

## 4 Voices and Experiences Of Young Journalists

- 5    Stitching a Community Together With a Newspaper Staffed by Young Journalists    BY BRANDON TUBBS
- 8    Restoring a Sense of What It Means to Be a Journalist    BY ROBIN JONES
- 10    When Mediocrity Beckons    BY WILLIAM BRENT CUNNINGHAM
- 12    Falling in Love With Words and How Journalists Use Them    BY KATHRYN S. WENNER
- 14    Teaching Journalism by Adhering to Unchanging Standards    BY NANCY DAY
- 17    Using the Realities of the Newsroom to Train Journalists    BY HELEN UBINAS
- 20    On-Line Journalism: Frustrations Along the Road to the Future    BY STEPHEN BORELLI
- 23    Riding the Digital Wave Into Journalism: Is It the Best Wave for Students to Catch?  
      BY STEPHEN D. ISAACS
- 25    Are Minorities Getting a Fair Shot At Journalism Jobs? The Answer is “No”: Now What Can be Done?  
      BY CAROLYN TOLL OPPENHEIM

## 29 Journalist’s Trade

- 30    Using Education Data to Build a Story’s Foundation    BY CAROL NAPOLITANO
- 33    A Newspaper’s Report Cards Offer Revealing Insights Into How Well Schools are Doing  
      BY NEILL A. BOROWSKI AND CONNIE LANGLAND
- 35    Using Education Data Effectively    BY SARAH COHEN
- 37    The Price of Hope: Investigating Disparities Among Rich and Poor Schools  
      BY TED MELLNIK AND DEBBIE CENZIPER
- 40    The Learning Gap: Highlighting Teachers’ Competency    BY LINDA J. JOHNSON
- 43    A Dual-Track Approach to Tackling the Topic of Reading:  
      Reporting the Story and Pitching in to Fix the Problem    BY DAVID LAUTER
- 46    By Being There, a Reporter Captures a Rare View of Middle School    BY JOLAYNE HOUTZ

## 48 International Journalism

- 49 Hong Kong's Press: While Debate Rages About Media Ethics, Self-Censorship Quietly Thrives  
By PETER STEIN
- 51 When Numbers Talk, Journalists Help People Listen By BRANT HOUSTON
- 52 International Journalists Use Internet Technology to Breach Borders By MAUD S. BEELMAN
- 54 If Birds Were Reporters, What Would Their Eyes Reveal? By CHRISTOPHER SIMPSON

## 59 Books

- 60 Unraveling the Mystery of Vanishing Foreign News By DEBORAH AMOS
- 62 Foreign Correspondents Transform Their Coverage Into Books By MURRAY SEEGER
- 65 What Difference Would It Make If Reporters Knew a War Crime When They Saw One? By ROY GUTMAN
- 66 Can Business Reporting Become a Positive New Force in Foreign News Coverage? By ORVILLE SCHELL
- 67 The Culture of Secrecy: Can It Be Cracked Open? By ATHAN G. THEOHARIS
- 69 Race Intrudes on a Newspaperman's Career By JOSEPH WILLIAMS
- 70 A Desire to Tell People What They Ought to Know By RAY SCHERER
- 72 Golf Offers a Window on Our Changing World By TOM WITOSKY

### 3 Curator's Corner

#### Nieman Notes

- 74 The Nieman Network Works in Wondrous Ways By CHRIS BOWMAN
- 75 Class Notes
- 79 End Note: A Photographer Unites Generations With His Camera By STEVEN RUBIN

The cover photograph is of a fourth-grade student from Lee County in South Carolina.  
*Photo by Diedra Laird, The Charlotte Observer.*

# Competing with Cyberspace: The Key is Reliability

By Bill Kovach

The Virginia Press Association invited me to their annual meeting to talk about the future. Specifically, they wanted to talk about how newspapers compete in the world of cyberspace. The weather canceled those plans so I'd like to pass along the gist of what I'd intended to say.

The proliferation of voices created by the new technology combined with the 19th Century notion of what makes news has—in cases from O.J. Simpson's trial to the impeachment story—created endless, overlapping reports of the same event rendered almost meaningless in the telling.

How does journalism regain its balance in this world? I think, as they say in the movies, it's back to the future.

No editor or publisher I know doubts newspapers will survive in the future although the form of delivery will change. The future then places in the hands of journalists emerging tools to develop different ways to tell the important stories that will assure an audience.

Let me offer a few suggestions.

First, there needs to be a renewed understanding of quality journalism. What will succeed in cyberspace is reliability. As the world of information becomes one of limitless voices marinated by advertising and entertainment to produce what I call advertainment news, the simple virtue of reliable information will become more distinctive. This simple virtue has equally simple requirements for its realization: boundless curiosity, the indispensable attribute for deep and textured detail that results from tenacious research and reporting. Curiosity and the wide-ranging knowledge and expertise that provide broad context in the stories produced.

Some of these skills—knowledge and expertise—can be taught, which means journalism education must rise and rise quickly to meet these new levels of challenge.

But the basic skill—curiosity—is an innate skill. It must become a habit of the mind, nurtured in newsroom environments open to fresh ideas, encouraging of creative ways of looking at old subjects and resistant to the herd instinct.

The second area that needs to be examined is what we cover and how we cover it.

International news is perhaps the most obvious example. In a wired world in which anyone with a computer can read dozens of international newspapers at will we are inviting those who care to go elsewhere for their news.

For U.S. newspapers to all but ignore a world that has become more interdependent, one in which both the threat and the promise of our future are tied directly to worldwide trends and distant events, is shortsighted and ultimately costly.

We must find ways to develop a curiosity about how distant activities and events might affect the people around

us. One way to do this is by letting readers know how they are impacted by decisions made on agricultural crops in Mexico or bank loans in London or technological advances in Japan or the number of African students at the local college.

In the early days of radio, William Paley told skeptical subordinates who said there was no audience for classical music, "You give me the program and I'll give you the audience." They did, and the New York Philharmonic broadcast became one of radio's longest-running programs.

There is reason to believe that, once the public's taste is cultivated in this regard, it will reap the harvest of an equally avid audience.

Finally, as the devolution of revenues and authority make what is happening on the state, regional and local level more important to our readers, we must think of better approaches to the way we monitor institutions close to home.

The proliferating world of nonprofit organizations is exploding as the newly rich invest in private philanthropy. This combined with the privatization of public functions is reshaping public life in ways few of us fully comprehend.

Because neither nonprofits nor privatized agencies are as transparent as public institutions, only an alert and curious press can make understandable these relationships that directly impact on the health and welfare of communities. What does it mean, for example, that by privatizing prisons we create a for-profit institution that has a vested interest in incarceration? What is the impact on a community when individuals withhold taxes from the support of broad public programs in order to support personal philanthropy?

There are limitless possibilities to redefine news in ways that will set the work of journalists apart from the babble of self-interest and self-celebration and, in the process, make the work of journalists more compelling, more connected with, and more rewarding to the public.

A secure place for quality journalism in the mixed media culture of today is assured if we produce reliable information that results from a disciplined methodology and write stories filled with depth, detail and context.

In doing this, we can reexamine the changing relationships between people and institutions in the world and in our society, exploring anew the currents, trends and events that are shaping their personal and professional lives.

Curious reporters on the lookout for the human implications of these interrelated pressures are going to find new sources of news and bring to the pages of newspapers the vigorous voices that your community is waiting to hear. ■



# Voices and Experiences of Young Journalists

**In this issue of Nieman Reports**, we explore journalism from the perspective of those who are training to be journalists, those who are teaching the next generation, and those who recently entered this profession.

**We open with** an article written by our youngest journalist, a 19-year-old from a tiny town in rural Alabama who became a community reporter at the age of 13 for a newspaper that he and fellow students created.

**Then we visit** with several journalists-in-training and with a professor who reflects on what it was like to learn about journalism in the late 1960's compared with what it is like to teach these skills today.

**Later on**, we hear from two reporters, one working in traditional media (a newspaper), the other in the frontier of on-line media.

**Finally**, two professors offer guidance about critical issues in journalism: the impact of "new media" on journalism and the training of new journalists, and the circumstances that confront minorities as they attempt to enter the journalism profession.

**In asking young journalists** to write about their experiences, what we wanted to provide was a forum in which they could express their views, concerns and ideas about the way in which journalism is practiced today.

**What we found** as their articles arrived is that these young journalists raise questions that are relevant for seasoned journalists to ponder. As one correspondent writes: "I know in the future... I'll take opportunities to listen to interns and recent college graduates who other folks in the newsroom might dismiss as starry-eyed idealists. I hope that listening to their perspectives will help me remember why I chose to become a journalist in the first place." ■

# Stitching a Community Together With A Newspaper Staffed by Young Journalists

By Brandon Tubbs

**S**hawn “Sham” Franks, a sophomore at Oakman (Alabama) High School, once said: “You cannot have a democracy and you cannot have a community if you don’t have a way to share ideas.” His statement illustrated why it was essential for members of his community to have a shared public voice.

Having lived in Oakman all of my 19 years, I knew exactly what Sham meant. People in my town (population 964) had no forum to call their own, no means of communication to strengthen the community. With the exception of covering the high school sporting events and announcing the times of the town council meetings, the county seat paper, *The Daily Mountain Eagle* in Jasper, Alabama, didn’t report on what was happening in Oakman. Gossip was the only predictable means of communication available to those of us who lived in this tiny coal mining town in the Appalachian foothills.

Sham’s observation arose out of a dialogue arranged among teachers, students, community members and rural educators by the PACERS Small Schools Cooperative. Concerned about the future viability of rural communities, PACERS works in 29 small, rural public schools to cultivate dynamic ideas for teaching and learning and community building. Because of Sham’s comment, which turned out to be echoed by other students and teachers in meetings that were held around the state, the idea of community newspapers reported, written and published by high school students was born. In my town, *The Oakman Times* went to press for the first time in December 1993. It was a remarkable moment, for those of us who had the privilege of producing it and for members of the community



Brandon Tubbs working as a mentor to a student from the PACERS Cooperative.  
© Photo courtesy PACERS Photography, Program for Rural Services and Research.

who now had a newspaper to call their own. This experience transformed my life profoundly.

Today, I am a sophomore at the University of Alabama majoring in journalism. I know this is what I want to do in life because I’ve already been a journalist in my hometown. I started being one when I was a high school freshman, not just for my school and read by my peers but for my community and read by my elders.

At age 13, I became a community reporter, one of the original dozen staff members of *The Oakman Times*, the second newspaper in the town’s history. Business manager S.W. Vice published the town’s first paper, *The Oakman News*, on April 12, 1894. Sidney Busby, a senior at Oakman High, designed our paper’s original banner depicting Oakman’s heritage and

present time. It flew as a symbol for *The Oakman Times* until October 1995 when we decided to change it in order to provide a more professional look to the paper.

I started out reporting whatever was assigned to me by the editors and watched what I thought to be well-written pieces turned into blood with the red ink of fellow classmates and teachers. I learned much of what I know now from making mistakes and having mentors there to steer me in the right direction. By my sophomore year I was the paper’s Editor. Our circulation increased from 1,000 to 2,500 in one year, and the paper expanded to 12 or 16 pages in a monthly tabloid format with a well-developed stylebook.

Students like myself sold and designed ads, created the layout for the stories, decided on and wrote editori-

als, reported stories and attached headlines, and shot the photos. Our staff wasn't structured like a totem pole. Meeting deadlines and teaching and learning the necessary skills of our new trade was everyone's responsibility, and so we incorporated a sense of teamwork into our routines. In working on the newspaper, we were no longer separated from our teachers by desks; we now learned together and from one another. Teachers used this experience and adapted it to their other classrooms.

The public nature of our work demanded that we improve in our use of the written word, in our business negotiations, and in our interviewing skills. The final product had to meet our standards as well as the standards of our community. And when we didn't, the community let us know. One Friday morning Mr. Woods, our principal, received nine phone calls within a 30-

minute span of time. The community wanted to know where the paper was. We were a few days late, and this made us realize, for the first time, how important we were becoming to the community. It was a wake up call for us as we had just entered our second year of publishing *The Oakman Times*.

As community members read the paper, many of their skills improved as well. Everyone bettered their lives by learning more about their community and heritage. Our community newspaper became a link between Oakman's past and its future. Young reporters talked with elders who could make history come alive in a way books can't because they had lived it. By understanding more about where we came from, we might have a better sense of where we were, wanted to go, and ways to get there.

The *Oakman Times* preserved the words, lessons and stories of people

such as Papa Chick, a man who has witnessed a century of change in Oakman. People like him became our primary sources for the paper because they knew more about Oakman than anybody else did. Plus, they have unique and valuable perspectives and opinions about the way people do things today.

As journalists, we provided a forum where voices within our community could come together. As a result, we were valued as much as the community members working in the real world and earning a paycheck. No longer viewed as insignificant young people doing more damage than good, The Times staff became an essential information resource for the community and a respected advocate for civic well-being.

For example, our paper served as the sole source of community information when SONAT, a Southeastern natu-



These newspapers were published by students in the PACERS cooperative. This effort to engage young people in journalism exists in 29 rural public schools.

ral gas provider, planned to lay a pipeline within sight of the elementary school. This plan was regarded as a threat to the lives of Oakman's children and property by many in the community. The county seat paper reported that a pipeline was coming through Oakman and left it at that. Because of our coverage, people were informed of community meetings, and those unable to attend still had access to vital and accurate information.

Our publication continued to meet the information need when reporting on rural transportation issues. When the state planned to remove and rebuild Tubbs Bridge, which is the only safe means of getting to Oakman from above Lost Creek, the county seat paper did not report on this decision. It was The Oakman Times's reporters who kept in contact with the state director of highway transportation and informed its readers about the possible loss of access and kept them updated on any changes. And when builders of Corridor X, a new interstate system connecting Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama, condemned land in the area, our reporters interviewed the people whose homes were demolished to make way for the road. The county seat paper simply reported that Corridor X was coming and discussed its perceived economic benefits.

Through these experiences, I understand what journalists go through on a daily basis. I gained a sense of respect for other journalists, but I also cast a more informed and critical eye on their practice. Frankly, as a profession, journalism could do better.

The Oakman Times didn't latch on to a story like a tick to an old hound dog. There was no harassing people for an interview, but a way was always found to obtain necessary information. No attention, except (save) editorials, was devoted to the Clinton scandal because we decided not to dwell on national stories full of sensationalism that have no direct and present link to our community. This goes for stories like the murder of JonBenet Ramsey, too. It's not that controversy was avoided. We reported aggressively on

issues relevant to the people who live in Oakman and discussed national issues only in the context of how they affected us in our daily lives in our community.

Nor did the paper present the news in a dry manner. The Oakman Times brings a certain flavor to its news coverage. We sat and talked with folks. Our reporters were more concerned about talking with people and conveying a clearer sense of meaning to our stories. We listened instead of just taking notes. We cared instead of just reporting. We were vested in the community; we were concerned because it affected our lives and the people we cared about.

The Oakman Times didn't confuse reporting with analysis or agenda setting. The paper didn't use "experts" to tell Oakman what a coal mine closing meant. Our coverage told how the miners planned to feed their children and send them to school and asked them what options were available to them.

We presented facts as we uncovered them and let the miners tell their stories and then let our readers decide for themselves how events affected the community.

I once read where Jeannine Guttman, Executive Editor of The Portland (Maine) Press Herald, said in a national civic journalism workshop that "citizens were missing from our stories because we didn't value their opinions," that "our own reporters didn't want to talk to the public." She questioned the relationship between giving people ways to share ideas and the well-being of our democracy just as Sham did. She wondered if her colleagues were "hurting democracy by ignoring the public."

Unlike many newspapers, our publication is not owned by some big out-of-town corporation which shuffles editors in and out, not allowing them to learn about the community for which they write. In an age of media consolidation, only 125 papers publish in Alabama today, compared with 1,000 at the turn of this century. Competition and commercialism is not a priority for The Times; community and the quality of our democratic and civic life is. We

understand the power of individual voices, spoken by and for members of that community.

Perhaps it's time for a "sandlot" renewal of journalism, in which stories are written out of love for the people they are about and respect for their experiences and opinions. Journalism should be as conscious as Wendell Berry, yet as entertaining as Lewis Grizzard, as encompassing as the Bible, and as interesting and meaningful as Grandpa's stories. Perhaps this is the utopian standard, but even so, the goal of journalists should be to reach it.

Today's journalists should understand that they are part of the community (even if that community is our nation or our planet), and should be conscious of their role within this community. Their focus should move away from being detached professionals to being vested members of communities where they live and work. Students who now report for and publish The Oakman Times continue to uphold this community approach and their work and the response it receives reinforce the necessary role newspapers play in the life and preservation of communities. Drawing from Oakman's experience, I urge journalists to stop talking about people through issues. Responsible journalism requires talking to people about issues. ■

*Brandon Tubbs is from Oakman, Alabama. As a sophomore majoring in journalism at the University of Alabama, he writes for university publications including The Communicator and The Crimson White. He has interned at The Daily Mountain Eagle in Jasper, Alabama. He is now employed by the Program for Rural Services and Research working as a mentor to other student-run community newspapers within the PACERS Cooperative. He plans to enter the journalism profession with utopian standards.*

# Restoring a Sense of What It Means To Be a Journalist

By Robin Jones

**M**ost people instinctively want to teach others what they know. And journalists are no exception. It is our job, after all, to share with our readers, viewers and listeners what we discover in the course of our reporting. But many of us also have an impulse to try to convince others to agree with our opinions about what we know, and this is the point at which journalists are taught to suppress this desire. Just as it is our job to share our findings, it is also our job to remain neutral in our telling.

It was this cluster of ideas that I brought with me into the classroom last spring when I began working as a teaching assistant for an entry-level journalism class at the University of Missouri. After college I had worked as a reporter at a small newspaper, but after two years I felt I needed to return to journalism school to learn more about the profession before continuing in it.

As a teaching assistant, I felt one of my primary roles was to explain the need for journalism's "norms" (such as passing along the admonition about impartiality) to help 19 young journalists understand and put into practice the profession's "rules." It was not my place, I thought, to question the status quo of the profession or even encourage my students to challenge the way journalism is practiced today.

Then, late one afternoon in the early part of the semester, I had a revealing conversation with Karyn, a doe-eyed and sweet-voiced freshman. Prior to this, she had talked candidly about her dreams of becoming a political correspondent in Washington, D.C., even as media coverage of happenings in the capital was drawing public rebuke. We talked about a lecture we had both heard in class earlier that week. The

lecturer, a professor in the school's television department, did exactly what I vowed I wouldn't do. He tried to encourage the students to challenge some of what could be called the "norms" of journalism.

Specifically, he argued that the members of the media ought to be much more careful when they create heroes. He gave examples of how some in the media transformed celebrities into heroes even when they'd done nothing heroic. Then he described how those same reporters were quick to knock those "heros" off their pedestals when public sentiment turned sour. He challenged the students to look for the real heroes and to find ways to hold their actions and beliefs up as examples for everyone to emulate.

His lecture inspired Karyn; she told me she left that class with a renewed sense of purpose about the profession she had chosen. She told me she agreed wholeheartedly with his message and intended to challenge the hero-making-and-breaking cycle of news reporting when she started working.

While I'd agreed with the lecturer's views about the recklessness of some media coverage, I hadn't been as inspired as Karyn was. Rather, I remember thinking that even though I didn't like the celebrity worship I was seeing practiced by some in the media, I felt powerless to change it, so why try? But I didn't tell Karyn that because by the time she finished talking I was feeling ashamed of my defeatist attitude. And I started to wonder: At what point in my career did I decide I couldn't do anything to make journalism better?

As it turned out, my conversation with Karyn was only the beginning of

**"I started to wonder: At what point in my career did I decide I couldn't do anything to make journalism better?"**

my awakening that semester. Throughout the term, I found myself increasingly enchanted with my students' insights on the state of journalism. Often their remarks contained a certain naiveté and a heartbreakingly sweet idealism that I realized had become almost alien to me even in the short time I'd worked in the business. I started to hear these sentiments expressed more and more often in the comments they made in class, and I began to see it in the essays they turned in: These aspiring journalists had a burgeoning desire to do good, to make the world a better place.

These students clearly wanted to change things; they hoped to make journalism more credible by doing things differently. Unlike some of us who have worked as reporters, they didn't shrug and cast the blame elsewhere. They never accepted the rationale that the viewers want to see Dennis Rodman's exploits, so we should feature them. They never used the excuse that news reporting is nothing more than a business.

My students believed they could maintain the integrity of their chosen profession and still satisfy its business side. They believed they could live by the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, the edict that instructs reporters to seek truth and report it, but minimize harm.

Their idealism is vaguely familiar to me; I know I had similar feelings in the



early days of my journalism career. As a 22-year-old, fresh-out-of-college reporter at a weekly newspaper in a small community, I set out to inspire with my words. I think all of us must start our first journalism job with these sorts of dreams. We remember articles that made us cry, ones that made us think, ones that inspired us to act, and we want our readers to be affected by our words in the same way. No matter how much we pay lip service to “telling the truth” and “being fair” and “fulfilling the public’s right to know,” I suspect that each of us hopes that our byline will be the one at the top of inspirational and groundbreaking stories.

But after two years of working at the community newspaper, I had become tangled up in deadline pressures and my editor’s pleadings for “award-winning stories” and had forgotten my reasons for writing stories in the first place. Like other reporters, I had become numb because of too much exposure to the squawks of the police scanner and too little contact with the people whose lives I was supposed to be reporting on. I had lost my motivation to pen the “best” stories, the kind I hoped I’d write when I entered the newsroom.

I hope my students don’t get to this point, but I am almost certain that someday, some editor will order one of my journalism students to break a trust or lie to a source to get the story. And I’d predict that someday, some publisher will kill a story one of them has written because it places an influential person in the wrong light. And I suspect that someday, one of them will justify going with a story that just slightly misrepresents some facts because there wasn’t time to reaffirm them.

Part of me wanted to prepare them for these eventualities in the “real world” they will one day inhabit. But the other part of me didn’t want to burden them with the debris of my own disillusionment. I wanted to allow their idealism to remain firmly intact because I think it’s exactly the thing journalism needs. Their idealism could be the best foe to this beleaguered profession’s current lack of credibility, to the “good enough” atti-

tude that sometimes exists in newsrooms today.

Obviously, there’s a cleft between the public’s perspectives and journalists’ sense of proportion when it comes to certain situations, most noticeably perhaps in the recent Washington scandal coverage. And there’s no question that cleft contributes to the increasing absence of believability that the press appears to engender with the public. My students, still part of “the public” and not yet journalists, reminded me of this disconnection with their reactions to various ethical dilemmas we discussed in class.

As I reflected on their comments, I realized that this gulf of distrust could be a result of something a student named Jennifer pointed out in class. Her remarks echoed an idea I first read in an essay by former New York Times reporter and columnist Anna Quindlen.

In the essay, Quindlen described a time she cried while interviewing the parents of a missing boy. Though she realized the story was gut-wrenchingly sad and knew the tears were a natural reaction, she was still angry at herself for acting in a manner she thought was unprofessional. “I thought that what was the right response for a human being was the wrong response for a reporter,” she wrote.

I am sure Quindlen’s experience is common among journalists. Traits and “rules” that make us good reporters are often quite different from those that make us decent citizens in our private lives. In other words, to do our jobs well as journalists, we must sometimes abandon the things we value most in friends, neighbors and role models: compassion, honesty and respect for privacy, to name a few.

When Jennifer raised this dilemma in class, unlike Quindlen (and most working reporters I know), she didn’t see the two sides as irreconcilable. “Just because you’re a journalist, that doesn’t completely define you,” she said. “I think a lot of journalists are under the impression that it does. You have to foremost be a human being and then think like a journalist. I think the answers [to many of our ethical dilemmas] would be clear then.” Many of the

other students agreed with Jennifer, and I found myself nodding as she spoke. Recognizing this linkage could be a first step in regaining the public’s trust, I thought.

This spring many of my 19 students will begin work at the school’s daily newspaper or television station. For most, this will be their first taste of “real” journalism. On the one hand, I’m glad for the experience they will be getting; on the other hand, I’m saddened to think about all that will inevitably happen as they proceed along this pathway into jobs. Most likely they’ll start to embrace some of the journalism “norms” they were so willing to challenge in class.

**“The student’s idealism could be the best foe to this beleaguered profession’s current lack of credibility.”**

I suspect this is something that happens in every profession as young people move into jobs where rules do matter and were developed with good and meaningful intent. But if they forget the arguments they made against those “rules,” the challenges they were once willing to make to them, then the profession will have lost another opportunity to keep itself fresh and honest and self-reflective.

I know in the future, unlike in the past, I’ll take opportunities to listen to interns and recent college graduates who other folks in the newsroom might dismiss as starry-eyed idealists. I hope that listening to their perspectives will help me remember why I chose to become a journalist in the first place. ■

*Robin Jones will receive her master’s degree from the University of Missouri in May. Before returning to school in 1997, she worked for two years as a news and sports reporter for The Half Moon Bay Review, a weekly newspaper in a small town just south of San Francisco.*

# When Mediocrity Beckons

By William Brent Cunningham

**M**ost of us know the frustration of desire outpacing ability. But what about coping with the reverse? What happens if you decide you don't want to live up to your potential?

The top is what we're all supposed to be gunning for. The best and the brightest. In America, we don't celebrate anything less. To aim elsewhere is considered a waste of talent.

Growing up in West Virginia, the top of anything but the next mountain seemed to me remote and unlikely. Yet from the time I wrote my first story for my college paper, *The Parthenon*, editors and colleagues have assured me that I could go as far as I wanted in the journalism business. They meant, of course, the top. It was understood that I should want it, so I did. Fifteen years later, I'm still wrestling that well-intended prophecy.

For a reporter, the top is a vague and shifting arena marked by only a handful of immovable icons—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc. But tethered always to this notion of moving into the journalistic stratosphere is the awareness that it takes more than just talent to do so. It requires complete subservience to the goal. In the deliciously cynical undercurrent of newsrooms, it can be a matter of pride to have one's life in shambles, but still be destroying the opposition.

At 23, my greatest fear was never escaping West Virginia and missing my shot at journalistic greatness. Since then, I've spent four years at an afternoon daily in Charleston covering politics, three years teaching reporting in Hungary, and two years as a freelancer in San Francisco writing dull articles about high-risk insurance products and the computer trade.

Today, at 33, poised finally to take that shot after a decade of rambling, I am hesitant to squeeze the trigger. The problem is that in the last 10 years I learned there are things as important to me as my career; maybe some that are more important.

Raising such questions makes me feel like a heretic in the halls of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, a veritable mill for journalistic gods and goddesses. My teachers here—many of whom have made the stratospheric sacrifices—are echoing editors past with their shiny predictions for my future in this business. And why not? Surely one comes to Columbia to be a part of all that.

The end of the millennium has people in reflective mode. Friends say, "Do what makes you happy." But would they understand if my happiness doesn't include the high-octane career we've all envisioned for me? How about a summer of cooking camp in Italy instead, or a couple of years squirreled away somewhere writing another novel? What if my greatest happiness means starting a family and actively raising the kids? Would they accept that as a mark of professional happiness? Would I?

It's not that one can't work in the stratosphere and do all these things, too. Some people manage it. But I don't think I can. I know from my newspaper days that reporting consumes me once I commit to it. My most self-destructive stretch thus far was when I was giving 12 to 14 hours a day to a newspaper. I drank more, ate

poorly, exercised less and was more irresponsible in my relationships. I never read anything other than newspapers. I never spent a rainy Saturday just cooking. In the winter, it was dark when I left home and dark when I

**"For several years now I have watched a friend's single-minded climb up the journalistic food chain while the rest of her life goes untended."**

returned. I worked weekends, holidays. My entire social existence, slim as it was, was confined to my colleagues at the paper. Newspaper people are without peer, but they are not the only species worth knowing.

I loved it and hated it simultaneously. I cannot imagine making my living any other way, yet I fear its ability to devour everything else I love. Regardless, you have to reach the top before such a flexible and varied life is possible, and that's where the real sacrifice comes unless you are a genius or celebrity. For several years now I have watched a friend's single-minded climb up the journalistic food chain while the rest of her life goes untended. I know plenty of people who would love to be where she is, yet nothing she ever does is good enough for her. I don't believe, through all that striving, she appreciates what she has already accomplished.

At first I watched with excruciating envy and self-loathing for not possessing similar courage and drive. Lately, though, I've watched with something akin to relief. There is still time for me to make wrong decisions and recover. But the weight of expectations, my own and others', real and perceived, has me reeling. People expected me to

be like my driven friend. So that's what I expected of myself. Yet at every turn, I have opted for the path that led elsewhere, to other pleasures in other areas of my life.

When I left my newspaper job, for example, the obvious next move for someone headed to the stratosphere was to a bigger paper in a bigger market. I went instead to Hungary, where I traveled and wrote a novel that may never be seen by anyone other than those few friends I trust to be kind. It was there that I first began to question whether the lifestyle I had always envisioned for myself was something I really wanted.

I was in Eastern Europe in the early 1990's and simply ignored my big chance to establish a toehold as a foreign correspondent. The opportunities were there and people I knew were taking them. I took, instead, cooking and language classes and spent long hours reading books I'd missed over the years. It's something I've tried hard to regret since coming back home, but I've never been completely able.

I understand the idea that you can do good work anywhere. That this notion of big-time journalism is an internal—an individual—thing. But I only agree up to a point. If everything but my career fell away, my dream job would be the freedom to write about whatever interests me anywhere in the world. Only a precious few journalists have anything approaching such a job. And only a few publications can afford to indulge such a desire. The best of the best.

Clearly then, this desire exists somewhere in me. I came to Columbia, at least in part, to figure out exactly where this desire resides and how strongly it could burn. Perhaps, despite the beliefs of friends and colleagues, I could never reach the stratosphere, anyway, even with 10 times the drive of my driven friend. The question now is whether I'll ever know.

So here I am, almost armed with a degree from Columbia's J-school. My shot is clearing, and in May it will be mine to take or not. In the meantime, I am at least preparing to take it, if not as aggressively as perhaps I should given the cost of my time at Columbia.

The school's career services office provides a weekly listing of various internships and fellowships worldwide. Through this, I have applied for several two-year internships at larger papers in cities where I would like to live. I would prefer an actual staff position to

some reason the lure of the stratosphere persists. Maybe it's habit, or maybe it's the proximity that Columbia affords.

Another friend fled the drive to the stratosphere when she was about my age and moved outside the city to seven



A newsroom for journalism students. Photo courtesy Medill School of Journalism.

an internship, but I suppose if I can't make them want to hire me in two years, it wasn't meant to be. And I know that the likelihood of being offered a full-time job at the end of an internship varies from paper to paper. A two-year intern stands a better chance of being hired than a summer one, but some things are beyond your control, such as the availability of a job when your time for review comes up. Still, I have more experience than most of my fellow students, and am ready for a staff position. So I will focus more intently on finding a full-time job this spring, both through career services and my own contacts.

In recent years, I have grown enamored of urban living, and plan—initially anyway—to limit my job search accordingly. If I come up empty, I will either suck it up and look to smaller markets or move back to San Francisco, land of the alternative lifestyle, and try to string together a living that allows for many loves. I may ultimately choose the latter regardless, but for

acres and a dog. From this bucolic base, she tends her extensive garden, writes the freelance stories she wants and pays the bills with a handful of steady corporate editing gigs. She takes great pleasure in the fact that corporate America is subsidizing her radical journalism.

Do what makes you happy. If only it were that easy. ■

*William Brent Cunningham graduated from Marshall University with a degree in journalism and a master's degree in comparative politics. He worked for four years at The Charleston Daily Mail and taught reporting at the American Journalism Center in Budapest before arriving at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.*

# Falling in Love With Words and How Journalists Use Them

By Kathryn S. Wenner

I don't particularly like thinking about what I might do after I earn my master's degree in journalism. J-school, for all the work and worry, is more fun than any job I've ever had. It feels like a great indulgence.

A year ago, I was fortunate to be able to walk away from a job I hated and an occupation, publications editing, that barely kept me awake. For four months, I swam, read, had lunch with friends, cleaned house, cooked dinner and spent relaxed, delightful days and nights with my husband, Mark, and our three dogs. By the end of May, when I turned 40, I felt great.

Two days after my birthday, I walked into Associate Dean Christopher Callahan's beginning-level reporting and writing class for graduate students at the University of Maryland College of Journalism. I said I was there to improve my writing but, truth be told, I wanted to know if I had what it takes to produce a good news story because I'd concluded that a) I am compelled to work with written words and b) most of my favorite writing these days is by journalists, especially in magazines such as *Harper's* and *The Oxford American*, and I want to learn how to write like they do. I wanted to give journalism one more shot.

Eleven years ago, I quit a budding career in broadcast journalism. I left a wonderful morning anchor slot at the number one news operation in Roanoke, Virginia, because I could not bear to look ahead at more years of writing about fatal fires, drunken homicides and car crashes. Nor did I want to use my appearance, my voice and my personality to present those kinds of stories to viewers day after day. I also

didn't want to have to keep on moving to wherever I could find the next bigger-market job on my way to a network job which, once I got there, might not be what I wanted anyway. My heart just wasn't in it. And, of course, my personal life stank. At 29, I looked at women like Diane Sawyer, then in her early 40's and unmarried, and thought, forget it. There's got to be more to life than an all-consuming, so-called glamorous job. Last June I came home from that first day of journalism class and told Mark, "Everything has changed. You've never seen me like this before."

