BRILL'S CONTENT

SKEPTICISM IS A VIRTUE

MELTDOWN

A MINUTE BY MINUTE ACCOUNT OF THE NETWORKS BLOWING ELECTION NIGHT—TWICE (PAGE 94)

PLUS: THE MEDIA CARTEL BEHIND IT (PAGE 26)

★ **ELECTION SPECIAL**

Q&A: BILL CLINTON ON HIS PRESS

STIFFED BY THE MEDIA BY RALPH NADER

BILL MAHER'S PERSONAL POLITICS

NIXON'S MAKEOVER AS "GRACIOUS LOSER"

POLL: WHERE WE GOT OUR CAMPAIGN NEWS

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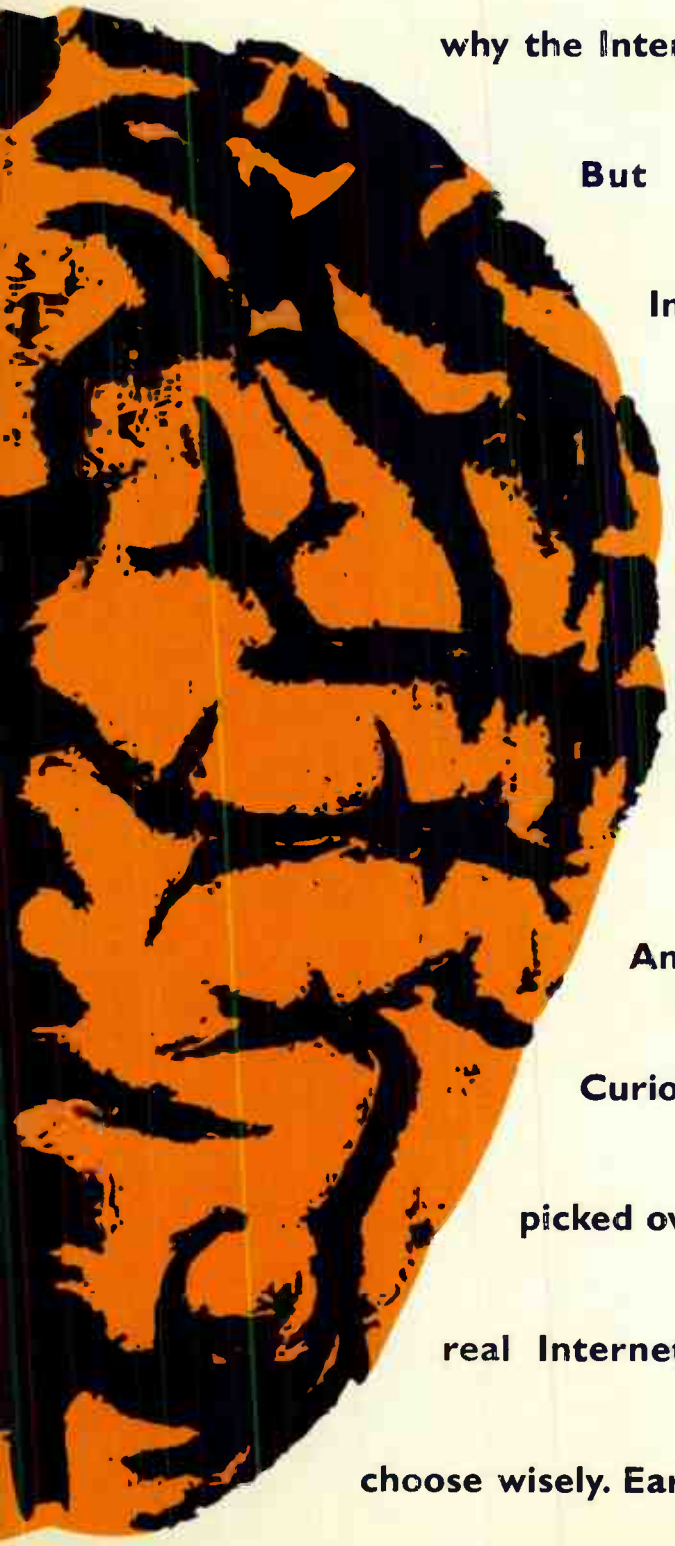

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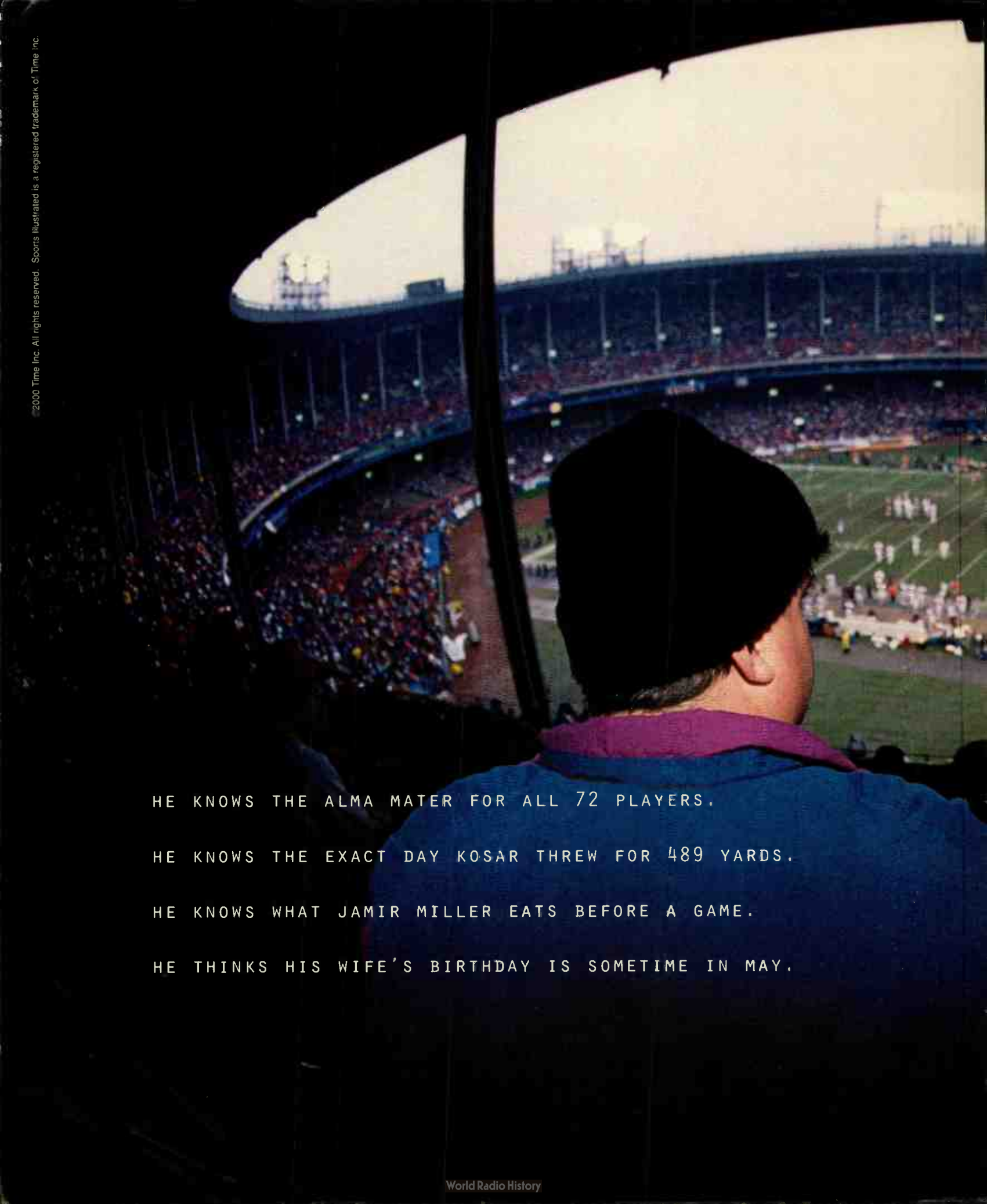

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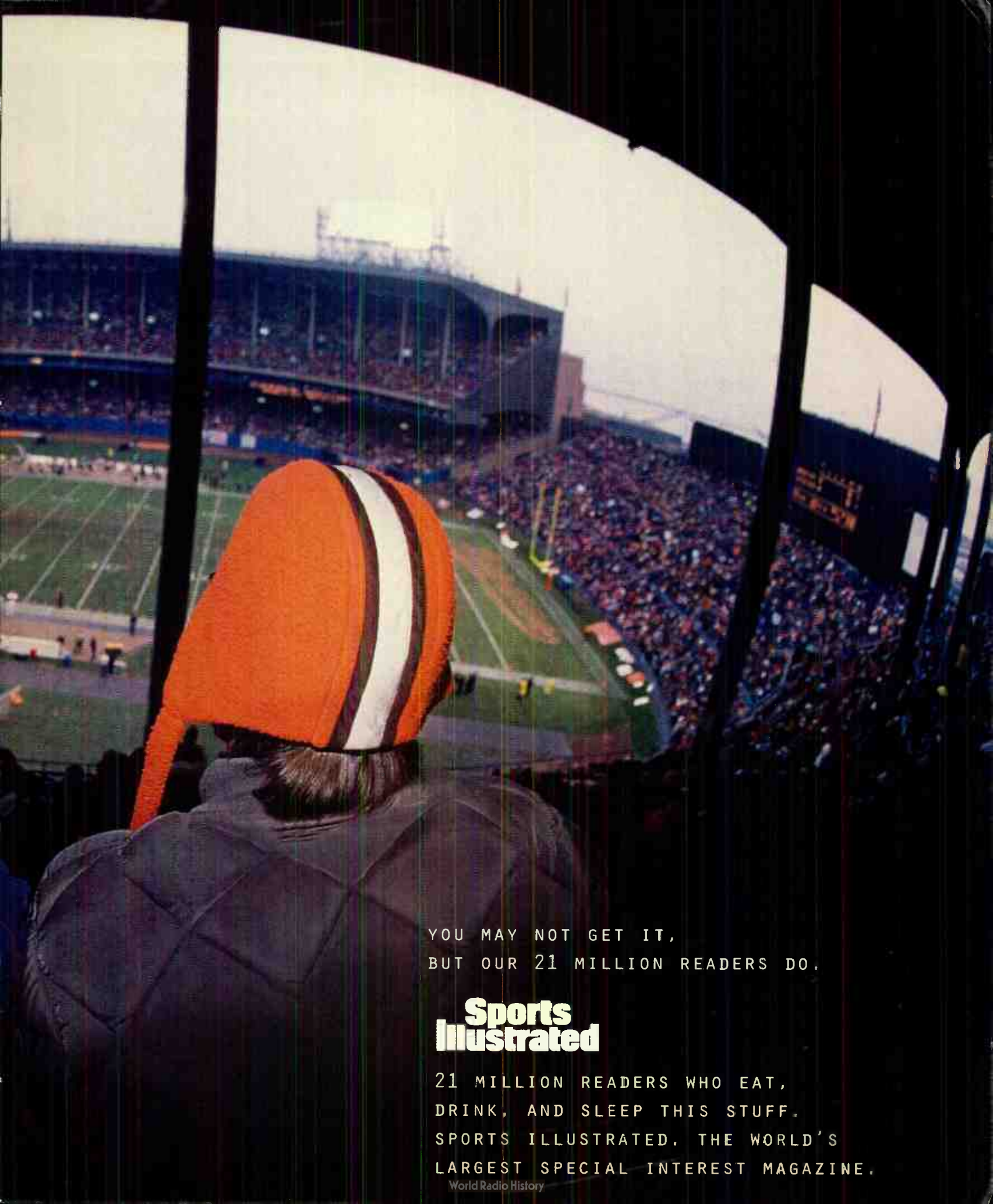

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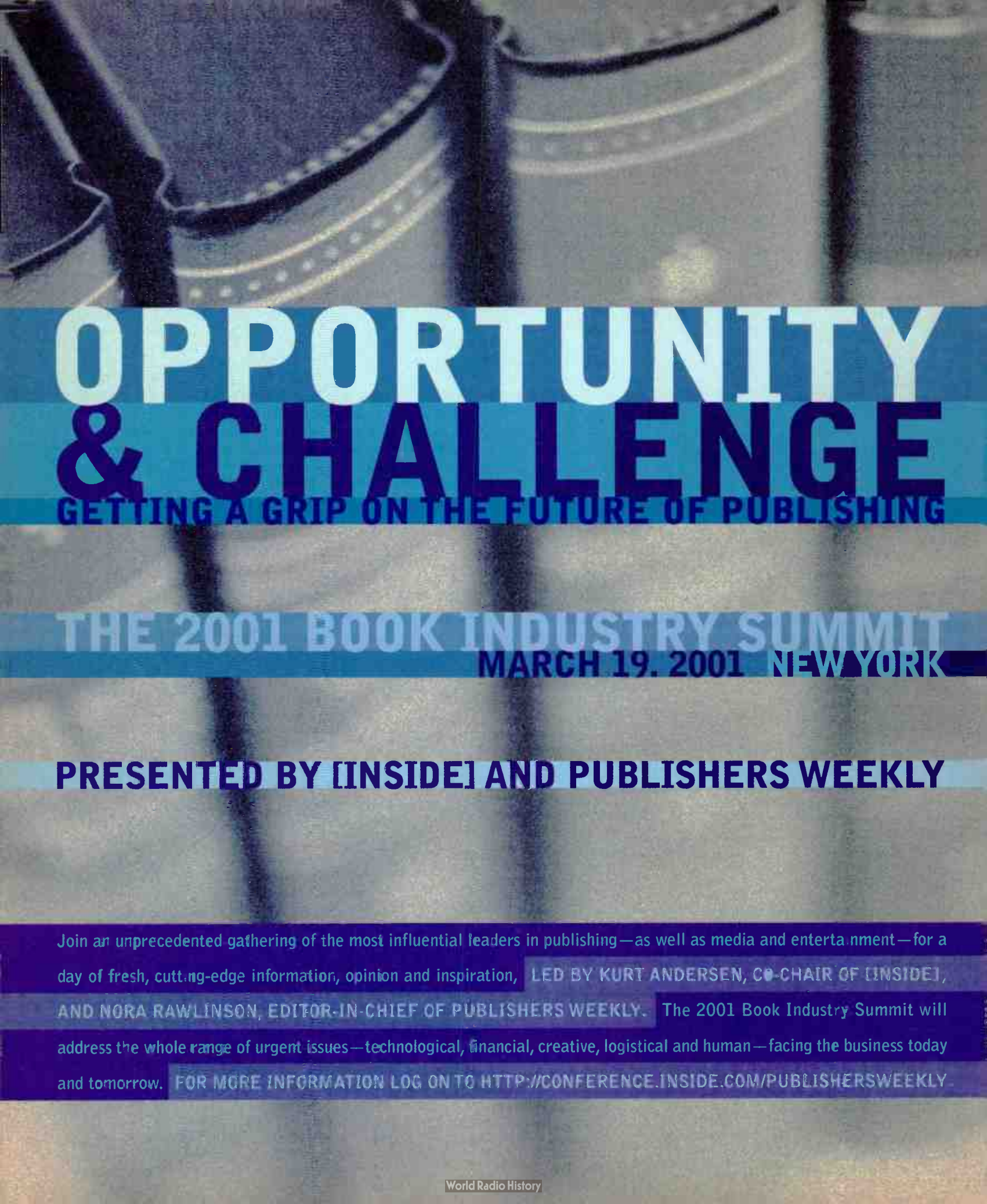

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OUR RECOUNT

During the first few weeks after November 7, 2000, the writers and editors at this magazine were as flummoxed as most other Americans about the presidential-election-that-wasn't. But one thing was clear: Election night 2000 would become a media moment for the books. Indeed, the coverage and its impact will occupy the minds and pens of historians for years to come. But amid all the paralysis and confusion, we also found ourselves firing on all cylinders. The result is our special election section, "The Presidency and the Press." Our curtain-raiser is Steven Brill's "Rewind" column, beginning on page 26, in which he dissects how the network-funded Voter News Service functions essentially as a cartel, providing the same polling results to all the networks. The VNS gambit, in the end, may cost the networks in credibility far more than it saved them in dollars.

Senior writer Seth Mnookin's evocative reconstruction of the election-night projections (page 94) captures the surreal experience most of us had while glued to our television sets wondering what was going on in the newsrooms—where the usually cool and coiffed anchors looked like so many deer caught in headlight after headlight. On page 106, historian and journalist David Greenberg offers an account of his election-night cameo as a Nixon scholar trying to correct the bad history that was being broadcast in the rush to compare this election to the squeaker of 1960. Meanwhile, senior writer Mark Boal files his report (page 112) from the Los Angeles set of *Politically Incorrect*, comedian Bill Maher's ABC program, on which celebrities and pundits debate the issues of the day. Maher is perhaps the perfect prism through which to view this election year's unprecedented blending of politics and show business: As Eric Effron points out in his "Big Blur" column (page 72), in this election, comedy provided "a common ground for a story where virtually every utterance—by politicians, by pundits, even by judges—was easily viewed as partisan and therefore could be dismissed."

Our election package also presents a variety of interpretations of the campaign and how the press covered it: from our "scientific" Hatchet Meter (page 104) to the deluxe, three-page Pundit Scorecard (page 118), which should have talking heads from coast to coast scrambling to find out how they ranked. On a more serious note, we're delighted that Ralph Nader accepted our invitation to reflect on how the media covered (or didn't cover) his presidential bid. His memoir, on page 100, may change the way many people view his candidacy. Finally, in Steven Brill's Q&A with Bill Clinton, on page 90, the president reveals his feelings about his treatment in the press over the past eight years and what he's learned from being the object of its scrutiny.

For trenchant glimpses into realms beyond the political, turn to page 128, where senior correspondent Abigail Pogrebin tells the story of Milton Allimadi, an enterprising Ugandan-born journalist whose tiny Harlem newspaper has found an unlikely angel in Christian Curry, the flashy Wall Street analyst who was fired by the investment firm Morgan Stanley Dean Witter after pornographic pictures of him surfaced. The episode resulted in numerous lawsuits, a mysterious settlement, Curry's sudden wealth—and perhaps the most unlikely publishing partnership in history. On page 81, filmmaker Daniel Minahan offers a behind-the-camera diary of the making of his new film, *Series 7*, a dark and prophetic satire of reality TV. And on page 136, journalist, editor, and publisher James Atlas delivers a deliciously detailed account of big-time publishing then and now, as captured in two recent books by publishing pooh-bahs Jason Epstein and André Schiffrin.

This issue hits the stands shortly before the inauguration. Those exhausted by the partisan posturing of this endless election might find our Books-section interview with Philip Hamburger (page 126) a tonic. The legendary *New Yorker* writer, who covered 14 inaugurations during his 60 years at the magazine, had this to say when asked about the explosion of punditry in today's press: "It seems to me that you assume in a democracy that anybody who is old enough to vote is old enough to make up their own mind and doesn't have to be told by a columnist or a pundit....I don't think they're as important as they do. They're all selling chewing gum, and Ex-Lax, and..."

DAVID KUHN

CONTRIBUTORS

JAMES ATLAS ("Publish and Perish?," page 136), founding editor of the Lipper/Viking "Penguin Lives" series, is the author of *Bellow: A Biography*. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Vanity Fair*.

GRAHAM EARNSHAW ("China Online," page 67) was the Beijing bureau chief for both Reuters and the London *Daily Telegraph*. His book *The Life & Death of a Dotcom in China* was published in October.

JIM EDWARDS ("Another World," page 142), a senior writer for *Brill's Content*, was the celebrity news editor at APBnews.com.

EVE GERBER ("Spinning a Biblical Battle—in New York," page 35, and "Divided We Watch," page 110), a staff writer for *Brill's Content*, has written for *Slate*, *American Lawyer*, and *The Economist*.

DAVID GREENBERG ("Gracious Loser? Hardly," page 106) is a historian and journalist who is writing a book about Richard Nixon. He writes a column for *Slate* and contributes to *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The New York Times Book Review*.

MICHAEL KORDA ("Loaded Words," page 50), editor in chief of Simon & Schuster, is the author of several books including *Another Life*, a memoir of his years in the publishing business.

DANIEL MINAHAN ("Reality Blights," page 81) is the writer and director of the film *Series 7* and cowrote the film *I Shot Andy Warhol*. He has produced documentaries for PBS, MTV, and BBC II.

SETH MNOOKIN ("It Happened One Night," page 94), a senior writer for *Brill's Content*, was the city editor at the *Forward*.

RALPH NADER ("My Untold Story," page 100), the Green Party's presidential candidate, has cofounded numerous public interest groups, including Public Citizen, Commercial Alert, the Center for Auto Safety, and the Center for Women's Policy Studies.

ABIGAIL POGREBIN ("The Odd Couple Uptown," page 128), a senior correspondent for *Brill's Content*, is also a contributing writer to *Talk*.

JUDITH SHULEVITZ ("Of Lovers and Lenses," page 123), one of the founding editors of the online magazine *Slate*, writes its "Culturebox" column.

TOM WOLZIEN ("The Bottom Line," page 97), senior media analyst for Sanford C. Bernstein & Co., was previously an executive producer of NBC News. His article in this issue is adapted from a report to his institutional-investor clients.

SCOTT MENCHIN

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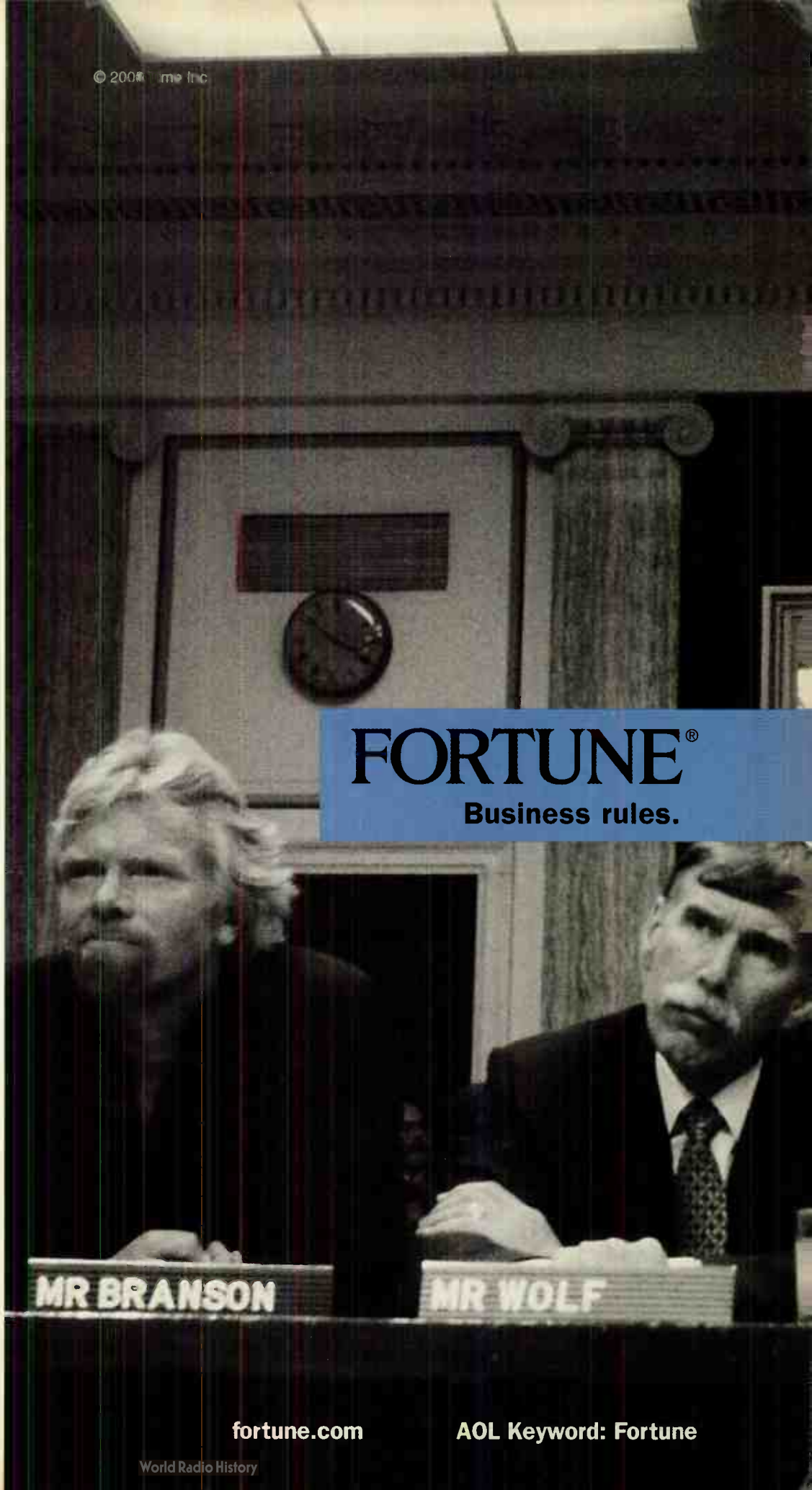

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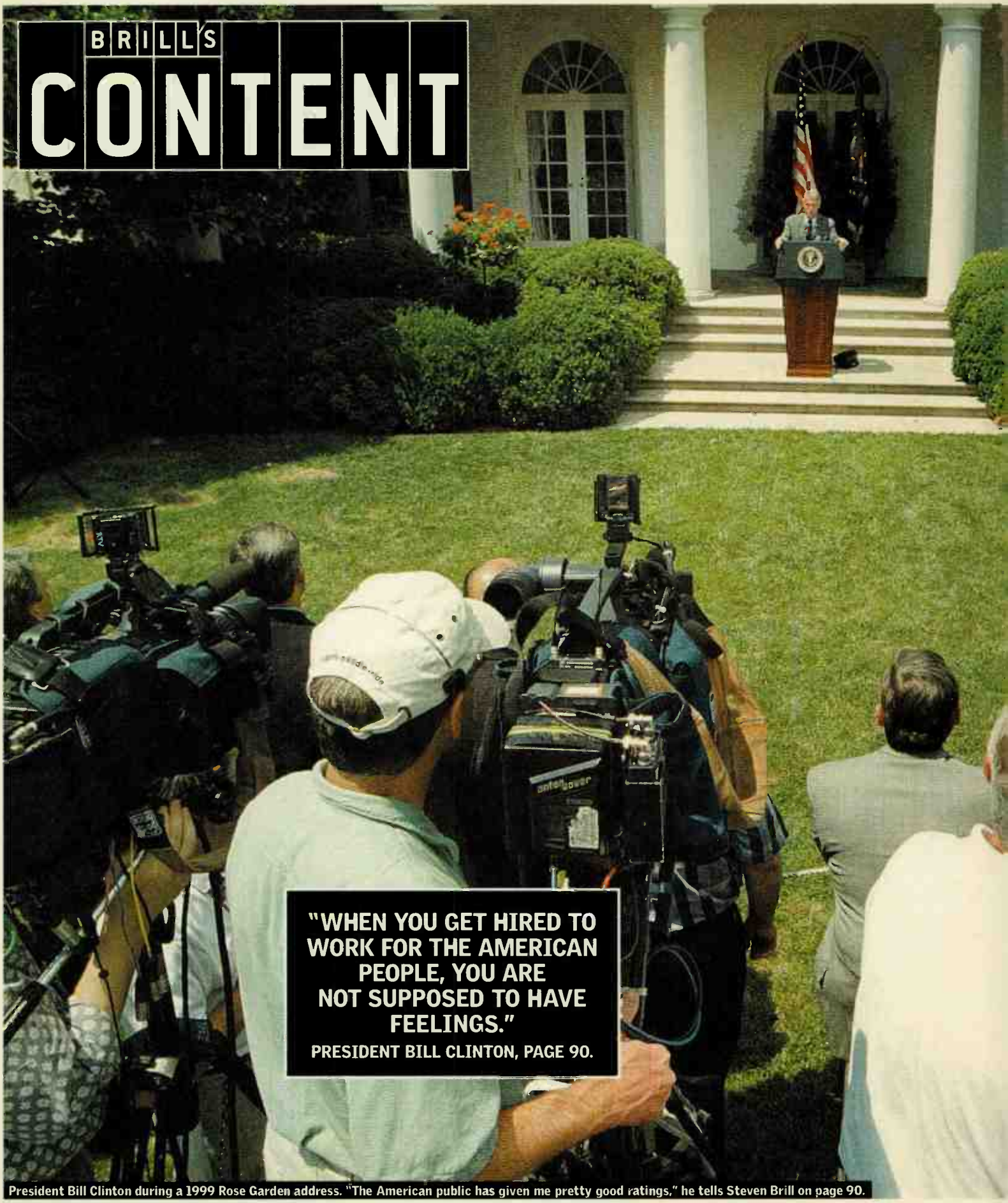


"WHEN YOU GET HIRED TO WORK FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE FEELINGS."

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, PAGE 90.

DAVE TRACY/NEWSMAKERS

President Bill Clinton during a 1999 Rose Garden address. "The American public has given me pretty good ratings," he tells Steven Brill on page 90.

FEBRUARY 2001
VOLUME 4
NUMBER ONE

ELECTION SPECIAL

COVER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN EDER

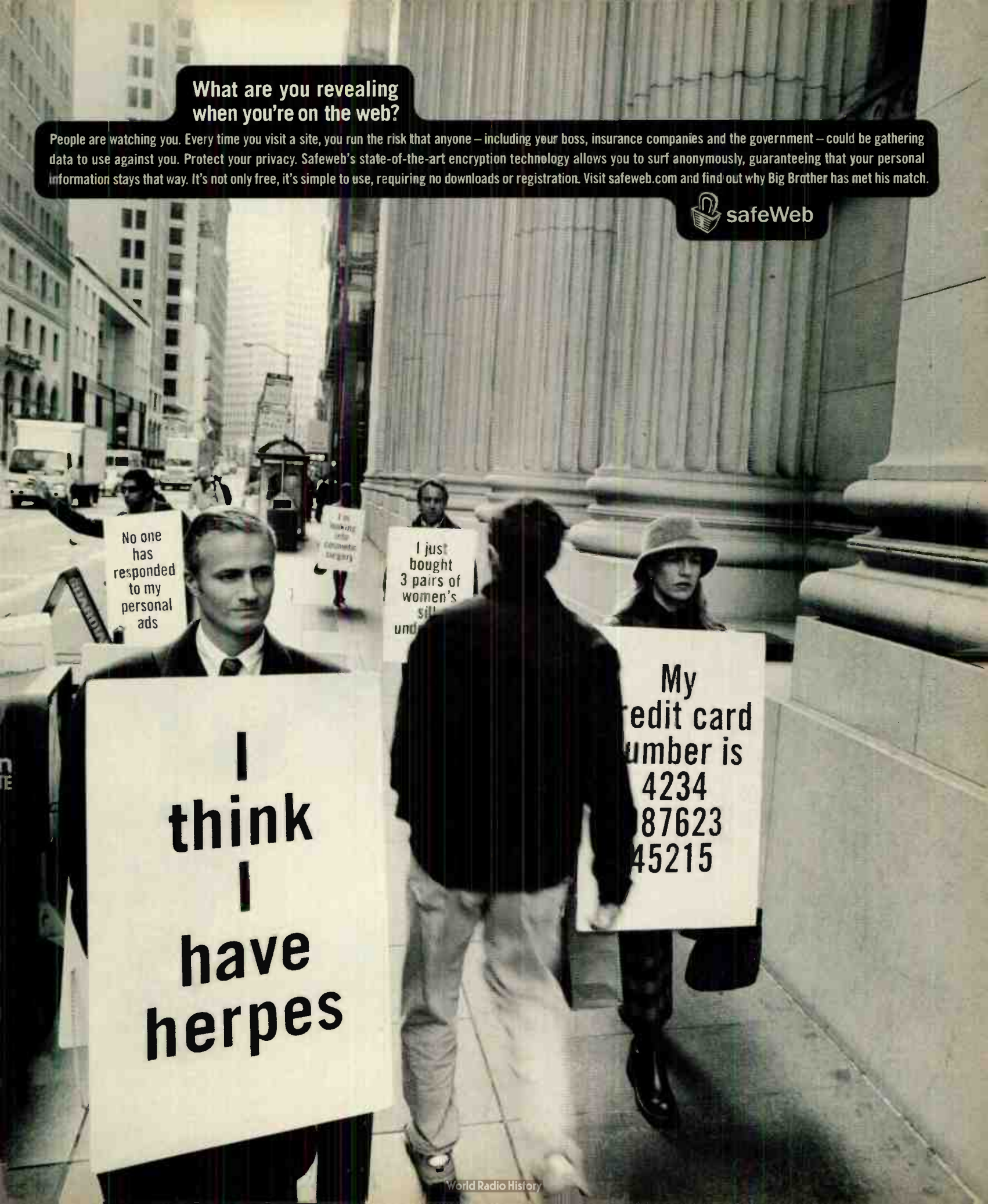
"EACH WEEK, SIX CONTENDERS ARE SELECTED BY LOTTERY, ASSIGNED CAMERAMEN, ARMED WITH GUNS, AND FORCED TO BATTLE IT OUT BY KILLING ONE ANOTHER ON TV."

