gaghan had been researching the drug war for a different project before he began working on the screenplay for *Traffic* and recently disclosed his past experiences as a drug addict, all of which, he says, helped him write a realistic movie about the subject. Soderbergh, explaining the unlikely success of a movie that takes on such serious material, says he thinks "people are interested in politics when they understand how it connects to their lives." In making a film about America's drug war, a piece of contemporary history hard-wired to our nation's politics, laws, and foreign policy, Soderbergh needed to have his facts straight. "I was prepared to be criticized for sins of omission," he says. "But

I didn't want to get attacked for being half-cocked or superficial." And so he hired Tim Golden, who shared a 1998 Pulitzer Prize for the *Times*'s reporting on the effects of drug trafficking in Mexico, to act as a story consultant. Golden would read and take extensive notes on every draft of the screenplay, placing him at the center of an arduous effort to make the film comply with reality.



Left: Mexican drug czar General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, who allegedly took bribes from a drug lord, provided inspiration for *Traffic*'s General Arturo Salazar, played by Tomas Milian (right).

Golden's advice was multifaceted: Most significantly, he helped Soderbergh untangle the thicket of drug-war relationships—between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement, between rival cartels in Mexico, and between all the factions within these groups. *Traffic*, which is based on a 1989 British miniseries titled *Traffik*, doesn't have a good guy/bad guy structure but rather offers a panoramic and ultimately disillusioned view of a problem nobody has been able to solve. Many of Golden's contributions were based on an almost anthropological understanding of the various cultures of the drug war—DEA lingo and technology, Washington policy-speak, Mexican police procedure.

Soderbergh, Bickford, and Gaghan had all read Golden's articles in the *Times* and found his input invaluable, although Gaghan says he was well versed in the subject before Golden joined the project. "I'd been down on the border before, driven all over down there on my own doing research," he says. Gaghan instead emphasizes Golden's "deep empathy for the way U.S. drug policy affects the people of Tijuana. He was sad about what had happened in Tijuana. More important than any detail or any introduction he made was the melancholy he felt. A screenwriter can do all the research in the world, but you can't fake that." Gaghan's minimizing of Golden's factual input on the screenplay is contradicted by Bickford and by Soderbergh, who says that "none of us had the depth of knowledge about that country and about that issue that Tim had." Golden gave his notes directly to Soderbergh, who passed on relevant comments to Gaghan.

Golden had spent most of the nineties in Mexico; from 1991 to 1995, he was the *Times*'s bureau chief, and from 1997 to 1999, he served as an investigative reporter for the foreign desk. He'd covered the assassination of a presidential candidate and a Roman Catholic cardinal, the Chiapas rebellion, the collapse of the peso, and—the reason Golden had this job in the first place—the rise of Mexico as the primary drug route into the U.S. By the early nineties, after the breakup of Colombia's Medellin cartel, Mexico had replaced the Caribbean and southern Florida as the main U.S. entry point for illegal drugs. The Mexican drug cartels prospered: They had been transporting cocaine from Colombia for cash, and they now began taking a cut of the product instead. By actively participating in the drug trade rather than acting as middlemen, they earned exponentially more money—so much money that Mexico's law-enforcement apparatus was quickly overwhelmed, and just as quickly corrupted.

Central plot elements of the film and several characters are based more or less directly on Golden's reporting. (Golden received permission from the *Times* to consult on *Traffic*.) In the opening scene of the film, for example, two Mexican cops, played by Benicio Del Toro and Jacob Vargas, make arrests and confiscate drugs after an airplane transporting cocaine lands in the desert outside Tijuana. They quickly find themselves surrounded by Mexican federal police officers, who take the drugs off their hands. Leading the *federales* is General Arturo Salazar (played by Tomas Milian), who becomes a corrupt Mexican counterpart to Robert Wakefield, the American drug czar played by Michael Douglas. Both of these stories appear in recognizable form in Golden's reporting. On April 19, 1995, the *Times* ran a story by Golden about an estimated 10-ton cocaine bust made by highway patrolmen in the western Sierra Madre after an airplane transporting the drugs landed in the desert. Some seven and a half tons went missing after federal police confiscated the drugs from the local officers. "It turned out," says Golden, "that the deputy attorney general in charge of that case [in Mexico] was being paid off by the drug traffickers." The Salazar character is based on General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, the Mexican drug-enforcement chief whose arrest in 1997 for allegedly taking substantial bribes from a notorious drug trafficker was widely covered in the press, by Golden and others. The movie-reality connection in that case is "quite direct, very literal," says

L. ALMANDO GONZALEZ/AP; R. BOB MARSHAK/USA FILMS

According to Laura Bickford, one of *Traffic*'s producers, the "entire Mexico story line was inspired by Tim's reporting."

Michael Douglas (foreground) stars as the American antidrug czar Robert Wakefield in Steven Soderbergh's film *Traffic*.

Golden. Before his arrest, Rebollo had been praised by U.S. drug czar General Barry McCaffrey as a soldier "of absolute, unquestioned integrity"; in *Traffic*, Wakefield meets with Salazar to discuss interdiction strategy. According to Bickford, the "entire Mexico story line was inspired by Tim's reporting."

Beyond providing raw material for the screenplay, Golden's contacts helped secure the cooperation of law enforcement agencies in the filming of *Traffic*. Their cooperation, in turn, meant access to such locations as the San Ysidro border crossing in San Diego and the DEA intelligence center in El Paso. Golden introduced the filmmakers to Craig Chretien, retired head of intelligence for the DEA, one of the agency's most senior positions. "Tim and I go back years," says Chretien. "I met him when I was down in Peru, working on an unusual paramilitary operation with the Peruvian police." Chretien took notes on the screenplay and later agreed to appear in the film, giving Michael Douglas, as the newly installed drug czar, a briefing tour of the DEA intelligence center. This is one of a few moments in *Traffic* that blend fiction with reality—a customs official also plays himself in the film. "We talked to him as if he was the real drug czar," says Chretien of his scene. "Soderbergh told me, 'Give a real briefing. Just make sure you say these two sentences.' Douglas's questions were better than some government officials' questions are."

BOB MARSHAK/USA FILMS (2)

Screenwriter Stephen Gaghan (left) with *New York Times* reporter Tim Golden, who consulted on *Traffic*

In addition to inspiring some of *Traffic*'s plotlines and answering many of Soderbergh's questions—Would a Mexican drug lord himself conduct a negotiation, or would he send an underling? Would the drug czar ever meet with pharmaceutical lobbyists? What is the preferred torture method of the Mexican police? How explicitly would DEA agents discuss payments with an informant?—Golden had a few larger concerns about the verisimilitude of the screenplay's first draft. He found unrealistic the rapid metamorphosis from housewife to drug lord made by Catherine Zeta-Jones's character, the wife of a powerful American drug trafficker who goes into the business after her husband is arrested; the rapid and dramatic ascension from crooked cop to Mexican drug kingpin by Benicio Del Toro's character (this story later changed significantly); and, most striking, a scene (later dropped) in which Michael Douglas's drug-czar character smokes crack cocaine.

"That scene just didn't work for me at all," says Golden, laughing. According to the original screenplay, after Douglas confronts his daughter about her drug addiction, he's curious to see for himself what it is about the drugs that's destroying her—and lights up her crack pipe, experiencing an intense high. Chretien says he argued until he was "blue in the face" that the scene should be cut from the screenplay. "We rehearsed the scene where Michael finds the drugs in his daughter's bathroom," explains Soderbergh. "And I thought, 'There's just no way this guy would do drugs.' Especially these drugs, with the paraphernalia and the preparation required. Michael Douglas said, 'I agree with you. I'll shoot whatever you want, but I agree with you.'" Soderbergh says he's glad he excluded the scene: "It would have completely derailed the audience. It would have taken them half an hour to recover."

Golden's suggestions on the Zeta-Jones character were ultimately rejected. "I had some stupid ideas they didn't use," he says, although he scoffs at another scene that survived in which DEA agents conduct their first meeting with an informant in a swimming pool. "That would never happen," he says. Craig Chretien laughed off the pool scene as "Hollywood," as well as another scene, in which an assassin plants a bomb under two DEA agents' car: "You wouldn't have that kind of access to cars. But I understand; it's Hollywood. You've got to blow up a car."

In the end, perhaps the most important effect of Golden's work as a consultant on *Traffic* was how he managed to deepen the filmmakers' view of Mexico. "I think they saw it initially as a swamp of corruption, a kind of amoral place," says Golden. "But how people operate in Mexico makes [CONTINUED ON PAGE 124]

BATTLE

AOL and Time Warner were confident—too confident, it turns out—that their merger would win easy approval.

By Robert Schmidt

A review of the fierce behind-the-scenes lobbying battle over the largest media coupling in history shows how strategic missteps put the company in such a bind that it had to accept extraordinary conditions on the deal.

Last fall America Online chief executive officer Steve Case and Time Warner chairman Gerald Levin made their way through the metal detector and past the security guard to the third-floor office of federal trade commissioner Mozelle Thompson, on Pennsylvania Avenue, ten blocks from the White House, in Washington, D.C. It was an important meeting for Case and Levin—their first (and only) official session with Thompson, who had been assigned by Federal Trade Commission chairman Robert Pitofsky to shepherd the review of AOL and Time Warner's proposed merger through the agency. Along with four other commissioners, Thompson was to assess the deal for antitrust violations and ensure that the new company would not unfairly dominate the market or harm consumers.

The meeting with Thompson and five or so staffers was cordial, and the conversation was progressing nicely. Thompson was asking general questions about the transaction when suddenly, as one person in the room recalls, Levin interrupted. "The problem with you, Mr. Commissioner," Levin said, "is that you don't understand the Internet and how it works." One of Thompson's staff lawyers gasped. Thompson, in fact, is one of the most knowledgeable FTC commissioners on Internet-related issues; he even taught a graduate class at Princeton University called "The Next Generation Internet Policy." (AOL Time Warner declined to comment on the details of the meeting; Levin did not respond to requests for comment.)

Levin's faux pas was typical of the companies' missteps as they tried to navigate the regulatory process: It showed a surprising lack of understanding about whom they were dealing with in government. The incident also spoke to a certain arrogance: From the day AOL and Time Warner announced their merger, in January 2000, they displayed absolute confidence that federal officials would easily approve it.

When the companies did get final approval this January, the lawyers and executives who spent all of last year negotiating with regulators and fighting the deal's opponents were almost too exhausted to celebrate. AOL Time Warner's general counsel, Paul Cappuccio, was sitting at his desk at AOL's headquarters in Dulles, Virginia, on December 14, staring at the FTC's Web page when news of the FTC's 5–0 approval broke. He let out a "Yesss!" that rang through the legal department, and then he went back to work.

In what had become one of Washington's most brutal lobbying battles, the companies had one more hurdle to jump: the Federal Communications Commission. Because the FCC—whose standard for approving the merger was that it be in the public interest—worked closely with the FTC, the FCC's endorsement was nearly guaranteed. Still, it would be four more weeks before AOL and Time Warner could legally combine their companies. Finally, at 4:30 P.M. on January 11, with the FCC's press release spitting out of fax machines, George Vradenburg III, AOL's chief Washington lobbyist, gathered his staff in the conference room and popped open a few bottles of champagne.

Over the past six months, *Brill's Content* has interviewed participants on all sides of the deal, including the officials who reviewed the merger. Some of the merger's opponents, such as The Walt Disney Company and a small band of public-interest groups, were happy to talk, hoping their comments would prompt the government to place restrictions on the companies.

Back from battle: AOL CEO Steve Case (left) and Time Warner chairman Gerald Levin are bloodied but unbowed after gaining regulatory approval for their merger. Photo manipulation by Jesse Champlin; original photo by Les Stone.

Disclosure: Brill's Content founder and CEO Steven Brill and Time Warner were partners in the creation of Court TV. As a result, Brill now owns an interest in AOL Time Warner.

ROYAL

Executives from AOL and Time Warner, however, agreed to speak officially only after the merger was completed in January.

AOL Time Warner is the largest media company ever created. The merger married AOL's nearly 27 million online subscribers with Time Warner's content factory, which includes Warner Bros. movies, CNN, HBO, Warner Music Group, *Time* magazine, and *Sports Illustrated*, to name a few. Time Warner's other big asset is cable television; the company services about 13 million cable subscribers (20 percent of the nation's cable households) in some of the country's biggest markets. Although the new company's reach is enormous, much of its power is still only speculative. The high-speed (broadband) Internet is in its infancy and used by few consumers. Cable seems to be the medium of the future for broadband, which is also offered via telephone lines (digital subscriber line, or DSL), wireless technology, and satellite. AOL Time Warner will surely also become a leader in the convergence of television and the Internet—a platform called interactive television, which most experts agree could change how news and entertainment are delivered to consumers—and in instant messaging, which portends the meeting of the Internet and telephones.

AOL and Time Warner don't apologize for what they call their tough negotiating tactics. Indeed, some FTC staffers said that although the negotiations were difficult, AOL and Time Warner conducted themselves professionally. "I don't agree that they made missteps. I think it was a tough negotiation with talented lawyers," said Richard Parker, who at the time was director of the FTC's Bureau of Competition. For their part, AOL and Time Warner contend that they always were willing to make concessions. Once FTC chairman Pitofsky had articulated his demands, an AOL Time Warner executive noted, the companies quickly negotiated the deal. Both AOL and Time Warner, however, made serious public-relations mistakes and underestimated the resolve of their competitors who opposed the merger. Their dealings with the government regulators were at times marked by poor communication and mistrust.

Although AOL and Time Warner officials said they were confident about getting approval, their actions during the final week of review at the FTC showed how close the deal came to disintegrating. Washington-based public-interest lawyer Andrew Jay Schwartzman, who lobbied for government restrictions on the merger, said that AOL officials urged him and his public-interest cohorts to back off. "They were calling us in a panic, [saying,] 'You guys are pushing too hard; the whole thing is going to blow up; the Time Warner people are going to walk.'" Schwartzman recalled. "They were really nervous." (An AOL Time Warner spokesman said he knew nothing about this conversation.)

Disney lobbyist Preston Padden declared war on AOL and Time Warner.

PADDEN: RON SACHS/CORBIS SYGMA. TIMELINE (L TO R): STUART RAMSON/AP, JOE MARQUETTE/AP, ILLUSTRATIONS: ANN PICKARD

Parker, who oversaw the investigation and the negotiations, said the merger could have ended up in federal court. The FTC, in fact, had its communications office prepare two separate press releases on the day of the vote, one announcing the agreement and the other saying that the agency was suing AOL Time Warner. FTC commissioner Thomas Leary, a Republican appointee, pointed out that the 5–0 decision misleadingly suggests that the approval was easy. "It could have gone the other way," he said.

The fight surprised even veteran dealmakers such as Time Warner president Richard Parsons—now co-chief operating officer of the combined company along with Robert Pittman—who had helped guide Time Warner through two other high-profile and contentious mergers involving Time Inc., Warner Communications,

AOL and Time Warner announce plans to merge. AOL chief executive officer Steve Case and Time Warner chairman Gerald Levin demonstrate a seamless blending of corporate cultures.

10

AOL Time Warner's first hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee goes well for Case and Levin.

29

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH

2000

LATE JANUARY

AOL Time Warner begins to lobby Capitol Hill.

Economists, engineers, and antitrust lawyers meet with Disney officials to discuss what the merger means to the market and to Disney.

Disney decides to lobby Congress, the FTC, and the FCC for "open access," meaning a company must allow competing Internet service providers access to its cable lines.

11

AOL Time Warner files a 22-page document with the FCC that barely addresses serious issues.

and Turner Broadcasting Systems. When I met with Parsons in his 29th-floor office at AOL Time Warner's Rockefeller Center headquarters in January, about a week after the deal closed, I asked him how the companies had managed to prevail. "Like Winston Churchill said, 'blood, sweat, and tears,'" Parsons replied. He wasn't joking. Parsons, who was then being mentioned as a contender for a cabinet post in the Bush administration, seemed weary of Washington and the long lobbying battle he had just endured. What surprised him most, he noted, was how many businesses crept into the regulatory process to challenge the proposal. "We didn't anticipate that there would be this outpouring of complaints and objections," he explained.

In the end, government regulators imposed on the two companies tough, far-reaching conditions, which are set to last five years. Most important, AOL Time Warner was forced to commit to "open access"—allowing at least three competing Internet service providers (ISPs) on its cable lines, which will power the broadband Internet—ideally ensuring that this new medium will have a diversity of voices. The company also accepted provisions that will ensure that AOL will not give up its DSL service in areas in which Time Warner provides cable and that AOL will keep the same pricing it offers for DSL service in non–Time Warner Cable areas. The agreement also guards AOL Time Warner from discriminating against other ISPs' content, including interactive television, that flows through AOL Time Warner's cable pipes. Moreover, AOL Time Warner will be watched by a "monitor trustee," paid for by the company but supervised by the FTC.

A monitor trustee can subject AOL Time Warner to an unprecedented degree of federal scrutiny.

At press time, the trustee was expected to be Dale Hatfield, an academic now affiliated with the University of Colorado at Boulder who worked at the FCC until the end of 2000. Whoever holds the post can subject AOL Time Warner to a degree of federal scrutiny unprecedented for a media company. Competing businesses, public-interest advocates, and consumers can complain to the trustee if they think the company is violating the agreement it made with the FTC. The trustee will make sure that AOL Time Warner, as the proprietor of the cable pipes, does not harm companies or consumers. If an ISP thinks that AOL Time Warner is, say, trying to drive up the fee for broadband Internet connection, the ISP can ask the trustee to look into the deal. If a competing company believes that AOL Time Warner is restricting access to the competition's online content, perhaps by making it harder for a consumer to find, that company can ask the trustee to investigate. In short, a monitor has now been established to look over the shoulder of one company—AOL Time Warner—that competes with a host of other companies that have no such potential impediment.

"What was put in place is an entire structure of public scrutiny and oversight that can and hopefully will be put in place if AOL misbehaves," said Gene Kimmelman, codirector of the Consumers Union and a key player in the battle. Although much of the trustee's power will depend on AOL Time Warner's behavior and on the number of complaints filed, consumer groups like Kimmelman's and small ISPs have vowed that they will be watching to make sure AOL Time Warner abides by the agreement. "A regulatory cloud was put over their head," Kimmelman added. AOL Time Warner executives said they will have no problem working with the monitor trustee, whose power, they contend, is limited.

The conditions are even more notable because back in January 2000, when the companies announced their merger, Time Warner's Levin and AOL's Case told reporters that they expected few problems from the government. The two companies didn't trigger standard antitrust concerns: They did not have overlapping businesses, nor did either company dominate in its respective markets, mainly cable and content for Time Warner and the Internet for AOL. Throughout the merger-review process, AOL and Time Warner maintained this posture, which may have been a crucial mistake. Some regulators thought that by publicly declaring their intention to sail

Time Warner president Richard Parsons said that getting merger approval required "blood, sweat, and tears."

PARSONS: RON SACHS/CORBIS SYGMA; TIMELINE: AP/TIME WARNER

Stanford Law School professor Lawrence Lessig continues to help public-interest groups in their fight against the merger.

APRIL

MAY

1

Time Warner pulls ABC from its cable systems, creating a climate of opposition to the merger in Washington.

Padden doesn't sleep for 48 hours after the blackout and spends his time strategizing in New York, then continues in California.

Multibillion-dollar media conglomerates lobbied the government for business goals that elude them in the free market.

through the negotiations, the two companies were spinning the situation and trying to box the agencies into a corner. Some also felt that when the companies spoke to the press during the negotiations, their comments painted too rosy a picture of the proceedings. "They took a public position, a public PR war before they even started [the review process]," FTC commissioner Thompson, a Democratic appointee, told me in early February. "It's not an effective strategy to pursue over here."

The yearlong battle royal (as more than one participant has labeled it) reveals how money and influence—from AOL Time Warner and its adversaries—work in Washington. It also illustrates how multibillion-dollar media corporations take to the halls of Congress and the private offices of the regulators to achieve the business goals that elude them in the free market.

The companies and groups that lobbied the FTC and the FCC against the deal are among the best-known names in the media and telecommunications business. And their lobbying often smacked of hypocrisy: Media conglomerates that fight government regulation of their own companies argued for federal regulators to impose restrictions on AOL Time Warner. Among the parties knocking on commissioners' doors were Microsoft, General Electric (NBC), Disney (ABC), BellSouth, Verizon Communications, SBC Communications, AT&T, RCN (Starpower), and a host of small ISPs from across the country. A group of public-interest organizations worked openly—and doggedly—on the campaign, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Media Education, the Media Access Project, the Consumer Federation of America, and the Consumers Union. Many companies approached the FTC in private, fearing recrimination from AOL Time Warner; one of the biggest stealth objectors was Internet portal Yahoo!, which played a key role in persuading the FTC to restrict the merger, according to people close to the deal. Media executives such as Michael Eisner of Disney, Bill Gates of Microsoft, Sumner Redstone of Viacom (CBS), and Rupert Murdoch of News Corp. (Fox) followed the negotiations closely. Eisner, for example, met with FTC commissioners last summer. Gates, at the very end of the FCC's review, called FCC chairman William Kennard and pleaded for the commission to require AOL to makes its instant-messaging system compatible with that of rivals. Barry Diller's USA Networks lobbied behind the scenes, as did Vivendi Universal (Universal Studios), according to lobbyists and others who worked on the deal.

Everyone in the lobbying process had something to fear, even though much of the fear was speculative. The content companies were afraid that AOL Time Warner's long reach and its control of the cable pipes would make getting their content to consumers difficult or impossible. Consumer groups were scared that the huge conglomerate would stifle the little guy, whether an independent Web writer or a small ISP. The regulators, meanwhile, feared that their restrictions would be either heavy-handed or inconsequential because of the rapid changes occurring in the market "on Internet time." The same fear affected AOL Time Warner, but differently. The company worried that any condition would limit its ability to compete.

Disney's chief Washington lobbyist, Preston Padden, had his own brush with fear at about 6 in the morning on January 10, 2000. In the basement of his suburban-Washington home, Padden stared bleary-eyed at CNBC while exercising on his NordicTrack. The merger was announced. "I lost my rhythm and just fell off, onto the floor," Padden told me in September, when we first talked about his objections to the merger. Time seemed to freeze for Padden as he lay on the floor wondering about the new media landscape that had suddenly been created and what it meant for Disney. "It was just a stunning announcement," Padden said. The combined $183 billion behemoth (by the end of the regulatory process, AOL Time Warner's value had decreased but was still huge at $112 billion) would make even Disney seem small.

The 52-year-old Padden is tall and dapper, with a penchant for wearing ties sporting Disney characters. He is press-friendly, and he would soon become the leading, most vocal opponent of the merger. But first he and his bosses at Disney had to be persuaded to take on AOL Time Warner. Disney—which owns movie studios, ABC, and ESPN, among other properties—is the second-largest content company in the world, behind AOL Time Warner, with which it competes directly. But Disney also relies on Time Warner's cable company to connect its television networks to viewers. Disney was worried that cable companies would control Internet access as they had controlled cable programming, and Padden, along with his corporate bosses, had been watching a

Members of Congress write letters (both supporting and expressing concern about the merger) to FTC chairman Robert Pitofsky and FCC chairman William Kennard.

JUNE

15

Production on Disney's secret video begins.

5

Disney lobbyist Preston Padden holds a secret opposition meeting. Attendees include representatives from Bell telephone companies, most TV networks, and public-interest groups.

JULY

Disney's Padden and public-interest groups produce fact sheets and folders filled with news articles and position papers for members of Congress and staff explaining why open access is important.

STUART RAMSON/AP

AOL's Case addresses questions about the proposed merger with (seated from left) Time Warner's Levin and Ted Turner, AOL's Robert Pittman, Time Warner's Parsons, and AOL's J. Michael Kelly.

spate of mergers in the cable industry for the past few years. AT&T's acquisitions of Tele-Communications Inc. and MediaOne Group, two of the nation's larger cable operators, posed problems for Disney, but company executives didn't want to anger the cable companies by opposing the deals.

However, Disney considered AOL Time Warner, with its content business and Internet dominance, especially dangerous. Shortly after the merger was announced, Padden had a series of meetings with Disney's top executives in Los Angeles. His bosses endorsed his plan to launch a quiet lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill and at the FTC and the FCC to herald Disney's newfound concern for open access.

AOL had long been a corporate supporter of government regulation of open access. The company was one of the top financial supporters (paying $100,000 in annual dues) of a lobbying coalition called openNET, which had been pushing the issue on Capitol Hill for the past few years. As the country's biggest ISP, AOL also was worried about getting access to the cable pipes. AOL lobbyist Vradenburg had been urging Padden—and Disney—to join the group. Congressional offices were familiar with AOL's campaign for open access (AOL paid two private lobbyists to work on the issue in 1999). However, once the proposed merger was announced—and AOL effectively bought the cable lines—the lobbying stopped.

By the day of the announcement, AOL had already begun changing its position. *The Washington Post* noted AOL's "stunning

The FCC holds a hearing on the AOL Time Warner merger.

27

AUGUST

Disney's video, "Consumer Choice in the Broadband Marketplace of Tomorrow," premieres before congressional staff. The video was also shown to reporters.

LATE AUGUST

Negotiations among Disney, AOL Time Warner, and the FTC heat up. No side is willing to make concessions.

SEPTEMBER

20

Case and Levin make their first (and only) visit to the FTC. They met with the FCC the previous day.

After Time Warner blacked out Disney-owned ABC, suddenly the word *monopoly* entered the merger debate.

reversal" as it shifted from asking for the government to mandate open access to deciding that the market would do a better job. "We always hoped [open access] would come through the marketplace, rather than having to have government get involved," Case said at the press conference. Levin also weighed in: "We are going to take the open-access issue out of Washington, out of city hall, to the marketplace," he told reporters. Although AOL still denies having flip-flopped, its new position would come to haunt it as the lobbying battle progressed.

Trade commissioner Mozelle Thompson (above) was insulted by a remark from Time Warner's Levin.

AOL and Time Warner went straight to Capitol Hill. Although Congress has no official role in the government's merger-approval process, the Senate and the House influence public opinion by holding open hearings and weighing in with letters to the FTC and the FCC expressing either concern or support. Case, Levin, and Time Warner president Parsons placed more than 50 "courtesy calls" to key senators and representatives, including the chairmen of the committees that would soon hold hearings: Senator Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee; Senator John McCain, a Republican from Arizona and chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee; and Representative Thomas Bliley Jr., a Republican from Virginia (now retired) who was then the chairman of the House Committee on Commerce. The executives also dispatched their lobbyists, including AOL's Vradenburg and Time Warner lobbyist Timothy Boggs (who has since retired), to preliminary meetings on Capitol Hill to discuss any contentious questions that might be raised during the hearings—which the press, the public, and the regulators would be watching.

Trying to head off concerns about open access, AOL and Time Warner put out a "memorandum of understanding"; although not legally binding, it promised that the companies would open their cable lines to other ISPs. The hearings, which began in February, went smoothly, and Levin and Case testified.

The process was bumpier at the FCC, which reviewed the merger to approve the transfer of cable and broadcast licenses from one company to another. (Because AOL and Time Warner were creating a new company, the licenses owned by Time Warner had to be transferred to the new company.) The companies' first FCC filing was a 22-page document that barely addressed any of the serious issues. Instead, AOL and Time Warner said that the merger would serve the public interest because it would speed the development of the broadband Internet and make more e-commerce applications available to consumers. Regulators demanded that the company make an additional filing. "The FCC went nuts, as they should have. It was a huge tactical error," said Andrew Jay Schwartzman, head of the Media Access Project.

Robert Pitofsky (below), chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, which finally approved the AOL Time Warner merger

PITOFSKY HILLERY SMITH GARRISON/AP

Nor did the two companies make many friends at the FTC. Some officials were annoyed that AOL and Time Warner made public statements arguing that the merger raised no antitrust problems—and that the two companies went straight to Congress to promote the deal. "It's rare that a company announces a merger and then

OCTOBER

27 Case and Levin testify in front of the House Committee on Commerce.

4 Wisconsin small-businessman Stephen Heins delivers to the FTC Time Warner's onerous contract offer to a small Internet service provider, blowing a hole in AOL Time Warner's "trust me" approach.

6 Opponents of the merger testify before the House Committee on Commerce.

11 The European Union approves the merger after Time Warner halts a proposed merger with EMI Group, one of the world's largest music companies.

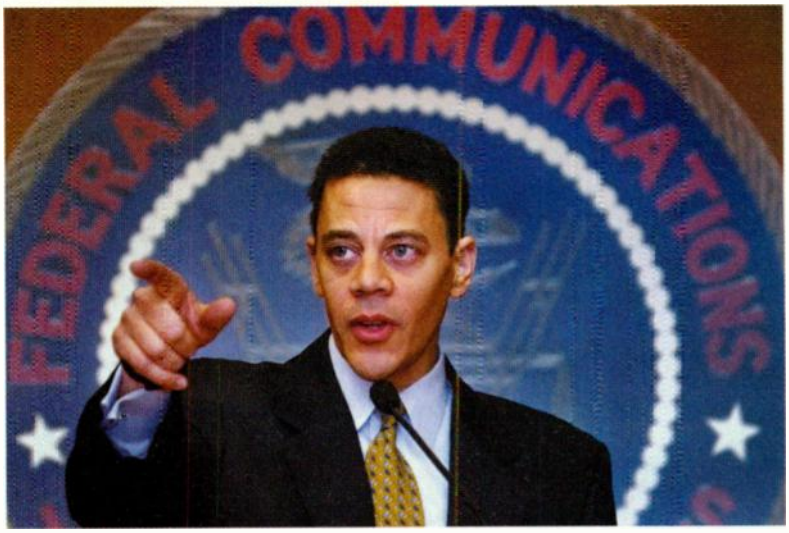
NOVEMBER

9 The FTC commissioners, ready to block the deal, extend the deadline for three more weeks in order to get concessions.

20 AOL Time Warner and EarthLink reach a deal for EarthLink to be carried on the new company's broadband network.

goes to Capitol Hill before talking to the regulators," said FTC commissioner Thompson. What's more, Thompson noted, the companies took an adversarial stance toward the FTC inquiry. Although in reviewing mergers of this magnitude the FTC would prepare a court case in the event that negotiations break down, much of the initial inquiry is merely fact-finding. The FTC's staff requests documents from the companies, asks many questions, and deposes executives to determine the companies' business practices and understand the market they operate in.

Some FTC officials and staff thought that AOL and Time Warner were stonewalling them. The companies' strategy, as some at the FTC saw it, was to reveal as little information as possible. For example, during the September meeting with AOL CEO Case and Time Warner chairman Levin, FTC commissioner Thompson recalled Case saying that interactive television "didn't exist." (An AOL Time Warner spokesman refused to comment on the conversations at this meeting.) Thompson looked down at his desk, where he had a copy of *eCompany Now* magazine (a Time Warner publication), the cover line of which was "Interactive TV—It Exists!"



Chairman William Kennard's Federal Communications Commission imposed additional restrictions on the merged company.