Dean Callahan, who loved news and newspapers like no one else I'd ever met, reminded me of everything I had loved about journalism and being a journalist: the blood-pumping challenge of getting the whole story exactly right in a ridiculously short amount of time; the reverence I feel for the vital role the press plays in a democratic society, the mental quickness and forthrightness that characterized the newspaper journalists I knew in Roanoke. At last I had the chance to concentrate on learning how to gather the parts of a story and tell it well, regardless of how my hair looked.

I'm now in my second semester at Maryland. Aside from my course work, I am a graduate assistant to Knight Chair Haynes Johnson, whose name I first heard during Watergate, when my mother would read excerpts from his Washington Post stories and say "I just love that Haynes Johnson." I'm even getting to do some research for his current book project about the United States at the close of the 20th Century. I don't have time to clean my house, and I rarely cook anymore. But I've

taken unforgettable courses with former USA Today National Editor Carl Sessions Stepp and American Journalism Review Editor Rem Rieder. I was one of a small group of students who met weekly last semester for Q and A sessions with Washington Post journalists and legends such as Leonard Downie Jr., George Solomon and David S. Broder. Why would I want to think about life after J-school?

I go around and around in my head about what I might do after graduation. The central conflict seems not an unusual one. I want it all, every day: challenging and creative work, time with my loved ones, time to do laps in the pool. And there's one more requirement. Whatever work I do has to be in or around Washington, D.C., because Mark, harmonica player and front man for a blues, rock and soul band that's been a local institution since the 70's, is not about to move anywhere.

From everything I've heard—in class, from friends who've worked at papers, from journalists at *The Post*—reporting at a daily is not for me. The hours, the pace, the prohibitions (at *The Post*, at least) on contributions to nonprofit organizations, all conflict with who I am. I have also heard, repeatedly, that the best way to develop into a great journalist is to spend years as a reporter at a daily. Whenever I read an article I think is especially well-written—a New Yorker profile of Gail Zappa, a Village Voice story about a teenaged murder suspect, to name two recent examples—I feel a gnawing unease that I might never reach my potential as a journalist because to have what I need to be healthy and happy I must set boundaries on my professional life.

I've never heard anything to make me think that setting strict personal boundaries leads to finding meaningful work at a daily.

This summer I'm going to explore magazine work as an intern at American Journalism Review. I love to read magazines and to hold them and page through them, feeling the paper, examining the typefaces, studying the design. The idea of eventually being able to freelance is appealing. Working at a publication that uses freelancers seems like a good way to find out a little about that part of the business, although I know it's a hard way to begin a journalism career. Still, I think I need to spend some time writing news stories on a regular

basis. I've also learned, in all the types of work I've attempted, that I need a mentor or two to help push my skills forward. If I'm lucky, I might get those needs met, for a while at least, at one of the Washington area

weeklies. To meet clip requirements in my courses, I've done some reporting for the Gazette weekly newspapers in Montgomery County, Maryland, where I live. Covering community news here is as much fun as it was in Roanoke when I started out reporting for a radio station, even though I had not at that point studied journalism.

One of my future-job fantasies is that I fall in love with covering Montgomery County. Then, in a couple of decades, Mark and I move to a village in Vermont and I spend my final years at a small family-owned newspaper with impeccable journalistic standards. I wonder, though, about my ability to adhere to the norms of what it means to be a journalist and refrain from taking a stand on political and community issues. Broadcast news and J-school have taught me to investigate issues from as many angles as possible, but the older I get the more important it

starts to feel to be able speak out and act when I sense that by doing so I might make a difference.

I've paid attention during the four decades that have so far comprised my life. And there are, as Dorothy Allison, author of "Bastard Out of Carolina," says, two or three things I know for sure. At the very least I need to be able to contribute my money to a few organizations whose work I believe is essential to making the world a better place. Whether I want to use my journalism skills to advocate particular causes or issues is something I have not yet decided.

I've thought a lot about some of the disturbing issues that now confront journalism: scandal feeding frenzies; private lives as news; increasing dependence on anonymous sources; unethical practices; weakened foreign coverage; rising public distrust of journalists; declining readership, and how the consolidation of media ownership affects our jobs. And we've discussed each,

sometimes ad nauseam, in my classes. Although these issues concern me deeply as a citizen, with the exception of the last two they do not figure into my thinking about my future career. First, I have set for myself high ethical and professional standards; I know from my experience on previous media jobs that I am not afraid to say no or put my job on the line if asked to do something I believe is wrong. Second, I've seen how quickly change occurs.

In the last five years, for example, Internet technology has opened up unlimited possibilities for publishing and marketing the printed word. At the same time, "public journalism" initiatives have created fresh approaches to news coverage. Though its configuration may change, and the ways we reach it may be in transition, I have no doubt there will continue to be an audience for substantive, probing journalism. Also, I am convinced that inde-

pendent-minded publishers will succeed on the Internet.

Sometimes I think I'd like to go to work with an on-line publication, although I am not sure the accelerated pace of that medium would coincide with my desire for the slower rhythm offered by a weekly or monthly. As a consumer, I've grown accustomed to getting my news on line and, like most everyone I know, spend hours every day reading, writing and listening to music on my computer. I'm among those who have the highest hopes for the Internet's ability to protect and enhance free speech. I'd love to do an internship at an on-line magazine or journal, to absorb the lessons of cyber-publishing and just to be around the kind of pioneers who are advancing this new medium.

This brings me to my bottom-line consideration as I try to figure out which way to go once my golden days at Maryland are over. Whatever I end up doing needs to include being a part of the journalism community. I love being in the company of print journalists. The best I've met are annoyingly independent in thought and action. They love words. They pay attention to what is happening around them. Without them in my life, my thinking would be narrower and my world smaller.

Meanwhile, I'll enjoy being a middle-aged kid in an academic candy store. I have figured out how to make my studies last until sometime in 2000. By then, maybe these thoughts and desires might clarify themselves into an obvious next step. And perhaps I'll be as lucky—and as energized—when I take that next step as I was when I walked into my first journalism class. ■

*Kathryn S. Wenner is a master's degree candidate in journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park. She was a news anchor and reporter at three different television stations in Virginia during the 1980's, then worked at a variety of Washington, D.C. organizations before deciding to attend journalism school.*

**"From everything I've heard...reporting at a daily is not for me. The hours, the pace, the prohibitions on contributions to non-profit organizations, all conflict with who I am."**

# Teaching Journalism by Adhering to Unchanging Standards

By Nancy Day

**C**onfession: I actually went to journalism school. And now I teach in one. But I've also spent plenty of time in newsrooms, a dual perspective critical to good journalism education.

When I first switched from a San Francisco newsroom to a Boston University classroom to teach basic reporting in 1981, I viewed it as temporary. I was resettling in the East with my husband, who'd earned his doctorate from Harvard the same year I was a Nieman Fellow (1979), and our newborn daughter. Now that child is a senior in high school and I'm still teaching at B.U. Whew. Perhaps it's time to reflect: Is this an honorable calling? Is journalism education necessary? How did I develop my journalistic values, and how do I pass them on?

I'm now Co-Director of B.U.'s On-Line and Print Journalism Program. That title alone conveys key technology changes from when I was an undergraduate at the University of Illinois, taught by men in suits pacing up and down clanging rows of typewriters. Yet those professors emulating gruff city editors were doing what I still consider crucial in educating future journalists: making classrooms as much like newsrooms as possible. The conundrum for schools of journalism is hiring professors who can build on real-life careers and keep current, neither falling into the "war story" trap nor having no stories at all to tell.

In 1996, I returned to a city room as part of a program designed by the American Society of Newspaper Editors to reacquaint (or, in some cases, acquaint) professors with today's journalism. The Anchorage Daily News

called me an "intern," so I was immediately time-warped to a student mindset. But I was an intern with chronic *déjà vu*. I'd been told by grizzled veterans nationwide, people my age who'd stayed in the trenches, that newsrooms had changed a lot and that the business wasn't as much fun as it used to be. I thought it was fun to be a reporter again, finding myself in new places, meeting new people, learning new things. These were all reasons I loved journalism in the first place.

What did surprise me was that newsrooms literally still looked almost the same as they had 15 years earlier when I had my last full-time job in one.

Men were mostly in charge and there were far fewer minorities working in them than at my last permanent news post, The San Francisco Examiner. I was less surprised to find that newsroom technology was behind that of many universities, since that was the word brought (or E-mailed) back from student interns and recent graduates of my program. In the end, my newsroom reentry that summer (I also worked at The Examiner and The Boston Globe other summers) helped me to feel confident that our journalism curriculum is on track. Although some of the ethical dilemmas faced by tundra reporters were dramatically different in detail than those of urban reporters, the soul-searching was similar, as were conceptual debates about whether the daily newspaper should be concerned with breaking news in this age of competing media or in writing more magazine-style pieces of depth and style. We should do both and we train students accordingly.

Because of the way my career has

gone, I've been hanging out with teen-aged journalists ever since I was editor of my high school newspaper.

One disturbing quality many young people share with veteran journalists today is cynicism, distinct from healthy skepticism. But how can they help it? They are exposed to infotainment, respected anchors hawking their books on network news, hyped "true life" stories, celebrity gossip masquerading as news. And some of my best students tell me they can't afford to go into journalism, especially newspapers, because low starting salaries won't put meaningful dents in student loans. (A good argument for the terrific journalism educations offered at many public institutions, but small comfort to students struggling to meet the costs of large private universities.)

Other students are turned off by invasions of privacy committed in the name of the people's right to know. They get upset at the rudeness of reporters and incensed at the misallocation of news resources where swarms of reporters cover the same story while many other important stories go uncovered. I tell my students at the start of each semester that they will learn to be more sophisticated news consumers as well as more logical thinkers and writers. We discuss "trial balloons," ethical lapses, omissions and commissions, and we deal with a new challenge in teaching reporting: getting some of our high-tech students to do in-person and telephone interviews for their stories. They'd rather get all of their information from the 'Net.

Many of our best graduates are lured by on-line jobs, but soon find that the initial excitement of going with a brand-

name company in a big city wears off when they spend their shifts repackaging bits of news reported by someone else into a flashy Web presentation. Some of our more satisfied graduates are ones who took jobs in the boon-docks, covering and uncovering news that's critical to the functioning of communities and that no one else is writing about. They know they are making a difference, getting immediate feedback (tips, criticism, accolades), being known around town as "the reporter"—in short, practicing journalism.

Many in my generation are concerned about diversity, but many of my students don't think it's an issue. Of course, I don't recall dwelling on these issues myself until I'd been in the working world awhile. For quite some time now, the majority of journalism students have been female, yet the majority of our faculty is still male; the chairs of all three departments and the dean of the college are all men, with female support staff. Whether you're a good writer, reporter or teacher is not determined by gender, of course, but I wonder about the impact of these daily visual reminders. I often hear from former students, now journalists, who call to ask my opinion about whether treatment of them and their stories is happening because of something anyone might encounter, or is it because of being black? A woman? Latino?

At this point, the questions they ask me are very different than when they were students. A few don't even deal with such issues as gender, appearance, ethnicity, unless they choose to.

In my own education, the best teachers I ever had were two remarkable middle-aged, white, male journalists. (Of course, I never had an opportunity to compare this with what impact women professors might have had.) The most intense course I took, including later studies at Stanford and Harvard, was Editorial Writing from Gene Graham, also the first person to mention the Nieman program to me. He made us read extensive histories of Indochina and introduced us to the writing of Malcolm Browne, David Halberstam and Ward Just. He showed us a piece he'd written about the Bir-

mingham church bombings. His spare language and vivid detail made us feel the horror of those girls' deaths without ever telling us what to think. Graham made sure we knew the background and context of what we planned to editorialize about before we disgorged our undergraduate opinions.

It was the academic year 1967-68. Protests against the Vietnam War were escalating, even at the socially conservative University of Illinois, with its huge engineering and agricultural colleges, and, when I started, strict cur-

fewes for women students. My final editorial series was on abortion, then illegal. In my conference on the series, Graham looked at the paper, then at me. "This is good," he drawled, a self-described "good old boy" from Tennessee. "But does your Daddy know you're writin' about this?"

Given today's sensibilities, his remark would have been considered sexist. I just laughed, savoring my teacher's rare compliment. In those days, classrooms and newsrooms were more formal; professors and editors dressed in



Pages from Gene Graham's Nieman year sketchbook.

jacket and tie. I don't recall feeling any discrimination or discouragement, although I was adamant that I not be assigned to the women's page on my first newspaper job, the summer I was 19. It was clear to me what was women's work. I knew I did not want to do it.

When I first taught, I tried to emulate my Illinois professors. I dressed in suits and was very strict. Following the dictates of Graham, a Pulitzer winner, I flunked students if they misspelled a name or reported inaccurately. "I always feel like throwing up after your class," one young woman confessed. I required students to report each matter addressed at a City Council meeting, in declining order of importance, just as I had been taught. I sent them to court and called the prosecutors and defense attorneys to check their facts. If they garbled the story, they got bad grades and had to rewrite.

My best training as a teacher came from those long-ago lessons of Graham and another former newspaperman then at Illinois, Charles Puffenbarger, known to all as "Puff." As a longtime colleague of his once observed, it was "not that he dealt condescendingly or too softly, as one might suspect of a professor known to students openly by his nickname. He was demanding, and expecting the best of his students, very often got it."

Expecting the best. Demanding. Being there for students.

A lot of people go into teaching not to nurture the next generation, but "to have time to write." How many times I've heard that, in interviews with prospective faculty or casual conversations when people ask what I do. They want to know what I've written lately. Often, it's comments on a student's paper, not for publication and certainly not under my byline. Good teaching is a lot like good parenting: it takes quantity as well as quality time and a healthy mix of discipline and support, all time-consuming tasks.

A few years ago, I was called into the then-chairman's office. He told me he thought I was being too hard on my students. They shouldn't be failed for one or two little mistakes, especially if "they are trying hard." He told me he

thought I was under strain from my divorce and should "ease up" on grading, suggesting that my student evaluations would improve, everyone would be happier, and my merit pay might even be higher.

Hearing this made me miss the "old days" at the U of I. Professors were not there to try to make students happy. Such an idea would have been completely foreign. They were there to teach good journalism, perhaps to inspire us, but basically to prepare us for the real world where, if we got the name wrong, it could ruin a reputation and we—and our employer—could be sued for libel. This was serious business, and we'd better learn it right or get out. There was no coddling. Grade inflation hadn't hit, nor had the pressure we now are under to accept excuses. We didn't know much about their personal lives, and they didn't know much about ours. It wasn't considered relevant.

But as much as the encompassing culture has changed, the qualities that make a good reporter have not: strict attention to detail, fairness, thoroughness, accuracy. I'm partial to reporters who want to fulfill those watchdog and spotlight roles, keeping a watchful eye on whether taxpayer funds are being wisely used by public servants, illuminating the hidden corners of our society, and empowering the powerless. The best journalists, whatever their media, are always going to be the ones with energy, passion, persistence and confidence—enough to go after the story, but not so much that they seldom have second thoughts about whether they could have done better.

After 17 years of teaching journalism, I'm much more relaxed. I tell students the class is informal and flexible, but the standards are not. By far the best aspect of this job is discovering great young journalists. I often keep coaching them by E-mail or phone calls while they're wrestling with stories, with difficult or indifferent editors, with whether to make a job change. If journalism teachers haven't been working professionals, they won't know how to respond to these questions, nor will they have a network of folks to whom

they can point students. It is essential that teachers have track records in what they're teaching and that they maintain those ties through freelance, summer or consulting work. The theory doctors—those who teach about a profession they never practiced—have a place in academia, but it's a separate one, in departments addressing communication as a social science. I'm pleased that where I teach the university recognizes this distinction, with the Department of Journalism now headed by a former ASNE president, and a different home for mass communications, advertising and public relations.

I wish Graham were still teaching, but the health problems that propelled him from his Nieman year to Urbana got worse and multiplied. It was only after his death in 1982 that his widow, sorting through his things, found a notebook from his Nieman year in which he had sketched seminar guests. She sent it to Cambridge. Now those sketches are framed behind glass and hung in a place of honor. I think of him and his legacy each time I'm at Lippmann House.

There is not one path to becoming a good reporter or a good journalism teacher. I hope those who teach also continue to "do," through programs such as ASNE's or endeavors they devise. I hope the elite institutions, such as Harvard, will offer meaty courses in the theory, practice and ethics of journalism, a field with a pervasive influence on our lives. And, most of all, I hope that students drawn to journalism will find their own Grahams and Puffs to guide them with grace, wit, empathy, humility and humor.

Remembering them reminds me that teaching journalism can be an honorable calling. ■

*Nancy Day is Co-Director of the On-Line and Print Journalism Program at Boston University where she is also an associate professor. She is a 1979 Nieman Fellow.*



# Using the Realities of the Newsroom To Train Journalists

By Helen Ubinas

**M**y high school journalism teacher gave me one piece of advice before graduation: “Major in anything but journalism.”

In his defense, he had a point. Although it took an unproductive year studying political science at the University of Connecticut and a slew of jobs, including a stint as a fry cook at McDonald’s, to figure out exactly what was so right about his advice.

In time I realized he wasn’t warning me to steer clear of journalism. He was telling me that preparation for being a reporter would take many forms other than what I could find at a prestigious J-school with reputable professors and theoretical classes on the ethics of the profession I would eventually enter.

This is something I came to learn almost by accident. After asking “you want fries with that?” one too many times, the horrors of boring, low-paid jobs sent me running and screaming to the closest school that would have me. I ended up at Northern Essex Community College (NECCO) in Haverhill, Massachusetts, for no other reason than its close proximity to my home and my unwillingness to waste more time and money at an expensive four-year college. As things turned out, I couldn’t have picked a better school for me to attend at that point in my life.

Although NECCO lacked the big-name professors and programs other schools had, it offered me exactly what I needed to realize that writing was what I wanted to do for a living. The students, many who like myself had taken the scenic route through school, were motivated and passionate about their studies. The school newspaper’s student editors were a core group of eager and aspiring journalists who worked through many nights on diets

of Coke and candy to get the paper out. The school newspaper consistently won awards, often beating out papers from more prestigious four-year colleges. The paper’s advisor, Joseph LeBlanc, pushed us to excel and was also a strong advocate of internships. His enthusiasm for them pushed me to want to do one myself.

Classes in journalism, which I also took, covered the basics—news and feature writing, copyediting. But it was the hands-on experiences both at the school paper and in my internships that was so valuable.

In time, I became Editor of the paper and, at the same time, worked on my internships as stringer for a Spanish-language publication and as a reporter at several community newspapers.

When it was time to move on to complete my four-year degree, I thought again of my high school teacher’s advice. But by then I was pretty certain that what he meant when he said not to major in journalism was that I had to make sure I could offer a prospective newspaper employer more than just a degree in journalism. So I majored in print journalism at Boston University and chose a concentration in Latin American studies.

Compared with NECCO, Boston University’s School of Communication offered a more diverse selection of journalism classes—ethics, communications law, the history of journalism. And while there were opportunities for hands-on experience like I’d had at NECCO—such as the school’s daily newspaper—there were also crowds of students waiting in line for an opportunity to write for it. As a transfer student with a limited amount of time, I couldn’t afford to get in the queue.

So I took the lessons I learned at NECCO—listening closely to the voice of my advisor there—and interned at as many papers as I could. I wrote a few articles for the school newspaper as well, but mostly I interned for Bay State Weeklies, writing stories for The Cambridge Chronicle, The Somerville Journal and The Watertown Press. By the time I left Boston University for a job at The Hartford Courant in 1994, I felt prepared for a career in journalism, and I knew I could offer my editors more than a degree acknowledging the courses that I’d passed.

My first year at The Courant was exactly what I expected from a newspaper job and from a career in journalism. I was assigned to report on Hartford’s neighborhoods, telling stories about people who before a daily section about the city was introduced a year earlier were rarely, if ever, represented in the paper, even though the newspaper carried the city’s name on its masthead. I had a supportive editor who also gave me feedback—something I later learned is a rare commodity in this business.

Now, nearly five years after I graduated from Boston University with that degree in journalism, I’ve had time to reflect on the lessons I learned along the way.

Above all, journalism school infused me with the enthusiasm for this profession that I think it takes to be a good reporter. My professors at both colleges were talented, supportive, creative individuals who were not only good teachers but also, very importantly, talented, working journalists. Because they kept themselves fresh about the profession by working in it as well as training us for it, their guidance was something I believed in. They pre-

pared me well for the mechanics of working at a newspaper. They talked and taught leads, got us to be serious about meeting deadlines, even had us trot out our inverted pyramids.

In terms of course work, there were required writing, copyediting and ethics classes that ranged from practical to theoretical. But while the course work was both instructive and, at times, inspiring, it was also flawed in some areas. Even some of the basics weren't quite there, as I've found out on the job. For example, some of the computers I learned on weren't compatible with any of the systems at the papers I worked for. After talking to many colleagues, I learned it's a problem that plagues journalism schools across the country and has for many years.

Copyediting was another basic course that received mixed reviews. I still use some of the lessons to edit today. However, advice I received about counting headlines by the point have gone unused, and even if someone asked me to do it today, I couldn't remember how. "I would have rather used that class time learning more about editing and story structure," a colleague said about her copyediting course at the University of Connecticut, where she graduated in 1993.

Then, there were the ethics courses that one of my more vocal cubicle mates deems "worthless." I spent many hours in ethics classes talking about issues like privacy and giving lots of thought to the possibility of tainting situations by our mere presence. While at the time I found my ethics class worth the time I spent in it, I later realized we spent too much time talking about esoteric issues. Consequently I never gave much thought to the more practical and everyday situations I found myself in just a couple of years after graduation. Situations where, unlike class discussions, I was forced to act first and think later.

For example, a few years ago I did a story on a teenage drug dealer. At about 4 a.m., as I stood with this dealer on a street corner, a car drove up and its occupants were looking to buy drugs. The young boy handed them over, and the people then began to move away.



For two days in late September, Bebe sold the crack cocaine rocks known as "Cookies" in the pouring rain—cold and alone. While other kids were in school that morning, Bebe spent his day doing his job. Photo from Helen Ubinas's series, "Mama can you save me? Children in Peril, Parents in a Desperate Struggle." *Photo by Brad Clift, The Hartford Courant.*



To live in the darkness, or to look to the future with hope? Otis sits on the edge: Will his mother's lessons about responsibility win out over the streets of Fair Haven, where a blunt of marijuana or the quick sale of a \$10 "rock" of crack cocaine offers immediate gratification? Late one night, Otis sits on a crate in front of his porch as his mother tells him what Fair Haven was like when she was a girl. She tells him she tried to leave the neighborhood once, but couldn't. "I'd miss the excitement," she says. *Photo by Brad Clift, The Hartford Courant.*

The boy pulled out a gun and forced the couple who was in the car not only to pay for the drugs, but also to give him all of their money.

When all of this was happening, I didn't have a chance to think about how my presence could influence this teenager's actions. It was the next day when I asked myself whether, because I was there, he was trying to prove himself. Would he have done the same thing if I hadn't been there? But by then it was too late for me to report that story differently. It was a reminder to me that discussions about the ethics and practice of journalism are important, but students ought to be aware that, as I found in that situation, reflective time is hard to come by. Instead, many times in the comfort of journalism classrooms split-second decisions made by working journalists are dissected and criticized in ways that make students think they will have the luxury of time to reflect about each and every one of their moves. They won't.

Next to ethics, classes about communication law seem to be about the least favorite course offered at journalism schools. "Most of my studies involved memorization of law cases by now long since overturned in some superior court somewhere, I'm sure," another journalist told me. Last I heard the law cases I memorized were still intact, but I can't say I've ever felt affected by them or referred to any of them at my job, at least so far.

Without a doubt, internships remain the most valuable skill builder in my journalism education. And other journalists I've talked with agree. Perhaps this is because many of us were eager to actually do something rather than just study it. But there really is something to be said for dealing with real stories, real editors and real deadlines.

Speaking about what makes journalism training "real" leads me to another issue that is rarely talked about in classrooms. Anyone working in a newsroom can tell you that newsroom politics are a reality. From perceptions to misconceptions and everything in-between, newsrooms are the natural habitat of political animals. Yet to sit in journalism classes, one wouldn't walk

away with this impression, or with the armor one needs to enter the fray. Nor is the jargon of daily journalism talked about a lot in any helpful detail in classrooms. Whether the topic is budgets (and their impact on my ability to report a story the way I think it should be reported), or shrinking "inch counts" of stories, or "zoning issues" that impact my stories' reach, I heard little about this back in the classroom but think about it a lot now.

But probably the most talked about issue in every newsroom today is the business of journalism and how corporate decision-making is impacting our jobs. Journalism professors never warned us about stories being done for the sake of advertising. There was little, if any, discussion about having a story held until it was properly advertised—until a team of advertisers and marketers created a brightly colored sign for the sidewalk newspaper boxes. No professor I had told me anything about having a story held for "sweeps"—a time when a newspaper's circulation numbers are counted. Or about business reporters been told to write stories for the newspaper's marketing brochures and annual reports.

I entered into journalism thinking of it almost as I would a marriage, as a partnership in which everyone involved is after the same things: truth, good writing, solid reporting and compelling stories. In short, the pursuit of excellence. But as happens in many personal relationships, partners sometimes grow apart, expectations change, needs get redefined, as do agendas.

I once worked on a story about a topic that had much relevance in the city our paper is located in. But because of an editor's penchant for keeping things "positive" in his hometown, we were told to report this story from a city we did not normally report on. When the piece was published, that community regarded the article as negative and not surprisingly both the content and the fact that we'd left Hartford to do this story caused an uproar in that neighborhood.

Knowing what I now know about the business side of journalism, I'd ask my professors to teach want-to-be jour-

nalists not only how to write the best story they can, but also how to fight for the stories they believe are important to tell, for the integrity of their professional obligations, and for their words. Besides telling them about the rush you get as a journalist on deadline, I'd ask them to also prepare students for the times when the newness of it all wears off and you feel like a factory worker chugging out eight-inch stories that nine council members will read and likely complain about.

I'd ask them to role-play for these future journalists how to handle themselves the morning after someone decided to cut a paragraph for space or inadvertently inserted a mistake and the first phone call they received was from an irate reader.

I'd ask them to teach students how to stick in there when cynicism starts to creep in, when you think no one is listening or thinking about journalism or truth or the words that you just bled onto the page.

I'd ask them, even now, to help me get through the times when I try to remind myself why I got into this business to begin with. And then I'd ask them to keep advising me that I will find good reasons to stay. So far, their advice has proved wise and has stood the test of time.

It may sound a bit idealistic, but these lessons are just the sort of things I would have been eager to learn more about when I was in college. Maybe it takes being out in the field, working for a paycheck under real-life circumstances, to really absorb them. But from where I sit today, I think it couldn't hurt—and it just might help—for a few of these contemporary journalism situations to find their way into the training that prepares us for this profession. ■

*Helen Ubinas is a reporter at The Hartford Courant, where she covers the city. She has worked at The Courant since 1994, first covering Hartford's neighborhoods, then reporting about the suburban town of Rocky Hill.*

# On-Line Journalism: Frustrations Along the Road to the Future

By Stephen Borelli

I knocked on the coach's office door in the visitor's clubhouse at Durham Bulls Athletic Park.

"Come in," said Stump Merrill, the gruff manager of the Columbus (Ohio) Clippers, the top minor-league team in the New York Yankees' system. I opened the door, and the bald, pot-bellied man peered up from his lineup card.

"Hi coach," I began. "My named is Steve Borelli. I'm with an on-line sports news service called Nando Media."

Merrill squinted and his mouth opened slightly. "I'm doing a piece on one of your players, Mike Lowell. I was wondering if you had a minute."

He shook his head, saying it was too soon before game time.

A Columbus Clippers beat reporter was surprised when I told him about this in the press box. He said Merrill is usually accommodating to all members of the media, even ones he doesn't know, and even one hour before game time—out of fear that any snuffs and snarls might get back to Yankees owner George Steinbrenner. But Nando Media? It was nobody significant.

Such is the plight of so-called "new media," or Internet journalists. While in the minds of many we are what the future will be, we're still stuck in the realities of the present.

As a 24-year-old climbing the journalism ladder, I've found my nine and a half months as an editor and reporter for Nando's SportServer at times rewarding, at other times aggravating. Whether it has been in dealing with grizzled sports veterans like Merrill or long-standing sports organizations like the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), we have had a difficult time getting access and respect that matches that of more traditional news media outlets. Without those ingredients, it can be a

lot tougher to do our job well.

The SportServer is the main sports artery of Nando Media, the new media hub of the McClatchy newspaper chain. The SportServer provides round-the-clock sports news and statistics and is sprinkled with feature stories and photos. We are like any sports page except that our immediate posting of news

allows readers to open their front door and pick up a fresh paper with nearly every click of their computer's mouse. Stories and information, either acquired from major news services or produced by one of the six members on the SportServer's editorial staff, are added and updated constantly throughout the day and night.



The mission at the SportServer is to get news up on our site first and fast, then cover it more completely and accurately than anybody else. During my office shifts (which I do four days each week), I will post an Associated Press story detailing how the Denver Broncos won the Super Bowl, hopefully before CNN/Sports Illustrated or ESPN.com does. I also want readers to have other reasons to read the SportServer than just to see a write-up on the big game. Maybe someone wondered how many career touchdown passes Broncos quarterback John Elway had in his Super Bowl career and goes to our special site devoted to the Super Bowl to find out. Or maybe the game involving their favorite team in the opening round of the NCAA men's bas-

ketball tournament isn't televised in their area, so they go to our special March Madness site to check out our in-game scoreboard.

My work in the office involves much moving of information from various sources onto our Web site. One time it meant quickly getting a picture up on our site of Mark O'Meara sinking the putt that clinched the Masters. Or with the death of former Kansas City Royals pitcher Dan Quisenberry last fall we rushed to post his career statistics. Sometimes work like this—the mechanical shuffling of information—makes me feel as though the reporting and editing skills that trained me for a job in journalism are being woefully neglected.

At the print publications where I worked leading up to this job—Baseball America magazine, The Washington Post, The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal, the Pensacola (Fla.) News Journal—often I could spend more time crafting a story, or even a headline, than I can now. On an average of one to two days a week at Nando, I'm given more time to develop stories and I write features and columns both in and outside the office to enhance our site's overall coverage. The reporting I do outside the office allows me to feel like I am employing the skills of a traditional journalist. I satisfy my desire to write and find opportunities to maintain a visible presence in the sports world, something my experience with the Clippers' manager reminded me is important.

Coming to Nando was, I think, a good career move for me at this stage in my professional growth. For one reason, we cover major league sports for a national—in fact, an international—audience. Because of our audience, we don't mess much with local interest stories, such as those involving high school and small college sports that I did often at my previous jobs. At Nando, I have had the opportunity to dive into coverage of major-league baseball, major college basketball, the NFL and professional tennis.

But there can be a downside, too, because there are times when we aren't yet regarded as a legitimate news gathering operation. When I introduced myself to major-league pitcher Jimmy Key in the Baltimore Orioles' clubhouse last season, he repeated the name of my employer—"Nand-oh Media"—like I worked for some Romper Room operation. When I was interviewing University of California baseball coach Bob Milano over the phone, I got a "Where are you from again?" after I'd asked only a few of the questions I'd prepared for him. When I asked a member of the University of North Carolina's media relations department why we weren't given a reserved spot for our photographers on the floor during their men's basketball games, he said, "We don't give everybody a spot, and the N&O already has two." (The N&O is



Raleigh's News & Observer, Nando's sister publication next door. Even if it's a regional newspaper, people in this area who have heard of Nando immediately think we are part of that publication because our title derives from its name. We aren't.)

In the pecking order of access, Nando usually falls behind print media, broadcast media and even some new media outlets whose names contain within them the names of established national print or broadcast organizations. (For example, the Super Bowl people told us they just didn't have the space to accommodate us, although our competitors CNN/SI and ESPN.com, whose Web sites are similar to ours, were given media credentials.) New media outlets which don't have this establishment backbone will surely assume a much more prominent role over time, but it will only happen as a generation of news and sports enthusiasts grows up reading the World Wide Web as much as their parents relied on the front page.

But for a person caught in this transition period, at times the wait can be tiresome. In five years of covering sports, I have noticed that individuals and sports teams often think about their dealings with the media as a way of garnering free publicity. Circulation and a media outlet's reputation turn out to be directly proportional to the kind of access its reporters get to a manager or player. The more people

equate cooperation with the media with some kind of positive impact on their bottom line. By contrast, while working for the prominent print organization in several similar-sized markets, my calls were regularly returned and access seemed automatic.

But because Nando is on the Internet, and society seems to be split between the Internet-savvy and the Internet-free, our success at gaining access to an event or interview remains spotty. We managed to obtain a credential to cover last year's U.S. Open tennis tournament, as the USTA credentials coordinator follows coverage of the world of tennis on our Tennis Server.

Yet we've been denied credentials at the Super Bowl and the ACC's basketball tournament. The ACC had failed to see us as objective journalists who could potentially bring them an additional audience. Rather I am convinced that they regarded us as competitors to their own Web site. While their Web site, like ours, consists of wire stories and statistics about teams and sports within their conference, they perform more like a college's sports information department. While we are also a sports information source, we are a media organization as well, just like newspapers and broadcast entities that cover their games.

When we do gain access to events, I have noticed we are

making some progress. North Carolina, Duke and North Carolina State each provided access for us to report on their home games this during season, which gave us the chance to make important inroads with "face" time. By late in the ACC's regular season, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, North Carolina's Bill Guthridge and many of their players recognized the Nando reporters and responded to—or evaded—their questions the same way they did with some of their beat report-

ers. Sports information directors who have granted us credentials to cover their teams' games are now taking a

**“...he repeated the name of my employer—‘Nand-oh-Media’—like I worked for some Romper Room operation.”**

look at our Web site, and their reactions to our coverage have helped land us an ACC tournament credential for this spring's event.