FILMMAKER DANIEL MINAHAN, DESCRIBING HIS REALITY-TV PARODY *SERIES 7*, WHICH OPENS IN THEATERS THIS MONTH. AT WORK, PAGE 81.

In the dark satire *Series 7*, actress Brooke Smith plays a pregnant reality-TV contestant—who must kill her on-air competitors. Page 81.

UP FRONT

COLUMNS



"I DON'T WANT MY READERS TO BE 'AMEN' TYPES."

MILTON ALLIMADI, EDITOR OF *THE BLACK STAR NEWS*, A HARLEM WEEKLY THAT HAS JOINED FORCES WITH THE SUBJECT OF ITS GREATEST SCOOP. INVESTIGATORS, PAGE 128.

With help from an unlikely angel, Ugandan-born editor Milton Allimadi says he hopes to make his small New York City weekly, *The Black Star News*, "like the *Village Voice* of the 1960s." Page 128.

DEPTS.

ERIN PATRICE O'BRIEN

BRILL'S CONTENT

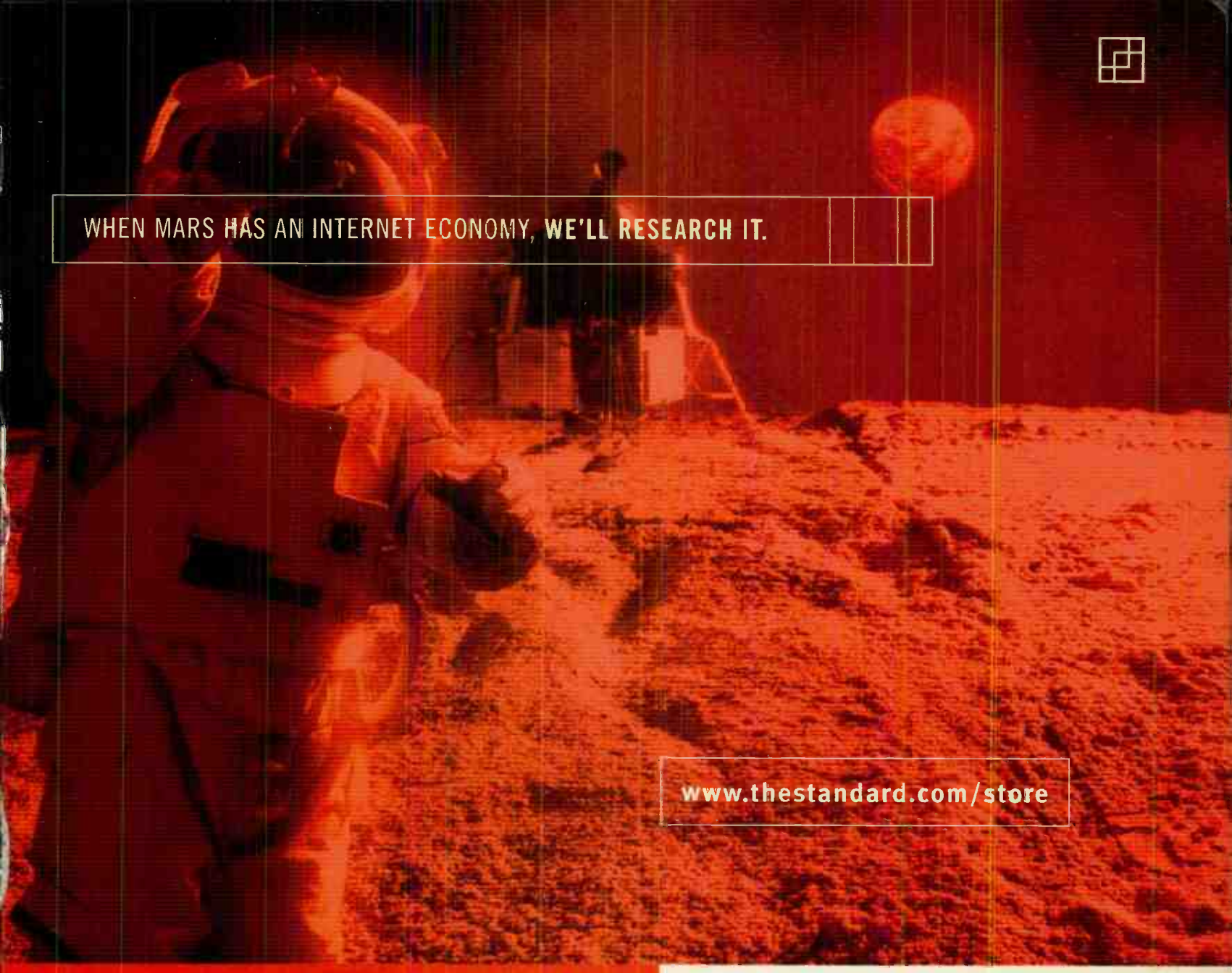
WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

No Conflicts of Interest
We believe that the content of anything that sells itself as journalism should be free of any motive other than informing its consumers. In other words, it should not be motivated, for example, by the desire to curry favor with an advertiser or to advance a particular political interest.

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



With the imminent entry of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the WTO, foreign companies are eagerly eyeing the 1.3 billion strong Chinese consumer market. So what are the most exciting growth markets in the Internet economy?

The Standard and IDC provide an assessment of the Information Societies of India, Australia and China as well as Latin America and the European Union. Benefit from deep knowledge of the workforce population, technological and business growth, online populations and potential for development of the Internet economy in these international locations.

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LETTERS

CORRECTIONS POLICY

1. We always publish corrections at least as prominently as the original mistake was published.

2. We are eager to make corrections quickly and candidly.

3. Although we welcome letters that are critical of our work, an aggrieved party need not have a letter published for us to correct a mistake. We will publish corrections on our own and in our own voice as soon as we are told about a mistake by anyone—our staff, an uninvolved reader, or an aggrieved reader—and can confirm the correct information.

4. Our corrections policy should not be mistaken for a policy of accommodating readers who are simply unhappy about a story.

5. Information about corrections or complaints should be directed to CEO Steven Brill. He may be reached by mail at 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; by fax at 212-332-6350; or by e-mail at comments@brillscontent.com.

6. Separately or in addition, readers are invited to contact our outside ombudsman, Michael Gartner, who will investigate and report on specific complaints about the work of the magazine. He may be reached by voice mail at 212-332-6381; by fax at 212-332-6350; by e-mail at mgartner@brillscontent.com; or by mail at 5315 Waterbury Road, Des Moines, IA 50312.

DISCLOSURE

Brill Media Holdings, L.P., the parent company of this magazine, has entered into an agreement in which NBC, CBS, and Primedia (a large magazine company) participate as limited partners in an Internet business run by Brill Media Holdings. Although the two ventures are separate and these media companies by contract specifically disclaim any involvement in or influence over this magazine, there is nonetheless an indirect connection between the magazine and these companies. Any complaints about perceived bias by the magazine in favor of NBC, CBS, or Primedia should be directed to Mr. Gartner.

MIDEAST BIAS; NETWORK ELECTION REFORMS; AND REMEMBERING AN HONEST JOURNALIST

GETTING EDUCATED

*Eric Effron's article "Between the Lines" [Rewind, January], about consumers eschewing "a shared media experience" and opting for specialized news sources, often available on the Internet, discusses the big problem but doesn't go far enough. The issue is not about big news media filtering all available reports into an objective, tell-both-sides tale. It's about people finding the news they want to hear and ignoring any opposing arguments.

People can avoid looking at mainstream media sources and instead find a media outlet that says what they want it to say. It's a guarantee for coverage that is more partisan, more biased, and, in the end, less enlightening. Perhaps the most instructive theory about human nature concerns the actions of Effron's friend, mentioned in the article. Bored with the Mideast coverage of the largely inoffensive though frequently inaccurate *New York Times*, Effron's friend doesn't search for a panoramic selection of comprehensive sources that will explore all sides and present different perspectives. Instead, the friend looks for the sites that are most likely to present a preferred and slanted view, and then blames the mainstream media when they don't take that view.

When consumers devote their energies to finding out more than ever about a subject but do it from only one direction, they may become hyperinformed, but they will be woefully undereducated.

MARK ROSE, SEATTLE, WA

SELF-DEFENSE

*In "Between the Lines," Eric Effron discusses the various sides of

news coverage in the current Middle East conflict.

News reports show organized gangs of Palestinian youths throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, but what you do not see in these tapes—even though this has been reported by news services—is fully armed Palestinian police in the background firing live bullets and grenades at the Israeli soldiers and using the young as protective walls.

Yet you characterize the Israeli soldiers as having committed atrocities. If you've ever been in a combat situation, you wouldn't term self-defense an atrocity.

For a magazine that preaches accuracy, you have failed miserably.

ALLEN SOMMERS, BALA CYNWYD, PA

PAY UP

Regarding the Report From the Ombudsman [January], it is my nonjournalistic opinion that Mr. Gartner should pay up immediately [in his bet with Steven Brill over whether nonjournalists will see the arrogance behind the Pulitzer Prize process].

Perhaps Mr. Gartner believes that we nonjournalists could not possibly understand the depth of consideration an award so noble as the Pulitzer Prize might require ["Eyes Off the Prize," September]. Perhaps he is merely arrogant. It is my belief that the writer, [Seth] Mnookin, wrote a fair and concise article about the process of evaluation concerning the Pulitzer Prize and the fallacies contained within that system. It is a shame that those involved in the entire process cannot see the inadequacies that Mr. Mnookin points out. If they are willing to listen to constructive criticism instead of being politically defensive, perhaps some positive change could come about.

TINA M. LAOLAGI, KEIZER, OR

FIVE NOT-SO-SIMPLE REFORMS

Brill's Content, on its website, has posted five bad and mostly naive election coverage reforms ["Five Simple Reforms"] and asked the television networks to respond. Let's take them one at a time.

1. You have asked the networks not to make projections in states where any polls are open. I assume you know that election officials are

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LETTERS

making public the voting results in those parts of the state where the polls have closed. In effect, you are asking that networks not talk about the vote while public officials and other news organizations are free to report and analyze. This makes no sense.

2. Networks already identify their statements as estimates or projections. They also report the vote count with the percentage of the precincts reported. What you have asked for [that networks "use qualifying language that explicitly says that this is a 'prediction' and that conveys that the actual results may turn out differently"] is essentially the same thing as what is already being done.

3. Your request [that networks "make all best efforts to assure that any voice-over or text headlines, bumpers, and captions do not use language that is more declarative than it should be"] is too vague. It is covered by item 2.

4. [By asking networks not to "combine any...polling efforts with those of any other non-affiliated national television news organization"], are you really saying that CBS and *The New York Times*, ABC and *The Washington Post*, NBC and *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN and *USA Today*, and the dozens of other print/broadcast media partnerships should dissolve? If so, I assume you will also advise every news organization not to use Reuters, The Associated Press, and Bloomberg.

5. [*Brill's Content* proposes that networks "not have someone on-air to explain a result that has not already happened"], but the election has already happened when the polls close. There are many different ways of knowing that result. Exit polls and actual returns in sample precincts are only two of the ways, and these have been remarkably reliable. I might say that in the 33 years I have been involved, the networks have had to make fewer election corrections than *Brill's Content* has made in its short life. The election projection system used by the networks made egregious mistakes in Florida on November 7. However, taken in the context of all the years the networks have been at it, they have been very accurate.

WARREN MITOFSKY, NEW YORK, NY

Editor's note: For more on the networks' election calls, see Rewind (page 26) and our special package on the election, which begins on page 90.

TRUTH IN JOURNALISM

I enjoyed reading "The Journalist and the G-Man" [November], Jim Edwards's piece on George Seldes and the voluminous file the FBI accumulated on him. It was perhaps the fairest and most detailed examination of Seldes's work ever to appear in a major American magazine.

It's not surprising that so few journalists, let alone readers, know about the man who was the link between the first generation of muckrakers (Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell) and I.F. Stone and the generation of investigative journalists that followed Stone's path. You can accurately judge a man by the enemies he makes, and with his uncompromising ideals and his relentless pursuit of the truth, Seldes made plenty of enemies. But every honest journalist owes Seldes a great debt.

RANDOLPH T. HOLHUT, EDITOR,
THE GEORGE SELDES READER
EAST DUMMERSTON, VT

BOOKISH LOOK

Jim Edwards's otherwise interesting piece on George Seldes was marred by a common failing of journalists: Edwards's observation that Seldes "looked more like a librarian than the rabble-rouser he was."

Muckraking legend George Seldes

This kind of trade in stereotypes is meaningless—or worse—to readers. It's just plain silly. What do librarians look like, anyway? Is there a model "look" for any profession?

HOWARD KARTEN, RANDOLPH, MA

P.S. I am not now, nor have I ever been, a librarian; nor do I have any friends or relatives who are or have been.

DEFENDING TINSELTOWN

Richard Schickel's review ["Show Them the Money," November] of the book that I coedited with Laura J. Shapiro, *The First Time I Got Paid For It...*, is a textbook example of the adage "Those who can't do write reviews." Mr. Schickel uses the format of a book review to deliver a rambling, disjointed screed against Hollywood, screenwriters, the Writers Guild, and just about everything else in his path.

He condemns such writers as William Goldman, Cameron Crowe, and their ilk simply because they are well paid for their work, while wrapping himself in the purer-than-thou mantle of the documentary filmmaker. He goes on to call a union whose card he carries and whose health plan he benefits from "a sad...impotent little union" and belittles its attempts to improve the creative rights of writers.

It would appear as if the man just doesn't like screenwriters or, more likely, is a failed screenwriter himself. I'd be willing to bet that he has a couple of unsold screenplays in his drawer. Or maybe this review is a form of retribution for the bad reviews he has gotten as a book writer (*The New York Times* said of his Clint Eastwood biography: "Mr. Schickel writes as if he had a .44 Magnum to his head").

Finally, lest I sound merely like a thin-skinned author responding to a sour review, let me point out that as the writer of five published novels I have had my share of sour reviews, but for the record, I have never received one from a writer who had such a dull ax to grind.

PETER LEFCOURT, LOS ANGELES, CA

Richard Schickel responds: For the record, as Peter Lefcourt likes to put it, no, I don't have any screenplays in my drawer. As I said in my review, I don't have any talent for or interest in that kind of writing. Also, I don't have the patience to sit around listening to "input" from "creative" executives regarding my work—no matter how good the money may be. Incidentally, I don't make documentaries because I think they are a "pure" form. Rather, I like the work, and since I write, produce, and direct them, I find considerable autonomy in the process.

As for the Writers Guild's campaign for "creative rights," it is mere posturing. The majority of scripts today, by the time they are produced, are the products of anonymous committees whose members rewrite and "polish" the original writer's work. I don't know what rights they might have—other than to a nice paycheck—or how, practically speaking, they might assert them. The vision of a dozen hacks standing around next to a director on the set and arguing about the intent of a scene is chilling.

CORRECTIONS

Due to an editing error, senior writer Seth Mnookin's response to January's Report From the Ombudsman misidentified the Lawrence *Eagle-Tribune* as a Kansas newspaper. It serves Lawrence, Massachusetts.

In the December/January Ticker column, staff writer Jesse Oxfeld miscounted the number of times *Newsweek* has used the phrase "the Austin powers" to refer to George W. Bush's Texas brain trust. The magazine also used the term twice in 1999; the correct total is eight.

In November's "Overkill," we reported that Douglas Clifton, editor of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, had fired veteran employees. In fact, Mr. Clifton "reorganized" the paper's newsroom—he offered to buy out the contract of one columnist who subsequently resigned, and a freelancer's column was dropped.

In October's "Favorite Son," we referred to a "front-page correction" in the Baltimore *Sun*. The correction ran on the second page.

We regret these errors.

COURTESY OF RICK GOLDSMITH

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LETTERS

I'll pass over Lefcourt's base (and baseless) imputations of motives, and content myself with the observation that he, like many of the writers in his book, is a victim of the Stockholm Syndrome—an eager accomplice in his own degradation. One can imagine, as I suggested in my piece, a system that does not automatically degrade its important contributors. But creating such a system would entail the abandonment of some of the economic entitlements Hollywood writers now enjoy (see the writing for theater or film in other countries). It would also, of course, mean abandoning the pose of whining victimization in which these writers also appear to revel.

INCOHERENT ARGUMENT

Next time I teach a writing class, I might use Jonathan Mahler's review of Christopher Hitchens ["Establishment Radical," January] to illustrate the ad hominem style of argument, though that characterization attributes more coherence to the review than it really has.

Mahler's principal objection seems to be that Hitchens has outlets in mainstream publications for his radical views. Mahler also seems disturbed that he cannot pin down Hitchens's politics. He writes that "to be an ideological hero, you need to have an ideology" and ascribes to Hitchens the belief that "it's better to be unpredictable than right." The problem with these lines of "argument" is that, in the first case, Hitchens himself does not claim to be an ideological hero; as for being right, Mahler's response to Hitchens's having "a soapbox for his campaign against the death penalty, soft money, and Clinton's mishandling of Kosovo" is apparently to point out that the man lives in a nice apartment. Facts have no place in Mahler's method. No wonder his way of dismissing Hitchens's collections is to write that they are "dense." How inconvenient.

MARK DOW, BROOKLYN, NY

Jonathan Mahler responds: If Mr. Dow does, in fact, teach writing and is not simply invoking a tired cliché in the first sentence of his letter, he might also wish to bring along a copy of his own handiwork to his next class as an example of tone-deaf and entirely misleading analysis. On to a few specifics. I hardly object to the fact that Mr. Hitchens has mainstream outlets for his "radical" views; I merely find it an amusing irony that the same man who writes a column called "Minority Report" for *The Nation* also pens a column for *Vanity Fair* that was once called "Cultural Elite." Ditto for Mr. Dow's claim that I am bothered by the fact that Mr. Hitchens lives in a penthouse apartment; to twist a phrase, he's a limousine radical.

I deny Mr. Dow's charge that I was disturbed at my inability to pin down Mr. Hitchens's politics, largely because I did pin them down. I'll repeat them here for the benefit of the letter writer: They are the politics of provocation.

As for Mr. Dow's claim that Mr. Hitchens himself does not claim to be an ideological hero, he may wish to consult the *Vanity Fair* column in which Mr. Hitchens compares his situation vis-à-vis Monica Lewinsky and Sidney Blumenthal to that of, yes, George Orwell and Whittaker Chambers. And I wasn't dismissing Mr. Hitchens's collections by calling them dense. I was simply stating a fact. I could go on, but I'll leave it to the students in Mr. Dow's writing class to explain the rest to him.

15 MINUTES

Andy Warhol was right: We will all get our 15 minutes of fame. Joe Kelleher ["The Player," January] received ten minutes more than his fame limit from *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Joe may have been a nerd and a real know-it-all, but that's what helped him to win and receive the glory afterward. Fate was good to Joe, for if the phone lines had remained busy every time he placed a call, Joe wouldn't have had his enlightening journal published in *Brill's Content*.

PAUL DALE ROBERTS, ELK GROVE, CA

Game-show contestant Joe Kelleher wanted to be a millionaire.

ADRIAN DELUCCA

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Michael Gartner's Report From the Ombudsman in your November issue reminds me how thoroughly tired I am of the endless moralizing among journalistic reformers over the use of anonymous quotes. Sure, I'm skeptical of quotes attributed to "a Clinton administration official" or "a Bush campaign insider," and properly so. But what about the corporate whistle-blower who can't afford to be fired, or the black cop who fears for his safety if he exposes racism on the force? The knee-jerk avoidance of anonymous quotes, without considering the source's personal or professional situation or the value of the information, would cripple investigative journalism and leave us at the mercy of the government and corporate PR.

MARC DESMOND, BROOKLYN, NY

DEFENDING THE PUNDITS

When after a hiatus the Pundit Scorecard was revisited [September], "[p]erennial loser George Will" was suddenly batting 1.000. The next month, suddenly and without explanation, the format was changed to include all predictions made over the two-year period since the Pundit Scorecard was born, and George Will was back at the bottom. Significantly, Will was singled out and personally addressed in the commentary regarding the change in scorekeeping, reinforcing the idea that the editors are out to get Will.

In all fairness to the pundits, the format of the scorecard should include monthly scores as well as the running total, and possibly a shorter-term total (the last six months?) so we can see if the individual pundit is improving with time or just fluctuating randomly. And if a pundit is truly improving—much as you may hate him and enjoy running pictures of him with the caption "LOSER"—be fair and give him or her credit.

KARL WAGENFÜHR, HACKENSACK, NJ

RIGHT-WING RHETORIC

In November's Face-Off, Jonah Goldberg puts the Clinton administration second from the top in the twentieth century's most dishonest administrations. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to look at that century and quickly count off Harding's Teapot Dome scandal, Nixon's Watergate criminality, and Reagan's Iran-Contra bucket of lies dealing with national security.

So for Jonah Goldberg even to hint at comparing a president's lie about sex in the Oval Office to heavy-duty dishonesty involving national felonies boggles the mind of any sane, real reporter. Get off it, Jonah! Conservative bias is one thing, but seeming ignorance of real twentieth-century wrongdoing in Washington betrays your statement for what it is: ill-defined right-wing rhetoric with very little basis in fact.

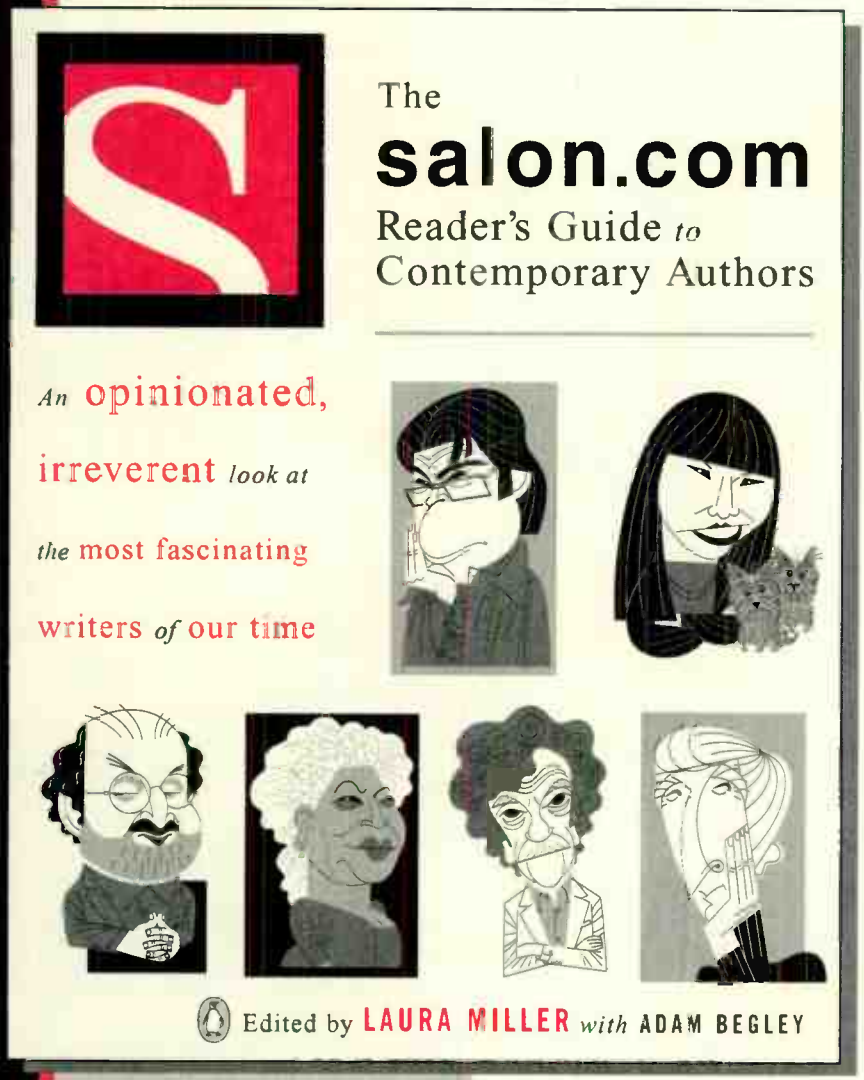
ROSS MURRAY, BOONVILLE, CA

CONFLICTING STORIES

I followed the initial story of [Cleveland talk-show host] Joel Rose ["Overkill," November] with some interest, since my wife is from the area. His suicide is a tragedy, and my sympathies go out to his family. But in these times of instant gratification, The Cleveland *Plain Dealer*'s reporting is just one more example of the media being driven by the desire to get a story first without regard to getting it right. This point is bolstered by the interviews with WEWS News and WKYC News, who judged their sources as conflicting and inadequate. Although the *Plain Dealer* may have been accurate about the police search of the Rose house, its further elaboration of accusations by "anonymous sources" is nothing more than libel by proxy.

CARL LAKATOS, DUBLIN, OH

Never Read Another Dud



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WIPEOUT!

Downhill skier Hermann Maier is favored to win at the world championships this month. But a crash is what made him famous.

Hermann Maier was in flight, hurtling at nearly 80 miles per hour on his way to one of the most spectacular crash landings in the history of downhill skiing. Standing next to the course at the 1998 Winter Olympics near Nagano, Japan, was photographer Carl Yarbrough, on assignment for *Sports Illustrated*. He managed to get off eight shots as Maier smashed through two safety fences and skidded to a stop. "I thought he was dead," says Yarbrough. "The Herminator" proved him wrong by going on to win two gold medals at the Nagano Games and more elsewhere; he's favored to win at the World Championships in St. Anton, Austria, this month. Yarbrough's photo—which appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*—has become the most famous of his 22-year career.

Before the Nagano downhill race, Yarbrough—who also shoots for *National Geographic Adventure* and *Outside*—staked out a promising spot near the dramatic first turn. "I like the snow flying. I like the angulation of the body," says Yarbrough via cell phone from a Utah mountainside, where he's shooting a giant-slalom race. In Japan, Yarbrough says, he was alone high up on the mountain. To avoid attracting competing photographers, he hid behind a fence for more than an hour before the race.

After the first skiers went by, Yarbrough decided his angle wasn't quite right, so he moved 15 feet. "You only get one crack at it," says Yarbrough. "You've been standing on the hill for two, three, four hours, and your reflexes aren't that sharp." While you're shooting 14 frames a second at targets moving faster than cars on a highway, he adds, concentration is essential. When Maier came flying off the mountain, Yarbrough was barely able to keep him in the frame. He then watched as Maier, out of control, tore through the very spot where he had been standing just moments before.

Months later, Maier complained to *Outside* about the American media's emphasis on violence. "There was an American photographer on the mountain," Maier said in an interview. "He didn't say, 'Hey, you all right?' He says, 'Hey, great picture!'" Not so, says Yarbrough, who contends he immediately asked about Maier's condition. In any event, Maier seems to have forgiven all, and now hypes Yarbrough's shot prominently in his promotional materials. STEPHEN TOTILO

Photograph by Carl Yarbrough/*Sports Illustrated*

fixing election night

The election-night fiasco shows what can happen when a cartel eliminates competition for a quality product—in this instance, the news. BY STEVEN BRILL

Imagine the following scenario. The top car companies decide that the money they spend each year researching ways to make their cars better is cutting too deeply into profits. So they all meet and decide to create one entity that they'll each chip in for. That entity—let's call it the Vehicle Improvement Service, or VIS—will do all the research that each company had been doing on its own. It'll be what's called a "pooling arrangement."

The savings will be enormous: Where there had once been a half dozen or more teams of seat-cushion comfort experts there will now be just one. No company will do any independent research, and each will be given regular reports on the results of VIS's work at exactly the same moment, so that if there's a breakthrough in windshield wipers or side air bags or car stereos, no one company will get the benefit of it first. No longer will Detroit executives lie awake at night worrying about some pesky competitor getting an advantage by spending more on product development or being better or more aggressive about it.

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN INDUSTRY COMES TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE.

Sounds pretty good—if you're a car company. But those of us who buy cars might not think so. Nor, of course, would the government. For it doesn't take David Boies to figure out that this would be a classic antitrust violation. Antitrust law has to do with maintaining not only price competition but also product competition. Not only can't competitors conspire to fix prices, they also can't conspire to limit the competition that comes when I try to outsell you by creating a better product. If they did, the government would be all over them, as would the press as soon as they found out.

All of this might be obvious when it comes to cars, or tires, or drugs. But apparently it's not obvious when it comes to the product that the press produces—news—and in particular when it comes to the most important breaking news that the press produces every four years: the results of the presidential election.

The simple fact is that the news media's election-night fiasco happened because the press seems to have violated antitrust laws by organizing a cartel called Voter News Service that was guaranteed to eliminate competition for a quality product—and, therefore, destined one day to produce a defective product that no one could tell was defective because there would be no alternative products to compare it to. Indeed, the antitrust violation seems so apparent yet was so out in the open, and, it now seems, carried out with such a "what, us worry?" attitude, that the whole episode says a lot about the media industry's sense that it is rarely accountable to anyone for anything, an attitude also reflected in how the various players have responded to criticism in the aftermath of election night.

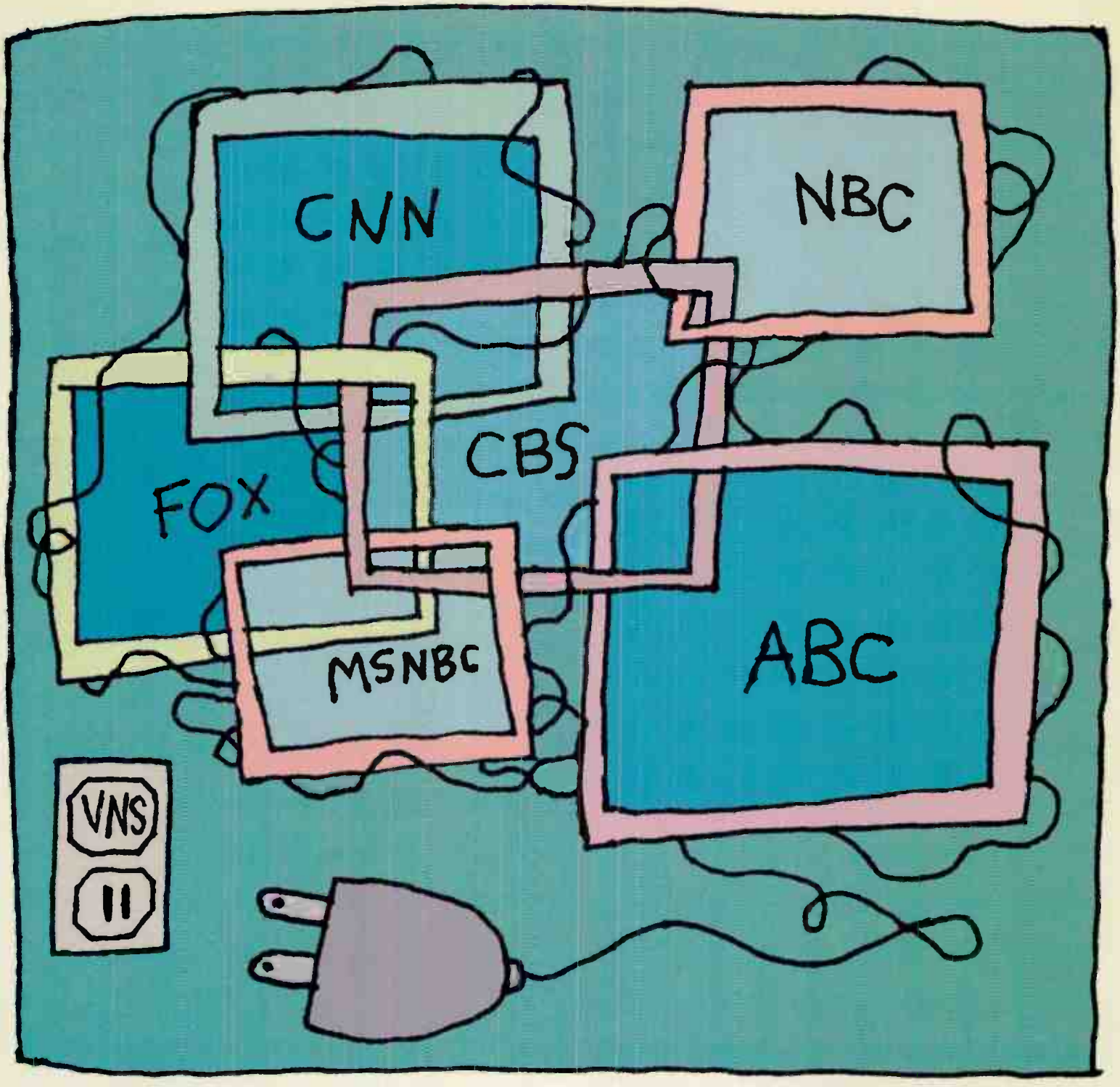
As financial analyst (and former NBC News executive) Tom Wolzien explains in an article on page 97, the Voter News Service was created in 1993 to save big corporations money.