KENNARD: KENNETH LAMBERT/AP. TIMELINE: THOMAS LAU/AP/AOL TIME WARNER

On May 1, 2000, at 12:01 A.M.—in a move that has been described as one of the biggest business blunders of all time—Time Warner pulled ABC's television programming off its cable systems in seven markets across the country (including such large cities as New York, Los Angeles, and Houston). The screen turned blue. Moments later, another screen appeared that said, "Disney has taken ABC away from you."

Time Warner cut ABC because of a business dispute over the price that Time Warner Cable would have to pay to carry certain networks owned by Disney. Although seemingly unrelated to the merger, the deal was being negotiated when the merger was announced. Disney, sensing that Time Warner couldn't afford to make waves while regulators were examining the merger, pressed Time Warner to make a deal on terms highly favorable to Disney. In addition to asking Time Warner to pay much more than Time Warner thought it should, Disney wanted the company to agree to a provision that would require Time Warner not to favor its content over Disney's on the Internet and with interactive television. In the absence of a new contract to replace the one that had just expired, Time Warner decided to yank ABC just as the May sweeps period, which Disney uses to set advertising rates, was starting.

But the move turned into a public-relations fiasco for Time Warner. The company was castigated by the mayor of New York and numerous members of Congress. Suddenly, the word *monopoly* was being uttered on Capitol Hill and in newspaper editorials. The loaded word played right into the hands of Padden and Disney, who took out full-page ads in newspapers across the country that said: "Only an arrogant monopolist would drop its most popular channel to retaliate against ABC for raising questions about Time Warner's stranglehold over your television, cable, and Internet access."

Time Warner was also criticized by the FCC for violating an FCC rule. FTC commissioner Thompson was in his New York City apartment that night in May—watching ABC. Thompson later said that the image of the blue television screen stayed with him for a long time. "If there was ever a clear picture that this company had market power and was willing to use it, that was it," said Thompson.

Padden, who was in New York City that night, began planning war. He stayed up the entire night, he said, maintaining almost constant phone contact with ABC president Robert Iger, ABC's general counsel, and the head of ABC's public-relations office mapping out talking points for media [CONTINUED ON PAGE 126]

AOL Time Warner faxes to the FTC the company's final concession, in which it agreed to forward to the company's general counsel letters written by ISPs that complained about access to AOL Time Warner content.

13

DECEMBER

EARLY DECEMBER

A flurry of last-minute lobbying against the merger begins.

14

FTC commissioners approve the merger with concessions. The vote is 5–0.

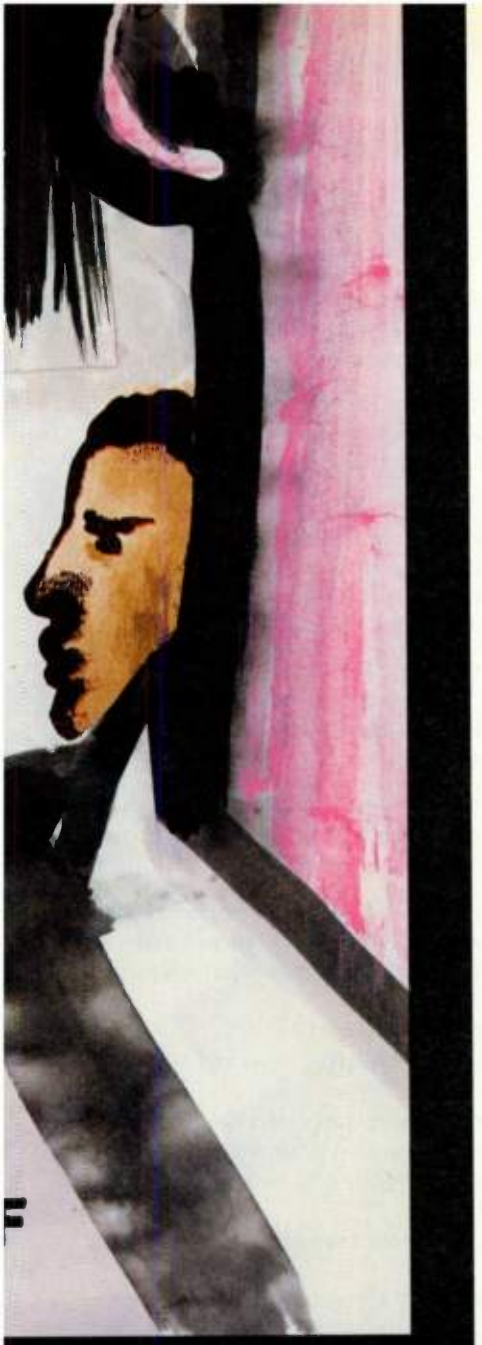
JANUARY

2001

11

The FCC approves the merger with conditions on "advanced" instant messaging. The vote is 5–0.

THE COLOR OF RATINGS



A veteran broadcaster interviews more than 100 TV-news executives, producers, correspondents, and crew—and discovers that in a ratings-obsessed management culture, stories about minorities are routinely rejected or stalled. By Av Westin

In the 50 years since I schlepped cigarettes and coffee for Edward R. Murrow at CBS News, I have worked with, competed against, or supervised just about everyone who runs TV news today. Before retiring from daily operations in the early nineties, I held nearly every conceivable newsroom position, including vice-president for program development at ABC News and executive producer at *20/20*. So I had no trouble arranging interviews with more than 100 executives, producers, correspondents, researchers, production assistants, and production crews from five commercial networks, PBS, four station chains, and the syndicated program *Inside Edition*. To help me assess how television news regards and upholds its responsibility for fairness and accuracy, they participated in bracing roundtables and private meetings. I distilled their insights—nonattributable to encourage full disclosure—into the handbook *Best Practices for Television Journalists*, underwritten by The Freedom Forum as part of its Free Press/Fair Press Project. I provided *Brill's Content* with third-party transcriptions of those conversations; for the purposes of this article, I conducted several follow-up interviews, which I transcribed myself.

Some of what I found is, well, old news. But much of it is revelatory and disturbing—especially the reality that race is a criterion for story selection. This article will focus on precisely that issue. But to frame the discussion, let's confirm what you should already know: Over the past decade, TV-news management has become obsessed with the bottom line—which means that ratings rule as they never have before. The vice-president for news at a major station group told me:

> *I think what's happened over the last five or ten years is that certain ratings information, research information that was never shared beneath a certain level, started being shared. So you ended up getting young producers...worrying to a great degree about ratings....And so, when you walk into certain newsrooms...you hear producers talking about their quarter-hour strategy, how they're going to get the meter, get the audience over to get the credit for the quarter hour.*

In other words, they're not thinking about the journalism: Demographics, and minute-by-minute Nielsen analyses, have influenced story selection. And that, in turn, has prompted my project's most sobering discovery: Every week—every day—stories about African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians are kept off the air. Based on the anecdotal evidence I encountered, I feel confident in declaring that racism is alive and well in many television newsrooms around the country. Race is a substantial factor in assigning stories and deciding whom and what to include. And some African-American reporters and producers have quit the business frustrated and angry [see "Airing Race," *Brill's Content*, October 2000].

Illustrations by Filip Pagowski

Television news has always been schizophrenic about race. Since as

Based on the anecdotal evidence I encountered, I feel confident in declaring that racism is alive and well in many television newsrooms around the country.

far back as the sixties, networks and stations have been hesitant to air minority faces; they recognized that they needed what they called "passports" into racial stories. When white crews were, say, being turned away from, or in some cases threatened at, a civil-rights march and African-American crews were getting access, management moved to hire more African-Americans. An all-black crew might operate better in an urban ghetto; an African-American correspondent might get the first (or only) interview with a militant leader. In the eighties and nineties, sensitized by pressure from African-American, Hispanic, and Asian advocacy groups, news managers diversified their staffs. Newsrooms now employ more minorities than ever before (but to a lesser degree in top decision-making positions).

The national editor at a network-news operation told me:

I think the people gathering the news have to...be of the broad spectrum of the people you're covering. You want to have something that's close to that. [As a best practice], your staff has to reflect your population, because they will see the things that you don't see. They're more inclined to jump up and say, "Shouldn't we be doing [this story]?"

This view was shared by the vice-president for news at a group of local stations:

When you have minorities on staff, it helps sensitize people to issues that would otherwise be ignored.

In theory, that's splendid. It's also utopian, ignoring the crushing quest for ratings. Viewer demographics (demos) reveal an audience's age and racial composition, and as one former executive told me, "[Blacks] don't get the demo." Indeed, "They are bad demos" is a euphemism for "Avoid stories about African-Americans." No one among the top management of the network newsmagazines would even begin to acknowledge that race influences story selection. Even off the record, with their office doors closed, they seemed genuinely surprised by my questions. What's more, although the executives confirmed that ratings are monitored by the minute, they barely allowed that the numbers affect content at all, let alone racially. Lower-level staffers, however, said that pieces involving minorities are routinely dismissed with such code phrases as "It's not a good story for us."

I began my project by interviewing several network producers, researchers, and production associates. They had worked for evening-news broadcasts, for network morning programs produced by news departments, and for special programs and prime-time newsmagazines. They had considerable experience with daily operations, breaking news, and longer features. Since I had intended to concentrate on the best practices for maintaining accuracy under deadline pressure, I started by asking questions such as "How do you catch errors in a breaking-news situation?" and "Give me your three best practices for checking spelling, correct name identification, and job description." The discussion would typically move from the procedural to the conceptual to the overarching policies dictating content and programming. And then, invariably, to race.

A roundtable of six network staff members prompted these comments:

We don't see other faces—black faces, Asian faces....I can say...with confidence, [that] every piece that I've seen...that includes black people [involves] black issues: black hair, black bodies.

Can't we do a story about day-care centers and have a black day-care owner...? Why can't they be regular, normal people doing regular, normal things that aren't just associated with their ethnic backgrounds? It makes me sick.

If you watch BET [Black Entertainment Television], it's the only time you actually see "normal black folks" that are doctors....When [BET interviews] people...their news and their public-affairs shows tend to have experts of color....You don't see it in mainstream television.

There's a great deal of stereotyping. "This is our poverty story." It's about rural poor whites. When we do those poor white people, they're in a trailer in West Virginia or Kentucky....I'm so sick of that stereotype...."This is our black story."

I don't know how many times I've heard..."The story is even better because the poor disenfranchised guy is black." It lights people up because...it fits in with our little [preconceptions].

I phoned several of my former colleagues at the commercial networks to ask how and why the exclusionary system worked so effectively. A highly regarded associate producer at a network newsmagazine said:

It's not the stories we do; it's the ones we don't do.

A producer who has worked at both NBC News and ABC News explained:

It's a subtle thing. A story involving blacks takes longer to get approved. And if it is approved, chances are that it will sit on the shelf a long time before it gets on the air. No one ever says anything. The message gets through.

A freelance segment producer managed to decode the subtlety:

They were told to find [something] sort of more upscale, or there was some euphemism used for the kind of people who they were going to do stories about. The implication being: "We don't want white trash in our stories; we don't want downmarket black people in our stories; we want pleasant white faces who are articulate and will make for safe television." So there's always a bias that way, I think.

A network-newsmagazine field producer was a bit more specific:

What you need to find for a white family is a lot less than what you need to find for a black family. If the white family lives in a decent-enough-looking house and a decent-enough-looking neighborhood...your cameras can make it look okay. Like, they have a swing set in the backyard and the kids' rooms look okay. And they dress alright. You can call them middle-class and it's okay, as long as they speak alright. [But] if they're black, she better be a doctor. He better be running a computer industry, and they better be sending their kids to private school—and we still won't put them on the air.

This producer, who also worked on a network medical special, added:

We needed a family that has [a mentally disabled] child for an

hour on that disability. I found a great, great upper-middle-class family in Miami, but they were black. I was told that since [the condition] is found in both white and black children, we should go with the whites. "Find another family."

The notion that stories about African-Americans yield unsatisfactory ratings is passed on to those who work in the trenches and are assigned to "cast" the characters in their stories. An executive producer at one of the network newsmagazines responded that he can't approve a story if one isn't presented to him. But the prevailing sensibility in most newsrooms virtually guarantees that stories involving African-Americans will rarely reach his desk—because the staff knows they won't air. A field producer said:

I was sent out on a story...[about] how...you deal with a mentally ill person in your family. Fascinating subject material, because most of the time...family members can't get their brother or sister help...or their daughter or son. [The initial source was a local newspaper that] had never called [the story's subject] black. He was from a middle-class neighborhood. Never said he was from [a predominantly African-American section of town]. So I go out there; I meet with the attorney, and the attorney doesn't mention it to me, either. I get out to the facility...and this man walks in, and he's black. And I'm, like, "Well, now I've just wasted my whole day." I knew...it was a complete and total waste of my time.

The producer added that after she returned to New York and mentioned that the subject of the story was African-American, they said that they indeed wanted her to find somebody else.

One reporter said that her bosses had made it clear that stories were not to feature black people, period:

They whisper it, like "cancer." [They whisper,] "Is she white?"

"Yeah, she's white."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, it says they are from Slovakian descent; I'm assuming."

"Well, go out and check."

The reporter continued:

In other words, get your ass on a plane, go out there, and make sure, before we spend thousands upon thousands of dollars and...send our cameras out there, that [viewers] are going to feel something for these people....[Basically that means] make sure they don't live in a trailer....I love the people I work with; they're nice people, and I don't know where they're getting their information from....When people live in a trailer, people watching at home, I've been told, do not give a crap. And if they're black, no one cares.

Hard news also is problematic. The experience of one former producer at a network evening-news [CONTINUED ON PAGE 129]

This year, you couldn't escape reports about IT, a top-secret invention that was hailed as being more important than the Internet. And in the media's intense speculation, they confused hype with reality.

By Mark Boal

OVERDOING IT

The difference between a particle and a wave was easy to demonstrate. Dean Kamen took a flashlight from the pocket of his army jacket and began pointing it in my direction. "See, you can see this," he said. Then he covered the lens with his hand. "But not this." Removing his hand, he twirled the flashlight in a tight circle. "Where is the light coming from now? Clearly, you can tell." Sound was another story. Sound was a wave and traveled differently. "Where is my voice coming from?" he asked, covering his mouth. "You don't know, exactly. You can't say if it's here," he said, jabbing the air with his other hand, "or here."

Dean Kamen at home in 1997 with a rare model of a 19th-century combustion engine

This was no ordinary science lecture. Kamen was very much in demand at that moment, having been the subject of some 200 news stories in the last few weeks. All of them said he'd invented something marvelous, something paradigm-shifting and earth-shattering, but since that information came from a leak and not from Kamen himself—who was declining to comment—not one story could say what the something was. Lacking a name, it was called IT, and was variously described as a hovercraft, a teleportation device, and a motorized scooter. It was said to be "bigger than the Internet." And the week before the Super Bowl, Kamen's IT was the subject of more queries on the Internet search engine Lycos than the NFL.

MY FIRST REQUEST TO interview Kamen at his office in Manchester, New Hampshire, was met with the polite suggestion that I'd be better off going skiing. A few days later I called again, this time from Manchester. I told Kamen's assistant that I might just do some skiing at Loon Mountain, and asked if Kamen would have any time before then. I was granted a dinner with Kamen, provided I not heckle him about IT and provided I hear him out on a subject dearer to his heart, a robotics competition for middle- and high-school students Kamen had organized called FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). Its mission, Kamen said without any irony, was to promote the notion that scientists ought to be celebrities.

Kamen himself is an odd candidate for celebrity. Sitting across from me in his blue jeans and faded jacket, his black hair brushed back in a gravity-defying pompadour, Kamen, who is 50, spoke in the nasal tone and rapid-fire rhythm of his native New York. "I want the best of both worlds," he said. "I want the press to go and see how great FIRST is, but I don't want the press to ruin my ability to run a small R & D company with secret projects."

He had come to dinner with Donna Tamzarian, the human-resources director of his company, DEKA (DEan KAmen) Research & Development Corporation. It wasn't easy being ordinary folks coping with a media onslaught, they said, what with all the phone calls, the pleading, the promises and threats. *60 Minutes II*, which had started filming a story on Kamen before the IT news broke, had returned for a follow-up interview, and Kamen said he was afraid the show would quote him out of context. Now Oprah was calling, too.

"I don't have time to take all these calls, to be on the phone all day," said Tamzarian.

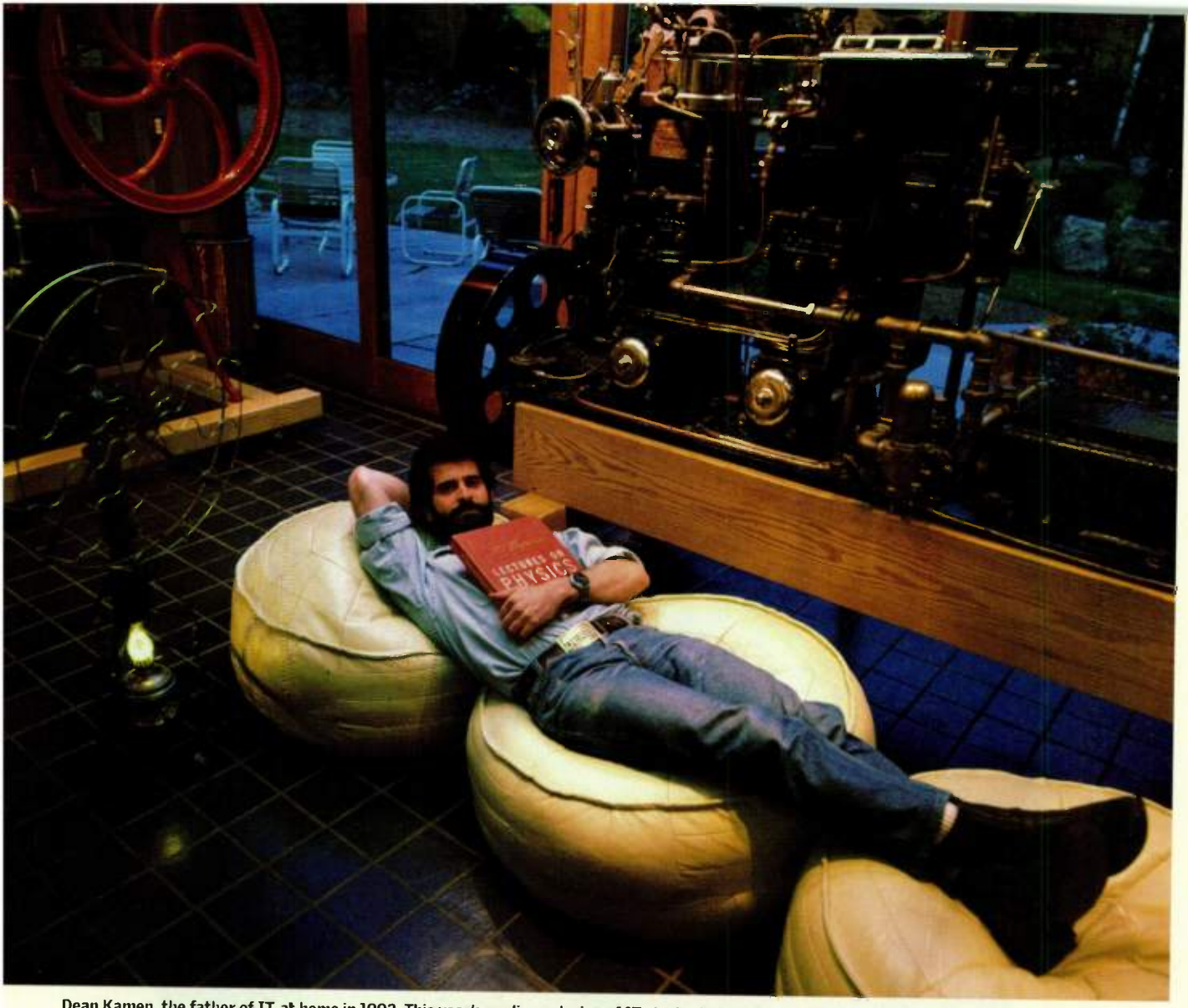
"This woman named Katie..." Kamen began.

"Katie Couric," Tamzarian interrupted.

Apparently, the *Today* co-anchor had been especially persistent.

The media didn't know what IT was, but that didn't keep them from guessing.

L. JOEL PAGE/AP; R. PETER BERSON



Dean Kamen, the father of IT, at home in 1992. This year's media explosion of IT stories has not been entirely welcome.

"I don't want anybody to feel like I'm poking a stick in their eye by not talking," Kamen said.

Around midnight, the lights outside the restaurant were turned off, and it was dim inside. A man from another table approached.

"I just wanted to say hello to the celebrity," he said.

Kamen eagerly shook his hand, then muttered, "Celebrity—that's just what I need."

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a company called Transmeta. The name suggested something big, something futuristic. But that was true of a lot of other Silicon Valley firms; what distinguished Transmeta was its secrecy. I don't mean that Transmeta was unknown—plenty of people knew it existed—but that it was unknowable. Apart from mundane details about its location (Santa Clara), hardly a soul knew what the firm was all about, even whether it manufactured hardware or software.

This was back in 1995. Remember 1995? When the air was thick with speculation and dotcoms were budding in NASDAQ's fertile ground, little fortunes waiting to bloom? Transmeta epitomized the best and worst of that era. Assuming that secrecy implied importance, reporters covered Transmeta's every twitch. Then, in January 2000, with press releases blaring, Transmeta raised the curtain. Some people knew right away; for others, reality took a while to set in. But in the end, it was clear that what Transmeta had invented was little more than another microchip. Dubbed Crusoe, it was supposed to be lightning-fast, but it was actually slower than existing chips. In short, Crusoe was a flop.

Transmeta is still around and may yet turn a profit, but for technology journalists like myself, who had spent years waiting for a chip revolution that never came, Transmeta became a cautionary tale. Judging by how IT dominated the news this January, however, the media still have the will to believe in technology miracles. Perhaps the dotcom boom had made us into a nation of cheerful futurists, but whatever the reason, in the frenzy over Kamen's IT, the hallowed journalistic practice of checking with primary sources was left by the wayside.

Like a self-replicating virus, the story of IT spread through the media. Ground zero was Inside.com, a site for and about media professionals. On January 9, Inside.com's Books section posted a story about Harvard Business School Press's recent acquisition of a forthcoming book; the headline read: "What Is 'IT'? Book Proposal Heightens Intrigue About Secret Invention Touted as Bigger Than

JAMES SCHNEPF/LIAISON

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What Is 'IT'? Book Proposal Heightens Intrigue About Secret Invention Touted as Bigger Than the Internet or PC

Steve Jobs quoted on accomplished scientist's new device: 'If enough people see the machine you won't have to convince them to architect' ... A venerable press pays $250,000 for ... unprecedented secrecy. EXCLUSIVE

[INSIDE]

the Internet or PC. A venerable press pays $250,000 for a book on project cloaked in unprecedented secrecy." The piece itself played up the book proposal's mystery: "Is IT an energy source? Some sort of environmentally friendly personal transport device? A type of personal hovering craft?" In the Inside.com story, we had an eccentric inventor straight out of central casting, "a single man obsessed with his work and out of touch with popular culture." And we had all of it sealed and certified by leading businessmen: "It has drawn the attention of technology visionaries [Amazon.com CEO] Jeff Bezos and [Apple Computer CEO] Steve Jobs and the investment dollars of preeminent Silicon Valley venture capitalist John Doerr...predicting Kamen will be worth more in five years than Bill Gates."

For PJ Mark, the Inside.com reporter who wrote the story, the piece was more about publishing than technology. It was unusual for Harvard Business School Press to pay $250,000 for a book, especially a book intended for a general audience. It was also important to Mark that consumer publishers had turned it down and that Steve Kemper, the freelance writer who wrote the book proposal, "had exclusive access to Kamen and the engineers." Inside.com's readers, who hail mostly from the worlds of publishing and media, no doubt read between the lines and sensed that the proposal about which Mark was writing in such a breathless tone was itself a document designed to stir interest. However, when Inside.com realized it had a story with legs, one that could reach outside its narrow readership of media insiders, the distinction between a tech story and a publishing story was either dropped or ignored.

One day after his piece was posted, Mark appeared on CNBC, and within 72 hours he had appeared on half a dozen shows, including CNN's *Today*, CNBC News, and NBC's *Today*. Mark was joined frequently by Scott Kirsner, a reporter for *Wired* who had profiled Kamen in the September 2000 issue. Together, they fueled the speculation that the invention would—in a phrase that was as meaningless as it was enticing—"change the world."

Then, only three days later, Inside.com continued to drive the coverage by filing a second story, this one comprising largely quotes from various technologists speculating about what IT might be. In the next three weeks, there were an additional 173 stories about IT, or, as it later came to be known, Ginger. (IT was the name Kemper gave the device in his book proposal. Ginger, it turned out, was the name Kamen had originally used.) *The New York Times* ran a chatty piece on January 12 wondering what IT was and followed with a more serious piece in the Week in Review section on January 21, which dismissed the speculation the paper's own coverage of IT had generated as "Nostalgia...masquerading as futurism." *U.S. News & World Report* wondered, "Could [Kamen] even make a wheelchair fly?" *The Washington Post*, on the other hand, cited inside "digerati" sources, who were certain the device was "a wearable car." A headline in *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* commanded, "Behold The Power of Ginger!" The news reached Europe and Asia, too, where Thailand's newspaper *The Nation* quoted local business hero Miko Matsumura as saying that Ginger was "kind of like a flying super tuk-tuk."

Above, the first Inside.com article about IT; below, one of Kamen's patent sketches, which many speculators think might be IT.

FIG. 21

USPTO/NEWSMAKERS

Word traveled at Internet speed. A day after the Mark story, a pair of ardent speculators started theITquestion.com, packed it with articles and a bulletin board, and claimed, within 24 hours, 125,000 visitors. Then came GingerPoll.com ("What do you think Ginger is: Can Opener? Hoax? Hovercraft?") and theGinger.com ("it HAS to involve computers in some sort of way, and not software"). Over at Slashdot.org, the news site for nerds, amateur sleuths posted one of Kamen's recent patent applications, along with more than 50 illustrations he'd submitted for previous patents; the messages ranged from the technological ("Perhaps IT is a robotic prostitute") to the gastronomical ("The George Foreman Grill has already been invented"). By the end of the second week in January, four days after Mark wrote his first piece, Ginger/IT was the fourth most requested search term on the Lycos search engine, right behind Britney Spears.

The websites became the subject of additional news stories, which the sites then posted, generating still further stories. So great was the momentum that not even Kamen—who emerged on January 12 with a statement downplaying the buzz—could stop it. "The leaked proposal quoted several prominent technology leaders out of context, without their doubts, risks and maybes included," Kamen's statement read. "This, together with spirited speculation about the unknown, has led to expectations that are beyond the mere whimsical."

In the three weeks after the Inside.com story ran on January 9, there were an additional 173 stories about IT.

But it was too little too late. Inside.com was invested in the speculation, having devoted three stories to IT. In response to Kamen's statement, Mark filed a retort saying that "Kamen himself made claims as grand as those made by those handpicked witnesses to greatness. In a letter to Kemper about the book proposal, Kamen wrote that the invention would 'profoundly affect our environment and the way people live worldwide.'" Afterward, Inside.com ran a piece evaluating the frenzy it had initiated (titled "The 'IT' Files: Who Cares If the Hype Is True, Let's Talk About the Hype," it also likened the IT phenomenon to the Transmeta one) and also planned to recap the whole affair in its print magazine. In other publications, the point-counterpoint between Kamen and Inside.com was duly noted, and then the speculation rolled on. There were a few skeptical voices. Forbes.com said [CONTINUED ON PAGE 131]

With her commercial-television background and show-business friends, new PBS president Pat Mitchell is trying to turn public broadcasting into popular broadcasting. Is that a contradiction in terms? By Gay Jervey

THE REINVENTION OF PBS

PAT MITCHELL WAS, as usual, in a hurry. It was late September 1999, and Mitchell—who last February was named president and chief executive officer of the Public Broadcasting Service—had planned to fly from Atlanta to London for the premiere of *Cold War*, a documentary she had coproduced for CNN, as president of Time Inc.–CNN Productions. But just a few days earlier, she had received a phone call: Her friend Raisa Gorbachev had died. Mitchell had known Mrs. Gorbachev and her husband, Mikhail, the former Soviet president, since 1993, when Mitchell joined the founding board of Global Green USA, an arm of Green Cross International, Mikhail Gorbachev's environmental organization. Mitchell was torn: She wanted to attend the funeral, of course, but was afraid she might miss the *Cold War* premiere. "The decision to go to the funeral really was last-minute," Mitchell says. "This was a very busy time for me. I called Ted [Turner, who also knows Gorbachev] to see if he was going to go....He could not, but he encouraged me to. So I jumped on a plane."

After arriving in Russia, Mitchell, Matt Petersen, the executive director of Global Green, and his wife checked into the Hotel Metropol and headed straight to the wake. "Over the years, Pat and Gorbachev had really developed a bond," Petersen observes. "It meant so much to him to see her there."

At about 11 P.M. Gorbachev's translator phoned Petersen and said, "Matt, the president would like Pat to speak at the funeral tomorrow." So Petersen phoned the sleeping Mitchell. "She said, 'I can't do that. I have to get to London,'" Petersen recalls. Gorbachev's staff assured Mitchell that she would make her flight, so she agreed.

Mitchell delivered her remarks at the funeral and went straight to the airport. She didn't even have time to hear former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, who spoke immediately after her. "I was pleased that Pat Mitchell accepted my request to speak," Gorbachev said recently through an adviser, adding, "I think Pat will manage well heading this unique and important organization, PBS." His statement continues: "I travel often in the U.S. and have been interviewed many times...by PBS....I know the importance of this institution, but also have seen some of its complexity.

CHRIS PIZZELLO STRINGER/AP PHOTO

PBS president Pat Mitchell addresses reporters at the Television Critics Association meeting in Pasadena, California, last July.

I also know a little something about what skills it takes to make tremendous shifts in such institutions. If there is one person who can help the organization move into the twenty-first century with certain success, it is Pat Mitchell."

Gorbachev's implied analogy between the former Soviet Union and the Public Broadcasting Service is not all that far-fetched; PBS is a sleeping and balkanized giant that needs to be reawakened. And Mitchell's background should serve her well in her new post: She comes from the world of cable and network television, and she is the first producer to head PBS. Mitchell, 58, is setting out to enliven a traditional and bureaucratic media institution that for roughly three decades has been emblematic of quality educational and cultural programming. But a good portion of its franchise has been eroded by cable—A&E, Bravo, The History Channel, and Discovery Channel, among others.

"Ratings count here," says PBS president Pat Mitchell. "There is a sense that being public and popular are these diametrically opposed concepts, and I don't think so."

Mitchell's spacious office in PBS's fortresslike headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C., holds two televisions: one tuned to PBS, the other to CNN. There are framed awards and family photographs, including one of her new husband, Atlanta businessman Scott Seydel. Mitchell stabs at a Caesar salad, eyeing the TVs, and remarks, "When cable came on the scene, public television just sort of said, 'We'll just stay here and keep doing what we do.'" A colleague pops his head in and mentions that Mitchell is running late, and she gets up to leave, her high heels clicking as she moves her slender, redheaded frame toward the door. She tells her visitor that she has "eight more minutes to talk," then goes on to stress that PBS cannot afford to stand still and must capitalize on what makes it unique. "I believe we are an essential service," she insists. "No matter how many channels there are, no matter how many choices consumers have, PBS is not about aggregating eyeballs or customers to sell them a product. Our purpose is to serve the American public, and that fundamentally differentiates us from everybody else in the business."