Our potential for gaining increased recognition is promising, but the wait is still frustrating. This was made very clear to me while I was covering the U.S. Open and noticed that a Sports Illustrated reporter was granted exclusive interviews with tennis players after they had finished their post-match press conferences. For now, I can only watch such access with a grimace. As our reputation for skillful journalism grows along with our faith in our young company, my hope is that in a few years our reporters will garner the kind of respect that members of the traditional media now enjoy. ■

*Stephen Borelli is a sports content editor and baseball writer for the Nando Media SportServer (www.nandomedia.com) in Raleigh, North Carolina. Nando Media publishes The Nando Times (www.nandotimes.com) and the SportServer (www.sportserver.com).*

**“While in the minds of many we are what the future will be, we're still stuck in the realities of the present.”**

who read about a team or its players, the more fan interest is generated and, ultimately, the more money the team makes, or so the logic of this arrangement goes.

Few in the sports world recognize the name Nando or appear to have any understanding about how our Web site—or on-line media in general—is able to connect with many of the people they want to reach. This can make it very hard for me to establish a connection with sources who have come to

# Riding the Digital Wave Into Journalism: Is It the Best Wave for Students to Catch?

By Stephen D. Isaacs

**W**hat is this new media stuff? Should journalists clasp it to their bosoms? Should schools of journalism require it? Should journalism students be encouraged to study it, to the exclusion of other, more traditional subjects?

I come from several generations of hard-nosed newspapering. A tradition of professional skepticism. Of the old Mr. Dooley ethos: The role of the newspaper is to “comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.” In fact, my pappy taught me, almost from birth, “Never believe what you read, and damn little of what you hear or see.”

So along come these “new media,” whatever they are. Do these new ways of communicating have anything to do with afflicting or comforting anybody? What do they have to do with skepticism? Or are they just toys?

And should the producers of most journalists these days (the nation’s 450 schools and departments of journalism provide more than 80 percent of new hires) be teaching what are essentially mechanical skills to students who end up with degrees in something called “journalism”?

Does Adobe PhotoShop Release 5.0 add up to journalism? What does Quark Express Release 4.0 have to do with pursuing truth? And what do seminars in software like RealAudio, ProTools and JavaScript have to do with what it is that makes good journalists? With Mr. Dooley? With my dad? With journalism? Hmmm.

When an enthusiastic and talented writer asks whether she ought to major in new media instead of studying magazine writing with the likes of Victor Navasky (formerly of *The Nation*) or television reporting with the likes of Rhoda Lipton and Derwin Johnson (ex

of ABC News) or radio interviewing with John Dinges (formerly with NPR) or working as a front-line journalist on a weekly newspaper in the gritty South Bronx, what should my advice be?

And how is my advice influenced by what I see around me, in all the ways in which the “communications” (the blending of computers and communications)

revolution and its new digital tools have already upended the news business beyond the imaginations of either Mr. Dooley or my dad? And that we ain’t seen nuthin’ yet.

What do I advise when I realize that the average graduate makes \$20,500 to start, on average, at a U.S. newspaper; the average TV major makes \$17,500? But starting salaries in new media average \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year, while the mid-level salary turns out to be \$75,000. Some of Columbia’s most talented new media graduates refuse to even consider offers to start at less than \$60,000 a year.

What do I advise when I know that this woman, age 28-plus (the average age of our incoming students this year is 28, and women comprise 62 percent of our class) will have taken out at least \$40,000 in loans to fund her nine months of education? (Students at the Columbia Journalism School now pay \$26,506 in tuition and fees, plus \$12,850 to get by—frugally—in New York for nine months. That totals \$39,356.)

Usually I reply that I think that a journalism school should teach journalism. That means training in and steady exposure to critical thinking,

skepticism, synthesis, accuracy, analysis, integrity, probity, resourcefulness, et cetera. Nowhere in there do I find what Quark Express 4.0 has to offer.

Except. A big except. If you want to get a job as a copyeditor anywhere in the United States of America, you’d

**“Some of Columbia’s most talented new media graduates refuse to even consider offers to start at less than \$60,000 a year.”**

better know Quark Express 4.0. That’s the software tool that enables editors to lay out newspaper pages at their desktops. Copyeditors—no matter how skilled, no matter how insightful, no matter what their skills at converting hack copy to beautiful prose—can no longer get a job without knowing Quark.

Except. Do you have the wherewithal to pay back your graduate loan, not to mention those you accumulated as an undergraduate? The difference between \$20,500 a year and \$30,000 or even more suggests a pretty obvious answer.

Except. Most of us—editors, publishers, anchor men and women, reporters, researchers, even journalism professors—know that something really big is afoot in our business. That the digitization of the world—that revolution, that sea change—has hardly even started. Those new tools with the 4.0’s and 5.1’s and 2.0’s dragging along behind their names are already wielding influence far beyond the algorithms that drive them. They already are changing the traditional definitions of news, of reporting, even of thinking. The fact that the House of Representatives chose to release the report of the Indepen-



dent Prosecutor on the World Wide Web signaled that we weren't kidding around any longer. The new era was now under way.

Except. Except journalists should not let computer whizzes decide what this new journalism will be. Journalists need to know enough to mold these new technologies into ways to tell stories better, not just better ways to soup up graphics and sounds and the like.

Shouldn't we really be channeling our best and brightest into new media, so that they, and not the Bill Gateses of this world, can invent the future of our business? At Columbia, we wrestle with this dilemma constantly.

What we're doing right now makes some sense to us: We require all our students—budding newspaper photographers, reporters, editors, magazine writers and editors, radio commentators, television producers and an-

**“Those new tools with the 4.0's and 5.1's and 2.0's dragging along behind their names are already... changing the traditional definitions of news, of reporting, even of thinking.”**

chors—to learn a little about new media forms of storytelling. They play with PhotoShop, manipulating images. They create their own sites on the Web. They learn the theory and philosophy of communications and the role of digital math in that. They record audio digitally, then play around with their sound bites as if they were so many Legos.

The concept underlying this approach is much the same as “visual literacy” that journalism schools instituted when television first exploded onto the scene. We regard digital literacy as even more important. We believe all students should graduate with the ability to comprehend whatever changes are coming and be able to understand them and to incorporate them into their practice of journalism.

For serious new media types, we also offer a newsroom-oriented workshop that gets them to devote two full

days each week to learn how to work with these emerging technologies. It is aimed at students who, despite all the concerns above, are trying to create different ways of storytelling, of doing journalism, and at the same time acquiring all these new media tools. They take some ribbing from the other students. They get labeled as “techies.” Or “computerheads.” Or “propellerheads.”

What these media students are doing so far amounts mostly to experimentation with merging various ways of presenting news. Much of what this involves is quite similar to what more than 5,000 newspapers around the world are doing on their Web sites, “repurposing” text that was originally intended for print. So far what they have created could be called new media feature stories, comprised of digital images, sound and text, brought together to

tell stories in innovative ways. But so far I've found few student reporters and producers who have figured out ways to take full advantage of the remarkable freedom unleashed by a limitless news hole.

The missing element in telling stories—so far, anyway—is full-motion video. When it becomes available via the Internet, news on the “net” might well drown out everything else. Probably by next year technology will provide the capacity to send television images across phone and cable lines, along with text, graphics and sound. Then, when a reporter sets out to tell a 60-second news story by mixing in the incomparable attraction of colorful moving images, a whole new epoch in the business of conveying news will have begun.

In the meantime, our students are getting ready, learning to use the computer tools they'll need and broaden-

ing their skills in ways of gathering and presenting news. Like the media companies that will be hiring them, these

**“Journalists need to know enough to mold these new technologies into ways to tell stories better, not just better ways to soup up graphics and sounds.”**

students aren't so certain about exactly what lies ahead in this technological revolution.

tion, but they do know the coming cataclysm will redefine much of what we consider journalism today.

The new media students probably work harder than their 240 classmates who take other, more conventional workshops. My office overlooks their workspace and frequently I see the same students working at their computers when I come in the morning who were there when I left the night before. And, despite my heritage that links me to the hard-nosed ways of my newspaper legacy, my heart is really with them. It's probably what I'd be doing if I were 40 years younger. ■

*Stephen Isaacs is professor at the Graduate School of Journalism and Co-founder of the Center for New Media at Columbia University.*



# Are Minorities Getting a Fair Shot At Journalism Jobs?

## The Answer is “No”: Now What Can be Done?

By Carolyn Toll Oppenheim

As a campus newspaper advisor, I felt defeated. The student newspaper editors had just rejected a promising black journalism student's coverage of a West African film festival she'd attended, and Helena Victorin was quitting the paper. She resigned herself to looking for jobs in public relations after graduation instead. She vowed this was the last humiliation she would allow herself to endure after struggling for years to become a respected member of the newspaper staff.

Just the month before I had been elated for her when she learned that the college would pay for her to accompany its own internationally acclaimed African-American film professor, Claire Andrade-Watkins, to Burkina Faso, to the Pan-African film festival, an event that attracted Robert Redford, Spike Lee and other innovative and successful filmmakers from around the world.

Now, the Emerson College editors' refusal to publish her pieces as “not newsworthy or of interest to the general student body” was a blow to both of us. As advisor to this campus weekly from 1989 to 1996, I had been exploring questions of how to foster diversity at the student newspaper. This small communications college was bubbling with a growing population of talented, lively minority students eager to prepare for careers in film, television, theater, print and broadcast journalism. They brought richness of culture, ideas and perspectives from everywhere—African-Americans, Latinos and Asians from all over the United States, Puerto Rico and Central America, many of them children of immigrants from Jamaica, Barbados, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa.

My work as a former journalist had taught me that these minority students needed to have solid campus newspaper experience to qualify for internships and newspaper jobs. It was mostly white journalism students who graduated with piles of clips and a couple of semesters' editing under their belts who moved easily from those internships into newspaper jobs. But few minority students had been able to stay with the process long enough to acquire these credentials. The consequence was a tougher time finding a journalism job after graduation. Ironically, many newspaper internships—now filled mainly by white students—were originally created by newspapers

in the late 1970's in a push for more diversity by the year 2000, according to “Winds of Change,” a 1996 study of journalism education prepared for the Freedom Forum by Betty Medsger, former Chair of the San Francisco State University Journalism Department.

Helena Victorin, a thoughtful, dignified daughter of Haitian immigrants who had settled in New Hampshire, was an elegant young writer who wrote for her high school newspaper. She was using her college years to embark on an intellectual discovery of her ethnicity—as did students of many backgrounds. Helena assumed the student newspaper would regard campus activities of ethnic discoveries as news-



Students from the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley. *Photo by Jim Vestal.*

worthy events, such as the coverage of the African film festival. The point at which she gave up the struggle, she told me, was when she concluded that racism and not ignorance underlay her editors' disregard for stories of interest to minority students.

Helena had served as an editor one semester at my urging. I had hoped the other editors would come to know and respect her, as I did, and consult her on news decisions. Instead, they regularly challenged her news judgment on is-

**“She concluded that racism and not ignorance underlay her editors’ disregard for stories of interest to minority students.”**

ues of concern to her, like coverage of Black History Month, a Nation of Islam speaker, and racial incidents in the dormitories. The constant battles to defend her perspectives, alone in the newsroom, became an ordeal as the polarization intensified. Students open to her points of view told her privately they were afraid to defend her. I became increasingly frustrated at my inability to help these students to embrace diversity as a positive force in their common experience of producing a newspaper.

This was a goal of mine that found its roots in my own newsroom experience. I first came into The Chicago Tribune newsroom in 1968, just one year after I'd earned my journalism degree at Michigan. It was the time when women and minorities were being hired in response to the northern urban riots, the women's class action lawsuits, and the Kerner Commission Report. Suddenly papers searched for talented minorities who until then had been unable to break into the ranks of reporting and editing. The sudden gathering of such a diverse group of new reporters, all women and minorities in our 20's, working together, hanging out and getting to know each other,

allowed us to learn firsthand about the value of diversity on a newspaper.

Twenty years later, I optimistically embraced the challenge of student newspaper advisor. I was determined to work to help the students create a college journalism environment so diverse and visionary that they would become leaders in renewing the spirit evoked by the Kerner Commission before its 30th anniversary took place. Yet by the time I left Emerson in 1996, I felt I had failed, just as other dedicated campus newspaper advisors who write in College Media Advisor seem to feel as they write discouragingly about their experience with this issue.

The failure of journalism schools to graduate minorities ready to take their places in the nation's newspapers is a problem the President of the American Society of Newspaper Editors is spotlighting. This past December he held a powwow with journalism school deans, issuing an urgent call for them to “hurry up and place more minority students into the pipeline for journalism jobs.” This “tough love” approach was sweetened with hints of up to \$3 million from the Freedom Forum being made available to J-schools that could devise smart proposals for solving the “pipeline problem.” At the “Round Table on Attracting Minority Youth to Journalism,” ASNE's Executive Director Lee Stinnett confronted the deans with a study of their colleges' failure to graduate minority journalism students—with the requisite campus newspaper and internship experiences—at rates necessary to increase the already too-low percentages in most newsrooms.

Getting journalism educators to respond seriously to those cold figures dropped onto the roundtable is critical if newsrooms are ever to achieve the industry's diversity goals. Just this past October, ASNE was forced to publicly admit its own failure to achieve its diversity goals for the year 2000. Clearly ASNE needs the journalism educators to get on board with the industry's now-revised goals for racial parity in the nation's newsrooms by 2025.

Yet the gathering of 60 editors, journalism educators and media foundation officials at this December Round

Table in San Antonio never broached what is driving those minority youths away, what keeps them out of the “pipeline” where they are so desperately needed. And the ASNE report appears to avoid any in-depth examination of why the country's major journalism programs have failed to produce minority graduates with the same campus newspaper and small paper internship experiences as white graduates. The solutions proposed in the report ignored the campus failure by looking to historically black colleges and high schools with large minority populations instead, completely dodging the critical questions.

ASNE may not have realized what a hot potato they were dumping on the doorstep of journalism school deans. Did they know that bringing statistical goals for racial parity into a higher education community already bitterly polarized about affirmative action is like throwing a hand grenade into a war zone? Yet that is precisely what America's campuses have become—a

**“...this past October, ASNE was forced to publicly admit its own failure to achieve its diversity goals for the year 2000.”**

zone where brigades of shock troops, engaged in bitter struggles to determine our national policy on affirmative action, have chosen to fight their war.

The center of this battle zone is the campus newspaper. These battles have been so highly publicized that I have been able to teach media ethics this semester—here at Indiana University, where I am a visiting professor—using case studies about the campus press from stories in major newspapers. In January, 15 elite campus newspapers published a full-page advertisement from the Center for Individual Rights (headed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett). The ad urged students to send for a booklet telling

them how to file class action lawsuits against their own universities for using race as one consideration in admissions. Recent assaults on affirmative action in higher education further polarize campus newspaper staffs. The advisors and student members of the campus journalism community have become isolated, not unlike when multicultural Sarajevo was surrounded by zealous nationalists.

Some journalism professors freely told classes they viewed pressures for a multicultural focus in the curriculum as a violation of academic freedom. These messages created a chilling effect on some white student editors whom I saw grappling with a desire to diversify their campus newsrooms. It confused young, well-meaning, inexperienced white student editors about which news values were the “right”

with another Emerson graduate, from Barbados. Their idea is to cover the islands as real places where people live normal lives, operate businesses, practice professions, and not merely as tourist playgrounds for rich Americans.

Another of my former students, Carla Mozee, an African-American-Mexican 1995 graduate, was one of the few minorities who did manage to tough it out as campus news editor, but at a high cost. “In terms of the school paper, I saw an opportunity for myself and I took it because I knew I would have to do this if I wanted a career,” she told me in a telephone call from her office at National Public Radio’s UCLA-based “Marketplace” business show, where she now works and can occasionally be heard on air. “I wanted people to know about news that affects everybody, and I knew I could do it. But I hated the racism in the Boston and Emerson environments. It was the first thing I woke up with and the last thing I went to bed with for four lonely years. I was obsessed with it. On the one hand it dragged me down and made me angry all the time, on the other hand I learned a lot about the real world.”

Carla’s willingness to hang in there at any price made it possible for me to recommend her for an internship so Carla was able to land a journalism job after college. While the system will produce an occasional Carla, by requiring minority students to pay that kind of price for their ambition, we have not created a system that is working in the way it should.

Journalism programs cannot succeed in producing diverse student journalists, whites and minorities working together, if they are left to grapple with this problem alone. I have come to believe that campus advisors need aggressive outside support from professional journalism organizations like ASNE, Freedom Forum, the Poynter Institute and others, if we are to create a system that works for all students and turns out generations of young journalists prepared to work together in diverse, inclusive newsrooms.

I offer some ideas that I know would have helped me to assist ASNE in reach-



Students at the Medill School of Journalism. *Photo by Brian Bahr.*

If ASNE needs campus newspapers to help produce experienced minority journalism students to reach its diversity goals, it cannot stay neutral. Student newspapers—regarded on most campuses as “student clubs”—can’t be expected to transform themselves into preprofessional training grounds in the middle of a college climate polarized by the culture wars. The shock waves of the 1994 publication of Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein’s “The Bell Curve” still reverberate through college communities. The October 24, 1994 cover stories of the nation’s weekly news magazines featured scholars debating the intelligence of African-Americans and questioning the value of affirmative action on campuses—a debate that rages again.

ones: traditional, colorblind, melting pot values that envision the world as a mainstream with minorities who are marginalized, or a new view of community that has at its core a multiplicity of diverse populations.

Most minority students dreaded the loneliness and isolation of spending long hours editing in newsrooms filled with white students, neither belonging nor feeling understood. Helena came to feel this way. Today she works at a small marketing and public relations firm and lives at home with her parents to pay off her more than \$20,000 in student loans. She hasn’t abandoned her hope of becoming a journalist, but says she will never try again in the United States. Instead, she dreams of starting a small paper in the Caribbean

ing its diversity goals:

- Develop programs that attract both minorities and white students: Loren Ghiglione, Emory University journalism Chair, obtained Freedom Forum funding for his innovative program offering his students—white and minority—two-month paid internships on South African newspapers preceded by courses on South Africa. Ghiglione, a former president of ASNE who as a small-town newspaper editor and pub-

**“White student journalists need to be rewarded for working towards diversity in a campus environment which now makes them defensive about advocating those values.”**

lisher for 26 years in Southbridge, Massachusetts, hired and trained numerous minority journalists, was asked by Emory two years ago to revive its journalism program. In two years he has achieved a minority student rate of 20 percent, a full 10 percent above the university's own minority rate. Foundations should offer funding to other campuses for developing similar programs in other multiracial societies, perhaps the Caribbean or Hawaii, for example.

- Mentor and finance student editors through organizations: ASNE should form a national society of campus newspaper editors, to hold meetings accompanying the ASNE meetings, with financial aid to attend. This would provide a forum in which student editors would have incentives to adopt professional standards and model their own newsrooms on professional lines. As ASNE plans to meet its own diversity goals, student editors will learn that the profession has economic as well as moral reasons for adopting a different approach to cope with the kinds of racial tensions and conflict raging on campuses. They will see that their success upon graduation depends

more on looking beyond the campus culture for ways to apply these values to the job of journalism.

- Mentor and finance diversity with scholarships: ASNE should find foundation funding for full scholarships for newspaper editors with diverse staffs, to reward white and minority campus journalists for incorporating diversity, and to make it possible for all low-income students who otherwise could not serve as editors, because they need to work, to obtain campus journalism experience. White student journalists need to be rewarded for working towards diversity in a campus environment which now makes them defensive about advocating those values.
- Induce curiosity about diversity with awards: Something else that brings results in journalism is honoring what is desirable with prestigious awards. If ASNE or another well-known journalism group were to give awards for quality student journalism about race and class issues, that could encourage sheltered and inexperienced student editors of all backgrounds to spend time and efforts on these issues, while cultivating staffers who can report, write and edit those stories.
- ASNE should immediately pay for mixed groups of campus editors to attend Unity '99, the second gathering of the national conventions of the African-American, Latino, Asian and Native American professional journalism associations, this summer in Seattle. They should also fund Unity coordinators to put on workshops for the campus press.
- Lastly, ASNE should urge local editors' groups and local chapters of minority journalism professional associations to visit campus newsrooms and invite campus editors to local gatherings. In 1994 I formed a minority students journalism organization at Emerson College that we called Unity Journalists of Emerson,

in the spirit of the first Unity '94 conference in Atlanta. By emulating this association on our campus, with our small numbers of each group, we created a strong feeling of synergy and community. It became a vehicle for reaching out for speakers and mentors among journalism professionals in Boston.

If the professional journalism community needs the campus experience to engender a better understanding of the meaning and value of diversity among its journalism graduates, then the campus newspaper community needs help in turning students' focus outward to the professional journalism world and away from campus cultural wars that are too often a fertile breeding ground for racism.

After several years of personal reflection, I realize that some of my student journalists and I were trying to carry the banner for professional journalism values in a hostile climate where diversity was targeted as “advocacy for political correctness.” This placed us in an untenable position, one that did not lead to achieving results any of us wanted. ASNE must find creative and supportive ways to nurture the editors and advisors to the campus press. Unless they do, neither the diversity goals they set for themselves nor ones I think most in our profession would like to see reached will be achieved. And in 2025, it will be left to another generation to admit defeat and push the due date up by another 25 years. ■

*Carolyn Toll Oppenheim is a visiting professor of journalism at Indiana University, Bloomington, and a prize-winning former reporter for The Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times. She edited a book on American Jewish opinion on public affairs called “Listening To American Jews.” She taught journalism at Emerson College, where she developed the college's first and only course on reporting on issues of cultural diversity.*

## The Education Beat: Dynamic Changes in How Schools Are Covered

**In education, it's the era of accountability.** Teachers are tested to measure their ability to instruct. Students take standardized tests to find out what they have learned and where they rank compared with others. Controversy and debate swirl around the education community as some experts challenge the legitimacy of particular tests while others argue about what the results tell us about what is happening inside our schools.

**In the midst of these debates,** the job of reporting on education is changing, too. No longer is coverage of school board hearings and school-day events enough to satisfy the primary consumers of this news—parents. Today some newspapers are reshaping what the education beat can be by combining their own independent numerical analysis—made possible by computer-assisted reporting—with old-fashioned shoe-leather investigations. Some papers issue annual Report Cards on how well schools are doing. The grades they give are based not on handouts from school districts but on their statistical analysis of data they have pushed hard to obtain. The combination can be powerful, as some of our Nieman Reports correspondents point out.

**In this section,** we hear about such efforts in Omaha, Nebraska and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and from a person who has trained reporters in the techniques of such reporting.

**From there,** we travel to Charlotte, North Carolina, to learn how the mixture of reporting approaches helped unravel the complex story of educational disparities among rich and poor school districts.

**Then** we head to Lexington, Kentucky, for a look at how one newspaper analyzed the often illusive and controversial issue of teacher quality and weighed its impact on student achievement.

**Our final two articles** explore two other approaches, both of which rely more on immersion in the community than on data. In Los Angeles, an experiment is in the making as both the editorial and business sides of The Los Angeles Times take up the challenge of ensuring that all children be able to read at grade level by the end of third grade. And in Seattle, a reporter was given a rare opportunity to devote an entire school year to reporting everyday details of one school's life to illuminate the educational issues confronting teachers, administrators and students. ■

# Using Education Data to Build A Story's Foundation

By Carol Napolitano

For at least a decade before The Omaha World-Herald published its five-part series “The Learning Gap,” we had been searching for ways to provide parents and the public with a meaningful understanding of how students’ scores on standardized tests were connected with what was actually happening in our schools.

Before we found a way to do this, the Omaha School District—the state’s largest with about 44,000 students—released only subject scores on the California Achievement Test (CAT) for the district as a whole. Those scores didn’t tell the public anything about the performance of individual schools.

“We would compare them to the previous year and to the national norm,” said World-Herald Executive Editor Larry King. “The only analysis we did was ‘Is it better or worse than the year before and the year before that?’ Those trend lines tended to go up and down, up and down. It was hard to make sense of what it meant.”

The public, including parents, had no idea whether some schools were performing as well as others on the tests. They could not compare how math scores in a math/science magnet school, for example, compared to math scores in other schools. And, in a district desegregated through busing, they did not know how scores of schools with busing programs compared with the scores of neighborhood schools that did not have busing.

Editors and reporters asked for more specifics, and the district began releasing scores by school and by grade. But when in the early 1990’s we requested the CAT scores by race there was, as

King described it, “a great reluctance.”

In 1995, a management restructuring left Mike Finney, the newspaper’s Executive Editor, in charge of the day-to-day operation of the newsroom. A former high school English teacher, Finney had a great interest in education issues. He also had been a Deputy Managing Editor at The Minneapolis Star Tribune, where reporters were conducting their own computer-assisted data analysis as a way of providing more in-depth reporting. Finney wanted the Omaha public schools to give us the CAT score data so we could conduct our own analysis of it.

“This was important information that every parent, every teacher and, in fact, every student ought to have access to,” said Finney, who now is President and CEO of World Media Co., an Internet company owned by The World-Herald. “In knowing exactly what is going on, we have the best chance of making the decisions we need and the public poli-



Parents assist children in a fourth grade math class. *Photo by Bill Batson, The Omaha World-Herald.*

cies we need to make the kind of schools we want.”

Despite the logic of our argument and the fact that the scores are public record, getting this information proved difficult. In 1996, after repeated requests, we threatened to sue, and the district finally agreed to release the

data. We received scores for nearly 70,000 students who were given the test between 1992 and 1996. The data did not contain students' names, but it did identify the grade, school, gender, race and home ZIP code for each student, as well as whether the student received free or reduced-price lunch—an indicator of poverty.

After much deliberation about how best to examine the scores, we decided to limit our initial study to the district's 58 elementary schools and to use a multiple regression analysis. That analytical technique is a statistical procedure that can be used to explain the differences among data, in this case differences among the CAT scores. The regression procedure calculated what the CAT scores were predicted to be, taking into account socioeconomic information about the students and the neighborhoods in which they lived.

Once we had this information about predicted scores, we could look at how schools actually performed and compare these two measures. Such a comparison had the potential to offer insights about student and school performance that had never been made available before to parents and the general public. The school district had been doing a similar regression analysis for the past several years to assess the performance of its schools. But it would not release its results, even to members of the school board.

Our analysis showed that in a third of the schools, the gap between actual and predicted scores was statistically significant. In both affluent and low-income areas, some schools scored significantly lower than the statistical model predicted while some scored significantly higher. When we showed the school district the results of our regression analysis, officials said their results were nearly identical. Only a few schools ranked differently. Nevertheless, the district told principals and teachers that the newspaper's approach was irresponsible.

"They were contending to their own staff that we were not to be trusted with this," said Paul Goodsell, a lead reporter for the CAT scores project.

After our regression analysis was



*Photo by Bill Batson.*



*Photo by Kiley Christian Cruse.*

completed, we knew there were significant differences between predicted and actual performance at certain schools. What we didn't know were the reasons why. To learn more, we needed to do some old-fashioned, on-site reporting. Using our data, we chose five pairs of schools to visit. Each pair had student bodies with similar demographics, but one school had CAT scores significantly higher than its predicted scores and one had CAT scores significantly lower. Each of five reporters took one pair in order to see any differences in how the schools operated.

For two weeks, this team of reporters spent every day observing in classrooms and interviewing teachers, principals, parents, students and others. Some evenings, we would attend after-school functions. At the end of most days, our reporting team would meet and exchange information. As the days passed, we began to see patterns emerge from our observations. Schools scoring better than predicted had these things in common:

- Experienced and creative teaching staffs who stayed at the same school for long periods of time





- Effective classroom and school discipline
- Substantial parent and community involvement in the school
- The ability to recognize and address shortcomings in the school.

These patterns provided us with daily themes for our series that appeared over five days in April 1997.

Since that series ran, the Omaha school district has routinely released the results of its own regression analysis and continues to provide us with

student-level scores. That has allowed us to do other education stories prompted by our analysis of data, such as one that showed a federally funded program to improve math and science skills among minorities was having a positive effect. We also have done our own analysis of standardized test scores for other school districts in the region and published those results.

While he can't place a dollar figure on it, Finney said the newspaper's investment in the CAT scores series was considerable because the reporters

needed to be trained properly in how to do complex analysis of data and statistical software had to be purchased. Most of the money went into the hiring of two consultants to help us learn these new computer-assisted reporting skills and into the staff time it then took to properly analyze the data, interpret the findings, and decide on how to use the results to guide traditional reporting. Consequently, the entire project took about seven months.

With fully trained reporters and properly equipped computers, Finney said, this type of story can be done inexpensively and much more quickly. Nevertheless, reporters and editors must understand the limitations as well as the possibilities of statistical analysis and that no story is completely contained in the numbers. While such analysis helps us to construct a strong and detailed foundation, the soul of the story resides in our schools. ■

*Carol Napolitano is Project Team Leader for The Omaha World-Herald and also oversees computer-assisted reporting. During the last months of the CAT scores project, she returned to school to earn a master's degree in communication with a speciality in research and applied statistics.*



*Photos on this page by Bill Batson, The Omaha World-Herald.*





# A Newspaper's Report Cards Offer Revealing Insights into How Well Schools are Doing

By Neill A. Borowski and Connie Langland

Parents stand up to speak at school board meetings, clutching a copy of the newspaper. The dog-eared newsprint is the source of research that buttresses their comments.

School officials pore over the newspaper, looking for academic trends in other districts or studying how their district's test scores stack up against districts of similar demographics.

People relocating use the information we analyze and publish about school districts as a guide to where to buy their home.

In an editorial, a suburban weekly newspaper points to the metro daily newspaper as the authoritative source of information on school spending.

The Philadelphia Inquirer has found its first two annual Report Cards on the Schools to be not only good journalism, but journalism with a broad impact on its readers. "Accountability" is the buzzword in public education today, and school report cards help readers hold their schools accountable. This is newspaper journalism that doesn't end up on the curb waiting for recycling day. It's daily journalism with a shelf life.

Like many newspapers, The Inquirer has found that teaming education reporters with computer-assisted reporting analysts results in a powerful tool to assess the successes and failures of local schools. The Inquirer's first Report Card, called "A District In Distress," looked only at the Philadelphia city school district in 1994. Three years later, a 20-page Report Card was published. Last September, the Report Card had grown to a 30-page broadsheet section.

A report card on schools is but one example of the type of data analysis now being conducted by newsroom specialists that formerly was reserved for the academic researcher or social scientist. While a researcher's study might take months or years to complete and publish, a newspaper can turn around an analysis of test scores, for example, in a few days. The statistical tools and methods used by the newspaper often are the same as those of the researcher.

The 1997 Report Card covered 164 public school districts in southeastern Pennsylvania and South Jersey, plus the giant Philadelphia school system (which has 22 sub-districts called "clusters"). In 1998, nearly 100 non-public high schools in the Philadelphia region were invited to be a part of the 1998 report. The response was remarkable, covering virtually all major Catholic, Quaker and private schools.

The section served up timely, comprehensive data in such areas as spending, teacher experience and salaries, class size, test results and SAT scores. A small part of the data came from state databases. However, by the time the state's data is made public it is already outdated. To include the most up-to-date statistics possible, The Inquirer conducts its own survey of school superintendents.

Simply presenting the data doesn't mean a report is complete. The newspaper must try to guide readers in interpreting the numbers. At the same time, though, journalists must ask themselves just how far can a newspaper go in rating how well schools are doing their jobs.

Some of the best measures of school districts in The Inquirer's Report Card turn out not to be numbers at all. Much of the report is filled with traditional, in-depth reporting on the schools by the newspaper's education staff. We also devote space to what we call "Points of Pride"—a non-numbers feature that allows school superintendents to tout features of their district that make them particularly proud. It might be a championship marching band, an effective after-school tutoring program, or an abundance of National Merit Scholar finalists. Their points are edited only for clarity and are included in each district's profile.

Our Report Cards also aren't large enough to print all of the relevant data about each district and school. Therefore, databases that include test scores, financial information and other numerical information from state sources as well as our own superintendents' survey are available through The Inquirer's on-line Web site.

These databases are heavily used by Internet surfers. The New Jersey Department of Education links to our presentation of its data from its Web site. We frequently hear from parents, researchers, realtors and librarians who have come to rely on our on-line education databases.<sup>1</sup>

In the printed Report Cards, the most striking differences among schools can be found in test scores. However, a basic problem with such scores is that they are on a school level only. We have no individual student data. Test scores also have been found to bear a strong relationship to the student's income. However, at the

<sup>1</sup>The 1998 Report Card is available at <http://home.phillynews.com/packages/schools/>  
The New Jersey data is available at <http://home.phillynews.com/packages/njschools/njs98.asp>

school level in Pennsylvania, we have only the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch as the proxy for income. New Jersey education officials have attempted a better demographic indicator, which rates school districts by family income, educational attainment of residents and other factors that are related to test results. Yet New Jersey's "district factor group" measurement is on the district, not the school, level.

Even if we were able to get individual student data from the schools, there are educators who maintain the standardized tests are seriously flawed as indicators of student performance. Is one elementary school not doing its job as well as another elementary school across town if its third-grade test scores are lower? How large a difference between test scores is significant? How do you adjust for variations in the number of students taking the tests each year? These questions shouldn't halt an analysis of test scores, but they should make the newspaper—or any analyst—realize a test's measurement capabilities aren't absolute.