That arrangement had its origins in 1966, when the news organizations formed something called News Election Service, or NES. What NES did was more innocent; it was simply a pooling arrangement that allowed one group of people to call various polling precincts on election night to get actual results. But in 1990, as these news organizations sought more savings, they formed something called Voter Research and Surveys, or VRS, which pooled exit polls. Whereas in the past many news organizations had each fielded teams of exit pollsters on election day to ask voters whom they had voted for, under this new arrangement there would now be only one set of exit polls, and all the information and analysis would be shared by most major news organizations.

In 1993, NES and VRS were combined in an effort to save even more money. The new organization would be called Voter News Service, and not only would exit polling be pooled but so would an analysis of the exit poll results, which would be combined with an analysis of actual results from sample precincts to produce a projected outcome. Why pay lots of teams of analysts when all of the networks and print organizations could use just one?

As Seth Mnookin's article on page 94 explains, it was the pooling of those exit polls and the use of the pooled analysis of the polls and of the results from sample precincts that caused everyone to go wrong roughly in lockstep on election night.

Occasionally, when competitors in any industry want to pool some limited effort of some kind—the movie studios' effort to standardize how movies are rated, for example, or some industry's effort to adopt a common size standard—they get clearance from the Justice Department's antitrust division. According to Warren Mitofsky, who ran VRS and helped organize the VNS, the Justice Department was approached when NES was formed. But, says Mitofsky, "we never went back in 1990 for clearance on VIS, or for VNS." And therein lies the legal problem. It



SCOTT MENCHIN

is no surprise that the Justice Department would not object to the NES's pooling of results-gathering. After all, getting the same fact from the same election official is not the kind of thing competitors can compete on; there's no creativity or expertise really involved. Thus, the networks have gotten clearance—or in other instances know they would get clearance—for joint activities such as having pooled camera shots at major news events. But once they got involved in 1990 in pooling for an exit poll, that would probably have been a problem; polling is a skill, subject to competition for quality. And then, once they took the final step with VNS in 1995 of pooling the analysis of the pooled poll and sample results to project results, they almost certainly would have had trouble. After all, isn't that just the kind of expertise our news organizations in so many other contexts routinely claim makes them better than their competition? And can there be any more important news "product" that any of them produces than the projecting of election-night results in a close election?

In fact, it turns out that the original March 21, 1966, letter from the Justice Department to the networks and wire services saying that Justice had no plans to challenge News Election Service's pooling of vote-tabulation efforts cautioned the news organizations that going further could be a problem. "It is our understanding," the head of the antitrust division wrote, "based upon the agreement itself and the representations made to us...that the proposed operation is solely intended [to be] a facility for the mechanical functions of vote gathering."

A lawyer whose specialty is antitrust law and who works at one of the television news organizations says that the first time he ever heard of or thought about Voter News Service was on election night, and, he says, "I immediately thought, *How can we be doing this? It's such an obvious violation of the law.*" This lawyer says that when he inquired more about it, "nothing I heard changed my mind at all. This is a no-brainer, really." It could be argued, he adds, that the original gathering of just the results "was perfectly okay; there's no competitive edge there. But a poll is different, and the analysis of a poll is really different."

Major national newspapers and some newsmagazines as well as wire services are also part of VNS. *New York Times* assistant general counsel George Freeman says that he, too, doesn't recall anyone ever asking him about antitrust issues related to the pooling arrangement. But, he says, "although I've never really thought about it, offhand I'd say that because we don't sell our election news as any kind of separate package, it would not be an issue for us." To be sure, there could be an argument that because the *Times* and other newspapers would otherwise buy services related to election coverage (from people doing the polling, for example), this would still be illegal collusion. But the television networks do, in fact, sell their election-night coverage to advertisers, if not to the people watching (though the cable networks do that, too, indirectly).

"I IMMEDIATELY THOUGHT, *HOW CAN WE BE DOING THIS?*" ONE MEDIA LAWYER SAYS. "*IT'S SUCH AN OBVIOUS VIOLATION OF THE LAW.*"

The other defense could be that once the networks get the numbers, analysis, and projections from VNS, they are free to use them or not use them as they wish, and that they have one or more analysts of their own who study them before they call a result. But the lockstep way in which they do call results—and did on election night 2000—would undermine that argument, as would the fact that their own people have no practical way of looking behind the poll numbers and sampling analysis VNS is supplying.

Three weeks after the election-night fiasco, the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission received a letter from the American Antitrust Institute, a self-described "research, education, and advocacy organization," asking that VNS be broken up. At press time, Justice Department spokeswoman Gina Talamona, while confirming that Justice was never asked to clear VRS or VNS, would say only, "We are reviewing the letter as we would any correspondence."

Asked about the letter, Barbara Levin, a spokeswoman for NBC, said, "We looked into the antitrust issues" when VNS was formed, "and we were satisfied that VNS complies fully with the antitrust laws," a response that reflected the position of other VNS members when asked to talk about VNS antitrust issues.

One way to think about the implications of this pooling arrangement is to consider how we'd feel if all the news organizations had gotten together and decided to save even more money by pooling all those weekly and then daily polls and analyses we were treated to last year in the run-up to each primary and the general election. So instead of four or five such polls (CNN–*USA Today*–Gallup, MSNBC-Reuters-Zogby, NBC–*Wall Street Journal*, CBS–*New York Times*), saying Bush was moving ahead of Gore or vice versa, we'd hear about only one. It would be THE POLL. And we'd never have anything to compare it to, so we'd have to assume it was right.

That's exactly what happened on election night, a phenomenon exacerbated by the networks' using the same information and analysis not simply to predict but to declare in near lockstep that someone was the winner.

So, here's the election-night story line as we now know it.

- Every major national news organization in our country forms a cartel to coordinate the production of one of their most important news products (election-night coverage and projections).
- The cartel adds to the profits of some of the world's largest conglomerates, but the first time it is put to a real test—calling a close national election—it produces a critically flawed product.
- Because there isn't a competing product, no one can tell it's a faulty product until it's too late.
- Meantime, a competitive urge that had been abandoned when it came to spending the resources to gather and analyze the news reappears when it comes to rushing to report and overstate its meaning: Poll and sample results become projections and then declarations of winners and losers.
- After failing once in the evening (when Florida is called for Al Gore, which some argue discourages Republican voters from voting in places where the polls are still open), the cartel's handiwork is deployed again and fails a second time (when Florida and the entire election is called for George W. Bush, which others argue gives Bush the advantage of being seen as the presumptive president from whom Gore then tries to take back the crown with a bunch of legal maneuvers).

What happens next? Various network executives and anchors, either publicly or privately:

- Apologize but blame VNS, as if it were some foreign virus rather than an entity that they own and control.
- Apologize but say that the solution is for Congress to standardize polling hours. Which would mean, I guess, that because the news organizations want to save money and want to predict results in unison, Hawaiians would need to vote from 1 A.M. to 1 P.M. and Californians from 3 A.M. to 3 P.M., or else polls would have to be open for 24 hours everywhere at an extra cost of billions of dollars.
- Apologize but point to the problems with voting machines and voting rules around the country, which are valid issues—so valid, in fact, that one would have thought that more news organizations would have used their resources to report on these problems *before* election night.
- Apologize but hint that part of the problem was that George Bush's cousin was the guy at Fox who called Florida for Bush and that if Fox hadn't they might not have, either. Leaving aside whether a Bush cousin should have, or in fact did. make that call at Fox, the implications of this blame-passing are breathtaking; they're saying that the herd mentality created by the pooled polling and analysis of the VNS cartel was such

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that Fox—or, I guess, a Bush cousin—was, in effect, making the call for them, too.

■ Apologize but say that because they're conducting their own internal investigations they're not going to answer any outsider's questions about what happened on the night they made the worst mistake they could make in covering the most important news event of the year—and made the mistake twice. Imagine how the press would react if a car or tire company responded to inquiries that way.

That last point brings us to a survey we tried to conduct among the television news organizations in the aftermath of election night.

We sent the chiefs of the five television news organizations—ABC, NBC (which includes MSNBC), CBS, CNN, and Fox—a letter asking if they would agree to make the following five changes in their election-night procedures having to do not only with VNS but with the whole process of calling the result. They were asked to check off a "yes" or "no" to the following:

1. During election day, including the evening of election coverage, we will not make any projections, including those based on exit polls, about the results in any voting jurisdiction where any polling places are still open to voters.

2. During our election night coverage (and later, if relevant), we will not declare anyone the winner or loser in any jurisdiction even after the polls have closed until we receive what we believe to be reliable information regarding an actual count of enough actual ballots necessary to make a result mathematically certain. If we refer to exit polls or analysis of partial returns to report on how we believe the candidates are doing, we will use qualifying language that explicitly says that this is a "prediction" and that conveys that the actual results may turn out differently. Specifically, in these circumstances we will never "declare" a winner or "project" a winner. Rather, we might say something like "[Name of news organization] predicts, based on exit polling [or results tabulated thus far], that Smith will be the winner in Florida, but we do not yet know the actual result."

3. In order to be in compliance with the pledge always to use qualifying language in referring to "predictions" we will make all best efforts to assure that any voice-over or text headlines, bumpers, and captions do not use language that is more declarative than it should be. *(We thought this was the ultimate no-brainer; it simply says that headlines won't overstate the body of the story.)*

4. In order to assure that our reporting and, in particular, our predictions are subject to comparison to the predictions of other news organizations, during the campaign season and on election night, we will not combine any of our polling efforts with those of any other non-affiliated national television news organization. *(This is the question that goes after the VNS arrangement and also attempts to deal with the prospect that the cartel might be extended to regular election-year polling, so that all year long we'd be told about one Big Poll. But note that it doesn't say that every news organization has to do its own work; it allows for the current election-year joint efforts of a major newspaper or magazine and a television organization—the CBS–*New York Times *poll, for example. It just forbids having any of the five television organizations working with another, let alone all five working in unison. Let's also remember that if the five television news organizations decide that not being able to fund just one organization makes election-day polling and analysis too expensive it would not be the end of the world if these networks could not declare a winner until all the votes had actually been counted and reported; they could just tell their viewers that although they're part of conglomerates like General Electric, Viacom, Fox, AOL Time Warner, and Disney they can't spend the money to bring us the earliest news about the single most important news event they cover every four years unless they form a cartel.)*

5. Until the actual results have actually been counted, we will not during our coverage feature analysts or other employees of our news organization whose comments imply that the result is already final. In other words, we will not have someone on-air to explain a result that has not already happened.

These changes may seem simple and straightforward. But only one news division chief, Roger Ailes of Fox News, wrote back agreeing with them. (Ailes quibbled with No. 4, the VNS provision, saying that he agreed that there should no longer be only one service, but did not want to commit himself to how many competitors there ought to be until he could cost out the implications.) CNN, ABC, and NBC cited their internal studies as reasons not to respond. After ABC subsequently issued a press release describing the changes it would implement as a result of its study—which included a vow not to project winners until all the polls in a state had closed, the hiring of some outside experts to review the operations of VNS, and a call for uniform poll closing times in all 50 states—spokesman Jeffrey Schneider said that the network would not comment on the five proposals other than to refer us to that press release.

We also sent the same survey to top producers, as well as the anchors and correspondents who were on the air on election night at the five television news organizations, asking if they thought their organizations *should* adopt these changes. All but five—Paula Zahn, Tony Snow, and executive political programming producer Marty Ryan of Fox, John King of CNN, and George Stephanopoulos of ABC—declined to participate, with many citing their network's internal deliberations and the need to allow the bosses to set policy. (Zahn, Snow, and Ryan supported all five proposals; Stephanopoulos supported four but wrote that he was undecided about the breakup of Voter News Service; King supported four but wrote that eliminating VNS would not be "cost effective.")

After also citing an internal "in-depth examination of what went wrong on Election Night" as a reason for not responding, CBS News president Andrew Heyward added, "CBS News has a long tradition of independence. We do not believe in industry-wide guidelines, whether they emanate from the government or from self-appointed critics of the medium." In other words, an industry-wide newsgathering cartel is acceptable and does not compromise "independence." But industry-wide guidelines in an area where the industry has clearly failed are another story. ■

REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

Recent articles in *Brill's Content* show confusion about the use of offensive language, blind quotes, and the role of fact-checking. The ombudsman thinks it's time to rethink some policies. BY MICHAEL GARTNER

What the h**k is going on at *Brill's Content*?

In recent issues, this magazine has written about a "major-league a**hole"; has quoted a writer about stepping "on your d**k"; has reported that an editor thinks "sometimes, sh** happens"; has mentioned a writer who told an actress, "You're infamous for the actors that you've f**ked"; and has quoted from a tape that was thought to have contained the words "f**ing niggers."

And yet...

In recent issues, this magazine has quoted Christiane Amanpour saying, "We kicked ass all over the world"; has reported that politico Paul Begala shouted at his friend George Stephanopoulos, "Goddamnit, George, how dare you call Al Gore arrogant?"; has noted that a friend of Matt Drudge's has said that Mr. Drudge would do something "particularly if it pisses people off"; and has written that a Silicon Valley entrepreneur said, "People kiss my ass all day long."

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How come?

How come this magazine will say "nigger" but not "f***"? How come it will say "ass" but not "a**hole," "pisses" but not "sh**"? And how come it will let a writer say "Goddamnit" and let another refer to someone as "dropping to her knees to execute a Lewinsky" (which, of course, involves a d**k)?

In November, *Brill's Content* published a letter from Howard Leonard of New York asking if the word "d**k" was "just too potent to be exposed to view," asking why the magazine drew "a cloak of prudery" over the very word that made the quote punchy, and asking if the editors were "afraid of polluting the minds of those children who might scan the magazine eagerly each month, in search of the naughty bits."

The letter ran without an answer, so here's the policy: *Brill's Content* wants to be tasteful, is indeed aware of its young readers, and sometimes just sc**ws up.

The editors won't allow "what strikes us as tasteless and unnecessary," e-mails the eponymous Steven Brill, the founder and chairman of this magazine. "In many circles, this is what is known as editing. You try to use judgment and weigh the pluses and minuses. I used to have a rule at Court TV that if someone on the witness stand casually referred to someone as a ni**er (I still can't type that word), we would use our time delay to bleep it out, but if it was one of the Rodney King cops or Mark Fuhrman using the word it would be central to the case and we'd keep it."

It was just "stupid and careless" that the word got into this magazine, he adds.

A year ago, Chip Rowe, an associate editor at *Playboy* magazine, took this magazine to task for bowdlerizing "f**ing" and "bulls**t," and he said, "Quit treating your readers as if they're children." In fact, Mr. Brill responded, "we do it, at my insistence, because my kids read my magazine." What's more, he told me, he loves "the idea that lots of schools use *Brill's Content* to teach kids about the media."

A few months ago, Mr. Rowe e-mailed me, predicting correctly that *Brill's Content* would use the word "a**hole" in reporting on the George Bush comment about *New York Times* reporter Adam Clymer. He closed, "When do Brill's kids turn 18?"

One of them has. But don't hold your breath, Mr. Rowe.

I'm with Steven Brill on this one. It's not that the words are shocking; it's just that they're usually not relevant and not necessary. Indeed, most of the quotes here could have been paraphrased—and probably should have been, given Mr. Brill's policy. They wouldn't have lost their force, but they would have lost those titillating **terisks.

There's nothing wrong with trying to be tasteful. Especially if it's your name on the magazine.

Still, I doubt that Mr. Brill's children, or any others, thought that man was stepping on his duck.

The editors respond: As a result of this exchange, we've decided to review our policy on obscenities to make sure we're being as consistent as possible.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

Jim Haner of *The* [Baltimore] *Sun* is one unlucky guy.

In a distinguished 15-year career, he has made one big mistake. And *Brill's Content* used that mistake to launch a five-and-a-half-page article that tears him to pieces.

To be sure, the story ["Favorite Son," October 2000] had all the to-be-sure material in it. It had praise from his current editors, endorsements from his past editors, references to all the good that he has done, and a testimonial from a colleague.

Then it ripped him to shreds.

There's no question Mr. Haner made a huge mistake in a story in *The Sun* last January. He had been writing good stuff about all the lead poisonings of Baltimore children, and then he wrote that Maryland governor Parris Glendening went to Baltimore "on a fact-finding mission into the city's epidemic of lead-poisoned children." While there, Mr. Haner reported, the governor met with a local activist, who gave Governor Glendening "an earful."

Mr. Haner seems to have invented those facts. The governor was in Baltimore for another reason, and while there he did not have a

confrontation with the activist about lead paint. Mr. Haner was called in by his editors and, in the words of *Sun* editor William Marimow, "had what I'd say were very extensive private conversations...conversations that I'd call 'corrective.'" *The Sun* also ran a correction (on page 2, not page 1, as *Brill's Content* reported) that made it and Mr. Haner look pretty bad. "In fact, the governor was in Baltimore" to discuss legislative issues with another group, the correction said. "In fact, [the activist] did not speak to the governor about lead poisoning."

When it was all over, Mr. Haner had caught hell but had kept his job.

That prompted a former *Sun* reporter, David Simon, to call *Brill's Content*. That call led to the October story, by Abigail Pogrebin, one of the magazine's top reporters. She found two other mistakes Mr. Haner had made since 1985, when he became a reporter—a middling one from 1995 and a murky one from 1994—and found two public officials who said Mr. Haner had misquoted them, which is a serious allegation against any reporter. She used that to do Mr. Haner in.

Pogrebin's facts are right, or very nearly so, but the tone is one of prosecution and persecution. Ms. Pogrebin could have written a piece explaining how a prizewinning reporter can make such an egregious mistake, or how an investigative reporter can get too caught up in his cause, or how jealousies can disrupt a newsroom. Instead, her article reads as if she's a coconspirator with Mr. Simon in carrying out a vendetta against Mr. Haner and *The Sun*. It lets Mr. Simon vent about Mr. Haner or *The Sun* in nine different places, and it relies on nine anonymous sources to pile on. It lets Mr. Haner or *The Sun* be criticized by "some others," "detractors," "one reporter," "reporters at *The Sun*," "a *Sun* reporter," "several people at *The Sun*," "one longtime reporter," "one reporter no longer with the paper," and "one reporter."

That all adds up to a violation of *Brill's Content*'s pledge to be accurate "in context" as well as in fact, and it stretches to the breaking point the magazine's policy on the use of unnamed sources.

"I KNEW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN," SAYS CARROLL. "THEY WERE GOING TO CLARIFY THE FACTS, BUT THE THESIS BASED ON FALSE FACTS WOULD REMAIN INTACT."

And although the story was accurate in fact, or nearly so, the reporter herself was as careless as she accused Mr. Haner and *The Sun* of being, *Sun* editor Marimow believes. He and his predecessor, John Carroll, who is now the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, say that when the *Brill's Content* fact-checker called them, she was reading them "facts" that weren't facts at all. "Four out of five facts" checked with Mr. Carroll "were dead wrong," Mr. Carroll says. Mr. Marimow says one wrong "fact"—subsequently eliminated—could have brought *Brill's Content* a libel suit from a Baltimore woman, and he is particularly incensed over a dispute about the meaning of one of his quotes.

The quote—also eliminated before publication—had Mr. Marimow being derisive about a Haner critic. Ms. Pogrebin inferred that he was talking about some *Sun* reporters, and she wrote that in the draft that was being checked by the fact-checker. Mr. Marimow told the fact-checker that that wasn't the case. "I then get a call from Abby, who tells me, oh, no, she interpreted it to mean *The Sun* staff, and she knew the interpretation was right. I said, how can you tell me the correct interpretation of my own words? I thought this was utter bull. Some reporter who is quoting me out of context and telling me that she knows what I meant, rather than I. It deeply upset me."

Mr. Marimow and Mr. Carroll came away pretty discouraged about this magazine. "*Brill's [Content]* made more errors in reporting my little part of the story than [Mr.] Haner has made in his whole career," Mr. Carroll says. Mr. Marimow adds, "Here's someone [Ms. Pogrebin] who is critical of someone making a mistake, and here's someone whose reporting, demonstrated by a fact-checker, was at best sloppy, at worst abysmal. Someone like that would not be hired at any newspaper in America." That's pretty strong stuff, but unlike the criticism of Mr. Haner, it's not anonymous.

Of course, *Brill's Content* can argue that its bad facts didn't make it to publication, that the fact-checking system worked and the mistakes were fixed before publication—not, as in the case of *The Sun*, after publication. That is true, but the tone wasn't changed. "I knew what was going to happen," says Mr. Carroll. "They were going to clarify the facts, but the thesis based on false facts would remain intact."

Footnote: In an e-mail to Mr. Haner, Ms. Pogrebin asked him to call so he could respond to the various allegations in the story. "But if you prefer to e-mail a response, that's fine, too," Ms. Pogrebin wrote, "*as long as it's on the record*." [Emphasis added.]

The editors respond: All this—a star reporter's mistakes, the way an important journalistic institution deals with those mistakes, and how those mistakes have touched off an emotional internal debate within a major newsroom—does not, according to the reporter, his editors, and our ombudsman, constitute a legitimate area of inquiry. We disagree. In fact, we think Abigail Pogrebin's piece on Jim Haner was one of the more important articles we've published, because it pulls back the curtain on aspects of media and journalism that are rarely examined—namely, how news organizations balance ambitions and standards, how they deal with errors, and what explanation they owe their public about such things.

Mr. Gartner suggests that the "to be sure" material—the words of those who defend Haner and his work—is mere window dressing to be dispensed with quickly so the article can get on with its mission "of prosecution and persecution." Actually, the positive views about Haner are substantial and are woven throughout the piece.

The point is that this article probed a controversy, and it did so in a fair, balanced, even transparent manner. For instance, the role of Mr. Haner's most outspoken critic, former *Sun* reporter David Simon, in bringing concerns about Haner to our attention is set forth right at the top of the piece. But that doesn't mean we set out to prove Simon's argument. In fact, we were suspicious of Simon's [CONTINUED ON PAGE 145]

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

NOTEBOOK

Photographers descend upon a Palestinian hurling stones.

L: DAVID SILVERMAN/NEWSMAKERS; R: PETER BERSON

PUBLIC RELATIONS

SPINNING A BIBLICAL BATTLE–IN NEW YORK

This past fall, televisions throughout the world flickered with sadly familiar scenes—stone-throwing Palestinian youths fighting with armed Israeli soldiers. As unrest spread from a Jerusalem holy site to the Palestinian territories, Israelis feared fallout from the violent images that were being broadcast to viewers around the globe. "We looked like Goliath and they looked like David," says Nachman Shai, the Israeli minister who coordinates the country's international information efforts. "David is always more popular." Desperate to win public sympathy and alter the course of the media war, the Israelis turned to those they thought could help them best: American publicity powerhouses.

On October 12, Shmuel Sisso, the Israeli consul general in New York, presided over an extraordinary gathering of about a dozen consultants who offered their expertise for free—from Howard Rubenstein, who handles such high-profile clients as Donald Trump and the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, to Ken Sunshine, who advises Barbra Streisand and Leonardo DiCaprio. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 36]

COSTLY ERROR

Early on November 8, many newspapers declared George W. Bush the next president. The latter-day "Dewey Defeats Truman" editions quickly became collectibles—at least for a few weeks. Here, some bids from eBay.

NEWSPAPER	HEADLINE	BIDS EARLY NOVEMBER	BIDS BY DECEMBER
New York Post	BUSH WINS!	$202.50	$12.50
The Washington Times	PRESIDENT BUSH	$132.50	$46.10
The Florida Times-Union	IT'S BUSH	$101.33	$26.99
The New York Times	BUSH APPEARS TO DEFEAT GORE	$95.00	$47.00

RESEARCH JOSHUA [illegible]

Standards

NEWS IN THE AIR

Boarding an airplane in the days after a fatal crash makes headlines can be nerve-racking. Although experts say the sky is safer than the road, news of a major accident can unhinge even the most confident traveler. "Some people are nervous fliers to begin with, so we don't want to do anything to make them more nervous," says John Hotard, spokesman for American Airlines. Hotard says that after a crash—such as the EgyptAir 990, Swissair 111, and TWA 800 disasters—American "will not provision [on flights] newspapers that have a crash story or scene

prominently displayed on page one of the paper." He says the primary motive isn't to hide bad news but to ensure that passengers are as calm and comfortable as possible.

David Castelveter, spokesman for US Airways, agrees: "We will not put magazines on-board that would cause passengers to have an uncomfortable experience," he says. The airline also carefully edits its in-flight video programming for the same reason.

Meanwhile, the CNN Airport Network, broadcast in terminals across the country, "covers major breaking news stories, including airline incidents, in a responsible manner," says spokeswoman Marea Battle. Still, she says, the network "exercise[s] editorial discretion on a case-by-case basis with all graphic video coverage, keeping in mind the uniqueness of the viewer in an airport environment." ALLISON BENEDIKT

Timeline

EMBARGOED?

When *Esquire*'s December issue featuring an interview with President Clinton reached members of the press 12 days before the election, it caused a frenzy. The president was criticized for stealing the spotlight from his vice-president, and he in turn accused *Esquire* of breaking their agreement about the issue's release date. Here's how the story evolved:

December's issue

MAY 26, 2000: Executive editor Mark Warren writes to then-White House press secretary Joe Lockhart to say that *Esquire* wants to "produce a beautiful, lasting piece on President Clinton," which would appear "on the December 2000 cover."

OCTOBER 26: *Esquire*'s PR team sends out advance copies of the issue.

OCTOBER 29: The press pounces. "[D]o comments like that from the president now complicate Al Gore's mission...?" asks NBC's Tim Russert.

OCTOBER 30: At a press conference, President Clinton says, "I was promised faithfully that the interview would be released after the election, and I believed it." On CNN's *Crossfire*, Lockhart refers to "an ironclad agreement...that this article wouldn't come out until after the election."

THE BACK AND FORTH:

***ESQUIRE*:** "[T]here wasn't any real discussion of dates," says editor in chief David Granger. "I think that once [President Clinton] saw the article...he expressed his displeasure ...his staff made the case to him that they had an agreement with us."

THE WHITE HOUSE: Press secretary Jake Siewert says, "When you're dealing with a less politically savvy, less Washington-connected organization, you have to be very explicit....They can claim they didn't violate the letter of the agreement, but they know they violated the spirit of it."

***ESQUIRE*:** "Politically savvy or not," says Warren, "we know what an agreement is, and we honor agreements when we have them."

ELIZABETH ANGELL

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35] "When you have a war you need the best generals, and when you have a media war we need the best PR people," says Sisso, who at the time was fending off criticism that he was mangling Israel's relations with the international media. (Immigration absorption minister Yael Tamir recently told *The Jerusalem Post* that she blamed Sisso for "Israel's failure in the press war." At press time, Alon Pinkas, the present chief of staff to Israel's minister of foreign affairs, was due to replace Sisso.)

Neither Sisso nor any of the PR experts present was anxious to speak about the late-afternoon meeting, held in a conference room at the Israeli consulate in midtown Manhattan. When *Brill's Content* initially asked the Israeli consul for media and public affairs, Yehuda Ya'akov, whether such a meeting had taken place, he dodged the question, saying, "We prefer to rely on our own expertise."

Howard Rubenstein is more forthcoming. "It was a very unusual gathering of people with real savvy," he says, calling the group "top-drawer; you had a few hundred years of experience around the table." Howard Teich, an attorney and a former president of the New York Metropolitan Region of the American Jewish Congress, corralled many of the attendees. In addition to Rubenstein and Sunshine, they included David Garth, who did the media campaigns for New York politicians Ed Koch and Mario Cuomo, and Michael Miller, executive vice-president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.


PR guru Howard Rubenstein

For Israel's antagonists, this public-relations mobilization comes as no surprise. "There is probably no limit to the amount of time and money that [the Israelis] are going to be willing to spend on this project," says Hussein Ibish, the communications director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), "because the Israelis have long realized, and the Palestinians are beginning to realize, how decisive the battle for public opinion in the United States [is]."

"IN THIS CASE THE MEDIA [ARE] THE BATTLEFIELD," SAYS SHAI.

It wasn't the first time that the Israelis solicited expert opinions on how to handle international PR efforts. In 1994 Rubenstein Associates assisted with press releases and arranged interviews for the Israeli consulate in New York, receiving $10,123.29 for its work, according to a disclosure filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Under FARA, individuals or organizations that provide public-relations assistance to a foreign government must disclose their work—even if it is pro bono. (At press time, no public-relations firm had registered work for the Israeli government since the October 12 meeting.)

The American PR experts urged the Israelis to "be more proactive," Sunshine says, and "offer more immediate spokesmen" to respond to crises. Rubenstein's firm provided pro bono assistance in placing Israel's representatives in various media outlets. His son, Steven Rubenstein, one of the firm's executive vice-presidents, helped draw up a rapid-response plan that was distributed to Sisso and Shai. The younger Rubenstein advised the consul general on the subtleties of the American media, "from the news cycles to who the right reporters are to who over time has shared Israel's perspective." (When asked who the "right reporters" were, Steven Rubenstein declined to elaborate.)

The Americans counseled the Israelis "that the war of images was being won by the Palestinians," Steven Rubenstein says. "We felt people were missing the full truth and that if you could show a fuller picture visually, it would be easier to make the Israeli case." Sunshine suggested that Sisso place the mothers of two lynched Israeli soldiers on television. More unorthodox was Shai's solution: Partially as a result of the ad hoc expert panel's advice, Shai equipped 15 random teams of soldiers with video cameras to document attacks on Israelis. "What you didn't see on television [were] the shots being fired at Israelis," Shai asserts. "We want those cameras to at least provide pictures of the armed Palestinians that the press routinely ignores." Shai suggests that arming soldiers with cameras isn't unusual: "In this case the media [are] the battlefield. The fight to get positive media is part of our military efforts."

But the ADC's Ibish sees these efforts in a different light. "One of Israel's greatest advantages over the Palestinians is their diplomatic advantage—their ability to make sure the United States uses its muscle to keep all the other countries of the world and the United Nations out of this situation," he charges. "If the Israelis aren't able to prevail in terms of public relations in the United States, they might lose that advantage."

Ibish says that although the Israelis "are in most cases still considerably more advanced at this art" of communicating with the American public than their Palestinian counterparts, the Arabs are catching up. The ADC responded to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by taking out full-page ads in papers across the country in the fall and "weigh[ing] in very heavily," Ibish says, with op-eds and grassroots work. "It's the first time in a long time that an Arab organization has done a very large media campaign," Ibish says. "We've done that without consulting outside PR experts."

Since the October 12 conference, the Israelis have acknowledged that they could use help. They continue to receive counsel from American professional consultants; as of press time, there had been at least three follow-up conference calls with the PR experts. "There is no 'we' and 'they' when it comes to the media now....The local media and the international media [are] one entity," says Shai. "It's very important for us to get the American point of view....For that, we have to consult with American experts, and we do."

EVE GERBER

RUBENSTEIN: ROBIN PLATZER/TWIN IMAGES

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COUNTING THE VOTES

MEN OF THE YEAR: *GQ*'S FUZZY MATH

Magazines from *Teen People* to *The New Yorker* now sponsor annual award ceremonies—gala events with high-profile honorees. *GQ*'s *Men of the Year Awards* show is the five-year-old granddaddy of these spectacles and one of the few to be televised (most recently in December on Fox). *GQ*'s is also one of the only major magazine awards shows determined by reader vote: "Who said no one ever listens to you?" the magazine asked readers last summer. "We listen. So tell us: Who should be *GQ*'s Men of the Year?" The answer appears to be whoever agrees to show up. When marquee names have refused to participate in the Men of the Year photo shoot and ceremony, the magazine has, in some cases, quietly altered the results of its poll. So much for "we listen": celebrity-wrangling trumps the vote.

GQ HAS QUIETLY ALTERED THE RESULTS OF ITS POLL.

Shows such as *GQ*'s or the *Vogue/VH1 Fashion Awards* are built on celebrity participation, because it's the stars who lure advertisers and viewers. *GQ*'s "Men of the Year" issue is an annual best-seller: Publisher Thomas Florio says that the 350 pages of advertising in the November 2000 issue were the most ever for a men's magazine. He calls "Men of the Year" a "cross-media package that [goes] beyond space in the magazine and time on Fox." Such shows generate enormous revenue, explains Lauren Zalaznick, a VH1 executive who produces the *Vogue/VH1 Fashion* and *My VH1 Music* awards shows. It's a foolproof formula. Advertisers are told, "We're going to have these kinds of categories and these kinds of stars," she says.

Unless, of course, the stars don't want the award: *GQ* has tried to persuade Los Angeles Lakers coach Phil Jackson to attend for some time, according to a source close to the Lakers, who insisted on anonymity. When Jackson declined the award in 1998, the magazine used stock photographs of him in the issue and presented the award in absentia, says the source. But when Jackson won the reader poll in 2000 and again declined to participate, *GQ* gave the honor to someone else. "They said, 'It's such great publicity, how could anyone pass up something like this?'" recalls the Lakers source. "Jackson's response was 'It's not anything I want.'" In December, *GQ* named Doc Rivers of the Orlando Magic "Coach of the Year." An NBA source, who asked not to be named, recalls the negotiations: "If Doc is not available," he asked, "does that mean he doesn't win?" *GQ* equivocated. "It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out their methods," says the source. Rivers attended the ceremony.