And yet PBS must keep up with the rest of the rapidly changing media world. Many of its signature programs have been on the air for 20 years or more—*ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre*, *Great Performances*, the *National Geographic* specials, and *Nova*, to name a few. So when many people think of PBS, they hear British accents, opera, and the symphony, and envision *Brideshead Revisited*, nature shows, *Barney*, and ballet—a limited assortment of mostly highbrow images.

What makes Mitchell an anomaly at PBS aside from her background in commercial-television programming is how well connected she is in mainstream media and entertainment circles. Mitchell counts among her close friends Ted Turner, as well as actresses Jane Fonda, Sally Field, and Lauren Hutton. Last summer, after Mitchell assumed her post at PBS, her 3,900-name Rolodex came in handy. She convened two public-television brainstorming sessions at her friend Robert Redford's Sundance Institute in Park City, Utah (Mitchell serves on its board and was married there last September). The idea behind both summits was to discuss the ways in which PBS needs to change and grow. The first was mostly for members of the creative and journalistic communities outside PBS. Attendees included Field; actors Richard Dreyfuss and Jason Alexander; playwright Eve Ensler, the author of *The Vagina Monologues*; director Sydney Pollack; Tom Rothman, then the head of 20th-Century Fox Film Group; Tom Bettag, the executive producer of ABC News's *Nightline*; and political commentator David Gergen. The second meeting, held a month later, was for PBS producers, programmers, and station managers.

Redford ended his opening remarks at the first Sundance meeting by saying, "Let's face it. We're all here because Pat is a persistent pain in the ass." Recalling Redford's comment, Mitchell laughs. "I was sitting there thinking, 'My God! Robert Redford just called me a persistent pain in the ass.'"

She needs to be. As if rejuvenating PBS's programming weren't enough of a challenge, Mitchell must confront its legendarily byzantine structure. Put simply, the Public Broadcasting Service is not a network but the national entity that represents 347 local public-television member stations. PBS is a private nonprofit enterprise owned and operated by the member stations; at a commercial network, afilliate stations around the country generally defer to the network in most matters of scheduling, programming, and advertising. Two years after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, the stations formed PBS to achieve a national cohesiveness—as well as to provide a programming pipeline. "The long and short of it is that ours is a 'bottom up' model, not vice versa," says Jonathan Abbott, a vice-president at member station WGBH in Boston.

Although PBS can commission and distribute programming, it does not actually produce shows itself. Rather, the three largest member stations—WNET in New York; WETA in Washington, D.C.; and Boston's WGBH—supply the bulk of the programming, along with independent producers, such as documentarians Ken Burns, creator of *The Civil War* and *Jazz*, and David Grubin, who made *Napoleon* and *Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided*.

PBS employs some 550 people at its Alexandria headquarters and has an annual budget of about $313 million, which comes

LACY ATKINS/AP PHOTO

Former PBS president Ervin Duggan with *Sesame Street*'s Big Bird in 1996

primarily from the member stations. The largest source of the stations' money, in turn, comes from individual contributions—from "viewers like you," as the station-break refrain puts it—gathered during those periodic intrusions known as fund drives. The member stations then fund PBS's operating revenues by paying two "primary assessments," as they are called—one for programs and the other for overhead and services—which vary depending upon a station's size. Last year these combined contributions constituted $137 million of PBS's $313 million in total operating revenues.

Nonmember revenues are derived from a variety of sources. For fiscal year 2000, $50 million came from educational product sales of home videos, books, and CDs—everything from *The Three Tenors* to *Mystery!* to *Barney*; $44 million from grants from the federally funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the U.S. Department of Education; and $81 million from royalties, license fees, and investment income. Additionally, program underwriting—from charitable foundations such as The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, and corporations, including ExxonMobil, Ford, and Archer Daniels Midland—accounted for $176 million last year.

COURTESY PBS

PBS's Pat Mitchell with former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev: "I also know a little something about what skills it takes to make tremendous shifts in such institutions," he says.

The local outposts—which have their own interests and mandates and have long resisted following one centralized vision—are not an easy group to please. The member stations are fiercely self-protective and believe that only they know what their viewers want. As John F. Wilson, senior vice-president of programming for PBS, puts it, "One of the things that is written into the genetic code of public broadcasting is that local autonomy would rule." Furthermore, since the member stations themselves formed PBS, they are wary of commands from on high—specifically from PBS headquarters, usually called simply "Alexandria" or "Braddock Place," a reference to its street address. Says WGBH's Jonathan Abbott, "PBS was created as a service organization for all of the member stations, so the stations' posture to Pat is 'What are you doing for me?'"

Consequently, the top job at PBS is "a presidency without a portfolio, almost," explains Bill Moyers, who has produced documentaries for public television for more than 30 years, including the popular *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, *On Our Own Terms: Moyers on Dying*, and, most recently, *Trade Secrets*, an investigation of the chemical industry. "The result is that it's very hard for a PBS president to change things with a stroke," Moyers continues. "As the head of PBS, you're more the conductor than you are the director."

Stephen McKenney Steck, president and CEO of member station WMFE in Orlando, adds: "The political and cultural problem that Pat inherits is that we at PBS demand a bold and visionary president, and then as soon as that president does anything bold and visionary, the system has a tendency to shoot that president in the foot."

Mitchell says she hopes that in the realm of programming, she can figure out a way of "keeping the best and reinventing the rest." But it will be a tricky balancing act to branch out while simultaneously sticking to what many see as PBS's mission—to inform, inspire, and educate, and also to measure success by impact rather than by numbers alone. "The question is," Mitchell emphasizes, "how many places does PBS touch American lives?"

The idea of chasing after numbers is anathema to many old-line PBS loyalists. As a result far too many quality programs do not always get the viewership they deserve. "Let's be real about this," Mitchell says. "Ratings count here because we're supposed to reach as many people as possible, and if we're not, then in my mind we're not serving our mission well. Somewhere along the line, there evolved this sense that being public and popular were these diametrically opposed concepts, and I don't think so. We clearly need to open the tent. Compelling content—that's what it's got to be about."

Mitchell's observations point to a larger question facing PBS: Where does it fit in today's broadcasting landscape? "The relevance of the whole system is at stake, really," Mitchell acknowledges. "And I won't be successful in this job unless every public-television station in America is gaining new members and new support. That's the ultimate measurement for me."

In the end, it is the member stations that Mitchell must win over by her programming vision, and given their recalcitrance, Mitchell's persuasiveness—being a "persistent pain in the ass"—is crucial. Mitchell knows that she must listen carefully to her myriad constituents, many of whom do not see eye to eye, but she thinks that such diversity of opinion can be a plus. At her appearance at PBS's annual meeting last June (at which Bill Moyers and Ted Turner spoke) in a packed conference room in Nashville's Opryland Hotel, Mitchell declared to an audience of PBS station managers, executives, and educators, "We will no longer accept the description of a 'dysfunctional' family as many have described us"—a line that was met with applause and even a few cheers.

Pat Mitchell on *Panorama*, the Washington, D.C., talk show she hosted in the late seventies

"I just couldn't stand that everybody used that word, 'dysfunctional,'" Mitchell says, shaking her head. "I mean, it's just not true. There are huge assets here. Plus, let's not forget, it's the only public-television system that we have. And it's essential to have not only a functioning one, but a vibrant and a relevant one."

Mitchell began her television career at Boston's WBZ in the early seventies as an anchor and correspondent. Her time at WBZ, even though it is a commercial station, could be of use to her at PBS. Among other things, she learned the dynamics between a local station and its viewers. "It was the heyday of local television," Mitchell explains. "We did 17 hours a week of local programming in addition to news." To this day, when Mitchell travels to Boston, passersby still stop and greet her as if she were an old friend.

In the mid-eighties Mitchell became a correspondent on NBC's *Today*, then worked as a producer and independent filmmaker and hosted several of her own independently produced programs. She joined Ted Turner's TBS in 1992 as senior vice-president of production and was eventually made president of CNN Productions, where she produced hundreds of hours of documentaries, among them *Cold War* and *Millennium: A Thousand Years of History*.

Vivian Schiller, who succeeded Mitchell at CNN Productions when Mitchell took the PBS post, recalls an incident in the early nineties when she and Mitchell were working together on a six-hour documentary for Turner on Native Americans. They were searching for a high-profile narrator—someone, Schiller explains, "who [would bring] authenticity and integrity and some star power to it. So, of course, Robert Redford's name came up." Schiller pauses, then says, "Well, nobody in the room, including Pat, knew Robert Redford. But, of course, that kind of thing doesn't stop Pat Mitchell—the fact that she doesn't know him."

Schiller continues, "So Pat gets on the phone, [and calls] somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody. And to make a long story short, Pat then gets on a plane and goes to meet Robert Redford to try to persuade him to be involved with this documentary. Somehow she manages to bring Redford on board. He did not end up narrating the shows, but endorsed and helped to publicize them, and within six months she's on the board of the Sundance Institute, and they have since become very good friends. I've known her for so many years, and I study this and I think, 'How can I learn from this? How can I bottle her power?'"

"What attracted me to this job," Pat Mitchell says, "is that this is a critical time in the media landscape, and it's changing at this enormous speed. And public television has a more critical role to play than ever."

So far, many within the system are cautiously optimistic about Mitchell and welcome her experience from "the dark side," as PBS insiders often refer to commercial television. "Yes, Pat is different for us," says WGBH's Jonathan Abbott. "She has lived in more worlds. She will be an

PHOTO: PETER BERSON; VIDEO COURTESY OF WBZ-TV 4

effective inside player, but her instincts are more outside. She can think all the way through to the audience, and that is different—that is breadth and flexibility and the capability of wearing many hats that PBS hasn't had previously."

Indeed, Mitchell's most recent predecessors have come from academic, public-policy, and inside-the-Beltway careers. PBS's previous president, Ervin Duggan, who resigned in October 1999 after five and a half years in the post, had served on the Federal Communications Commission. During his tenure PBS's revenues increased from $182 million in 1995 to $313 million in 2000. However stellar his bottom line, though, Duggan was also known for an imperious manner that alienated stations, making them feel out of touch with Alexandria. (Duggan did not return calls for comment.)

After Duggan left Braddock Place, Mitchell was hired by a search committee comprising members of the PBS board of directors. That board includes PBS station executives from across the country, as well as people from outside public broadcasting. "Pat called me from an airport as soon as the search opened and said that she was interested in the job," recalls Sharon Percy Rockefeller, the president of Washington's WETA, who is on the PBS board. "So her name entered the process early on, and it clicked quickly with Pat." The full board then approved Mitchell's appointment, which was announced in February 2000.

Jane Fonda, who has been a close friend of Mitchell's for nearly a decade, observes, "I think Pat is the right person at the right time for the right company, and it doesn't hurt that she has stellar friends—and by that I don't just mean the movie stars. I mean writers and producers and cinematographers and newscasters—all of the people whose talents are just as important as the flashy ones in front of the camera. They may not be as famous, but they can make or break a project, and Pat knows who those people are."

Mitchell has already made a number of significant programming moves to bolster PBS's relevance and broaden its profile. In November, PBS and National Public Radio teamed for the first time to produce a live, three-hour election special, *Time To Choose*. However logical the partnership between PBS and NPR may appear, the idea initially faced resistance. "When I first convened the meeting about this program, I can't tell you how many people said to me, 'These people don't work together,'" Mitchell recalls. She persevered, and the show has opened the door for future ventures between PBS and NPR. In January, Mitchell announced the creation of *Public Square*, a public-affairs program loosely modeled on NPR's *All Things Considered* that is scheduled to debut next year and will cover "arts, politics, economics, music, history, science, and popular culture." But *Public Square* has its detractors. Martin Koughan, an independent producer who has made documentaries for PBS's *Frontline*, as well as for CBS and CNN, considers *Public Square*'s inclusion of popular culture especially troublesome. "Music, comedy, and investigative reporting; what kind of investigative reporting will a show like that have?" he asks. "It is laughable....Here is Pat Mitchell trying to come up with a show to please a system that is the Tower of Babel. I sympathize with the woman, and I understand why she did this show, [but] it is not what public television should be."

As the new relationship with NPR suggests, Mitchell is eager to form more partnerships with producers outside PBS. Last October, for example, PBS announced *Life In Bold*, a new one-hour magazine series about "America's everyday heroes," such as teachers, doctors, and community leaders. The series is a coproduction between Oregon Public Broadcasting and ABC News's *Nightline*, in conjunction with PBS stations and independent producers across the country, and it will be hosted by ABC News's Michel Martin. In January, PBS and *Nightline* also collaborated on *The Clinton Years*, which was shown in nightly installments on ABC, then broadcast as one two-hour episode of PBS's *Frontline*.

Partnerships with commercial networks, however, can be problematic. As Rebecca Eaton, the executive producer of *Mystery!* and *ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre*, puts it, they are "tricky, because we have to maintain our integrity as a public broadcaster and our legitimacy....[Programs made] with a commercial network [are seen as] sleeping with the enemy." As Eaton's remarks suggest, the member stations are historically resistant to change. "Running PBS is like having a day-care center—you always have to run around and take care of somebody." Eaton continues, "These are people with a deep commitment to public broadcasting and how it should be run." Robert Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University, argues that although "there is clearly a need for change...[PBS's] core audience has liked what it sees enough to continue to subscribe." He adds, "The stations that need to keep those viewers renewing their pledges might have a rough time during this transition."

For the most part, Mitchell has received high marks simply for trying, though it is too soon

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 134]

L: CINDY KARP/CNN; R: COURTESY PBS

Above: Pat Mitchell with Cuban leader Fidel Castro, whom she interviewed on CNN's *Perspectives* in 1998; above right: Mitchell and PBS producer Ken Burns at the 59th Annual Peabody Awards last May

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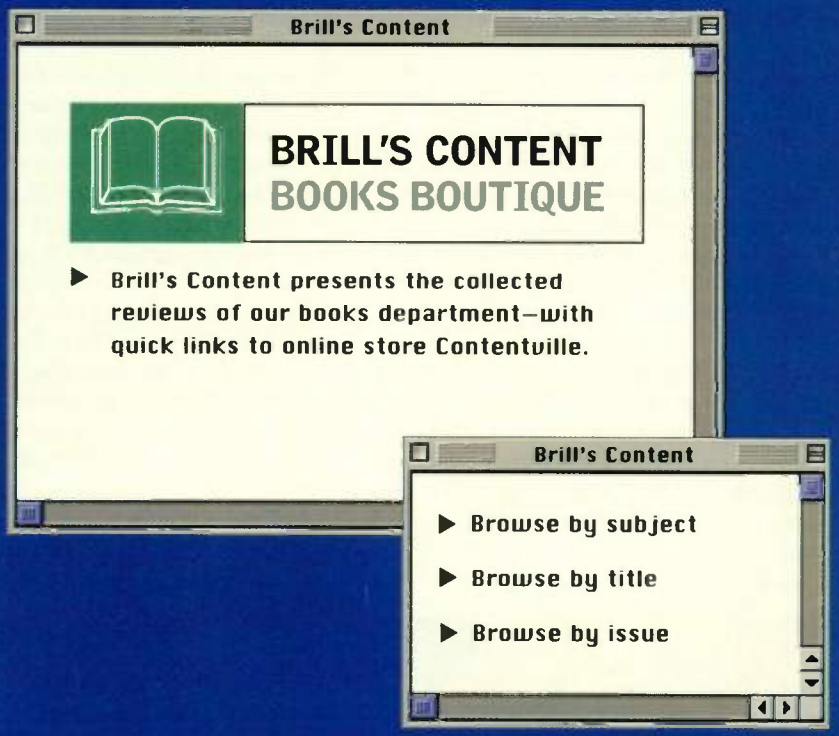

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CONTENTVILLE

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BOOKS

A publisher searches for truth in a Holocaust "memoir" • Harry Potter joins Comic Relief • Veteran reporter Hugh Sidey looks back on nine presidents • Guiding the unprincipled journalist • African-Americans vs. prime time • Feminist icons revised • A writer revisits the racism of her hometown • The history of gays and lesbians in Hollywood

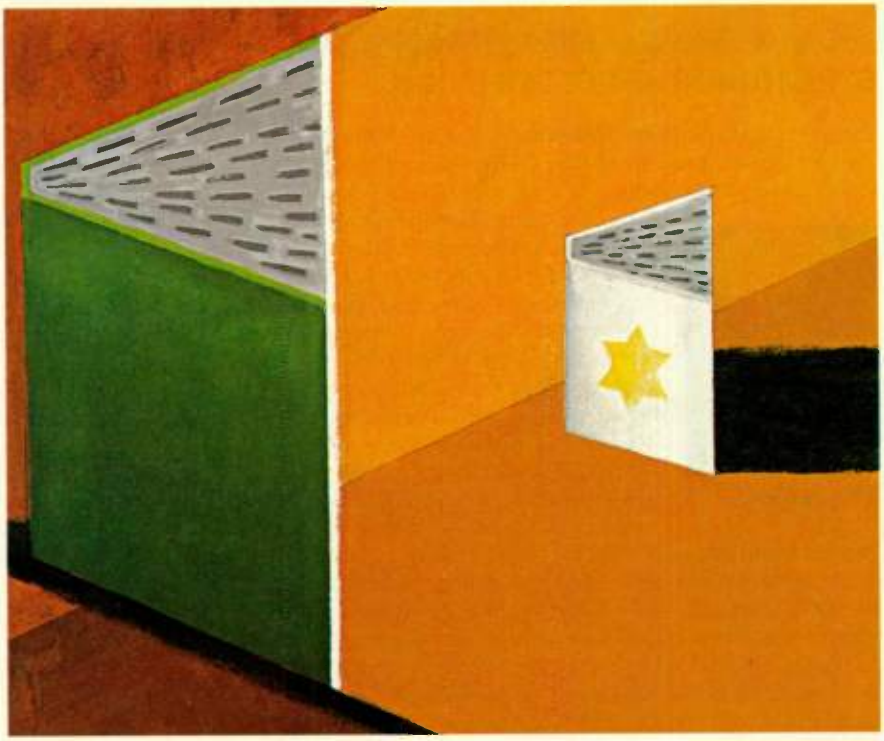
THE END OF THE AFFAIR

BY BLAKE ESKIN

By the time the American publisher Schocken Books suspended publication of *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, in November 1999, its author, Binjamin Wilkomirski, had taken two spins around the media carousel. When the book was first brought out in the United States, in the fall of 1996, Wilkomirski was resoundingly praised for his harrowing account of early-childhood abuse at the hands of the Nazis. Awestruck critics elevated *Fragments* to the pantheon of literary testimony about the Holocaust. In *The New York Times Book Review*, Julie Salamon wrote that *Fragments* "recalls the Holocaust with the powerful immediacy of innocence, injecting well-documented events with fresh terror and poignancy." Jonathan Kozol, writing in *The Nation*, said, "This stunning and austerely written work is so profoundly moving, so morally important, and so free from literary artifice of any kind at all that I wonder if I even have the right to try to offer praise." And *Fragments* penetrated more popular media outlets: Rosie O'Donnell plugged the autobiography on her daytime talk show.

The second media cycle was anything but adulatory. It began with the stunning disclosure in August 1998—by Swiss-Jewish writer Daniel Ganzfried in the Zurich weekly newspaper *Die Weltwoche*—that *Fragments*'s author, Binjamin Wilkomirski, was in fact a Swiss gentile born Bruno Grosjean, who had been to the Auschwitz and Majdanek concentration camps "only as a tourist." In subsequent interviews with *60 Minutes*, *Granta*, *The New Yorker*, and the BBC, Wilkomirski insisted he was an authentic Holocaust survivor who had been secretly switched as a young boy with Bruno Grosjean upon his arrival in Switzerland after World War II with the complicity of his foster parents.

Now Schocken Books, the Jewish-interest imprint of Random House, has republished *Fragments* as part of a larger book, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*. The hefty volume comprises the full text of the Wilkomirski memoir plus the results of another investigation commissioned, in response to the hue and cry, by the Liepman Agency of Zurich, Wilkomirski's literary representative, and conducted by Stefan Maechler, a historian specializing in World War II Swiss refugee policies. At the Liepman Agency's urging, Wilkomirski reluctantly granted Maechler power of attorney, thus enabling the historian to view all of Wilkomirski's governmental files. Maechler's work therefore fills in gaps that Daniel Ganzfried, and subsequent journalists, could not and leaves little room for misconstruing *Fragments* as authentic. "There is not the least doubt that Binjamin Wilkomirski is identical with Bruno Grosjean and that the story he wrote in *Fragments* and has



ED MILIANO

told elsewhere took place solely within the world of his thoughts and emotions," Maechler writes. Maechler's exhaustive audit is not too little—with footnotes, it takes up 366 pages, roughly three-quarters, of *The Wilkomirski Affair*—but it certainly came too late.

As far back as February 1995, just before *Fragments* was originally published in Germany by the publisher Suhrkamp Verlag, a Swiss journalist named Hanno Helbling warned, in a letter to Suhrkamp Verlag, that it was about to issue a phony Holocaust memoir. Helbling called the book "a psychological rarity, testifying to the Holocaust's ability to radiate into new mythic shapes." Stefan Maechler has now reached essentially the same conclusion as Helbling.

But instead of retaining someone like Maechler from the start to evaluate Wilkomirski's story, both the publisher Suhrkamp Verlag and the Liepman Agency relied on assurances from Wilkomirski's intimates that his anguish was sincere and his undocumentable memories were plausible. What papers Wilkomirski did have were, he claimed, wrong and impossibly muddled, and it would take time and legal action to correct them. (Maechler reports that in early communications with Suhrkamp Verlag and the Liepman Agency, Wilkomirski grossly overstated the difficulties he had finding his files, and once *Fragments* went forward, Wilkomirski called off the document search.) The Holocaust produced many improbable stories of survival and left many people without documents, so Suhrkamp Verlag went ahead with *Fragments* anyway, adding Wilkomirski's cryptically worded caveat, "Legally accredited truth is one thing—the truth of a life another," in the book's afterword.

PUBLISHERS WERE WILLING TO PASS OFF A STORY THEY KNEW WAS QUESTIONABLE ONTO A TRUSTING PUBLIC.

Maechler writes that he wasn't mandated to assign responsibility, yet he criticizes the Liepman Agency and Suhrkamp Verlag for neglecting to consult independent experts in their prepublication inquiry. Maechler also faults Schocken Books, Suhrkamp Verlag, and other publishers for their tenacity in keeping the book on store shelves for more than a year after Daniel Ganzfried's discoveries, which were reported in *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*. (I myself reported on Wilkomirski for the *Forward*; I felt drawn to write about *Fragments* because my ancestors were Wilkomirskis from the city the author claimed as his hometown.) Maechler finds no ulterior motives on the part of the Liepman Agency or the various publishers of *Fragments*. "No one got rich on the book; it was more a media event than a sales smash," he writes, and cites the sales figures for the book that the Liepman Agency provided to him: *Fragments* sold about 67,400 copies worldwide and netted its author $110,000 after the agency's commission. "A provisional withdrawal [of the book] until the questions raised could be resolved would have obviated misleading speculations—for example, that the book was being kept on the list purely for the sake of profit," he writes.

Although the last word on profit motives will come from the Zurich district attorney's office—which has been investigating whether the publication of *Fragments* violated Swiss fraud laws—the decisions to publish *Fragments* and to leave it on the market were not unrelated to business concerns. If, as the Liepman Agency's Eva Koralnik tells Stefan Maechler, she struggled for six years to find a publisher for a book of Holocaust stories by the estimable author Ida Fink, surely *Fragments* could have waited six weeks or even six months for Binjamin Wilkomirski to produce his paperwork.

BEHIND THE BOOK

THE BUSINESS

SPREADING THE POTTER MAGIC

Though Richard Curtis is a star screenwriter—his credits include *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill*—he had never met fellow British literary celebrity J.K. Rowling, author of the wildly successful *Harry Potter* books. Last January, Curtis sent Rowling a letter asking if she might do something to benefit Britain's Comic Relief (no relation to the U.S. charity of the same name), which was founded in 1985 to help famine victims in Sudan and Ethiopia and has raised more than $250 million for other projects in Africa and the United Kingdom. "I hoped her response would be 'yes,' but I was reconciled to it being slight. Maybe she would write a 2,000-word *Harry Potter* thing or let us give away lightning bolt tattoos," says Curtis, the group's cofounder and vice-chairman. He had no idea that Rowling had supported Comic Relief for roughly a decade—since her struggling pre-*Potter* days, when, after watching a TV fund-raising drive, she sent a check for £2, which bounced. This time Rowling answered Curtis with two *Harry Potter*–inspired paperbacks, *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them*, which appeared in bookstores worldwide March 12. Net proceeds from the 64-page books, which had a combined first printing of at least 10 million copies, will go to a Harry Potter Fund set up by Comic Relief to benefit the world's poorest children. Companies throughout the book world—from printers to booksellers, including Barnes & Noble and Borders—are donating work or taking less than their usual profits to boost the proceeds. In the United States, where Rowling's American publisher, Scholastic, released 5 million copies of the two books, an estimated $3 of the $3.99 list price will go to Comic Relief; HarperCollins Publishers, which handles customer service and billing for Scholastic, is working for free on the titles. And publications including *USA Today* and *The New York Times* have donated advertising space. "Everyone's attitude is 'We have benefited from *Harry Potter*, it has been a wonderful boon for the industry; we want to help,'" says Barbara Marcus, president of Children's Books at Scholastic. Rowling's not the only British author Curtis has recruited: Others include Helen Fielding, whose contribution, *Bridget Jones's Guide to Life*, came out March 12, and English celebrity chef Delia Smith, whose *Delia's Chocolate Collection* was released in February. (Unlike the *Harry Potter* companion books, Jones's and Smith's titles will not be published outside the United Kingdom.) Comic Relief is also receiving royalties from a children's title published by BBC Worldwide last year, *Robbie the Reindeer: Hooves of Fire*, as well as two collections of scripts from British television shows for which Curtis wrote, *Blackadder: The Whole Damn Dynasty* and *The Vicar of Dibley*, both published by Penguin UK. Curtis says he plans to ask more writers for help, noting that this year it was three women who stepped up to write books for the charity. "Now of course the bit is between my teeth," he says, "and I feel it's time for the boys to do a little bit of work."

J.K. Rowling

KAREN JENKINS HOLT

PROXIMITY TO POWER

In his new book, *Profiles of the Presidents: From FDR to Clinton with* Time *Magazine's Veteran White House Correspondent* (Bulfinch Press), Hugh Sidey looks back on the nine chief executives he covered for both *Time* and *Life* magazines, and his words are accompanied by photographs of private and public presidential moments. Sidey has compiled his previously published essays—chronologically divided by presidential terms and historic events—and added commentary introducing each piece, giving a fresh take on American culture and politics. The book's photos capture memorable images of past commanders in chief. We see George Bush—smiling from ear to ear—meeting the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, and shaking his glove in the White House (right), among many others. But these photos are more than just accompaniments to Sidey's work. As a veteran of the White House beat, he was an everyday presence in the West Wing, and because of his access and stature, Sidey was able to get to know his subjects personally. Through *Profiles of the Presidents*, we get to know them a little better ourselves. ALLISON BENEDIKT

President George Bush greets singer Michael Jackson at the White House in 1990.

But at the time the rewards must have outweighed the risks. And although the memoir did not exactly earn Oprah's Book Club money, Wilkomirski's writings and lectures were gaining a foothold in Holocaust-education programs—professors assigned his memoir to undergraduates, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum sent him on a six-city fund-raising tour—and *Fragments* had backlist potential.

Stefan Maechler also takes the media to task for its hastiness in recycling Daniel Ganzfried's investigation and exposé without attributing the work to Ganzfried and without attempts at independent verification. That did happen in some papers, but it is also true that U.S. publisher Schocken Books relied on German publisher Suhrkamp Verlag's last-minute vetting (which happened only because of journalist Hanno Helbling's initial warning; book publishers generally don't check facts). Both Schocken Books and Suhrkamp Verlag—without fully disclosing any prepublication worries—evidently expected reviewers and feature writers to take Wilkomirski at face value. Moreover, if Ganzfried's story hadn't been picked up elsewhere and pressure hadn't mounted, the truth about Binjamin Wilkomirski might have remained in limbo. When a credibility problem in a work of nonfiction becomes well known, publishers tend to react by digging in their heels, burying their heads, using reputations as shields, and standing by their authors. (Publishers are no better or worse than any other corporation about taking responsibility for their actions—sometimes it requires public shame to get them to recall faulty vehicles or clean up toxic messes.) The German media conglomerate Bertelsmann, which owns Schocken Books's parent company, Random House, used to boast of how the Nazis closed it down during the war for political reasons until an article in *Die Weltwoche* pointed out that Bertelsmann had printed propaganda for Goebbels and that its owner had made contributions to Hitler Youth. As a result Bertelsmann hired an independent team of historians to look into its own Nazi past.

Binjamin Wilkomirski, a.k.a. Bruno Grosjean

Even if one cynically views such belated research as a public-relations maneuver, it's better late than never. Schocken Books has found a laudable solution to a troublesome publishing dilemma by yoking the fantasy of *Fragments* to the truth about Wilkomirski. (Suhrkamp Verlag had the option of bringing out *The Wilkomirski Affair* in German but declined; another publisher released Maechler's report on its own.) *The Wilkomirski Affair* may attract the Holocaust-denier lunatic fringe, but it will be useful to them only insofar as they distort Stefan Maechler's presentation just as they have played fast and loose with the rest of the historical record. An opportunity arose when the insufficiently scrutinized *Fragments* made Wilkomirski a public figure, but there is no better bulwark against pseudohistorical "revisionism" than a full and transparent presentation of the facts.

Fragments emerged in the wake of the opening of the Holocaust museum and the success of *Schindler's List*, at a moment of late-harvest urgency about gathering individual testimonies regarding the Holocaust and making unheard voices publicly available. A detailed memoir in which a child takes the reader inside a Nazi

concentration camp is uncommon, and an eloquent one rarer still. Today Random House (i.e., Bertelsmann) is donating $1 million to the World Jewish Congress's Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project to underwrite the publication of more first-person manuscripts. Meanwhile, books such as Peter Novick's 1999 *The Holocaust in American Life*, and now *The Wilkomirski Affair*, are stepping back to examine the context of that scramble for eyewitness stories.