We use the test scores both in the report and for guidance in our stories. A first step each year is to run a regression analysis looking at the relationship of test scores to income. "Over-achievers"—schools performing far better than they should have, given their income level—and "underachievers"—schools performing far worse

than expected—are flagged for on-site reporting. Reporters contact these schools to learn more about what is happening there each day. Overachieving schools, for example, might employ innovative teaching methods that could be shared by other schools.

The Inquirer also uses the test scores to rate schools in two ways: 1. How the school ranked compared with all other schools of the same grade in the state, and 2. How the school ranked compared with schools of similar demographics in the state.

The first ranking (using quartiles, which breaks data into four equally sized parts, each representing 25 percent of the schools) is broad and of limited use. It should come as no surprise that the wealthiest school districts populate the top 25 percent of schools, and the poorest populate the bottom 25 percent. We have, however, found the second ranking elicited some surprises. The schools in Pennsylvania, for example, are broken down in our analysis into five equally sized groups (quintiles) based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Then, within each quintile, schools are broken into quartiles based on their test scores. A relatively wealthy school might fall into the top 25 percent of all schools in the state but fall to the bottom half or bottom 25 percent of all schools when

rated against other schools of similar income. This kind of analysis is something that parents and educators had no access to prior to our publication of this data. In fact, school district officials call us to ask for extra copies of our test score studies.

Readers have seized upon the report as essential to their understanding of how the schools are performing. And The Inquirer views the Report Card research as the foundation for the reporting we do on education issues and controversies about teaching methods or school performance that might arise. An added benefit is that the Report Card strengthens communications with readers. We include the E-mail addresses of the education team in the annual section as well as a special E-mail address for the Report Card. We received well over 100 E-mail notes and numerous telephone calls from readers. Last fall, orders for a special reprint of the section arrived in our office before we'd even published it in The Inquirer. That reprint then went into a second printing and, so far, 7,000 additional copies have been sold. ■

*Neill A. Borowski is Director of Computer-Assisted Reporting/Analysis at The Philadelphia Inquirer. Connie Langland is the lead education reporter for the annual Report Card on the Schools.*

# Pennsylvania School Districts

Here is a look at the 61 school districts in Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties, plus the School District of Philadelphia.

## Reading the Table

Enrollment		Race				About the Students			Class Size	About the Teachers				
Number of students	1994-95	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Special education	Gifted & talented	Private schools	Average size of public class size	No. of teachers	0-5 years experience	Rank of 62	Master's degree	Rank of 62
The number of students in the district	How the district's size compares to other districts in the Philadelphia area	The racial composition of the district. The data is based on the 1990 census and includes Hispanics.				The percentage of students in the district who are in special education, gifted and talented, and private schools.			The average size of the public class size in the district, based on the 1994-95 data.	The percentage of teachers with 0-5 years of experience and the rank of the district based on the percentage of teachers with 0-5 years of experience in the Philadelphia area.				

School District	Enrollment	Race				About the Students			Class Size	About the Teachers				
	1994-95	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Special education	Gifted & talented	Private schools	Average size of public class size	Number of teachers	0-5 years experience	Rank of 62	Master's degree	Rank of 62
<b>Bucks County</b>														
Bordentown	7,703	10	76%	11%	3%	1%	1%	22%	22	412	85%	2	88%	10
Bristol Borough	7,100	59	64	23	1	6	18%	7%	20	26	78	83	64	65
Bristol Township	8,088	11	80	14	2	4	16	4	24	379	74	101	51	40
Camden	6,493	17	89	6	3	1	10	11	20	449	81	4	78	5
Central Bucks	14,013	2	90	2	2	1	0	12	14	21	609	81	23	78
Doylestown	11,691	6	94	1	2	1	0	10	7	20	621	93	0	44
Doylestown Borough	1,107	60	98	27	4	0	11	0	20	20	20	93	0	48
Doylestown	10,369	8	95	3	2	1	7	0	20	400	87	23	42	51
New Hope-Solebury	1,028	61	86	4	1	1	7	12	21	64	70	62	60	60
Philadelphia	3,202	10	95	4	1	1	17	12	21	64	70	62	60	60
Philadelphia	8,768	15	97	1	1	1	0	0	25	346	88	22	54	50
Philadelphia	11,107	6	95	4	2	1	12	0	22	704	91	7	40	44
Quakertown Community	9,031	23	97	1	1	1	8	0	20	220	88	10	61	45

# Using Education Data Effectively

By Sarah Cohen

After two years of traveling the country working with reporters and editors on computer-assisted reporting techniques, it was clear that no story invokes more fear than the dreaded annual school report. Editors know educators will complain. After all, the experts say, each student is different. Parents demand impartial reviews of schools—until their children's schools are shown to fare poorly. And school administrators say it's not just unfair but also downright destructive for journalists to try to do anything other than repackage their press releases.

These complaints, though, fly in the face of what the school systems themselves do. After his rankings of school districts was published in the paper one reporter heard from the man who was principal at a school he'd attended. The principal complained that his district did not score as well as he had expected, arguing that there were too many factors that numbers could not

the problem by making it clear to educators that it's the newspaper's or station's job to provide information to parents, not to hide it. They let "the experts" know they won't be deterred from getting this important information to parents. The experts can help them make it as fair as possible or they can live with—and furiously debate—the results. Still, reporters are often left on our own to figure out ways to measure the quality of the schools we cover, and often on deadline. Here are five tips to help guide journalists through the minefields of data. These tips are culled from numerous discussions with reporters and their editors who are tackling this kind of project annually.

## 1. Fight for Student Level Data

One of the key failings of many school report stories is that they rely on statistics generated by the school systems. This problem is driven by the way these

data are offered. Instead of providing a database of basic infor-

mation about the students (with names and exact addresses redacted), the schools provide hundreds of summary statistics. This makes the analysis a lot harder than it has to be.

A skilled reporter needs to know only about 10 things about each student to generate meaningful summaries. For example, if you had the grade level, ethnicity, reading test result and math test result for every child in the

district, in an independent analysis the median or average score could be calculated by school along with the percentage of kids who took the test.

Instead, school officials present a series of pre-made calculations to reporters, turning 10 columns of information into hundreds: the percentage taking the test by ethnicity, the percentage of each ethnic group passing, the percentage of high achievers, and the like. Then they provide fields for the school, the district, the county and the state. In the end, their numbers and analysis amount to a sea of numbers with little meaning. And the data they provide turn a rather straightforward analysis into a nightmare for someone just starting out in computer-assisted reporting.

So fight for all the information it is possible to get about individual students, not schools. You may have to sign away some rights to use the data. A caveat common in the use of computer files on children (and patients in health care) is that you won't try to track down anyone you find through the data.

Just be sure you're allowed to interview students in the schools—as way of illuminating what the data demonstrate—without trying to find an individual student.

## 2. Copy Someone Else's Methodology

Don't try to reinvent school rankings each year. Although reporters grow bored with the same annual analysis, parents appreciate consistency. And

**"The newspaper's or station's job is to provide information to parents, not to hide it."**

take into account. The reporter reminded him that the school system never had trouble labeling him as an underachiever based only on standardized test scores and grade point averages. Apparently, it only became unfair when the schools, not the individual students, were being graded.

Some reporters, including the ones writing in this issue, have addressed

it's not always even necessary to come up with a ranking system on your own. You can borrow a method from others who have spent more time studying how best to present this information. Education Week, for example, grades school systems across the country each year in its Quality Counts project. The researchers there have spent years trying to come up with a way to compare one school with another, one district with another, and one state with another. Borrow their techniques and ask for their help.

Also, look for any standards developed in your state to measure school performance. In Maryland, for example, the state has threatened to take over schools that fail to meet certain standards. This yardstick is written into the regulations and provides a good least common denominator.

### 3. Define "Quality" Early On

One of the big criticisms of school report stories is that they're subjective. As school kids might put it, "And your point?" Of course a ranking or grading of schools is a qualitative, not a purely quantitative, endeavor. There will always be an element of opinion in your work based on what you choose to measure and exactly how you combine those factors. Be prepared to defend your choices.

The best reason for doing this kind of independent analysis is your job as a watchdog of local educators. Remember that the grading is of the job that educators, administrators and legislators are doing, not the kids themselves. Staying focused on grading the adults is the reason that many reporters adjust results to account for the difficulties kids bring from the home, usually by using statistical regression techniques. Giving the school system credit for advantages kids bring to school from home isn't telling your audience much about the quality of the school. Neither is blaming the school for prob-

lems the kids bring as a result of the impact of lower family incomes.

U.S. News & World Report dubbed this kind of adjustment "value added," and includes it in the annual ranking of colleges. It's a good signal to parents that what is being graded is the school system, not the children.

### 4. Go Beyond the Report Card

In Baltimore, reporters examined the experience of teachers in inner-city schools. Reporters there found that the least experienced teachers were assigned to the most difficult schools. As soon as they got a little experience, they moved.

In Broward County, Florida, reporters found that, despite a court order, schools in minority districts have received little extra money to bring their facilities up to par with schools in wealthier districts. And in Charlotte, North Carolina, a groundbreaking story in January detailed

the potential effects of returning to neighborhood schools at Ground Zero of 1970's-era forced desegregation. About half of the region's children would attend schools with virtually no diversity if the busing were to end.

These stories and others use the data that generate the school report cards to focus their reporters in terms of the ongoing coverage of education news.

### 5. Give Parents Choices

On-line editions provide readers with powerful tools. Let them use the data on Web sites by giving them the option of examining the schools in any way they'd choose—by diversity, combined test scores, math scores or student-teacher ratios. This option doesn't just

stand out as a public service, but it can also counter the criticism that there are many ways to measure the performance of a school, and the newspaper chose to illustrate its case with only one or two.

Of course, the biggest tip is one that is so obvious it doesn't require its own heading: Write in depth about schools, teachers and students rather than relying on the numbers to tell the story. Focusing on schools that do well—as well as on those that don't appear to be working to their potential—will result in compelling stories. Finding teachers and administrators who have come up with ways of organizing a school or teaching a particular subject that works well for students is also a way of telling essential stories about education. So is reporting that uncovers complacency in teachers or burdensome regulations or rules that serve to hold back kids

**"Remember that the grading is of the job that educators, administrators and legislators are doing, not the kids themselves."**

who might otherwise succeed in school.

Put the numbers in their place, in charts and on line, and let reporters go out and illustrate with words the stories that are responsible for the numbers we can now reveal. ■

*Sarah Cohen was Training Director for Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. for two years and traveled the country teaching computer-assisted reporting techniques to reporters, editors and producers. She was recently hired as the Database Editor for The Washington Post.*

# The Price of Hope: Investigating Disparities Among Rich and Poor Schools

By Ted Mellnik and  
Debbie Cenziper

For years, parents and educators in poverty-ridden pockets of the South sensed the public schools were shortchanging their children. And they were right. Their schools face numerous challenges: Administrators and teachers must educate some of the region's most disadvantaged students, children whose home and community environments often don't have the ability to support them in pursuit of a rigorous education. These deficits are accentuated by the inability of poor districts to raise local tax dollars needed to provide the kind of resource-rich schools found in wealthier districts.

In 1998 The Charlotte Observer set out to document the educational disparities among rich and poor school districts in North and South Carolina. We did this by illuminating the lives of children and families as they confronted the circumstances of their local public schools, but we also brought to this investigation a fresh analysis of data about how students and schools were performing. This data included comparisons of test scores, rates of teacher turnover, and a host of measures that researchers conclude are key to children's academic success. Our analysis gave us a way to present to readers the stark reality of what happens when poor children don't have access to a quality, competitive public education.

We spent eight months tracking down local, state and national reports that would help us show how the eco-



*Photo by Diedra Laird, The Charlotte Observer.*

omic gap in public investment impacts student achievement. We developed databases and spreadsheets so we could get a better handle on the dynamics of our region. We wanted to portray the stark contrasts between wealthy and poverty-plagued systems and help readers see more starkly than they had before the saddening failures that were the unfortunate hallmark of our poorer public schools. The result was a series called "The Price of Hope," published August 16-20 in The Charlotte Observer."<sup>1</sup>

Our series began with a teenager named Quanda Edwards, who wants to go to Harvard but is growing up in a

school system without such basics as advanced placement classes. Our story also included comparisons of the financial gulfs between each state's richest and poorest school systems. The basic measure was wealth per student, an estimate of the local tax money a community could afford to spend if it levied a state average tax rate. This yardstick—basically a measure of a community's ability to support schools—was created by the North Carolina Public School Forum, which has long studied school finance. The South Carolina Department of Education provided its tax data, which we used to create a measure similar to

<sup>1</sup>An on-line version of the series in The Charlotte Observer is at: <http://www.charlotte.com/schools/carolinas/>

what we were using in our state.

According to this measure, Mecklenburg, The Observer's home county and one of North Carolina's wealthiest school systems, could afford to spend an estimated \$5,529 per student. In contrast, the state's poorest county, Hoke, could afford to spend only \$708. A similar gap appears when one looks at the actual dollars spent on education. In Mecklenburg, spending per student in local taxes was estimated at \$2,271, compared with \$563 in Hoke. With this information, we could also see that the ratio of spending to wealth is about twice as high for Hoke (0.8) as for Mecklenburg (0.4). This suggests that Hoke, although it is much poorer, is expending significantly more taxation effort for its schools, even though the amount generated is meager.

Given these disparities, it was perhaps not surprising as much as it was disheartening to learn how students were faring in poor schools. Among other things, our investigation found

that students in the 15 poorest districts in each of the Carolinas post an average combined SAT score that is 100 points lower than their peers in the wealthiest systems. Teachers in the poorer schools are less likely to hold higher-level degrees, and students are less likely to take gifted or advanced placement classes or attend college. And those who do get to college are more likely to need remedial help.

Students from poorer counties are also less likely to perform at grade level in reading and math, a situation that our data were able to convincingly describe. In each of the Carolinas, the 15 poorest school systems post test scores that repeatedly pull both states down on national education measures, such as the SAT.

On our Web site, we offered demographic and educational profiles of every North Carolina county and South Carolina school system so our readers could explore these patterns in detail. Many people had heard something about the plight of poor school sys-

tems and about terms like "educational equity," so this gave readers a chance to see the relationships among these factors.

Poor districts in each of the Carolinas had filed lawsuits asking for new ways to be created to raise more money. These cases are similar to many that have been heard by courts in other states. In North Carolina, the state Supreme Court has ruled all students have a right to a sound, basic education. At the time our series ran, lawyers were scrambling to determine just what it would take to provide a "sound, basic education" to all students. The South Carolina case is still pending.

The Observer wanted to help readers better understand what those lawsuits were about. Beyond helping them to corral the facts, we wanted to introduce them to students, teachers and parents whose lives and futures were directly impacted by the poorer schools' inability to afford what most would consider to be the basics of education at the end of the 20th Century—advanced placement classes, well-equipped computer labs, teachers trained in how to use these new education tools, and programs for the gifted.

To tell these stories, I (reporter Cenziper) and photographer Gayle Shomer traveled the back roads of North Carolina to spend time in rural school systems where our data told us that students were producing consistently low test scores as their towns struggled with issues of chronic low funding. We wanted to rely not only on our statistical analysis, but on real people and their stories.

Our first stop was the city of Weldon, an old railroad town in a poor northeastern region of the state. There, in a middle school made up almost entirely of mobile classrooms, we met Quanda, an eighth grader who wants to become a lawyer, attend Harvard and build her own house. She's a high achiever in a school where, our data let us know, teachers don't often return after summer vacation. As is true in so many other poor school systems, teacher turnover is severe, and when teachers come and go from a school, student performance tends to suffer.



At her home in rural Lee County, Diane Davis helps her sons with their homework.  
*Photo by Diedra Laird, The Charlotte Observer.*

When Quanda gets to high school, she will not be able to take advanced placement classes because the system doesn't have the money to offer them. Weldon City High has no school newspaper, no yearbook, no electives such as psychology or chorus or photography. There are no school plays because there is no drama class or teacher. No one in the last graduating class had gone on to an Ivy League school, and it's been a rarity for anyone to do so.

Still, Quanda is not worried: "I am very confident in myself, and I have my friends and my family there for me whenever I need them.... As long as I have that support, and, you know, I believe in myself, to me, right now, I'm sitting on top of the world." Can her confidence and support get her over the hurdles created by all that her school system lacks?

From Weldon, The Observer staffers moved south to Harnett County, where they spent time with rookie teacher Kathy Harding. In poor school systems, successful teachers like Harding often move on for higher-paying teaching jobs in wealthier counties. In Wake County, for example, our data showed that Harding would make \$2,000 more

a year; and \$2,700 more a year in Mecklenburg. In a typical year, Harnett schools will have to fill 130 of 670 teacher jobs. Harnett school leaders hope Harding will stick around but they can't provide financial incentives. Harding loves teaching, but she becomes exasperated when she thinks about teachers elsewhere who earn higher pay for jobs that might be much less challenging than hers. "You do the exact same things they do. I have the same degree. I've been to school for four years. I'm a hard-working person. I show up every day. It doesn't make any sense just because we're a few miles away, we make less money," she told our reporters.

The Observer's next stop: Anson County, just east of Charlotte, and home to Debbie Smith. Debbie, who never got to finish college, dreams that her four children will. She started putting money into college funds years ago. But Debbie is worried Anson County schools won't prepare her kids for the demands of higher education. Three of her children attend Morven Elementary, where the academic challenges are among the most formidable in the state. Though test scores are improv-

ing, less than half of the students who attend that school are reading at grade level. Only 38 percent of the fourth graders passed the state writing test. "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that principals and teachers here are doing everything possible with the resources they have," Smith says. "But with more money and more resources, everything could be a whole lot better."

In South Carolina, Observer reporter Jonathan Goldstein and photographer Diedra Laird traveled to Lee County and met Diane Davis. Her four children hunt for books in a half-empty library at West Lee Elementary School. They wait in long lines to use a computer. They tumble through physical education lessons in a musty trailer behind the school. Although rich-poor differences exist in every state, critics say the situation is consistently worse in South Carolina, which spends less state money per pupil than neighboring states.

Many readers responded to our series, offering advice and donations for poor schools. One of the state's most vocal education advocacy groups is using the findings in our series to try to mobilize members of the public to bring about change. An Observer poll taken just before the series ran showed 71 percent of Carolinians are willing to shift tax money from wealthy to poor systems. Several measures were recently put into motion among legislators to bolster poor schools, including one that boosted from about \$50 million to \$60 million the supplemental fund that is used to aid low-income and poor school systems.

"The Price of Hope" took our readers on a well-documented journey into the educational plight of children and families whose lives aren't often covered in our newspaper. By compiling and analyzing data, then finding the human stories to illuminate the various tales our numbers told, we were able to produce a unique and valuable series about a vitally important issue of public policy and debate. ■



Quanda Edwards, 13, left, listens with classmates to school test scores being announced at Weldon Middle School. Photo by Gayle Shomer, *The Charlotte Observer*.

Database Editor Ted Mellnik leads *The Charlotte Observer's* computer-assisted reporting program. Debbie Cenziper is the paper's education reporter who also reported on schools and social issues for *The*

*Nieman Reports* / Spring 1999  
(Fort Lauderdale) *Sun-Sentinel*.

Their most recent project is "Decid-

# The Learning Gap: Highlighting Teachers' Competency

By Linda J. Johnson

Education writers often try to measure the success of their local schools by analyzing such things as test scores, class sizes and poverty rates. But many reporters overlook one of the most influential factors in children's school success: the quality of teachers.

A primary reason why education journalists tend to omit this measure from their reporting is the difficulties they confront in finding reliable data about teacher qualifications.

But as we at The Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader found, it can be done.

The Lexington Herald-Leader published a four-part series last November that demonstrated how our state's nationally acclaimed Kentucky Education Reform Act requires schools to set high expectation for students, but the same can't be said for teachers.

In 1989, the state Supreme Court ruled the state's public school funding mechanism unconstitutional. It ordered the General Assembly to start from scratch in redesigning more equitable funding. The result was the passage of the 1990 reform law, which has as its premise the belief that all students can learn at high levels. While the law was far from perfect, it did succeed in focusing Kentucky's attention on school equity and student achievement.

But the law has failed to address teacher quality. There are two major reasons:

- Kentucky's teachers union has used its political clout to successfully hold off attempts to toughen teaching standards.
- Lawmakers and bureaucrats have not had access to reliable data about the teacher workforce from which to

make sound policy decisions.

These circumstances prompted us to want to look more closely at the issues involved with teacher competency and quality in our state. This meant also looking at the ways in which teachers are trained and whether their roles as teachers are adequately matched with their preparation.

In reporting this series, "The Learning Gap: High Expectations for Students, Low Standards for Teachers," education reporters Holly E. Stepp, Linda B. Blackford and I documented that Kentucky's teachers are able to receive a passing grade on their certification exams despite producing some of the lowest scores among similar test-takers throughout the South.

One invaluable resource we used for developing our reporting on this series was an electronic database of information about teachers that helped us to gauge their quality. We supplemented this analysis of data with interviews with policymakers, school administrators and teachers.

Arranging the interviews was easy; getting access to the necessary data was not. State education officials balked at turning over what they considered confidential information, including details about teachers' academic



*Photo by Michelle Patterson, The Lexington Herald-Leader.*

records and their scores on state-mandated certification exams. And some data that we would like to have had, such as tests taken by teachers before the state began using PRAXIS and solid demographic data such as race and gender, simply didn't exist in an electronic form that could be trusted.

The newspaper argued in a series of letters and telephone calls with the attorney for the Kentucky Department of Education's Professional Standards Board that the information, as a whole,





*Photo by Michelle Patterson, The Lexington Herald-Leader.*

should not be regarded as confidential. Because Kentucky's school reform law evaluates schools largely based on students' test scores, why shouldn't teachers be judged by their scores on teacher certification tests? Kentucky children are tested annually on what the state has decided they should know. Each year, as the reform law spells out, the bar for schools is raised slightly higher. If a school declines beyond a certain point, it faces sanctions.

But for Kentucky's teachers, the standards haven't changed.

Getting the information we thought we needed to do our own analysis of teacher preparedness and performance required two months of negotiation with the Standards Board's attorney. In the end, state officials released the scores on the three core PRAXIS certification tests required in Kentucky and more than two dozen specialty tests used for individual teachers. They also released to us data about the college each teacher attended, deleting names or demographic information that might have allowed us to identify any individual. In a second database, the state released the PRAXIS test scores and told us the school district—but not the specific school—where each teacher

went to work after becoming certified. The state's data expert also changed the identifier for each person in the separate tables to make it impossible for us to match the tables and identify individuals.

For the most part, this arrangement worked. Only in some extreme examples—such as one teacher who took the three required certification tests a total of 22 times—was it easy to learn where that person ended up working. (That person never was able to pass all three tests and is a teacher working with “emergency certification” in a county in the south central part of the state, not far from where he or she graduated from college.)

We asked for data that went back 10 years. But we soon discovered that the state has very little electronic data about teachers prior to 1994. For us to have received hard copies of these records, after the state blacked out the names and other identifiable information, would not have been worth the cost or time it would have taken us to put it into the electronic form we needed to do our analysis. But we never faced that hurdle since the state couldn't guarantee that the older data we wanted existed in any form.

Because there is so little electronic data about teachers hired before 1994, it became impossible for us to draw any solid conclusions about their qualifications as teachers. And this was illuminating because it meant state officials couldn't do that kind of analysis, either. This is a significant problem since more than half of our state's teachers have been in the classroom for at least 15 years. This means they never took the PRAXIS tests, which the state began using during the 1990's, yet they still hold their lifetime certification. These teachers will remain certified despite never having taken any kind of test or doing anything more than attend to the annual required professional development, which we found to be mediocre in many places.

Now, having said that, all Kentucky teachers must get master's degrees, but they have 10 years in which to do that. Many experts with whom we spoke for this story questioned the value of earning a degree that can be stretched over that length of time. Essentially, what our search for information let us know is that the older age of many of Kentucky's teachers is a potential barrier if one is trying to find ways to gauge their qualifications.

Do these circumstances mean that many of Kentucky's teachers aren't qualified for their jobs?

The answer is that no one really knows, because nobody had ever tried before to compile the data and analyze it. Looking at the individual test scores by using Visual FoxPro, a computer program that lets us query information from a database, we were able to provide a glimpse at some of the information that is useful when measuring teachers' competency:

- We could let readers know how many teachers passed certification tests the first time by combining the scores we had with other published data on passing scores.
- We could let readers know how many teachers failed the first time and in which colleges they were trained. (Such comparisons had not been made public before our series appeared.)

We found that in Kentucky, to no one's surprise, people tend to go to college near where they were raised, and then they often return to their hometowns to teach. This means that students who came out of weak school systems tend to return to them. And this sets into motion a destructive cycle that makes academic excellence harder to achieve in these areas of the state.

By also analyzing the test scores, using a technique developed by an economics professor at Carnegie Mellon University, we learned how little is actually necessary to pass Kentucky's teacher certification test. In fact, teachers were being allowed to pass the three basic tests and 18 specialty exams we reviewed by answering anywhere from 35 percent to half of the questions correctly.

The state agency that oversees teacher training told our reporters that it intends to raise the bar for passing teacher certification tests and expects to release specifics of its plan early this year. Officials say they will require new Kentucky teachers taking the PRAXIS tests to score at least as high as those elsewhere in the South, a region of the country in which these test scores, in general, are lower than in other areas.

So the state is faced with several dilemmas. Is it enough to want its teachers simply to score as well as they do elsewhere in the South? Or should the bar be set higher for them, as it is for its students? This remains a delicate balancing act for state officials, as our reporters discovered: raise the bar too high, too quickly, and not enough teachers will pass. That leaves students without teachers.

What we hope our series helped readers and policymakers understand is why quality matters in terms of how teachers do their jobs and how being lax in terms of letting teachers pass tests at lower thresholds might jeopardize children's learning. Certainly our series did succeed in getting the state's bureaucrats and policymakers to talk seriously about the need for better teacher training and higher qualifications. The day after our series began appearing in the newspaper,



*Photo by Michelle Patterson, The Lexington Herald-Leader.*

Kentucky's Education Commissioner released the outline of a plan to improve education. Teacher training and quality were focal points of many of his initiatives. Since these had not been top agenda items before, the education establishment was caught by surprise.

And then in the middle of January, the newspaper learned the Governor was planning to create an 18-member task force to examine teacher training issues. One state lawmaker said teacher training has been a "hot topic" for some time, but that the paper's series heightened awareness of the low standards set for teachers even more.

That, to some degree, was our mission in setting out to do this series. We wanted to take an aspect of education to which enough attention had not been paid, shine a light on what could be learned by carefully analyzing data, and provide some vivid examples—through our reporting—that would exemplify the harm that can occur if the problem is left untreated. It took a lot for us to get the numbers we needed out of the state bureaucracy, but our efforts to do so paid off handsomely

when the articles ran and, for the first time, people were able to make connections where none had been visible before. ■

*Linda J. Johnson is education writer for The Lexington Herald-Leader. Earlier this year she became the paper's Computer-Assisted Reporting Coordinator. She began her involvement with computer-assisted reporting when she was health/environment reporter for The Vindicator, a paper in Youngstown, Ohio.*

# A Dual-Track Approach to Tackling The Topic of Reading: Reporting the Story and Pitching in to Fix the Problem

By David Lauter

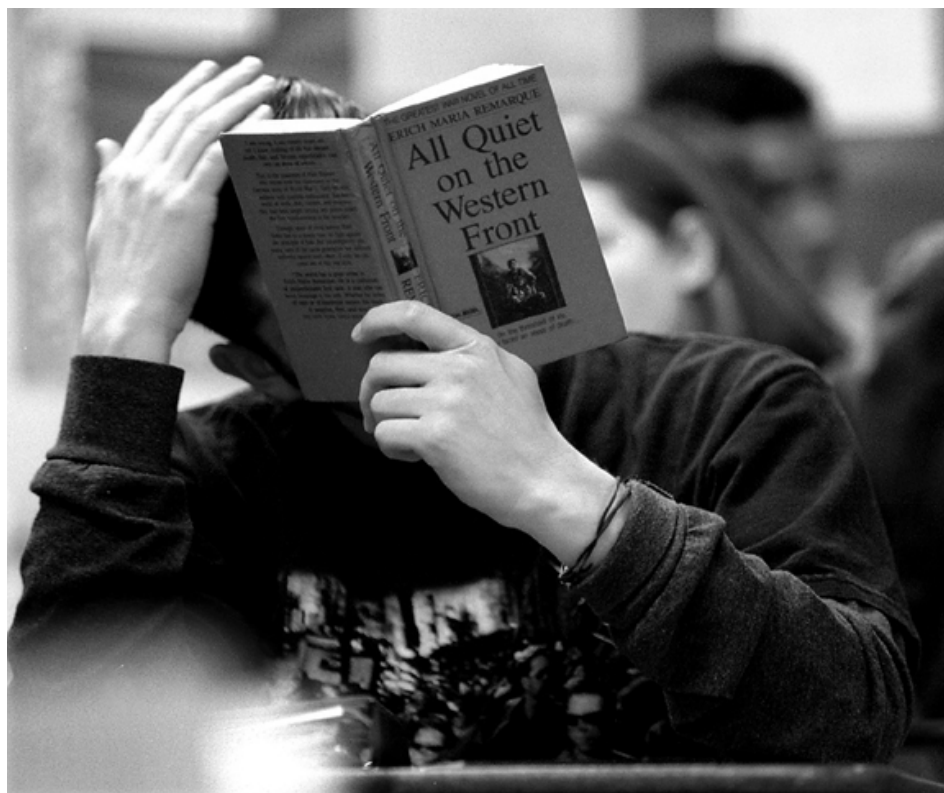
In May 1998, The Los Angeles Times published an exhaustive look at the problem of California's schools—three special sections, 20 pages in all, entitled “Public Education: California's Perilous Slide.” The project documented the disastrous effects of two decades of neglect—the worst overall ratio of teachers to students in the nation, 31,000 classrooms statewide presided over by men and women who lack a teaching certificate, and test scores in math and reading that are among the lowest in the nation.

The project, which had been six months in the making, engaged the efforts of more than 20 reporters and photographers. It prompted an enormous reaction among readers and helped galvanize the attention of state leaders. The state's current efforts at education reform are heavily aimed at the two issues—teacher training and system-wide accountability—that were the focus of the project's final installment.

Once the exhaustion of getting the project into print wore off, discussions within the paper turned to the question, “now what?”

We had devoted huge resources to calling attention to the problems of education, and clearly our readers cared about the issue. We certainly did not want to abandon the field, but neither could we simply do more of the same without being repetitious.

Times publisher Mark Willes had been greatly impressed by a project launched the previous year at The Baltimore Sun, which is also a Times Mirror paper. The Sun's Reading by Nine project set a simple, albeit ambitious, goal: engage the community to get every child to read at grade level by the



*Photo by Robert Durell, The Los Angeles Times.*

end of the third grade—the year that reading experts have identified as the make or break point for academic success.

To achieve that goal, The Sun had highlighted lagging reading scores in Baltimore, focused on the lack of phonics instruction in the schools, and encouraged employees of the paper and members of the community to tutor students in schools with particularly bad scores.

Willes, greatly concerned about the evidence reinforced in our series that hundreds of thousands of children in

southern California read far below grade level, asked if the same effort could be replicated here.

His proposal faced some immediate problems. The most important involved scale. The Sun's project dealt largely with one school district, Baltimore. By contrast, The Times's core circulation area covers major portions of five counties. The roughly 800 elementary schools in our region are governed by scores of independent school districts. The Los Angeles Unified School District is by far the biggest—the second-largest in the country. But our circula-

tion area also includes such sizable cities as Long Beach, Santa Ana, Ventura and Riverside as well as suburban districts and tiny rural outposts with only one school.

Moreover, the policy issue that The Sun focused on—whole language versus phonics—had already been resolved in California, at least on the policy level. State officials had adopted a new phonics-based curriculum earlier in the decade. In California, other issues such as teacher training, accountability and bilingualism were at the forefront of public concern.

As people in The Times's community affairs office began to examine the size of the effort that would be needed to launch a Reading by Nine program in so vast a region, it became clear that the organizational task, alone, would take far more time than anyone had initially realized. On the newsroom side of the paper, however, Times Editor Michael Parks had concluded we should not wait.

And so, with the beginning of the new school year in September, The Times launched a second major education project for 1998—a series of page-one stories, one each Sunday from

September on into November, that would examine different facets of our reading problem. In the meantime, our colleagues on the corporate side of The Times would continue to lay the groundwork for the work the newspaper would be doing in the community.

That two-track approach proved to have several advantages. Reporters and some editors were concerned, when the effort was first announced, that the compromises and political coalitions that might be necessary for a successful public campaign could affect our journalism. If, for example, The Times on a corporate level were to back a particular reading method as part of the Reading by Nine campaign, would that affect the sorts of stories we wrote? By putting our news coverage on a faster track than the overall corporate campaign, we allayed those concerns.

A second nagging fear remained: Would we be able to find enough newsworthy stories to sustain a continuing series? That fear was put to rest soon after the project was launched. As word spread that the Reading series was a major priority for the fall, reporters from all parts of The Times began to suggest ideas: Washington Bureau re-

porter Melissa Healy examined preschool reading programs, and education specialist Richard Colvin teamed up with one of our senior Washington reporters, Richard Cooper, to look at school reform efforts nationwide. Another education writer, Duke Helfand, looked at companies that are hoping to make money off the state's move back into phonics while Elizabeth Mehren, a national correspondent based in Boston, examined the rising phenomenon of merchandise being sold as tie-ins to children's books.

The article that drew the most reader response so far came from Robert Lee Hotz, one of our science writers, who produced a fascinating look at new research into the neurobiology of reading and the insights that the research has begun to supply for teachers.