GQ spokeswoman Kathleen Madden acknowledges that Rivers did not win the poll and says he finished second. She also says that *GQ* changed results in the "Individual Athlete" category, substituting second-place Pete Sampras for Tiger Woods, who refused the award. (Jackson, Woods, and Sampras declined to comment for this article. A spokesman for the Orlando Magic would say only that "Rivers appreciates any recognition from *GQ* readers.") According to Madden, Stephen King won the literature award by an "overwhelming margin" but declined to participate, so that prize was scrapped. She says Sampras and Rivers were the only winners who were not *GQ* readers' first choice; she would not release the actual tallies from the 16,000-person survey.

Tiger Woods, *GQ*, and Phil Jackson

Editor in chief Arthur Cooper brushes off concerns about *GQ*'s selectively ignoring readers' votes. "You can't give an award to someone who doesn't want it," he says. "It's a nice award, but is it an Oscar? I'd like to think so, but I'm not fooling myself." KAJA PERINA

SPEAKING IN FOREIGN TONGUES

How many foreign correspondents can actually speak the language of the country they cover? We polled the bureau chiefs of the major American news organizations in Moscow—a plum foreign post—to find out. Was their Russian fluent (as opposed to merely "conversational")? Did they use interpreters when conducting interviews? Their comments and responses—in English, conveniently—follow below. ANNA SCHNEIDER-MAYERSON

NAME	FLUENT IN RUSSIAN	USES AN INTERPRETER	COMMENT
Christian Caryl *Newsweek*	Yes	Sometimes	"You get to hear every answer twice, and that's very convenient."
John Daniszewski *Los Angeles Times*	No	NA	"I'm doing language training now. I've been doing intensive language training ever since I got here."
Jill Dougherty CNN	Yes	Never	"Russian doesn't always make a big difference. Great reporters can still be great."
Masha Gessen *U.S. News and World Report*	Native	Never	"Basically, having a translator is a bad situation. You're not speaking directly to the person you're interviewing, and you're not alone with that person. I mean, these are really bad things for journalists. Period."
Andrew Higgins *The Wall Street Journal*	Yes	Never	"The problem is, you have to take the plunge. If you use a translator all the time you'll never get anywhere. Because it's a crutch."
David Hoffman *The Washington Post*	Yes	Sometimes	"Translating is an art form, sometimes a high art. Translators have often—and I would say even daily—improved our understanding of what was being said and improved the quality of the quotations that appeared in the paper."
Michele Kelemen NPR	No	Sometimes	"Sometimes I like to confront somebody when I'm asking them a question in a direct way, and the translator will want to come at it in a different way or a softer way or not be as direct. We've gotten in disputes over that."
Kathy Lally *The Sun* (Baltimore)	No	Usually	"You just don't want to be in a position where you can't ask a question as refined or pointed as you want to because you can't put it exactly as you want to."
Colin McMahon *Chicago Tribune*	No	Sometimes	"The verb *to write*, if you stress it incorrectly, it sounds like the verb *to urinate*. I've often stressed that word incorrectly....You get a really big wide smile."
Paul Quinn-Judge *Time*	Yes	Never	"There's a tendency of journalists to say they know a smattering of a language, and it means they can order fried rice."
Deborah Seward AP	Yes	Rarely	"Unless you have native Russian, there will be times when an interpreter is necessary."
Patrick Tyler *The New York Times*	No	Usually	"If you travel or work with a native Russian it immeasurably improves the texture of your reporting, even if you're fluent."

WOODS: DAN HONDA/ART COBURN SYGMA; JACKSON: MARK J. TERRILL/AP PHOTO

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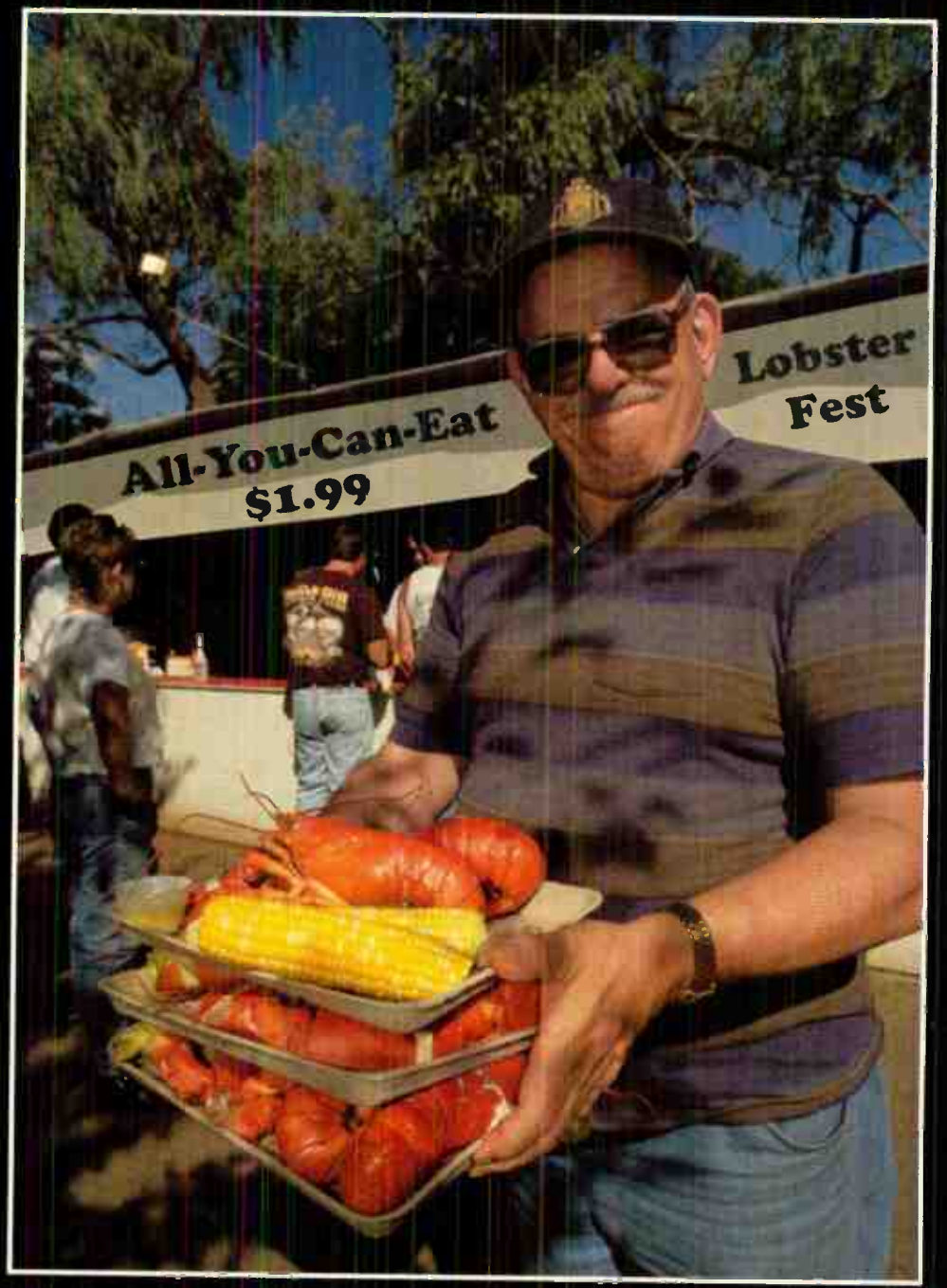

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Blur

TRUTH IN ADVERTORIAL

The distinction between advertising and editorial can get especially fuzzy on the Internet. Last summer, the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) updated its guidelines about publishing editorial content online, issuing detailed rules about disclosure and labeling. The guiding principle is clarity: Readers ought to know when content is sponsored and when it isn't. But as a recent advertorial promotion in *Sports Illustrated* demonstrates, the difference is sometimes lost in the translation from print to Web.

SI **publishes an ongoing advertising feature called "Suzuki presents Heisman Heroes." These advertorials—**

SI**'s "Special Advertising Feature" is labeled in print (bottom) but not online (top).**

full-page profiles of college football stars—all conform to ASME guidelines: At the top of the page, above the "Suzuki presents" line, are the words "Special Advertising Feature." The profiles also appear on *SI*'s website, CNNSI.com. But online, they are presented without clear indication that they are sponsored content. Suzuki's logo appears as a banner ad of the sort found on any other CNNSI.com page, and nowhere do the words "Special Advertising Feature" appear. The Web page in every way resembles an online *SI* editorial.

Marlene Kahan, the executive director of ASME, would not comment about a specific case but pointed to the organization's guidelines for digital media: "Special advertising or 'advertorial' features should be labelled as such."

CNN/SI's managing editor, Steve Robinson, says: "Look, could we have been clearer? I think it's possible we could have been clearer....But there was obviously no intention to deceive anyone." JOSEPH GOMES

SECOND THOUGHTS

SITTING ON A D.U.I. SCOOP

Last July *Portland Press Herald* reporter Ted Cohen visited the police chief of Kennebunkport, Maine, the town where the Bush family has been summering for years. Cohen wondered whether George W. Bush had gotten into any trouble during one of the many summers he'd spent there. "I asked [chief Robert Sullivan] whether he had any goods on Bush," says Cohen, a 25-year veteran of the paper. Sullivan said yes.

As most of us now know, George W. Bush was arrested in Maine in 1976 for driving under the influence of alcohol. Sullivan told this to Cohen and pointed him to the evidence. Cohen was the first reporter to ask Sullivan about Bush's past, but despite Cohen's discovery, the *Press Herald* was not the first news outlet to publish the story. The public did not learn of Bush's arrest until November 2, three months later, when a TV reporter from the Portland Fox affiliate, WPXT, broke the story—just days before the presidential election. Both campaigns were left to speculate what would have happened if the news of Bush's arrest had seeped out earlier.

Pondering a Bush bombshell

Why did such a stunning scoop sit untold for months, and how did the Fox affiliate, the smallest of four local TV stations, beat out its competitors? When Cohen unearthed the information in late July, he told his boss, regional editor Andrew Russell, who was unimpressed. "[Russell] said, 'It's a little old, and Bush has already talked publicly about having a drinking problem,'" says Cohen. "I had the biggest news story I will ever have and the biggest news story the *Press Herald* will ever have. I should have pressed this with my editor." (Russell declined to comment.)

The managing editor of the *Press Herald*, Curt Hazlett, has since resigned, but he says that Russell never told him or the paper's executive editor, Jeannine Guttman, about Cohen's discovery. "Sometimes people make stunningly bad decisions," Hazlett observes. He maintains that he and Guttman would have gone with the story had they known about it. "Such is life in the trenches," says Hazlett. "This is a confusing, difficult way to make a living, and sometimes we bobble."

The *Press Herald*'s fumble cleared the field for other reporters. Erin Fehlau, a WPXT correspondent, broke the news, but Susan Kimball, her counterpart at the local NBC affiliate, WCSH, could have had it first. Both reporters were at the Cumberland County Courthouse on November 2 when they heard rumors about the Bush arrest. Fehlau spoke to Tom Connelly, a local lawyer active in Democratic politics who she heard had information on the story, and grilled him on the specifics. (Connelly declined to comment.) Kimball would not reveal her source, but like Fehlau, she began racing to verify the information. Fehlau obtained a copy of the arrest report, as well as of Bush's Maine driving record. Her boss, WPXT's news director, Kevin Kelly, was initially skeptical, but ran the story when Fehlau confirmed it with the arresting officer.

The story ran at about 7 P.M. on November 2, and WPXT's phones started ringing immediately. (A brief version of WPXT's story ran on Fox national news at about 6 P.M.) "At that point, *we* were the story," says Kelly. Fehlau appeared on *Nightline* that evening and *Good Morning America* the next day.

Kimball didn't make any of the morning shows. Her version of the D.U.I. story appeared on WCSH at about 8:45 P.M., less than two hours after Fehlau's. Kimball hadn't managed to obtain a copy of Bush's state driving record or speak to the arresting officer. WCSH general manager Steve Thaxton says that because there was no corroborating evidence or confirmation from the Bush campaign, he and his news team decided to hold off. (Kimball declined to comment.)

NBC's WCSH has roughly double the reporting staff of Fox's WPXT, and Thaxton says he did feel a twinge of regret when Fox landed the story first, but he's not sorry he waited. "In a charged situation, you don't want to look back and say 'I made the wrong decision,'" he says.

The *Press Herald*'s Ted Cohen says that after his story was tabled, he waited to see which news outlet would drop the bomb. "What stunned me as each day passed was that none of the biggies had asked the same question," he says. "I began to persuade myself, 'Jeez, Ted, maybe this wasn't such a big deal, and it's a good thing that you didn't print [it].'" ELIZABETH ANGELL

ILLUSTRATION SCOTT MENCHIN MORRY GASH/AP PHOTO

SYNERGY QUIZ

Is there such a thing as too much synergy? The answer seems to be yes. Whether to satisfy regulators or simply to raise cash, a number of companies involved in recent mega-mergers have sold off assets on their way to the altar. Match the company, left, with the business or stake it sold, center, in the process of merging with the company on the right.

COMPANY	ASSET SOLD	TO MERGE WITH
Qwest	Tropicana	AT&T
Clear Channel	advertising display divisions	Infinity Broadcasting
Outdoor Systems	long-distance assets	PolyGram
MediaOne	108 radio stations	U S West
Seagram	Time Warner Telecom (10%)	AMFM

ANSWERS Qwest, long-distance assets; U S West; Clear Channel, Communications radio stations; AMFM, Outdoor Systems, advertising display divisions; Infinity Broadcasting, MediaOne, Time Warner Telecom; AT&T, Seagram, Tropicana; PolyGram, U S West

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Media Diet

ANDREA THOMPSON

As the new season of *NYPD Blue* was beginning in January, Andrea Thompson, a.k.a. Detective Jill Kirkendall, was spending her first winter as a television news reporter in Albuquerque. Thompson abandoned Hollywood and arrived in New Mexico last year, trading a role in an Emmy-winning prime-time drama for *KRQE News 13*. Critics say she broke into journalism because of her star power rather than her skill, but Thompson insists she's always been more of a news junkie than an actress. Her media diet, below, proves it. STEPHEN TOTILO

NOW THAT YOU'RE WORKING IN THE MEDIA, WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU CHECK OUT IN THE MORNING?

I wake up at a quarter to 5 and look at the [CBS affiliate] KRQE newscast and then NBC and ABC, respectively, to see what they're doing. I watch CNN; I read the *Albuquerque Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post*. Whatever hasn't landed in the driveway I hit the laptop to read.

WAS THERE ANYTHING YOU HAD TO READ AS A TV STAR THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO LOOK AT ANYMORE?

No. I never cared about the Hollywood goings-on. The whole glamour life—if in fact it really does exist—completely passed me by.

WHICH MAGAZINES DO YOU READ?

Time, *Newsweek*, *Harper's*, *The New Republic*, *Brill's Content*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*. I love *Harper's* because I adore the essays. I love *The Economist*.

DO YOU READ ANYTHING THAT'S NOT THAT SERIOUS?

I have a subscription to *National Geographic*. I can't remember the last time I read something like *Vogue*.

DO YOU EVER CHECK OUT YOUR OLD COWORKERS ON *NYPD BLUE*?

No. I'm not a big fan of television drama. I watched *The West Wing* pretty religiously the first year, but not anymore.

MISSING PERSONS

THE PROPHET MOTIVE

The self-described psychic Sylvia Browne is a frequent guest on such TV programs as *Larry King Live* and *The Montel Williams Show*. She drops by to promote her books (most recently, the best-selling *Life on the Other Side*) and her New Age pantheism, and occasionally to solve a missing-person case. For the most part, Browne delivers simple entertainment. But her claims that she has solved crimes, assisted law enforcement, and directed victims to missing loved ones are something else entirely: They concern real people and real tragedies. What's more, talk-show hosts such as King and Williams often accept Browne's claims without question or, in Williams's case, enthusiastically endorse them.

"GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING YOU WOULD SOLVE."

Browne has appeared on Larry King's show three times since 1999 and *The Montel Williams Show* about 25 times since 1995. Whenever she appears on either program, Browne asserts her legitimacy as a "psychic detective" with claims that range from the vague and unverifiable to the patently false. The following exchange, from a recent appearance on *Larry King Live*, is typical:

> KING: Do you ever work with, like, police?
> BROWNE: Oh, yes, I have 250 cases, in fact, right on my...there's a lot of cases I've solved right on Montel's show.
> KING: You've been on *Montel Williams*, like, on numerous...
> BROWNE: Yes.
> KING: Give me an example of something you would solve.
> BROWNE: There was a woman that came that wanted closure on her son that was killed, and I said that there was two lakes together. I said, "I'm pretty sure it's in Pennsylvania, and there is a space in between, and there is a tree, or a name of a tree." Well, she knew exactly what I was talking about. I didn't know. And they went to...it was called Willow, I think. And there, I said, "on the left pond is where your son is," and they found him. I also cracked the ski-mask-rapist case. I also found a girl in Seattle. I mean, it just goes on and on.

King did not inquire further about any of these cases. Browne's business manager and spokesman, Larry Beck, says the psychic has assisted authorities on several occasions but refuses to cite specifics when asked about the claims made on King's show. "It's just too private and painful to give out that sort of information," he says.

Producers at *Larry King Live* also wouldn't comment on the veracity of Browne's claims. Says CNN spokesperson Erin Sermeus: "Larry King's responsibility is to be a fair host and interviewer, and it's up to the viewers to draw their own conclusions."

As for Williams, he often seems more of a cheerleader than a disinterested observer. In February 2000, on a show titled "Psychic Sylvia Browne: A Family's Last Hope," Browne claimed to have directed members of a Texas family to the body of their missing father. "I'm pretty positive that constitutes the third body that [Browne has] found on this show," Williams said. "So there are a lot of people out there perpetrating and saying what they can do." However, he added, "you looked exactly where [Browne] said and bingo-bango, he was found." Bexar County, Texas, homicide detective A.J. Damiani disagrees. "[Browne] said it was buried in a hillside about 12 miles northwest of the new house," Damiani says, "but we found him floating in the water....We didn't find any evidence to suggest [Browne] was accurate." There's no evidence that Browne's "clues" on Williams's show have ever led to the discovery of a body or missing person.

Left: TV hosts Larry King (top) and Montel Williams; "psychic detective" Sylvia Browne

Producers for *Montel Williams* refused to comment for this article. That's understandable: *Brill's Content* has examined ten recent *Montel Williams* programs that highlighted Browne's work as a psychic detective (as opposed to her ideas about "the afterlife," for example), spanning 35 cases. In 21, the details were too vague to be verified. Of the remaining 14, law-enforcement officials or family members involved in the investigations say that Browne played no useful role.

"These guys don't solve cases, and the media consistently gets it wrong," says Michael Corn, an investigative producer for *Inside Edition* who produced a story last May debunking psychic detectives. Moreover, the FBI and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children maintain that to their knowledge, psychic detectives haven't helped solve a single missing-person case. "Zero. They go on TV and I see how things go and what they claim but no, zero," says FBI agent Chris Whitcomb. "They may be remarkable in other ways, but the FBI does not use them." JOSEPH GOMES

ON THE RECORD:

"Attention Nielsen Homes: See Inside."

—INSTRUCTIONS FEATURED ON A PROMOTIONAL TAPE THAT KSWB-TV, THE WB AFFILIATE IN SAN DIEGO, SENT TO 75,000 VIEWER HOMES BEFORE THE NOVEMBER SWEEPS PERIOD. EXECUTIVES AT OTHER LOCAL STATIONS COMPLAINED THAT KSWB'S ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE NIELSEN FAMILIES VIOLATED NIELSEN RULES.

BROWNE: JAN COBB

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NOTEBOOK

Gimmick

FAUX FAMILY

The Microsoft Home—which was unveiled last November and will remain intact through March—is a simulated family dwelling constructed inside an 8,000-square-foot loft in New York City. Open only to members of the press, the "home" is in fact an elaborate showroom: a suburban three-bedroom as imagined by the Microsoft Corporation. It was designed to show journalists how Microsoft products can be integrated into the home environment. But the airy rooms, with their tasteful knickknacks and inoffensive furniture, are just the beginning: The Microsoft Home comes complete with a Microsoft Family.

An actor playing "Uncle Dave," his leg draped casually over the arm of an easy chair, illustrates the pleasures of Microsoft's UltimateTV service. In the kitchen, "Grandma" shows how easily she can find recipes using a small Internet-access device.

Steven Guggenheimer, director of consumer strategy for Microsoft, says that "using actors in a family setting gives people a snapshot of how technology helps simplify daily living, improves communication, and makes entertainment better in real-life scenarios." Though it's hard to call the Microsoft Home in New York realistic—where's the clutter? and the bathroom?—the Family's interactions with the technology probably are. "Mom," for example, seems to freeze her computer while demonstrating photo-editing software. But the gimmick is working: The next group of journalists mills about in the foyer, eating box lunches and waiting to meet the clan. Within days, articles about the Home will begin to appear in *The New York Times* and elsewhere. EMILY CHENOWETH

Microsoft's high-tech living room

QUESTIONABLE QUOTES

SHALIT STRIKES AGAIN!

Ruth Shalit's "The Name Game," a November 1999 feature for Salon.com about the peculiar world of corporate branding, was written in her trademark style: biting, witty, and full of big words. "Welcome to big-league corporate naming," she wrote, "a Pynchonesque netherworld of dueling morphemes, identity buckets and full-scale linguistic sabotage." Many of those interviewed in the story, however, contend that it is Shalit—a rising star at *The New Republic* until she was twice caught plagiarizing there—who is the linguistic saboteur.

Three people Shalit interviewed for the story say she fabricated some of their quotes. And although *Salon* ran a lengthy correction (eight months later), all three say the amended story still contains statements they never made.

In her *Salon* piece, Shalit profiled a branding company named Landor Associates. She portrayed "the extreme sport that is modern corporate nomenclature," in which formerly "mild-mannered grad students" use their linguistic cunning to convince companies that naming a product or enterprise is a deeply complex process worth millions of dollars. The article focused on several Landor employees, including David Redhill, and their work to christen a Hewlett-Packard spin-off, Agilent. According to the article, Redhill's branding team "approached the problem with ingenious thoroughness, devising a naming module that would eventually cost the client more than $1 million...." Redhill's work, Shalit wrote, included developing "random visual associations, attached to sequential words." But Redhill says, "I don't even know what that means....That's totally fabricated." As *Salon*'s correction would later note, Redhill was Landor's spokesperson (he left the company in May) and was not involved in naming Agilent.

Shalit quoted another Landor employee, Amy Becker, about the company's work on the Hewlett-Packard spin-off. But Becker says she was "not involved" with naming Agilent and never discussed the issue with Shalit. "At a certain point, my unwillingness to speak to it frustrated [her] and she just decided to develop all this information and attributed it to me," Becker says.

THREE PEOPLE SAY SHALIT FABRICATED QUOTES.

Immediately after *Salon* posted the story, Redhill and Rick Bragdon, another branding consultant who says Shalit put words in his mouth, each wrote to *Salon* editor in chief David Talbot. Bragdon's letter was posted along with a response from Shalit, who acknowledged two minor mistakes but wrote, "I stand by my piece as reported." Redhill's letter and a personal note he wrote to Talbot went unanswered. (Talbot did not respond to interview requests from *Brill's Content*.)

Shalit's editor, *Salon* executive editor Gary Kamiya, says he misplaced Redhill's letter, which, he explains, "ended up falling through the cracks." Although *Salon* forgot about the complaints, Redhill and other Landor employees quoted in the story didn't. They spoke with a lawyer, and in June *Salon* received what Kamiya calls "an extremely threatening legal letter." By this point, Kamiya says, seven months had gone by and Shalit had lost her notes. (Shalit declined to be interviewed for this story and referred all questions to Kamiya.)

Salon posted a seven-point correction in August 2000 that addressed numerous inaccuracies. Editors also removed some of the questionable quotes from the online story—although the correction didn't note the change.

But Redhill, Bragdon, and Amy Becker say that other false quotes remain. Redhill, for example, is still quoted as saying that clients are too wrapped up in their company to be involved in naming it: "'I mean, would you name your own baby?'" ("My wife was pregnant," Redhill now responds. "I doubt very much that I would have said that.") Becker's comments about Agilent, which she says she never made, are also still in the amended story.

salon.com | Media

The name game

Welcome to the vicious world of corporate name-creation, where $75,000 buys you a suffix and competing shops slur each other over the virtues of Agilent and Avilant.

By Ruth Shalit

Welcome to big-league corporate naming, a Pynchonesque netherworld of dueling morphemes, identity buckets and full-scale linguistic sabotage. What was once a diverting sideline for mild-mannered grad students has become an increasingly lucrative and increasingly cutthroat profession, as blue-chip consulting firms schedule raids on college English departments and linguistics nerds scramble to shift their focus from the syntax of negation in the Anatolian languages to the murkier precincts of corporate identity.

Ruth Shalit

Despite Shalit's lack of notes and *Salon*'s removal of some inaccurate quotes, Kamiya stands by Shalit and the remaining disputed statements. "You're talking about one's fundamental trust and belief in a reporter's professionalism," he says. "And one does not need to see notes in order to have that fundamental trust."

Nor, says Kamiya, has that trust been damaged by Shalit's past plagiarism. In 1994, while at *The New Republic*, Shalit wrote a story that the magazine admitted contained, without credit, "some information" (including at least one full sentence) from a piece in *Legal Times*. And in 1995, Shalit copied three sentences from an article in the *National Journal*. Shalit acknowledged having lifted the passages, but claimed the appropriation was inadvertent. Shalit left *The New Republic* in 1999 to work at a New York advertising agency, and later that year began writing a column about the industry for *Salon*.

Kamiya is adamant that the latest complaints about Shalit are unfounded. "Anyone who's ever been interviewed has a different take on how accurately the reporter characterized what they said," says Kamiya.

Redhill, however, doesn't believe he was misunderstood or quoted out of context. "There's a fine line," he says, "between getting someone to hang themselves with their own words and making up the words to hang them with—and that's what she definitely strayed into." LARA KATE COHEN

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ONWARD. UPWARD.

Verbatim

BERNARD SHAW

Bernard Shaw has been the face of CNN since its founding, in 1980. This month, Shaw will retire from the network after 20 years on the job. Here are a few highlights from his career as anchor and correspondent.

ALLISON BENEDIKT

"Governor, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?"
—question to Michael Dukakis during the second Bush-Dukakis presidential debate, 10/13/88

"To sum up for you, it has been one hell of a night here in Baghdad....When the bombs exploded, it shook you to your soul....If this was surgical bombing, I don't like being so close to the operating table."
—reporting from Iraq during the Gulf War, 1/16/91

"Tom, I'm fine. I'm sitting on a chair for a change. I've been crawling on the floor for the last two, three hours. And I should tell you that your colleagues from NBC, CBS, ABC, and those journalists who remain here on the ground are all down in the bomb shelter....Our staff tells us that down there all is well."
—in Baghdad, interviewed by NBC's Tom Brokaw, 1/16/91

"Dick Cheney, Joe Lieberman, you are black for this question."
—from a question about racial profiling, posed during the Cheney-Lieberman vice-presidential debate, which he moderated, 10/5/00

"Harder than entering this business is leaving it....But you know, some roses are so fragrant. And as a gardener, I want to grow and smell them more—when I'm not writing."
—announcing on *Inside Politics* that he was leaving CNN, 11/10/00

A TINSELTOWN TARNISHING

GOLDEN GLOBAL POLITICS

On January 21, the 58th-annual Golden Globes ceremony will be held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. If the past few years are any indication, the evening will be one of the biggest in Hollywood, second only to the Academy Awards, with all-star attendance and coverage in most major newspapers. It will also be the occasion, as it is every year, of scathing attacks on the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA), which selects the winners.

The show's influence has skyrocketed since it began airing regularly for a large audience, on NBC, in 1996, and the Globes are now widely considered a fairly accurate predictor of the Academy Awards. A Globe nomination gives a movie crucial exposure during the month that members of the Academy are sent nominating ballots. In fact, 15 of the 20 "Best Picture" Oscars handed out in the past 20 years first won a Golden Globe in the "Drama" or "Comedy/Musical" category. However, the journalists who award the Globes have been routinely demonized over the past two decades by their domestic peers. HFPA members have been called corrupt and, perhaps more tellingly, have been derided by Hollywood insiders as incompetent, slovenly, and junket-buffet gluttons.

HFPA president Mahfouz Doss (left); HFPA member Ray Arco and Harrison Ford

To be sure, the association's 89 members, a clique of foreign entertainment writers, are a decidedly ragtag band of industry outsiders. Many freelance for obscure overseas film magazines (a fact their stateside colleagues evoke often and condescendingly), but others are correspondents for top foreign papers—including Israel's *Ma'Ariv*, Germany's *Die Welt*, Italy's *La Repubblica*, and England's *Daily Telegraph*. The group has been savaged since 1982, when Pia Zadora won the Golden Globe for female "New Star of the Year" just a few weeks after her multimillionaire husband, Meshulam Riklis, flew them all to Las Vegas for a few days of entertainment. The HFPA has never lived that moment down: The Zadora debacle is mentioned in nearly every article on the group. The HFPA has also, over the years, made a habit of accepting gifts from studios and stars under consideration for their awards. Sharon Waxman of *The Washington Post* has doggedly questioned the institution, and she reported in 1999 that NBC had forced the HFPA to change its rules. Members must now sign agreements forswearing valuable gifts, and the organization must relax its ultraexclusive application policy. The HFPA says it has changed its ways, but it has an image problem that may have less to do with misdeeds than with Hollywood elitism.

"THEY'RE LIKE THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES," SAYS ONE PUBLICIST.

"They're like the Beverly Hillbillies," says one publicist who represents top Hollywood talent. "They're not sophisticated." Indeed, among the complaints about HFPA members, lack of sophistication predominates, along with a focus on food consumption: "I don't even know how to say this so it doesn't sound like I'm a snob or a snot, but these ill-dressed people slump in and help themselves to all the food," says Richard Schickel, film critic for *Time* magazine. "At the [HFPA] screenings there tends to be giant goody bags that I don't see." Aljean Harmetz wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* last year that HFPA members are perceived—perhaps unfairly—as "freeloaders who would sell their votes for a vodka and tonic and cross the Alps for a hot dog."

Other objections are less specific but no less personal: Of the foreign journalists' writing, *New Yorker* film critic David Denby says: "I can't say that I see it very much, but it's always been very nondiscriminating, very fawning." Bernard Weinraub of *The New York Times* wrote that the group is "treated with a shrug and a certain humor by the Hollywood elite." The humor often takes the form of insults: Peter Travers calls them "boneheads" and "fogeys" in a *Rolling Stone* article, making much of the HFPA's 1999 nominations for "Comedy/Musical" of *Patch Adams* and *The Mask of Zorro*, although the award was won by *Shakespeare in Love*—which went on to win the "Best Picture" Oscar. Indeed, critics seem to have a harder time remembering the Globes' many respectable nominations and winners (last year: *American Beauty*) and Oscar's most embarrassing moments (Marisa Tomei's bizarre win over Vanessa Redgrave and Joan Plowright in 1993). The subtext is clear: HFPA members are old and foreign, and have bad taste.

What's striking about all the critical statements is their tone: The sniping by American entertainment journalists reveals the field's own lingering self-doubt. The accusations—that HFPA members are in it for the food and the goody bags and that they function as an extension of the Hollywood PR machine—could well be leveled against the entertainment-journalism community. Most writers and editors in the field are on the studios' mailing lists: They receive promotional gifts and movie-premiere party invitations and attend interview junkets—and food is, indeed, often served at such events. Everyone eats it.

HFPA members say the idea that they can be bribed with food and trinkets is ridiculous. "If anyone thinks you're going to vote differently because you have a bag with a large pink Eddie Murphy on it," says member Vera Anderson, "they're nuts."