Toward the end of his report, Stefan Maechler writes, "Without an audience, there would be no Wilkomirski." This isn't quite true; the man born Bruno Grosjean would still likely have his own ideas whether people believed him or not. But it's certain that without publishers willing to pass off a story they knew was questionable onto a trusting public, there would have been no Wilkomirski affair. ■

JOURNALISM HOW-TO

What standards, ethics, and limits do journalists have to guide them? Unfortunately, little more than vague

principles, which are too often improvised and makeshift. Two accomplished journalists sought to change that. But instead of actually creating standards, Bill Kovach, chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists and a former curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard (and this magazine's former ombudsman), and Tom Rosenstiel, the director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, talked to newspeople about what guidelines they already use. After 21 public forums, two surveys, and interviews with more than 100 journalists, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (Crown Publishers) emerged. A straightforward guide that should be of interest to the informed news consumer, the book is a collection of core principles. The authors' assessment is bleak; they contend, for example, that objectivity in the news is often sacrificed for entertainment. Rather than merely indict the trade, however, Kovach and Rosenstiel suggest that it's not too late for the profession to embrace the things that are done right. Some are common sense: Journalists' first loyalty should be to citizens, for example, and not to the corporations that pay them. But the authors also remark on how often such fundamentals are ignored. "[These elements] hold the only protection against the force that threatens to destroy journalism and thus weaken democratic society," write Kovach and Rosenstiel. "This is the threat that the press will be subsumed inside the world of commercialized speech."

KIMBERLY CONNIFF

BLACK-AND-WHITE TV

Donald Bogle's *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is a troubling chronology. Bogle demonstrates that despite some progress, television has for decades routinely favored stereotypes and innocuous assimilation over an honest treatment of race. The fifties TV versions of radio's *Beulah* and *Amos 'n' Andy* were popular with black and white audiences alike, because the stars—despite playing racial caricatures—imbued their roles with talent and personality. Sixties programs such as *I Spy* and *Julia* saw Bill Cosby and Diahann Carroll nonchalantly blended into white America; in the seventies, shows such as *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons* exaggerated jive talk for laughs. The networks tried to strike a balance in the eighties with the racially integrated ensemble of *Hill Street Blues* and the upper-middle-class Huxtable family on *The Cosby Show*. But by the end of the decade and in the early nineties, quality shows with nuanced portrayals of race relations, such as *I'll Fly Away* and *Frank's Place*, didn't draw enough viewers. Meanwhile, "black cast" programs, as Bogle calls them, like *The Steve Harvey Show*, *The Wayans Bros.*, and *Moesha*—essentially updated throwbacks to the lineups of the seventies, Bogle argues—flourished among African-American audiences but barely registered with white viewers. Bogle's focus on the networks omits many of cable's advances—HBO's *Oz* and comedian Chris Rock, for example, are mentioned only in passing. The author's meticulous research and ambitious inclusiveness make the book feel more like a catalog than a social narrative at times, but *Primetime Blues* is an important chronicle of African-American—and American—television history.

PATRICIA CHUI

Bill Cosby (left) and Robert Culp in the sixties series *I Spy*

I SPY: PHOTOFEST

FEMINIST ICONS

Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage (Scribner), by Elaine Showalter, examines women she

identifies as "rule-breakers who followed their own path, who were determined to experience love, achievement, and fame, and who wanted their life to matter." Showalter, author of the seminal feminist critical work *A Literature of Their Own*, and a professor of English at Princeton, contends that the lives and works of typically overlooked women—novelist Olive Schreiner, activist Eleanor Marx (daughter of Karl), and author and critic Charlotte Perkins Gilman, to name a few—have nonetheless inspired generations of symbolic daughters. Showalter calls them "feminist icons": Mary Wollstonecraft, the original feminist intellectual; anthropologist Margaret Mead; and Diana, "the People's Princess." Though the book's early chapters have a sepia-tinged hint of the romantic and occasionally the tragic—educator Margaret Fuller dies in a shipwreck and Eleanor Marx commits an Emma Bovary–like suicide—the later ones explode into Technicolor with snappy, perceptive narratives about such powerful contemporary thinkers as Susan Sontag, Germaine Greer, and Camille Paglia. Through brief but telling biographical sketches, Showalter presents her icons as brilliant, complicated, and fallible women who rebelled against political, intellectual, emotional, and sexual boundaries. It is a deliberate and personal—rather than definitive—list; Showalter recognizes that because of cultural shifts, Margaret Fuller and Oprah Winfrey are both part of the same feminist timeline. Part history and part tribute, *Inventing Herself* is a convincing argument for the public recognition of

private lives, because "life stories retain their power when theories fade."

EMILY CHENOWETH

ALABAMA BOUND

Birmingham, Alabama, was an epicenter of the civil-rights movement. It's where Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous letter from jail, where police chief Eugene "Bull" Connor sicked police dogs on child protesters, and where, on Sunday, September 15, 1963, four young African-American girls were killed by a segregationist's bomb while they were fixing their hair in a church basement. Diane McWhorter, a regular contributor to *USA Today*, grew up in Birmingham as a child of the white ruling class. In *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama—The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (Simon & Schuster), she traces the civil-rights movement through the history of the city—and explores her family's role in the power structure that created and supported segregation. (Her father often slipped out at night with Klansmen, and her older and distant cousin was a longtime leader of the upper-class "respectable resistance" to civil rights.) The book's detailed recounting of the civil-rights movement, in Birmingham and elsewhere, is a fascinating story but one that's been written before. What distinguishes *Carry Me Home* is how McWhorter uses the history of her hometown to chart the history of segregation itself. McWhorter shows how Birmingham's steel-industry titans ("big mules") had, for decades, promoted—and funded—racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, to keep labor divided. By focusing on the social classes in one of the South's most historically racist cities, *Carry Me Home* exposes the inner workings of systematic prejudice—how it began, who supported it, and how it eventually collapsed.

ERIC UMANSKY

BEHIND THE BOOK

OPEN ON MY DESK

AN AUTHOR DISCUSSES THE RESEARCH FOR A FORTHCOMING BOOK

BY WILLIAM J. MANN

Too often, when the words *gay* and *Hollywood* have been paired, the traditional association has been *scandal*. The literature that's out there has dealt primarily with such things as *Confidential* magazine's threat to expose Rock Hudson, the secret lesbian loves of Marlene Dietrich or Greta Garbo, or the sensational boy-trading parties supposedly thrown by George Cukor or Cole Porter. Even today, pick up a book or a magazine that emblazons the words *Gay Hollywood* on its cover and you'll usually find something titillating: the outing of a current celebrity, perhaps, or a juicy expose of who's queer in Tinseltown. Researching a more serious and thoughtful examination of the gay experience in American cinema therefore necessitated looking beyond traditional published sources. My intent with *Behind the Screen, Between the Lines: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood in the Studio Era* (which will be published by Viking in October) was to consider the gay experience as other populations in American film history have been considered. There is Neal Gabler's portrait of the Jewish experience in his groundbreaking *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. Other books, including Molly Haskell's classic *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and Jeanine Basinger's *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930–1960*, have documented the experiences and contributions of women to American film, from star actresses to the director's chair through the editing room, the writer's department, and beyond.

Fifties and sixties screen idol Rock Hudson: His sexuality was long the subject of gossip and rumor.

HUDSON: NEAL PETERS COLLECTION

I determined that finally the same would be done for gay men and lesbians. Having previously written *Wisecracker* (published in 1998), a biography of the twenties and thirties gay actor William Haines, I was well acquainted with the period, but from the beginning, I knew my book would have to be more than the story of movie stars. I would need to consider the film industry as a whole, exploring not only what it was like for actors who were gay but also for designers, directors, writers, editors, and publicists. I discovered which fields embraced gays and which remained off-limits and the reasons behind such segregation. I knew that these stories, to be fully understood, must be put in context with their times: from the free-loving Roaring Twenties through the conservative Depression years to the progressive flowering that occurred during World War II and the turbulent backlash of the McCarthy era. I chose to end my study in the latter half of the sixties because here the narrative conveniently broke, with both the demise of the studios and the rapid rise of the modern gay movement after the Stonewall riots. In fact, post-Stonewall gay Hollywood offers a radically different paradigm for study: Only in the last three decades has the film industry's homophobic reputation been articulated. One of my more surprising discoveries was that Hollywood hasn't always been the menacing behemoth most studies and memoirs have made it out to be. Although gays certainly faced more than their share of struggles, they also experienced opportunities for creative self-expression in the studios that were unavailable anywhere else in the world at the time—and without necessarily compromising their integrity or hiding their authentic identities.

Writing gay histories requires a re-evaluation of traditional rules of "evidence." Learning to read between the lines without reading into them is an acquired skill, as is learning to discern the truth as much by what isn't said as what is. The Hollywood press of the studio era is in fact loaded with information on the gay subculture, and I suggest that much of it is there consciously. Researching gay history also requires weighing the vast body of gossip, film lore, and legend—too often high-handedly dismissed without even cursory consideration by writers consumed by their own seriousness. At the start of my research, I cast my net wide, going through every obituary in *Variety* from 1905 to 1995, collecting those that contained the usual gay flags: "Lifelong bachelor"; "Survived by a sister and a nephew"; or, most typically and most inaccurately, "There are no immediate survivors." For, of course, there were survivors—lovers, friends, gay families who knew these people far better than any brother or sister might have. I was fortunate in some instances to find these people, often listed as the informants on death certificates. Frequently younger than their partners, they were still alive and willing to be interviewed. Although I needed always to remain conscious of and sensitive to the shifting social construction of homosexual identity, I believe I succeeded in constructing a platform for a new way of seeing both the Golden Age of Hollywood and the history of American gay men and lesbians.

This article is adapted from contentville.com, where the full text can be found.

A BLUEPRINT FOR CONFLICT

The New York Times is building splashy new digs. So did Herbert Muschamp, the paper's influential architecture critic, approve of the design? Of course: He helped pick it. By John Cook

Being the architecture critic of *The New York Times* is a uniquely perverse proposition, in that it requires both a) an abiding passion for formal grace and structural beauty and b) entering *The New York Times* headquarters on West 43rd Street in Manhattan every day. For those who haven't seen the *Times* headquarters, it will suffice to say that the building does not embody the qualities that most lovers of architecture cherish. Paul Goldberger, who was the *Times*'s architecture critic from 1973 to 1990 and currently serves in that capacity for *The New Yorker*, described it last year as "a sombre pile of bricks atop a series of loading docks."

So it's no surprise that when The New York Times Company decided in 1999 to abandon its current digs and build a brand-new headquarters in midtown Manhattan, Herbert Muschamp, the paper's architecture critic, was more than a little interested in whom his employers would choose to design the building (as were the reporters and editors who cover the local real-estate scene for the *Times*'s Metro desk). Muschamp has written caustically that New York City has seen "little thoughtful architecture in recent years"; the Times Company's decision to raise a new building presented a rare opportunity to break that dismal pattern. It was also an unusual opportunity for Muschamp to step outside his rarefied role as a critic and into the rough-and-tumble world of real-estate development by assisting the Times Company in selecting the architect to design the new tower.

The fact that The New York Times Company is undertaking to build an architecturally ambitious tower in Manhattan with the potential to enrich the city's landscape is an important story for any paper that purports to cover New York City. But when that newspaper is *The New York Times* itself, the story raises some knotty questions about the practice of journalism and the roles that reporters and critics are expected to play when they are covering their own employers: Is Herbert Muschamp an objective critic working for the ethically upright *New York Times*, composed of scrupulous reporters who produce one of the nation's finest newspapers every day, or an architectural consultant for The New York Times Company, the publicly traded media corporation with an eye on the bottom line and an appetite for good press? Is the *Times*'s Metro section a forum for hard-hitting news about local real estate or for self-congratulatory flacking for the Times Company? The answer, in each instance, is both.

THE PAPER'S CORPORATE AND JOURNALISTIC AMBITIONS CLASHED.

Muschamp is probably the most widely read and influential architecture critic in America, and certainly the most enigmatic. As former *Slate* columnist Judith Shulevitz wrote in a highly critical assessment of Muschamp in November, he is "the most obsessively dissected cultural critic in American journalism." (Muschamp can now count Shulevitz as a colleague—she writes a column for *The New York Times Book Review*.) He is a forceful advocate for the avant-garde in architecture, and his writing regularly veers outside the realm of the traditional review and into revelatory, occasionally indulgent prose (he once wrote that Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, was "the reincarnation of Marilyn Monroe"). Muschamp's allure among New York intellectual circles is such that, in a rare public appearance in January, he drew a full house for a lecture sponsored by The New York Public Library. Dressed in leather pants, a gray blazer, and a white collarless shirt, Muschamp gave a meandering and occasionally impenetrable speech in which he proposed Mahayana Buddhism—which he practices—as a theoretical framework to understand architecture. He also argued that *The Matrix*, starring Keanu Reeves, was "the great urban architectural allegory of all time."

That frenetic intellectual style is Muschamp's trademark, and it was fully in evidence in a long and odd essay he wrote about the *Times*'s new building for its Sunday Arts & Leisure section. The article, which appeared on the section's front page on October 22, 2000, nine days after the *Times* announced that it had selected the Italian architect Renzo Piano from a field of three design proposals (a fourth contestant, Gehry, who was collaborating with New York architect David Childs, withdrew from the competition shortly before the selection was made), revealed for the first time that Muschamp had helped the Times Company choose Piano. "At the invitation of Michael Golden, the vice chairman of The New York Times Company," he wrote, "I met periodically, over a six-month stretch, with the group of people responsible for choosing an architect for the new Times building."

Muschamp's take on that experience is a curiously mixed bag: On the one hand, he candidly acknowledges in the piece his reservations at crossing the line from the newsroom to the corporate side of the paper, noting with approval that the *Times* generally forbids its critics to serve on art juries or committees of this sort. But on the subject of how The New York Times Company came to select the Piano design—and whether his reservations were justified—Muschamp remains silent, writing instead that he's not going to "report on what transpired behind closed doors."

Precisely what Muschamp *does* choose to report is difficult to discern. After declaring at the outset that "it is too soon to evaluate Piano's design," Muschamp's essay meanders from aesthetic manifesto to architectural review to personal history to a primer on how architects work, only to settle into an enthusiastic endorsement of Piano's design. In the same fashion, he dismisses the two losing proposals—one viciously, the other kindly—after writing that it will "never be possible to assess what [they] might have done." And he ends with an ecstatic appreciation of the withdrawn

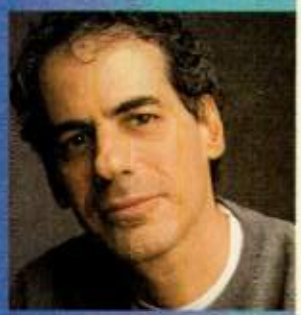
Renzo Piano's winning design for *The New York Times*'s new building; inset: *Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp

A Times critic muses about the building where he may one day practice his craft.

The New York Times

Arts & Leisure

A Rare Opportunity For Real Architecture Where It's Needed



MUSCHAMP: TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS; BUILDING: RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP-NAUM KAZHDAN/NEW YORK TIMES

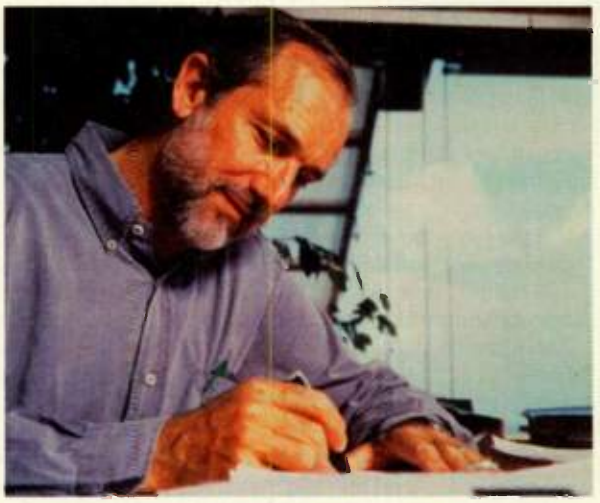
Gehry/Childs design, with which Muschamp admits he was "madly in love." If the essay has a unifying theme, it is that The New York Times Company has, with Muschamp's counsel, chosen an architect with the "potential to raise the quality of building in New York."

The Piano building is an important story, no doubt worthy of coverage in both the *Times*'s news and arts pages. But it is also a commercial venture of The New York Times Company, which has a commitment to its shareholders as well as its readers. According to *The New York Times*'s own reporting in its Metro pages, Times Company executives threatened to move some jobs out of state unless the corporation receives special tax breaks on the building. The sight of Muschamp vigorously advocating in the pages of *The New York Times* the construction of a Times Company project in which he was deeply involved caused some in architectural circles to wonder: Was it arts coverage or self-serving cheerleading?

"It's an unusual article to appear in a newspaper," says John Rockwell, the *Times*'s Sunday Arts & Leisure editor. Rockwell says that, although Muschamp's involvement in the selection process initially raised some concerns for him, "the upsides—the insights gained, the corporate self-revelation—outweighed the downsides." Despite Muschamp's glowing disquisition on Piano's design, Rockwell insists the piece was not a review but rather an unusual inside look at how corporations select architects. When asked how Muschamp could be expected to give an inside look while declining to report on what happened behind closed doors, Rockwell says simply that readers may have had to read between the lines.

Muschamp says that his initial reaction to Times Company vice-chairman Michael Golden's invitation to advise the selection committee was mixed. "I didn't want my feelings toward my job or my employer to be colored by an experience where I had no idea what the outcome would be," he says. Still, he agreed to participate at the urging of *Times* executive editor Joseph Lelyveld. "This is not something that critics do," Muschamp says, "and I was very happy that it ended, because it was disorienting. I get very engaged with the ideas I write about, and it's very safe when I do it as a critic and reporter." It's not so safe, he says, when you get involved in a selection process that will have an impact on the city's architectural heritage.

In fact, Muschamp got a little more involved than his essay lets on. While he writes that he "met periodically" with the committee that chose Piano, Muschamp declines to elaborate on that characterization of his role. According to Golden, Muschamp served on an advisory committee that consulted with the eight-member selection committee. Muschamp didn't get to vote for the winner, but one member of the selection committee says Muschamp made an "invaluable" contribution to the process. "He had the most important role," the committee member says. "He was a major presence, and people looked to him for his thoughts." Muschamp was present during the meetings when each of the four architects formally presented designs. And another meeting took place 3,000 miles from New York City, at Gehry's Santa Monica, California, studio: Muschamp confirms that, accompanied by a delegation of selection-committee members, he paid a visit to Gehry's studio before Gehry withdrew. But he won't say precisely when he did, what the visit was for, or if he paid similar visits to any of the other competitors.



The design for the *Times* building by Renzo Piano (above) received warm coverage in the newspaper's pages.

"I'M PROUD TO BE PART OF AN INSTITUTION THAT WOULD DO THIS," MUSCHAMP SAYS.

Anxieties aside, Muschamp says, he is glad that he chose to participate. But it's not the path that some of his counterparts at other newspapers would have chosen. "You can't stick your head in the sand," says Blair Kamin, architecture critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, arguing that the *Times* and Muschamp handled the episode appropriately and offered readers full disclosure. "The fact is, this is the most important newspaper in the world acting as a cultural patron." Although Kamin is careful not to criticize Muschamp's role in selecting Piano, he says he wouldn't put himself in the same position. If the Tribune Company asked his help in choosing an architect for a new building, he says, "I think I'd pretty much say, 'I believe in the wall between church and state, and I'm not going to cross it.'" David Dillon, the architecture critic for *The Dallas Morning News*, agrees. "I think the basic rule is you can't make the news and write about it, too," he says. "There's no way you can win. As a critic all you have is your credibility. I don't think you can wear both hats."

GIVEN THE PRICKLY QUESTIONS inherent in Muschamp's situation, the genesis of his article is rather curious: Muschamp says writing the piece wasn't even his idea. His boss, culture editor John Darnton, assigned the story to him on a Friday and asked him to turn it around by Monday so it could appear in the following Sunday's paper. Muschamp says he doesn't know why Darnton wanted the story to appear so quickly. One reason may have been that *The New Yorker*'s Paul Goldberger was working on his own story about the new building at the same time, a piece in which he refers to Muschamp's involvement in the selection process. Muschamp's article appeared on October 22, one day before Goldberger's arrived on newsstands. Could Darnton have ordered the piece to avoid the embarrassment of having Muschamp's unusual role in the selection reported outside the *Times*?

"There was, I remember, a frenzy to have him write this and get it in," says Darnton. "But there always is." Darnton says he had no idea that Goldberger was writing a story at the time and that the "frenzy" was an effort to be timely, not to disclose Muschamp's role before somebody else did. Goldberger says he made his first

G. BERENGO GARDIN/AP PHOTO

formal inquiries to the *Times* in reporting his story on Friday, October 13, at the latest—the same day Darnton asked Muschamp to write his story. Muschamp says he had no knowledge that Goldberger was writing a story and that he had made no effort to keep his role in the selection process a secret.

"If they were trying to beat *The New Yorker*, why not?" says Rockwell, the Sunday Arts & Leisure editor. "It doesn't seem to be a particularly unusual thing in journalism."

At the end of the day, despite the different hats he was required to wear throughout the process, Muschamp says he is very happy with the result. "I'm proud to be part of an institution that would do this in New York City," he says. "I love working for *The New York Times*." And what if the institution he loves had chosen an architect he hates? "If they had chosen a bottom-feeder architect," says Muschamp, "I wouldn't have written the story." Why not? "It's an interesting question—I don't know the answer." After a pause, he answers, and succinctly encapsulates the quandaries confronted by a critic in his situation: "It would be suicide." In a subsequent interview, Muschamp revisited that comment, presumably after giving it some thought. He would have written a piece condemning a bad choice, Muschamp said, but "whether they publish it would be up to them."

The dilemma inherent in Muschamp's answer is something *Times* editors take seriously and is one reason for a policy requiring that any story in which the *Times* or the Times Company is mentioned be read by an editor on the news desk—not a rare occurrence, given that the newspaper's corporate parent operates numerous media holdings. In January, for instance, employees at New York Times Digital learned of impending layoffs from a story by *New York Times* media reporter Felicity Barringer, an episode that caused Times Digital CEO Martin Nisenholtz to write in a memo to employees, "A news organization reporting on itself can be very awkward at times like this." Although *Times* editors pride themselves on stories like Barringer's—that is, stories that don't pull punches just because they involve the *Times*—they have come under fire for failing to disclose conflicts of interest, such as when an article in the Sunday Arts & Leisure section last year prominently covered the show *Trauma: Life in the E.R.* without mentioning that it was produced by New York Times Television.

The architect Frank Gehry and his design proposal for *The New York Times* building, which Gehry withdrew from the competition

MUSCHAMP WASN'T the only *Times* writer placed in an uncomfortable position by the new building: Back in 1999, *Times* Metro reporter Charles Bagli broke the story that the *Times* was exploring a new headquarters. Even though Bagli was in the awkward position of reporting on the corporate designs of his own employer—and, in doing so, reporting details that the Times Company would rather have kept under wraps—he says he received the wholesale support from his editors at the Metro desk. Bagli's colleagues in the *Times*'s corporate offices, however, weren't so enthusiastic: Times Company executives declined to discuss their plans, and a *Times* spokeswoman offered only a noncommittal comment. When the story, which relied entirely on unnamed "government officials" and "real estate executives," ran on October 14, 1999, on page 3 of the Metro section, it was a bizarre sight: A *New York Times* reporter was breaking news about The New York Times Company without the cooperation of The New York Times Company.

Times Metro editor Jonathan Landman happened to be at a retreat with *Times* executives and editors when he got word of the story. "We were chuckling, of course," says Landman, "because there I was. So I went to Lelyveld [who was at the retreat]...and I said, 'We've got a good story, and we're putting it in the paper.' He went to Arthur [Sulzberger Jr., the publisher of the *Times* and chairman of the Times Company], and I don't know what they said, and Lelyveld came back and didn't say much of anything, and we put it in the paper."

"I didn't do anything to further that story," says Times Company vice-chairman Michael Golden, who admits to being torn over Bagli's scoop. He didn't want it in the *Times*, because the company simply wasn't prepared to announce anything, but he also wanted *The New York Times* to be "the best newsgathering organization in the world," he says. One reason Golden may not have wanted Bagli's story to appear: Bagli reported that the Times Company had threatened to move some of the company's operations out of New York state unless city and state officials agreed to "tax breaks and other incentives" on the new building, which, according to the New York City Department of Finance, would otherwise cost the Times Company an estimated $7.7 million per year in property taxes. (Negotiations as to the precise discount are ongoing.) The implication that the *Times* was shaking down the city and state governments for tax breaks is perhaps what motivated *Times* publisher Sulzberger to, according to a story circulating throughout the newsroom, joke after Bagli's newsbreak appeared, "I don't know whether to fire him or promote him."

IN EIGHT STORIES ON THE NEW BUILDING, THE *TIMES* HAS NEVER MENTIONED THE LAWSUIT.

"I don't remember saying that," says Sulzberger. "Why would I fire him? He's fabulous." Despite the annoyance Bagli seems to have caused in the *Times*'s corporate offices, Sulzberger is clearly proud of the scoop. "If it's going to be broken, it's better in our paper than anywhere else," he says.

If the new headquarters does indeed get built, the Times Company will presumably sell its Times Square headquarters, currently valued by the New York City Department of Finance at $49 million (though it could sell for a much higher price). That's a lot more than the building would have commanded, say, ten years ago, due partly to the city's extended real-estate boom

GEHRY: IVORY SERRA/CORBIS SYGMA; BUILDING: FRANK GEHRY & ASSOCIATES

and partly to the recent dramatic revitalization of Times Square (named after the newspaper nearly a century ago). That process, which began in the mid-1990s when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani altered the city's zoning laws to push pornography theaters out of the neighborhood, was decried both by civil-liberties groups and neighborhood advocates who opposed the "mall-ification" of Times Square. It was supported wholeheartedly, though, by the *Times*, which has pressed for the revitalization of Times Square in no fewer than 50 editorials since 1980. That influence was not limited to the *Times*'s editorial page: Arthur Sulzberger Jr. was the founder and first chairman of the Times Square Business Improvement District, the coalition of Times Square businesses and tenants that worked with the city to bring about the area's transformation.

Almost one year to the day after Bagli's initial story on the new building, his colleague on the real-estate beat, David Dunlap, got his own newsbreak when the *Times* chose Piano to design the new headquarters. In fact, Dunlap says he got wind of the story because Michael Golden "directly relayed" to him that Piano was the choice. "Because it was a story about the future home of *The New York Times*," Golden says, "I thought it would be appropriate if people heard about it through *The New York Times*." Golden commented on the record in Dunlap's story, which began, "*The New York Times* plans to stake a gossamer claim to the mid-Manhattan skyline...."

Dunlap's story made page 1 of the Metro section and featured extensive upbeat quotes from Piano. It did not mention the tax breaks or threats to move out of state. The *Times* issued a press release announcing Piano as the choice on the same day Dunlap's story ran, which included almost all of the same details that had appeared in that morning's *Times*. (New York *Daily News* real-estate reporter Eric Herman managed to report Piano's selection on the same day as Dunlap, citing unnamed sources. But according to Herman's story, *New York Times* spokesmen did not return his telephone calls.) In fact, it's difficult to distinguish between Dunlap's story and the press release: The only significant aspect of the story that Dunlap mentioned and the release omitted was Gehry's withdrawal from the design contest.

Both Dunlap and the *Times* release did note that the proposal rests on whether the state can use its powers of eminent domain to condemn the property occupying the lot on which Piano's design is to be built. The site is occupied by 11 different owners—and one of those owners, Leonard Weiss, who operates a parking lot, has filed a lawsuit against the state to prevent such condemnation. If successful, the suit would stop the plan in its tracks. (The case is currently on appeal.) In eight stories about the proposed new headquarters, *The New York Times* has never reported on Weiss's lawsuit. (By contrast, *The New York Observer*, a Manhattan-based weekly, ran a lengthy profile of Weiss in July 2000—more than three months before Dunlap's article.)

"That's an idiotic question," says Metro editor Jonathan Landman when asked to explain the difference between Dunlap's story and a press release. As for the prominent play the story received, Landman says, "How often do you have four of the greatest architects in the world competing to do a commercial building? This particular contest is one of a kind."

Scrappy Parking Man Battles Times Tower, Won't Sell His Lots

State Says It Has Deal for Paper's New Skyscraper. But Did They Ask Garage Magnate Leonard Weiss? Joins Developer, Butcher to Contest $100 Million Sale

***The New York Observer*'s profile of Leonard Weiss, who filed a lawsuit that could prevent the construction of the *Times*'s building**

If that were the case, of course, one might expect New York City's other papers, competitive instincts aside, to have given the story similar attention. Granted, comparing the coverage of a particular subject in competing newspapers is a tricky business, particularly when that subject is one of the papers themselves. But while *The New York Times* covers the arts more extensively than its competition does, it is nevertheless instructive to note that the *New York Post* never covered the choice of Piano to design the building. The New York *Daily News*'s 171-word story on the selection, written by Herman, was buried on page 55 and included a quote from *The New Republic*'s architecture critic, Martin Filler, calling Piano a "very disappointing" choice. Herman says he admires Charles Bagli's reporting on the project, but calls Dunlap's story "promotional." *The New Yorker*'s Paul Goldberger doesn't criticize Dunlap but says that the *Times* has occasionally inflated its coverage of the building in a self-congratulatory manner, while New York City's competing dailies have downplayed it for basically the same petty reasons. "This hasn't been covered as you would expect a similarly important building project would," says Goldberger. "It's been exaggerated in the *Times* and diminished elsewhere—except *The New Yorker*." But Goldberger is quick to add (after getting in a plug for his employer) that that's the way it goes in New York journalism: "Where's the news in that?"

The journalistic muddle that the story exposes wasn't limited to New York City: It extended all the way to Santa Monica, where Frank Gehry lives and works. Gehry's proposal with David Childs was anchored by their vision for the *Times* newsroom. "It was the symbolic heart" of the design, says Gehry. He adds that after he presented his design, which was by all accounts enthusiastically received, one criticism was that the newsroom took over the building: "The point they made was that if the newsroom became the essence of the building, it would be to the detriment of other departments." Gehry says he was excited to try to work through this criticism, but he eventually withdrew when he realized that the Times Company was behaving more like a traditional corporate client than somebody interested in building a "signature building." "I think of *The New York Times* as Anthony Lewis, Thomas Friedman, Herbert Muschamp, Maureen Dowd," says Gehry. "We had the fantasy that we would be doing it for those guys."