The stories not only drew attention to the issue of reading, they also illuminated new facets of the broader national debate over improving our schools. And as time went on, we discovered that far from running out of stories, exploration of reading was turning up more ideas as we went along.

In mid-fall, a page-one letter to readers from Willes and Parks announced that The Times was committed to a five-year effort to help our communities teach all children to read by age nine. The paper's work is two-fold: On the newsroom side, we are committed to explaining, analyzing and clarifying issues, monitoring success or failure of statewide and community efforts, and making sure that public officials know their work is being watched. On the business side, a task force of executives from all departments has been deeply involved in planning a region-wide Reading by Nine campaign. How exactly these two initiatives will work in tandem is not yet clear since the corporate effort is not yet fully engaged.

As our newsroom efforts unfolded, readers across Southern California began to take notice. In addition to letters and E-mail, we started to find that at community forums and speeches to outside groups—regardless of the ostensible topic—someone in the audience almost always brought up Reading by Nine. To extend the effort further,



*Photo by Luis Sinco, The Los Angeles Times.*

The Times took three additional steps during the fall.

First, we expanded our full-time staff of nine education writers by adding a new position solely devoted to coverage of reading-related issues.

Second, we added to our Sunday Metro section a full page devoted to reading aimed at parents, teachers and

school children to read. A prominent feature of the page is a serialized short children's story that runs each week.

As those editorial efforts have rolled out, the business side of the paper has continued its efforts to plan the Reading by Nine campaign.

Some elements of that plan already are in place. Willes and other senior

the paper plans to host a regional reading conference to build on this work.

The campaign has clearly made a mark on the public agenda. Newly elected Governor Gray Davis, for example, has declared Reading by Nine one of his top official priorities and has proposed legislation to a special session of the Legislature to enhance the state's teaching of reading.

By now, Reading by Nine has become institutionalized in the newsroom. Editors and reporters, knowing that stories about reading are a priority for the paper, keep an eye out for ideas and are quick to offer suggestions. Their ideas will be needed. While the paper's initial announcement declared a five-year commitment, further involvement has proven once again that school reform is not a sport for the short-winded. The effort to ensure that our schools are properly teaching every child to read will be a priority at The Times for at least a decade. ■



Photo by Wally Skalij, *The Los Angeles Times*.

other adults who care for children. Each week it includes a main story that looks at some aspect of teaching reading—a school, a curricular issue, new research, etc. In addition, the page includes several features: a column of advice from reading experts for parents, a list of children's book events localized for each part of our circulation area, a list of recommended children's books prepared by local librarians, and a short essay by a prominent person about what first turned him or her on to reading.

Finally, as part of a previously planned redesign of our lifestyle section, Southern California Living, The Times added a page aimed at children—The Kids' Reading Room—that is designed to encourage elementary

Times executives have made Reading by Nine the focus of speeches to scores of community organizations, business groups and the like, urging them to lend their help to book drives, tutoring programs and other efforts aimed at helping children learn to read. The Reading by Nine task force has met with community organizations from across the region to discuss strategies for improving the schools. The task force has also hosted several meetings of education officials from around the region, providing a forum in which they meet with literacy experts from the federal and state governments, academia and elsewhere. Newsroom personnel do not take direct part in those sessions, but stay informed about the task force's efforts. This summer,

*David Lauter is the Specialist Editor of The Los Angeles Times, responsible for the paper's coverage of education, science, medicine, religion, law and the environment. He has previously served as National Political Editor and was White House correspondent from 1988-90 and 1992-94.*

# By Being There, a Reporter Captures a Rare View of Middle School

By Jolayne Houtz

Ten young teens draped themselves over chairs, forming a sloppy circle in the center of an empty middle-school classroom. I sat on the edge of the circle, an outsider looking in on an extraordinary pre-adolescent confessional.

"OK, clean time. How long since you used? You know the drill," said the drug and alcohol counselor as he kicked things off unceremoniously.

One by one, each of the students gave an accounting of his or her drug and alcohol use during the previous week. Funny, irreverent and vulgar, their hurt filled the room.

The girl with the longest clean time had two weeks and a day behind her. The girl next to her was still nursing a hangover from the night before. Their ages ranged from 11- to 14-years-old.

Being there, watching the fits and starts of pre-teens trying to navigate their way over the chasm between childhood and adulthood, was at the heart of a three-day series I wrote last June for *The Seattle Times* about "The Kids in the Middle."

This was purely a shoe-leather story that explored the everyday lives of students, teachers and the principal at a Seattle middle school. This school became a sort of petri dish in which to explore what works and what doesn't in reaching middle-grade students. The series relied on my fly-on-the-wall presence in the school. I was there at least once a week for most of the school year. And I filled dozens of notebooks with details that could draw readers into a story about the fragile, critical, sometimes funny middle years, and the unique issues that challenge educators in trying to reach these students.

Being with them consistently was the only way to earn the level of trust

that ensured I could go literally anywhere in the school unescorted, listening in on classes, lunchroom conversations, teacher-lounge gossip, counseling sessions and more. I attended school dances, staff meetings, parent orientations, special artistic performances and graduation ceremonies. I've never had such wide-open access to a school and its students, and I know it grew out of the fact that, over time, I became just so much furniture, blending into the background of the school. The same was true for *Times* photographer Steve Ringman, who worked with me on the project.

"I felt like an alien from outer space when I first landed there," he recalled.

With cameras hanging around his neck, Ringman became a curiosity, an

instant target for questions and a magnet for the class clowns. It was impossible to get the natural, spontaneous pictures he believed would best tell the story of these mysterious years.

But after about three months, "I became sort of a boring figure to them," Ringman said. Familiarity bred comfort, if not contempt. By the end of the year, students and teachers weren't even looking up when Ringman's shutter clicked. The result was a set of pictures capturing quintessential middle-school moments—hallway roughhousing, a young couple slow dancing, the music teacher at the end of a long day, a line of girls primping between classes in the bathroom.

Being there, in the midst of the action, is essential for a photographer. This story proved once again to me that

it matters for good reporting, too. There is no substitute for spending the time it takes to earn the trust and absorb the rhythms of her subjects' lives. Of all the beats I've covered, including politics, health care and the courts, this is most true in education reporting.

Reporting education stories from a distance makes it difficult to cut through the jargon educators tend to use. And it is all but impossible to put into perspective the fads, from new instructional and testing methods to school-reform models, which ebb and flow through schools, and the subjective interpretation of statistics that can be used to buttress those fads. Test scores, disciplinary rates and other statistics

**"There is no substitute for a reporter spending the time it takes to earn the trust and absorb the rhythms of her subjects' lives."**

are often less straightforward than they appear. Being there is the only way to know for certain that the story that appears to be captured in the numbers reflects what's really going on inside the school.

Firsthand knowledge helps cut through the haze of fuzzy ideas and well-intentioned experiments that just don't work in the bright light of a classroom filled with real kids. In computer-assisted reporting projects, being there is at least as critical. But with resources stretched at many newspapers, I worry that reporters—once armed with data—won't have the luxury I had to linger so long within schools.

Test scores, dropout rates, free and reduced-price lunch statistics measure a part of the education picture, but numbers don't convey much about the

art and craft of teaching or tell us much about the motivations and challenges of the students. The best education reporting projects rely on spreadsheets and crunched numbers only to frame a story, not to tell it. In these stories, the role of the computer may be virtually invisible to the reader but instrumental in guiding the reporter.

So much of what makes a school successful—or not—is in the relationships among teachers and students, in the atmosphere of the classroom, in the school culture that dictates how seriously academics are taken. Does the teacher have control of the rowdy students in her classroom? Is it clear what she wants students to learn? Do students get it? Will they remember how to use what they've been taught? Those elements are nebulous and hard to capture by numbers alone. As I set out to report my story, I used statistics to help me select the school I featured. But when the story was published, its telling relied almost exclusively on what I had observed.

My shoe-leather approach offered parents a rare and valued glimpse into their children's world. Being on hand to see and hear for myself what happened each day at this school paid off with rich details and evocative moments that let parents eavesdrop on events in their children's lives that they would not otherwise have been a part of. As readers they were able to peek in on the choir class where the teacher struggled to keep control of an unruly group of altos.

"You have too many rules!" a girl complained, pulling out a tape recorder and hitting the play button.

"Please put that away. That's a toy," the teacher said evenly.

"No, it's a tape recorder to keep people like you from harassing me. God, there's like 75 rules. STUPID RULES!" she yelled. She was standing under a sign listing class rules, one of which said "I will show respect and consideration for others."

And readers experience that sweet, fleeting moment when a year's worth of work pays off, when teacher and student connect, and the light of knowledge burns so brightly you can almost

touch it. This happened to Elizabeth Kim this spring during a special 10-week poetry workshop in Julie Lehnis's sixth-grade classroom. The shy 12-year-old was terrified to learn she would have to stand up in front of her classmates, read her own poems aloud, and be judged on her eye contact and posture as well as her words. But every week she stood in the circle of her classmates, Elizabeth found it got easier until she was looking other students in the eye without fear and reading her poetry in a strong, clear voice.

Last month, Elizabeth did something she never imagined she could. She was one of a dozen middle-school students who volunteered to read poetry in front of a microphone at a crowded West Seattle Starbucks coffee shop. Wearing white carnations and carrying themselves with new confidence, Elizabeth and the others spoke poignant words they'd written about hope, peace and social justice. Shoulders squared, they looked the audience in the eyes, sprinkling in just the right dramatic pauses and hand gestures, though if you looked closely, you could see their hands shaking.

I knew what a metamorphosis this was for Elizabeth and her classmates because I'd been watching them since they arrived new to the school, feeling awkward and timid and confronting the challenges that go along with heightened expectations of these middle-school years. I was transfixed that night at Starbucks six months later, watching these newly confident young people on stage. That night, I could see the outlines of the adults they would become, rather than the children they had been.

I'm glad I was there during all those months so that I could see for myself the stages of this remarkable passage and, most of all, I was grateful I could share it with readers.

What we discovered is how hungry parents are to find out what happens in the classroom once they turn their children over to the school. It is difficult, if

not impossible, even for parents who have the time to visit their children's school, to get an accurate picture of what goes on. More than 75 people—most of whom were parents—called, wrote or E-mailed in response to the series. This was among the greatest number of responses I've ever received on any story I've written. Many parents said they were grateful to know their families weren't alone in trying to figure out how to weather the tough

**"The best education projects rely on spreadsheets and crunched numbers only to frame a story, not to tell it."**

transformation that their pre-teens were experiencing.

I know that the impersonal presentation of numbers or a briefly reported glimpse at this school or a selected classroom would never have connected readers to the issues and challenges that educators confront as this year-long assignment enabled me to do. This series served as a valuable reminder that while technology can help us, it can never be a substitute for using our eyes, our ears and our minds to portray the human experience. ■

*Jolayne Houtz has been a reporter at The Seattle Times for nine years. For the past five years she's reported on education, writing about the Seattle schools and statewide education issues and trends.*



# International Journalism

## **From Hong Kong—**

A report on the press after China's return

## **From the United States—**

Reports on technological tools to help journalists track international stories from their office computers

**Peter Stein**, Managing Editor of The Asian Wall Street Journal, opens our section with a close-up view of how the press handles controversial stories—such as recent trials of dissidents in China—in the wake of Hong Kong's 1997 transfer to Chinese sovereignty. His report reveals the emergence of “quiet self-censorship,” evident in the degree to which newspapers are willing to probe and analyze sensitive political topics.

**The rest of the section** examines from a variety of perspectives the role that technology is able to play in assisting reporters with the coverage of stories that involve reporting across national borders. Using sophisticated software programs to guide computer-assisted reporting, large databases of information can be untangled by journalists who want to investigate the financial activities of multinational companies or set out to analyze politicians' performances or report on charges of price gouging in telephone rates.

**Brant Houston**, the Executive Director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, writes the first of these articles. He provides examples from Denmark and South America in which journalists put their newly acquired skills to work in locating and analyzing data and publishing important news stories based on their findings.

**Maud S. Beelman**, Director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, follows with a modern-day tale about the “ties that bind journalists,” links that are now located in cyberspace.

**Christopher Simpson**, Director of the Project on Satellite Imagery and the News Media at American University, describes what reporters can learn by examining some of the millions of non-classified, high resolution images of earth that are available on line, thanks to satellite technology. ■



# Hong Kong's Press: While Debate Rages About Media Ethics, Self-Censorship Quietly Thrives

By Peter Stein

Recently, academics and leading journalists from Hong Kong gathered at a conference in Hong Kong to reflect on the woeful state of this city's news media. Their genuflection focused on declining ethical standards. Hong Kong's journalists themselves admit that the media here—like their counterparts in America—are more prone than ever to promote salacious stories over “hard” news, twist or outright fabricate their facts, and invade the privacy of the people they cover. Amazingly the conference, sponsored by the Freedom Forum, almost entirely ignored the question of how free Hong Kong's press remains under Chinese rule.

The omission may have resulted from the conclusion—not entirely outrageous, at first glance—that Hong Kong's press freedom is self-evident, almost a non-event. Unfortunately, that's not true. Imposed censorship hasn't shut up Hong Kong's boisterous press, but self-censorship has softened its tone and restricted the depth and direction of its coverage.

That's not to say reality hasn't turned out better than expected prior to Hong Kong's historic July 1, 1997 transfer from British to Chinese sovereignty. Hong Kong's most outspoken newspapers and magazines—including those run by unapologetic anti-Communist Jimmy Lai—continue to publish. Reports about political dissidents in China, articles about the Dalai Lama, and news from Beijing's archenemy, Taiwan, are all widely available. No reporters or editors in Hong Kong have been sent to prison for reporting on politically sensitive issues.

“Certainly, of all those terrible scenarios, none of them materialized,” says Kin-ming Liu, Chairman of the Hong Kong Journalists' Association (HKJA). “For that we have to give credit to China.”

This is all the more remarkable considering that Beijing is waging a severe political crackdown on the mainland. In December, three dissidents hoping to organize Communist China's first real opposition party were jailed for up to 13 years; in January, authorities also imprisoned an entrepreneur accused of selling Internet E-mail addresses to an overseas political group.

Yet Beijing has avoided making overt moves to curb the Hong Kong press. The result is that in certain respects, Hong Kong journalists appear to enjoy a lot of freedom. That's particularly obvious in the relish with which many newspapers have criticized the government of Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa. Tung and his administration are satirized and lambasted frequently for their handling of crises such as the crash in Hong Kong's stock and property prices, a near epidemic of bird flu last year, and the disastrous July opening of Hong Kong's new airport.

Hong Kong newspapers appear free likewise to carry news on political developments in China. Take the December trials of Chinese dissidents. When a Chinese court sentenced Xu Wenli to 13 years in jail for the crime of “subversion,” the English-language South China Morning Post put the story on its front page, just like The New York Times and The Washington Post. Hong Kong's top Chinese-language papers—Oriental Daily News, Apple Daily and

Ming Pao—ran the story either on page one or page two.

Coverage of other dissident stories has also been extensive. When Wang Dan, a prominent June 4, 1989 democracy activist, was released from prison and exiled to the United States last April, Hong Kong's top newspapers all splashed it across their front pages. Oriental Daily boasted about getting an exclusive interview with Wang after his arrival in America. Apple Daily reprinted some of Wang's writings. Mainland Chinese newspapers mostly steered clear of this subject altogether, highlighting their reluctance to tread on politically sensitive ground on which the Hong Kong press apparently feels at ease.

Despite this, self-censorship clearly thrives. In fact, its existence has been a fact of life for Hong Kong's press since years before the handover. Under British rule, reporters from newspapers that criticized China too frequently weren't invited to important press gatherings organized by China's political authorities in Hong Kong. Those same newspapers also rarely, if ever, received lucrative advertising revenues from China-backed companies that have become increasingly important in the Hong Kong business community.

Today, self-censorship remains in the degree to which Hong Kong's media is willing to probe and analyze, rather than simply relate. The news reports on China “are all factual and safe,” says Claudia Mo, a television anchor, radio host and columnist. “What puts me off is there's very little commentary.”

Editorializing, in particular, has become extremely sensitive business. To their credit, some newspapers do indeed publish critical opinion pieces about Beijing's policies. The day after the sentencing of Xu and his colleagues, Ming Pao's editorial warned that "the heavy sentencing of Xu Wenli will exact a high cost," and that "the enlightened, open image that [Beijing] has recently built up within the international community will suffer as a result of this." An editorial in Apple Daily remarked that Xu's treatment "makes a joke of the human rights covenant" that Beijing signed last year.

Yet the same events elicited a different reaction—or lack thereof—at The South China Morning Post, where the editorial page remained silent on Xu's sentencing. The Post's one English-language competitor, The Hong Kong Standard, chose to editorialize, but with a message quite different from the one at Apple and Ming Pao. "Dissidents," The Standard declared, "Must Heed History." China has come a long way, and the livelihood of its masses has improved dramatically under Communist rule, the editorial noted. "The dissidents," The Standard concluded, "would be better off making a thorough study of the mainland's needs before blindly pushing for full adoption of the Western system without any modifications whatsoever."

If some areas of coverage require Hong Kong's press to tread lightly, others appear to be practically off-limits. Consider two of China's most powerful organizations operating in Hong Kong: Xinhua news agency and the Hong Kong office of China's Foreign Ministry. Xinhua, China's de facto embassy in Hong Kong under British rule, is still believed to be the central coordinator of Communist Party activity in the territory today. The head of the Foreign Ministry office, Ma Yuzhen, is nominally China's top-ranking representative in Hong Kong. Yet newspapers rarely, if ever, report on what these bodies do. "These kinds of taboo subjects, no one will touch them," says Liu of the HKJA.

Fear of crossing the line in political coverage ultimately stems from an



Dissident Wei Jingsheng at home in Beijing in 1994 shortly before his rearrest and imprisonment. *Photo by Philip Cunningham.*

unnervingly ambiguous section of the Basic Law, China's mini-constitution for Hong Kong. That section, known as Article 23, notes that Hong Kong is expected to enact laws to prohibit acts of "treason, secession, sedition [and] subversion" against the Chinese state. As yet, those laws haven't been passed, and the definition of those terms remain a mystery. Could an investigative article about Xinhua, or an editorial calling for a Chinese leader to resign, be "subversive"? No one knows. Cheung Man-ye, director of broadcasting at Radio Television Hong Kong, calls Article 23 the "one thing that hangs over our heads."

Whatever void of politically sensitive stories exists within Hong Kong's media has been filled with coverage of sex scandals, violent crime and society gossip—thus the wringing of hands over media ethics at that Freedom Forum conference. It's hard to conclude that fears of covering certain political issues alone has prompted the push into sleaze. Intense competition within an overcrowded industry is no doubt a more important factor. Some 20 newspapers compete for the eyeballs of Hong Kong's 6.6 million residents, driving many to make sex and crime a higher coverage priority than politics. Market-driven journalism, frets

Raymond Wong, Assistant General Manager at Hong Kong's largest television station, Television Broadcasting Ltd., "has more potential to sabotage than to serve the public interest."

A few bad scandals have especially tarnished the industry. Among the worst of these took place after a Hong Kong woman killed herself and her two sons late last year. Apple Daily photographed her laborer husband in bed with prostitutes—and later confessed to having paid the man to pose for the picture. Incidents like these explain why, in a survey last November by the University of Hong Kong's Social Sciences Research Center, more than one-in-three respondents found Hong Kong's news media to be "quite irresponsible" in their reporting.

If all the agonizing at the Freedom Forum conference has its intended affect, Hong Kong's media may move toward a greater respect for public ethics and morality. Perhaps, also, toward greater professionalism. The University of Hong Kong is soon starting a journalism degree program—the territory's first.

It's unlikely, however, that this will coincide with the media becoming more outspoken on political issues. The delicate reality of Hong Kong's situation as an autonomous region that answers to an autocratic state makes that inevitable. So does the self-interest of Hong Kong's media magnates, many of whom hope to make fortunes expanding their business into the mainland market. For that to happen, their safest bet is to avoid ruffling Beijing's feathers with aggressively critical commentary and "unpatriotic" reporting. "If I were an editor," admits Mo, the journalist, "I'd do the same." ■

*Peter Stein is Managing Editor of The Asian Wall Street Journal, based in Hong Kong.*

# When Numbers Talk, Journalists Help People Listen

By Brant Houston

Venezuelan reporter Carlos Subero constructed his own databases to analyze politicians' performances.

Swedish reporter Stefan Lisinski exposed questionable practices involving bankrupt companies by using a massive Swedish database of information on the companies and directors.

Dutch journalist Marjan Agerbeek probed government data with spreadsheet software and was able to document poor financial planning by the country's 13 universities.

In the face of a general lack of liberal open-record laws and easily available government databases, journalists throughout the world are learning how to effectively use tools of computer-assisted reporting that extend past E-mail and searching the Internet. Computer-assisted reporting (or CAR) not only involves searching sources on the Internet, but also doing data analysis with such software as spreadsheets and database managers. Often journalists use the spreadsheets Microsoft Excel or Lotus 1-2-3 and the database managers Microsoft Access or Paradox. As the journalists become more skilled, they add statistical software—SAS or SPSS are two such programs—and mapping software—ArcView or MapInfo—to their repertoire.

In the United States, CAR was launched a decade ago when dozens of reporters began consistently practicing it to provide broader context and depth to their stories. Those stories attracted attention and garnered awards for the reporters who practiced this kind of information gathering. Now, in support of their stories, these reporters could claim not that they had randomly reviewed a few hundred documents, but instead that they had

methodically examined hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of records.

By 1994, word of the CAR successes had reached other countries, and foreign journalists began attending the "boot camps" (weeklong, intense seminars where many U.S. reporters were trained) at the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting (NICAR) at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. In the past five years, journalists from many countries, including Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, Venezuela, Argentina, the Netherlands, Norway, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Bosnia and Canada have participated. And periodically NICAR's newsletter, Uplink, publishes articles on the successes and experiences of international journalists using CAR.

## The Danish Effort

One example of how CAR has aided foreign journalists happened in Denmark. In 1996, Nils Mulvad and Flemming Svith from Jyllands-Posten, Denmark's largest newspaper, participated in our boot camp and visited U.S. newspapers where reporters were using CAR extensively. Excited by what they saw, Mulvad and Svith returned to Denmark only to be met by what Mulvad characterized as a mostly "defeatist attitude," since it was unclear how these reporters might employ their newly acquired skills.

"Over the past three years this has changed fundamentally," Mulvad wrote recently in a paper for a workshop on CAR. "Although no right of access to electronic data exists, many authorities are prepared to pass on information anyway."

Mulvad and Svith invited NICAR to Denmark in 1997 and 1998 to conduct

seminars for other Danish journalists from print and broadcast. Employing CAR techniques, they also reported and wrote stories that disclosed the side jobs of moonlighting legislators, outlined price gouging in telephone rates, and dissected election results. Other reporters followed their leads for daily and longer-term project stories, sometimes constructing complex databases that would challenge more experienced U.S. journalists' skills.

These two reporters have also written a CAR textbook based on their Danish experiences and have created an association and institute to encourage widespread use of data analysis in Danish journalism.

## The Mexico Project

At the same time Scandinavian journalists began venturing into database techniques, journalists in Central America and South America also were taking their first steps into CAR. Jump-started by training provided by the Investigative Reporters & Editor's (IRE) Mexico project, Periodistas de Investigacion, journalists in Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil and other nearby countries overcame their initial doubts, and the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation provided extensive funding.

Pedro Armendares, Director of Periodistas de Investigacion, has cited numerous examples of how CAR has helped stories, whether journalists use U.S. data, their country's data, or build their own databases.

- In Brazil, a journalist analyzed a U.S. database from the Immigration and Naturalization Service for a front-page story on the "brain drain" of Brazilian executives to the United States.

- In a CAR workshop in Honduras, an editor was thrilled to find information on military aid to his country in U.S. General Accounting Office records. That information had been denied to him by Honduras officials because of national security reasons.
- A Mexican journalist, Francisco Vidal, has cruised the Internet for his business and economic beat, finding tips and databases, and downloading data into Excel or Access to report on mergers, multinational companies and company executives.
- In Brazil, a journalist dug into Brazilian government statistical reports to show that in Sao Paulo the first cause of death among children between 10 and 14 years old is homicide and that often the killer is a parent.
- Reporters from the daily *Publico*, in Guadalajara, Mexico, and *El Universal*, in Caracas, have built databases from judicial hard copy to methodically profile and background felons convicted for drug-related offenses. For example, in *The Publico* series, reporters found that only five percent of drug arrests resulted from police investigations. The stories also uncovered disparities in sentencing,

including the case of a child caught at home with two drug plants who received the same jail time as a drug smuggler arrested while transporting pounds of cocaine.

### Sharing Information and Experience

More sophisticated techniques engendered by computer-assisted reporting lead to sharing of information and reporting experiences on the NICAR listserv, nicar-l and at conferences in the United States and other countries. For the past two years, journalists have gathered at NetMedia, an annual conference in London, for a day of classes in computer-assisted reporting led by NICAR. The classes cover the basic uses of the Internet, spreadsheets and database managers. Last year, about 200 journalists from Great Britain, other European countries and Africa attended the classes. Organized by Milverton Wallace of London's City University, NetMedia will again offer a day of more than two dozen classes in July of this year.

In 1997 and 1998, IRE and Periodistas also offered training at "Border Gatherings" in Mexican cities in

which reporters from the United States and Latin America swapped information on Web sites and databases on the environment, law enforcement and drug smuggling, and illegal immigration. Periodistas also conducted hands-on computer training classes.

At NICAR's annual conference, journalists take part in panels and hands-on classes. Through these conferences, on-line discussion groups, and the new international investigative reporting effort by the Center for Public Integrity, journalists have opportunity to expand their skills, the breadth of their reporting, and their network of contacts and knowledge.

Leading international journalists regard the mastering of these techniques as critical to journalism and its place in the 21st Century. "Basically," as Nils Mulvad recently said, "the aim is to secure democracy in the society of the future." ■

*Brant Houston is Executive Director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. An associate professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, he also is author of "Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide."*

# International Journalists Use Internet Technology to Breach Borders

By Maud S. Beelman

A journalist in Zimbabwe, researching a story with ties to Sweden, needed to contact an investigative reporter in that Scandinavian country, though he knew no one there. In Montreal, a French-speaking reporter, working on an article about corporate sleuths, was seeking help from a U.S. colleague versed in "competitive intelligence." An American correspondent, meanwhile, wanted to know about in-

ternational databases that might have material for an investigative piece.

The ties that bind these journalists are in cyberspace. Each posted notes on different journalism listservs—electronic mailing lists geared to specific groups—in hopes that someone reading their message could help.

Journalists have generally not been the quickest to grasp the full range of opportunities offered by the new in-

formation age. And with United States dominance in cyberspace technology, it is not surprising that international journalists lag behind their American counterparts. But increasingly, the Internet (E-mail, listservs, Web sites) is becoming a means by which journalists around the world network and collaborate and, with relatively little effort, increase their knowledge base (skepticism about the accuracy of

Internet content notwithstanding).

As I write, for example, a freedom-of-information listserv posting has just arrived. On this particular day it reveals a little-known part of the Food and Drug Administration's Web site that identifies troublesome manufacturers. A different posting advises that Nigerian journalists are fighting a proposed section of the draft constitution that will inhibit freedom of expression. Yet another announces the availability of an English-language edition of the Hungarian journal *Replika*. Each time, their postings provide an invaluable potpourri of helpful hints and useful information for journalists.

Beyond offering specialized discussion, listservs direct their members to Web sites packed with information about subjects they are trying to learn more about, such as the Asian studies virtual library site constructed by Australia's National University in Canberra, or to sites such as ProfNet, which boasts of being "the shortest distance between a journalist and a source." (On it, one can post questions and someone with expertise in that area is likely to respond to them.) And there are ever-growing numbers of Web sites dedicated to special reporting needs, such as science or human rights. Even some of the world's more obscure newspapers, in Bhutan or Vanuatu, now have on-line editions.

The accessibility and breadth of such simple-to-use border-spanning technology have also given birth to new working alliances that were previously impossible. For example, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) has formed as a network of leading investigative reporters to work on cross-border investigative projects. ICIJ is a project of the Center for Public Integrity, which is a non-profit group based in Washington, D.C., that is well-known for its detailed investigations of corruption and money in politics. ICIJ was launched in late 1997 at a time when the steady spread of Internet use and the dissolution of Cold War barriers had reduced considerably the limitations of doing major investigative projects outside the confines of national borders.

ICIJ conducts most of its business via E-mail and through its Web site. Members from 31 countries met for the first time last November at a three-day conference sponsored by the Nieman Foundation. (Nieman Curator Bill Kovach is Chairman of ICIJ's Advisory Committee and a member of the Center's Advisory Board.) The gathering focused on old-fashioned brainstorming for future projects, as well as on learning more about sophisticated technology to aid their efforts. Patrick Ball, an electronic security specialist from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, explained how journalists could use E-mail encryption software to keep their cyberspace correspondence private and secure. This software can be downloaded free of charge from an Internet site. Human rights groups around the world, which have a vital need to protect information and sources, are already using the E-mail encryption.

Knowing about various national laws is essential, however. A half-dozen or so countries, including Israel, Russia and China, have strong domestic controls on the use of cryptography and penalties for violating them. (France announced in January that it was dropping its long-held restrictions.) United States law, for example, prohibits the export of the kind of strong cryptography that is used in this country, even though the same level of encryption is already available overseas.

Other high-tech options available to journalists worldwide include satellite imagery. Christopher Simpson, the Director of American University's Project on Satellite Imagery and the News Media in Washington, D.C. [See Simpson's accompanying article], explained how relatively high-resolution satellite imagery can be downloaded from the Internet and used to assist in reporting. Investigations in which such imagery could be useful include analyzing the impact of mass deforestation in Central America and its role in the flooding and landslides that accompanied Hurricane Mitch, or tracking mass refugee movements or confirming military claims of battlefield successes.

Although most international jour-

nalists still work at the low end of the high-tech spectrum, there are a few stunning examples of how adventure-some reporters have made the new technology work for them. In late 1996, Yugoslav authorities shut down the state-owned transmitter of the country's popular independent radio station B92, which was reporting on street protests that followed the annulment of municipal elections won by the opposition. B92, which had several of the same Web sites on servers in the United States and the Netherlands, moved its broadcasts onto the Internet. Using regular phone lines, B92 posted written news accounts of the protests along with sound clips on its Web site. The BBC then picked up the audio from the site and rebroadcast it to Yugoslavia. Shutting down B92 at that point would have required the government to disable the country's phone grid.

"The number of Internet users in Serbia is not that big, but the number of radio users is," explained Dragan Cicic, a former B92 reporter and ICIJ member. "As soon as it became clear that there was no sense in shutting off the [B92] transmitter, the government repaired it."

The Internet's ability to circumvent government censorship has not gone unnoticed or unchallenged. In China, a 30-year-old computer engineer was sentenced in January to two years in jail for alleged subversion for providing 30,000 Chinese E-mail addresses to an on-line publication run by Chinese dissidents in the United States. Similar prosecutions have been reported in Bahrain, Malaysia and Turkey.

Human Rights Watch estimates that Internet access providers in half a dozen countries use filtering technologies and voluntary measures "to make prior censorship of on-line communications a reality." This happens because in these countries the Internet service providers are either state-owned or required to have licenses issued by the state and, as such, might be required to use such filters. In its 1999 report about freedom of expression on the Internet, Human Rights Watch warned, "The trend is towards extending these technologies more broadly, with global

implications for free expression.” Britain, for example, has urged European countries to adopt an E-mail interception system that would allow unconditional government access to E-mails on the grounds that it is necessary to fight cross-border crime, the HRW report said.

Totally blocking Internet access in a given country is like trying to attack a moving target. And Internet use is growing exponentially. The current boom areas are Asia-Pacific and Latin America, said Jagdish Parikh, an on-line research associate for Human Rights Watch. Trailing behind are the Middle East

and Africa, where in most nations telephone lines are scarce and costly, and dial-up access charges are prohibitively high, reportedly averaging \$10 an hour. Parikh estimates that people in only a few countries are still unable to connect with the Internet.

Other factors guarantee, too, that international journalists will rely on the Internet more in the future to connect with colleagues and vast resources of information. Journalism groups, such as Investigative Reporters & Editors, offer computer-assisted reporting seminars in an increasing number of countries. And work is continuing

on perfecting translation software, now only about 85 percent reliable.