JULIE SCELFO

L GILBERT FLORES/CELEBRITY PHOTO; R COURTESY OF RAY ARCO

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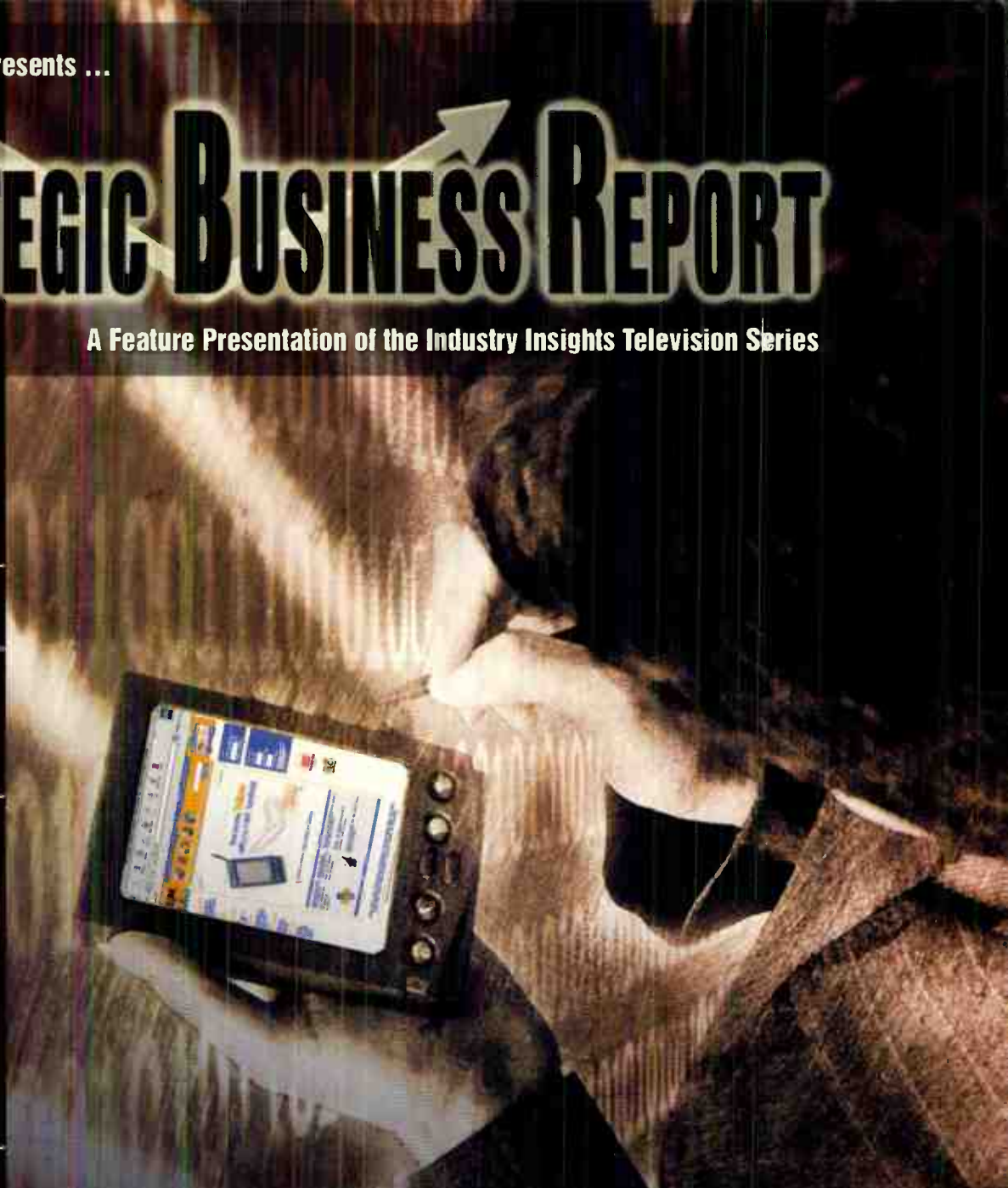

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Ticker

40.2 Combined rating for multinetwork prime-time coverage of November's election

25.8 Combined rating for multinetwork prime-time coverage of the 1996 election

46.4 Combined rating for multinetwork prime-time coverage of the 1980 election, the most recent with ratings higher than last November's[1]

181.1 Total number of minutes devoted to election coverage on the three network evening newscasts on the five weekdays prior to Election Day

267.9 Total number of minutes devoted to election coverage on the three network evening newscasts on the five weekdays after Election Day

29.2 Average combined viewership, in millions, of the three network evening newscasts on the five weekdays prior to Election Day

34.3 Average combined viewership, in millions, of the three network evening newscasts on the five weekdays after Election Day[2]

130 Number of Internet companies that closed from the start of 2000 through the middle of November

6 Number that closed in the first four months of the year

22 Number that closed in October

8,000 Estimated total number of jobs lost due to all of these closings[3]

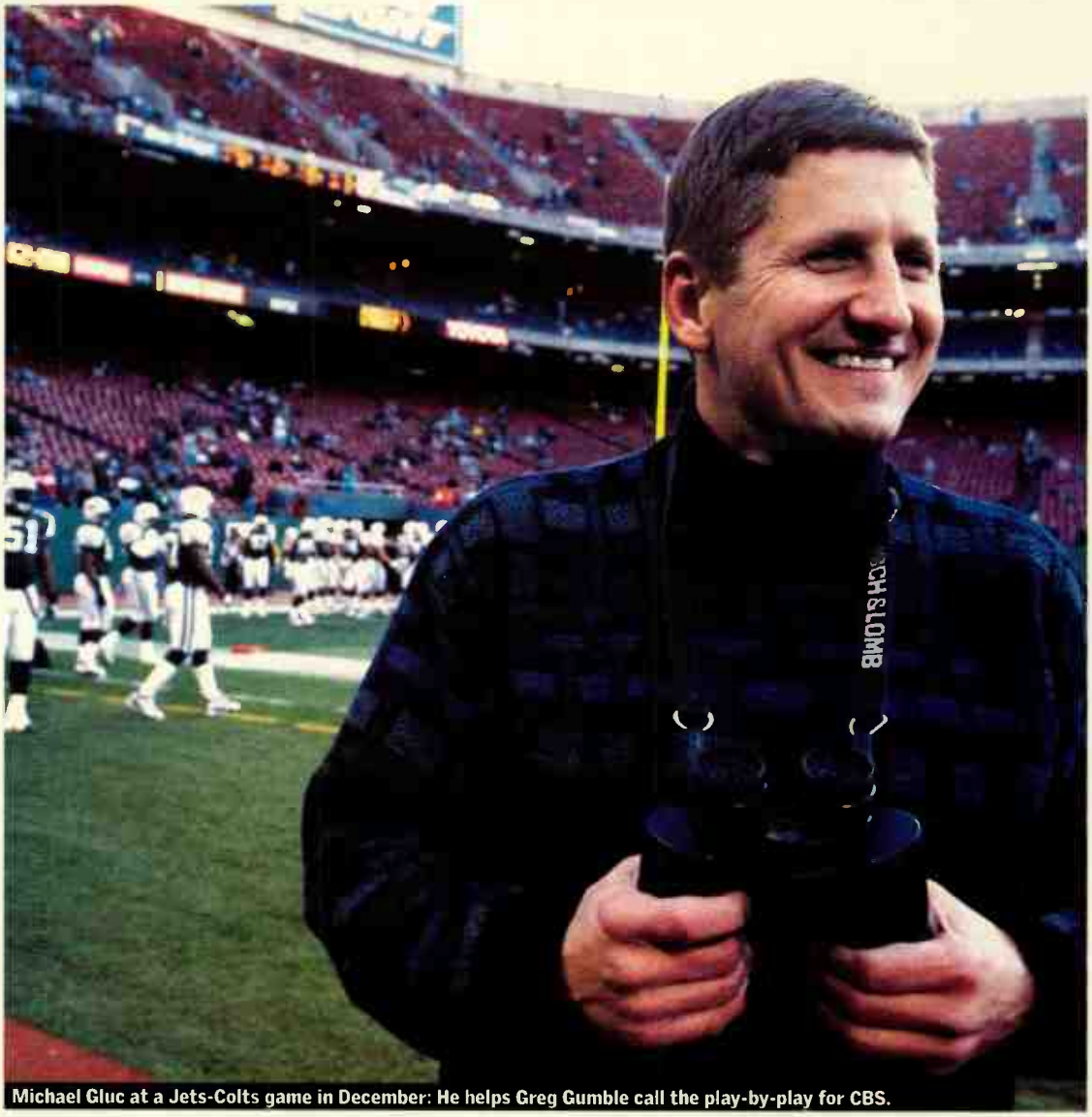
35.2 Number of unique visitors, in millions, to e-commerce sites during Thanksgiving week, the traditional start of the holiday shopping season, in 2000

25.1 Number of unique visitors, in millions, to e-commerce sites during Thanksgiving week in 1999

56 Percentage of online retailers who said at the end of November that they are confident of their ability to handle the high volume of orders during the holiday shopping season[4]

COMPILED BY JESSE OXFELD

1) Nielsen Media Research 2) Tyndall Report; Nielsen Media Research 3) Webmergers.com 4) Media Metrix; Jupiter Research



Michael Gluc at a Jets-Colts game in December: He helps Greg Gumble call the play-by-play for CBS.

MINDING THE X'S AND O'S

MEDIA LIVES

MICHAEL GLUC
Sports news assistant

Michael Gluc is a "spotter." From the broadcast booth above the 50-yard line during National Football League games broadcast on CBS, Gluc keeps track of the plays and the players, and communicates the action on the field—silently, using hand signals—to Greg Gumble, the play-by-play announcer sitting next to him. "They depend on [me] to be correct, accurate, and fast," says Gluc. This January he will spot plays at the Super Bowl.

"Greg's doing so many things at one time....He's watching the game happen, he's listening to a producer, he's handed a promotion that he has to read off after the next play, a stats guy is giving him something about the 13-yard completion," Gluc says. "He may not know who made the catch or the interception, and that's where I come in." Using an elaborate system of gestures, Gluc signals the action to Gumble: A forearm across his chest represents a block; a flat palm slammed into a fist represents a forced fumble. Gluc then points to a list of players and numbers and identifies the athlete involved in the play. "The quarterback drops back, he throws, completion Andre Reed!" says Gluc enthusiastically. "I'm pointing at the board, showing that Andre Reed made the catch."

Gluc considers himself exceptionally lucky to have a weekend job in the football broadcasting business. He started in 1985, working Buffalo Bills games for various networks, and has been at it ever since, serving as Greg Gumble's personal spotter since 1998. He earns only a nominal fee for his time—"spending money," Gluc says—and during the week he appraises property for his real-estate business. "The chances of someone like me from Buffalo getting to do this are like winning the lottery," he says, "and that's how I feel every Sunday."

LARA KATE COHEN

ROMAN BARRETT

loaded words

The press treatment of a recent book on the origins of the American gun culture shows that almost no topic is more subject to the media's unwitting biases. BY MICHAEL KORDA

Outside the major media markets of the United States—that is, in most of the country beyond the cities of the liberal elite like New York and Washington, D.C.—private gun ownership is a simple fact of life. People are neither ashamed nor apprehensive about owning a shotgun, or teaching their kids or grandkids to shoot with a .22, or going bird shooting or deer hunting, or having a pistol in the house. For many, perhaps even a majority, of nonurban Americans, those things are as much a normal, matter-of-fact part of exurban or rural existence as raking leaves, mowing the lawn, and buying Girl Scout Cookies.

NATURALLY, *ARMING AMERICA* ATTRACTED POSITIVE ATTENTION FROM THOSE WHO TEND TO SEE FIREARMS AS THE DEVIL'S RIGHT HAND.

Within the media, however, there persists a constant, though perhaps unwitting, preoccupation with guns and gun laws, understandably prone to rear its head at times of tragedy—the school shootings at Columbine or the episode at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas. Events like these focus attention on fundamental questions about gun control and the Second Amendment to the Constitution, commonly referred to as the "right to bear arms," which in any case are treated skeptically in the media at the best of times. The media tend automatically to stigmatize gun ownership, or simply to dismiss the whole subject as if those who support private ownership of firearms are eccentric, dangerous, or linked in some way to right-wing "militia" fanatics and mass killers—such as those folks who brought us Columbine or Waco. For example, when the revered *New York Times* recently paid attention to the subject of gun ownership, it was in the form of a long piece in the November 26, 2000, issue of *The New York Times Magazine* on people who own and shoot .50-caliber rifles, which can pierce a three-and-a-half-inch-thick cast-iron manhole cover at 200 yards, as if the weapon, and the people whose hobby this is, were representative of the average gun owner. With such preconceptions, the press tends to make a burning issue out of something that, most of the time, is barely lukewarm in most of the country.

This bias, I believe, has both a regional and, to a certain degree, a class component. Attitudes toward guns differ radically from group to group and from region to region, just as the laws regulating gun ownership vary from state to state. For example, Connecticut, which used to manufacture the lion's share of America's firearms, is loath to damage further a local industry by making it difficult for its residents to buy one, so up until a few years ago, a driver's license was enough to buy a pistol there, whereas in neighboring New York, you need a permit, which may be easy, or hard, or impossible to get, depending on the views of your county. Crossing state lines is always a problem. If I want to take a course in combat-pistol shooting in New Hampshire, I have to look at a map first: I can drive from Poughkeepsie up to Hoosick Falls in New York (no problem, I have a New York state permit to carry a pistol), then cross the state line into Vermont at Bennington (still no problem, for Vermont, quaintly, has no laws regulating handguns), then on into New Hampshire, for which I have a nonresident pistol permit. All I have to do is steer clear of Massachusetts, where I would be subject to a mandatory one-year prison sentence for possession of a handgun.

The class issue is more complicated than the regional issue, but in my experience, it can be summed up by saying that most Americans regard the groups they *don't* like as the ones who shouldn't be armed. Thus, wealthy upper-class people with a gun cabinet full of expensive sporting weapons are eager to see their poorer neighbors deprived of their Saturday night specials. People living in Beverly Hills, with hundred-thousand-dollar security systems and a Colt Python .357 by the bed, are eager to disarm poor African-Americans and Hispanics. And suburbanites (who aren't known as hunters and live close to each other) are determined to take guns out of the hands of their rural neighbors (for whom hunting is a legitimate pastime and who live in the boonies, where a Winchester 12-gauge pump shotgun may be a comforting item to have at hand on a dark night when there's noise at the window and the nearest cop may be an hour away).

Given this complex reality of gun ownership in America today—that the media are in general fraught with an anti-gun bias that is not always shared by the rest of the country—it is hardly surprising that when *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*, by Michael Bellesiles, a professor of history at Emory University, was published last September it was widely lauded in major reviews, which rolled out all autumn. Bellesiles examines, and in the end attempts to demythologize, America's image of life in colonial America and the role of the gun in it. The book puts forward the thesis, supported by copious notes, that Americans of the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries didn't hunt that much, rarely owned firearms in the first place, and,

Illustration by Daniel Bejar

moreover, were poor marksmen. Bellesiles further asserts, contrary to popular belief and our national historical imagination, that the colonial militias were unarmed and untrained, but that, nevertheless, the Second Amendment was written for the sole purpose of supporting these useless bodies of men, and not with any thought of protecting private ownership of firearms.

Naturally, *Arming America* attracted positive attention from those who tend to see firearms as the devil's right hand and perhaps the deepest flaw in American political reality since slavery. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Garry Wills, in *The New York Times Book Review*, wrote that Bellesiles "provides overwhelming evidence that our view of the gun is...[a] deep superstition." Former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Dan Baum, also the author of a book on U.S. drug policy and one on the Coors brewery dynasty, writing in the *Chicago Tribune*, called *Arming America* an "exciting new book....that absolutely devastate[s] the myth of the gun in early America." And in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, the 18th-century historian Fred Anderson, author of a recent tome on the Seven Years' War, said that the book is a "great achievement....With thorough scholarship, lucid writing and impassioned argument, Bellesiles offers a brief against the myths that align freedom with the gun." Similar, though occasionally less sweepingly glowing, notices came in newspapers everywhere, from Indianapolis, Denver, Dallas, and Cincinnati, among others.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT *ARMING AMERICA* REPRESENTED WHAT A LOT OF BOOK-REVIEW EDITORS ALREADY BELIEVED.

Given the nearly unanimous praise of the reviews (more than 50) and that Bellesiles's thesis was accepted not just as gospel but as long-awaited gospel, it may be of some legitimate interest to look more closely at the book itself. The historical arguments Bellesiles makes in *Arming America* are being fiercely attacked in gun activist circles by firearms scholars and gun owners, notwithstanding the extent of his footnotes. That most reviews accepted his claims may merely point to the media's inherent bias against guns and its willingness to accept scholarship, however debatable, regarding anything that deflates the conventional wisdom surrounding firearms.

Bellesiles's claims that there were few capable gunsmiths or gun makers in colonial America, that guns were rare, hard to come by, and ineffective, are, and have been for years, contradicted by far more observers of American culture than he quotes in his book. The independent U.S. historian Clayton Cramer compiled a list of 118 gunsmiths and gunmakers in New York and New England alone during the early colonial period. Yet in the *Los Angeles Times* review, Anderson wrote, "American 'gunsmiths' [Anderson's quotation marks] seldom made weapons but tended to be general-purpose metalworkers who mainly repaired guns when they broke...."

Bellesiles supports his thesis of the scarcity of firearms by looking at probate records and by studying the inventories of firearms carried out by certain states like Massachusetts, and concludes—to his own surprise—that there were far fewer guns logged in documents than one would have suspected. It was precisely this methodology that was hailed as such fresh and exciting new research. Dan Baum's review in the *Chicago Tribune* cited probate records as part of a "fascinating array of sources" that "bolster [Bellesiles's] argument."

But this seems to me a dubious method, since in the 18th century it seems unlikely that Massachusetts or any other state would have tried to inventory the ownership of privately owned weapons, as opposed to those owned by or on loan to members of the militia, an institution that Bellesiles also attempts to debunk or, as Garry Wills's review put it, "deflate the myth of the self-reliant and self-armed virtuous yeoman of the Revolutionary militias."

Fact is, the 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century state militias have always come in for bad press—partly because of class prejudice, since their armies contained a high proportion of poor people and rural bumpkins. But they were not, as Bellesiles would have us believe, just a bunch of bumbling clowns. Undoubtedly, the militia was not any match (or substitute) for a trained army, and was often poorly armed and led, but it must be borne in mind that these criticisms were made most loudly by those like Alexander Hamilton, who thought the United States ought to have a professional army with regular officers in the British tradition (just what most of the founding fathers wanted to avoid), and also overlooked the fact that it was the militia's troops that did so much damage to the British regulars on their way back to Boston from Lexington and Concord, whence the British had gone to seize militia military supplies. This would suggest that a substantial number of the militia not only were armed but knew how to shoot. At Bunker Hill, the militia stood up to the British bravely, inflicted heavy losses on them, and gave way only when they ran out of ammunition and the British infantry advanced with bayonets fixed.

So it would seem, according to Bellesiles, that the militia was good for nothing. Inexplicably, in defiance of that, the framers of the Bill of Rights wrote the Second Amendment *only* in order to ensure that weapons would be available to the militia, not to the general public. Of course, the Second Amendment has always been a subject of vigorous debate, and seldom have so few words—"A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed"—produced such a mass of commentary. It has given birth to almost as much speculation and disagreement as the Bible. A good deal of this is of the order of trying to decide how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, and it is only too likely that the Second Amendment seems ambiguous for the very good reason that its drafters meant it to be. The founding fathers, if they knew nothing else, knew how to write clear English, and if they had wanted to ban the private ownership of firearms, or to limit ownership of firearms to those who served in the militia, no doubt they would have found a clear way of saying so. That they did not is, self-evidently, because the idea did not occur to them. They drew up the Bill of Rights to safeguard, protect, and defend the liberties of Americans, not to limit and circumscribe them, and nothing in 18th-century American experience (or the Revolutionary War) would have led them to believe that it was a bad idea for a citizen to keep a gun at home, or a good idea to let government

decide on whether or not he could do so. The words of the Second Amendment are, no doubt, a pious sop to the idea that the average citizen ought to be a member of his local militia, but hardly more.

What is disturbing is that in his book Bellesiles appears to be attacking the militia for his own cause, trying, as it were, to retrofit past centuries as a means of showing that the attitudes of many Americans toward guns and gun owners in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have few roots in the historical past, and make little sense. Bellesiles derives the American obsession with firearms from the "historical coincidence" that occurred when aggressive selling techniques on the part of early firearms mass-manufacturers like Samuel Colt coincided with the Civil War and its increased demand for firearms. Bellesiles would have us believe that the gun had only a minor place in American life until the mid-19th-century gun manufacturers invented a need for it where there was none.

Ultimately, the point is not so much whether Bellesiles is right or wrong, but rather that nearly all the newspapers that reviewed his book relied on writers, historians, academics, or journalists with little or no expertise in the specialized field of the history of American firearm manufacturing and, for the most part, with a bias against the private ownership of guns.

The politics of book reviewing—that books are at the very least unimaginatively assigned for review—is of course, an old complaint, and not one limited to books about guns. The process by which book reviews are assigned carries with it an almost subliminal agenda on the part of the publication. They are often handed out to people whose opinions coincide with that of the editorial page of the newspaper or who are well known to the book-review editor so that it's easy enough to guess what they'll write. Books with ideas that are "unpopular," or are deemed to be "reactionary," are often given to people who are reasonably certain to attack and belittle those ideas, rather than to anyone who might have some kind of expertise in the field, or who might be sympathetic to the author's viewpoint.

This is not terribly surprising, for it's no trick to produce a good or a bad review for any book. You need only to send it to somebody who knows or admires the author, or agrees with him or her, to produce a positive one; or someone who you know holds the opposite point of view to ensure a bad review. This is partly due to the unwitting biases of book-review editors, and partly a matter of convenience. As the editor in chief of Simon and Schuster, I published Ronald Reagan's autobiography in 1990, and it was amazing how many newspapers sent it out for review to people whose politics were the opposite of Reagan's—Garry Wills, Maureen Dowd, and Richard Reeves, among others.

Left: Michael Bellesiles's *Arming America*, which made the cover of *The New York Times Book Review* (above) on September 10, 2000

Richard Nixon, several of whose books I edited, once wrote me, about a book of my own, "Join the club! As I read the sh--ty review of your book I realized again that when the editors of [a major book review] don't like the thesis of a book—fiction or non fiction—they pick a reviewer who shares their prejudices." Needless to say, this is not a phenomenon limited to one newspaper, and also needless to say it works in both directions; when they *do* like the thesis of a book, they can send it to somebody who will praise it.

It would seem that *Arming America* represented what a lot of book-review editors already believed, or thought other people ought to believe, so instead of sending it out for review to people who might have argued with some of Bellesiles's conclusions—and even more important, his methods of research—they simply sent it out to people who would treat it as gospel. Such people would not be hard to find. On the other hand, R.L. Wilson, the distinguished author of 30 books on American firearms history, wrote in a letter to me that Bellesiles's book is "an example of gross bias against gun culture" and "a shocking deceit." Others on the side of gun owners and traditional thinkers about America's firearms history have provided enough attacks against Bellesiles's accuracy to fill several large cartons with detailed refutations of his research (I know because the cartons are on my floor as I write): Among others, firearms historian Merrill Lindsay and Don Kates, an author, scholar of firearms history, and lawyer specializing in Second Amendment issues, have produced scholarship that would seem to contradict Bellesiles's assertions.

Perhaps Professor Bellesiles should have begun his research by reading the fiction of James Fenimore Cooper, in which the ability to shoot accurately is highly admired, and gun ownership on the frontier—then in upstate New York—was a natural thing in view of Indian raids and warfare with the French. But no. What we are seeing with *Arming America* is another familiar example of history being rewritten to make the past conform to the media's prevailing opinion of the present. In the meantime, those who read this book should do so with a cautious and skeptical eye, since, like all sweeping generalizations about the past, it reflects the prejudices of the present, and proves once again that the sheer number of notes does not necessarily make a case and that book reviewing is no more objective than any other form of writing. ◘

Editor's note: Michael Bellesiles, author of *Arming America*, did not reply to an invitation to respond to this article.

PETER BERSON

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TrillinCam? forget it.

Thanks to the Webcam revolution, nothing is considered too private or too mundane. But why would anybody want to watch this stuff? BY CALVIN TRILLIN

If you are under the impression that God has perfect timing, consider the fact that the Internet came along only after Andy Warhol was out of the picture. Had Warhol lived to see the World Wide Web unfolding, particularly the increasing use of Webcams to make public even the most mundane aspects of day-to-day existence, we might be saying that it had been created especially for him. In Warhol's heyday, I wrote a short story for which I concocted a distinguished avant-garde film called *Nostril*, which consisted of four and a half hours of a totally blank screen—at least the screen looked blank—and the sound of breathing. I was thinking of the films Warhol and like-minded filmmakers were then turning out—several hours of training the camera on the Empire State Building from some distance away, for instance, or a couple of hours of filming Henry Geldzahler, a well-known art-world figure of the time, while he was sitting on a couch. Now that I think of it, maybe *Nostril* was Warhol's film and I invented the one about Geldzahler as couch potato.

It wouldn't surprise me to hear that a 24-hour-a-day long shot of the Empire State Building is actually available on the Web; for all I know, someone more skilled than I am at snatching what he needed out of the surf could find a review of *Nostril* in there somewhere. (Although I spend enough time in cyberspace to be referred to by my daughters as Netboy, I tend to flail around clumsily if I'm not tethered to a more conventional site, like a newspaper's.) Simply by typing in "Webcam" on Yahoo!, I did manage to discover that anybody with an Internet connection has the capacity to pass his time staring at pictures of the University of Buffalo campus or the Nebraska state capitol or the delights of a site described as "Geek guy at home in Sacramento, CA, and work in Mountain View, CA." I even happened across a site that was commenting, in the tradition of *Nostril*, on just how interesting all of this is in the long run: It advertised a Webcam view of the continent drifting and noted: "Image updates once per year."

According to a piece I read recently in *The New York Times*, about 250,000 people have Webcams running in their homes at least part of the time. Many of those people, of course, use the Webcam to observe what's going on at home when they're not there—to check from the office, say, on whether the baby-sitter is pummeling the kids or if the cat is attempting to get at the goldfish. But a considerable number of them have installed Webcams around the house in order to film themselves 24 hours a day for the edification of the public. Essentially, the people who take this full-court-press approach to Webcam coverage are, whether they're aware of it or not, making Warhol movies. A statistically oriented scholar of film might be tempted to calculate how many images of someone scratching his stomach are being projected in this country at any one moment.

By chance, I came across the *Times* piece on Webcams just as I was having a broadband connection installed. The technician who did the work extolled the various wonders I could expect from broadband and

TONY MILLIONAIRE

spoke with disdain of what he called, with something approaching a sneer, dial-up. Explaining how broadband could suck a book the size of *Gone With the Wind* into its maw in a nanosecond, he made the new system sound powerful enough to be of use if we happened to find ourselves in another Gulf War and the Defense Department decided at the last minute to borrow my computer for command-and-control. One of the wonders he mentioned was an enhanced capacity to watch video on the Internet.

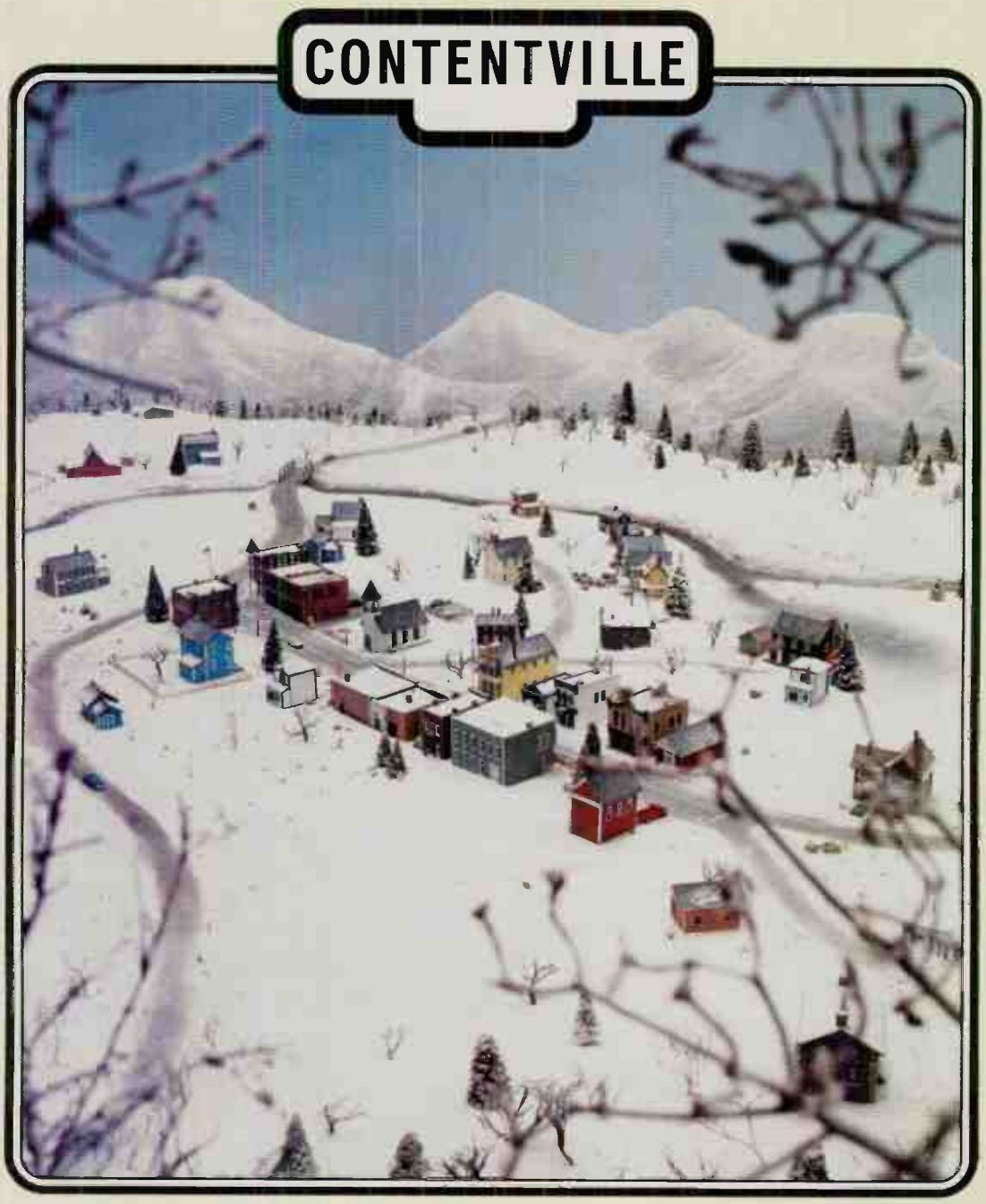
Of the video opportunities he talked about, the one that particularly intrigued me, I have to admit, was the opportunity to watch movie previews. I happen to love previews. Once, when I was working on a magazine profile of the magicians Penn & Teller, Penn Jillette told me, "The fact that previews are better than movies is so obvious it's not even an observation," and I could only nod my head in affirmation. But my broadband capacity would also permit me, I was told, to tune in instantly and effortlessly to sites like WeLiveInPublic.com, which Josh Harris and his girlfriend, Tanya Corrin, had just opened—having, according to the *Times*, "outfitted every nook and cranny in their 4,000-square-foot SoHo loft with Webcams." WeLiveInPublic.com is, of course, a purely Warholian name.

A SCHOLAR OF FILM MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO CALCULATE HOW MANY IMAGES OF SOMEONE SCRATCHING HIS STOMACH ARE BEING PROJECTED AT ANY ONE MOMENT.

Josh Harris and Tanya Corrin are in their thirties. Jennifer Ringley, who runs JenniCam.com and was described in the *Times* as "the mother of the personal Webcast," is 24. As far as I can tell, most Webcam stars are on the young side. Middle-aged and older people seem less keen on arranging for 24-hour-a-day coverage of their lives. Maybe they are more likely to have regular jobs that occupy them outside the house, leaving relatively little time at home to be observed by strangers. Maybe they're mired in the restrictive culture of the days when Americans labored under the impression that such matters as the workings of their digestive tract are private. Maybe they've come to understand that they no longer look absolutely perfect in their jammies. Maybe they don't understand how to operate a Webcam.

Feeling the sort of headiness people must experience when they first slip behind the wheel of a powerful new sports car, I tried WeLiveInPublic.com almost as soon as the broadband technician was out the door. After my usual 20 or 30 minutes of trying to respond sensibly to instructions that didn't seem to apply to my situation, I found myself gazing at a video image of Josh Harris discussing the technical problems involved in installing WeLiveInPublic.com's recording system. It had the sound of a conversation that was going to last a long time. Since I'd rather observe continental drift than listen to a conversation on technical problems, I switched to JenniCam.com.

On JenniCam.com, I couldn't seem to figure out how to tune in to the routine Webcam coverage, and I found myself watching instead something called JenniShow. A young woman, presumably Jenni herself, was speaking directly into the camera. She said, "I really missed you guys," even though I had never seen her before. I clicked on an icon that looked like a magnifying glass, and the image took up my entire screen. Jenni began talking about her cats. She has six. As it happens, the only use I've ever thought of for people talking about their cats is to pipe it into the cells of political prisoners until they agree to confess. I quickly reached for my mouse to click Jenni away, but what was there to click on? The entire screen was Jenni. I stared helplessly at Jenni as she explained that Porch Kitty is, "like, the friendliest cat you've ever seen." I realized that I was the one who should be filmed by a Webcam: *Klutzy Man Involuntarily Watching Someone Talk About Her Cats*, a film by Andy Warhol. ◘



WHAT'S GOING ON AT CONTENTVILLE?

Part magazine stand, part corner bookstore, and part research library, Contentville offers the widest spectrum of content anywhere, from books and magazines to dissertations and transcripts to e-books and study guides—and more. On top of that, Contentville has dozens of insightful experts who will help you find out what you want to know. Here's what they've been up to lately.

WHAT THE INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS ARE SAYING...

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

VISIT THE EXPERTS
Independent Booksellers

Roxanne Coady of R.J. Julia Booksellers, in Madison, Connecticut, discusses how Tom Ashbrook's *The Leap: A Memoir of Love and Madness in the Internet Gold Rush* delivers the roller-coaster thrills and charismatic storytelling of the best business books.