Construction is scheduled to begin on the Times tower within the year; if the remaining obstacles it faces are overcome, as most observers expect they will, it will be occupied by 2005. During a question-and-answer session after his January lecture, Muschamp was asked by an audience member what was to become of the old *Times* headquarters. His answer indicates that his corporate employers are unlikely to seek his advice when it comes time to dispose of the building: "I think they should donate it to some journalism school." Catherine Mathis, a spokeswoman for The New York Times Company, responds: "We believe it is in the best interest of our shareholders to sell the building." ■

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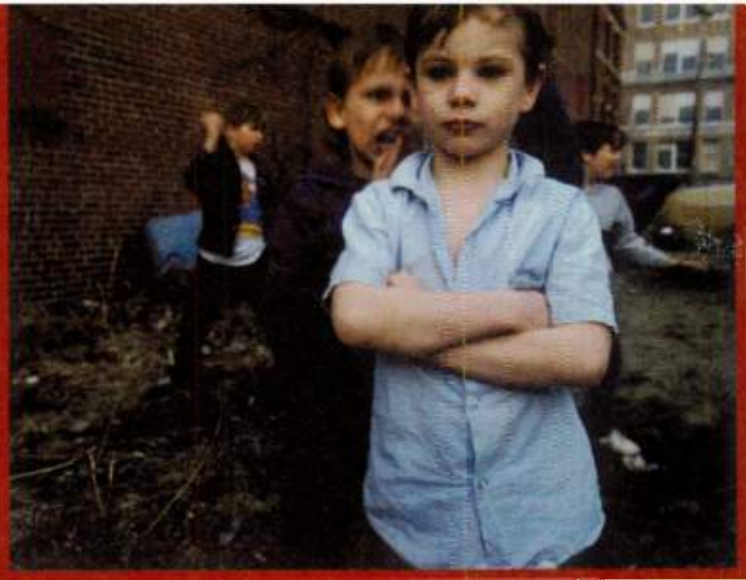

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LORDS OF THE DANCE

These five dance critics translate movement into words—and try to discover poetry in motion.
By Anna Schneider-Mayerson

JOAN ACOCELLA

***THE NEW YORKER*, 1998–**

B.A., English, University of California, Berkeley, 1966; Ph.D., comparative literature, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey (New Brunswick), 1984

Work highlights: Senior critic, reviews editor, *Dance Magazine*, 1982–85; dance critic, *Daily News* (New York), 1991–93; dance critic, *The Wall Street Journal*, 1996–98

Author (selected works): *Mark Morris* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993)

What sets you apart from other dance critics? *One thing I really do think is important is to tell the reader what the dance meant to you in human and personal terms, why a human being should have wanted to spend that night at the ballet rather than at the movies.*

How does dance criticism differ from other arts criticism? *In dance criticism, you're depending on your memory, so it's much more subjective, passionate.*

Whom do you consider your audience? *Many people who read my work tell me that they don't go to the dance; they just read the work as an essay. The assumption is that criticism is consumer advice, that you're recommending things. But it really isn't that. It's an essay, a piece of thought, a piece of writing.*

CLIVE BARNES

***NEW YORK POST*, 1977–**

M.A., English language and literature, St. Catherine's College, Oxford University (Oxford, England), 1951

Work highlights: Dance critic, *The Times* (London), 1962–65; dance critic, drama critic, *The New York Times*, 1965–77; columnist, reviewer, senior consulting editor, *Dance Magazine*, 1990–present

Author (selected works): *Inside American Ballet Theatre* (Hawthorn Books, 1977); *Nureyev* (Helene Obolensky Enterprises, 1982)

Is it hard to be a dance critic without having been a dancer? *I think sometimes the disappointed artist is really...not always a good critic....You're not a ballet teacher. I'm not trying to teach Baryshnikov to do pirouettes or Balanchine to choreograph....I'm merely trying to help people appreciate [dance].*

How does writing about dance differ from writing about theater? *Writing about dance is extremely difficult, because it's extremely difficult to convey in words. When you're writing about theater...literature, novels, [or] film, you're writing about a verbal art. [With dance] there's very little accepted vocabulary that everyone will recognize, and, particularly with modern dance, you very rarely have a story to tell.*

DEBORAH JOWITT

***THE VILLAGE VOICE*, 1967–**

University of California, Los Angeles, 1951–52; New School for Social Research (New York, NY), 1959–60; Hunter College, The City University of New York, 1960–62, 1964

Work highlights: Dancer, choreographer, Dance Theater Workshop, 1964–72; master teacher, dance department, New York University–Tisch School of the Arts, 1979–present; cochairman, Dance Critics Association, 1991–95

Author (selected works): *The Dance in Mind: Profiles and Reviews, 1976–83* (David R. Godine, 1985); *Time and the Dancing Image* (William Morrow & Co., 1988)

What sets you apart from other dance critics? *I don't know that this sets me apart, but since dance is pretty perishable, I feel I need to ground my opinions and my analysis in some kind of descriptive writing—not a blow-by-blow account but impressions that may help the reader envision what I'm talking about.*

Whom do you consider your audience? *In some sense I'm writing for myself [but] I aim my criticism at what I think of as an intelligent, interested, at least semi-knowledgeable reader....I'm aware that the people I've written about will read it, but I certainly can't write for them. An advice column would be tedious.*

ANNA KISSELGOFF

***THE NEW YORK TIMES*, 1977–**

B.A., English, Bryn Mawr College (Bryn Mawr, PA), 1958; M.S., Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, 1962; M.A., European history, Columbia University, 1963

Work highlights: Editor, English desk, *Agence France-Presse* (Paris), 1963–65; freelance feature writer, dance reviewer, *The New York Times International Edition* (Paris), 1965–67

Did you ever aspire to become a dancer? *At age 14, I knew this was not for me....People always ask critics, 'Are you a frustrated playwright or a frustrated dancer?' No, I am not a frustrated dancer....I preferred to look at it.*

What sets you apart from other dance critics? *I...try to do a lot of research. I don't always feel that—as was once fashionable in all art forms—to just go in there and let it wash over you and say: 'Do it to me.'...I think...that, unless you know something about what the artists were trying to do, to just go in and give your instant opinion may be interesting, but it may not be... an accurate opinion of what's going on.*

LEWIS SEGAL

***LOS ANGELES TIMES*, 1996–**

B.A., theater arts, M.A., theater history and criticism, M.F.A., theater directing, University of California, Los Angeles, 1964, 1966, 1967

Work highlights: National publicity director, Capitol Records, 1971–73; dance writer, *Los Angeles Times*, 1984–96; adjunct professor, University of Southern California (Los Angeles), 2000–present

What sets you apart from other dance critics? *I might be as traveled or more traveled than any dance critic of my generation. I have had an opportunity to look at world dance and form a basis of appreciation for dance in a really wide and global perspective, [which] gives me respect for certain kinds of dance that a lot of other dance critics sort of marginalize.*

Do dance critics differ from other arts critics? *A shared experience is smaller than film or television experiences, where you can presume that a large body of the readership is seeing or will see what you're writing about.*

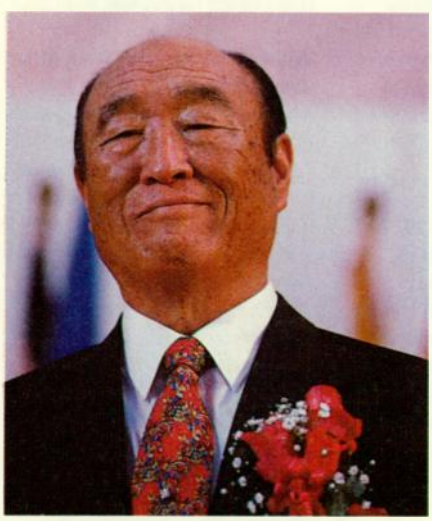
ACOCELLA: BEATRIZ SCHILLER; BARNES: HOWARD SCHATZ/*DANCE MAGAZINE*; JOWITT: LOIS GREENFIELD; KISSELGOFF: THE NEW YORK TIMES CO

LOOKING FOR A MIRACLE

The once formidable United Press International has a deep-pocketed new owner—Reverend Sun Myung Moon's News World. But the wire's latest benefactor could also be its biggest obstacle. By Eve Gerber

The headquarters of the 94-year-old United Press International lie near the center of power in Washington, D.C., less than a block from the White House. On the sixth floor of the nine-story building sits a typically cramped and cubicled newsroom, the heart of the agency. Although the room's decor is ordinary, its history isn't. As visitors exit the elevator bank, they are greeted by a 1950s photo transmitter and a display of plaques that commemorate, among other honors, UPI's nine Pulitzers. Most of the awards, however, date from the middle of the 20th century; the most recent plaque was inscribed in 1972. And before this past January, visitors couldn't even see them: For several years, the prizes had been relegated to a forgotten corner.

In UPI's heyday, 6,000 employees and dozens of bureaus fed hundreds of bulletins per day to 5,000 subscribing news organizations and competed with The Associated Press for front-page space in the world's great dailies. But the beleaguered news agency has lost nearly all of its clients and cachet—and hasn't turned a profit since 1961. By last year, the wire's workforce had dwindled to about 150. What's more, no major U.S. metropolitan newspaper regularly carries UPI's copy; the only subscribers the agency can name are *The Straits Times* (a large Singapore daily) and the *Daily Challenge* (a tiny, New York–based African-American paper). AP, meanwhile, serves 1,700 newspapers in the United States alone.



The Reverend Sun Myung Moon: "In accordance with the will of God, I founded *The Washington Times*."

JOHN HARRINGTON/BLACK STAR

Last May, UPI gained a new owner, News World Communications, which dusted off the awards and began pouring money into the operation. The agency has hired more than two dozen new editorial employees, including such seasoned journalists as John O'Sullivan, the former editor of the *National Review*, who became the wire service's editor in chief last June. "If you came into the newsroom a year ago, it would've been pretty well deserted," says the 58-year-old O'Sullivan, surveying his new domain. After 5 on a Friday afternoon in February, more than a dozen people were bent over new computers, furiously working to fill the wire. The service now turns out more than 100 news items a day, including long investigative articles, 800-word news analyses, and nugget-size bulletins, which, for now, can be found mainly on obscure websites, such as NewsMax.com.

But UPI's latest benefactor may also be its biggest obstacle to a comeback. News World is a deep-pocketed media conglomerate that belongs to the temporal empire of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who leads the Unification Church and also owns *The Washington Times*, which he founded in 1982. Some UPI employees, such as the doyenne of the White House press corps, Helen Thomas, who had stuck with the service through its decline, resigned to protest the purchase. And the man expected to save UPI, Arnaud de Borchgrave—a charismatic journalist who had spent 30 years as a *Newsweek* foreign correspondent—abruptly resigned as CEO in December, barely seven months after stewarding the wire's sale.

News World isn't shy about explaining Moon's motives. "We want to definitely influence and impact the flow of information to be more value-oriented," Unification Church spokesman Reverend Phillip Schanker says. The company will likely be patient and financially generous with its new acquisition: News World has been funding the profitless *Washington Times* for more than 18 years.

By purchasing the remnants of the once proud UPI, Moon's followers, popularly (and pejoratively) known as Moonies, acquired at least the appearance of influence. The perception that News World has power over international news organizations might benefit Moon's movement, and the company's coffers give UPI a badly needed cash infusion. But at what cost: Will Moon's News World further tarnish UPI's reputation, or will it nurse the wire back to health?

NEWS WORLD is "very happy to stand behind UPI," says Jack McLean, UPI's director of marketing and sales. "They regard UPI, as well they should, as one of the great, internationally recognized brands." Indeed, for most of the 20th century, news services were lifelines. Using telegraph cables to transmit content, they provided the only immediate dispatches on current events, and newspapers relied on them.

AP dominated the field from the day a newspaper consortium founded it, in 1848. But the service allowed only one publication per region to purchase its product, which froze papers such as news baron E.W. Scripps's *Cleveland Press* out of the AP alliance. Frustrated, Scripps inaugurated United Press in 1907. (It became United Press International after merging with International News Service in the mid-fifties.)

From its inception, UPI was the underdog, offering young journalists little pay but a lot of opportunity. (Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, and *The New York Times*'s Thomas Friedman, among others, got their start at UPI.) Time and again, the upstart, pocket-poor wire managed to beat its competition. According to Lucien Carr—whose pal Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road* using a roll of Teletype paper swiped from UPI's office—"UPI's great virtue was that we were the little guy [that] could screw the AP." Richard Harnett, who spent more than 30 years at UPI, recalls what is often considered its greatest achievement: Merriam Smith's Pulitzer Prize–winning coverage of John Kennedy's assassination. "Smith was in the press car....When he heard shots, he called in to the Dallas

Above: Karl Bickel, then UP's president, stands (center) in a 1920s United Press newsroom. Right: Amid the rubble, several UP staffers report on a 1925 earthquake in Santa Monica, California.

BETTMANN/CORBIS (2)

office and sent a flash bulletin," Harnett says. "The AP reporter started pounding on his shoulder to get to the phone, but Merriam kept it from him."

Despite UPI's spectacular scoops, AP continued to win the war for wire supremacy. UPI's biggest clients were afternoon newspapers, and with the advent of television, that market shrank. By 1962, UPI was operating in the red. According to Ronald Cohen, a former UPI managing editor who cowrote the book *Down to the Wire*, which chronicles the news agency's decline, the situation only worsened: Annual operating losses surged to $3.5 million in the mid-seventies, as the syndication of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* content further eroded UPI's client base. The financial troubles seemed irreversible, and in 1982, the Scripps family unloaded the agency to two inexperienced entrepreneurs. The sale price was one dollar.

The new owners sold key assets, driving UPI into bankruptcy in 1985. Over the next decade, it changed hands three more times—from a Mexican media mogul who didn't speak English to a company, Infotechnology, that filed for bankruptcy. Client desertions further damaged employee morale, and *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and dozens of other prominent dailies canceled their contracts.

In 1991, UPI fired one-third of its employees and again sought bankruptcy protection. A judge auctioned off what was left of the wire to a group of Saudi businessmen, who paid $3.95 million. And in 1999, after several years of presiding over the wire's slide toward extinction, the Saudis brought in Arnaud de Borchgrave to rescue UPI.

WHEN *BRILL'S CONTENT* interviewed de Borchgrave last July, the 74-year-old sat in his stately CEO's suite in Washington, D.C., and pointed to the photographs that line the walls. They show him clowning with King Hussein, huddling with a young Yasser Arafat, and dining with Ronald Reagan.

Born in 1926 to a Belgian count, de Borchgrave began his journalistic career at UPI in 1946 but hardly fit the mold of a Unipresser (as employees call themselves). In 1953, he defected to *Newsweek*, where he built a career as a swashbuckling foreign correspondent and worked for 30 years. Nevertheless, when the Saudis came calling in 1998, de Borchgrave (who was then an adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies) rejoined the down-and-out wire. "It was my first love," he says. "You feel very grateful to your first love."

De Borchgrave, the editor in chief of Moon's *Washington Times* from 1985 through 1991, also felt close to News World—so close, in fact, that some former UPI staffers feared that he was a fifth columnist. From the onset, de Borchgrave helped to set *The Washington Times*'s conservative tone; he penned a front-page editorial in 1985 to help launch a fund-raising drive for the Nicaraguan Contras. But de Borchgrave also made the paper a staple of the political-junkie media diet.

De Borchgrave left the *Times* in 1991, but continued to contribute articles as an editor at large. He also spoke annually at Moon-sponsored conferences and maintained his friendship with Douglas Joo, News World's CEO, lunching with him once a month.

When de Borchgrave arrived at the wire, he says, "morale was very low. Funding was irregular....We never knew whether we could meet payroll." De Borchgrave was committed to saving the company, but the Saudis couldn't bankroll his vision. In September 1999, he persuaded them to sell.

Despite his long association with News World, de Borchgrave says, the possibility of the Unificationists' buying UPI didn't occur to him until a News World executive broached the subject. According to de Borchgrave, the board was entertaining offers from Canadian newspaper mogul Conrad Black and former CNN anchor Lou Dobbs when, over lunch at Washington's exclusive Metropolitan Club in early May 2000, Joo asked de Borchgrave whether it was too late to acquire the wire. Neither party will disclose the terms of the sale, but de Borchgrave insists that News World outbid UPI's other suitors and offered the wire its only hope for salvation.

Last July, de Borchgrave radiated optimism as he spoke of carving out a new niche for the old wire. "We cannot compete in the traditional news-agency area," he said, noting that AP—not to mention countless websites—already satisfies the demand for basic news. De Borchgrave boldly forecast that after nearly 40 years in the red, UPI would break even by the end of 2001. He would serve as the firewall between the agency and News World: "I have a contract that guarantees no interference," he said, emphasizing that righting the course of the struggling wire service would be his "last hurrah."

De Borchgrave did make encouraging changes, hiring such veteran newspeople as former *Time* correspondent Roland Flamini and Martin Walker, who once headed the American bureau of the left-leaning *Guardian* of London. He recruited young, ambitious reporters, for whom the opportunity to cover major stories often outweighed any doubts about News World. De Borchgrave also expanded technology coverage and started a terrorism beat. Although some acknowledge that they had qualms about joining News World ("Do I have reservations about the Moonies? Sure," says columnist Harlan Ullman), many say de Borchgrave allayed their fears. "I know Arnaud worked for them for a great number of years," Flamini explains. "He basically said they leave you alone, and that's what they've done so far."

Helen Thomas, the doyenne of the White House press corps, spent 57 years at the historic wire before resigning in May 2000.

UPI IS STARTING TO GENERATE NEWS SCOOPS, ALTHOUGH FEW READERS GET TO SEE THEM.

Despite the confidence de Borchgrave expressed, he announced in December that he was stepping down. "We're well on our way to recovery, and I wanted to get back to what I really love, which is writing and reporting and traveling," he says. (He remains an editor at large for UPI and in mid-February landed an interview with Colombian president Andres Pastrana.) De Borchgrave says that he gave it his "best for two years" (including the time under the Saudi ownership) and denies that other factors motivated his decision. "[News World] guaranteed editorial independence by contract....There is no concern on that front whatsoever," he says. Still, de Borchgrave's resignation can be seen as a publicity setback for an organization desperately trying to regain its luster. By February 1, he had vacated his office so the wire's new leader could move in. De Borchgrave's replacement, at least for now, is News World CEO Douglas Joo, probably not a good omen to those concerned about UPI's editorial independence.

JOO IS NOT A TRAINED JOURNALIST but a church member who leads a company that was founded to help fulfill Moon's religious vision. As News World's CEO, the 55-year-old Joo helms several of its publications, as well as a range of nonmedia Unification enterprises, such as a real-estate holding company. He also chairs The Washington Times Foundation, a nonprofit organization that sponsors conferences for policymakers and has donated more than $1 million to George W. Bush's presidential library. As for Joo's UPI plans, he isn't talking: He has so far refused to respond to press inquiries, and his spokesperson, Larry Moffit, says Joo speaks only to News World publications. (Moffit, in fact, recently attended a UPI staff meeting, which raised the eyebrows of some editorial employees in attendance.)

IN 1935, ACCORDING TO Unificationist theology, Jesus Christ asked Sun Myung Moon to save the world. In Moon's native North Korea, Communist authorities repeatedly imprisoned him for preaching. Undeterred, he founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in 1954. Moon's acolytes regard him as the Second Messiah, but among nonbelievers, he is best known for officiating over mass wedding ceremonies: In 1982, he married 2,075 couples in New York City's Madison Square Garden.

Despite Moon's public-relations efforts, the Family Church (what Moon now calls the Christian denomination he heads) has had difficulty escaping the popular notion that it's a cult—an organization that brainwashes impressionable youths, wrests them from their families, and forces them to work for slave wages to fuel Moon's lavish lifestyle. Church spokesmen say this is nonsense.

Over the past 40 years, Moon has added a multibillion-dollar international commercial component—including a Korean ginseng distributor, an Alaskan fishery, and a New York City recording studio—to broaden his spiritual realm. A 1978 Congressional Report by the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Organizations concluded that "Moon exercises substantial control over temporal matters. These include the transfer of funds from one organization to another, personnel changes and allocations."

Cult expert Steven Hassan says, "Moon started his media empire to gain power." Even members of Moon's church acknowledge that a part of his media mission is to spread his ideology. "Reverend Moon has clearly stated the vision of creating a network of newspapers, promoting values in media and being a media presence on every continent," says Unification spokesman Schanker. Indeed, News World owns publications around the world—from *Sekai Nippo*, a Japanese daily known for its staunch anti-Communist stance, to the Uruguayan tabloid *Ultimas Noticias*.

Until it acquired UPI, News World's

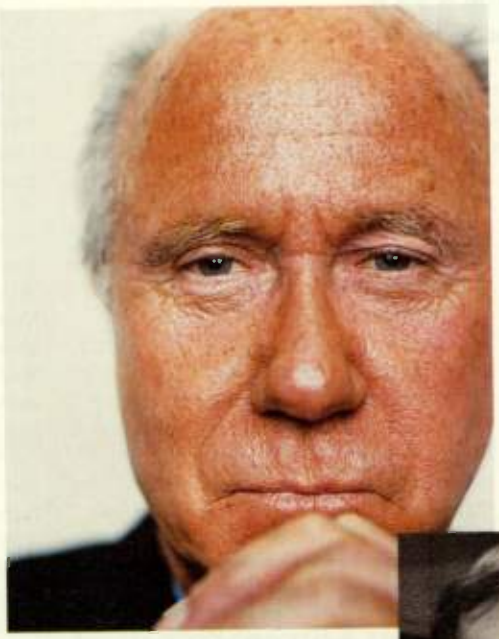
HARRY HAMBURG/*NEW YORK DAILY NEWS*

crown jewel was *The Washington Times*. President Ronald Reagan called it his favorite newspaper, and former president Bush traveled to Argentina in 1996 to celebrate the opening of Moon's *Tiempos del Mundo*. Schanker says that "there is absolute organizational separation between the Family Federation [which oversees the Family Church] and News World Communications," but at times the distinction seems blurry at best. Schanker readily acknowledges that News World CEO Joo "reports on a regular basis" to Moon, and the *Times* extensively covers Moon's activities—in January, for example, the paper prominently featured a Washington Times Foundation prayer luncheon headlined by attorney general designate John Ashcroft and attended by Moon. In January 1999, Moon said: "In 1982, in accordance with the will of God, I founded *The Washington Times*....Ever since then, this newspaper has led American public opinion as a conservative news medium showing the path that America must follow."

Do these words apply to UPI? "People who worked at *The Washington Times*...told me stories about the hierarchy wanting certain slants on stories," says Ken Bazinet, a New York *Daily News* White House correspondent who worked at UPI for 17 years. "To think that a wire service would be owned by a company with that kind of history is really disturbing....An organization that has a clear political agenda now controls [UPI]."

That organization is also clearly committed to funding the storied wire. "At least News World has got the wherewithal to keep UPI going," news-industry analyst John Morton says. "They've shown they are willing to underwrite losing operations." But as Leo Bogart, a newspaper-industry consultant and author of the book *Commercial Culture: The Media System and the Public Interest*, points out: "I don't see large numbers of metropolitan newspapers of substantial size in which the lure of a low-budget wire service would outweigh the lack of credibility that is imputed to an organization associated with Reverend Moon."

LIKE DE BORCHGRAVE, UPI editor in chief John O'Sullivan has estimable journalistic credentials, and now his is the face the wire is presenting to the world. Besides leading the *National Review*, the British-born O'Sullivan edited the opinion pages of the conservative *Times* of London. On a "casual Friday" in February, O'Sullivan was dressed in French cuffs and a chalk-striped suit, his only bit of Fleet Street a purple Windsor-knotted tie. O'Sullivan tells *Brill's Content*: "The owners are not interfering in the editorial direction, which they are happy to leave to journalists whom they have hired and in whom they've placed their confidence." O'Sullivan expresses faith in both the wire and its new owners, saying, "It was a good purchase, and I think that they saw the opportunity that with wise investment and sensible management it could be turned around, and I think they're right." When asked whether de Borchgrave's financial forecast will bear out, O'Sullivan says, "I forecast a terrific product by the end of the year."



Above: Arnaud de Borchgrave, UPI's former CEO; right: John O'Sullivan, the news wire's editor in chief

In one sense, News World's investments are already beginning to pay off: The wire is landing scoops, such as Richard Sale's January 17 story that describes Ariel Sharon's alleged role in Israel's transfer of U.S. intelligence to the Soviets and his January 26 piece linking Osama bin Laden to the deaths of American soldiers in Somalia. In what could be an indication of editorial independence, UPI reported last August that Moon and his wife were fined for overfishing in Alaskan waters. "UPI is continuing to put out the sort of product that earned it a reputation as a fine news organization—fair and balanced reporting," UPI Capitol Hill reporter Ashley Baker insists.

If you can find it, that is: UPI's copy is as elusive as its new owners. The agency's biggest clients remain Bloomberg and Lexis-Nexis, both of which carry UPI's copy on their subscription-based services, and the Kyoto News Agency, a service that translates and redistributes content to newspapers in Japan. No major website, let alone a major domestic newspaper, regularly carries UPI's work, and many of its reporters privately doubt whether anyone reads their copy. Matt Drudge will occasionally link to a UPI story featured on the Virtual New York site, but the wire is rarely cited in contemporary news accounts other than obituaries of its former staffers.

UPI'S DIRECTOR OF MARKETING and sales, Jack McLean, nonetheless believes that UPI will appear in mainstream publications once again. McLean, a Harvard-educated former Marine whom de Borchgrave hired last September, is courtly as he walks through the UPI newsroom, exuding enthusiasm for resurrecting what he calls one of the world's great brands. McLean promises a marketing push this month and a corporate makeover that will boost UPI's client roster. Having helped found the Greater Washington Initiative (which transformed the image of the District of Columbia from the murder capital of the nation into one of *Fortune*'s top ten business cities), McLean faces a similar challenge with UPI. He compares UPI to a defunct Broadway theater: "When a marquee is starting to fade, you can walk by it every day and not see any change. But every day a couple of lights will go out. After a year or two it's gone, and there are homeless people and newspapers swirling around in the doorway." McLean adds, "If you want to bring back a marquee, if you want to bring back a brand, you have to do it one bulb [at a time]."

O'Sullivan's success in restoring UPI's editorial strength would be one such bulb. "Ownership that will allow you to execute a plan, sometimes at considerable expense, is another bulb," McLean says, referring to News World. But when that owner is tied to a religious leader who asserts, as Reverend Moon did last December, that "we absolutely should utilize the mass media," its support could overshadow whatever its employees might accomplish. ■

DE BORCHGRAVE: NATHANIEL WELCH/SABA. O'SULLIVAN: MICHAEL GEISSINGER

THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW

To save his administration's records for posterity, Bill Clinton turned to professor and speechwriter Ted Widmer—who set in motion the most ambitious White House history project in decades. By Jesse Oxfeld

The Old Executive Office Building is an enormous, ornate 19th-century structure that sits next to the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. It houses overflow from the executive mansion's West Wing, and it's a place with a perpetual background hum—people constantly moving and talking and doing. That sense of controlled chaos was particularly acute on the second-to-last Thursday of the Clinton administration, as good-byes were said and boxes packed. The second-floor office of Ted Widmer, at the time senior adviser to the president for special projects, was particularly harried, if only for personal reasons: He and his wife had just been invited on their first trip to Camp David. Professionally, things were calmer. Widmer's final White House job was to ensure that the Clinton administration was properly packed up and preserved for history, that papers reached their archival homes. At this late date, he was simply waiting for documents and reports to be turned in. He would have been done with his work, in fact, except that he'd spearheaded a further White House organization-and-collection effort, the Clinton Administrative History Project, more ambitious than any since the Johnson administration.

Before the White House, Widmer (center) played guitar with the Upper Crust.

Widmer is a historian turned speechwriter turned historian again, and his manner is clearly professorial: He's friendly, funny, and soft-spokenly long-winded. He's a slight man, pale with thinning hair, who looks more than a little like Russian president Vladimir Putin. This fact was probably more jarring during the three years he was on staff at the National Security Council, writing foreign-policy speeches for President Clinton. Last summer, Widmer decided to return to academia—he'd previously taught at Harvard—and take a job running a new American-studies center at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland. President Clinton asked him to stay and supervise all of the administration's wrap-up historical work. Widmer agreed, and began splitting his time between Washington College and the White House.

"WHAT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES DO IS A HARD THING TO RECONSTRUCT," SAYS HISTORIAN ALAN BRINKLEY.

AT THE END of every presidency, all the records it created must be squirreled away for future historians. Clinton's papers had to be transferred to the not-yet-built Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock; someone had to find a place for all the pages on the White House website, which were removed to make way for the Bush-Cheney site; the papers and records of all Clinton administration officials had to make their way to the National Archives. Widmer was responsible for overseeing these jobs. But he did something more. With the full backing of the president and John Podesta, the chief of staff, Widmer spearheaded the gargantuan Administrative History Project, a series of 33 histories that collect, cabinet department by cabinet department and White House agency by White House agency, the paper trail of all of the executive-branch policy work done during Bill Clinton's presidency.

What he wants, Widmer told me that busy afternoon in his office, is "to get people thinking of the last eight years as a period of American history." The project, he says, will "help future historians understand the work that we did here." The room was decorated for the earnest speechwriter and young dad he is: Posters from Clinton trips overseas, signed copies of State of the Union addresses, and more than a few finger paintings filled the walls. There was no trace of Widmer's musical past, no memorabilia from the Upper Crust, the thoroughly sarcastic glam-rock band he played guitar with in Boston whose members dressed as 18th-century aristocrats and once appeared on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*.

Widmer's first step when launching the history project was to contact people at the National Archives, which is responsible for collecting an outgoing administration's records. Presidential libraries are two institutions in one: Partially, they're privately funded museums built by that president's friends and devoted to a sort of hagiography; they're also outposts of the National Archives, staffed by Archives personnel and devoted to the neutral and scholarly maintenance of presidential records. The Archives suggested the creation of the Administrative History Project, modeled on a similar project carried out at the end of the Lyndon Johnson administration and not repeated since. "It's very unpredictable who's well organized and who isn't," Widmer says. "One thinks of Republicans as well-organized people with every hair perfectly in place, and yet none of them ever did this." Since 1968, outgoing administrations have preserved their documents, but none has made such a large-scale effort to organize and compile them.

Each volume in the history project contains 1,000 to 2,000 pages of primary sources, prefaced by a 50- to 100-page narrative. The product, then, is 33 sets of three-ring binders and document boxes that will reside at the Clinton Center once the James Polshek–designed building is constructed (and will eventually be available to the public). The histories contain officials' notes from meetings, internal memos, printouts of e-mail exchanges, and memos to the president with his comments. There are

PETER BERSON

Widmer meets with President Clinton in the Oval Office two weeks before the end of his administration.

OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO COURTESY TED WIDMER

communications between different departments and agencies, written speeches, briefing books for debates and press conferences and meetings, and decision memos. "In the first days of the administration, there were memos," says Jeff Nussbaum, a Gore speechwriter who coordinated the history effort within the vice-president's office, "literally yes-no memos: 'Are we for deficit reduction?' And by saying 'Yes we are,' it really determined a lot." And having that document in the collection, points out Nussbaum, who worked on Gore's presidential campaign, "shows that Al Gore was out there early."

There is some question as to whether an official history effort like this one will yield an inherently pro-Clinton piece of propaganda. "They're feeding us candy, and we've got to be aware of that," says Douglas Brinkley, director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans. But, he says, as long as that's understood, "it's going to be extraordinarily helpful for scholars instead of waiting to look for needles in a haystack 20 years from now."

The needle-in-haystack element is what makes the project so valuable. When a scholar tries years later to reconstruct a decision-making process that occurred in a more obscure department or agency—where, for example, beyond a desire to irritate George W. Bush, Clinton's last-minute executive order declaring 58 million acres of federal land off-limits from any development originated—it can be an excruciating effort to dig up the relevant documents from different archives and collections of personal papers. Here, though, scholars can be guided by the project's history of the Department of the Interior, which will contain much of the relevant paperwork in one place and thus help them get started. "What departments and agencies do is a very hard thing to reconstruct," says Alan Brinkley, a historian at Columbia University. "They're not covered very much in the press."