The hope is that someday soon such software will help to break down linguistic barriers the way that the Internet is breaching geographic ones. ■

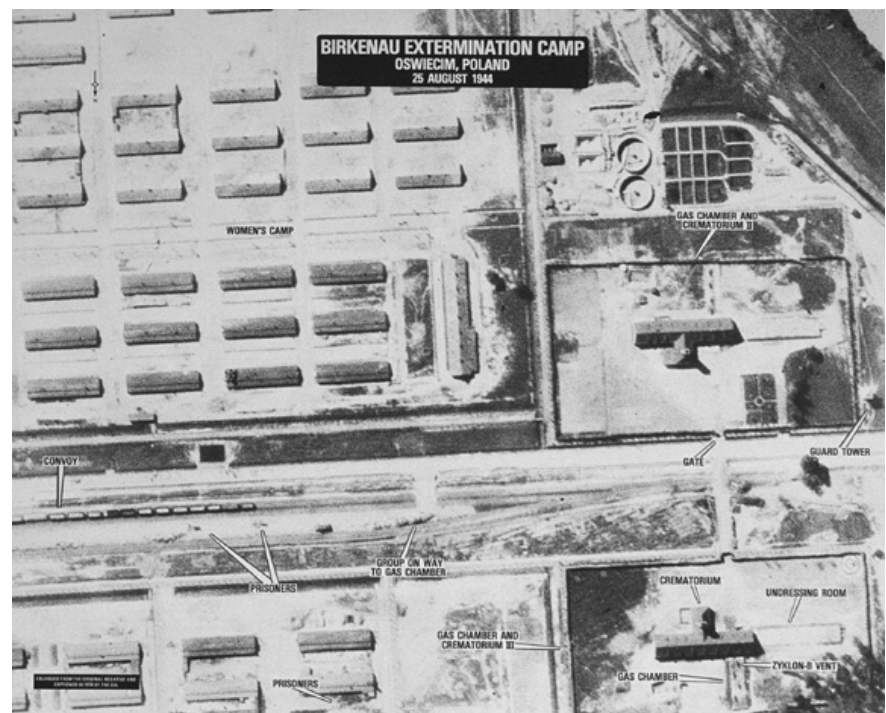
*Maud S. Beelman is Director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists ([www.icij.org](http://www.icij.org)) and a former foreign correspondent for The Associated Press. ICIJ staffers Zoë Davidson and Linda Yun contributed to this report.*

## If Birds Were Reporters, What Would Their Eyes Reveal?

By Christopher Simpson

Millions of non-classified, high-resolution images of earth are already available to news organizations. Thousands more are being collected each day. With a little practice, photo editors and journalists can browse large and well-indexed archives of many of these images from their desktops, pinning down overhead imagery of Indian and Pakistani nuclear test sites, newly discovered temples at Angkor Wat, Cambodia, forest fires devastating Central America, or tracking the touchy issue of water politics in California’s farm country.

There has been a lot of hype about this new form of information gathering, yet it is indisputable that medium- and high-resolution images of events on earth gathered by satellites and U-2 surveillance jets are finding their way into the reporting repertoire of print, broadcast and on-line journalists. (Because much of this data about earth are collected outside the narrow bounds of visible light, in the infrared and



This image of Birkenau death camp taken in August 1944 shows prisoners lined up at gas chambers and other parts of the camp. Though photographed from an airplane, the image is roughly equivalent in clarity and sharpness to those captured now by commercial satellites. *Courtesy U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.*

microwave radar range, then converted to more conventional photos for easier use, scientists use the word “imagery” or “image” rather than photograph.) Among the examples of recent coverage that has relied on these images are the following:

- The New York Times gave front-page treatment to high-resolution imagery of Baghdad made public by the Department of Defense following the December 1998 cruise missile attacks on Iraqi intelligence headquarters.
- CNN played the same images at the top of its news coverage.
- Magazines such as *Archeology*, *National Geographic* and *Scientific American* frequently present analysis based on high-resolution imagery to their readers, as do relatively obscure academic journals such as *The Nonproliferation Review* and *Science and Global Security*.
- Modest eight-page monthly newsletters such as the USAID-financed *Famine Early Warning System Bulletin* regularly compile weather satellite imagery to provide informed estimates of rains and crop health in Africa. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist, as the saying goes, to see the relationship between Africa's ecological crisis and the potential for renewed civil war or mass flight of refugees in the Sahel or the Horn of Africa.

Imagery and a related technology, interactive geographic information systems (GIS), seem to be particularly well-suited for on-line publishing of news. Media Web sites such as [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) and [CBS.com](http://CBS.com), as well as others, use this technology to enhance their reporting. The Washington Post Web site, for example, includes interactive, multimedia compositions made up of satellite imagery, maps and still photography of Iraq, along with text and “hotlinks” to declassified Defense Intelligence Agency and UNSCOM (United Nations arms inspectors') documents.

Fully operational sources of satellite images include France's well-established *Système pour L'Observation de*

*la Terre* (SPOT) satellites, Canada's Radarsat International, India's Remote Sensing Agency, Japan's ADEOS/AVNIR system, the European Space Agency's Eurimage division, a Russian venture with North Carolina-based Aerial Images Inc and Microsoft Corp., and several U.S. government agencies, to name a few. The world's largest and most sophisticated archive of satellite and aerial imagery is operated by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and housed at the EROS data center near Sioux Falls, South Dakota. (Contrary to popular belief, NASA's collection of earth observation imagery is considerably smaller than that of the USGS, and it generally ends up being transferred to the EROS center for archival storage. The route traveled by imagery collected by U.S. military and intelligence agencies is usually more convoluted than that of NASA's. But in the end it, too, usually ends up housed at the USGS.) Presently, almost all unclassified images produced by the U.S. government entities can be studied and used by journalists at minimal or no cost.

We hear often about the potential for U.S.-based private companies to sell high-resolution imagery of earth on demand. This is still an enterprise waiting to be launched. Companies such as Lockheed-Martin and Ball Aerospace, who own significant shares in start-up earth imaging companies, are among the world's technological leaders in design and construction of earth observation satellites, in part due to multi-billion dollar contracts with U.S. intelligence and defense agencies. But building the most advanced government spy satellite when cost is no object is one thing; building a stripped-down, unclassified version of a similar bird within the cost constraints of the private marketplace is quite another, and it hasn't been fully realized yet.

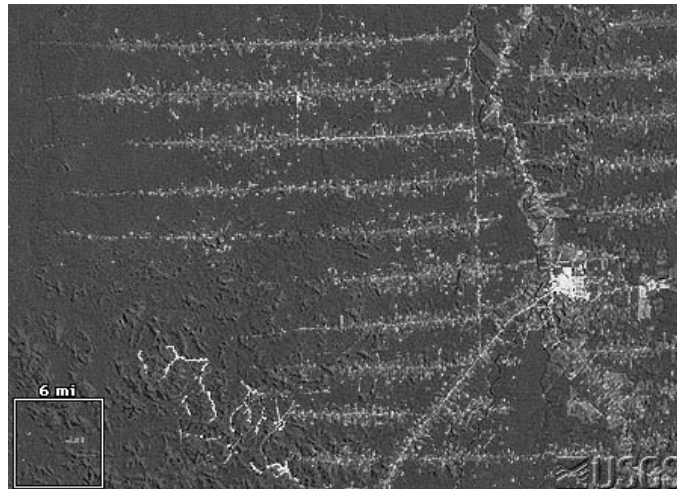
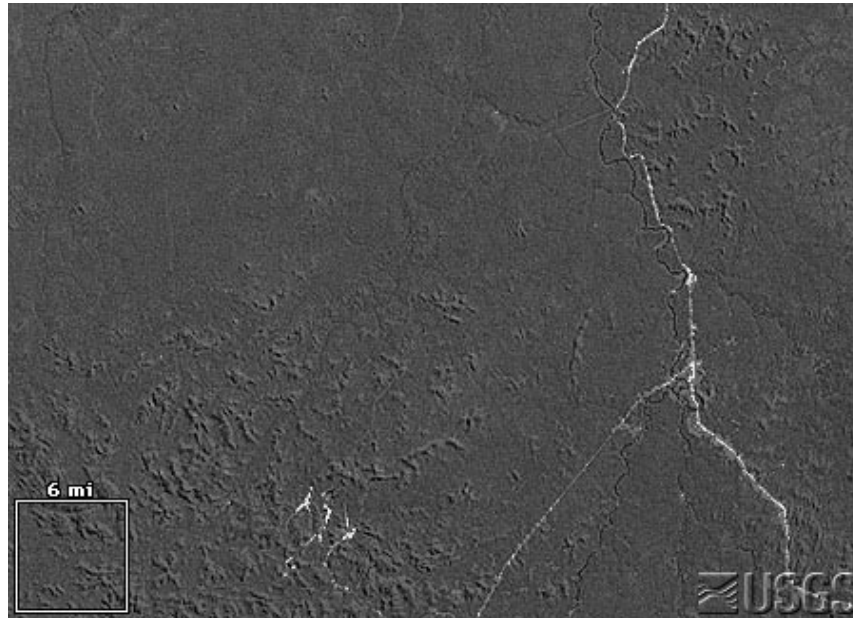
The first U.S. corporate launch of a high resolution commercial satellite by EarthWatch Inc of Longmont, Colorado, failed to achieve a useful orbit in early 1998. That company remains competitive, however, due to its Digital Globe imagery index and planned launch of a second satellite in 1999. But it also laid off much of its staff

within days of the first failed launch. The Lockheed-Martin/Mitsubishi Industries/E-Systems venture known as Space Imaging Inc. had to delay launch of its commercial satellite for more than a year, but predicts it will have its high resolution satellite aloft by summer 1999. The buzz on the street is that a subcontractor's laser gyroscopes used to stabilize the satellite's sensors during flight have tended to wear out more quickly than expected, thus reducing the satellite's useful life. Space Imaging remains upbeat on its launch plans, but declines comment on the reasons for the delays. For the moment, a dark horse candidate, OrbImage (a subsidiary of Orbital Sciences in Dulles, Virginia) might enjoy the lead among U.S. companies in the race to be first in space with a commercial, high resolution earth orbiting satellite.

There is little doubt that one or more of the U.S. high resolution imaging companies will eventually become commercially viable. During recent months, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency has guaranteed U.S.-based imaging companies purchases of up to \$600 million worth of their products over the next five years—and that is before any of the satellites have been launched successfully. (NIMA is the reorganized version of the better known Defense Mapping Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, and several officially non-existent, multi-billion dollar government imagery programs.) Other national governments and major industrial concerns, among them the governments of Canada, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, have offered somewhat similar guarantees. From the point of view of the President's National Security Council (which sets broad U.S. space policy), the potential for profit and geopolitical leverage derived from the commercialization of these technologies is simply too important to pass up.

Significantly, the news media's entry into systematic use of the products of these technologies presents challenges and opportunities that relate directly to the core of news organizations' responsibilities to the public. Earth observation from space provides





Three satellite images of the identical Rondonia region of the Amazon taken in 1975, 1986 and 1992.

These images vividly illustrate the changes occurring in the rain forest due to illegal clear-cut logging.

*Images courtesy of USGS/Landsat.*



rich sources of information that can aid reporters in gathering information for stories and publishing their findings. These images are more than an intriguing backdrop for illustrating stories. When used with a geographic information system, such imagery helps readers and viewers analyze and visualize some complex social issues in somewhat the same way skillful weather forecasts concentrate billions of bits of information into a map or diagram that can be readily understood.

The real power of earth observation imagery and GIS are their ability to help illuminate almost any economic, social or political issue that has a geographic component. Better informed, geographically-based reporting can be done on housing and transportation planning in midsize cities, crime control, armed conflicts in Nigeria or along the Turkish/Syrian border, enforcement of arms control or environmental protection treaties, or the tracking of commercial fishing violations off Georges Bank, for example, when journalists learn how to use these sources of information. Even midsized news organizations already have the potential capacity to provide comprehensive coverage of county-by-county farm production reports from Illinois, Nebraska or other agricultural centers that can be customized for readers or viewers in those counties by using these technologies.

Prices for imagery range from about \$30 to more than \$3,000 per scene, depending on the age, source and ground resolution of the image, as well as the volume of purchases. Many imagery companies are responsive to requests from bona fide news organizations for occasional free use of in-stock imagery, as long as a customary source credit and copyright notice appears with the image's reproduction. Some companies even post an "image of the week" on the Internet which is available to the media to download at no cost. (Those interested should contact the imaging companies directly for details.) Of course, news organizations that demand emergency, first-priority acquisition and processing of new images will have to pay for that privilege, with negotiated prices ranging from

\$5,000 per image and up. And there is no guarantee that the satellite will capture exactly what the news editor might wish to see. Further, an emergency, one-time consultation with a trained image analyst can cost hundreds of dollars per day.

Today, news organizations should team up with universities, think tanks or appropriate experts to ensure they accurately report what satellites and geographic information systems are able to see. Some observers say the day is not so far off when a large news organization may have image interpretation and GIS experts on staff in much the same way they now employ meteorologists. For the moment, however, news organizations are likely to achieve best results from these technologies, at a moderate price, by building carefully selected computer libraries of data relevant to ongoing stories that are almost certain to remain in the news, such as the Middle East, the Korean peninsula or selected world capitals. For metropolitan-based news media, metro-area data is often cheap, flexible and applicable to stories on a remarkably wide range of issues, including crime, the environment and urban sprawl and debates about new highways or sewer systems.

American University's School of Communication has helped pioneer such work among scientists and journalists from more than two dozen nations. On-line mailing lists such as [satshr-l@american.edu](mailto:satshr-l@american.edu) (which specializes in imagery and human rights issues) and [imagsr-l@ces.net](mailto:imagsr-l@ces.net) (for the more technically minded) have begun to trade tips on effective newsroom projects, as well as on identifying the pitfalls and ethical questions that these powerful new tools inevitably raise. Recent A.U. student projects included studies of mining accidents in Colorado and the Philippines, the civil war in Kosovo, and jungle fires in northern Brazil that reached the size of the state of Rhode Island. The school is now working with high school journalists from the Washington, D.C. area to create interactive, geographic Web sites. On these sites, a new generation of journalists is learning how to portray

the vital issues for their home neighborhoods using interactive maps, words, imagery and photographs.

If democracy depends on an informed electorate, then potentially, at least, the news media's use of geospatial technologies can help us look more deeply into places and issues that haven't been easily accessible. As with meteorology, accurately interpreted earth imagery and interactive maps permit millions of people to see in a few seconds what would otherwise take a half hour or more to explain in words. More than that, when produced judiciously and fairly, this form of information-rich news can enhance the visual appeal of media in similar ways to how the arrival of photojournalism transformed the presentation of news in papers and magazines.

Some caveats are crucial. Commercial earth observation does not create the "all-seeing eye" that some fear (and others want) because it will not be able to achieve that degree of visual acuity. If your company really wants a photo of, say, Barbra Streisand's wedding, it's far cheaper and more efficient to hire a small airplane and a photographer, and that option has been open to news organizations since at least the 1930's. Television news most likely will not enjoy the immediate turnaround for high-resolution imagery that spot news reports require, even though Radarsat International and an experimental European program can deliver four- to six-hour turnaround times between acquisition of an image and delivery to a customer. (While that is an extraordinary advance for the imaging industry, the catch remains that it may take more time than a television news producer can afford for the right satellite to arrive at the right spot at the right time to acquire the right image.)

What earth observation combined with GIS *can* do is provide glimpses into places closed to reporters and photographers, such as war zones and nuclear test sites. They can vividly compare and contrast options for environmental protection or upgrading transportation systems, and they can document almost any medium or large-scale human activity such as the build-

ing of a dam—or of a concentration camp. They can reveal the health of forests and help identify urban neighborhoods where construction of a modest clinic could dramatically cut costs at city hospital emergency rooms. And in some instances, GIS computer analysis might help link clusters of disease to specific toxic waste dumps.

The images provide journalists with the raw materials for checking up on international compliance with arms control, environmental and some aspects of human rights treaties. One very important story for which this kind of coverage has already proved invaluable involves the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction in countries where access by any means other than satellite imagery is impossible.

When designing news projects using these imaging techniques, it is probably prudent for journalists to take their initial cues from scientists, intelligence experts and the major resource corporations who have long used earlier, more awkward versions of earth observation and GIS techniques. And remember that these images are most effectively used to document “big picture” changes over time, changes that take place almost unnoticeably, yet affect the lives of millions of people.

Earth observation and GIS will never replace the emotional power of a close-up photograph of a human face. They do, however, provide powerful tools that can transform and enrich democratic debate or reveal some secret terrors of a dictatorship to the world’s view. Those are rare and valuable instruments in any journalist’s tool chest, and ones that many journalists will want to learn how to use properly. ■

*Chris Simpson specializes in information literacy issues at the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C. He directs the school’s Project on Satellite Imagery and the News Media. Simpson spent more than 15 years as a journalist and is author or editor of five books on communication, national security and human rights.*

## Web Sites of Satellite Images

**<http://edcwww.cr.usgs.gov/webglis>**—The U.S. Geological Survey’s EROS Data Center is the government’s primary repository for satellite images, aerial photos, unclassified intelligence imagery from the 1960’s and 1970’s, topographic information and mapping data of all sorts. GLIS is the primary index to the collection and is relatively easy to use considering the vast scope of the material. Declassification of certain intelligence satellite imagery from the later 1970’s and 1980’s is presently underway and will most likely be first available via the USGS site.

**<http://gcmd.gsfc.nasa.gov>** and

**<http://www-eosdis.ornl.gov/daacpages/otherdaacs.html>**—These NASA sites are gateways to a giant, evolving effort to link indexes to imagery around the world known as EOSDIS. The effort is by no means complete and sometimes operates awkwardly, but the sites do permit access to a very wide range of unclassified U.S. government imagery and scientific data gathered from outer space.

**<http://waa.saa.noaa.gov>**—The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration’s index to its weather imagery provides high quality and often free imagery of continent-sized parts of earth. In addition to overhead images of hurricanes and typhoons, it provides wide-angle imagery necessary to see the scope of forest fires throughout the northern Amazon, environmental crises in northern Africa and similar very large scale phenomena.

**<http://www.crisp.nus.edu.sg/crisp.html>**—This Singapore-based ground station provides an index to imagery collected over Southeast and much of South Asia by satellites from the United States, Canada, Europe, SPOT, Japan and other sources.

**<http://isis.dlr.de/services/ISIS/ISIS-query.html>**—This index, sponsored by the German Aerospace Center, provides convenient access to imagery of Europe from several sources as well as links to other indexes worldwide.

**[http://www.eurimage.it/einet/einet\\_home.shtml](http://www.eurimage.it/einet/einet_home.shtml)**—The European Space Agency operates this user-friendly index to imagery collected over Europe, much of the Middle East, and western territories of the former USSR.

**<http://www.fas.org/irp/index.html>**—Operated by the Federation of American Scientists, this index specializes in declassified “spy satellite” imagery and support for treaty verification projects.

**<http://www.spaceimaging.com/home/products/carterra/worldview/index.html>** and **<http://www.spaceimaging.com/home/products/carterra/carterra3d/index.html>**—This is Space Imaging Corporation’s Carterra imagery index, providing access to commercial and unclassified governmental imagery gathered over the United States. The second URL provides the first access to “assembly line” (as distinct from custom-built) fly-through, moving satellite images that simulate the view that a low flying aircraft might see over, say, China’s nuclear test range at Lop Nor.

**<http://www.spot.com>** and **<http://www.spot.com/spot/home/sirius/welcome.htm>**—SPOT Image’s commercial DALI index presently costs \$100 annually to subscribe. It provides an unusually well-organized and complete index for medium resolution imagery (about 30 meters per pixel) for almost any point on earth. SPOT’s imagery at present is often more complete and more current than that of any of its competitors, though not necessarily as useful for presentation of close-up shots of events on the ground. The new Sirius index promises to maintain DALI’s functionality, offer new services, and be available for free. The Sirius product is predicted to be available this spring.

**<http://terraserwer.microsoft.com>**—This very large data collection combines USGS aerial photography of the continental United States with very high resolution imagery gathered throughout the world by Russian Sovinform Sputnik satellites. The USGS data can be downloaded for free; the high quality Russian data is offered at a modest cost but is spotty in its coverage. ■

# Books

**As foreign reporting struggles** to find its foothold in the news that Americans watch, listen to and read, reporters write books about human tragedies they observe. They hope someone will pay attention. We open this section by examining some current trends in foreign news reporting.

**Deborah Amos**, who for many years was a foreign correspondent with National Public Radio, reviews “Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death,” by Susan D. Moeller. Amos concludes that Moeller’s indictment of the media as “dulling the audience’s natural reaction to tragedy” falls a bit shy of the mark in explaining why fewer and fewer foreign stories receive prominent coverage by American media.

**Murray Seeger**, a former foreign correspondent, reviews three books about foreign conflicts—Bosnia, Chechnya and Rwanda—written by journalists. In his review, he explores the difficult circumstances foreign correspondents confront in the post-Cold War era.

**Roy Gutman**, a Newsday correspondent whose reporting disclosed systematic killing at detention camps in northern Bosnia, previews the summer release of the “Crimes of War Project,” an effort to educate news media about humanitarian law. Only by knowing what constitutes a “war crime,” he argues, can journalists accurately report on atrocities they see in covering regional conflicts.

**Orville Schell**, Dean of Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism and a long-time foreign correspondent, looks at business reporting as a new force in foreign news coverage during a Nieman Seminar.

**Athan G. Theoharis**, an expert on secrecy, writes about the government’s oversight of “secrets.” He explains its impact on what journalists (and the public) ought to be able to know by focusing on Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s book as well as on a collection of essays which he edited.

**Joseph Williams** reviews a biography of Ted Poston, The New York Post’s first black reporter. As Williams writes, Poston’s “best work transcended race, but was inextricably bound and ultimately limited by it.”

**Ray Scherer**, who reported for NBC News from the White House for nearly two decades (Truman to Johnson), reviews the memoirs of Richard S. Salant, who was President of CBS News during some of those years. “Salant is gone and so, increasingly, is the straightforward, no-nonsense style of reporting news on the air which he exemplified,” Scherer writes.

**Tom Witosky**, sports-projects reporter for The Des Moines Register, reviews a memoir by Jack Whitaker, a man whose broadcasting career spanned more than 40 years. Golf is his passion, but as Witosky observes the book could be “an interesting read” for non-golfers, as well. ■

# Unraveling the Mystery of Vanishing Foreign News

## Compassion Fatigue:

**How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death**

Susan D. Moeller

Routledge. 390 Pages. \$27.50.

By Deborah Amos

Any reporter working in the twilight of the Cold War and into the 1990's knows how much journalism has changed. The Cold War world was a more predictable place for foreign correspondents. We kept score on the ideological battles of the 20th Century. While some of the hot spots of that period threatened to spill over into conflicts that could have involved the superpowers, the risk of larger involvement meant diplomats were thick on the ground.

In those days, the news business was more predictable, too. There was always a full house of television crews, print magazine and radio reporters for the big stories. Television news functioned as the public service division of hugely profitable networks. News budgets reflected the American public's interest in the world, and an important international development would likely lead the nightly newscasts.

**"The public's appetite for foreign news has changed from a desire for a full meal to a willingness to pick from a revolving tray of light appetizers."**

In the last few years famine, disease and civil wars, the small, nasty, internal conflicts, have become the regular reporting duties of foreign correspondents. These journalists have to take greater personal risk for stories that involve death and destruction. And to tell these stories, reporters are chasing

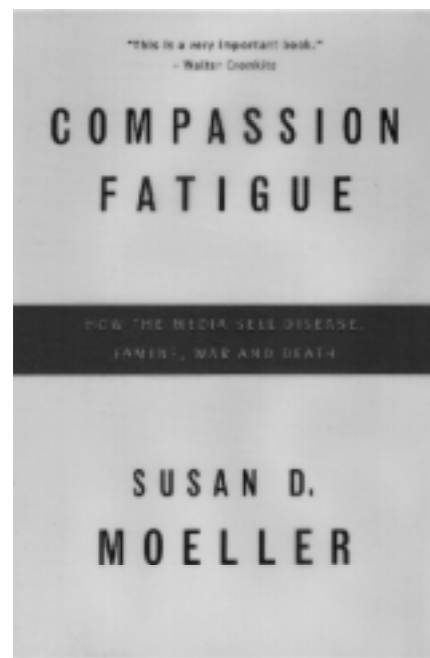
the small personal dramas that appear necessary if connections with today's American audience are to be made.

The news business, that's changed, too. The number of news outlets has exploded, fragmenting the audience, and in this competitive news landscape budgets are being slashed after being scrutinized by different sets of eyes. Network news operations now have to show a profit, just like every other division, as corporate owners keep a watchful eye on the bottom line.

The notion that the public airwaves are a public trust and that news is a civic responsibility has vanished. The real money is in news packaging to a prime-time audience rather than news reporting. Polls also show the public's appetite for foreign news has changed from a desire for a full meal to a willingness to pick from a revolving tray of light appetizers. In part, this is because there are other courses on the news table. Science news and health news, with real breakthroughs that have a direct impact on an individual's quality of life, are more likely to become leads. A tragedy in Rwanda has to compete for air and print time with the news of the cloning of a sheep.

In this atmosphere, it's no wonder that more and more journalists are turning their reporter notebooks into full-length books. There is simply no other form of communication that gives such depth to their experiences.

However, in her book "Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death," Susan Moeller takes a different approach. She has tracked the U.S. news coverage of bloodshed and pestilence around the planet and indicts the media for dulling the audience's natural reaction to



tragedy. Her charge: "The media is now part of the entertainment industry that no longer informs but overhypes select crisis stories." The result is "compassion fatigue," a disease that causes viewers and readers to yawn and turn the page or click to another station. The book is a disappointment not because her concept lacks currency but because Moeller, the Director of Brandeis University's journalism program, fails to make her case.

It's unfortunate, because there is a case to be made. The general level of international reporting has slipped in the last few years. The number of foreign news minutes on the evening news has dropped considerably. While there are foreign news stories that deserve coverage (certainly more than they are receiving now), the economics of television news has altered the process of how coverage is assigned, and this ac-

counts for some of the dearth of coverage in these important stories.

As consumers in this changing world of news, it's important to understand why some news stories get more attention than others. But Moeller relies on her all-purpose notion of "compassion fatigue" as the explanation for the crisis in foreign reporting during the past couple of years. Her measure is far too confining to explain the enormous changes that have taken place both in the audience's receptivity and in the reporters' circumstances.

**"Budget fatigue is more likely the key explanation for the state of the news business today than compassion fatigue."**

Moeller is at her best when weaving recent events with media coverage. One example is her analysis of Saddam Hussein's 1988 campaign of terror against the Kurds that included a poison gas attack and other attempts at extermination. It is true that reports on the tragedy of the Kurds were sporadic, and the coverage failed to ignite the outrage that was due. However, reporters' access to northern Iraq was extremely limited. It is more likely that access was the problem here rather than Moeller's charge that "the media like heroes and villains" and the Kurds didn't fit the bill.

On the crisis in Somalia, Moeller gives an excellent recounting of the events that led to this man-made famine. It is important to remember that the collapse of the Siad Barre regime brought this country into its civil war. It is significant that these events took place at the opening of the Gulf War and so were mostly ignored. The story did become front-page news when President George Bush sent Marines to the Somali capital. However, it is almost silly to suggest, as Moeller does, that "the images pushed Americans to care about helping the Somalis but the pictures did not push them to call for an end of famine everywhere." This is a

lofty but unrealistic sentiment, especially when it is attached with the job journalists are supposed to do. As veteran war correspondent Tom Gjelten wrote about the role of journalists in such situations: "Their major responsibility is to see that the world is explained, not that it is improved."

Moeller hits pay dirt on her critique of the November 4, 1995 coverage of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's Prime Minister. The comparison with the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat 14 years earlier, which her research helps us to see, is telling.

Following Sadat's assassination, all three television networks scrambled to send anchors and crews to Egypt. It was considered newsworthy to explain the death of one of America's best friends in the region. Yitzhak Rabin was killed on a Saturday afternoon, U.S. time. I was in a television newsroom at the time and Moeller is accurate when she writes: "It was an inconvenient time for the networks. Sponsors were paying major money for commercials during the Saturday afternoon sports programs. To interrupt them meant the loss of some premium dollars. ABC, airing college football, broke into the Penn State-Northwestern game with special reports only twice between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m., the first time at 3:30. And NBC, which was televising the Notre Dame-Navy football game, waited until 3:27 to first tell its audience of the shooting." It was a shocking example of the change in the television news business.

Budget fatigue is more likely the key explanation for the state of the news business today than compassion fatigue. Media mergers, changing network ownership, the emergence of cable outlets have all contributed to changing the line-up and content of news programs more than any other non-economic factor. And from the perspective of the news consumer, Moeller hits on another truth when she writes that perhaps another explanation for compassion fatigue is that there are just too many tragedies happening at the same time, tragedies that in earlier times we would not have known

were occurring.

However, all is not as gloomy as Moeller's book suggests. She writes that "we, the consumers of the American media are also tied to the end of a too-short cord. Our cord is the media itself." But there are now more news sources than ever before. Cable channels are filled with programs designed to capture audiences who have special interests, including foreign events. In any one evening in New York City you can see the Russian parliament debate, as well as the British and Canadian news. News from around the world, from sources never before accessible so easily or so quickly, is on the Internet.

There is no doubt that we are in an evolving world of news reporting. As consumers we have to learn how to navigate that world to remain informed. It may well be that news about foreign events will appear on a cable business channel that deals with stock market prices, but the story will get coverage. Although Moeller writes that: "On this side of the Atlantic, the now defunct Brooklyn Eagle reminded its reporters: 'A dog fight in Brooklyn is bigger than a revolution in China,'" this is no longer the case. These days a revolution in China is covered contemporaneously; in fact, the extraordinary events of Tiananmen Square could be seen live on CNN.

This might not have been what "compassion fatigued" viewers would choose to watch on a Friday night, but the choice was theirs to make. And while it's true that television news coverage from China and other foreign places has diminished considerably in the absence of such gripping and visual moments, the reasons merit a broader and more complex analysis than Moeller's book provides. ■

*Deborah Amos, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, has been an ABC news correspondent since 1994. She was the National Public Radio Bureau Chief and a foreign correspondent for NPR from 1982 to 1994.*

---

## Foreign Correspondents Transform Their Coverage Into Books

### **Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia**

Chuck Sudetic

Norton. 393 Pages. \$26.95.

### **Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus**

Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal

New York University Press. 416 Pages. \$26.95.

### **We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow**

### **We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda**

Philip Gourevitch

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 353 Pages. \$25.

### By Murray Seeger

Bosnia, Chechnya and Rwanda form a trio of disaster areas. Different worlds, different people, but common strains of ethnic and religious tension, murder and mayhem trace themselves through the history of these lands.

During the last decade, each of these areas has been manipulated by indigenous politicians who used vicious, medieval tools to consolidate their power and to remove perceived enemies and opponents. The outside world, especially the Western powers, largely stood aside when each region exploded into violence. In none of these places, where internal ethnic, religious and nationalist conflicts have arisen, can anyone say that peace has been restored.

The three books under review represent approaches typical in journalists' books. The authors offer mountains of meticulous reporting, including the essential local histories that torture each area. As book authors, these journalists have fewer constraints in how they employ their reporting, express their personal views, and air their frustrations than they do when acting as reporters. But as often happens when journalists step outside their conventional role, they tend to wade into trouble when they attempt to analyze the politics outside the selected regions or to suggest alternatives to policies that delayed or prevented the

United Nations and individual major powers from intervening. In fact, each of these authors puts their part of the world under a microscope without adequately placing their story within a broader context of post-Cold War global politics.

Bosnia is the best known of these stories since it is part of the contemporary history of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia into its constituent republics. Chuck Sudetic takes a quite personal approach to telling this story in his book. He explores the bloody events of the war in Bosnia by linking his battlefield reporting to the lives of his wife's extended Muslim family, who lived in a mountainous region not far from the border with Serbia. This is the same area about which Ivo Andric wrote his classic novel, "The Bridge on the Drina," which helped him win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961. As tensions between the Bosnian Muslims and Serbs rose, locals smashed a monument to Andric that had been placed on the 16th Century Turkish bridge and threw it into the river, claiming the writer had put Muslims in a bad light.

Sudetic was an American living in Belgrade, where he had met his wife, when he began reporting on the war as a stringer for The New York Times. After five years he was given a staff job and transferred to the metropolitan desk in New York, where he was treated

like most newcomers with limited experience. He decided he was not cut out for daily journalism and fled back to a tenuous existence in Belgrade, pouring his soul into this book.

"The old addiction [the war], my mania, seized me once again and I broke the promise I had made to my wife," Sudetic recalls in the book. "I took off alone for one last stint in Bosnia for the sake of a few stories and words that might lay some living memories of the dead and of a dying world silently to rest." His intense emotions give a strong flavor to his reporting of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the population is divided among Muslims, Orthodox and Roman Catholics. Sudetic describes particularly well the cynical manipulations of the Serb leader, Slobodan Milosevic, as he got local surrogates to carry out his "ethnic cleansing" campaign in Bosnia.

On the other hand, it is depressing to see this bright young reporter tear himself apart over his first major story. He has now left journalism and emigrated to Canada, but this profession needs more reporters like Sudetic. His experience in Bosnia also reminds us of how many significant foreign stories are being covered by "stringers" rather than seasoned staff correspondents as major media cut back on their international bureaus and staff. Thinking of this made me nostalgic for the stories



Rwandan refugees board a cargo plane in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that will take them back to Kigali, Rwanda. A mother sits next to her daughter who died on the runway of Mbandaka's airport after walking more than 1,000 miles through the jungle for seven months. Her other children sit with her. The refugees were scattered all over the jungle when they fled massacres committed by Alliance rebel troops. *Photo by Michael Robinson-Chavez, The Boston Globe.*

sent back by such career correspondents as Bill Touhy, Don Cook, Keys Beech and Henry Mamm, all reporters who could convey the tragedy of war-torn countries without being personally destroyed by the assignments.

Like the Balkan Peninsula, the Caucasus Mountains shelter tribes in small, isolated valleys where they relive ancient hatreds and wait for opportunities to wreak revenge on enemies and rivals. Stalin and Beria, killers with no historic rivals, came from one of the larger republics, Georgia. Nearby, the people of Chechnya were viewed as fierce and anarchic; in Moscow they were regarded as successful and feared gangsters.

The Soviet-imposed order in the area collapsed with Christian Georgia and Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan form-

ing independent states, while smaller, less viable areas remained within the new Russian Federation. The threat that the Muslim Chechens would become independent threatened Moscow's control over the rest of the Caucasus, stirring President Boris Yeltsin to display his muscle by sending the Russian Army down from the north.