Cheryl Barton of Just Books, in Greenwich, Connecticut, finds that *The Biographer's Tale's* combination of wit, wordplay, literary sleuthing, and romance makes it A.S. Byatt's best novel since *Possession*.

In *Discovering the Body*, by Mary Howard, Barbara Theroux of Fact & Fiction, in Missoula, Montana, finds all the positive aspects of a first novel, as well as some characteristic flaws.

Robert McDonald of Unabridged Bookstore, in Chicago, Illinois, delights in Augusten Burroughs's *Sellevision*, appreciating its sharp wit and dead-on skewering of our celebrity-obsessed consumer culture.

Vivien Jennings of Rainy Day Books, in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, learns about author Ha Jin's literary influences during his in-store reading of his new short-story collection, *The Bridegroom*.

Koty Sinclair of Boulder Bookstore, in Boulder, Colorado, takes a hard look at *Remedial Christianity: What Every Believer Should Know about the Faith but Probably Doesn't*, by Paul Laughlin, and decides that dedicated readers will get a wealth of information from the book, while the less dedicated might get lost.

Micheal Fraser of Joseph Beth Booksellers, in Cincinnati, Ohio, discovers that Shannon Ravenel's *New Stories From the South: The Year's Best* paints an interesting and honest portrait of the region today.

And for a look at the best of the old South, Paul Ingram of Prairie Lights Bookstore, in Iowa City, Iowa, recommends heartfelt memoirs by screenwriter Horton Foote and novelist Ellen Douglas.

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STAN NEWMAN
A DIFFERENT LIGHT
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

RECENT COMMENTARY FROM OUR EXPERTS


Damon Husebye

AN EXCERPT FROM "CURRENT TITLES" BY DAMON HUSEBYE OF SAM WELLER'S BOOKS

While reading *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*, by James B. Twitchell, I couldn't help thinking that its audacity alone makes it worthy of recommendation. The word "commercial" is derogatory; there are few words more damning to describe a person, or their work, in our contemporary culture. Artists sneer at the paintings of Thomas Kinkade as being consumerism disguised as art, nothing more than "insidious" commercialism. But Kinkade posted over $100 million in sales last year. For all the nattering we do about materialism, we are shopping in record numbers and spending record amounts of money. Consumerism is our greatest guilty pleasure.

Sam Weller's Books *is located in Salt Lake City, Utah.*


Linda Urban

AN EXCERPT FROM "BUZZ FROM THE FLOOR," BY LINDA URBAN OF VROMAN'S BOOKSTORE

When I began working at Vroman's eight years ago, there wasn't even a spirituality section. Books were categorized as either religion—serious, doctrine-based theology, mostly for a specialized audience—or inspiration, usually cute little books about smiling through defeat or counting rainbows. Now our spirituality section is so large we're considering breaking it into subsections reflecting the more popular areas of interest. I could hardly have imagined eight years ago that we'd be debating whether or not to have a "monastic life" section.

Vroman's Bookstore *is located in Pasadena, California.*

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"In the cozy, West Village-meets-Baja, California, apartment of Eduardo Galeano's leonine-maned agent, Susan Bergholz, guests moved amid tapestries, terra-cotta walls, and urns as conversation flowed freely in Spanish and English."

KATHARINE GARDEN
THE MOVEABLE FEAST,
CONTENTVILLE'S COVERAGE OF THE NEW YORK BOOK-PARTY CIRCUIT

BEHIND THE CONTENT

A SAMPLING OF CONTENTVILLE'S LATEST EDITORIAL FEATURES

BOOKS

OPEN ON MY DESK As she writes *They Went Whistling: Women Wayfarers, Warriors, Runaways and Renegades*, her forthcoming book on unabashedly infamous women, **Barbara Holland** discusses how controversial women are repackaged as pristine role models.

THE MOVEABLE FEAST Our pseudonymous book-party columnist, Katharine Garden, keeps up an astounding pace, chronicling fêtes for Frank Rich's *Ghost Light*, Louis Begley's sequel *Schmidt Delivered*, and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano's latest, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World*.

DIARY OF A BOOK SLEUTH Our industry spy ponders Oprah's effect on e-books and reports on the expected plethora of election-fiasco titles.

CRITICS' CHORUS A simple breakdown of who loved and who loathed Michel Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*, Richard Ben Cramer's *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life*, and some of the other books everyone's talking about.

THE CONTENTVILLE AUTHOR Q&A Renowned author **Frederick Forsyth**, who has delved into the world of Internet publishing with "The Veteran"—the first of five short stories that will be published as e-book originals—answers the 17 questions we always ask.

WHEN READING IS NEW Children's book author and NPR commentator **Daniel Pinkwater** discusses the simple joys of "home-brewed" books, praising Sandy Scruggs's warm and funny *Ode to the Wart Hog*, published by the tiny, New Mexico-based Azro Press.

THE LAST WORD **Dalton Conley**, author of the controversial *Honky*, takes on issues of race, class, and gender in America.

ONLY AT CONTENTVILLE **Gore Vidal**, author of the recently published *The Golden Age*, discusses the three great lies of American politics and responds to some of his critics. An excerpt: In *The Golden Age*, I revealed, tactfully I thought, life in Washington during the decade from the fall of France to Pearl Harbor to the Cold War and Korea. No one needs to know any history at all to follow the story. Even so, one American reviewer was upset that I did not know how "dumbed-down" (his phrase) Americans were, and how dare I mention people that they had never heard of, such as Harry Hopkins?

BOOK NEWS In "Valley of the Independents," *Brill's Content* staff writer **Elizabeth Angell** discusses San Francisco journalist Sara Miles's new book, *How to Hack a Party Line: The Democrats and Silicon Valley*, about how the Democrats have the region almost wrapped up.

LITERARY WANDERER Author **Geoff Dyer** attends the surreal Burning Man Festival and adds a bit of his own literary eccentricity to the mix.

MAGAZINES

THE CONTENTVILLE EDITOR Q&A Editor **Carrie Tuhy** takes us behind the scenes at lifestyle magazine *Real Simple*.

LAUNCH OF THE MONTH Lou Dobbs ponders the cosmos with his newest venture (and offshoot of Space.com), *Space Illustrated*.

DISSERTATIONS

DISSERTATIONS DECONSTRUCTED **John Plotz** on Lynne Cheney's dissertation "Matthew's Arnold's Possible Perfection."

WHAT THE CONTRIBUTING EDITORS ARE SAYING...

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

VISIT THE EXPERTS
Contributing Editors

David Brown reads the William Randolph Hearst biography *The Chief* and shares his own memories of the media titan, a man so mighty he had Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini on his payroll.

Faith Childs enters the thorny terrain of reparations for African-Americans, and through a colloquy in *Harper's Magazine*, she finds that the subject is moving toward the mainstream.

Rereading is sometimes a pleasure, other times an ordeal. Sissela Bok takes great joy in revisiting Arundhati Roy's "near-magical" *The God of Small Things*, while the thought of taking another crack at D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* is "too boring to entertain."

Hero worship, the politics of team athletics, and the peculiarities of sports biographies all come into play as Frank Deford reads Richard Ben Cramer's best-selling biography of the Yankee Clipper, *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life*.

Mimi Sheraton goes on a literary exploration of New York City—reading Amram Ducovny's historical novel about Coney Island—and gives a scathing evaluation of the American Institute of Architects' latest guide to NYC architecture.

Ira Glass praises Chris Ware—not just as a skilled artist but a talented writer—for his innovative graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*.

A book he never thought he'd read, *I Love You, Ronnie*—a collection of letters from Ronald Reagan to Nancy Reagan—gives Peter T. Glenshaw a refreshingly charitable perspective on our former president.

The dominance of television in our information culture owes a lot to Dennis Potter, one of the overlooked pioneers of the medium. David Salle reads a Potter biography and praises him for his artistic and cultural acuity.

Our culture's obsession with physical beauty makes for a thought-provoking memoir, Christine Vachon discovers, as she reads a pair of books about the trauma of facial disfigurement.

Ilan Stavans reads about the Sokal hoax—a physicist's hoodwinking essay about science and the humanities—and joins the ongoing debate about whether the academic left might be too isolated for its own good.

OUR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

SHERMAN ALEXIE
JONATHAN ALTER
LOUIS BEGLEY
HAROLD BLOOM
SISSELA BOK
ROBERT BOOKMAN
DAVID BROWN
STEPHEN L. CARTER
FAITH CHILDS
JAMES CRAMER
FRANK DEFORD
RAHM EMANUEL
GENEVIEVE FIELD
LARRY FINK
IRA GLASS
PETER T. GLENSHAW
DAVID HALBERSTAM
ANITA HILL
LAURA INGRAHAM
DAVID ISAY
WENDY KAMINER
POLLY LABARRE
NEIL LABUTE
CRISTINA MITTERMEIER
DAVID SALLE
JOHN SCANLON
MIMI SHERATON
ILAN STAVANS
GAY TALESE
CHRISTINE VACHON
REBECCA WALKER

"Holocaust survivors talk about the concentration camps in the same way that Indians talk about boarding schools—both were created for the purpose of culturally wiping out an entire population."

SHERMAN ALEXIE
ON SPEAK YOU ALSO: A SURVIVOR'S RECKONING, BY PAUL STEINBERG

RECENT COMMENTARY FROM OUR EXPERTS


Rahm Emanuel

AN EXCERPT FROM "WHAT I'M READING NOW" WITH RAHM EMANUEL

I read Taylor Branch's *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-64* a couple of years ago and thought it was excellent. More recently, I was in between books and my brother [Contentville Magazine Expert Ezekiel J. Emanuel] had just finished reading Branch's *Parting the Waters*, which is about Martin Luther King from 1954 through 1963, and was raving about it. So I gave him my copy of *Pillar of Fire*, and he gave me his copy of *Parting the Waters*. I worked with Taylor during my time at the White House, so naturally I read his work with particular interest. *Parting the Waters* offers extraordinary insight into the King years. For example, the average person might think they know something about the FBI's role in the subversion of Dr. King and of the entire Civil Rights movement, but until you read this book you don't *really* know anything about the FBI's activities during that era.

New Contributing Editor **Rahm Emanuel** *is a Managing director of Wasserstein, Perella & Co. and served as senior adviser to President Clinton.*


Wendy Kaminer

AN EXCERPT FROM "WHAT I'M READING NOW" WITH WENDY KAMINER

I don't think Mary Zeiss Stange and Carol K. Oyster [authors of *Gun Women*] are saying that women have to be either peace-loving or gun-toting. Rather, they're pointing out and debunking the ways in which the stereotype about female incompetence and vulnerability is used to promote the notion that guns are anti-female. The essays in the book are uneven—as essay collections often are but, all in all, *Gun Women* offers an interesting look at the gun debate and an interesting perspective on this larger feminist debate about natural gender difference.

Wendy Kaminer *is a regular columnist for* The American Prospect *and IntellectualCapital.com, as well as a contributing editor to* The Atlantic Monthly.

PHOTOGRAPH BY © BRIANSMITH.COM

WHAT THE MAGAZINE EXPERTS ARE SAYING...

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

VISIT THE EXPERTS
Magazine Experts

American Girl, an ad-free magazine for girls, strives to treat its audience with respect. Elizabeth Crow explains how this handsome publication succeeds.

Has America fallen out of love with technology? After reading *The Industry Standard* and *Wired*, John R. Quain evaluates two sobering morality tales: the legal troubles of eBay and Microsoft.

Matthew Goodman sets his sights on *Williams-Sonoma TASTE*, a gorgeously produced new magazine that nonetheless elicits the question, "Just how glorious a photo does one really need of a baked apple?"

Chicago's Willow Creek church offers mass-worship experiences with rock music, orchestras, and videos, yet it manages to provide valuable personal guidance. *Christianity Today* takes readers inside the megachurch, an institution that Winifred Gallagher says is "changing America's spiritual landscape."

Keith Olbermann takes us back to the days of cutting pictures out of magazines and taping them to the wall, commenting on *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN: The Magazine*'s recent visual achievements.

Daniel Radosh tackles the question "Do rock-and-roll magazines care about rock and roll?" His answer? No.

It's got the brand name and the hype, but does *Teen Vogue* have what it takes to last? Susan Burton reviews the magazine from the teen angle, Elaina Richardson from the fashion side.

Beauty magazines tell readers how to shed the pounds, but they're less responsible with serious weight-related issues such as eating disorders and obesity. Kate de Castelbajac takes the editors of *Glamour* and *Harper's Bazaar* to task.

They're racy, they're popular, and they're here to stay. Michael Segell looks at England's cockiest imports, "lad" magazines (*Maxim*, *FHM*) and their dominance of the men's-magazine market.

OUR MAGAZINE EXPERTS

- DONALD BAER — Fashion Magazines
- SUSAN BURTON — Teen Magazines
- ELIZABETH CROW — Women's, Parenting and Children's Magazines
- KATE DE CASTELBAJAC — Beauty Magazines
- DR. EZEKIEL J. EMANUEL — Health Magazines
- TIMOTHY FERRIS — Science Magazines
- WINIFRED GALLAGHER — Religion and Spirituality Magazines
- MATTHEW GOODMAN — Cooking Magazines
- STÉPHANE HOUY-TOWNER — Fashion Magazines
- THE STAFF OF *MARKETPLACE* — Money and Finance Magazines
- KEVIN MITNICK — Computer Magazines
- KEITH OLBERMANN — Sports Magazines
- CHEE PEARLMAN — Design Magazines
- JOHN R. QUAIN — Technology Magazines
- DANIEL RADOSH — Entertainment Magazines
- ELAINA RICHARDSON — Fashion Magazines
- MICHAEL SEGELL — Men's Magazines

"To some people, rock magazines will always begin and end with *Rolling Stone*. I would bet that most of the people who believe that either actually haven't read the magazine in 25 years or are Jann Wenner."

DANIEL RADOSH
ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINES

RECENT COMMENTARY FROM OUR EXPERTS


Susan Burton

AN EXCERPT FROM "OFF THE RACK" WITH SUSAN BURTON, TEEN MAGAZINES

Think of what it might be like if Anna Wintour [Editor in Chief of Vogue] took over your high school. She'd hang a solid-gold coat from Gucci in her locker. When called on in algebra, she'd sashay to the blackboard in Earl Jeans. In December, she'd excuse herself from the wreath sale to fly to New York and buy a dress for Winter Ball. And sooner or later she'd take command of the school paper, from which she'd eliminate those earnest stories about cafeteria food and heartwarming tales of friendship. She'd hand the goofy boy columnists their pink slips, give writing assignments to Christy Turlington, and rename the publication *Teen Vogue*.

Susan Burton *is a senior editor of* Open Letters, *a daily magazine of first-person writing in the form of personal correspondence.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JON HUGHES


Kevin Mitnick

AN EXCERPT FROM "OFF THE RACK" WITH KEVIN MITNICK, COMPUTER MAGAZINES

So, now you've got yourself a new computer and you just love it. You use your computer all the time. Actually, you use your computer so much, it's kind of disturbing. Do you just happen to find yourself surfing the Net into the wee hours of the morning on a regular basis? Donald Unger's article on Internet addiction in *Laptop* may be a wake-up call. Having once been obsessed with computers myself, I know how easy it is to lose track of time online.

While Internet addiction is not listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, researchers believe the symptoms are subsumed under other disorders, including substance abuse and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. If you are addicted, you can get help...online, of all places. Maybe I'm crazy, but referring Internet addicts to online help groups seems to make as much sense as sending an alcoholic to the local pub for an A.A. meeting.

Kevin Mitnick *has 20 years experience circumventing information-security measures and has gained unauthorized access to computer systems at some of the world's largest corporations.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY AP/ STEVE BOITANO

RECENT PROFESSOR'S PICKS

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

VISIT THE EXPERTS
Academic Experts

JACK ZIPES
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Professor's Picks on
FAIRY TALES AND FOLKLORE

THE UTOPIAN FUNCTION OF ART, by Ernst Bloch (1988)
FROM COURT TO FOREST: GIAMBATTISTA BASILE'S LO CUNTO DE LI CUNTI AND THE BIRTH OF THE LITERARY FAIRY TALE, by Nancy L. Canepa (1999)
FAIRY TALES, SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN FRANCE 1690-1715: NOSTALGIC UTOPIAS, by Lewis Seifert (1996)
FROM THE BEAST TO THE BLONDE: ON FAIRY TALES AND THEIR TELLERS, by Marina Warner (1994)
THE CLASSIC FAIRY TALES, by Maria Tatar (1999)

ROBIN LAKOFF
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Professor's Picks on
POWERFUL LANGUAGE

YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND, by Deborah Tannen (1991)
ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND, by Lewis Carroll (1865)
LOST IN TRANSLATION, by Eva Hoffman (1989)
LANGUAGE MYTHS, by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill (eds.) (1998)
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FREE SPEECH...AND IT'S A GOOD THING TOO, by Stanley Fish (1994)

MICHAEL ZUCKERMAN
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Professor's Picks on
AMERICAN BEST-SELLERS 1776 TO PRESENT

COMMON SENSE, by Thomas Paine (1776)
AUTOBIOGRAPHY, by Benjamin Franklin (1791)
UNCLE TOM'S CABIN: OR, LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852)
HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE, by Dale Carnegie (1936)
DR. SPOCK'S BABY AND CHILD CARE, by Benjamin Spock (1946)

JOHN E. MACK
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Professor's Picks on
ALIEN ENCOUNTERS

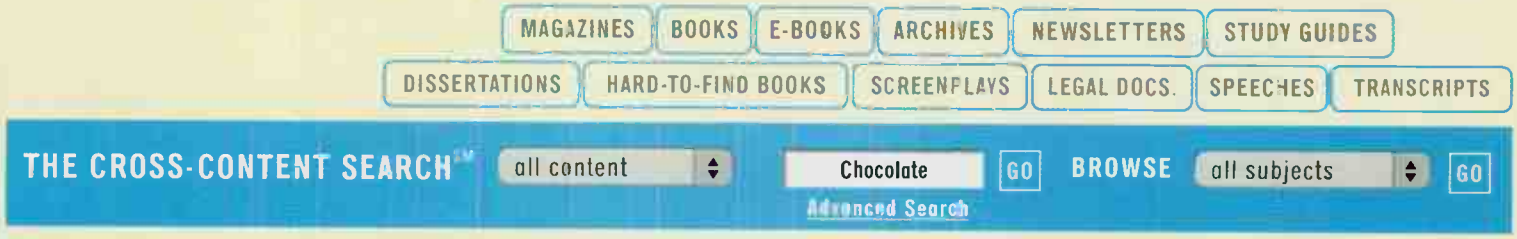
TRICKSTER MAKES THIS WORLD: MISCHIEF, MYTH AND ART, by Lewis Hyde (1998)
DAIMONIC REALITY: UNDERSTANDING OTHERWORLDLY ENCOUNTERS, by Patrick Harpur (1995)
COMMUNION: A TRUE STORY, by Whitley Strieber (1987)
INTRUDERS: THE INCREDIBLE VISITATIONS AT COPLEY WOODS, by Budd Hopkins (1987)
THE HOLOGRAPHIC UNIVERSE, by Michael Talbot (1992)

OUR OTHER ACADEMIC EXPERTS

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

THE CROSS-CONTENT SEARCH℠

At the heart of Contentville is The Cross-Content Search℠, which draws from hundreds of thousands of books, magazines, doctoral dissertations, magazine-article archives, speeches, *New York Times* archives, even transcripts of TV shows. Here's a good example of how The Cross-Content Search works:



CHOCOLATE

In time for Valentine's Day, we offer delicious content on chocolate—cookbooks, literature, magazines, newsletters, and more. It's the perfect love offering for the smitten (or consolation for the lonely). If you type in "chocolate" and click on the "GO" button, you get the following results:

BOOKS

Suzanne Somers' Get Skinny on Fabulous Food by Somers, Suzanne
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Dahl, Roald
The Chocolate Touch by Catling, Patrick Skene
Click for full list

E-BOOKS

Like Water for Chocolate by Esquivel, Laura

MAGAZINES

Chocolatier

TRANSCRIPTS

Saturday Today, Nov. 18, 2000
Today, Oct. 11, 2000
The Roseanne Show, Aug. 31, 2000
Click for full list

NEWSLETTERS

Chocolate Industry in Eastern Europe, American Directory Corporation, January 2000
1998 Confectionery Report: A Survey of the World's Developed Markets, The ERC Statistics Intl plc, June 1999
Countlines & Chocolate Bars: The Global Survey, ERC Statistics Intl plc, April 1998
Click for full list

ARCHIVES

Taking candy from kids, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 2000
All for the Cause, *Business 2.0*, Oct. 24, 2000
Black and Bitter, *Economist*, Oct. 21, 2000
Click for full list

DISSERTATIONS

Things That Are Good And Things That Are Chocolate: A Cultural Model of Weight Control as Morality, Moore, Nancy Helen Vuckovic
The Immunobiology of Nutritional Modulation of the Inflammatory Response, Borchers, Andrea Thea
Handmade in France: Discourses on Skill, Tradition, and Authenticity Among Contemporary Artisanal Chocolatiers, Terrio, Susan Jane
Click for full list

HARD-TO-FIND BOOKS

Ultimate Chocolate Cake by Rubinstein, Helge, 1982
Chocolate Kicks by McHugh, Edna, 1970
Chocolate the Consuming Passion by Boynton, Sandra, 1992
Click for full list

CONTENTVILLE EXPERT COMMENTARY*

Current Titles in Hardcover Fiction, Cheryl Barton, Jul. 10, 2000
Buzz From The Floor, Jaclyn Friedman, Aug. 14, 2000
Cooking: Classic Titles, Susan Cohn, Oct. 24, 2000
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*Articles commissioned by Contentville to help you decide what is and isn't worth reading—FOR FREE!

china online

Navigating a haphazard and contradictory government policy, China's growing number of Netizens are logging on with or without the Party's blessing. BY GRAHAM EARNSHAW

It's 3 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon on Haidian Lu, one of the main drags through Beijing's equivalent of Silicon Valley. I've taken the train up from Shanghai, where I've lived for five years. In my 20-year relationship with China, I've worked mainly as a journalist and most recently as a jack-of-all-trades entrepreneur. Hanging out in one of the dozens of crowded Internet cafés that line the street, I finally manage to snag a seat in front of a computer. I log on. The PC users around me are largely silent; New Age music plays over the speaker system. The customers seem mesmerized by the screens in front of them, whether chatting online, sending e-mail, or playing games. I seem to be the only one surfing the Web—and am curious to see which Western news outlets the Chinese government has deemed appropriate.

I type in "NYTimes.com." The site doesn't come up. "IE cannot open a connection to NYTimes.com," the computer says. *The Washington Post* doesn't come up, either, but the staunchly anti-Communist *Washington Times* site does. The *International Herald Tribune*'s site, IHT.com, is available (though it's usually blocked in Shanghai). LATimes.com comes up, but the *Chicago Tribune* site is blocked, as is the *San Jose Mercury News*'s. The *Miami Herald* site is open, which is a relief since I'm a huge Dave Barry fan. WSJ.com is accessible, but most of the content is blocked—not by the Chinese Communist Party but by Dow Jones's desire to profit from subscriptions—and, well, I don't have a subscription. CNN.com is a no, *The Sun* of Baltimore is a yes, and *The Boston Globe* is another no. London's *Financial Times* website is open, and one of its top stories, by Richard McGregor, is about Chinese students who flout Internet controls: "An Internet Headache for China," the headline reads.

A headache? Not really. It's more of a minor nuisance. A nuisance for a divided government that craves the information and the economic advantage that the Internet provides but also wants to control access to what it considers potentially subversive ideology. It's a nuisance, too, for China's Internet users, who never know when and how that control will be exercised—or whether they will be arrested or fined for challenging it. Despite the Internet regulations the government released last fall and its determination to establish Chinese websites that give users a variety of Communist Party–approved content, the people are finding ways around the system as the government struggles to settle on a policy.

LAST AUGUST, CHINESE PRESIDENT JIANG ZEMIN ACKNOWLEDGED AND WELCOMED THE INTERNET WITH ONLY A FEW CAVEATS.

Chinese surf the Internet at a computer exhibition in Beijing last year.

GREG BAKER/AP PHOTO

Michael Robinson, the chief technical officer at the Beijing startup Leyou.com, which markets children's clothes and accessories, has been working in and around the Chinese telecommunications industry for five years. Robinson considers the Chinese authorities' filtering of Web addresses and other forms of control to be more symbolism than censorship. "People [in the West] often think of [China] as being like *1984* and Big Brother, but that's not it at all," says the California native. "It's much more aligned with Chinese concepts of face and respect for authority."

The latest figures state that about 17 million people in China use the Internet, up from 9 million at the end of 1999; they are the educated elite—intellectuals, white-collar workers, students, and academics—instrumental to the government's obsession with flourishing in a global economy. "The Chinese would love to disconnect the commercially useful aspects of the Internet from those elements that might be politically corrosive," says Kurt Campbell of the Center for Strategic & International Studies, in Washington, D.C. Given the sheer vastness of the Web, though, that's simply impossible. "The Internet is the most difficult challenge that [the Chinese authorities] face," Campbell says. "If you look at percentage increases in home pages and Internet activity, Asia is growing faster than any other region....Home installation of PCs in China still lags, but the advent of online coffee shops is a new feature which has great significance."

SINCE 1996, A YEAR BEFORE China went online, the Chinese Communist Party has strictly regulated virtually all information that flows in from the outside world: newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Stopping newspapers from getting into China is easy, and satellite broadcasts have proved to be a minor inconvenience—CNN airs only in China's top hotels. Nearly a decade ago, Rupert Murdoch challenged the authorities in Beijing when he said that satellite television would prove "an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes

A messenger delivers computer monitors by tricycle in Beijing.

GREG BAKER/AP PHOTO

everywhere." Angered, the Chinese authorities dismantled most of the country's satellite dishes, promoted their own cable networks, and used stick-and-carrot tactics to persuade Western media to conform to government requirements. (Murdoch removed the British Broadcasting Corporation from his Star TV network to please the Chinese government, and he sold the *South China Morning Post* to a pro-Beijing businessman.)

Then, in 1997—and accelerating in March 1998 when Premier Zhu Rongji took over from Li Peng—China officially embraced the Internet. Last August, the 16th World Computer Congress, a biannual event run by the International Federation for Information Processing, was held in Beijing, and on its opening day, Chinese president Jiang Zemin acknowledged and welcomed the Internet with only a few caveats. "We should deeply realize the great power of the information technology and actively promote the development of the information technology," he said. "The convergence of the traditional economy and information network technology is a powerful force that will shape the social and economic development of the 21st century."

Now the government is investing heavily in Internet infrastructure: Chinese companies were supposed to have established some sort of Web presence by the end of 2000. What's more, the official media are full of information about new websites. Just as they foiled Murdoch's plans by promoting their own cable networks, the Chinese authorities are busy setting up their own Chinese-language content providers, such as chinadaily.com.cn and xinhuanet.com. Kathleen Hartford, a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, says that China is trying to create "a safe sandbox" of content on the Web that will attract its citizens and keep them from logging on to non-Chinese sites. "If you provide most of the content from within China and make sure you only provide safe content, that's probably going to be enough to keep most users from venturing into places that the government doesn't want them to go," she notes.

Chinese authorities try to filter out websites and information they consider hostile—those that, for instance, contain pornography, advocate an independent Taiwan or Tibet, or question the Communist Party. They use a URL screening system, which is basically a list of forbidden addresses determined by the Ministry of State Security. The system checks the Web addresses surfers request against the master list and stops the connection if necessary. But a senior Chinese executive with one of the largest U.S. computer companies in Shanghai says the filtering has little impact on users' access to information. "They have cyber cops who monitor Internet activity and do surveys and checks on the Internet cafés," he says. "But I don't think it means a lot....They want free information; they know that free information is good for the Chinese economy."

So how does the government decide which Web addresses to ban? The process is arbitrary, and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, whose controlling shareholder is the Malaysian-Chinese magnate Robert Kuok, is a prime example. The paper publishes more news about mainland China than any other English publication outside China and reports on human rights, dissidents, beatings of devotees of the outlawed Falun Gong religious cult, Tibetan protests, and much else the Communist authorities supposedly want to stop leaking into China. Yet the *South China Morning Post*'s website is not blocked. "It is not blocked because it is perceived as

laughing matters

The election aftermath was confounding, exasperating, and—thanks to the merging of news and comedy—funny. Here's to the patriots on *Saturday Night Live*. BY ERIC EFFRON

Did you catch this joke from Jay Leno on *The Tonight Show*? "We've got Bush and Gore headed to the Supreme Court," Leno said. "You've got George W. Bush's intelligence, who we pitted against Al Gore's honesty. It's more like a case for small-claims court."

Or how about this one from David Letterman: "Katherine Harris is in the middle of her 15 minutes of fame," Letterman declared, going on to explain the four stages of fame: The first is public ridicule, followed by the beauty makeover, then posing naked in *Playboy*, and finally "stage four, becoming Mrs. Larry King."

And no doubt you caught a bunch of those Bush-Gore skits on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, featuring Will Ferrell's scarily vacant Bush ("I am victoriant") and Darrell Hammond's stiff-as-a-board Gore turning the most simple observation into a condescending lecture.

I've been focused on the newscasts these past several weeks, but I nevertheless came upon these routines—and many more—not because I was religiously watching Leno, Letterman, and *Saturday Night Live* but because I was glued to CNN and MSNBC and the Fox News Channel and various network news shows and C-SPAN. All of these (yes, even C-SPAN) treated the comedy shows as part of their coverage of the election deadlock. MSNBC seemed to have as many clips of its sister network's *Saturday Night Live* skits as it did of vote-counters staring quizzically at those hanging chads.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW ABOUT COMEDIANS' MILKING THE NEWS. BUT WHAT'S NEW IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE NEWS HAS BEEN MILKING THE COMEDIANS.

There's nothing new about comedians' milking the news for their material, of course—just ask O.J. Simpson or Monica Lewinsky or Lorena Bobbitt. But what is new is the extent to which the news has been milking the comedians—and that says a lot about how Americans have experienced the biggest political/legal/constitutional story in recent memory, as well as about the role of comedy in our evolving media environment.

The election story's most striking difference from the other mega-stories of recent vintage is that it was less sordid. Compared with, say, the Clinton impeachment saga, it was far easier for the mainstream press to credit the election-inspired comedy. For the newscasts to have endlessly quoted Jay Leno during impeachment would have been deemed distasteful, and unfair to Bill Clinton. Similarly, while many comedians were relentlessly harsh to O.J. Simpson, the comedy was too divisive to be integrated into the saturation news coverage. But no such downside presented itself with the election jokes, which, after all, targeted both candidates. And for the channels that had once been All Monica, All the Time, the funny stuff certainly must have been a programming relief to producers when they became All Vote-Counting, All the Time.

So more than ever before, the news we consumed was filtered through a comedic lens. Whether we actually tuned in to the comedy shows or left our televisions tuned to the news, there were the funny-men, wisecracking, making light of Bush's intellect and of Gore's demeanor and of the morass of confounding legal strategies and relentless partisanship and—naturally—of the media's handling of the entire spectacle.

Leno, in an interview with Barbara Walters on *20/20* in December, succinctly explained how comedians, liberated from some of the conventions of journalism, can get to the point more effectively. "[W]hen you see people come on and say, 'The president did not lie; he misspoke,' what does that mean?" Leno said. "But when you do a joke about it, people get it right away....a joke is kind of like an anti-spin doctor."

At first, I took all those *Saturday Night Live* segments on MSNBC to be merely promotional. But then I came to appreciate the comic relief and the, well, serious way comedy kept things in perspective: Comedy was one of the few places you could turn to not feel spun. And the humor was providing a common ground for a story where virtually every utterance—by politicians, by pundits, even by judges—was easily viewed as partisan and therefore could be dismissed.

I suspect one reason the polls kept showing that the public didn't believe there was a "crisis," despite the sometimes apocalyptic proclamations of the talking heads, was the presence, in the middle of the story, of the humor. How freaked out can you be when you're laughing? Comedy no doubt served a similar purpose during earlier periods of national trauma, but courtesy of our new media landscape, this time the political comedy was woven into the very fabric of the coverage. And why not? It was all so absurd, anyway.

It's not that suddenly our most popular comedians have been transformed into latter-day Lenny Bruces. For most of them, it's the laughs, stupid, not the politics. As Letterman remarked to his

Doing their duty for laughs and for country (from left): Jay Leno, Darrell Hammond (as Gore), David Letterman, and Will Ferrell (as Bush). Illustration by Zach Trenholm

musical director, Paul Shaffer, after Shaffer accused him of being a Democrat: "No, no—we're right down the middle, my friend," Letterman said, according to an account on Salon.com. "Either side, we just don't care."

Judging from the equal-opportunity skewering by Letterman, Leno, Conan O'Brien, Jon Stewart, and the rest, it does seem that the comedians (with the possible exception of Bill Maher; see page 112) have been neutral—objective, if you will. And that made it possible for us to trust them because they weren't advancing an agenda.