Widmer—more historian than political operative—was well aware of the propaganda issue when organizing the project. He gave specific instructions to include documents pertaining to everything important—both the things that worked, such as welfare reform, and those that didn't, such as a dead-on-arrival plan to require public-school students to wear uniforms. "We made it very clear from the start that we absolutely did not want shareholder reports. We didn't want people tooting their own horns, saying these were all our successes, and this is why we're so great," Widmer says. "We wanted a realistic portrayal of eight years, so we wanted the frustrating moments in there, as well as the moments we're all proud of."

All the histories eventually came in, from every cabinet department and from offices such as the National Security Council, the CIA, and the Domestic Policy Council. Some were arriving, Widmer says, up until "the last plane took off" for Little Rock on January 20. Now they're sitting in the former car dealership that's holding materials for the Clinton Center until the building is ready. Presidential documents can't be released until at least five years after the end of a presidency, but Widmer is lobbying Clinton and his advisers to allow release as soon as possible. Once they're available, Widmer hopes this archive will be "the jewel of the collection" at the Clinton library. They'll be available both to serious historians coming to Little Rock—Widmer expects they'll be used as a starting point for major research—and also to the public; he hopes high-school and college students will find them accessible enough for term-paper research. Some departments and agencies also prepared electronic versions of their histories, which the Clinton library may make available online.

There's another group Widmer hopes will take advantage of this project: incoming administration officials. "Most cabinet secretaries do not really know that much about what they're doing," he says. "They've never been a cabinet secretary before." Well, actually, many of the current batch *have* done it before. "True. But a lot of things have changed since Gerald Ford was president," Widmer says. "A quarter-century's gone by, and it's a very new ballgame." ◘

HAND TO HAND COMBAT

The PalmPilot is the reigning champ of handheld computers. But its up-and-coming nemesis, Handspring's Visor, lets you use all sorts of attachments, which can turn the unit into just about anything but a toaster. By Mark Boal

Flat-screen TV
Portable printer
Tan suit
Socks

On my wish list of things to buy or, more precisely, things I could/should/ought to buy, a new handheld computer was never near the top. And yet there I was at Staples, looking at PDAs—Personal Digital Assistants—when, considering my priorities in terms of mental health, I should have been shopping for clean socks.

I blame my family.

Standing by my side in Staples was a man who over the years has served on and off as my Chief Technology Adviser and who also happens to be my older brother. Like most brothers, Chris and I are stuck in a childhood mode of competition. Then, it was for our parents' attention; now, we battle over gadgets.

This year he's winning, and it hurts. Last time we had dinner *en famille*, before even the appetizers came, he flashed his new top-of-the-line PDA, the Visor Prism (made by Handspring and sold for $429), and I nearly lost my appetite. The PDA had a color screen. Chris doesn't gloat. But when my eyes were wide with shock and I was admitting defeat, he captured the moment by taking my picture with his Prism's attached digital camera.

That was low. But what could I do? I was mired in 1997, with a Palm Personal. At the time, it was one of the first off the assembly lines; now the only place you can find it is eBay. Facing the loss of early-adapter prestige, I suddenly felt like the last guest at an already crowded party.

Truth be told, it wasn't merely fraternal angst that had brought me to this point.

It's a reflection of the times that I was ready to plunk down a few hundred bucks for a new PDA, even though my old standby had never failed me and its only flaw was my own fault (a dent in the screen, resulting from my habit of keeping the Palm in my back pocket, had turned a part of the screen permanently black and unusable).

Handspring, which was cofounded by Jeff Hawkins (who invented the Palm operating system and then bolted to run his own shop), has a line of PDAs that competes so successfully with Palm that it has turned the handheld question into a lifestyle choice. It's the ultimate status detail.

These days, Handspring's Visors are to Palms what Macs were to PCs in the nineties. Sleek and serious, the Palm Vx says Powerful Executive, while the new Palm M100 says Wants to Work for Powerful Executives. Visors, by contrast, are bulkier yet more expandable and powerful, and therefore ideal for suitless Creative Types who need the power and can accommodate the extra bulk in those soft messenger-style bags with nylon webbing.

CHOOSING BETWEEN A PALM AND A VISOR WAS DEADLY SERIOUS FOR ME: A MATTER OF WHO I WANTED TO BE.

And at the risk of imbuing all this with a false sense of drama, I have to say that choosing between a new Palm and a new Visor was deadly serious for me, a matter of who I was or wanted to be. I also had to upstage Chris.

I trolled the message boards and quizzed friends until I discovered a drawback to the Visor Prism—some people complain that its battery dies too quickly. I rushed to Chris with this news, told him I wasn't about to repeat *his* mistake, and then triumphantly bought a Visor Platinum, a step below the Prism. At $299, the Platinum doesn't have the color screen, but it runs twice as fast as the cheaper Visors and comes with 8 megabytes of RAM (more than ten times what my Palm has). At home, my old Palm lay on my desk, cast-off and forlorn, but I never looked back.

One advantage the Visors have over Palms: They HotSync—or download—faster. But the true plus is that Visors have an easy expansion slot, into which one slips so-called modules that can transform the unit into any number of useful gadgets.

There was one module I really wanted, and to understand why, you have to go back in time. In the seventies, the U.S. government began placing satellites into the earth's orbit as part of a project to improve navigation for the military. By 1995, we had 24 satellites in the air, and together they covered the entire globe and made up the Global Positioning System, or GPS. These birds broadcast signals 24/7, which anyone with a GPS receiver can pick up at no charge.

Under the right conditions, a GPS receiver can give extremely precise information about one's location, accurate within about eight feet. I figured it would be useful next time I was stranded at 2 A.M. with no hip bar in sight. Had I thought about it further, I probably would have realized that if you're trying to find such a place at all, you have more problems than a GPS module is going to solve.

As it turned out, I learned the hard way that there's a catch to GPS magic: Finding the right conditions for it to work is not easy. A GPS receiver needs an unobstructed view of the sky so it can lock onto signals from at least three satellites. That's great if you're a soldier in Desert Storm but less useful if you're in a city where tall buildings block reception—or if you're hiking in a valley surrounded by mountains.

Not only that, but even when GPS does work properly, most maps aren't accurate enough for it. The military has state-of-the-art maps of potential hot spots, but consumers are stuck with the stuff from commercial mapmakers, most of whom made their maps long before GPS was invented. The upshot is that while a GPS locator can tell you your position accurately within a few feet, the map it's hooked up to is probably at least a hundred feet off-scale.

As I said, I learned this the hard way. I tried my personal GPS device, in this case GeoDiscovery's Geode ($289; it slips right into the back of the Visor), in Manhattan. The result? It had me standing in the Hudson River when I was on Fifth Avenue—a good mile away.

The Visor Platinum, with attachable keyboard, Glenayre's @ctiveLink e-mail module, and GeodeDiscovery's GPS device

I also tried a module that turns a Visor into a pager and an e-mail device. OmniSky is the best known manufacturer here [“The Whole Web in Your Hands,” Tools, November 2000], but I went with a less-known firm, Glenayre, which makes a lot of the infrastructure for wireless communication, the switches and routers and so forth. I figured that if it built the guts of a paging system, it could also build the best pager, and I was pleasantly surprised to be right. Glenayre's “@ctiveLink” module ($179, plus a $35 monthly access fee) let me e-mail from anywhere; it uploads and downloads without delay. One downside for power users, however, is that messages are limited to 2,000 characters, and it doesn't read attachments.

In addition to e-mail functionality, there's a menu of other info available from Glenayre, including news and sports headlines, travel info, and the ability to track UPS and FedEx packages. The tracking features are so-so, and I found the headlines pointlessly abbreviated. What good does it do me to know immediately that “Indonesia's Wahid Refuses to Step Down” when I can't even read a story telling me who the heck Wahid is (Indonesia's president, it turns out).

He who invents the long-lasting battery shall inherit the earth. Both the Geode and the Glenayre ripped through batteries. I didn't mind this as much with the Glenayre because the e-mail was so fast, but the Geode also attacked my handheld's battery, and that brought on the fear that I'd lose my personal data. Word to the wise: If you buy a Visor, get the backup module ($40) right away!

Of all the add-ons I tried, the grooviest one is also the simplest: a foldable and totally portable keyboard. You can buy them for either Visors or Palms, and there are several serviceable models; mine, from Targus for $99, is shown above. This keyboard is really a low-tech deal, nothing more than your average keyboard broken into three pieces and held together with straps.

But it works beautifully and nearly transforms the handheld into a laptop. Somebody should have thought of it years ago. And, yes, Chris already has one. ◘

E-mail comments to mboal@brillscontent.com.

PETER BERSON

REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22] **7.** Did historian David Greenberg interview every newspaper columnist and every reporter before writing his very interesting article showing that Richard Nixon was anything but a gracious loser? He writes: "Everyone knows, of course, that research isn't in a pundit's job description. For most, a spin of the Rolodex and a vigorous Nexis search make for a proud day's work." And, later, "most newspeople place getting a good story above honoring the richness and fullness of history."

And everyone knows, of course, that accuracy isn't in a historian's job description, either. For most, a sweeping statement and a broad indictment make for a proud day's work. Most historians place getting a good book contract above honoring the fairness and thoroughness of reporting.

8. Does Ralph Nader know what *fulsome* means? Do the editors at *Brill's Content* know? In Mr. Nader's long and whiny story about his campaign, he writes:

"There is one hero in this story who often goes unsung. Brian Lamb, the creator of C-SPAN, convinced the cable industry years ago that serious events deserve unedited coverage. In all the giant United States, the communications leader of the world, only C-SPAN covers entire events regularly during a presidential campaign. That fulsomeness speaks volumes about the vacuum that surrounds it."

The American Heritage Dictionary, fourth edition, defines *fulsome* as "offensively flattering or insincere. Offensive to the taste or sensibilities." "I don't mind a little praise," Adlai Stevenson once said, "as long as it's fulsome."

I'VE LONG THOUGHT JOURNALISM SCHOOLS SHOULD REQUIRE A COURSE CALLED "NUMBERS FOR JOURNALISTS."

9. Were we told all we needed to know to understand that poll about how we got our political news last fall?

We were told the poll included 800 voters and 400 nonvoters. But what were the questions? How big were the subgroups? The story says: "Sixteen percent of under-30 voters and 14 percent of college grads frequently (ten times or more per week) surfed for election news." What the story didn't say was this: The size of the under-30 sample was 89 people. That's tiny, and all but meaningless. The editors should have told us that. Indeed, they should have told us that no subset was larger than 374; they should have run a little box listing the sizes of all subsets; and they should have listed the questions. "Skepticism is a virtue," the cover always reminds us. And the fewer facts we are given, the more skeptical we should be.

10. Finally, does pollster Frank Luntz know the difference between a percent and a percentage point? The article dutifully reported that the worksheet he provided *Brill's Content* noted a "margin of error +/- 3.5%" for the 800-voter sample and a "margin of error +/- 4.9%" for the 400-nonvoter sample.

In fact, those margins of errors are percentage points, not percents, and that's a huge difference. Example: Let's say a poll showed that 52 percent of the electorate favored Al Gore and 48 percent favored George Bush. If the margin of error were 4 percentage points, that means that anything from a 56–44 Gore landslide to a 52–48 Bush lead was within the realm of possibility. But if the margin of error were 4 percent, that means the range could have been only 54–46 Gore or a 50–50 dead heat. A percent is the same as a percentage point only if the base number is 100.

When asked about this, Mr. Luntz responded: "I don't understand what he is getting at. Most polls use '+/- x%' and not 'x percentage points' in stating error margins." We apparently read different polls. Most polls I see, including the best of the lot—the polls by The Pew Research Center for The People and The Press—give the margin of error in percentage points.

I've long thought journalism schools should require a course called "Numbers for Journalists." Perhaps it should be called, instead, "Numbers for Journalists and (Some) Pollsters."

I am, like the elevator, dubious.

The editors respond: Mr. Gartner has sent us a seemingly impressive list of mostly nitpicks, so bear with us while we pick back.

1. President Clinton and Mr. Brownstein: Different genres of journalism carry with them different conventions and engender different expectations in readers. In a Q&A format, the reading experience would be off-putting and disjointed if people mentioned by the interviewee were in turn interviewed and quoted in response—as Mr. Gartner says we should have done with Ronald Brownstein. We don't think readers want or expect that, and we don't think it's appropriate. Of course there may be situations where an interview subject says something unfair or untrue about somebody else, and in instances like that, we ask for a response or we would edit out such material. But in this case, President Clinton praised Ronald Brownstein, hardly the sort of statement that would necessitate breaking the format of an interview in order to obtain a response. We're pleased the exchange was deemed interesting and important enough that *The Washington Post* followed up.

2. The unmentioned subscription price hike: By noting that we didn't write about our new price and then commenting that we do report on "what's going on at other magazines," Mr. Gartner seems to be implying that we are being sneaky and hypocritical. Wrong and wrong. First of all, we don't report on other magazines' raising their subscription prices, because that's not all that interesting or newsworthy. But more to the point, it's not as if anybody buying the magazine doesn't know the cost. And putting in an explanation about a price hike would only be confusing, since the new price gets phased in over time and different subscribers pay different prices, depending on when they signed on. The point is, everyone who subscribes or renews or buys a copy at a newsstand knows the exact cost. As for the discrepancy between the price in the blow-in card and the price listed in small type in the postal information box on page 159, Mr. Gartner caught us red-handed: We forgot to update the info in the box.

3. The Bill Maher joke: Mr. Gartner chides us for referring to a joke Maher told about Leonid Brezhnev but not quoting the joke. Naturally, we made choices about which of Maher's remarks and jokes advanced the story and shed light on its subject, and the article about Maher included many examples of his humor and numerous verbatim quotes. If Mr. Gartner feels that the portrait our piece painted of Maher was flawed or unfair, that's one thing, but he makes no such complaint.

4. The "dubious" elevator: Did we misuse the word *dubious*? Our dictionary of record, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, tenth edition—a spelling and usage arbiter of *The New Yorker*, *Time*, and various other news journals—defines *dubious* as "of doubtful

promise or outcome...questionable or suspect as to true nature or quality." Mr. Gartner's *American Heritage Dictionary* offers, "Fraught with uncertainty or doubt...arousing doubt; doubtful...of questionable character." A dubious elevator, then, would be one of suspect quality, one that arouses doubt. The context of the sentence is more than clear: a shoddy-looking elevator in a run-down building. Perhaps Mr. Gartner is constricting the word to one of its many definitions, one of which *Webster's* phrases (secondarily) as "unsettled in opinion: doubtful." Or, perhaps, he would have preferred *fulsome*. (See No. 8.)

5. Nixon and the book review: Mr. Gartner questions Michael Korda's motives in not including the name of the review that Richard Nixon complained about. The letter from Nixon to Korda was a private correspondence, and Korda felt that going into more detail would be a violation of Nixon's confidence. Besides, elsewhere in that same piece, specific book reviews, including the major ones the author is accused of kissing up to, were in fact criticized by Korda.

6. "Snuggles": Mr. Gartner is of course correct that normally, second references to people use their last name. We did stray from that practice here and perhaps could have done so more artfully. In one of the "Snuggles" references, Christian Curry is explaining how he bought a new engagement ring for Marisa Wheeler, and in the second, Curry's publicist, David Granoff, is discussing the couple's modeling ambitions. Quotation marks around the name would have made it clearer, but the use of the nickname, rather than the formality of Wheeler's last name, was meant to convey the color and flavor of Curry's and Granoff's comments, not as a snide or catty editorialization, and we imagine most readers understood that.

7. Greenberg's broad sweep: Mr. Gartner criticizes David Greenberg's use of the phrase "everyone knows" as not being technically true. But in our view, everyone knows that "everyone knows" is neither meant to be taken literally nor read that way.

8. Nader's "fulsomeness": Mr. Gartner questions whether Ralph Nader or we know what *fulsome* means. Well, our dictionary, *Webster's*, offers four definitions. The first: "characterized by abundance: copious...generous in amount, extent, or spirit." This, clearly, was how Nader wished to describe C-SPAN's coverage. Mr. Gartner's preferred definition, which *Webster's* phrases as "aesthetically, morally, or generally offensive," appears second. To be sure, the careful writer or editor must think long and hard about the deployment of words with multiple meanings, but in this instance, the usage was linguistically apt and completely clear in its context.

9. The Poll, Part 1: We didn't include the exact wording of the questions in the poll because they were accurately paraphrased in the story and/or the charts, and unless the story somehow mischaracterized the poll questions—which Mr. Gartner doesn't claim—then we see this as a case of "no harm, no foul." We didn't quantify the size of the subgroups, but we believe that they were in fact large enough, according to accepted polling standards, to justify the conclusions we drew from them. Surveys like CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup's and *Newsweek*'s regularly report on results with similar cell sizes. According to Frank Luntz, even though the error margin is relatively high with small subgroups, the numbers generated are worth reporting because they can reflect a trend or a deviation from the norm.

10. The Poll, Part 2: Mr. Gartner is right about the difference between percentage points and percentages, but again, according to Luntz, most media polls assume that +/- 3.5% means the results could go up or down that spread—i.e., 3.5 points.

In sum, although Mr. Gartner's bill of particulars certainly appeared fulsome (first meaning), upon careful consideration, let's just say we're dubious.

Michael Gartner responds: You guys sure can get defensive. Also, Nixon is dead. ◘

CNN's Free Fall

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69] in the news group."

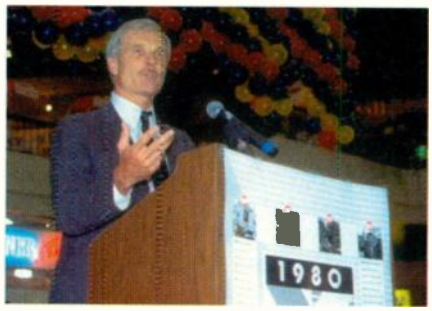
But, as one of Kent's employees puts it, the current management team is "a politburo without a general secretary." Although Bedingfield has announced major programming changes and has signaled his desire for more live shots as opposed to packaged segments, most CNN staffers have been left, after the layoffs, with little guidance as to how to do their jobs. "We're definitely getting mixed messages," says an Atlanta source. "There's a leadership void." One example: At a meeting in mid-January, Bedingfield was pushing for "stories people talk about." The message, the source says, was that CNN should be doing "news you can use." Just one week later, though, the network's executive producers were relaying a different message: "hard news, hard news, hard news." According to Chris Black, a congressional correspondent who had been with CNN for just two years and was laid off in January, "The place has been run by committee, and there's a tremendous amount of confusion." Brooks Jackson, a highly respected Washington-based senior correspondent who has been with the network for 11 years, describes a shift in emphasis in the way he does his job. "We're going to be challenged to do hard-hitting news in a different way," he says, citing a January field report from Pennsylvania about energy deregulation. Before the restructuring, Jackson would have put together a produced package, similar to one you might see on a network newscast; instead, he decided to report his story through a series of live shots throughout the morning. When asked how he got the message that live shots are to be the new norm for CNN, Jackson says, "I put my finger to the wind."

While CNN staffers wonder who's in charge in Atlanta, many current and former employees see troubling signs of a decline in the network's day-to-day news coverage. "I question the importance of dogs," says Carl Rochelle, a CNN on-air veteran who was let go in January, referring to a segment that inspired much derision in CNN's hallways: a January 22 report about a fire at an Escondido, California, animal shelter that killed more than 100 animals (one shelter volunteer told the camera, "It was really devastating because I, like, love these dogs, and I know, like, the personalities and stuff, and it's really sad"). "Some of us thought, 'Wow—that's not even good local TV,'" says Rochelle. Sol Levine, a CNN senior producer who was dismissed in the layoffs, had a stronger reaction. "There was some police officer on, and they had a puppy," he says. "At one point, I started screaming at the TV, in the middle of the newsroom, 'Just get the officer to shoot the dog, and that will get you ratings!'"

Another embarrassment Rochelle cites occurred on January 5,

when CNN broadcast four segments on the Atlanta Boat Show, which was held at a convention center across the street from CNN headquarters. "We talked about what it might look like to see 500 watercraft in one room," said anchor Leon Harris from the scene. "This is it. This is amazing." For Rochelle, the segments did not represent CNN's mission. "It was almost like a commercial for the boat show," says Rochelle. "Just on and on and on. Who cares about boats?"

CNN News Group CEO Tom Johnson says there's room for that type of story. "All excellent news organizations...have a mix. In our case our emphasis is on hard news. But of course we'll do features which are of interest to the audience." The bottom line, he says, is that "there is no softening of the news at CNN."



Ted Turner celebrates CNN's tenth anniversary.

Of course, hallway grousing about boat-show puffery is hardly a rarity at news networks. "It was not 'Good God, the network's dying,'" says Rochelle. "It was 'What are they doing now?'" Still, the recent tumult has heightened tension at the network between what one source calls the "purists," such as Rochelle and John King, and the "realists," who maintain that CNN must undergo significant change. "There's an opportunity here," says Washington bureau chief Frank Sesno, "to make CNN better than it's ever been before. I don't minimize the pain, but they're growing pains. No pain, no gain, right?"

Those changes go far beyond a few puffy pieces. "We're going through a rough patch," says Jackson. "Not just in terms of layoffs. CNN's having a tough time figuring out how to position itself in a competitive environment. You can see our programming evolve, and it will continue to evolve." That evolution is most evident in the new prime-time lineup instituted by Bedingfield, who canceled the signature hourlong 8 P.M. newscast *The World Today* and replaced it with *Wolf Blitzer Reports*, a half-hour show in which the longtime CNN Washington correspondent and anchor interviews newsmakers and reporters about the day's events, and *The Point With Greta Van Susteren*, a Fox-style interview show. After that comes *Larry King Live* at 9, followed by *CNN Tonight* at 10, a half-hour newscast anchored by Bill Hemmer, who became a familiar face at CNN through his Florida election recount coverage. Wrapping up prime time, at 10:30, is *The Spin Room*, a political chat show with Tucker Carlson and Bill Press. The lineup changes mean that between 8 and 11 P.M., the all-news network broadcasts only 30 minutes of a traditional anchored newscast. The rest, in one form or another, is talk. (Chief operating officer Phil Kent disagrees with the characterization of Blitzer's show as talk-oriented, emphasizing that it is a "news broadcast that has a talk element within it.")

"We now have as short a newscast as the broadcast networks," says a staffer. "MSNBC and Fox have a full hour of news—a broadcast of record—every night. We don't." Given these changes, how will CNN differentiate itself from Fox and MSNBC? "Through its superior reporting," Bedingfield says, and "the level of dialogue on *Greta*. The quality of guests and the range of guests."

But CNN insiders say that for better or worse, the programming change represents a decisive shift on the part of CNN's management away from the network's 20-year model of news delivery toward personality-driven talk shows. "CNN has to decide what it wants to be," says a highly placed source at the network. "Forget Fox and forget MSNBC. We don't have an O'Reilly; we don't have a Hannity and Colmes. There needs to be a discernible vision of the tone our air should take." Under Bedingfield, one of the network's age-old slogans has been decommissioned. "CNN used to say, 'The news is the star,'" says Jackson, who is no on-air hunk but does some of the toughest, most substantive reporting on television. "And now," he adds, "we've come around to promoting personalities. I take this as a challenge to keep myself relevant." Many consider the personality gambit, which puts the network's future largely in the hands of Blitzer, Van Susteren, and Jeff Greenfield, who has been given a 6 P.M. talk show, a cost-cutting maneuver. Talk, after all, is cheap. And in the wake of the AOL Time Warner merger, cheapness is a virtue.

Many CNN staffers also object to the new format's smaller "news hole"; there are simply fewer broadcast minutes available throughout the day for the packaged reports producers and correspondents send in from the field. Instead of a variety of reports about the day's news, CNN is increasingly moving toward MSNBC-like repetitive coverage of the day's major story—the White House shooting, for instance—and then filling up the nighttime schedule with personalities who talk about the same story. "You have that sinking feeling," says one CNN staffer, "'If I do a piece today, will it even see air?' Your opportunities to be seen early and often are now diminished."

Bedingfield allows that his schedule changes mean fewer packages in prime time, and that these changes have increased competition among CNN producers for which packages make it onto the air. But, he says, something must be done to attract viewers. "We want not only for CNN to be the best newsgathering organization," says Bedingfield, "we want it to be watched." And, of course, the beneficiaries of the changes are not as disgruntled as the rank and file. "You can be optimistic or you can be pessimistic," says Greenfield, whose new show will feature unconventional guests, such as athletes and musicians, discussing the day's political news. "Where are you going to go on cable when real news breaks out? We're going to be the place....I would not have agreed to re-up with CNN if I thought they were going to take this network and go south with it....If I look up in several months and it turns out I was wrong, I'll go somewhere else." Similarly, Christiane Amanpour, CNN's chief international correspondent, says that from where she sits, the network is in good shape. "Look, in terms of why I'm at CNN and the work that I want to do, I have been assured that there is no attempt to wipe that off the face of the network," she says. "And while it is a struggle—as we know in the entire news environment—to get foreign news on, I'm finding that my stuff, at least, is being played."

Johnson says the network's repositioning is simply a healthy attempt to stay lean financially and relevant journalistically. "Every organization needs to take a comprehensive look at itself at least every ten years," says Johnson, adding that CNN, at the ripe age of 21, was about ten years late in that regard. "If not, somebody else is going to do it for them." Somebody like AOL Time Warner CEO Gerald Levin or co–chief operating officer (and MTV cofounder) Bob Pittman? "It creates pressures for continued growth," says one CNN insider of the new corporate environment.

"Pressure to keep The Street happy. Much of it is about cost-effectiveness, if not the absolute bottom line."

The bottom line shouldn't be considered such a problem for CNN. The CNN News Group, for instance, brings in $1.3 billion per year in total revenue. And because last year was the network's most profitable, the layoffs and reorganization are puzzling. Why would a profitable company with one of the best-known brands in journalism lay off 10 percent of its workforce? "Change is an inevitable part, I think, of the...world in which we are operating today," says Johnson. Or, as the insider notes, CNN is facing an earnings growth target of around 13 percent. When *Brill's Content* asked four of CNN's top executives—Tom Johnson, Phil Kent, Eason Jordan, and executive vice-president of news standards and practices Richard Davis, who were all on one conference call—for estimates of the cuts in domestic production and newsgathering budgets in 2001, none would provide a specific answer other than that CNN will spend more money "in total" in 2001 than in 2000 (which could include advertising costs or international programming) and that the newsgathering budget is "humongous" and "bigger than anybody else's." In the interview, they claimed not to know the specific numbers off-hand. Later, a CNN spokesman declined to provide them, saying, "We don't discuss that type of information."

Another sign of CNN's cost-consciousness is found in Jordan's memo to staff on the restructuring. "Look for the quick introduction of small, high-quality DV [digital video] cameras," Jordan wrote, "and laptop editing equipment...enabling us to deploy smaller reporting teams—one or two people at times when it makes sense." The implication that reporters would become one-man news crews—"correspondents would do well to learn how to shoot and edit," Jordan wrote—prompted snickers. "I think if [Jordan] had his way, everyone would be running around with little *Max Headroom* cameras on their heads," says one former correspondent.

CNN executives are clearly frustrated by that attitude. "All we're trying to do," says Johnson wearily, "is become much more multi-skilled....And we're not going to be asking Greta to be walking around with a large camera."

When asked about staff morale, Jordan (who had recently returned from a tour of some of CNN's foreign bureaus) answers, "Depends on where you are. Among the vast majority of our people overseas morale is very high. Domestically," he adds, "we're undergoing a significant process of change."

Johnson is more candid. "Morale is down," he says. "Look, we just laid off 400 people. We've got to lead CNN vigorously in a very positive way going forward, but morale is down." Johnson emphasizes that Jordan was (as of press time in February) embarking on a similar whistle-stop campaign to all of the U.S. bureaus to provide, as Kent puts it, "the human personal touch." The first of those meetings, held in Washington, D.C. (which Bedingfield and Kent also attended), was described by Sesno as, "in State Department parlance, frank and candid."

Morale certainly wasn't helped by what some describe as the cold manner with which the unfortunate were dispatched in January: The press seized gleefully on the image of CNN as a corporate bully. "CNN's Inhuman Resources," read one headline in Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* (Murdoch also owns Fox). Some CNN executives vigorously deny those reports. "Only a fool would believe everything that's been written about this process," says Jordan of the *Post* coverage. "To the best of my

CNN's Free Fall

knowledge, no one was escorted from the building by security guards." Kent says that two employees who were "disruptive" were escorted out. To hear Johnson tell it, however, one gets the sense that, even if security didn't march every laid-off employee from CNN property, guards were kept handy just in case. "This is an emotional time for a person to be laid off," says Johnson. "It was my responsibility to ensure that, even if one out of 400 people had decided to go postal in some way on us, that our people were protected." Kent puts that remark in context: "While this was going on, it was a few days after the incident in Boston," he says, referring to the December workplace shooting in Wakefield, Massachusetts, in which seven people died. Johnson emphasizes that the layoffs were handled with "the greatest degree of sensitivity" and points to generous severance packages offered to those who were let go. Nonetheless, a CNN that has guards at the ready because it fears violence from its employees is a far cry from the band of upstarts who founded the network 21 years ago.

In defending his programming changes, Bedingfield says he is adding an "in-depth hourlong" program on Sunday nights called *CNN Presents*, which will be an "outlet for the best in-depth reporting on CNN." Hearing Bedingfield describe a program as an "outlet for the best in-depth reporting" on the network gives pause. Why would a 24-hour news channel need an outlet for its best reporting? What is CNN, if not an outlet for reporting? Another of John King's trenchant e-mails puts the questions more succinctly. In January, King wrote to Bedingfield and others to complain that two of his exclusive newsbreaks—he was reporting the nominations of two of Bush's cabinet secretaries—were mishandled by the network's anchors. "Allegedly there is a premium on trying to break news," King wrote. "Allegedly [it] is good for our ratings and profile. Yet do it and it often turns out it is a waste of energy." The e-mail goes on to complain that Atlanta anchors didn't give enough attention to King's stories and read them with qualifying language when no qualifications were in order. "Allegedly CNN wants its reporters to break news," the e-mail continues. "But CNN doesn't know how to handle breaking news when its reporters do break news. In any event, it wasn't walking, wearing leather, or in The New York Times. Not to mention the gadget guy was waiting. God this place is depressing."

So, for many CNN staffers, was this year's Washington Press Club's Annual Congressional Dinner, one of those Washington affairs where prominent journalists and politicians looking for an excuse to dress in black tie share a night of inside-the-beltway navel-gazing and lighthearted ribbing, all for a good cause. At the dinner, emceed by Mark Shields on a Tuesday night in early February and attended by Colin Powell, Hillary Clinton, Chris Matthews, David Broder, and others, CNN was the butt of some jokes. "Those of you who know me," said Rep. David Dreier from the dais, "know that I will find time for any television appearance, no matter how small the audience. In fact, just this afternoon I appeared on CNN." Dreier's dig at the news network was met by gasps from the CNN table and opened the door for the next speaker, Rep. Martin Frost, to go in for the kill. "I'm sorry some of the CNN people couldn't be here," said Frost. "They're all over at Kinko's running off their résumés."