Carlotta Gall of the English-language *Moscow Times* and Thomas de Waal, who reported for the same paper as well as for *The Times of London* and *The Economist*, have combined their reportage into this methodical account of the battle for Chechnya which lasted from 1993 to 1997. Like Sudetic's book, their reports emerge from the battlefield. Unlike the young American, these two reporters kept their emotions un-

der control while making a strong case for the cruelty and incompetence of the Russians. In this book we find little to admire about the Chechens, either, who like the Kurds not far to the south seem to live to fight and appear unable to do what it takes to organize themselves into a viable nation. The Chechens fought bravely and fiercely before they were driven from their capital, Grozny, and were forced to make peace and postpone talks about independence until 2002. They exist now as an autonomous "republic" governed by an unstable, local government in an unstable region where western oil interests collide with the regional interests of Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Despite the volatility of this situation and the possible consequences of this instability in this region, this book

received little attention in the United States. This is perhaps because the book was published initially in England, but also because of the methodical style its authors use in walking us through the events of this war. Also, there seems little interest in the Caucasus region by Americans who are tired of reading and hearing about problems besetting the people in what used to be the Soviet Union.

By contrast, Philip Gourevitch, a reporter for *The New Yorker*, has managed with his book to garner the attention of Americans about another region that they generally ignore: Rwanda and central Africa. His book is based on six trips to this tiny, mountainous, beautiful country that held special affection for its former Belgian rulers. The genocide unleashed by the majority Hutus against the minority Tutsis in 1994 was not well covered by the American media. With few reporters stationed in Africa, the ones that were there were distracted by political events in South Africa and were late in covering the brief, bloody war.

In his book, Gourevitch sets forth the official policy in Rwanda that ignited this wave of horror and murders. "The government had adopted a new policy by which everyone in the Hutu majority group was called upon to kill everyone in the Tutsi minority. The government and an astounding number of its subjects imagined that by exterminating the Tutsi people they could make the world a better place, and the killing had followed." Gourevitch turns his late arrival to the scene to his and our advantage as he is able to locate victims and have them retell their stories in their own words. He also tracked down some of the killers, tracing one to Texas.

Sorting through tribal histories, Gourevitch traces these peoples back to their origins, to a time before the population of central Africa was divided arbitrarily by Europeans into colonies that became Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo under Belgian rule. Some of his best reporting recounts the ugly scenes of refugees who fled west in panic from the invasion from Uganda of a well-

trained army led by Tutsis determined to take control from the genocidal Hutu regime. The Hutu fighters squatted in the Congo, reconstituted themselves into a new army, and made victims of the true refugees.

Gourevitch is more of an essayist than the reporters turned authors who wrote about Bosnia or Chechnya. He relishes making historical connections to his family's experience with the Nazi-organized Holocaust, connections that I felt appeared strained, and then reaches afar to punch Thomas Jefferson who had "leisure to think and write as grandly as he did" because of his "unrepentant ownership of slaves." He also takes on an easy target in Washington's unwillingness to get involved in a small, isolated African state where the United States had no compelling interests, a place too close to Somalia where the American participation in an international humanitarian operation turned into a political and military disaster.

The American public, and therefore its government, is not prepared to send its soldiers on dubious missions to faraway lands, particularly if our usual political allies have conflicting interests, as they often do in Africa. And Gourevitch can come up with no formula that would permit white outsiders to intervene successfully in black-ruled countries. Even black-led intervention forces with financial assistance from the West have not been successful in alleviating tensions in such places as Sierra Leone, the Congo or Liberia.

Rwanda remains a frightful contemporary example of officially sponsored murder and inexcusable fumbling by the United Nations and individual countries. But this failure should have been acknowledged within the context of the long history of the destructive intervention by Western nations in the affairs of black African nations. Instead, too often when journalists take on writing about these current atrocities what emerges are only glib policy prescriptions that don't seem well-grounded in either the geopolitical realities of today or the historical roots that were planted decades ago.

While each of these books is well-written and reported, each could have been improved by incorporating these larger contemporary and historic perspectives. If readers are going to be drawn to these stories, part of their appetite for learning more about these distant conflicts will need to come out of a desire to better understand the changing dynamics of the post-Cold War era. This is a time in which America's political, military and economic roles in regional conflicts are still seeking clear definition, and these books—in fact, news coverage in general of such conflicts—can provide important and valuable insights.

Too often, however, a weary American public is freed from the need to pay attention to such stories by a media, especially television, which have largely given up on providing comprehensive coverage of foreign news. Of course, when particular incidents carry immense shock, such as embassy bombings, or when American interests have been defined by past conflicts or present clashes, such as Israel, Iraq and Korea, news coverage is more consistent and better informed. But part of what it ought to mean to be a journalist is to confront in a responsible way the decisions about reporting on what the audience "wants" to know and what it might need to become better informed about. The positive reception Gourevitch's book has received from critics, in particular, provides some measure of hope that the critical lessons of these distant conflicts that these and other journalists are chronicling will, in time, seep into our national consciousness. ■

*Murray Seeger, a 1961 Nieman Fellow, is a former foreign correspondent, is Washington, D.C. representative of the Committee to Protect Journalists and Executive Director of the Newspaper Guild Committee on the Future of Journalism.*



# What Difference Would It Make If Reporters Knew a War Crime When They Saw One?

*This article is excerpted from a paper prepared by Roy Gutman, a correspondent for Newsday, for the International Studies Association conference held in Vienna, Austria in September 1998.*

By Roy Gutman

**H**uman rights abuses, war crimes and impunity are the stuff of journalism for the simple reason that crime is news. The traditional watchdog function requires media to report on disregard for the law, especially if that is the attitude of a State or an institution supported by taxpayer's money.

Yet media coverage of international or internal conflict is rarely framed in terms of infractions of the laws of war. International humanitarian law is a thicket of interconnected assumptions, principles, statements and caveats that most laypersons find impenetrable. Would a grasp of human rights and the Geneva Conventions produce better news coverage? Personal experience leads this reporter to think it would.

Reporters were among the first to discover that major governments, far from upholding humanitarian law, would just as soon walk away from it in the absence of vital or commercial interests or a carefully trained spotlight. Early in August 1992, following my own reports disclosing systematic killing at detention camps in northern Bosnia, the stunning television footage by the British ITN network, and the on-site reporting by Ed Vulliamy of The Guardian, United States President George Bush issued a stern-sounding but evasive statement that nonetheless reflected a clear grasp that international humanitarian law had been violated. He did not denounce crimes against humanity, demand the closure of the camps, the freeing of the prisoners, or even an investigation to determine whether crimes had occurred. His only demand was that the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) be granted access to Omarska and other camps. Other major governments were slower to respond.

What role can or should reporters play in alerting the world to infractions of humanitarian law? Can they put a spotlight on these violations, if in fact they are not certain themselves what constitute transgressions of humanitarian law? And if they did know, would it make a difference in how these stories are reported and, in turn, how these events are regarded and treated by the international community? How is a reporter to know a war crime when he or she sees it? Too often, what happens is that journalists observe gross abuse and don't call it by its real name, a war crime. What in the past have been called "tragedies" are, in fact, grave breaches of international law, but the law is so complicated and so poorly understood by journalists that their reporting often falls short.

The potential impact of improved coverage of this issue on public awareness is hard to assess in the abstract, but in certain circumstances it could be substantial. Had the media covered the abuses in the Croatia war of 1991 more skillfully, the reportage would have alerted the world to the true nature of the conflict and prepared it better for the explosion of crimes in the 1992-1995 Bosnia conflict. And had reporters provided the legal frame of reference for the systematized maltreatment they found in the Bosnian Serb concentration camps, the widespread and systematic rape, the destruction of culture, the attacks on cities and civilians during the Bosnia conflict, then the public and major governments might have had a better frame of reference for

determining a response.

Reporters cannot play the role of judge or jury in a war crimes case, nor should they advocate policy responses. The reporter's proper role is that of watchdog: to alert the public to the first signs of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. Until and unless there is an effective International Criminal Court with an active prosecutor who has a method, staff and the necessary access to chase down allegations, I am not sure who except the media can investigate, document and present the evidence of crimes in real time. Doing this properly and avoiding major errors requires professional skills, patience, resources and risks that are not always in ample supply in the news media.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions, far from being outdated or overtaken by events, might provide the public a normative guide to what matters in conflict. After all, they represent the lessons learned after the century's worst conflict; and their content, much of which dates back a good deal further, has a certain logic to it. While the ICRC properly seeks to encourage observance by citing positive examples, the news media can properly put the spotlight on war crimes. Public grasp of what is at stake in war will be enhanced if reporters know which acts are legal and which are criminal, particularly in the era now opening of international courts to hear cases of abuse.

At the end of what may well be remembered as the decade of ethnic cleansing, at the close of a century of wars waged against civilians, and at the turn of a tumultuous millennium, perhaps it is time to make the public more

aware of these same distinctions.

In an effort to raise awareness of international humanitarian law, a group of reporters and law scholars, with the backing of American University's Washington College of Law and its Department of Communications, have organized the "Crimes of War Project." The project's aim is to educate the news media in the United States and abroad about humanitarian law. A pocket guide to war crimes—including 60 articles by reporters about grave breaches of the

Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity—will be available later this summer. Some examples will be unambiguous in terms of how they represent violations of this law. Others will be more ambiguous, but in each instance a discussion of the applicable law will provide guidance. There will also be articles from coverage of nine major wars, with reporters taking a fresh look from the perspective of international humanitarian law and, more specifically, at war crimes.

Making the determination whether an incident rises to the level of a war crime is unfortunately a task that journalist should now consider taking on given the brutal conflicts they are now sent to cover. While the process of learning about what constitutes such crimes requires time and effort, I think the value of doing so will be reflected in the coverage that results. ■

## Can Business Reporting Become a Positive New Force In Foreign News Coverage?

*This is excerpted from a December 18 Nieman seminar in which Orville Schell, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Berkeley, offered his perspective on foreign news coverage.*

**Q**uestion: Why should the average American newspaper reader care about China? The second broader question is how should American newspapers be writing about foreign news in a way that engages readers? During the last 20 years the ways that Americans get news have changed so much, and Americans' interest in it reflects that change. Can we write about foreign countries the same way in 1998 and 1999 as we did in 1978 and 1979?

Orville Schell: The conventional media wisdom, as you know, is that even though the world is more globalized now than ever, these days nobody cares about foreign news. And yet still in some ways, it's true that people are presumed not to be interested in world affairs. Of course, in another way I think such disinterest is a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if nobody hears classical music, nobody is going to learn to really appreciate classical music. You don't just turn on Wagner for the first time and say "wow!" But actually, as Mark Twain said, "Wagner is not as bad as it sounds." It just takes acquiring a taste for it.

What I mean to say is that you basically have to become cultivated to something like foreign news, you have to

learn to understand it to really have it be meaningful and to enjoy it. So I find it quite alarming that there is this common wisdom that nobody wants to hear about foreign news, and that's that....

I think there is a new way into foreign news stories at this point in history. That way is through business. But I must add that this way leaves me of two minds. I mean, now, business is "the story" and in Asia business news is particularly big—whether it's economic miracle or meltdown. Actually, I personally don't find purely business stories that interesting. I'm much more interested in history, culture, politics, art, things like that. But that's just my own bias. However, business reporting presents an opportunity, a challenge, that is to take business as the central beating heart and then to try and relate it to other topics—to have it lead into other areas of life.

I'm not sure that business reporters have done that as well as they might or that people who aren't business reporters know how to tap into the business side of the story to get to something larger that might help clarify questions of what's going on, for instance, in literature, art and society.

It's really interesting what's happening because of the marketplace in publishing; that is, after all, a business story with profound political and societal implications. So business does present a way to experiment with writing about foreign stories and other subjects that haven't been fully explored. In fact, I'm trying to get a chair set up at Berkeley to do precisely this. You know, find someone who can think about a really broad view of business reporting. How does business reporting affect human rights? How does it affect culture, religion? It's really an interesting subject when you start opening the door on it. And I think that's what's missing in much reporting these days. We end up with a kind of mono-cultural approach to business journalism. We get a Bloomberg and Dow Jones view of the world and few people want to look at the larger societal effects of it all. After all, business is the animating force in this fin de siècle world of ours, and it is having a profound effect not just on commerce and finance, but on every aspect of our lives, from politics and science, to psychology and culture. ■

# The Culture of Secrecy: Can It Be Cracked Open?

## **Secrecy: The American Experience**

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Yale University Press. 262 Pages. \$22.50.

## **A Culture of Secrecy: The Government Versus the People's Right to Know**

Edited by Athan G. Theoharis

University Press of Kansas. 245 Pages. \$29.95.

### **By Athan G. Theoharis**

Has unwarranted secrecy caused needless harm to a democratic society and in the process to the practice of investigative journalism? These two books answer affirmatively. They share a commitment to openness and regard the post-Cold War era as an unparalleled opportunity to challenge a secrecy system based exclusively on standards imposed by executive orders. The authors, nonetheless, offer differing conceptions of the nature and scope of our nation's current secrecy problem. Simply put, Daniel Patrick Moynihan defines the problem as "Can secrets be known?" whereas the Athan G. Theoharis-edited collection reframes the issue as "Can secrets ever be known?"

For journalists, questions about the secrecy of information—How it is made secret? How long it is kept secret? And by whom?—are critical to the ability of reporters to tell the whole story to a public that more often than not has a right to know, if only after the fact.

Moynihan's tightly argued book offers an historical overview of the evolution and costs of an unprecedented commitment to secrecy (dating only from World War I). International developments, and a companion internal security concern about subversion, he maintains, contributed to the over-classification of information, the rationalization of security procedures, and the creation of bureaucracies committed to secrecy. He then evaluates the adverse consequences of these practices: the precluding of independent critical evaluations of anachronistic or faulty

assumptions, the unintentional promoting of popular belief in conspiracies, and the allowing of bureaucrats to withhold secret information from presidents and members of Congress even when such information could have ensured a more reasoned decision. The Cold War, Moynihan concludes, "bequeathed to us a vast security system that shows no sign of receding" but, he argues, "it is time to dismantle government secrecy...and to begin building the supports for the era of openness that is already upon us." To achieve this, classification and declassification should be based on legislation—not on executive orders—and overseen by the creation of an independent National Declassification Center.

Moynihan's assessment captures the frustration of most journalists covering national politics and intelligence issues. But it misses two other troubling aspects of the secrecy problem highlighted in the Theoharis collection: special records procedures to ensure the undiscoverable destruction of politically sensitive documents and the courts's role in effectively neutralizing an opportunity for openness.

Dating from the 1940's, FBI and CIA officials purposefully sought to make certain that their destruction of specified records could never be traced. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover required the use of "Do Not File" memoranda for requests and authorization of "clearly illegal" break-ins, and "summary memoranda" for reporting derogatory information concerning "criminal or corrupt practices, subversive activities, and

immoral conduct" of members of Congress. There were also "blue/pink" documents (called this because of the color paper these secret memos were written on), and then "informal" memoranda for communications about sensitive and administrative matters by senior FBI officials. These procedures guaranteed that the resultant records would not be indexed or filed in the FBI's central records system. This allowed such records to be destroyed without leaving a trace.

In addition, Hoover maintained at least two secret office files and instructed his administrative assistant, Helen Gandy, to destroy one of them in the event of his death. She did. CIA officials similarly maintained in their offices records which were not to be incorporated within the Agency's official records—"files of convenience or working files," "privacy channel cables," "shadow files," "soft files." In addition, dating (at least) from the 1960's, even some official CIA files were purposefully destroyed—those pertaining to the Agency's 1953 covert operation to overthrow the Mossadegh government in Iran, others relating to the Agency's assassination planning and drug testing programs, and the tapes and transcripts of CIA Director Richard Helms's telephone and office conversations.

These record destruction practices were uncovered only in the mid-1970's when for the first time Congress investigated the authority and covert activities of the intelligence agencies. Congress's interest was triggered by the Senate Watergate Committee's rev-

elations of how President Nixon had used secrecy to abuse power, as well as a concurrent controversy over the possible destruction of his Oval Office tapes. Shortly before resigning as President, Nixon made an agreement with the head of the General Services Administration under which he retained exclusive control over his presidential papers and the right to destroy the Oval Office tapes once the criminal prosecution of White House aides was concluded. Congress responded by enacting the Presidential Recording and Materials Preservation Act (PRMPA). This assigned control of Nixon's presidential papers and the Oval Office tapes to the National Archives and mandated the early release of those tapes pertaining to the former President's "abuses of power." Congress also approved a series of amendments to the 1966 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to promote the release of the records of the intelligence agencies (FBI, CIA, and National Security Agency, NSA).

These legislative initiatives, however, did not achieve the intended goal of creating an "era of openness" nor did they "dismantle government secrecy." Relying on the FOIA, journalists, activists and scholars requested specific FBI, CIA and NSA files. When processing these requests agency officials, by broadly interpreting the Act's provisions regarding exemptions, either heavily redacted or withheld in entirety the requested files. At the same time, FBI officials drafted in 1975-1977, and the National Archives approved, plans to destroy all closed-field office files and a massive headquarters file on the Sex Deviates program, which sought to identify and then purge homosexuals from various jobs.

As the intelligence agencies claimed FOIA exemption, journalists and others filed lawsuits challenging these decisions. Former President Nixon went to court to challenge the legality and then the implementation of the PRMPA. In a series of crucial FOIA rulings, the courts ruled against those who challenged the system. One court rebuffed on "national security" grounds journalist Harrison Salisbury's claim demanding the release of NSA records

about him, including reports the NSA had disseminated to the FBI and CIA.

Salisbury's FOIA suit was not a personal matter but is important for an understanding of the relationship between journalists and the intelligence community. Given Salisbury's assignment as the first U.S. correspondent in Moscow, and then the controversy surrounding his reports from Hanoi challenging the Johnson administration's claims of precision bombing, the question arises: Had the NSA intercepted Salisbury's communications with Times's editors in New York and disseminated this information to the FBI and CIA?

Another judge ruled that the National Security Council's (NSC) electronic records of the Reagan Administration were not releasable under the FOIA. The decision held that the NSC was a presidential advisory body, not a federal agency, and thus presidents controlled the timing of release of such records subject to the Presidential Records Act of 1978.

Ironically, some of the requested NSC records had been created under a "do not log" procedure devised by NSC officials Oliver North and John Poindexter. Because these records were not logged in the NSC's central records system, they could be safely destroyed, and were with the inception of the Iran-contra investigation. Only North's failure to have also destroyed the memory safeguard of the NSC's computer system permitted the reconstruction of some of these records. Poindexter, in contrast, was even more thorough.

In ruling on Nixon's suits, the court upheld the constitutionality of the PRMPA but subsequently denied that the National Archives could retain any "personal" material in the Nixon papers and tapes. These would have to be returned to the Nixon estate. And the Nixon estate was entitled to financial compensation for the "taking" of his presidential papers.

To focus solely on over-classification misses a more disturbing aspect of our secrecy problem. That is what I call "the culture of secrecy" that underlies executive officials' belief in their pro-

prietary right and responsibility to determine whether information generated in the course of doing the public's business should be disclosed and which of their agency's records should be preserved. It is significant to note that under current classification restrictions, records which FBI and CIA officials had purposefully destroyed would not have been released in the immediate or foreseeable future. These officials' objective was not to reduce the risk of harm to the national security should classified information be released. Instead, they intended to sanitize the record, to ensure that controversial and abusive practices could never be discovered and never reported in the press.

Congress remains unwilling to reverse the courts' deference to executive secrecy claims by legislating different standards that would give greater weight to disclosure than to continuing secrecy. Such legislation was proposed by Senator Moynihan in 1997. Instead, in 1998, Congress suspended the automatic declassification requirements of President Clinton's 1995 executive order governing records that are more than 25 years old. That suspension would require that the more than a billion pages of such records be reviewed page by page "to prevent the inadvertent release of records containing Restricted Data (RD) and Formerly Restricted Data (FRD)."

The course this debate over secrecy takes will go a long way toward determining whether journalists and others will gain the kind of access they should have to records of public decision-making. Right now, the public record is not being well served by the decisions of a few to shield many from "secrets" that all of us should know. ■

*Athan Theoharis is a professor of history at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who has focused on the FBI in his work. His books include "Spying on Americans" and "From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover."*

# Race Intrudes on a Newspaperman's Career

## Ted Poston: Pioneering American Journalist

Kathleen Hauke

University of Georgia Press. 326 Pages. \$29.95.

By Joseph Williams

In today's age of hyper-speed journalism, where news cycles change hourly and consumers can get stories at the click of a mouse, it's interesting to note how little has changed. The best reporters rely on shoe leather and guile and are willing to do what it takes to get the story. Considering the state of African-Americans in the newsroom, however, the old maxim seems to apply: The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Though it's been at least 30 years since mainstream newspapers were widely integrated, relatively few blacks have advanced to upper-level leadership in those newsrooms; meanwhile, most African-American reporters either assume or are assigned the task of reporting on minority affairs for a readership that's increasingly white.

That irony kept recurring as I read "Ted Poston: Pioneering American Journalist," a biography by Kathleen Hauke, an independent scholar in Atlanta. The book chronicles the life and times of Poston, The New York Post's first black reporter. Though Lester A. Walton, who briefly worked for The New York World around the turn of the century, broke the color line, Poston's life and career was defined by a paradox common to black journalists in the modern age: His best work transcended race, but was inextricably bound and ultimately limited by it.

Poston's remarkable life is fascinating in historical context alone. He was a union activist, chronicled the Harlem Renaissance, and was a "Black Cabinet" advisor to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. He covered the trial of the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama, wrote a pioneering series examining race relations in New York and Dixie, and was part of the New York social scene dur-

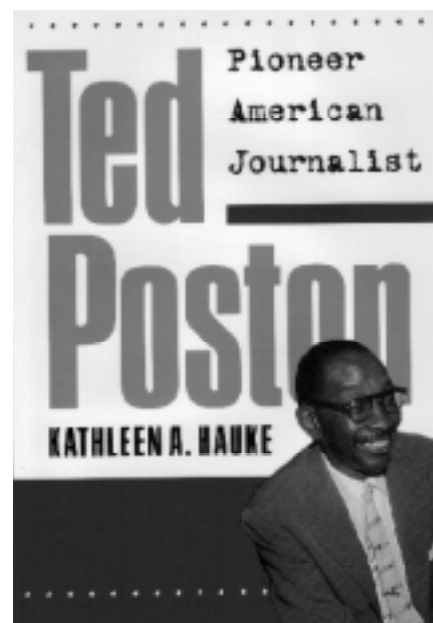
ing the 1940's and 1950's. His friends included Thurgood Marshall, Dorothy West and Henry Lee Moon, an influential member of the NAACP.

Hauke paints a detailed portrait, one researched during 10 years without any comprehensive sources; Poston left behind few memoirs or personal papers, and The Post restricted Hauke's access to its archives. She managed to reassemble Poston's life through his surviving friends, official memos, records and even his divorce papers, detailing his battles against racism and his own personal demons.

The eighth child of Ephraim and Molly Poston, Theodore Roosevelt Augustus Major Poston was taught at an early age to uplift the race. His parents were both educators, and his oldest brothers joined Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). His father and brother even tried to establish a black paper, The Hopkinsville Defender, but it failed, wrecking the family finances.

At Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College, Poston was a bright, energetic student whose resourcefulness and drive showed up early. Lacking the funds even for a proper collegiate wardrobe, he paid his tuition as a railroad porter. Though hard, demeaning work, Poston saw the country and developed a love of newspapers. At layovers, he read every paper he could, particularly influential black periodicals like The Baltimore Afro-American and The Chicago Defender.

By the time he neared the end of college, Poston knew he wanted to be a newsman. He moved to New York to help his brothers produce The Crusader, the UNIA journal, and moonlighted for Harlem's Amsterdam News as a freelance reporter and columnist.



During the early 1920's, as the Communist Party began to recruit blacks seeking equality, Poston joined a cadre of black artists, writers and intellectuals for an all-expenses-paid first-class trip to Russia. Though the project on race relations ultimately failed, Poston and Moon, then a fellow writer for The Amsterdam News, produced a wildly successful English-language daily. Poston's career path had been established.

Back in New York, Poston and Moon rejoined The News, but labor strife and uncertain management made it a short stay. Poston, newly married to a young Harlem woman who was enthralled by his personality, emerged as an up-and-coming talent while covering the Scottsboro trial in Alabama—an assignment in which his experience as a porter came in handy. He became active in the city's guild newspaper movement, a relationship that helped lead the financially shaky News to fire him.

During the Depression, Poston and Moon both did brief stints with the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal program, until it was shut down in 1936. When *The New York Times* rejected them, Poston found work at *The New York Post*, long a bastion of liberalism. But he had to prove himself first to City Editor Walter Lister. Hauke writes that Lister, "certain that he would never hire a Negro, agreed to pay Ted 30 cents an inch if he could find 'one story that's an exclusive that any other reporter doesn't have.'" That day, Poston had his scoop: A white process server, trapped by an angry mob in Harlem, was rescued by a policeman near a subway turnstile. The man was headed to deliver papers on legendary radio missionary Father Divine.

Despite the cold shoulder from other reporters and some sources, Poston parlayed his uptown connections into several Post scoops and exclusives. He briefly left the paper for a stint in FDR's "Black Cabinet," a coalition of African-American thinkers who advised the President on racial matters. But Poston, a dyed-in-the-wool newsman, returned to *The Post* when FDR, his "spiritual father," died. Back in New York with his second wife, the socialite Marie

Byrd, Poston's career took off during *The Post's* golden era.

But racism overshadowed his success. Up for a Pulitzer for his work covering the trial of four black boys accused of raping a white housewife in Florida, a jealous colleague sabotaged Poston's nomination. Still, Hauke writes, Poston "enticed the mainstream white ethnic readership to learn about black culture, and of course through his work, blacks could read about themselves in the context of the broad American spectrum. Explaining Negroes palatably to whites wearied him but, as a colleague says, 'it was his race and he wanted to do that.'"

Throughout the 1940's up to the early 1960's, Poston's career flourished, including close coverage of the integration of Little Rock's Central High School and the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling. But it stalled when Alvin Davis—Poston's former drinking and poker buddy—was appointed Managing Editor at age 35. Davis wanted a new kind of coverage for the old-school liberal Post, and Poston's style didn't fit in with his vision.

Poston's career rallied when Davis was dismissed after a series of mistakes, but not for long. A hard drinker

and lifelong smoker, Poston developed arteriosclerosis in the mid-1960's and was largely viewed as a relic by the new generation of black reporters hired by *The Post*. The beginning of the end came when he was sent to cover the assassination of Martin Luther King: Poston got drunk in a Memphis bar and missed deadline as black America burned. Within a few years he had retired, and his third wife had divorced him. By 1974, he was dead.

Given the complexity of her subject and a lack of resources, Hauke does an extraordinary job detailing Poston's life—proven by more than 70 pages of footnotes and a 59-page bibliography and index. Unfortunately, her academic writing style is somewhat dry and lacks narrative; the effect is like a collage instead of a painting. The footnotes are also somewhat distracting. But overall, Hauke puts Poston's life in perspective and makes the ironies for today's black journalists even clearer. ■

*Joseph Williams, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, is City Editor of The Boston Globe.*

## A Desire to Tell People What They Ought to Know

### Salant, CBS, and The Battle for the Soul of American Journalism:

#### The Memoirs of Richard S. Salant

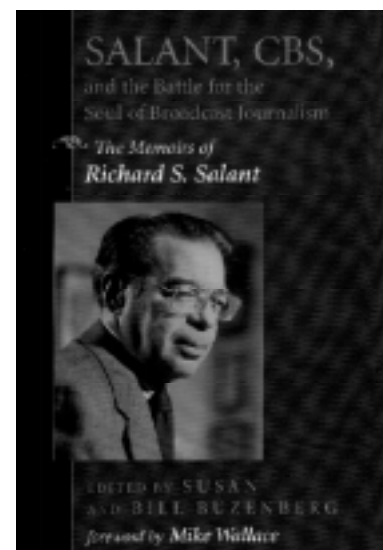
Compiled and Edited by Susan and Bill Buzenberg  
Eastview Press. 331 Pages. \$27.

By Ray Scherer

Dick Salant, the CBS corporate lawyer whom Frank Stanton named president of his news division in 1961, was so wedded to his job that he watched the Cronkite evening news in his limousine every night while being driven home. Once he arrived there, he played back the ABC and NBC versions of the evening news and made notes of what he liked and disliked. The next morning he peppered his deputies with memos, comments, complaints and admonitions—so many of them that

Gordon Manning, Vice President for News, said, "My God, he's writing them faster than I can read them."

By 1999 standards Salant was unbelievably high-minded and old-fashioned. He drew as sharp a line as he could between news and entertainment. For news shows he ruled against music and opening fanfare. He was a world-class grammarian with an overriding concern for content. Pictures were of secondary importance.



He bridled at any tendency to aim at the emotions rather than the mind. Salant subscribed to the Reithian BBC philosophy that it was radio and television's stern duty to tell people what they ought to know. As he put it to one critic, "I feel strongly that it is a journalist's function to tell people what they ought to know, and not take public opinion surveys to find out what is most interesting, titillating, and amusing in the way of news. It has always been the function of editors and journalists to choose those news stories which are most important, and the fact that many people may not be initially interested in them cannot deter us. I am afraid that is elitist, but it is the true profession of journalism."

Salant spent much of his 16 years as head of CBS defending the troops. When various critics jumped on Walter Cronkite for "editorializing" in 1968 for declaring that the only way out of the Vietnam quagmire was to negotiate, Salant bent his rules and declared that "there are some extraordinary occasions when our senior correspondents should, on the basis of personal surveys and observations, be given permission to state conclusions."

When Dan Rather's removal from the White House beat to be one of the lead correspondents in "CBS Reports" was seen by some as a demotion, Salant said, somewhat extravagantly, that he had told Dan that any time he wanted to go back to the White House, he could do so. "As a matter of fact, as far as I am concerned, I would be delighted if he went back as President of the United States."

He claimed to be "heartbroken" when the gruff and acerbic Hughes Rudd came a cropper on the "CBS Morning News." Salant said he "loved" Howard K. Smith, but had to fire him for violating CBS policy against editorializing. Elsewhere in his book, Salant admits to a major mistake in bringing the egoistic David Schoenbrun home from Paris to head the CBS Washington bureau. Salant's conclusion: "Management—the bureau chief's job—and reporting should not be combined in a single person, particularly when the person has an insatiable appetite for

power, for airtime, and visibility." He came close to firing Dan Schorr for a number of reasons, but Schorr beat CBS to the punch by resigning. Salant concedes it "was a notable black mark on his watch" to hire Sally Quinn as co-anchor of the morning news. He felt that Quinn "could not make the adjustment to television," and CBS let her go.

When CBS got into grievous trouble with Congress over their new documentary "The Selling of the Pentagon" and demanded the outtakes, Salant tucked the reels of film and other material in the trunk of his car to protect them from subpoena.

These anecdotes are a random sampling of many inside revelations in this memoir which is not strictly a memoir, but an edited compilation of 3000 pages of Salant's recollections, memories and speeches. Before he died Salant told his family, "I can't do it," and stopped work on what he called "the world's longest unfinished book on news." Fortunately for the historical record of broadcast journalism, the Buzenbergs have managed to boil down Salant's 40 pounds of memory to a trim 300, often fascinating, pages.

His legacy, as illuminated in this book, is large. Salant played a major role in expanding the evening news to half an hour. He shepherded many other news programs, such as "60 Minutes" and "Calendar." His 16 years at the helm of CBS spanned cosmic news events—Watergate, the Civil Rights Movement, the assassination of President Kennedy, space exploration. Each of these was seminal reportage in an era when TV news came of age.

His most notable contribution was setting high standards and keeping the conscience of broadcast news. Newsmen who reported to him have no hesitancy in proclaiming him "the best boss we ever had." He took as much pride in maintaining the integrity of the news as he did in restoring the Cronkite show to the top after the ascendancy of Huntley-Brinkley.

Salant was promised a consultancy after he took mandatory retirement from CBS at the age of 65 in 1979, but it never developed. He hated retirement and, somewhat warily, was per-

suaded to become Vice-Chairman of NBC. The atmosphere there proved uncongenial, and he soon decided that NBC was not a place where he could be useful. In 1983, still afraid to retire, he became President of the National News Council. His old network, CBS, supported the Council, but other big players, notably The New York Times, felt that the Council threatened the papers' independence. When the Council folded in 1984 Salant ruefully concluded that he had "retired five years too late."

That did not deter him from continuing as an apostle for better broadcast journalism. He took to the luncheon circuit to decry the intrusion of soft news and disappearance of serious-issue documentaries. On February 16, 1993 Salant gave a talk in Fairfield, Connecticut. His theme was the blurring of news and entertainment. He had begun to answer questions when, suddenly, he slumped to the floor with a fatal heart attack.

Salant is gone and so, increasingly, is the straightforward, no-nonsense style of reporting news on the air which he exemplified. The proliferation of magazine shows has inexorably changed the focus of the news divisions. Network news viewing is steadily going down. Every year brings smaller audiences. Ownership changes bring with them an erosion in standards. Foreign news and Washington coverage is shrinking.

The editors of this book write that Richard Salant's life in broadcast journalism has come to symbolize the profession's highest ideals. "Some day," they conclude, "in a less profit-and-ratings-driven era, his enlightened blueprint for broadcast journalism will again point the way for others who know that the First Amendment is not just a license to make money but that it comes with enormous responsibility to serve the public."

Let us all embrace this hope, but I wouldn't bet the farm on it. ■

*Ray Scherer was White House Correspondent for NBC News during the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson years.*

# Golf Offers a Window on Our Changing World

## Preferred Lies and Other Tales: Skimming the Cream of a Life in Sports

Jack Whitaker

Simon and Schuster. 272 Pages. \$24.