At one point in late November, Letterman draped his set with American flags and quipped that it made him look "more presidential." It was a deft move that poked fun at the candidates' manipulative use of symbols. Letterman's flags seemed right for another reason, too: He certainly has been doing his patriotic duty. ■

WE SHOW

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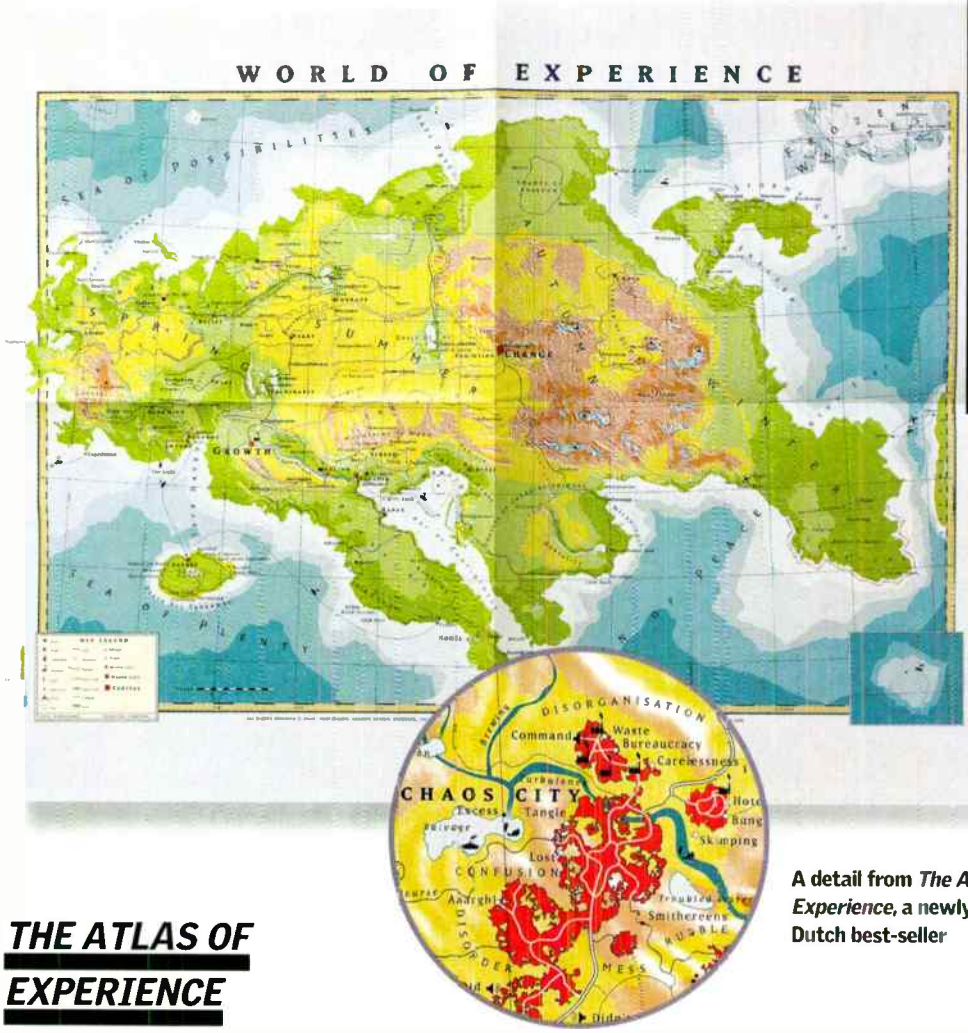


A detail from *The Atlas of Experience*, a newly translated Dutch best-seller

THE ATLAS OF EXPERIENCE

BOOK OF IMAGINARY MAPS

Call it Proustian cartography: *The Atlas of Experience* (Bloomsbury) maps existential terrain in striking detail. The book consists of make-believe maps—by designers Jean Klare and Louise van Swaaij—that somehow are immediately familiar: bodies of water, mountain ranges, capital cities, and forests. But look closely at "Mountains of Work," and you realize you're examining the village of Jealousy, which is near the submerged wreck *Past Glory* in the Bay of Wealth. On the "Adventure" map, the road from Tall Stories leads past the town of Doubt to an area labeled Danger. Other maps depict "Pleasure," "Knowledge," "Chaos," and "Secrets." *Atlas* appeared in Holland in 1999, where it sold more than 100,000 copies, and the recent English translation is as oddly compelling as the maps themselves. ELIZABETH ANGELL

TOP PETER BENSON

MSNBC's Lester Holt smoothed the ride on that bumpy election night.

LESTER HOLT

MSNBC NEWSCASTER

It's a law of nature: A national media storm will produce a new crop of media stars. This time around, in the wake of Election 2000 and its replays and overtimes, it was Lester Holt of MSNBC who stood out. "This story has certainly given everyone a higher profile," the anchor says. No one more so than Holt, who arrived at MSNBC only four months before the election to host the afternoon *NewsFront* program—and soon found himself amid a once-in-a-lifetime political drama. "I had always wanted to work at the network level, and this was a good time for a change in my life," he says.

Early in his career, Holt reported from Northern Ireland, Iraq, and El Salvador, among other places, then worked the anchor desk at Chicago's WBBM for almost 14 years. Holt jumped to MSNBC soon after WBBM ousted him to make way for Carol Marin's no-nonsense local news broadcast (which was recently canceled). Holt's style is smooth and authoritative but never glib. As the election story unfolded, he literally rolled up his sleeves and explained the procedural minutiae of ballot counting without losing sight of the larger picture. "There was a moment there," he says, "when it hit everybody that we were watching history unfold." LARA KATE COHEN

STUFF WE LIKE

***Dresie and Casie, twins, West Transvaal, 1993,* from photographer Roger Ballen's collection**

OUTLAND

PHOTOGRAPHY FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Now that apartheid has dissolved, the diamond miners, farmers, and security guards who pose for American photographer Roger Ballen find themselves in a new and strange land. In his third book, *Outland*, Ballen captures people who appear dazed and, well, strange, bringing to mind the haunting photographs of Diane Arbus.

Ballen's work has evolved along with post-apartheid South Africa. "The first book I did was about the small towns of South Africa," he says. "The second book was about the people in these places." In his latest volume, Ballen has once again photographed poor whites in rural South Africa—"a group of people," he says, "on the fringe of society."

The characters in *Outland* are emaciated, dirty, and exhausted; some wear masks, pose against sparse backdrops, or hold props such as twisted wires or animals. "I go into someone's home—working with the subject," Ballen says. "I'm a director." He suspects that the pictures will be difficult for many white South Africans to embrace, because "the history of the country is such that these people are still very unsure of...and very defensive about their identity."

ALLISON BENEDIKT

STUDIO 360

HIGH/LOW RADIO SHOW

Is Kurt Andersen the real "King of All Media"? The magazine editor (formerly of *Spy* and *New York*), writer (*The New Yorker*), novelist (*Turn of the Century*), and website founder (Inside.com) now hosts a public-radio program, *Studio 360*. Andersen and guests such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, comic-book writer Neil Gaiman, and scholar Harold Bloom debate the idea of history as a theme-park attraction, ponder why Shakespeare is "suddenly everywhere," or opine that Napster is a "tragedy" not because it may bankrupt artists but because downloadable music eliminates the need for album covers.

In the dozen or so topics per show, Andersen hopscotches through high and low culture: from the Mister Softee theme song to the "new urbanism" of architecture, from Civil War battle re-creations to Madame Tussaud. Expect witty ripostes: The host charges *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik, a former Montrealer, with "Canadian revisionism," to which Gopnik retorts, "You have to have a history to have revisionism, Kurt. So that's what [Canadians] are missing." Andersen's shtick is light on pretension and pedantry as he gamely invokes—all in a quick hour—the enduring popularity of Baroque music or a childhood obsession with the sixties television show *The Fugitive*.

KAJA PERINA

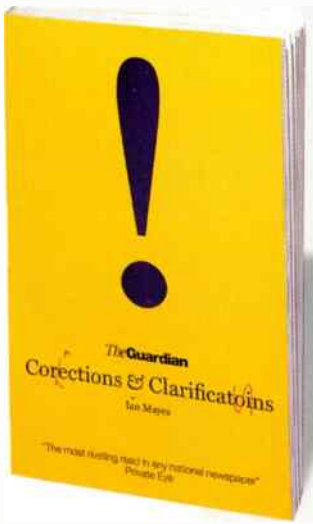
Studio 360 airs on public radio nationwide.

***Studio 360* host Kurt Andersen**

NEWSPAPER MISCELLANEA WE LIKE

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

***GUARDIAN* COLUMN**



A collection of Ian Mayes's British *Guardian* corrections columns

Since its inception, three years ago, the "Corrections & Clarifications" column in Britain's *Guardian* has become one of the liberal newspaper's most popular features. Credit goes to Ian Mayes, who has turned a dry assignment into a witty and dignified read. A collection of his work, also called *Corrections & Clarifications*, was recently published in the United Kingdom.

Mayes gently skewers his colleagues for errors large and small, icing his copy with sarcasm. What reporter, for example, would not feel the sting of this addendum: "The Royal Mail 'spokesman' referred to in a report about male chauvinism in the organisation, was in fact a 'spokeswoman.' Apologies." Material for the column comes from the more than 6,500 readers a year who point out typos and alleged bias. One man faxes Mayes as often as twice a day. ("I keep a file," Mayes says. "I was thinking that one day I might just do a column about his activities.") Mayes says his favorite item so far concerns the column itself: "'The absence of "Corrections" in *The Guardian* yesterday was due to a technical fault and not to a sudden onset of accuracy.' I was away and they couldn't find the 'Corrections' column."

JIM EDWARDS

Read the column at guardianunlimited.co.uk/corrections.

NY *TIMES* TV GRID

MOVIE REVIEWS

★ **Shall We Dance** (1937). Fred Astaire. The dancers at their swank peak. (CC) 2847171	
Trauma: Life in the ER (PG) 619191	**Maternity Ward** In-vitro fertilization. 606627
★ **House Calls** (1978). Briskly appealing caper, with stars surmounting material. (PG) (CC) 695511	

Scathing movie reviews are the most fun to read. A deft knifing by Stephen Holden in *The New York Times*, for example, can be a work of art—even when the film in question most definitely isn't. On a practical level, a review really needn't go on at such cruel length: A few choice words ("Stay away," say) would probably do. And just such super-abbreviated reviews—positive, negative, or ambivalent—can be found on *The New York Times* television listings page. At their best, the distilled movie review capsules embedded in the hour-by-hour TV grid evoke a two-hour film in five words or less. *Giant* is summed up as "Big, tough and teeming" while *The Mod Squad* is called "Torturously boring"; *When Harry Met Sally...* is "Brisk and funny but hollow" and Fred and Ginger in *Shall We Dance* are "dancers at their swank peak." The reviews are witty, blunt, and, despite their brevity, usually right on target.

LUKE BARR

UNCLE SADDAM

DOCUMENTARY

Uncle Saddam takes on Iraq's megalomaniacal dictator, Saddam Hussein. The hour-long documentary, dark and comic, is divided into two parts. The first half is a tour of Iraqi art and architecture, all of it devoted to extravagant expressions of the man's greatness: the art museum in

TOP: ROGER BALLEN; BOOK: PETER BERSON; ANDERSEN: BRIGITTE LACOMBE

which every portrait is of Saddam, for example, or the plans for a man-made island in the shape of his thumb, covered with a huge replica of his thumbprint. The second half charts Saddam's systematic elimination of his rivals—most of them family members.

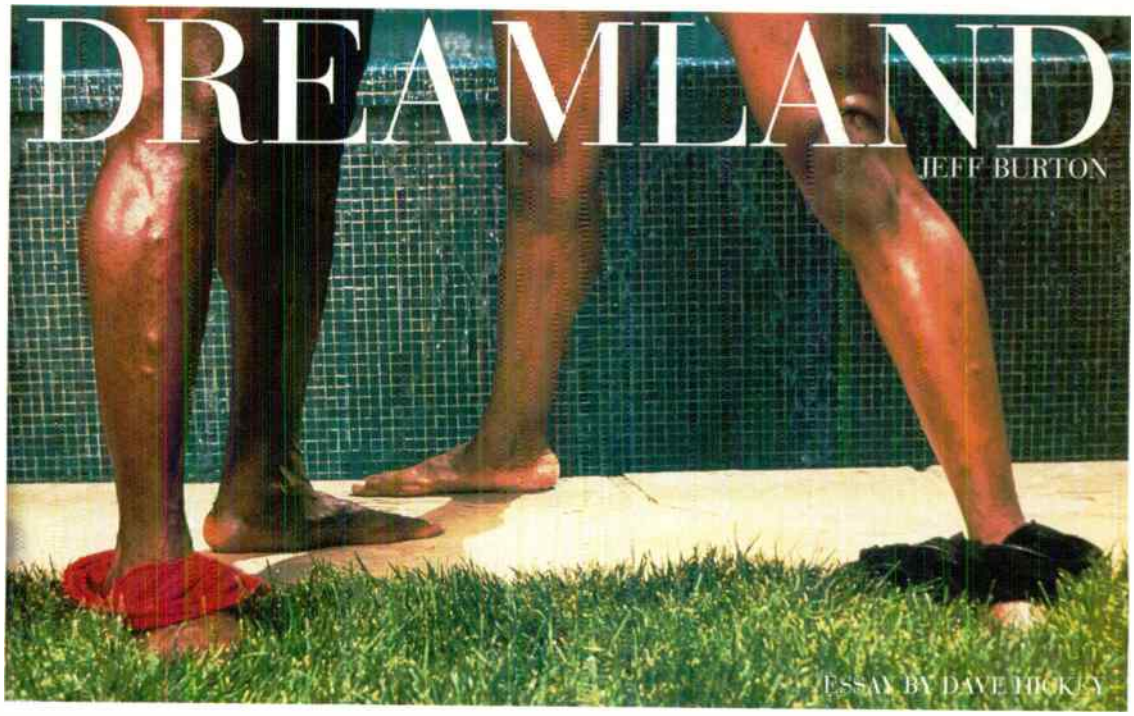
Director Joël Soler told the Iraqi government he was making a film about the effects of U.N. sanctions. He returned with something quite different. Soler interviewed members of Saddam's entourage—such as his interior decorator—and collected video footage available on the Iraqi black market. Soler says Saddam is so pleased with his achievements that even the most mundane details of his life have been taped. We see him lecture on personal hygiene. We see him receive guests, who kiss him near his armpit—his preferred greeting—and get to watch him fish by throwing hand grenades into the water. "I wanted to show his campy side," says Soler.

Uncle Saddam is making the rounds at film festivals, but after a Los Angeles screening in November, Soler received a death threat on the front door of his house: "Burn the Satanic movie or you'll be dead."

STEPHEN TOTILO

Saddam Hussein receives his preferred greeting, a kiss near the armpit (top), and lectures a group on hygiene in *Uncle Saddam*.

DREAMLAND. JEFF BURTON/POWERHOUSE BOOKS



In *Dreamland*, photographer Jeff Burton explores the margins of the adult film business.

DREAMLAND

PHOTO COLLECTION

Photographer Jeff Burton finds beauty in unexpected places. His latest collection, *Dreamland* (Powerhouse Books), provides a subtle, abstracted view of a sordid world: the adult film business.

A graduate of CalArts, Burton has worked on porn sets since 1989 and took *Dreamland*'s color-saturated pictures when he wasn't shooting glossy box covers and hard-core production stills. But the book's take on the San Fernando Valley's multibillion-dollar industry is detached and cerebral. Though some of the photographs are explicit, most focus on the edges of the set: a man's bent leg, a potted plant, an actress reflected onto a parked car. Faces are largely absent. "I prioritize the visual impact of the image above the content," says Burton. "What is often missed by the crew and the cast becomes extremely important to me." Burton says his restlessness, his "compulsive" creativity, drives his art. "If I were working in the shoe industry," he says, "I would find something to shoot there."

EMILY CHENOWETH

THE FIRST PRODUCER'S CLUB

BEHIND-THE-NEWS TV

The creator and longtime executive producer of *Larry King Live* has turned the tables on her industry colleagues—by putting television news producers on the other side of the camera. Tammy Haddad hosts *The First Producer's Club*, a one-hour interview show on the America's Voice cable channel, in which she interviews the architects of the country's top news and entertainment programs. The program offers a surprisingly candid view of the media business. "I don't think people sitting at home ever think about the fact that Mike Wallace doesn't come up with every story" or conduct every interview, she says.

Haddad believes it's instructive when producers, who often shape the news, speak up about what they do. She booked former *60 Minutes* producer Lowell Bergman—think *The Insider*—for her inaugural episode, and has aired interviews with executive producers of *Meet the Press*, *Nightline*, and even *Survivor*.

"What I find most shocking is sitting in the hot seat," she says. "You realize how hard it is to have continuity in an interview if somebody goes off the subject." The guests are even more out of their element. "They're not used to someone looking at what they're wearing," Haddad says, and can't suppress their urge to produce. "During the commercial break, everyone starts telling everyone what to do. 'Wear this.' 'Your collar!' It's producerpalooza."

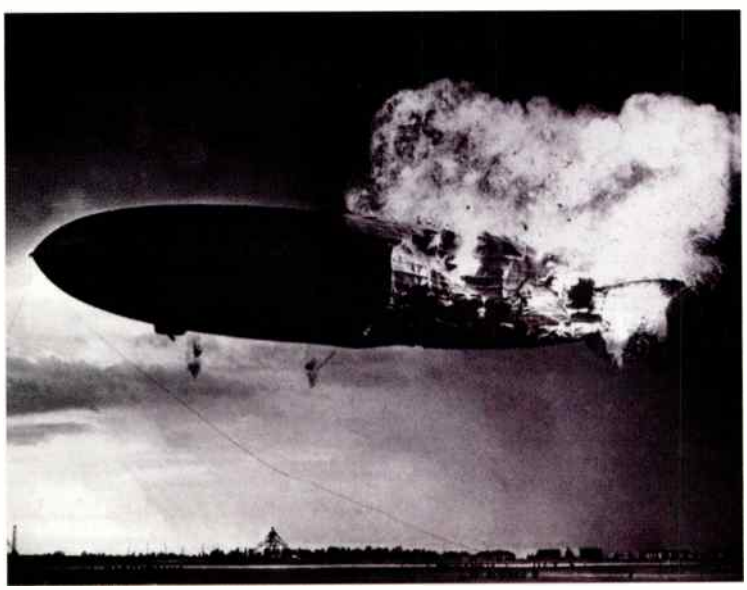
STEPHEN TOTILO

STUFF WE LIKE

NEWSPLAYER.COM

NEWS ARCHIVE

"If you're sitting on a subway train and you pick up a copy of last week's *New York Times*, it's sort of mildly interesting," says Paul Duffen. "But if you're on the same subway train and find a *New York Times* from 40 years ago, it will be utterly fascinating." That's the business idea behind Newsplayer.com, Duffen's London-based website. The online digital news archive offers a searchable database of more than 14,000 newsreel clips—900 hours' worth—from the past 104 years. Duffen wants users to "revisit major events and see them as they happened." For an annual fee of £25 ($36), subscribers can view the 1937 *Hindenburg* disaster, the 1896 coronation of Tsar Nicholas II, or Muhammad Ali as he proclaims his greatness in 1964. The site's breadth is remarkable: Newsplayer.com has gathered clips from ITN, Reuters, and British Empire News for its collection, which continues to grow. The site has partnered with Sir David Frost and will make 67 of his interviews from the PBS program *Talking with David Frost* available in February. Among the interviewees: actor Sir John Gielgud, Al Gore, poet Maya Angelou, and the inimitable Walter Cronkite. JOSEPH GOMES



The 1937 crash of the *Hindenburg*, as seen at Newsplayer.com

THE BIG ISSUE

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS MAGAZINE

The Big Issue is a glossy magazine with a serious agenda. According to Nigel Kershaw, the weekly's chairman, it's a "business solution to a social crisis." As with the newspaper *Street News*, homeless and unemployed men and women are *The Big Issue*'s salespeople, and they keep about half of their proceeds from selling copies. The London-based magazine is distributed around the world and recently launched an edition in Los Angeles.

***The Big Issue* recently launched in Los Angeles and has 270,000 readers in the United Kingdom.**

Besides putting money in its vendors' pockets, *The Big Issue*'s foundation invests millions of dollars a year in long-term career training—in fields including publishing and the Internet. The magazine was founded in 1991 as a small London monthly, and now has a circulation of about 270,000 in the United Kingdom. It is also distributed in Australia and South Africa.

Recent issues have explored international tobacco smuggling and eco-scams, mixing in celebrity coverage (an interview with Lauryn Hill, for example) to create an engaging read in the name of a good cause. JOSHUA NUNBERG

STUFF *YOU* LIKE

AL-JAZEERA: 24-HOUR NEWS IN ARABIC

BY NANA ASFOUR

Heralded as the CNN of the Arab world, Al-Jazeera provides balanced reporting—in Arabic—on the Middle East and beyond. The satellite network, based in the tiny Persian Gulf nation of Qatar, is owned by the government of the relatively liberal Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. In Arab countries, where news outlets are often propaganda organs for state bodies, the round-the-clock Al-Jazeera has revolutionized how news is disseminated.

The Al-Jazeera network broadcasts news of the Arab world.

Since 1996, Al-Jazeera has explored many taboo topics, including women's voting rights and how to interpret the Koran. The network has invited both standard-bearers and dissidents to speak on the air and has featured leaders on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "We want to build a new vision of the media in Arab countries," says Ali Kamal, an Al-Jazeera executive.

In 1998, American diplomats urged the station's management not to air a live interview with Osama bin Laden, the Islamic militant believed to have planned the bombings of American embassies in Africa. Al-Jazeera wasn't deterred. Arab governments, however, do more than urge. Kuwait closed Al-Jazeera's bureau there after an Islamic militant suggested during a phone-in program that the country's ruler should resign for having given women the right to vote. But Al-Jazeera persuaded Kuwaiti authorities to reconsider. "We made them understand that it is not Al-Jazeera's aim to speak badly of other Arab countries," Kamal says. "We just want to provide an open and free debate and cannot censor our participants."

Nana Asfour is a freelance journalist who writes about the Middle East.

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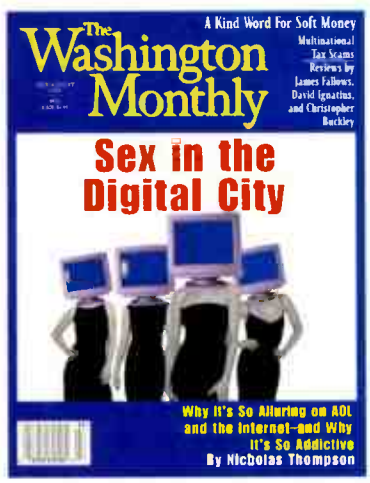


reality blights

In his new film, *Series 7*, the author applies what he learned as a TV producer to write and direct an unsettling vision of reality programming gone to extremes. BY DANIEL MINAHAN

My obsession with reality television began when America's did: in the early nineties, with the debut of *Cops*, *America's Most Wanted*, and *Rescue 911*. As a segment producer on the Fox newsmagazine *The Front Page*, I watched the shows religiously—and was touched by the battered wife's pleas, appalled by the drug dealer's blatant lies. This first strain of vérité broadcasting delivered real people in real crisis—without scripts, lights, stars, deserted islands, or camera-rigged bungalows. And the programs, with their lack of pretense and propriety, affected me more than anything else on television—even more, for that matter, than news programs and feature films.

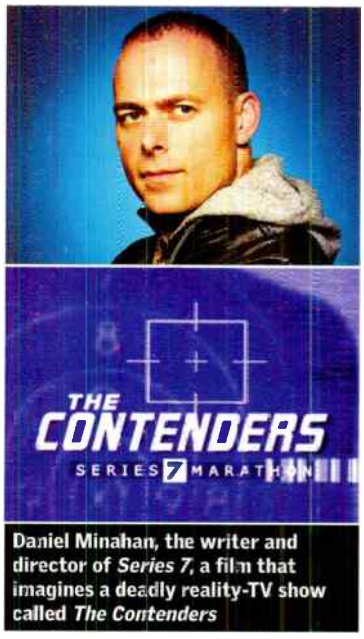
I felt like a spy at Fox—like I had no place in TV news. The network had lured me from the BBC (I'm an American), where I'd produced highbrow pieces on U.S. arts and culture. Before that, I had produced esoteric segments for Channel 4-WNBC, MTV, and PBS. I had a film degree and no hard news experience, which assignment editors noticed immediately. While my colleagues at Fox chased after the "Death Row Dog," I tackled "Navigating the 500-Channel Universe" and a profile of actress and diet guru Marilu Henner.

My heart just wasn't in it. Every morning, as I walked to the office through the 20th Century Fox back lot, I'd get a charge as I passed the set for *NYPD Blue*. For me the set symbolized the true blurring of news and entertainment, of reality and fiction. And in the evening, after I got home, I'd watch *Cops*, which I considered the purest of the shows, and the others, ending the night with *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

As a filmmaker, though, I began to recognize the programs' inherent fiction. Their narratives relied mostly on their subjects' desperate desire to reveal themselves, their need to be seen. The producers borrowed traditional dramatic structures: Every story, every confession, had its own narrative arc. What appeared to be unrehearsed and authentic was, on closer inspection, just a new combination of exploitation and showbiz. But this didn't dampen my enthusiasm. Even as the genre grew more stylized—as willing participants risked degradation and injury to thrill an audience—I felt like I had stumbled onto a new way of telling stories.

Indeed, it inspired me to make my own reality-TV show.

The program, however, became a feature film—a work of fiction satirizing a genre that aims to explode conventions of reality TV.



Daniel Minahan, the writer and director of *Series 7*, a film that imagines a deadly reality-TV show called *The Contenders*

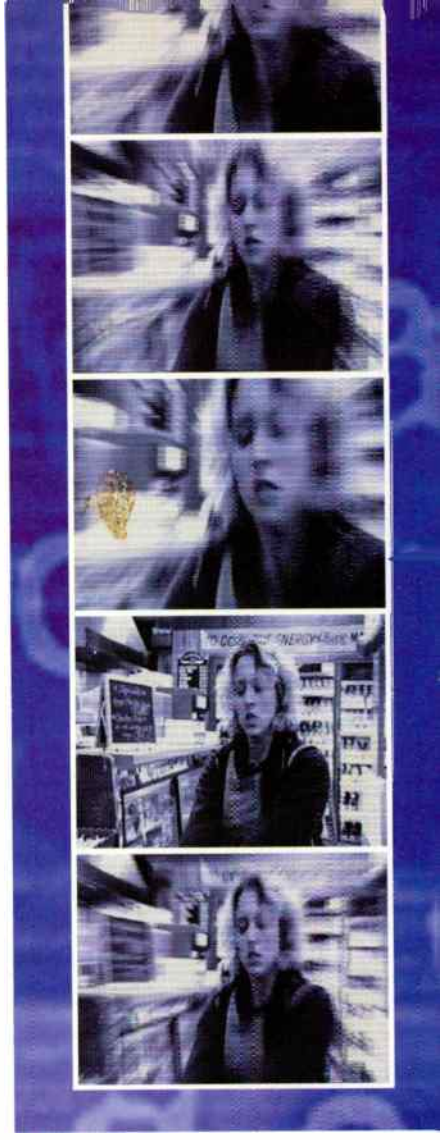
Series 7, my first film (which will be released this month), imagines a three-episode marathon broadcast of the highest-rated program on American television, a reality show called *The Contenders*. Each week, six contenders are selected by lottery, assigned cameramen, armed with guns, and forced to battle it out by killing one another on TV. The last one left standing advances to the next episode and a new round of contenders. When I wrote the script, in 1995, the idea of real people killing each other on TV seemed like science fiction, but given the current trend in reality programming—in which people battle for food (and money) on an atoll, eating rats and larvae for sustenance—it seems less far-fetched.

The film is a dark satire that sends up current controversies surrounding media violence and the exploitation of privacy. But back in 1998, I teamed up with a TV "runner" (an established producer) and pitched the fake-reality-show concept to a network executive as an actual series. The first round of notes came back from the executive. "Can it be more sexy and less violent?" Less violent? But it was a TV show about people killing each other on TV; that's what made it satirical. I agreed to try to make it sexier. But when I got the next round of notes, I saw that the executive had asked me to make it more like *Ally McBeal*. That's when I decided that I would make the show into a movie. And I'd do it alone.

APRIL 1999: THE FINAL REWRITE

In my conception, the movie would depict three episodes of *The Contenders*, bracketed by the behind-the-scenes events of its filming. The actual episodes would be shot on videotape; the production scenes would use conventional film. When Blow Up Pictures agreed to make *Series 7* as a "digital production"—it would be shot on videotape and transferred to film—we had to confront the creative conundrum of conveying the difference between the reality show we'd created and the movie itself. Finally, one of my producers and I decided to structure the movie simply as three half-hour episodes, a 90-minute feature. I also decided that I would exclusively use television techniques—the reality- and tabloid-TV techniques I'd studied for years—to tell the story. It seemed that the best way to comment on TV was by doing so in TV's own language. I would make my points not with commentary but through mimicry and exaggeration.

MINAHAN: TOM LEGOFF



I holed up in the workroom of a friend's house on Cape Cod and immersed myself in hours of tabloid-TV tapes during my final rewrite. I revisited *Cops*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Trauma: Life in the ER*, *Real Stories of the Highway Patrol*, *Rescue 911*, *The Real World*, and *Road Rules*. Each show had its own language and style. *Cops* was spare, cool, almost existential; *America's Most Wanted* posted photos of alleged criminals and encouraged audience participants to rat them out; *Trauma* was ultragory and frenetic, accompanied by an adrenaline-pumping rock score; *The Real World*'s episodic multiple plots intertwined like those of a soap opera. I made notes on the shows' packaging, editing styles, and performances, trying to get into the mind-set of their producers.

I decided I would introduce the contenders' personal stories in *60 Minutes*–style profiles: intimate interviews in which the characters described their strengths, hopes, and fears, addressing the camera directly. An insidious-sounding voice not unlike that of Robert Stack (who provides voiceovers for *Unsolved Mysteries*) would narrate. I'd echo *America's Most Wanted* by using dramatic re-creations to suggest offscreen scenes. I would build suspense and move the plot forward with tabloid-style promos that barked out "Coming up next!" In employing these techniques, I broke every rule I learned in film school and embraced and exaggerated every trick I learned from working in TV production.

SEPTEMBER 1999: PREPRODUCTION

To achieve the degree of verisimilitude needed to both parody—and yet replicate—reality programming, my producers and I modeled our production after a remote TV shoot. All departments (hair, makeup, art, lighting, etc.) would be pared down to a couple of people; this would enable us to move the company quickly and film efficiently. By using TV production apparatuses, TV cameras, TV lights, and TV sound equipment, we hoped to match, on the film set, the production values and sensibility of an actual television series. But things didn't work out quite the way we had planned.

After interviewing a number of TV cameramen, some of whom I had worked with at Fox—and many of whom were not enthusiastic about abandoning their union gigs for an independent film—I met a cinematographer named Randy Drummond. He had experience shooting independent features, including *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, but he also had experience in news reportage and he had shot many of the dramatic re-creations for *America's Most Wanted*. Randy's technical expertise also helped us navigate the somewhat uncharted terrain of digital filmmaking.

IT SEEMED THAT THE BEST WAY TO COMMENT ON TV WAS BY DOING SO IN TV'S OWN LANGUAGE.

In the first days of preproduction, Randy and I spent a weekend creating our own rules for the shoot, called a "bible." All of the TV shows I have worked on provide a "video bible" to their producers. It's a photocopied pamphlet of guidelines that provides a style sheet for the show, addressing the preferred camera angles, tape stock, and interview techniques. We devised about six major guidelines for our bible: 1) We'd use only available lighting except in the interview setups and the light on the camera; 2) scenes would be shot in their entirety in single takes, without extensive blocking or traditional coverage, to ensure an uncomposed, documentary feel; 3) we'd conduct "precap" and "recap" interviews with actors in character before and after scenes; 4) except for produced profiles and staged setups (such as interviews and dramatic re-creations), we'd rely on handheld-camera work in all coverage; 5) camera operators would wear black at all times in case they appeared in the shot; and 6) we would keep our shooting to a minimum and resist the TV-news tendency to "hose it down," or to shoot anything that moves. (Our editor would thank us later!)

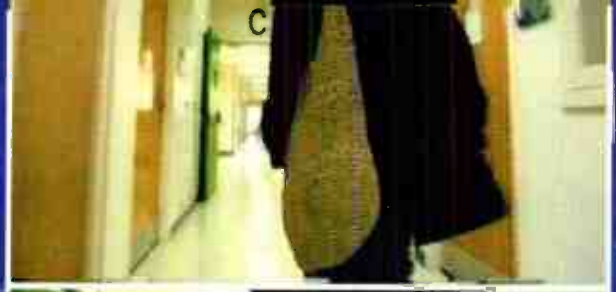
We broke these rules many times, but they kept us on track. Randy said that once we committed ourselves to this shooting style, we couldn't turn back. On the set, he would constantly ask me, "Are we making a movie here, or a TV show?" In other words: This looks too cinematic to be on TV.