Perhaps that sort of ridicule is appropriate for a network that, according to its own senior White House correspondent, doesn't know how to handle breaking news. But Bedingfield's response to King's e-mail, which he forwarded to several executive producers, doesn't offer much comfort. "Once you get past the sarcasm," he writes, "John has a point about how we handle news that our folks break—Do we give it enough punch? Rush it to the air? Put up a breaking news banner? State definitively CNN HAS LEARNED...? It is just these sort of quick breaking news items from our reporters that will give our air the kind of urgency we want across the day. We should make the most of them—never bury them."

"I'm sorry some of the CNN people couldn't be here," said Rep. Martin Frost at a congressional dinner. "They're all over at Kinko's running off their résumés."

The fact that CNN's most visible leader, at least internally, feels it necessary to write in a memo to his executive producers that CNN should "never bury" breaking news is a telling indicator of the network's troubles. Bedingfield's memo raises questions—essentially, how should we handle breaking news?—that are perhaps more appropriate to a startup network than to one that has just celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Asked whether the fact that he felt it necessary to write that note in the first place suggests that CNN is drifting, Bedingfield responds, "You don't just say, 'We learned something 15 years ago, so we're doing fine.' You always want to critique and refine." The question on the mind of many in Bedingfield's employ, though, is whether, in refining CNN, he has forgotten what it did learn 15 years ago. ◘

Additional reporting by senior correspondents Gay Jervey and Abigail Pogrebin

Traffic Cop

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73] just as much sense as how people operate here." It was Golden's input, at least in part, that led Soderbergh and Gaghan to change Del Toro's character from a remorseless and increasingly corrupt cop to an officer simply trying to do his job and maintain his integrity amid rampant corruption. (Del Toro also lobbied Gaghan and Soderbergh to make his character more complex.) On the filmmakers' trip to Mexico, says Golden, "we talked to a powerful cop in Tijuana, a good guy. He starts telling stories about the depth of corruption inside the police, stories that force you to ask, How does he survive, much less do the right thing?" In *Traffic*, the Del Toro character raises, and attempts to answer, those same questions, which pleases Golden.

Traffic's real-world effects remain to be seen: Soderbergh says he hopes the film will get people to begin to consider drugs as a health-care issue rather than a political or criminal issue. "I'm generally a skeptic when it comes to the political impact of films," says Golden. "I'm surprised it's resonated as powerfully as it has." And with the drug war he knows so well finding such a broad audience, Golden says, "it makes you think about the disparate impact of different ways of telling a story. You always ask yourself if you're getting through to people."

Not that he's considering a career in Hollywood. "I like my day job," he says. ◘

Battle Royal

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 81] appearances. In anticipation of the blackout, Padden had scheduled meetings with *The New York Times*'s editorial board, a deputy mayor of New York, and the city's chief attorney. The next day, Padden also dropped in on the editorial board of the *New York Post*, and he and Iger appeared on most national television news broadcasts, including CNN, CNNfn, CNBC, and the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC.

That night, Padden flew to Los Angeles, where he met with the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Orange County Register*, and various municipal cable-television franchising authorities. While Padden was talking to the *Register*'s editorial board in the afternoon, someone handed him a note. Time Warner, during a live press conference, had announced it was putting ABC back on the air.

The companies would eventually settle their cable-rate differences in a series of meetings between Time Warner's Parsons and ABC's Iger. But the damage was done. Padden was on his way to being known in Washington as "the ubiquitous Preston Padden," the man reporters turned to for their antimerger quotes and intelligence—the man who had declared war on AOL and Time Warner.

Time Warner's Levin (left) and AOL's Case in April, shortly before Time Warner pulled ABC off the air

"Pulling the channel was a significant kick up," conceded Parsons in January. "It galvanized Disney to sort of lead the charge and legitimize all of this." It became apparent to competing lobbyists in Washington that after the ABC blackout fiasco, AOL took greater control over the government-relations work, relegating Time Warner to the background. As more members of Congress started to pay attention to the merger—and wrote letters to the FTC and the FCC expressing their concerns—Time Warner's lobbyists were nowhere to be seen. Instead, AOL's lobbyists started meeting with congressional staffers. Some were quick to point out, however quietly, that their company was not the one that had pulled the plug on Disney.

In Washington, if you want to hold a clandestine meeting full of lobbyists, the best place to do it is usually a law firm—nobody will notice a few extra suits entering the building. So Preston Padden called a secret meeting on June 5 at Howrey Simon Arnold & White, a high-powered law firm whose modern offices were featured in the movie *The Pelican Brief*. Lawyers and lobbyists representing BellSouth and other Bell telephone companies, General Electric, RCN, USA Networks, and representatives from a coalition of ISPs—about 20 companies in all—gathered around the table. So many lobbyists attended that some had to stand. There was also a smattering of public-interest advocates who make their careers fighting corporate interests. The strangeness was not lost on Jeffrey Chester, the executive director of the Center for Media Education. "It was a who's-who of Washington heavyweights, and we are all going around the room explaining why we're there," recalled Chester. "Everyone said, 'I'm here representing the interest of my company,' but when it came to me, I said, 'I'm here because I'm concerned about the free flow of information and the diversity of content.' They all looked at me like I was from another planet."

Despite the crowd, however, only four public-interest groups and BellSouth agreed to join Disney in combating the merger. All who attended sympathized with Padden's arguments that AOL Time Warner would become the gatekeeper of the Internet, but many were afraid of taking on such a powerful conglomerate. Most of the companies would become what Padden called "free riders"—they wanted to keep in close touch with Padden and his troops but only to find out what was happening. And they wouldn't contribute to the cause, at least not publicly. "Padden deserves credit for trying to have a big tent," Chester said. "Whether or not people followed through publicly, [the meeting spurred] a lot of action behind the scenes."

While the opposition was building, AOL and Time Warner turned their attention to Europe. The two companies were facing a deadline for getting their merger approved by the European Commission, the governing body of the European Union—yet another step in the regulatory process. The EU's concerns were different because they dealt only with AOL and Time Warner's much smaller European market share. The EU antitrust officials quickly homed in on the new company's potential to dominate online music sales. Before approving the merger, and after almost five months of negotiations, the EU forced Time Warner to withdraw from a previously planned merger with music giant EMI Group, one of the world's largest music companies.

The two companies spun the EU's approval, which came on October 11, as a victory and a big step toward winning approval in the U.S., but that was not quite the case. As AOL and Time Warner officials would soon discover, there was a firestorm waiting for them at home. "We finally got out of Europe...and in the fall turned to the FTC, [where our competitors] had built up quite a head of steam around this open-access issue," said Parsons.

Christopher Curtin, Preston Padden's chief lieutenant in the lobbying battle, spent most of his time in Washington, but for a three-week period in May, Curtin was bicoastal, masterminding a top-secret project that Disney was creating to help win over members of Congress and the press. The idea was simple: How do you explain interactive television and the broadband Internet to important legislators who barely know how to turn on a computer? The answer: Make a video. Indeed, Curtin's project came to be known in Washington as "The Video."

First Curtin jetted out to Los Angeles, where he sat down with a group of engineers, a film producer, and a young Disney screenwriter to write the script. "It couldn't be a technical film, but it couldn't be a *20/20* piece either," Curtin said. "It had to be deeper." Then, with script in hand, Curtin flew to New York, where the film was shot at ABC's television studios in one day. The company hired an actor to play the role of a television reporter, who walks the viewers through a litany of what a combined AOL Time Warner could do if allowed to dominate the market.

Disney blanketed Washington with the ten-minute video, "Consumer Choice in the Broadband Marketplace of Tomorrow." It plays like a hyped-up newsmagazine story, complete with on-air

SUZANNE PLUNKETT/AP

reporter, threatening music, and flashy graphics. One scene shows AOL Time Warner making it impossible for viewers to participate in an interactive version of ABC's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Another scene notes that AOL Time Warner would have the power to slow access to competitors' websites. The video was sent to key congressional staffers in late July, but in one of the lobbying battle's odder twists, AOL received an advance copy of the video by mail. As *Newsweek* reported, the leaker, who identified himself as "Mickey" on the package's return address, was an ABC employee.

AOL's reaction to the tape, coupled with Disney's secrecy about the project, sparked one of the corporate war's most intriguing skirmishes. Widely sought, the video was uploaded onto the Internet and accessible on a variety of sites. (Nobody seems to know how it got there.) AOL blasted the tape as another example of Disney hype and sent a squad of lobbyists to Capitol Hill to rebut its allegations. AOL's lobbyists were waiting in the hall, handing their response to the video to congressional staffers as they entered the room for a showing. Disney even had a special showing for reporters, and about 20 journalists from such publications as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *BusinessWeek* showed up.

The video was part of a much larger Capitol Hill lobbying campaign. Because congressional staff members do most of the work on the actual issues, much of a lobbyist's job is educating staff, and there's a lot of legwork involved. Padden and the public-interest groups spent much of their time handing out "fact sheets" and folders filled with news articles and position papers, explaining why open access was critical. The opposition lobby collected about 20 letters from lawmakers against the merger, some of them arriving as late as the day before the FTC approved the merger. "We wanted to create a political environment in which the people at the FTC and FCC would feel safe and comfortable doing whatever they thought was the right thing," said Padden. "We wanted to take away any fear that if they acted to preserve competition that they would get in trouble on the Hill."

The opposition campaign also forced AOL and Time Warner to spend a lot more time on Capitol Hill answering Disney's charges and soliciting their own letters in support of the merger. Although AOL and Time Warner countered Disney with about 15 letters from lawmakers, their lobbyists bruised a lot of egos on the Hill. One Democratic Senate staffer said that after the May blackout, he made about half a dozen calls to AOL's government-relations office, seeking answers to questions he had about the merger; not a single call was returned. Meanwhile, Disney and the public-interest groups were encouraging the staffer to write antimerger letters on behalf of his senator to the FTC and the FCC. Once the aide wrote the letters (which incorporated points made by Disney and the public-interest groups), AOL lobbyists started calling him. They told the staffer that the company had been having problems with the receptionist and had recently fired her. AOL asked the aide to write follow-up letters to the FCC and the FTC that softened the senator's position. The senator, however, had no intention of retracting his statements—especially because AOL did nothing to convince him otherwise. "I don't understand their lobby strategy and no one else up here seems to either," the staffer said. (AOL lobbyist Vradenburg says that AOL received numerous calls and was responsive to all of them.)

Political contributions also played a role in the lobbying efforts. For the 1999–2000 election cycle, AOL gave $1.7 million to candidates, up from $149,500 for the 1997–1998 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a money and politics watchdog group. Though corporations, including Time Warner and Disney, make political contributions all the time, AOL's 1,037 percent increase is noteworthy when compared with Time Warner's 28 percent increase and Disney's 27 percent increase during the same time period.

Not all lobbying is political arm-twisting. The Center for Media Education's Jeffrey Chester, a fast-talking sixties liberal and onetime independent-film and television producer, doesn't spend much time on the K Street Corridor, as Washington's stretch of lobbyists' offices is known. In fact, the corporate world seems pretty distant when viewed from Chester's office. Papers are stacked high over almost every surface of his desk, the floor, and a small table wedged into the corner; media trade magazines are everywhere. Chester opened his public-interest shop in 1991 to ensure media diversity and quality television programming for children and families, and his organization has been a thorn in the side of big media ever since. In recent years, Chester expanded his mission to the Internet, and in late 1999, before the AOL Time Warner merger, he began to promote open access. From this cramped warren, Chester handled much of the press and media strategy for the opposition to the merger; he also took a leading role in explaining interactive television to the FTC.

Stephen Heins, a small-businessman from Wisconsin, blew a hole in AOL and Time Warner's "trust me" approach.

As I sat with Chester in his office, he told me how the opposition brought an important philosophical element to the battle by enlisting Stanford Law School professor Lawrence Lessig. Lessig is one of the pioneering academics in the study of cyber law, whose credentials gave AOL Time Warner's competitors a gravitas they did not have. "Lessig helped transform the dimensions of this issue; it was one of our tactics, to fight this out philosophically," Chester said. "I knew I couldn't win politically against AOL Time Warner; they have too much clout, too much money, and too much power. We needed to frame [the debate]."

Lessig became involved with Chester in late 1999, when the public-interest advocate brought him to Washington for a policy briefing on open access, meetings with various foundations, and visits with the editorial boards of *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. Chester was worried about the spate of cable-company mergers, and Lessig had advised some of the opponents to one of AT&T's big acquisitions. Once the AOL Time Warner merger was announced, Lessig's role became more important. Chester brought him back to Washington in February 2000 to meet with FTC chairman Robert Pitofsky and with staff at the House and Senate antitrust subcommittees. Along the way, Chester began referring reporters to Lessig to give an academic, not political, perspective on the fight for open access.

Lessig understood his value. "We succeeded in getting people to see that the principle affected [by the merger] was a principle that affected innovation on the Internet in general," he said. "It was not just Preston Padden's politics." Lessig's role was vital because he was able to link the issue of openness on the Internet to the success of the Internet economy. He brought an economic argument to members of the public-interest community, which had been fighting the merger because they were worried about the diversity of content—which had little to do with the FTC's job of ensuring open markets for competition.

Battle Royal

Lessig had actually done some work in Washington two years earlier, talking to the Department of Justice and FCC regulators who were reviewing the merger between AT&T and the cable company MediaOne. But according to Lessig, regulators did not grasp his arguments at the time, and the merger went through without any conditions for open access. This time, however, Lessig found a more sympathetic ear in Pitofsky. The FTC chairman is a highly regarded academic who has studied cyber law, and the two hit it off. After his February meeting, Lessig came back in August to talk to Pitofsky, and it was clear to Lessig that Pitofsky understood his arguments. "I could see how every step of the way he got it, and he was just pushing to the next step," said Lessig.

Meanwhile, as the summer ended, the teams of lawyers who had been working on the deal for AOL and Time Warner dwindled to only a few. Most meetings at the FTC were held in a small conference room or in the office of Richard Parker, then the director of the FTC's Bureau of Competition. General counsel Christopher Bogart and Robert Joffe, a partner at the powerhouse New York firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore, represented Time Warner, while AOL used its general counsel, Paul Cappuccio, and Joe Sims, a private attorney from Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue.

The two sides were still far from a settlement. Much of the talks remained focused on open access. Parker was convinced he had a strong case in defense of some form of government regulation before the deal could be approved. Lawyers from AOL and Time Warner still believed that they had the upper hand because there was almost no business overlap between the two companies—which, they believed, meant they would win in court. The FTC, of course, thought otherwise, and the talks often devolved into posturing over who would make whom look bad in court. "It was a very intense time from August on," said Parker, who is now in private practice.

But not all of AOL and Time Warner's tactics were programmatic. During one round of talks, Parker said that Time Warner's and AOL's lawyers were arguing that the deal should be approved because the FTC had no case under antitrust law. Parker disagreed and started explaining, louder and louder, the merits of his case. "I'm leaning over, pounding the table; I'm ripping and snorting and I'm on a roll," Parker recalled. Suddenly, Cappuccio reached into his briefcase, pulled out a Tazmanian Devil doll, and waved it in Parker's face. The negotiators broke out laughing, and Parker completely lost his rhythm. Parker said that his staff was so impressed with the doll's effect on him that they asked Cappuccio where they could get their own.

When AOL and Time Warner finally met with the FTC commissioners, in September, commissioner Thomas Leary said he made it clear to the companies that he had some serious questions about the deal. AOL and Time Warner's initial strategy was essentially to say "Trust me." And trust was not an option for the regulators, who still clearly remembered Time Warner's decision to pull ABC from its cable networks four months earlier.

Stephen Heins, the director of marketing at a small ISP from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, helped blow a hole in AOL and Time Warner's "trust me" approach. Heins's company, NorthNet, has 2,500 residential subscribers and 250 business customers—hardly an AOL competitor. Heins, who had worked in marketing at a small Wall Street investment bank, quickly found himself in the middle of this fight among major corporations.

About five months before the proposed merger was announced, Heins had met with Time Warner's regional office, 20 miles north of Oshkosh, to try to negotiate a deal that would allow NorthNet to provide its Internet service over Time Warner's broadband cable lines. Nothing happened. Once the proposed merger was announced and AOL and Time Warner said they were committed to open access, Heins tried again. And again. "The more they said and the less they did, the madder I got," said Heins. As he stewed, Heins acquired an important document—a term sheet Time Warner had sent to another small ISP that was trying to negotiate a deal to use the cable company's broadband lines. The onerous terms of the deal—Time Warner wanted 75 percent of the ISP's subscription revenue and 25 percent of its advertising and e-commerce revenue—were explosive. The ISP was also required to make a $50,000 deposit to Time Warner and a minimum monthly payment of $30 for every one of Time Warner's subscribers who switched to the rival provider. Heins knew that such a deal would drive ISPs out of business. The one problem, however, was that the small provider had signed a confidentiality agreement barring it from revealing the terms of the deal.

Many think that AOL Time Warner's open-access agreement will likely become the de facto standard for the broadband market because the new company is the largest player.

For two months Heins thought about the agreement. He had gotten it from a friend, whom he did not want to implicate. But the lobbying battle over open access was heating up in Washington, and Heins knew that small ISPs could be ruined if the deal wasn't restricted. On October 3, Heins took a plane to Washington and checked into a hotel in Georgetown. He was a little nervous about taking on two of the biggest companies in the world. "Was I looking over my shoulder as I came into Washington? You bet your ass I was," Heins recalled. The next day, when he hand-delivered the term sheet to the FTC, Heins found a receptive audience. He met for four hours with a group of staff attorneys and economists, who were eager to listen to what a small-businessman had to say. "It was a very eye-opening meeting for them," Heins said.

Heins then traveled across town to the FCC, where he also tried to deliver the document. However, unschooled in the ways of Washington, Heins didn't know he had to make a legal filing before submitting documents to the agency. (He was forced to send it the following day.) While he was in town, Heins also leaked the term sheet to a *Washington Post* reporter.

Partly because of the term sheet and partly because of AOL and Time Warner's intransigent negotiating tactics, the FTC began to take a hard stance against the two companies. With little progress in the negotiations, the FTC was forced to push back the September deadline. By the end of October, negotiators at AOL and Time Warner began to feel that an agreement was within reach because the companies offered a deal, in which Time Warner would put another ISP on its network at the same time that it put on AOL. In addition, within 90 days of that deal, AOL Time Warner would sign on two other ISPs.

That concession still didn't satisfy the FTC. The commission wanted AOL and Time Warner to actually sign a contract with a rival provider before getting approval. When the FTC commissioners met in early November, it was clear that they still had problems with the merger. The FTC voted to extend its review for

three more weeks, and the decision motivated AOL and Time Warner. "As we worked with the FTC, it became clearer and clearer that this was a key piece of the puzzle to solve," said Time Warner's Parsons. "We needed to kind of give those guys ironclad assurance there was going to be a paradigm or a format under which at least multiple ISPs would be on it." During the summer, AOL had been negotiating carriage contracts with several ISPs, including EarthLink (the second-largest provider behind AOL), Juno Online Services, and Microsoft's MSN. Part of the problem, as AOL and Time Warner saw it, was that none of the ISPs wanted to make a deal because they were all hoping that AOL Time Warner would have to make big concessions during the regulatory process that would give the ISPs even more negotiating power. No one, it seemed, wanted to be first.

But with the deadline approaching, AOL and Time Warner got serious. Eleven days after the November decision to extend the deadline, AOL and Time Warner reached a deal with EarthLink. The contract, according to press reports, called for EarthLink to pay about 60 percent of its monthly high-speed subscriber fees as well as a portion of its e-commerce revenue to AOL Time Warner.

Now approval seemed close, but much to AOL and Time Warner's chagrin, it took a few more weeks before an agreement would be reached. AOL and Time Warner were worried that as the FTC reviewed the EarthLink contract, the companies' competitors would rush back to the FTC and demand more concessions. And that's exactly what happened.

This time, there was an even more powerful presence lobbying the FTC: Microsoft. The FTC asked Microsoft to weigh in with comments on the EarthLink deal, and the company was happy to oblige. Also spurred by the approaching deadline and wanting more restrictions on interactive television, the Bell phone companies, Disney, and the public-interest groups returned to the FTC for a final attack, along with Yahoo!, a significant—and clandestine—player. Yahoo! privately pushed for conditions on open access and interactive television, according to people familiar with the last-minute lobbying. A Yahoo! lobbyist said reports of Yahoo!'s involvement were "inaccurate."

AOL and Time Warner particularly fought efforts to impose restrictions on their content because they believed that such conditions violated their First Amendment rights. The FTC was worried that AOL Time Warner would not make its content available to other ISPs. The two companies argued that it would be foolish for them to give up markets where they could sell their products. For instance, making a Madonna record available only for download on AOL, they argued, made no economic sense. The FTC's argument, on the other hand, was that if AOL and Time Warner had no intention of restricting their content, they may as well sign an agreement stating that. The two sides were rapidly approaching another impasse.

On December 13, the night before the merger was voted on by the FTC, AOL and Time Warner budged slightly on their content stance. In a two-page document, the companies agreed to forward to their general counsel letters written by ISPs that complained about access to AOL Time Warner content. According to FTC commissioners Leary and Thompson, this concession was essential to the two of them voting in favor of the deal. The next morning, the five commissioners gathered in the FTC's fourth-floor conference room and voted to approve the merger. At a press conference that afternoon, Pitofsky praised the deal as good for consumers, noting: "This order provides that AOL Time Warner cannot interfere with the content of interactive television and cannot discriminate against competitors of Time Warner in any arbitrary way." Disney and the consumer groups also heralded the agreement.

AOL Time Warner issued a statement saying that it was gratified that the regulators had accepted the agreement, but it remained relatively quiet since it was still looking for FCC approval. That process would take another month—again, longer than AOL Time Warner had anticipated. The FCC would impose a few more concessions before voting to approve the deal, the most important of which involved instant messaging; AOL Time Warner was ordered to open its instant-messaging system to three competitors if it adds "advanced" services in the future. The agreement ordered the company to give competing ISPs control over the first screen that users see when they go online; it also required AOL Time Warner to allow competing providers to bill their clients directly. On the issue of open access, the agreement prohibits AOL Time Warner from discriminating against other providers in the quality of service it gives them and requires AOL Time Warner to negotiate "in good faith" with rival service providers.

Most people, including executives at AOL Time Warner, the lobbyists who opposed the deal, and the regulators, believe that the concessions extracted by the FTC and the FCC will be good for consumers. Many think that AOL Time Warner's open-access agreement will likely become the de facto standard for the broadband market because the new company is the largest player. "The old-fashioned cable and telephone model for information no longer applies to the Internet," said Thompson. "They will never get that genie back in the bottle." Others are not so sure. Consumer activists and competing ISPs plan to keep a watchful eye on AOL Time Warner.

Case and Levin are now struggling to combine the two companies. The streamlining has already resulted in a spate of layoffs, most notably at AOL's Dulles, Virginia, headquarters and at CNN (see "CNN's Free Fall," page 66). Observers in Washington also point out that the lobbying battle has depleted much of the company's reserve of political capital. That, of course, will need to be restored. It's notable that on the day the merger was finally approved by the FCC, Case and Levin, as well as co-chief operating officers Parsons and Pittman, picked up the phone and began making a new round of calls to key legislators and members of the new Bush administration. ◘

The Color of Ratings

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85] broadcast matches several I heard:

It was a health series. I found a story about a doctor who was trying to get old ladies to have mammograms. She would take portable mammography equipment into beauty parlors in order to reach the elderly customers at a convenient place for them. The story was fed in late from our Southern bureau for the 6:30 P.M. broadcast. When the executive producer saw the piece come in on the feed and saw that the doctor was black and the little old ladies were black, he said to [the producer]: "You didn't tell me that the doctor was black...that the people were black!" That's what he said to me. What he told the anchor was "This isn't the story we expected. It's a more serious subject. I thought it would be a light kicker." [He] killed the piece.

Consider ABC's *World News Tonight Saturday/Sunday*. The program's staff seems younger than that of most other news shows and has probably produced more stories with minority themes than any other ABC News broadcast. Indeed, the program

has one of the highest percentages of minority employees in TV news and is anchored by Carole Simpson, an African-American. But in the corridors of ABC News, a former member of the program's staff told me, this diversity earned the broadcast the pejorative tag "the black *World News Tonight*."

Paul Friedman, the executive vice-president and managing editor of ABC News, told me that he considered that label "offensive," adding, "If the *Saturday/Sunday* broadcasts have more stories with minority themes because the staff has a relatively high percentage of minority employees, that confirms why it is so important for us to continue our efforts to hire and promote talented employees." ABC News, in fact, had conducted a series of seminars after a group of minority employees complained about stereotypical footage on the networks.

In examining the problem, ABC is not alone. An NBC News executive producer detailed his network's efforts:

The other question that we ask all the time is about bias. Are we approaching [a story] from a biased point of view?...It could be in terms of how it's edited or how it's not. Case in point: [if] we're doing a story about welfare. Should every welfare mother be black? Well, the answer, of course, is no. [If] we're doing a story about unwed mothers, should every unwed mother that you go to pick be black? No....The fact, of course, is that more unwed mothers are white than are black.

A CBS News correspondent cited his own "best practice":

When I've been presented with an opportunity, for instance, in a prison story, to talk to a white inmate or a black inmate, I will always pick the white inmate on the theory that it will surprise people that there are white inmates, because everybody assumes that the inmate population of America is overwhelmingly black, which in fact it is not.

The national network-news editor who told me that newsgatherers should represent the "broad spectrum" of the populace added:

One of our bureau chiefs is a black woman who...constantly [asks her staff questions like] "Why was the interview with the black guy [conducted] standing in his driveway outside his house, and the interview with the white guy was in his living room with his picture of his family and his dog behind him?" It's a small thing, but small things can make a difference in shaping a newsroom's attitude. Viewers get the message, too.

The NBC Diversity Council, itself diverse in both race and gender, is worth noting. I was told that the group often worked with David Doss, then the executive producer of *NBC Nightly News*, to vet scripts and editorial content for bias. NBC News maintains what I have heard described as a "Rainbow Rolodex," which lists African-American, Hispanic, and Asian experts on a variety of topics, who can be interviewed for stories. The idea is to prevent a pileup of Caucasian talking heads in news segments. ABC offers a similar resource in notebook form. Nevertheless, my conversations with staffers didn't convince me that the books were making a difference—or even being used. ABC executive vice-president Friedman acknowledges that he "would not be at all surprised" if the manuals had "fallen into...disrepair," adding, "The point is that we have made an effort to broaden our lists of experts...and we have every reason to believe that those lists are influenced by the news division's concerns."

Perhaps the most dramatic example of sensitivity training occurred at CNN. Bob Furnad, then an executive vice-president of CNN and until recently the president of CNN Headline News, faced an internal revolt. He explained:

A few years ago...most of the blacks at CNN had gathered in a group and lodged a protest to me about the material we were using on the air. So I called a meeting, and I invited them all to attend, and I went. Their complaints were that every [time] we do a story on poverty, we roll out the b-roll [pictures to illustrate a reporter's narration] of blacks. Every time we do a story on crime, we roll out the b-roll, [and] it's got blacks on it. We shoot interviews this way. We characterize people that way, plus we don't like using the word blacks *on the air. We should be using [African-American] and the whole list. So...I said, "All right, I'm gonna authorize the overtime. You all decide who's gonna do it, but I want a team to produce a tape...that raises the issues of sensitivity on the part of the reporter, on the part of the cameraman, on the part of the tape editor." And they did. It's called* Through the Lens. *It's 20-some minutes long, and after that, everybody was required to view it and everybody who is hired since then is required to view it.*

The program identifies many areas of news coverage that are susceptible to imagery and narration that promote unintentional stereotyping. CNN anchors and reporters—Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian—offer practical advice for their colleagues in all segments of newsgathering and production, using examples from CNN's own coverage. It is a superb, wide-ranging review of subjects including financial news, international reportage, crime, drugs, and single parenthood.

On the local level, closet racism is manifested by news departments that will not cover murders or kidnappings in their minority communities but swarm over similar events in the white sections of town.

Using a live-video excerpt of one of President Bill Clinton's State of the Union addresses, *Through the Lens* showed that when the president discussed welfare reform, the networks' pool camera singled out the African-American Carole Moseley-Braun, then a senator from Illinois. The video cited statistics indicating that welfare is not solely a black issue. "As a result of this tape," Furnad adds, "we had crews going out [to] intentionally [get] video for use on crime stories and poverty stories that showed [people] other than blacks, because [when] we went back and looked at our file tape in fact, it was all black."

I learned that CBS News and ABC News had undertaken a similar review of its library footage and replaced much of it.

On the local level, closet racism is manifested by news departments that will not cover murders or kidnappings in their minority communities but swarm over similar events in the white sections of town. A former local assignment editor put it this way:

As in every local newsroom in the country, you have a crime story that breaks out in a rough neighborhood as opposed to a story that breaks out on Central Park West [one of New York City's most exclusive addresses]. I mean, where are you going to go? What story has the residue that would build overall viewership of the program? It's most likely Central Park West....It's got some glamour.

A former network-news president who had worked his way up through local newsrooms recalled:

I went to Chicago as a news director at one point, and there was

some horrendous crime committed that seemed worthy of a story....It was maybe my second day, and I remember sitting in our morning news meeting...going, "Wow, this is terrific!" And the producer of the show said, "Oh, it's a domestic." I had never heard the term before. I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "Well, it's a domestic: A husband and wife in the ghetto had a fight and they killed each other and their kids." And he deemed it therefore unworthy of coverage.

The notion that stories about African-Americans yield unsatisfactory ratings is passed on to those who work in the trenches and are assigned to "cast" the characters in their stories.

Is there any hope? What, if anything, can be done? Only news directors and station general managers can break the pattern and change attitudes. They know the challenge they face. A news director at a New York City network affiliate said:

We don't like discussing race even in our newsrooms because it can make us uncomfortable, and if we're uncomfortable, how do we have a team?...What we want to do is have everyone working together now....I maintain, however, that when dealing with issues regarding race, the newsrooms themselves first have to be prepared to deal with issues of race before covering issues of race. We discuss race. We discuss culture....And we have, hopefully, an environment where we can explore those issues and then know how to transfer those over to the coverage of our news stories....If you walk into the newsroom, you're going to see Caucasian, Asian-American, African-American, [and] Latino producers [and] assignment desk people....I do that deliberately. Because it helps if this place is a microcosm of "out there," because the same issues that are "out there" then will work their way back here....So we have white reporters doing stories about African-Americans. We have African-Americans doing stories about white people.

This person happens to be an African-American. She has thought long and hard about how race influences news coverage:

Facts are facts....If you are...in a community where many of the people who are being arrested for street crimes, drug dealing, et cetera...are African-Americans, and [if] you focus on that kind of coverage, those are the pictures that you're going to show. You're going to see African-Americans handcuffed. You're going to see them walked. They will be the "perps."...[If] the only pictures that we're sharing of African-Americans are handcuffed—that's all we're seeing—then there's a problem.