By Tom Witosky

There is a movie scene that haunts just about every serious sportswriter I know. In "North Dallas Forty," actor Mac Davis, who portrays a grizzled veteran quarterback, explains to wide receiver Nick Nolte why breaking an arm during a professional football game actually felt good.

"It made me feel like I was doing something important," Davis says, with chilling effect.

It is the sportswriter's curse to know that same feeling.

How could something so unimportant in the whole scheme of things in life become such a serious center of attention in American society?

Jack Whitaker—in a memoir from more than 40 years of sports broadcasting from major sports venues for CBS and ABC—does an admirable job of trying to answer this question. But as with many of Whitaker's simple-but-eloquent commentaries, it takes some time to absorb the message.

"Sports cannot end wars, erase racism, or end poverty, but properly guided, they can be a more positive force in these areas than they are now. To help with that guidance seems a worthwhile challenge for a new generation of sportscasters and sportswriters. All they must remember is that it's an adventure, not brain surgery on children," he concludes.

And for Whitaker, whose sports telecasting career from the 1960's to the 1990's spanned the greatest explosion in sports interest in the country's history, it's been an adventure that afforded him the best of life—lots of travel, lots of famous friends, lots of money and lots of golf—something he

acknowledges almost too eagerly.

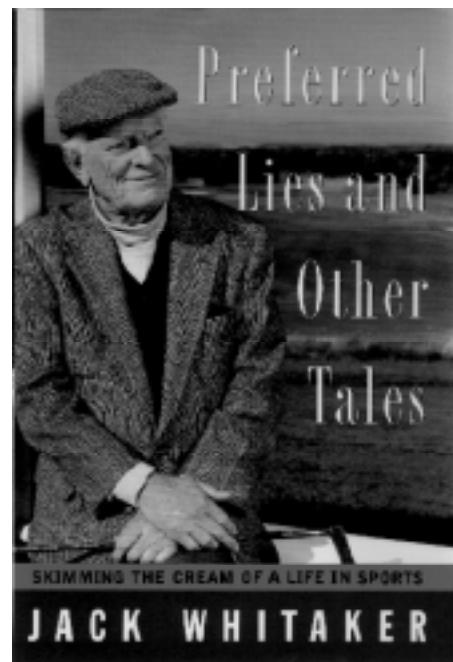
Like any sportswriter or broadcaster who has spent so many years on the road, Whitaker has compiled a marvelous collection of stories about athletes, broadcasters and other sports figures from the worlds of football, baseball, track, the Olympics, but most of all, golf. Many will hit readers' palates like a dry white wine, but there are a couple of boilermakers in the mix.

My favorite is about golfer Bob Rosberg, who worked with Whitaker on many golf telecasts, and a fan of the late Tony Lema, who died in an airplane crash in 1966 just after becoming a star on the professional golfers tour. Rosberg and Lema battled in a playoff in the 1963 Orange County Open at a time when Lema was about to leave the tour because of poor play. On the first playoff hole, Lema hooked his tee-shot into the trees, but found his ball barely in bounds. Lema went on to defeat Rosberg.

Thirty years later, a Lema fan found Rosberg at an ABC-telecast tournament and reminded him of the hooked shot. The fan reported to Rosberg that he, too, was on that first playoff hole, had found Lema's ball out of bounds, and had kicked it back into play, paving the way for Lema to win.

Rosberg, whose sardonic sense of humor delighted Whitaker over the years, replied: "If you hadn't done that, he'd [Lema] still be alive."

Another favorite anecdote is about Laddie Lucas, a top English amateur golfer, who became an RAF fighter pilot during World War II. Whitaker had been told a story about Lucas crash-landing his shot-up plane on a fairway



of a golf course Lucas had played often. Upon further investigation for a television piece, Whitaker learned that the story wasn't quite true. Lucas had tried to land on the course, but missed the fairway and ended up walking away from the plane after it landed in a nearby field.

As he was helped from the plane, Lucas reportedly said: "Never could hit that fairway with a driver, don't know why I thought I could hit it with an airplane."

One warning: If you aren't a golfer, you're likely to find the book more than boring. Whitaker's love affair with golf is almost overwhelming even for those of us who are avid about what he



calls "the most movable feast of all." There are abundant stories about Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and Arnold Palmer, just to list a few of the names Whitaker casually drops.

Whitaker is unabashed and unapologetic about this. "A journalist's life is a happier one if the people he writes and talks about are the great ones, whether they are politicians, statesmen, entertainers or sports figures. My generation was fortunate to have great subjects," he writes.

Unlike most sportswriters and broadcasters whose jobs are covering high school sports, college athletics and maybe a professional team or two, Whitaker spent his career covering legends of American sport. But that also raises a nagging question about sportswriting and sports broadcasting during this period: Just where were the hard-hitting reporters who cared less about having lunch or a drink with a legend than revealing the truth about them and the business behind the game?

It's not fair to criticize Whitaker or his contemporaries for turning a blind eye occasionally to the seamier side of athletics. That is what happened for years until one of Whitaker's contemporaries, Howard Cosell, discovered that sports fans have as big an appetite for scandal as for sanctimony.

At one point, Whitaker calls today's professional sports "sadly squalid" while remembering that most athletes and coaches are good citizens who give back to their fans and communities. My

## Books About Journalism

**The American Newspaper Columnist.** Sam G. Riley. Praeger. 272 Pages. \$65.

**Calling Elections: The History of Horse-Race Journalism.** Thomas B. Littlewood. University of Notre Dame Press. 202 Pages. \$30.

**The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Cote D'Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy.** W. Joseph Campbell. Praeger. 138 Pages. \$55.

**Newspapers of Record in a Digital Age: From Hot Type to Hot Link.** Shannon E. Martin and Kathleen A. Hansen. Praeger. 159 Pages. \$55.

**Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises.** David D. Perlmutter. Praeger. 192 Pages. \$55 hardcover, \$17.95 paperback.

**The Popular Press, 1833-1865.** William E. Huntzicker. Greenwood Press. 210 Pages. \$65.

**Reporting Live.** Lesley Stahl. Simon & Schuster. 444 Pages. \$26.

**Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War.** William M. Hammond. University Press of Kansas. 362 Pages. \$34.95.

**Reporting Vietnam Part II: American Journalism 1969-1975.** The Library of America. 857 Pages. \$35.

### Correction

In the Winter 1998 issue we published "What Numbers Can Tell Us," a box of statistical information that accompanied an article on Media and Juvenile Violence. The information included in this box was compiled by Jason Zeidenberg at the Justice Policy Institute. We did not credit his work, as we intended to do, and for that oversight we apologize.

sense is that the squalor was always there amid the splendor.

But give Whitaker credit: He also accepts responsibility.

He remembers the 1990 Shoal Creek controversy over racial restrictions at many of the country's wealthiest country clubs. Shoal Creek's failure to have any African-American members only came to light when a local newspaper reporter asked Hall Thompson, an Alabama businessman, about it. Thompson responded that the club would not be pressured into accepting "the blacks." The ensuing tempest lasted about a week until several major PGA sponsors threatened to withdraw support for the 1990 PGA Tournament to be played at Shoal Creek. The club revised its policy.

Whitaker praises the change, but also acknowledges the failure of many

newspaper and television executives to challenge similar restrictions in their own country clubs. "Many of us thought we could change these restrictive policies by working from within, but we were so thrilled to have been accepted into this elite world that we didn't make waves and we didn't make trouble. We were not completely silent, but our efforts to change the status quo were weak and ineffectual," he writes.

That kind of honesty is rare even in today's sports world. But that apparently is the kind of guy Whitaker is and why his book makes for an interesting read, perhaps even for someone who has never played the game of golf. ■

*Tom Witosky, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is Sports-Projects Reporter for The Des Moines Register.*

# Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

## The Nieman Network Works in Wondrous Ways

By Chris Bowman

Nearly four years have passed since my class toasted many farewells at the elegant Harvard Faculty Club. Our Curator, Bill Kovach, had the last word: "You are part of a community now that stretches around the world, that's there all the time, all day, every day, with your interests and your hopes and your values in mind. And you've got something you can lean on the rest of your life. You've got something you can call on, you can enlist in your own help and your own support when nobody else is around."

Today, as I play back my videotape of that night, Kovach's spontaneous speech seems as prophetic as it was profound. I realized the full import of his message last summer in Africa, where I truly needed something to lean on. The Nieman connection played a serendipitous role in my overseas venture.

A few years ago, I contributed to a Nieman Reports issue on reviving environmental coverage. A year later, I got this response from Ghana, of all places: "I am Clement Wiredu, a communications programme officer with PACIPE [a French acronym for a West African environmentalist organization]. An active component of this programme is building the capacity of journalists in environmental reporting. I would be pleased if you would help by providing some resources and materials."

Wiredu originally turned to Kabral Blay-Amihere, Editor of The Indepen-

dent newspaper in the seaport capital of Accra and guiding light of West African journalism. Blay-Amihere, a 1991 Nieman Fellow, passed his copy of Nieman Reports to Wiredu. The timing was exquisite.

I happened to be mulling over an announcement of the inaugural Senator John Heinz Fellowship, which combines the training of journalists with reporting on international environmental issues. The International Center for Journalists in Washington, D.C., posts one U.S. journalist per year for up to three months in a developing country of the fellow's choice. The program runs on a grant from The Teresa and H. John Heinz III Foundation and is named in honor of the late senator from Pennsylvania.

"How about I just show up and do the training myself?" Luckily, the fellowship judges liked this plan, and off I went in mid-June to the sweltering edge of the equator. I had my laptop, anti-malaria pills, guidebook—and absolutely no experience overseas. That's where Nieman Fellow number two stepped in. Blay-Amihere was out of the country, so I looked up Nana Kofi Coomson from the Class of '94.

Coomson is a business whiz, a passionate and compassionate investigative journalist and a genius in human relations, with friend and foe alike. Every day he rides a razor's edge between freedom and incarceration as Editor-in-Chief of the country's other

independent daily, The Ghanaian Chronicle. Coomson took me under his wing the week he was set to be tried on a criminal charge of "publishing false news with the intent of injuring the reputation of the state." He already had been detained 10 days in a nightmare of a prison—"I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemies"—and, if convicted, faced up to 10 years there.

Yet, with all this and 32 libel suits around his neck, Coomson gleefully ushered me around Accra, a mostly disease-ridden jumble of 1.9 million. He introduced me to several of the nation's top editors, politicians and businessmen and insisted on my staying as a guest in his home. But Coomson and I were at a loss to explain my sustained bouts of high anxiety, which soon prompted me to flee to the somewhat tamer Zimbabwe.

Enter Nieman number three, Remer Tyson, Class of '67. The balmy, southern African country, where tobacco and cotton are king, remind Tyson of his native Georgia. He and his writer-wife, Virginia Knight, want to make the capital city of Harare their permanent home. He recently retired from The Detroit Free Press after a 12-year stint of covering war, famine and other harrowing African stories for the Knight-Ridder chain. Along the way, he became known for his courage and class.

Tyson broke my family and me into Africa as he has many a foreign journalist over the years. He introduced us to

the beauty of Zimbabwe, beginning with the ancient bushmen cave drawings on the outskirts of Harare. And he was the first to figure out the source of my mysterious trauma—my malaria prevention medicine, Lariam. “Drove me batty once,” Tyson said. “I’d sooner get malaria.” On Tyson’s recommendation, I switched to a more benign prophylactic, and within a couple weeks I was well on my way to a successful fellowship.

Thanks Remer. Thanks Kofi. Thanks Kabral. As they say, once a Nieman, always a Nieman. ■

*Chris Bowman, a 1995 Nieman Fellow, is an environmental reporter at The Sacramento Bee. He can be reached at cbowman@ns.net.*

## Year 2000 Reunion Plans Advancing

A year from now—Saturday, April 29, 2000—we will be sitting in the ballroom of the Hyatt Hotel in Cambridge getting an update on our Harvard education.

On that day Harvard professors will lay out for the hundreds of Nieman Fellows attending the Year 2000 Reunion a vision of the world and its critical issues as we near the close of the millennium. That night there will be a reception and dinner at the John F. Kennedy Library.

The reunion begins Friday, the night before, with a block party at Lippmann House. It will end the next day, Sunday, with brunch.

Plans are advancing. Rooms have been blocked out for Nieman Fellows at the Hyatt, the Charles and the Sheraton Commander hotels. Bed and breakfast establishments are being contacted. By fall we will have room rates so reservations can be made.

Get out your New England maps and start planning for a spring vacation tied to the Year 2000 Reunion. ■

## —1952—

**John M. Harrison** died on February 14 at the Oaknoll Heath Center in Iowa City following a brief illness. He was 84.

Harrison and his father published *The Oakland Acron* from 1934-47. From 1947-58 he was Associate Editor of *The Toledo (Ohio) Blade*. He published student publications and was a journalism instructor at the University of Iowa from 1958-61. In 1961 he joined the faculty of Pennsylvania State University, retiring as Professor Emeritus of Journalism and American Studies in 1978.

Harrison wrote a number of books, including “The Nickel Machine.”

## —1965—

**Donald M. Kendall** died on February 8 after suffering a heart attack while driving near his home in suburban Silver Spring, Maryland. He was 70.

Kendall was a farm writer for *The Associated Press* for 23 years before his retirement in 1991. He covered the Agriculture Department and wrote six columns a week from 1968 until his retirement.

“I want to be a farm writer,” Kendall wrote then-AP President Wes Gallagher just before he was given that beat. “Agriculture is too vital to be viewed entirely from the barnyard, too important to be entrusted entirely to the bureaucrats.”

Kendall began his journalism career at *The Hutchison (Kan.) News*, where he covered agriculture issues and the State Legislature for 11 years.

In 1977 Kendall won the J.S. Russell Memorial Award, the top award of the Newspaper Farm Editors of America (now known as the National Association of Agricultural Journalists). He was president of the group in 1979.

In addition to his wife, **Lou**, survivors include a son, three daughters and six grandchildren.

## —1970—

**Larry L. King’s** 13th book, “A Writer’s Life in Letters: Reflections In a Bloodshot Eye,” will be published in October by Texas Christian University Press. Some 300 of King’s personal letters spanning 50 years have been selected for inclusion from among almost 20,000 on deposit in The Southwestern Writers Collection at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. In November King will again emcee the Annual Texas Book Festival in Austin at the invitation of Texas First Lady Laura Bush, who is Honorary Chairperson.

## —1971—

**Hyuck-In Lew** died on January 29, after a five-month struggle with lymphoma. He was buried in his hometown of Andong, Kyungsang Province, in the southeast of Korea. He is survived by his wife, **Ang Hur Lew**, two sons, a daughter and a son-in-law.

## —1972—

**John Carroll** was named Editor of the Year by the National Press Foundation. Carroll, who is Senior Vice President and Editor of *The Baltimore (Md.) Sun*, received the award at the Washington, D.C. Hilton Hotel on February 24. The Sun recently won back-to-back Pulitzer Prizes—in 1997 for feature writing and in 1998 for investigative reporting. Carroll, who joined *The Sun* as a reporter in 1966, has been Editor since 1991.

## —1974—

**Shirley Christian** writes: “For the past year this recovering foreign correspondent has been working to create a publications division for a biomedical research institute being built in Kansas City, Missouri. Offbeat though it may sound, it is very exciting to be in on the development phase of an enterprise that aims to become the best of its kind in the world. It is being financed by two wonderful local billionaires, Virginia

and Jim Stowers, who have already created a generous endowment for the institute and plan to leave it their entire estate when they die.

"How I got here really began five years ago when I resigned from The New York Times (after 17 years in Latin America with The Times, The Miami Herald and The Associated Press). I didn't want to live abroad any longer and didn't want to return to New York or Washington but *did* want to start my own book publishing house. So I came home to Kansas City and tried it. I loved being a publisher, but eventually decided I couldn't hemorrhage any more money.

"After considering various job possibilities that would have taken me to New York or Washington I accepted the offer of the persuasive Mr. Stowers and am glad that I did. Like the Margaret O'Brien character in 'Meet Me in St. Louis,' I'm lucky to have been born in my favorite city. I still write occasional pieces for The Times from this area and, after all my exotic datelines, I find that nothing gives me more pleasure than telling the nation and the world about the wonders of the midlands. Getting Dodge City and Wyatt Earp reprinted in The International Herald-Tribune is more fun than living on airplanes!"

—1981—

**Masayuki Ikeda** has changed jobs within the Japan Broadcasting Corporation. Ikeda writes: "Last June, I left my work at the news desk where I was a chief director for news and other programs for overseas service both in radio and TV. I became a senior media analyst of NHK's Broadcasting & Culture Research Institute. My present assignment is to cover the development of the media in the United States. I visited the United States two times late last year to meet people in the industry—three Nieman alumni were among them—to learn about the digitalization of broadcasting. The purpose of my research work is to contribute to NHK's efforts to digitalize its satellite and terrestrial broadcasting. Digitalization of terrestrial broadcasting will

## Lew Clapp, Nieman Technology Advisor, Dies

Lewis C. Clapp died on December 26 in Boca Raton Community Hospital in Florida after an operation for a ruptured appendix. He was 61.

Clapp, a pioneer in computer technology, spent the last eight years helping guide and instruct Nieman Fellows on the mysteries of the computer. Armed with the newest technological gadgets, from beepers to cellular phones to miniature cameras, he enthusiastically supported anyone interested in stepping into what he believed to be the future of journalism. With unlimited generosity, he would rush to help a flummoxed Nieman Fellow or staff member restore a crashed computer, find the right dentist, or organize a trip to Fenway Park.

Clapp's interests were wide-reaching. Part of his life's work was spent with Timeshare Inc., the first independent national computer time-sharing service, which he co-founded and for which he served as Executive Vice President and Direc-

tor. He was a medical data consultant to the Joint Center for Radiation Therapy at the Harvard Medical School and Dana Farber Cancer Institute, where he developed a grant management and tracking system. He was a consultant on computer information systems for the Museum School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and a member of the Board of Visitors. He was a Founder and Publisher of Toy Review Magazine, a contributing science writer for International Science and Technology magazine, and a co-editor of a special Sunday supplement on computer information technology in The New York Times.

Clapp received a bachelor's degree in physics and computer science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and studied Japanese language, technology and government history at Harvard University.

He is survived by his wife, Judith, his mother and three daughters. ■

start experimentally in 2000 in and around three major cities including Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. Nationwide commercial TV networks here will also follow suit.

"Digitalization is a heavily technical matter. Technology is, I confess, something I have avoided since I became a news reporter for NHK more than two decades ago. (But I've found you can talk about mathematics even when you can't explain why minus times minus will be plus.) The problem is that digitalization is so technical and dream-scattering that people seem to be mesmerized and are not serious in talking about the disadvantageous side of digitalization for daily life, society and culture. I myself don't know what kind of disadvantage we are going to have, but I really want to see where this process takes us."

Ikeda can be reached at his E-mail address, [masayuki@culture.nhk.or.jp](mailto:masayuki@culture.nhk.or.jp)

—1986—

**Gustavo Gorriti's** book, "The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru," has been republished by the University of North Carolina Press. The 1999 edition includes a new introduction by Gorriti, who began covering the Shining Path while writing for the Peruvian weekly, *Caretas*. The book examines the period between the rebels' first attack in 1980 and the military intervention ordered by then-President Fernando Belaunde in 1982. Gorriti, who lives in Panama, is Associate Editor of *La Prensa*.

**Yvonne van der Heijden** writes: "After eight years working as a foreign correspondent in China, I've decided to leave Peking and look for new challenges elsewhere. It hasn't been an easy decision. I am still fascinated by China and the Chinese. To cover for almost a decade the transformation this country and its people are going through has been a most interesting and enriching experience.

"Yet the breathtaking pollution and the urge to feel for a while what it is like to live and work in a more sophisticated country all contributed to my decision to say good-bye to the place and the people which have been very good to me. I guess I'll be back in China in the future. But first I'll go for a two-month holiday traveling in Southeast Asia. In early March I'll plan to be back in Holland to start job hunting."

—1987—

**Marites Vitug** and Criselda Yabes had a book they co-wrote, "Jalan-Jalan: A Journey Through Eaga," published by Anvil Publishing. (Jalan-Jalan is a Bahasa word meaning "leisurely stroll.") The book is an account of their travels through the recently defined East Asean Growth Area, a region comprised of fringe areas of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, and is both travelogue and social commentary.

Vitug writes for the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, The Manila Times, Newsweek and World Paper. Her book, "Power From the Forest: The Politics of Logging," won the National Book Award in 1994. In 1991, Vitug received the Courage in Journalism Award from the Washington-based International Women's Media Foundation for her reporting.

—1988—

**Eugene Robinson** has been named Assistant Managing Editor/Style for The Washington Post. He had been Foreign Editor for the past five years.

—1990—

**George Rodrigue** is now President of News and Executive Editor of the

Press-Enterprise. He had been Managing Editor.

—1991—

**Tim Giago** sold Indian Country Today to the Oneida Nation of New York state. The publication was born in 1981 when Giago, who had grown frustrated with coverage of Indians in the mainstream press, founded a weekly paper named The Lakota Times and based in South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation. When the newspaper became a national publication, the name was changed. Giago says that he wanted to sell the paper to an Indian entity that would keep its staff intact and guarantee its journalistic freedom, which the Oneida Nation has done.

—1993—

**Heidi Evans's** new book, "How to Hide Money From Your Husband...and Other Time-Honored Ways to Build a Nest Egg: The Best Kept Secret of Marriage," a mischievous and practical look at the war between the sexes over money, will be published by Simon & Schuster in September. The book grew out of an article Evans wrote at The Wall Street Journal about how for generations women everywhere have been quietly putting money aside. Women still make only 76 cents to a man's dollar and need to be prepared for the best and worst that can happen in life and in marriage.

Evans is currently working at Newsday, covering issues of aging in America.

**Olive Talley** writes: "It's been another year of big changes for me. Good ones. I married my long-time partner, **John Davidson**, in May 1998. After a traditional church wedding, we had a lovely party at an historic bed and breakfast in Waxahachie, near our home south of Dallas. Of course, horses played a role. We rode in a carriage pulled by two draft mares, with their two-week old colts trotting alongside, and then took guests on rides around town. It was fun.

"On the work front, I left ABC this year after nearly four years of produc-

ing for Diane Sawyer and Sam Donaldson. On Feb. 16 I joined 'Dateline NBC,' also as producer. My new number is 212-664-2598. E-mail is Olive.Talley@NBC.com. I'm still in New York, but will return to Dallas full-time by year's end. John (who's still at The Dallas Morning News) and I look forward to finally living in the same zip code! We've got an extra bedroom, so y'all come visit."

—1996—

**Tom Ashbrook's** Internet start-up company, BuildingBlocks Interactive, "has been handsomely funded and is cranking up at cheek-flattening speed." BuildingBlocks publishes HomePortfolio ([www.homeportfolio.com](http://www.homeportfolio.com)), the leading Internet destination for premium home design products. HomePortfolio shows an independent, editorial selection of the world's best home design products, coupled with electronic brochures from paying manufacturers. Ashbrook's memoir of his personal transition from the old to the new economy will be published by Houghton Mifflin early next year.

**David Marcus** reports: "After nearly 18 years in daily journalism, I decided to take the plunge into newsmagazines. I joined U.S. News & World Report, where I am covering higher education—a beat that will often take me to Harvard and other campuses. I welcome story ideas from those of you who have gone into academia.

"To answer the question everyone asks: I left The Boston Globe because I wanted to get away from must-do dailies and try more enterprise stories. I'm still a huge fan of the paper and of Boston.

"We'll stay in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Work telephone: 202-955-2376. E-mail: Dmarcus99@aol.com.

"Thanks to Bill Kovach for the career counseling."

**Jacques Rivard** writes about his new job in Vancouver, British Columbia: "I moved from Montreal to Vancouver to become the National Correspondent of the Societe Radio-Canada (French Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

network) for national TV news. I will go on with the environmental coverage I've done for 17 years, although the scope of my coverage will be wider and will embrace political and economic matters as well. My territory extends from Alaska to Mexico and because the West Coast is the site of many environmental concerns such as fisheries, whale hunting and forestry mining, most of my reporting will still revolve around the 'Green Beat.' I now have a fresh series of subjects dealing with nature and its losses, as developed countries are talking more about the impact of human activities, not only on climate change, but on species that disappear or are biophysically affected by them.

"Other than that, I still represent Canada on the Board of the Society of Environmental Journalists, a U.S.-based association of reporters covering the environment. It is 1100 members strong, mainly American, but with increasing membership from Canada and Mexico, which makes for lots of traveling in the U.S....As you can see, I am

still very busy here, but I cannot imagine my life differently."

The ongoing saga of **Mary Schmich's** mock graduation address to the class of 1997 was outlined in the January 31 issue of *The New York Times*. In her original column, which appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*, Schmich urged her audience to floss, wear sunscreen, and get plenty of calcium, among other things. The speech quickly circulated in E-mails and on the Internet, but somewhere along the way its author was mistakenly identified as Kurt Vonnegut. Most recently, the speech was turned into a song that became a hit in Australia and is currently the most requested tune at KNRK-FM in Portland, Oregon.

**Joe Williams** is now City Editor of *The Boston Globe*. He had been Assistant City Editor. Williams previously worked at *The Miami Herald*. (See his review of a book about journalist Ted Poston on page 69.)

—1998—

**Phillip Martin** is the new Race Relations Correspondent for National Public Radio's Cultural Desk. Martin has worked as Senior Producer for Public Radio International's "The World," as a commentator for WGBH-TV and NPR's "Morning Edition," and for Oxfam America. He will be based in Boston.

**Jim Meek** is the 1999 winner of the Hyman Solomon Award for Excellence in Public Policy Journalism. Meek, a columnist for *The Halifax (Nova Scotia) Herald*, received the award for the body of work he did in 1998. The Solomon award, which recognizes outstanding coverage and analysis of public policy issues, is sponsored by the Public Policy Forum, a group comprised of 115 Canadian organizations dedicated to improving government.

Meek, who left *The Herald* at the end of February, is now freelancing. ■

## Expanded Web Site Offers New Services to Niemans

An expanded Nieman Foundation site has gone on line.

The revised public site offers excerpts from seminars, photos of all the Nieman classes, and a growing catalog of full editions of *Nieman Reports* (except for the current issue) with a search capability. The continuing discussion of watchdog journalism will soon extend to the Internet.

A private, password-protected Fellows' Forum will go on line soon. Niemans will be able to search directory listings and link to E-mail addresses. A listing update form will be posted. A bulletin board will facilitate exchanges among fellows.

Take a look at the new Web site and tell us what we can do to improve it. Send us your Internet address to obtain a password necessary to access the Forum and join in the discussions.

The address of the new Nieman Web site is the same as the old: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu>. ■

**The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University**

Search Contact Us

**Welcome to the Nieman Home Page**

**Nieman News**

- [Doug Marlette Reflects on Clinton's 'Dark Side'](#)
- [Galbraith Warns Against Speculation](#)
- [Lew Clapp, Nieman Technology Advisor, Dies](#)
- [Second Watchdog Conference, May 14-15, 1999](#)
- [Reunion 2000 Info](#)

**Nieman Reports Magazine On Line**

- [Coverage of Children & Violence](#)

**Fellows' Forum - Bulletin Board**

Revised: 2/21/99

Copyright 1999 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College  
The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University  
Lippmann House, One Francis Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138, U.S.A.  
telephone: (617) 495-2237  
fax: (617) 495-6976

**About the Program**

- [What It Is](#)
- [History](#)
- [Note from Center](#)
- [How to Apply](#)

**Events**

- [Seminars](#)

**People**

- [Current Fellows](#)
- [Alumni Fellows](#)
- [Staff](#)

**Nieman Reports**

- [Current Issue](#)
- [Previous Issues](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

**Fellows' Forum**

- [Bulletin Board](#)

[Nieman Home](#)  
[Harvard Home](#)

# End Note

## A Photographer Unites Generations With His Camera

These photographs are from an ongoing project that I began 16 years ago, a visual chronicle of a town—West Athens, Maine—and its people. Returning there year after year, the children I first photographed are now having children, and cycles of family, community and, inescapably it seems, poverty perpetuate themselves. My project is intended to be an historical record and also a way of paying homage to people who have given me this opportunity to portray the passage

of time as this community grows up, grows older, changes, or as often happens in West Athens, stays the same.

Life in West Athens is defined by its isolation and unrelenting poverty, yet it is lived with energy and ingenuity, affection and laughter. In this hub of rural poverty, there are few opportunities or escapes. Here, there is no gas station, no country store, no church, no schoolhouse, no police station, or even a sign proclaiming it exists. Menial jobs are scarce, and government

support, until recently the only reliable source of meager income, is now threatened as well.

West Athens is a town of relations—five generations of aunts and cousins, grandparents and in-laws—all living on ancestral land. Survival is accompanied by a fierce attachment to family, land and tradition. While those who live in other places often mourn the loss of community, here it is woven into the fabric of daily life. ■

—By Steven Rubin,  
Niemman Fellow 1999



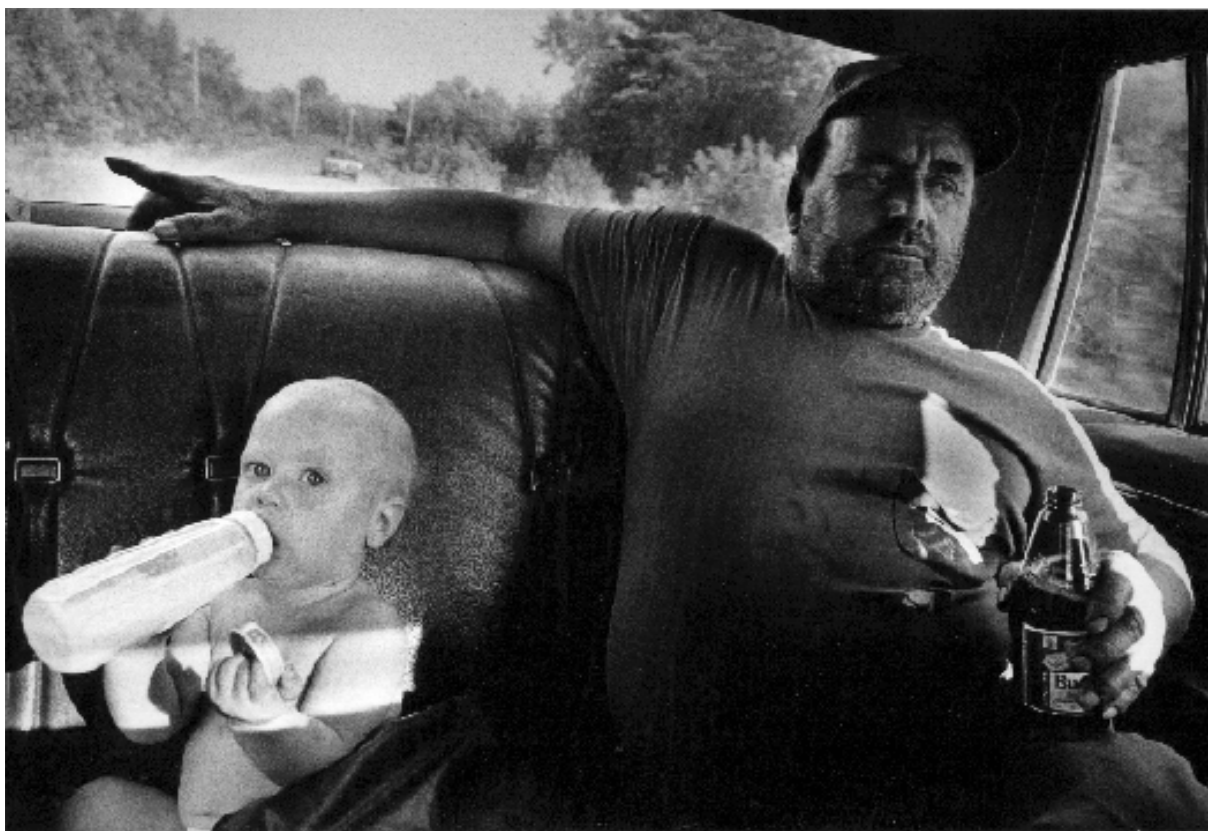
*Donny's Girl*

*Photo by Steven Rubin*





*Grandma Rosie's kitchen.*



*Christopher and his great-uncle, "Six-Pack" Sammy.*

*Photos by Steven Rubin*



“...to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

Vol. 53 No. 1    NIEMAN REPORTS  
Spring 1999    THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

**Publisher** Bill Kovach  
**Editor** Melissa Ludtke  
**Assistant Editor** Lois Fiore  
**Editorial Assistant** Adam Reilly  
**Design Editor** Deborah Smiley  
**Business Manager** Gina Camara

Nieman Reports (USPS #430-650) is published  
in March, June, September and December  
by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University,  
One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098.

Telephone: (617) 495-2237  
Internet Address (Business):  
nreports@fas.harvard.edu

Internet Address (Editorial):  
nreditor@harvard.edu

WWW address:  
<http://www.Nieman.Harvard.edu>

Copyright © 1999  
by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.  
Subscription \$20 a year, \$35 for two years;  
add \$10 per year for foreign airmail. Single copies \$5.  
Back copies are available from the Nieman office.

Please address all subscription correspondence to  
One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098  
and change of address information to  
P.O. Box 4951, Manchester, NH 03108.  
ISSN Number 0028-9817

Second-class postage paid  
at Boston, Massachusetts,  
and additional entries.

POSTMASTER:  
Send address changes to  
Nieman Reports,  
P.O. Box 4951,  
Manchester, NH 03108.