By 1990 or so, newspapers were publishing weekly newscast ratings, turning station- and network-news performances into horse races. Network-news divisions are now part of conglomerates concerned about profit margins, and more and more local stations are part of groups whose managers have the same financial concerns. Few news directors or network executive producers, with mortgages and tuition to pay and their jobs on the line, could rebuff the demand for higher ratings. And if, as we've seen, they believe that blacks don't give good demos, they will keep deciding "We don't do stories about blacks. Period."

For one of my final interviews, I dropped by the production center of one of the most popular daily news broadcasts. We'd finished the formal discussion, and the program's senior staff and its anchor were lounging in the room, swapping war stories. I ended the conversation by recounting how dismayed I was to have found so many examples of how programmers rely on racial criteria. Someone in the room acknowledged that the topic has generated an unspoken "buzz" in the industry—that "it was something that some people do, and [they] keep it quiet." A man in the room nodded. "Av," he said, "you've been away a long time. It's our dirty little secret." ■

Overdoing IT

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 89] that "IT has media manipulation written all over it." But on the whole, the game had run for so long that by the time IT reached the morning talk-show circuit, it was being compared to cold fusion.

Here's Bryant Gumbel on CBS's *The Early Show* on January 25, 2001:

Gumbel: So it's a mode of transportation.

Meteorologist Mark McEwen: See, it's like a little scooter....Well, let me tell you what these guys said. Now you said Jobs. It—is it Jobes?

Cohost Jane Clayson: Steve Jobs.

McEwen: I pronounced it *Jobes*.

Clayson: I always called it Steve Jobs. What is it?

Gumbel: Don't look at me.

McEwen: Okay. They quoted Apple's Jobs as saying—listen to what Steve said: "If enough people see the machine, you won't have to convince them to architect cities around it, it'll just happen."...Listen to what Bezos says from Amazon.com: "It's a product so revolutionary, you'll have no problem selling it."

Clayson: And these guys, Bezos and Jobs, have—have invested millions of dollars.

McEwen: That's right.

Gumbel: It's between the Internet and cold fusion.

Clayson: Somewhere between the Internet and cold fusion—Okay.

Gumbel: Cold fusion. That's pretty big.

In fact, neither Jobs nor Bezos is an investor in any firm held by Dean Kamen. And the scientific community believes that cold fusion is not feasible. But at this point, we were in the playground of myth.

I WAS CURIOUS TO MEET the writer whose article started the craze, and PJ Mark agreed to meet me for lunch at a restaurant near Inside.com's offices in Manhattan. Mark, who is in his early thirties and cordial, was crisply attired. Though his television appearances hadn't hurt his career, he seemed sheepish about the media ride. It was, he said, a surreal experience. Though Mark had no regrets, he did say, "I would have stressed more the hyperbole of the proposal. It was always a book story for us. It was never a tech story."

Had it been a technology story, perhaps Mark would have quoted from the proposal more inclusively. *Brill's Content* obtained a complete copy of the proposal and found that portions he left out portrayed IT as being mired in setbacks and uncertainty, a far cry from an invention about to take over the world.

The proposal reveals that Kamen, far from flush with venture-capital cash, had mortgaged his home in 1999 to pay DEKA's employees. It also says that Steve Jobs and Jeff Bezos were deeply critical of IT's design and the plans for its release. Jobs said the design "sucks" and that "its shape is not innovative, it's

not elegant, it doesn't feel anthropomorphic." Bezos said, "I think this plan is dead on arrival. The U.S.A. is too hostile." His idea was to introduce IT in Singapore. (Jobs thought it should be introduced at Stanford and Disneyland in order to build interest and run feasibility studies.)

The proposal continues, "All it took was one stupid kid at Stanford who hurt himself using a Ginger and then said on-line that the machine sucked, and the company was sunk, because there was no way to control or counter it."

"All the talk about small launches at colleges or in foreign cities or among industries worried [Kamen]."

And as for the billions of dollars? Kamen's marketing director, when asked by venture capitalist John Doerr what Ginger would be worth in dollars and cents, could not provide an answer: "Doerr snorted in disgust and shook his head, then looked at Kamen to see if he understood that he had a dunce for a marketing director....Doerr still seemed agitated. He had drawn several conclusions from the meeting. First, they needed a value proposition. Second...the launch was indefinitely on hold until they got the product right."

Dean Kamen working at home in New Hampshire

SO WHERE DID that leave IT? Was the phenomenon—and by the end of January, that's precisely what IT had become—nothing more than hype layered on hype, a spectacle of no meaning? The morning after our dinner, I visited Kamen at home in a last effort to find out.

There was a tall metal gate keeping visitors at bay, beside which was a granite marker with Kamen's name etched in, announcing the occupant to passersby. I buzzed, and the gate opened to a long, sharply curving driveway, which crested at the top of a hill, where there was a house designed by Kamen.

Many millionaires build homes to impress, but this one was designed to leave the impression of a scientist at work. In his varied career, Kamen had invented a drug infusion pump, which made him rich; a portable dialysis machine; and, most recently, an all-terrain wheelchair he called the IBOT. In the living room, there was a gigantic steam engine, at least two stories high and extending down into the floor below, that Kamen had bought from the Henry Ford Museum, reassembled himself, and put in working order. There were, in strategically positioned glass cases, various models of historically significant inventions, including a replica of a Ming Dynasty compass. It was a museum designed for entertaining. Spread out across the shiny floor were toys: a stainless-steel pool table, a Lucite Ping-Pong table, a working vintage elevator, a pinball machine, an original tabletop version of the seventies videogame Asteroids. But for all the life these playthings suggested, the place had a strangely sterile feel to it—the only personal touches, the only signs of the individual who lived there, were Kamen's awards and plaques and the many portraits of Albert Einstein.

In the basement, Kamen had a factory-quality shop, complete with a computerized lathe and a foundry for melting metal. There were several clocks lying about (he makes them as a hobby) and tools of every sort. When Kamen is tired and unable to think clearly, he relaxes with his machines. He'll calibrate the gears on a clock or cut a steel rod into finely threaded bolts.

On the way down to the shop, I noticed several diagrams and futuristic sketches of various devices. When I asked if I could write about them, Kamen replied, "Well, they're not really for the public. I mean, people know about them, but they're not public."

Kamen's dining room doubles as a conference room, and we settled there for the interview. It was here that Kamen had held so many meetings with corporate leaders, trying to persuade them to invest in FIRST. He reiterated his dilemma: This year's FIRST competitions were starting soon, and he was worried that any interviews he gave would focus on IT, which, he said, he had both a fiduciary and legal obligation to keep out of the public eye.

Steve Kemper's earliest conversations with Kamen were about FIRST. Then Kemper wrote a glowing profile of Kamen for *Smithsonian* magazine in 1994, and the pair developed a mutually beneficial relationship. It's not clear who dreamed up the book idea or whether the two had a financial agreement. Kemper declined to be interviewed for this article, but his book proposal states that Kamen offered to pay him for the job, which Kamen vehemently denies.

The disagreement doesn't stop there. Although Kamen says he believed a good chunk of the book would be about FIRST, Kemper's proposal, which is 26 pages long and structured as a series of letters from Kemper to his agent, mentions FIRST only in passing. Kamen also told me that he thought that Kemper's agent had sent the proposal under strict confidentiality to only two publishers. But according to three publishing sources I spoke to, the agent had submitted the proposal to at least three editors via e-mail—without a confidentiality agreement, which is how literary agents protect sensitive proposals. The proposal had also been sent to several New York–based literary scouts, whose job it is to flog American books to overseas publishers. It is beyond reasonable to assume that Kemper's agent, Dan Kois, who works for the high-powered Maryland-based Sagalyn Literary Agency, was unaware that Inside.com had a practice of writing about hot proposals and that scouts were some of its main sources. So there was a good deal of speculation in the press (confirmed by two people in the publishing business) that the proposal was leaked after the Harvard sale to drum up interest in the foreign rights.

In response to that speculation, Kamen said, "You know, would people think I did this—I didn't know, and I just...I made a simple statement, which took an hour to write. I didn't want to accuse anybody, not the guy or the agent of doing anything knowingly, misrepresenting things. But I just wanted everybody else to know, hey, I've got a private little company, I've spent 30 years working on projects, and I know how to hold a confidential—I mean, I'm not saying anything. What I was saying was, I don't really think it's appropriate or in anybody's best interest...." He looked off into the distance and shook his head.

While Kamen says he has no personal disagreement with Kemper, he adds that he "would have assumed and believed to this day that he still couldn't disclose to them things that are confidential information inside DEKA, which apparently he did, because people are all speculating." Whatever their understanding, it's clear that the writer-subject relationship is now strained, perhaps beyond repair. All of Kemper's overheated prose is distinctly at odds in at least three respects with Kamen's own view of his work.

SUSAN LAPIDES/LIAISON

First, Kemper portrayed Ginger as a project ready to take off. Kamen, on the other hand, suggested that it was still very much on the drawing board and nowhere near completion. "This is hype about a product that doesn't even exist yet," he reminded me. There were patents that needed to be filed, he said, which was why he couldn't talk about IT; discussing an invention before filing a patent can result in loss of rights.

Second, although the proposal paraphrased representatives of the investment bank Credit Suisse First Boston as having projected that Ginger would make Kamen richer than Bill Gates in five years, Kamen says he is not aware of any financial projections made about Ginger, and certainly none that compared him to Bill Gates. "I don't even know how much money Gates has," he said.

Third—and, for Kamen, worst—was the issue of confidentiality. Kemper's agent, Dan Kois, along with Harvard Business School Press, declined to comment for this story, but by Kamen's account, Kemper had signed a confidentiality agreement with him, and by releasing details of the meeting to the public, even if it was only to the small world of book publishing, he had breached that agreement. Furthermore, Kamen believed that Kemper was obligated to get permission from Jobs and Bezos and anybody else before quoting them in either a proposal or a book.

The writer portrayed IT as a project ready to take off. Its inventor says it is nowhere near completion.

Indeed, the hype got Kamen in trouble. According to Kamen, half of the meeting with Jobs and Bezos was about FIRST—though obviously not the half that made it into the proposal. By Kamen's lights, he was meeting with Jobs and Bezos in order to get their help with FIRST; IT was secondary, "coffee table" conversation.

Kamen says that Jobs was more than a little annoyed at the implication that he had invested in Ginger. Shortly after the stories began to break, Kamen called Jobs, Bezos, and John Doerr and apologized. "I called them all and said, 'You know, I hope this thing isn't a source of nuisance and embarrassment, and also I hope you all understand I certainly wasn't trying to exploit your reputation. And I guess, certainly there's a lot of bad judgment here, but I don't think there's any malice,'" Kamen said. "I just apologized to them," he continues. "I think they were all very classy about it. But that only makes you feel worse."

WE PAUSED OUR INTERVIEW for lunch. Kamen said he was sorry we couldn't fly to a nearby restaurant in his helicopter, as the rotors were being repaired. We went down to a garage, a short walk from the main house, where a mechanic Kamen keeps on staff was lying under the chassis of his truck.

"How's it going?" Kamen asked.

"I still gotta put your muffler back on," came the reply from under the truck.

Kamen leaned under the hood. "Did you fix the lights?"

"Nope. Haven't gotten to those yet."

Kamen then asked if it was going to be ready by the evening, and the mechanic said yes. As we walked to my rental car, Kamen explained that his mechanic was certified to repair both airplanes and cars. The combination of those skills, he said, was, sadly, increasingly rare.

FOR ALL THE TIME Kemper spent with Kamen (two days a week for two years), he seems to have missed an essential trait of his subject: Kamen is a master of exaggeration. Kamen knows this about himself, but he also knows that when it comes to launching a new enterprise, being skilled in the art of hyperbole is often the difference between success and failure. "Look, I say FIRST is going to be as big as the Olympics....[It can] change American culture," he said.

In fact, Kamen is such a good publicist for his own work that he's gotten press for his wheelchair, IBOT, even though it has yet to be approved by the FDA. Of course, he's not alone in his ability to impress a media always hungry for the next new thing. Bezos, after all, became the *Time* magazine "Person of the Year" despite running a company that loses money on every transaction. And Jobs emerged from the disaster that was the Newton to revitalize Apple, largely by encasing the computer in a candy-colored shell. The business and technology presses know all too well that the salesman's reach sometimes exceeds his grasp, which is why most avoided this January's media frenzy. As *Wired* noted in its September 2000 issue, it was well known within technology circles that Kamen had for the past five years been working on a project that combined a balancing mechanism—like the one he designed for the IBOT—with a clean-burning Stirling engine into some sort of personal transportation device. But since nobody has ever made a Stirling engine viable for mass production since the engine was first patented, in 1816, *Wired* never gave the project much heed. The "wearable car," as *The Washington Post* had dubbed it, may fit the individualistic tenor of our times, but rolling sidewalks were much discussed in the seventies, when urban planners predicted they'd become standard in cities and usher in a new kind of communal space; now, of course, they are to be found only in airports. Furthermore, standing in the way of consumer acceptance of any new kind of vehicle are not only a host of regulatory issues, the vagaries of the market and marketing, and inclement weather (which would disfavor an open-air device of the sort Kamen purportedly imagined), but also just plain old inertia. One could hope that all that might be overcome—but anything more than hope would be a guess.

By the time Kamen and I were finished talking, it was late, and I clearly wasn't going skiing. Kamen offered to let me sleep in his guest room. I accepted. As the evening stretched on, we polished off two bottles of excellent wine (his private label) and talked about many of his other plans to change the world. Kamen had just been to Davos, Switzerland, at the global summit of leading political figures and intellectuals, and was disappointed by the lack of leadership he saw there. Then there was the Stirling engine, which Kamen said might be adapted to power portable water purifiers in Third World countries, thereby saving the tens of thousands of people who die every month from tainted water. And, of course, we talked a lot about FIRST, and the failure of American culture to honor worthy icons. By the time I went to bed, IT seemed the least interesting project on his plate.

The next morning, I woke up early, with a dry mouth. I walked through the silent hallways and down the stairs, heading for the kitchen. On the way, I passed the library and paused for a moment. I could see a thick bound document sitting on Kamen's desk. I'd seen it the previous day on my tour with Kamen and knew the cover said "Confidential." I thought about tiptoeing in, flipping through the pages, and reading all about IT. Frankly, it wasn't ethics that held me back, and it wasn't a failure of nerve. I was supposed to care, but I didn't. What I wanted right then, more than anything else, was a glass of water. ■

The Reinvention of PBS

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 95] to tell whether her efforts will succeed, and she is still in a honeymoon period. "Pat has to jump-start an engine—PBS needs to be experimental and innovative, and Pat is nothing if not bold," says Tom Bettag, the executive producer of ABC's *Nightline*, who attended the first PBS summit at Sundance, "and that is what you want PBS to be, in-your-face bold but in a graceful way." As Michael Sullivan, the executive producer of *Frontline*, who will also be working on *Public Square*, says, "[Mitchell] has tremendous clout within the system right now...and she is working very hard and very fast to make something happen."

Still, some find the idea of attracting more viewers while maintaining quality contradictory. "It's the notion that you can't be half-pregnant," producer Martin Koughan says. "What you have now is a hybrid that pretends to be public television but is really commercial television in disguise. This is public television tarted up to be attractive enough to lure an audience."

Among Mitchell's most revolutionary—and, in some corners, most controversial—moves was the acquisition in September of *American High*, which will debut on PBS in April. R.J. Cutler, who produced *The War Room* and *A Perfect Candidate*, spent the 1999–2000 school year at Highland Park High School in suburban Chicago, gave video cameras to 14 juniors and seniors, and had them record their everyday lives. *American High* originally aired on Fox, and critics praised the program for its smart, hip, and realistic look at high-school life. Nonetheless, Fox canceled the show last August, after only four episodes.

"*American High* was up against *Big Brother* this past summer and still got 5 million viewers a week," says Cutler. "Pat has said that she wanted a younger audience for PBS. The day after Fox canceled us, Pat and I were on the phone, and from the moment that she and I spoke, PBS was my first choice. This is the kind of stuff that PBS should be doing—prime time with ongoing nonfiction characters."

Although Cutler is naturally pleased that his show will be given another chance, some argue that it does not make sense for PBS to covet a program that was a failure on Fox—especially one about teenagers, hardly stalwart PBS viewers. As one PBS insider says: "I have heard programmers say, '*American High* may be great, but it won't run on my station.' They will say it is innovative, but privately they then say, 'I'm never going to get a 17-year-old to watch my station, and then I will be asked to give up my air and lose my blue-haired grandmother.'" But there are others who welcome the gamble. "*American High* is like a grenade thrown into the public-television schedule," comments Dalton Delan, executive vice-president of Washington's WETA. "It may be a great grenade, but it is [still] a grenade. Pat is experimenting, which is a very different thing." He adds, "One wants to see how these experiments work, and I think that we have to let Pat succeed and fail."

Some argue that it does not make sense for PBS to covet *American High*, a show that was a failure on Fox—especially a program about teenagers, hardly stalwart PBS viewers.

Mitchell says, "I have always had the tendency to take risks. Even as a little girl, because my dad used to say to me, 'You know, if you really want to succeed, you need to be willing to fail,' and in fact you do. And some of my most interesting life experiences have come out of what could be interpreted as failures, or something that didn't work out."

Perhaps one of Mitchell's most profound professional disappointments was the early—and public—death of a planned women's cable channel at Turner Broadcasting that she had worked on for more than a year. She described it as "virtually a CNN for women, with all original nonfiction programming." Ted Turner announced plans for The Women's Network in June 1999, signaling that he wanted to compete with other female-oriented networks, such as Oxygen Media, which had not yet launched, and Disney's Lifetime. The Women's Network was to be a joint venture drawing on the properties of Turner, Time Inc., and Advance Publications, the parent company of Condé Nast. By all accounts, Mitchell had thrown herself into the project. She had assembled a core staff, made offers to producers, and had started negotiations with magazines and websites. She was clearly high on the network's potential: "We're not going to have to rely on reruns [or] made-for-TV movies or do-it-yourself programs for our audience," Mitchell told *USA Today*, adding that the new channel would show "why the Kosovo story is important to [women], as well as what's the best buy in mascara."

In August 1999, at a meeting in Atlanta, Mitchell updated executives, including Turner, on the network's status. After she gave her report, Mitchell got on a plane for a family vacation in Sea Island, Georgia. "When I landed at the airport, I was being paged," she recalls. "I went to the phone and my secretary said, 'Ted wants to talk to you.' And Ted got on and said, 'You're not going to like this, and I'm really sorry to be the one to tell you, but we decided not to go along with The Women's Network.' At first, I actually thought that he was kidding, because I had just left that meeting in Atlanta 45 minutes ago."

"Pat worked very hard on this business plan for the women's information network that would have involved Time Inc. and Turner," comments Norman Pearlstine, editor in chief of Time Inc. "While both Gerry [Levin, then the chairman and CEO of Time Warner Inc.] and Ted were very enthusiastic, it was very hard to make the numbers work."

Looking back on it today, Mitchell says, "I'm very philosophical about it now, as one can be, but you can't be then. At the time, all that you can think of is that somebody has just pulled the rug out from under you and slammed the door. I'm not too good at taking no for an answer. And, boy, to get it that way was a really harsh and tough rejection."

However discouraged, though, Mitchell was eager to move on. "Pat is not a wallowy kind of person," observes Vivian Schiller, who worked closely with Mitchell on the network. "The idea got axed in August, and by February, she was accepting the PBS job. So obviously, she didn't sit around moping for long."

"When I was first approached about Pat by the PBS search committee, I said to them that I would fight to keep Pat with everything that I could muster," says CNN chairman and CEO Tom Johnson. "But I also knew that Pat was hurt and disappointed when The Women's Network was canceled. And I also knew that she had all of the right stuff for the PBS job that was being described to me. By that I mean the ability to work with the board of directors, the ability to work with some very powerful, creative forces in the whole PBS community, and to work with individual stations."

Film producer Steven Haft, who sits on the board of the Sundance Institute with Mitchell, had served on a Corporation for Public Broadcasting panel in 1999 that explored various content alternatives. Like Tom Johnson, Haft was one of a chorus of friends who cautioned Mitchell about PBS's internal politics. "I said, 'Are you sure that you know what you are getting into?'" Haft recalls. He told her, "This is politically a very complex subculture, and it won't be easy to get all of these people anywhere near to singing the same tune. This is like a 300-instrument orchestra, but if you can bring leadership to it, you can make it work."

Mitchell acknowledges, "I did not know much about the structure, the intricacies of format or funding or any of that. But I knew that public television was about serving the public in a different way, and it was about education, and those things resonated with me very strongly. I really wanted the job after the first search committee meeting and somehow never stepped back and considered the obstacles." She adds, "A lot of people would call me up and say, 'But don't you want to know more about this loose confederation of 347 stations, and don't you want to know more about the challenges?' And I said, 'No, but I will find out.'"

So far, many within the system are cautiously optimistic about Mitchell and welcome her experience from "the dark side," as PBS insiders often refer to commercial television.

On Mitchell's first day at PBS, in May 2000, she e-mailed every station manager in the system to introduce herself and ask for input. "I was amazed at how many people took the time to answer me very thoughtfully," she notes. "They would say things like 'Here are the three things I'd put on your priority list' or 'Here are the areas that you should address first.' Now, they didn't all agree, so right away I was made aware that not everybody has the same priority list."

Mitchell says she realized that she needed to be on the road, visiting as many stations as possible, in order to grasp just how eclectic the system is. This has kept her very busy. During the first two weeks of December, for example, Mitchell looked in on stations in St. Louis and Indianapolis while maintaining a congested schedule of conference calls and meetings—with everyone from actor Rupert Everett to the president of Tulane University. "I think I've shaken the hand of just about every general manager and had a conversation with them, and in some cases, I've had long visits," Mitchell says. "And they are all saying to me, 'Okay, now maybe it's time to jump off the ledge, to take some big steps.'"

One of Mitchell's earliest moves was to reorganize PBS's programming arm. Her goal was to streamline the green-lighting process for independent producers—whereby member stations give programs the go-ahead—as well as to open up production opportunities for more than just the major producing stations, Boston's WGBH, New York's WNET, and Washington's WETA. Mitchell also hired several regional vice-presidents for programming. "The idea for regional vice-presidents arose out of this criticism or concern about Alexandria feeling isolated," Mitchell says. "And that the schedule was looking a little too East Coast and was not as diverse as it should be. And I felt that part of the problem is that you can't run a programming department in Alexandria and know what is going on in all 347 stations."

Mitchell is trying not only to effect change at the national level but to urge the member stations to take honest stock of where PBS is and where it needs to go. Sally Field has worked with Mitchell on the board of the Sundance Institute and attended the first PBS creative retreat. "There we really talked about the importance of public television, and its value," Field says. "It should not be allowed to be something that the creative community has passed by because it no longer has its finger on the pulse. And in some ways PBS was on the verge of having that happen."

In one exercise at the Sundance retreats, attendees were asked, "If PBS were a party, what would you envision it to be?" The response? "At our party, there were a lot of people, somewhat older, upscale. And smart, absolutely smart," explains Wayne Godwin, PBS's vice-president for member relations. "We were all standing out on a lawn, sipping champagne—elegant, absolutely. Then the question was 'If you were a viewer, would you want to go to the party?' And the answer was 'Well, yeah....' Then, 'Would you want to go for long?' 'Well, no, not really. I would just kind of want to be there for a little while. I could say that I was there and then just kind of move along and go someplace else.' Then," says Godwin, "there was the question of 'What kind of party would you like it to be?' And the description changed to one that was more contemporary, more lively, one that is provocative."

In short, one that would be more fun.

"With our party," Mitchell concedes, "you want to get an invitation. And you want to show up, because there will be people there that you want to see and meet. But you wouldn't necessarily hang around for a while. We did that exercise as a way to understand how our audiences feel."

It is late on a Friday night, shortly before Christmas, and Mitchell is exhausted. "My schedule is crazy," she says, "and by the end of the week, I am pretty catatonic, which is how I feel right now." She adds that she has not seen her husband in ten days.

Mitchell recalls the time that a colleague, concerned about Mitchell's frenzied days, turned to her and asked why she was in such a hurry. "He was telling me to slow down, that I was going to burn myself out. And I replied, 'I have to be in a hurry. I don't have any choice.'"

Mitchell says, "Jane Fonda used the term 'the third act' at her 60th-birthday party. She talked about her life in acts, and the notion that now that she was 60, she was entering her third act. A lot of us, particularly the women in the room, were touched by that. What attracted me to this job," she pauses, "is that this is a critical time in the media landscape, and it's changing at this enormous speed. And in my opinion, public television has a more critical role to play than ever. And if there was a way to make a contribution to that, then, my gosh, what else could one look for as I describe my 'third act'?" ■

BRILL'S CONTENT (ISSN 1099-5234) (GST 866176886) is published monthly except combined issues in December/January and July/August by Brill Media Ventures, L.P., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscriptions are $21.95 for one year in the U.S., $26.95 in Canada, and $31.95 in all other countries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BRILL'S CONTENT, PO Box 37523, Boone, IA 50037-0523. Vol. 4, No. 2, March 2001.

KICKER BY JESSE OXFELD

Grades in the Balance

Al Gore is teaching a course at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism this semester. *Brill's Content* has exclusively obtained the final exam for his class, reproduced below.

May 8, 2001

Prof. Al Gore (Visiting)
Journalism 6002y-99

"Covering National Affairs in the Information Age"

Final Examination

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer all questions in your blue book. You may use diagrams as needed to explain complex theories. Pursuant to previously announced policy, this examination is NOT off the record. Please remember, though, that any material quoted from the exam, including these instructions, must be attributed to "a Columbia source familiar with the former vice-president's thinking." Please write clearly. Leave your completed exams in the lockbox at the rear of the classroom by 5:00 p.m.

1. **MULTIPLE CHOICE:** The following stories were reported during last year's presidential campaign. Two of the stories, by thoroughly objective standards of newsworthiness, should not have run at all. Three should have run prominently. *Indicate the three stories that should have run on page one.*

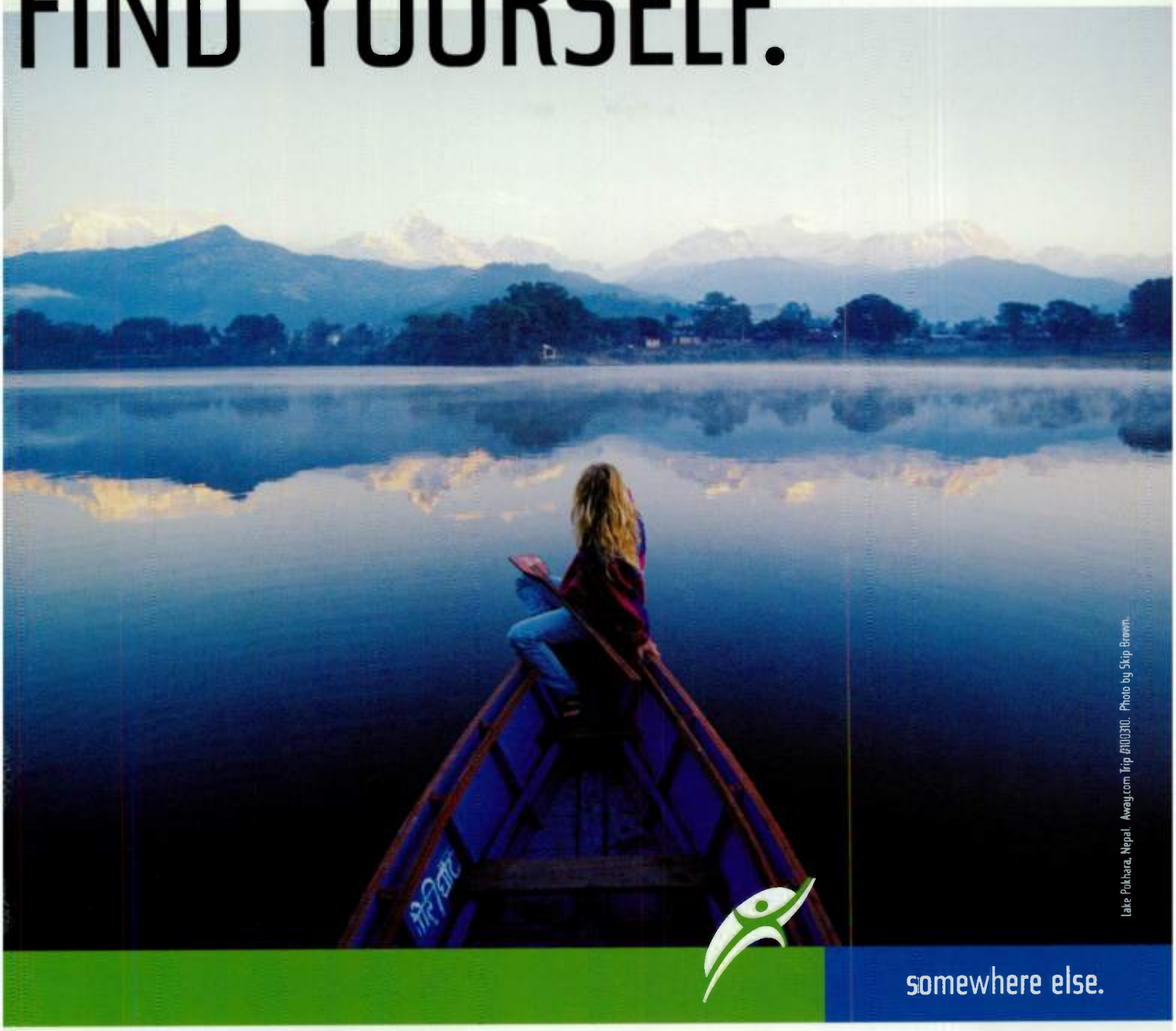
   A. One candidate had barely visited any foreign country other than Mexico, which doesn't really count.
   B. One candidate may have sighed slightly too audibly during one of the presidential debates.
   C. One candidate used family connections to join the National Guard instead of going to Vietnam and, it seems, didn't even bother to report for all of his Guard service.
   D. One candidate may have hired a well-known feminist author to advise him on appearance issues.
   E. One candidate was arrested for driving under the influence as an adult, never disclosed the arrest, and may have untruthfully denied it. This candidate's running mate was also arrested for driving under the influence--twice.

2. **SHORT ANSWER:** In three sentences or less, explain why media outlets should not refer to a presidential candidate who lost the electoral vote while winning the popular vote as a "loser." Extra credit will be given for skillful use of the phrase "cabal of five right-wing Supreme Court justices and his own brother." Remember that the average network-news sound bite is eight seconds long.

3. **ESSAY:** A presidential candidate has served in the federal government for 24 years, most recently as vice-president. He has not had any extramarital affairs. He has not been involved in shady Arkansas land deals. He is running against an inarticulate, overprivileged, empty suit. He loses. Explain why the press is solely responsible for this. Be sure to contrast the fawning coverage given to one candidate with the exceedingly prosecutorial coverage of the other. *(Additional blue books are available from the proctor.)*

PETER MEDILSON

FIND YOURSELF.



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