As Randy and I strategized the shoot, I was also casting the roles of the six contenders. People don't realize that real-life television—from newsmagazines to reality-TV shows—"cast" their subjects, too. Producers must find characters who can convey the story they want with the most emotional impact, people who could appear natural and uncoached in front of the camera.

I recall one segment from *The Front Page*, about the hazards of high-speed police pursuit, for which the producers sought people who had been injured in chases. One young mother had watched her child die in her stroller when a police car had jumped the sidewalk. "If she cries in the pre-interview," said the assignment editor, "we'll use her." I also needed people who could perform for the camera, but in my case, I didn't have to hope my subjects would provide convincing and moving performances—after all, I was working with real actors.

I had written the script with actress Brooke Smith in mind, whom I'd cast in the lead role of Dawn Lagarto, eight months pregnant and the show's reigning "contender," having killed off her fellow contenders in the previous (unseen) episodes. Her gripping performance as the girl in the pit in *The Silence of the Lambs* convinced me that she would come across as an everyman and a survivor. As for the rest of the cast, I was determined to find unrecognizable or unknown actors.

I turned to casting director Susan Shopmaker, who had made her mark by casting real people in TV commercials. She dipped into her file



Left to right: Brooke Smith, who plays Dawn Lagarto, the reigning contestant, shoots a fellow contender; Smith on the hunt in the hospital; Glenn Fitzgerald, who plays Jeff, a contender with cancer; and Michael Kaycheck, whose character, Tony, is handed his gun by *The Contenders*' operatives

Sometime during the second week of our shoot, I returned to the motel to find a fax from my agent in New York. It was a newspaper clip announcing a reality-TV show in which real-life castaways were left on a deserted island to compete for food and slowly vote each other off the program. The surviving castaway would win $1 million. We laughed at the similarities to our film. "We'd better get this done soon!" we joked, and I tossed the clipping in the garbage. Nothing, I thought, would ever come of that.

"WHAT YOU'VE CREATED HERE IS A TRULY AMORAL FILM," OUR PRODUCER SAID. I TOOK THIS AS A COMPLIMENT.

JANUARY 2000: POSTPRODUCTION

We watched our first assembly of the film in the new year. More than two hours long, it was lugubriously paced and felt more like a vérité meditation on reality TV than a fast-paced tabloid show itself. After a lukewarm reaction from our producers, we decided to go all the way tabloid. We wanted to propel the film forward, make it ballsier. We wanted to offend people. My editor, Malcolm Jamieson, and I decided to employ some of shock TV's methods in the next cut of the film.

Just as I had, Malcolm had renounced his arts background and started working in commercial television. He had cut hard news and newsmagazines and had finally ended up making promos at HBO studios. He had just the right combination of critical wit and technical flash to set the film's tone.

As we started reshaping the film, I found myself quoting the TV executives I had worked for at Fox: "That's great! Now just take out all the pauses." There was no room for poetics or lingering moments. As in TV, we would be spare and economical and telegraph our story to the audience. As Malcolm liked to say, he had to "put on his TV hat" when he started the second cut of this film.

We heightened the pace dramatically, and added TV-style "swish pans" and stylized lens flares with sound effects to create jarring transitions between scenes where there was no tension. On tabloid shows, these transitions create a kind of artificial sense of excitement and drama. Lens flares, for example, occur when light spills into the lens of the camera and creates a prismatic effect. It's a technical mistake, but it also suggests a sense of urgency, of immediacy (ours were computer-generated). We also created instant replays to exploit critical moments, such as a chaotic battle in the mall between several of the contenders. We overscored scenes with sentimental music. And, most important, we created more promos.

A TV promo producer joined us at this stage to develop phony spots for *The Contenders* that would be shown in the film between episodes; we created melodramatic teasers that tracked the personal stories of the contenders with Fox Sports–style graphics.

On a real TV show, promos are used to tease the audience and keep viewers tuned in during the commercial break. An effective promo is part poetry, part advertising, and part pure titillation. To make the spots authentic, we licensed canned TV music and hired real voiceover actors. Although we didn't include commercials in the film, the promos worked: They moved the story forward, heightened suspense, and helped contextualize the scenes. In the end, the promos themselves became the structural frame that made *Series 7* truly feel like a TV show, minus the commercials.

I was strict with my collaborators during the final edit: I reminded them to always play it straight; we wouldn't tip our hand to the audience. I was nervous when the producers saw the racy new tabloid cut of the film. We'd put so much into creating an authentic TV show that I wondered if the satirical tone came through at all. After screening the film—which had been cut to a lean, tightly knit 85 minutes—one of our producers summarized it very elegantly. "What you've created here is a truly amoral film," he said, "and you're going to get a lot of s--t for it." I took this as a compliment.

FOUR YEARS AFTER I WROTE the first draft of *Series 7*, *Survivor* debuted on American television. I was in the last stages of editing the movie, and I was eager to see this new reality-TV show.

The first thing that struck me was how contrived, how self-conscious, it was. It had none of the gritty, run-and-gun action of *Cops*. The cast was even more predictable than the stars of *The Real World*. But the similarities to our *Series 7* were amazing: The cast included a person with cancer and an elderly man. There were shifting alliances, betrayals, and ever-changing rules that seemed to morph to suit the dramatic needs of the story. The greatest similarity, of course, was that characters were eliminated from the proceedings (although more benignly than in *Series 7*). During *Survivor*'s first commercial break, *Series 7* producer Christine Vachon called me. "It's as if they got a hold of our script or something," she said. That was reassuring; it proved that by thinking like TV producers, we had cast and shot our film the right way.

There were differences, of course. Where we had tried to give our contenders heart and even a certain sort of dignity, the castaways on *Survivor* were, it seemed, vilified by the producers from the start. Part of the "fun" of the show's viewing experience was the sort of hatred it inspired in viewers and participants alike: You waited for the people you disliked to be humiliated and get voted off the island. Physical weaknesses were not to be tolerated: I was truly saddened when Sonja, the tribal elder and a breast cancer survivor, was the first to go. There seemed to be a sort of manufactured mean-spiritedness to the contest that made me uneasy.

Having said all this, though, I didn't intend *Series 7* as a condemnation of reality TV, nor a preachy cautionary tale. I simply set out to make a wicked satire that goes too far and, I hope, makes people look at television in a different way. Somewhere along the line, I've lost my gusto for reality programming. Maybe I got too close to the truth in my creation of a fake reality-TV show. I find myself kind of nostalgic for the days when I would devour a whole *Cops* marathon in one sitting, the way I couldn't stop watching.

What's strangest to me is how the premise of *Series 7* no longer feels as radical as it did when I first wrote it, before *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. I hope, of course, that *The Contenders* won't ever become a reality, but I still can't help worrying that the film feels a bit underwhelming in a *Survivor*-saturated TV culture: I certainly never expected I'd be scooped.

Recently, a stranger asked me what my movie was about, and when I said "It's about a reality-TV show where people are armed with guns and battle to the death," he looked at me distractedly. "Oh, yeah," he said. "I think I saw something like that on TV." ◘

Why is it a hate crime when whites commit violence against blacks but not vice versa?

In our politically correct culture, it is simply improper to notice that black people, like whites, can be responsible for vicious crimes of hate. That's why the self-righteous left will be in for some surprises should the law they're proposing go into effect. Sorting Americans into specially protected racial and gender groups like a human "endangered species" act, and designating whites and heterosexuals as "oppressors," is itself an instigation to commit next page | www.salon.com/bc

That pretty much says it all. Think about it... The fastest growing paid circulation of any publication, according to ABC Fas-Fax. Not just of other business magazines, but faster than any magazine. We're pretty proud of that and we're proud of our other stats as well. Like how our 300,000+ readers have an average net worth of $1.8 million. Or how these same readers demand that we publish two issues per month starting in October. Get in on the action. Visit www.redherringmedia.com.

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

During one of his last weeks in the White House, Bill Clinton sat down with Steven Brill and reflected on how the media judged him—and how he judges the media.

BILL CLINTON, PRESS CRITIC

"I am in a poor position to complain," President Bill Clinton said, speaking about press coverage of his life and his presidency. "The American public has given me pretty good ratings." Indeed, while friends and aides of the first family unanimously say President Clinton and his wife share an antipathy toward the press, the president seems to realize he'd look foolish—and has looked foolish—if he complains too much. He was reflective and gregarious in a 40-minute conversation on December 4, 2000, with Brill's Content *CEO Steven Brill, talking about subjects ranging from coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal to his opinion of* The New York Times*'s Maureen Dowd. Speaking in the Oval Office from a chair next to the fireplace and in front of a desk strewn with old copies of* Time, Newsweek, *and* The Economist, *he sipped a Diet Coke and toyed with an unlit cigar during the interview. Reflecting on how times have changed since the JFK days, when being a favorite of the president was in most circles a journalistic badge of honor, the one question he refused to answer—until the moment the interview was ending—was to name who he thought was the best White House reporter. He feared that doing so would "kill" the reporter's career, he said. The text of the interview with minor edits is published below. The unedited transcript can be found online at Brillscontent.com.*

STEVEN BRILL: If you were giving a talk to students or voters...Mr. President, what tips would you give them on how to read the news or watch the news on television? What should they be looking for to be smarter consumers of news reporting?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...[I]f there's some big story that seems to have an aura of scandal about it, I would tell them to look at it with a grain of salt, read all the follow-ups, and don't rush to judgment.

BRILL: Do you think you are a little more skeptical and jaded about that yourself, eight years later?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think that I am more cautious than I was when I got here.

BRILL: Did you come here, you think, in a sense, naive? It seems like [in] the '92 campaign a lot of the reporters were [the] same generation as you, your comrades in arms and then, arguably you got burned by some of them. I guess this is my Joe Klein question. Do you see it that way?

DOUG MILLS/AP PHOTO

President Clinton exits the White House East Room after a press conference.

ON CALLING ELECTIONS

"Maybe they ought to have a kind of a rule of thumb that if it's 4 or 5 points or less, they don't call it."

ON THE MEDIA'S TREATMENT OF GEORGE W. BUSH

"I think he did pretty well with it. I think they did a good job of setting low expectations for the debates."

ON HIS FRUSTRATIONS WITH THE PRESS

"I do believe if you go out and bang somebody, and it's a big deal, when they are subsequently exonerated, then you ought to make the exoneration as big a deal as the bang."

ON THE MEDIA'S "ARGUMENT CULTURE"

"You get the feeling that if Bill Press ever looked at Bob Novak or Mary Matalin and said, you know, you might be right about that, old Press would have to leave his job. And Mary would be run out of the Republican Party if she said to Bill Press, well you've got a good point there."

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think I was naive in some ways and I think I am wiser in some ways. But I think we had a pretty tough time in the '92 campaign too. The other thing I would say is that, because there are so many media outlets, it's sometimes hard to keep up with all the players. But at least if you are a candidate or if you are president and somebody gets it wrong, it's up to you to at least try to get it right. Normally you can have a forum for a contrary view.

BRILL: What should you do?...

PRESIDENT CLINTON: It depends on what it is. But if it's significant, I think you should respond.

BRILL: Do you think you've been good at that?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Better.

BRILL: Better? Getting better?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, we got better at it.

BRILL: Watching the returns this past election night, what was your reaction to how the press called Florida, then uncalled Florida, then called Florida again. Your reaction to the whole coverage?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...I remember in '96 I guess...they called the Senate race in New Hampshire for Dick Swett, and then they had to uncall it. And sometimes when they are tied, it's hard to know....Maybe they ought to have a kind of a rule of thumb that if it's 4 or 5 points or less, they don't call it. Because I do think that in a funny way, it may tend to set things in voters' minds about who's got a legitimate claim or whatever.

BRILL: Do you think that happened this time? Do you think there was a sense that the vice-president was challenging the results once it got called for Governor Bush?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes. The truth is...this whole thing should be looked at as an attempt to find out what happened. Not all the votes have been counted once yet. So that's how I think. But I don't think that was the intent of the networks. I think they were just all trying to get it right, and you know, calling the election has become, you know, a feature of election-night coverage.

BRILL: Is it too competitive? Does the press make mistakes by trying to do something faster sooner? Is the whole cycle of news too fast? Something starts out on the Internet and it ends up in the mainstream?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, it's probably inevitable, but I think that the serious press outlets, the major networks and the big newspapers, ought to, if there's cause for a grain of salt, they ought to say, this is what it looks like but here's the grain of salt.

BRILL: What about their process of sometimes reporting what others are reporting...[of] saying, we're not reporting this, but we're reporting that others are reporting this?...

PRESIDENT CLINTON: It depends, if they don't think it's right, accurate, or they think it might not be accurate, then they ought to say this is what they report, but others have cautioned, X or Y or whatever the fact.

BRILL: What do you think Governor Bush's biggest success was with the press? Do you think he did pretty well with the press in this campaign?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...I don't know that I am in a position to judge that. I think he did pretty well with it. I think they did a good job of setting low expectations for the debates. Probably that might have been a big success....

BRILL: Which of course leads to my next question. Which of the two do you think got the better break from the press? The vice-president or Governor Bush?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, in the debates Bush did, I think, because he had a lower standard and he did that really well....

BRILL: ...What about your coverage? Looking back, what...episode of press makes you the most frustrated or the angriest?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Oh, boy, I don't know. That's hard to answer. The thing that I was most disappointed in, I could tell you, was the way Whitewater was covered. There were all these sort of breathless things, one thing after another was big. And the thing that burned me the most was when Hillary was called before the grand jury, it was big headline news all over America.

Then when that report from Pillsbury Madison [an outside law firm] came out saying not only did she not do anything wrong, but their billing records confirmed her account of the thing, there were no big headlines. Some of the papers had no separate stories. There was no big story on the evening news about it. I do believe if you go out and bang somebody, and it's a big deal, and then when they are subsequently exonerated, then you ought to make the exoneration as big a deal as the bang.

BRILL: ...What about the whole coverage of impeachment and the Lewinsky matter and everything related to it? Do you think the press should have handled it differently as a general matter?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: First of all, it's hard to comment on it as a general matter. I think there are specific parts of the press that basically did an excellent job in...difficult circumstances, and there were one or two that I thought were house organs for Ken Starr. So, I don't think you can generalize about it. It was a big sensational story. It had to get covered big time, and I think, uh, in the beginning there was sort of a stampede and then it kind of slowed down and it kind of played out the way it did.

BRILL: If I made you the editor of *The Washington Post* today, how would you have covered it differently?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't want to comment on that. I can't do it. I may comment on it if I write a book.

"I think I was naive in some ways, and I think I am wiser in some ways," says President Clinton, shown here in Newark, New Jersey, in 1999.

KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

BRILL: What about writing a book? I read somewhere that you had already done it.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I haven't written a book. No. But I hope I've got a couple of good books in me. But what I am most interested in is what we did here. And I guess...I wish somehow there was more serious attention on a consistent basis to a lot of the very serious things we did here.

That's one of the things that was interesting about Joe Klein's *New Yorker* piece. You know, he finally said, well, this guy had a pretty serious administration. That's one of the things that I think is very important about newspapers. Because they too have to get caught up in this constant 24-hour news cycle and competing with what's on the Net, what's on CNN and what's in the tabloids and all that kind of stuff. But they still have the space in the paper to deal with thoughtful, substantive things....

There's a core of Americans who care very much about that, and I think that's basically the sort of indispensable role of the serious daily newspapers, to deal with a lot of other things that don't get on the evening news or if they do, they are 20 seconds or whatever. I think that's very important.

BRILL: What's your favorite read? What columnist, what paper do you pick up? Who do you think does that the best?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: What [press secretary] Jake [Siewert] just told me [was] if I compliment any columnist I will ruin their career.

[Laughter]

BRILL: Try it.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...Well, I read the *Times* and the *Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* every day. At least I scan them, and I try to read the *Los Angeles Times*, Washington edition, which I think is actually quite good. I bet they lose money on it, but I appreciate it.

BRILL: ...Do you think that shows like *Crossfire*, and *Hardball* contribute to the argument culture and if so, what's the effect on someone like you trying to do your job?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, I do. I think they do and they are entertaining but they are not as enlightening as they would be if people didn't scream at each other [CONTINUED ON PAGE 148]

ON HIS PRESIDENCY'S WORST OF TIMES

"During the impeachment thing, I read almost nothing and watched nothing on television, even if people defended me. I just didn't."

WAS TIM RUSSERT'S QUESTION TO THE FIRST LADY FAIR?

"No. But I think it helped her because she handled it with dignity and strength."

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

On election night 2000, something went horribly wrong. Here, the story of how bad numbers and network laziness caused a media meltdown.

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

BY SETH MNOOKIN

In a November 14 memo to the board of directors of Voter News Service, Murray Edelman, the polling consortium's editorial director, discusses an internal investigation "that the members and the lawyers have asked us to conduct." The investigation is meant to uncover how and why VNS failed at the one thing it is designed to do: accurately call presidential and state elections. This year, counting only statewide races in which the top two candidates finished within 5 percentage points of each other, VNS miscalled about 10 percent of the races it was hired to project, including the presidential race and a key Senate race.

VNS, and the television networks it works for, failed so spectacularly because it didn't factor in the massive shifts in how Americans vote. Brill's Content gained access to VNS documents, including screen grabs of the VNS numbers that resulted, first, in the calling of Florida for Vice-President Al Gore and, later, the calling of the state, and the presidency, for Texas governor George W. Bush. Network and VNS officials have been predictably parsimonious with their comments, but the VNS documents, combined with interviews and transcripts of the networks' election-night coverage, explain how a multimillion-dollar project designed to serve the public ended up doing exactly the opposite.

The Marriott at the Capitol in Austin, Texas, was calm the morning of November 7. The hotel was booked solid—hundreds of newspaper reporters, dotcom scribes, and television producers had reserved rooms months in advance—but there was little of the frantic energy that fuels campaign life. No predawn baggage call. No urgent press releases or pool reports. No earnest spinning or misplaced luggage.

The weather was miserable—rainy and cold. The last several blocks of Congress Avenue, leading to the steps of the capitol building, were cordoned off. An enormous riser faced the capitol, and TV crews were setting up their klieg lights and cameras. Behind the riser and past a security checkpoint, a spacious media tent housed two rows of tables; each table, assigned to four or five reporters, was equipped with phones and electrical outlets.

Just after 2 P.M. central time (CT), I called my editors in New York. The election looked tight, at least for the time being. Bush wasn't doing as well across the South as had been projected, and Gore didn't look good in Pennsylvania. Most important, the battleground states that would likely determine the election—states like Michigan, Iowa, and Florida—were all close.

These numbers and projections were being generated out of New York by VNS. The Associated Press and five television networks—ABC,

DOCUMENT: PETER BERSON

This is a copy of the explanatory memo VNS editorial director Murray Edelman sent to the board of directors in the aftermath of the election night miscalls in Florida.

TO: VNS BOARD
FROM: Murray Edelman
Date: November 14, 2000

In conjunction with the investigation that the members and the lawyers have asked us to conduct, I am s
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This is a screen grab of the information VNS was transmitting to its subscribers. The round of data is from 2:15 A.M. eastern time on November 8.

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ALL ESTIMATORS

CAND	RATG	RATP	SIMG	SIMP	BUNM	BIAS	BVPA	CORE	INT	POST	BSRV	RATG	INT	COR	L-V	S-V
BUSH	47.7	47.6	46.7	46.4	47.9	47.7	47.9	49.3	49.2	49	45.9	0.7	0.2	0.3	2	1
GORE	50.4	50.4	51.4	51.7	50.2	50.4	50.1	48.7	48.7	49	52.5	1.1	0.2	0.3	2	1
NADR	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.3	0	0
BCHN	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0	0

CORRELATIONS

CAND	196T	196D	196R	196I	298T	298D	298R	398T	398D	398R
GORE	-.09	.86	-.78	-.07	-.13	.80	-.72	-.09	.64	-.65
BUSH	.44	-.84	.91	.27	.49	-.71	.93	.46	-.42	.82
BCHN	.24	-.18	.19	.37	.18	-.13	.24	.20	.03	.18
NADR	.31	-.13	.17	.45	.11	-.09	.16	.19	-.12	.30
TOT	.94	.58	.76	.64	.94	.62	.85	.94	.80	.82

3

VNS estimated that there were 102,204 votes yet to be counted in the state, or 1 percent of the total.

2

At this point, VNS said George W. Bush led Al Gore by 47,861 votes.

GS25 FL P 4 <V1> INTG MOD T- 2.5 FLA GENL PRES 11/07/00 2:15 P.4

	VOTE	TAB%	NEED
BUSH	47861	49.4	
GORE	681[illegible]	48.6	72.4
NADR	72376		
BCHN			

TABULATED 5[illegible]035 98%
OUT (EST) 102204 01%

STR		%PREC IN	%VOTE OUT	VOTE OUT	SIZE	GORE	HLR
1	MI[illegible]/GOLD COAST	95	4%	64065	63%	60.1	-
2	S[illegible]UTH	99	0%	3652	4%	49.1	-
3	TAMPA BAY AREA	98	2%	16086	16%	49	-
	CENTRAL	100	0%	3	0%	45	-
	NORTH	99	1%	18404	18%	41.2	-

TY	GEO						
0	PALM BEACH	1	88	15%	52761	52%	61.9 -
9	HILLSBOROUGH	3	95	5%	16576	16%	47.3 -
32	JACKSON	5	37	50%	14763	14%	40.0 -
6	BROWARD	1	98	2%	13949	14%	67.8 -
13	DADE	1	99	2%	9249	9%	52.3 -
47	OKEECHOBEE	2	67	45%	6021	6%	44.5 -
45	NASSAU	5	95	7%	1523	1%	29.6 -
64	VOLUSIA	5	99	1%	1405	1%	48.7 -

4

If these numbers were correct, Gore would have needed 72.4 percent of the remaining vote to overtake Bush.

5

Gore was faring best in the "Miami/Gold Coast" part of southern Florida, but even there, he was drawing only 60.1 percent of the vote.

6

VNS estimated that there were 1,405 votes yet to be counted in Volusia County. In fact, Gore picked up about 21,000 more votes in the county from this point, or almost 20,000 more votes than VNS had thought remained.

Above left: CBS News predicts that Al Gore wins the state of Florida. Above right: Later, MSNBC predicts that George W. Bush wins Florida and thus the presidency of the United States.

CBS, CNN, Fox News, and NBC—fund VNS, and many other print and broadcast outlets pay to receive its data. *Brill's Content* does not subscribe to VNS, but editors here, like editors and reporters at other newspapers, magazines, and websites across the country, were leaked exit-poll information on election day.

The networks don't rely solely on VNS to make projections; VNS supplies raw data and analysis, from which network employees make projections. Each of the networks has its own "decision desk," where a team of analysts reviews the VNS reports as they come in, hoping to call states minutes or even seconds before others. It's unclear what the networks hope to gain. As Martin Plissner, a former political director at CBS News, writes in *The Control Room: How Television Calls the Shots In Presidential Elections*, "The principal beneficiaries of this entire exercise...would be the egos of the news executives; hardly anyone in the greater world, even in the world of media and politics, knew, let alone cared, about this rat race among the networks."

At 1 P.M. eastern time (ET) the first round of VNS data was released. It came from 28 states, including Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. This data contained about a third of the total exit-poll questionnaires from those states; another third would come in around 4 P.M., and the rest would trickle in until after the polls closed. This first round of numbers didn't look good, at least not from the perspective of the decision desks. State after state showed four or five "bads," or precincts in which the data seemed too aberrant to be trusted. A maximum of two bads is considered acceptable out of 40 or 50 polling points, but these numbers meant that early on, up to 10 percent of the networks' information was unreliable.

This was troubling but not disastrous. For one thing, there was still time to correct bads. Furthermore, exit polls are just one part of a complicated equation used to make projections. Historical factors, such as a state's voting record and changes in its population, are included. As polls close, sample precinct data of real results—data culled from poll workers by VNS—are added in. Finally, the actual county-by-county vote is used. This information is used by VNS to alert subscribers to a state's status: WIN, CALL, LEAD, EVEN, and REV (reverse). Before the 2000 presidential election, VNS had had only one REV: In 1996 it declared Democrat Dick Swett the winner of a New Hampshire seat in the U.S. Senate; in fact, the seat was won by Republican Bob Smith.

Jonathan Alter, a *Newsweek* columnist and commentator at NBC and its cable affiliate, MSNBC, remembers when he saw the first round of numbers. "At 1 o'clock, I went to the decision desk at 30 Rock [NBC's headquarters in New York City's Rockefeller Plaza]," Alter says. "They were getting the early exit polls...and Jeff Zucker [executive producer in charge of election night] said, 'If Pennsylvania doesn't change, it's over, Gore lost'....It was a sign of how wrong the early exit polls were. They already had a bunch of states wrong." Alter noted that the people at NBC all knew early exit polls often changed dramatically before election day was over. (Gore won Pennsylvania by more than 200,000 votes, 51 percent to 47 percent.) Zucker says that "all throughout that afternoon...the VNS model was showing that Gore had lost Pennsylvania....Everyone assumed...there was no way Gore was going to win because he was going to lose Pennsylvania."

Still, there was time to correct the Pennsylvania error and other errors in VNS's models. The country's earliest poll closings were hours away. At 2:47 P.M. ET, VNS sent out an alert to its subscribers that read: "The problems with the state survey weighting are cleared up. We have cleaned out the bad precinct problem."

By the time the second round of data started coming in, at 4 P.M. ET, there were at most one or two bads, out of 40 to 50 precincts for

TALK-SHOW HOST LARRY KING AND FORMER SENATOR BOB DOLE, 8:00 P.M.*, NOVEMBER 7, CNN

LARRY KING: Thanks so much, Alan.

BOB DOLE: Thank you.

KING: Always great to see you, Bob. I called you Alan....

DOLE: That's all right.

KING: It's close—well, you know him....

DOLE: Right.

HISTORIAN DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN, 9:50 P.M., NOVEMBER 7, NBC

I love the founding fathers. I love their wigs; I love their hearts; I love their brains. [But the Electoral College] is one part of their institution that, I think, we've got to change.

CORRESPONDENT JOHN KING AND ACTOR-DIRECTOR ROB REINER, 4:10 A.M., NOVEMBER 8, CNN

JOHN KING: Now, why are you here? You have a comfortable life; you could be home watching this on television.

ROB REINER: Well, you know, I'm quite attracted to you, John, and that's why I'm here. You know, it's getting a little late. We're getting punchy....We've had two close moments tonight, so anything can happen. Even an important relationship between you and me can happen. Anything can happen tonight, John. That's how wild this night is.

KING: Hate to disappoint you. But I'm going to rule that out....

*All times are approximate

The Bottom Line

Election night 2000 was more than just bad journalism; it highlighted the risks to corporate images and stock prices when the wrong budget cuts are made.

By Tom Wolzien

Once upon a time in tall city towers, there lived protectors of democracy. And one of them worked for me. Back then, I was the vice-president in charge of operations for NBC News, and at the time I didn't know he was a protector. But in the weeks after the networks' Florida fiasco, it has all become clear to me.

Roy Wetzel, now retired, was the protector assigned to me. He worked in a darkened office in the upper reaches of NBC's 30 Rockefeller Plaza tower, where he ran a network election unit that controlled the measuring of hundreds of key precincts by thousands of precinct pollsters. He made his own calls from data of a design he created. It was the 1970s and the 1980s, and calling the elections was serious business—so serious that no part of it could be trusted to subcontractors.

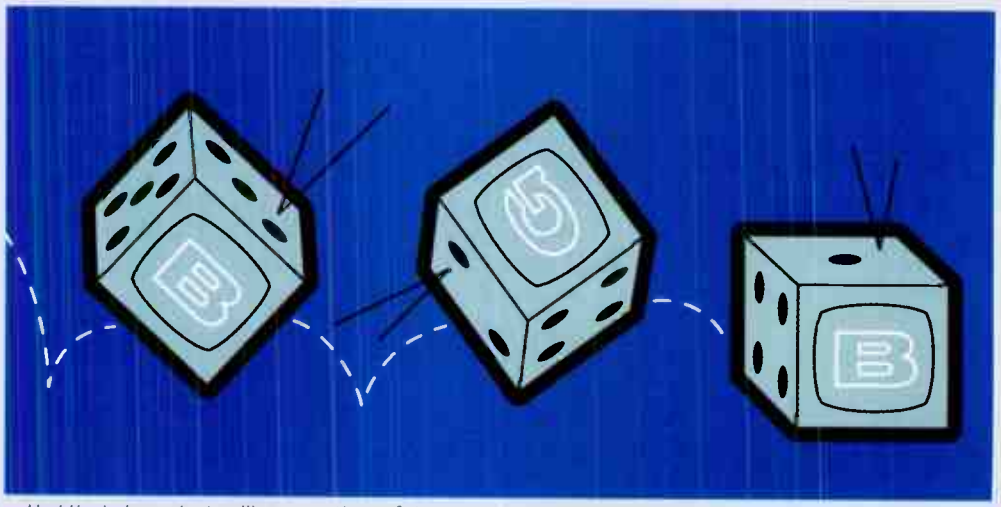
Protectors at each network were true believers in what they did. They spoke in tongues—of the need for keys and extra precincts and county models and more horsepower for computers that had names like PDP and Vax with programs in languages known as FORTRAN and COBOL. It was not the language of news, nor was it the language of everyday computing. The protectors demanded resources and accuracy unheard-of in either business. They demanded perfection, and they lived in fear that the competition would make better judgments on key precincts and polling criteria, would train their people better or design superior computer programs. They feared the wrath of the executive producer when they were beaten. But more than anything else, they were terrified of making the wrong call for president of the United States. To be wrong would mean that there was a failing in the system that they had honed for years, a failure of their intelligence. To be wrong would be to abdicate their responsibility as protectors.

In the end it was that fear of being wrong that drove the protectors to dig in more and more even as news divisions were told to spend less and less. Polling units came to be seen as cost centers with no function that couldn't be handled by a pool. The units became easy prey for a new breed of executives who focused on the bottom line to please their new breed of corporate owners. This group didn't understand the fear of miscalling the election when they abolished separate polling units in the early 1990s—but now, after November 7, 2000, their successors are beginning to.

In my current position as an analyst at an investment research firm in New York City, I help big pension and mutual funds evaluate media investments. Like the companies I track, I struggle with finding a balance between short- and long-term earnings, which should result in higher value over time. The decisions leading up to election night did not display that balance. In addition to being an example of bad journalism, the election-night problem for the networks shows the risks to the long-term corporate position when the wrong cuts are made to enhance short-term earnings.

When the networks had to pull back their Florida call for Al Gore, and then went for George W. Bush, and then went to "too close to call," the terror the protectors had tried to avoid became real. As the protectors feared, the broadcasters discredited themselves among their viewers, among politicos, and, in fact, across the entire world. Although it is unlikely that the networks changed the outcome of the election, authorities in Washington, D.C., were given fodder for months of congressional hearings. In addition, the networks probably damaged their future positions with both candidates in the tight race.

Before the 1990s, each network ran its own polls during election years. These polls included interviews with voters and other survey data that let the "decision desks" of each network make their own separate calls on who won or lost. In the early 1990s, however, the networks pooled their efforts and conceived what eventually became the Voter News Service (VNS). Every network was thus provided the same data at the same moment. That's why most calls were identical and made by competitors within a few minutes of each other. And if there were errors in that data, all the networks' decisions would reflect them.



Had the independent polling operations of the networks still been in operation, there would have been at least four separate polls of sample sizes similar to or greater than that of the VNS poll. With multiple network polls in the close Florida election, nuances in the data might have caused one network to call Bush, another Gore, and maybe one or two would have held off altogether, saying that it was too close to call until the end. With multiple polls saying different things, Gore probably would not have phoned Bush to say he was going to concede and then called again to take it back. Bush would not have been anointed only to see his win taken away. The attitudes of both candidates might have been different. Early recounts might have been more of a quest for an answer than an attempt by one candidate to take the election back from the once-called winner.

Even if VNS data were correct, the lack of other polls either to corroborate or contradict the VNS poll left the nation wanting for confirmation. The one-versus-multiple-poll situation is analogous to the difference in the volatility between owning one stock in a sector and four or five.

The cost savings of shutting down the independent network polling operations was seen most in presidential election years. Each network probably saved between $5 million and $10 million by killing the polling units, including the poll-design teams, canvassers in key precincts, data-collection systems, and initial computer-processing programs and apparatuses. That may seem like a substantial savings, but these news divisions belong to networks that are part of the largest media conglomerates in the world—CBS at Viacom, ABC at Disney, NBC at GE, and CNN at the proposed AOL–Time Warner combination. For investors in those companies, the savings from the elimination of the polling units amounts to only a fraction of a cent in earnings per share.

For the companies, more than just global humiliation is at stake. These companies are pursuing a multitude of requests for regulatory relief in Washington, including permission to own more television and radio stations. Investors see this relief as providing more earning potential for the companies—and an upside to their stocks. Some relief would require legislation, while other proposals come before political appointees at the Federal Communications Commission. All requests need the goodwill of a majority of the regulatory establishment. But after Florida, finding enough friends in the nation's capital to push through regulatory relief will be more difficult.

So, network shareholders and managers need to ask whether the damage done to their image and political clout in Washington was worth the price of cutting polling costs. There may be an object lesson for corporate chiefs here as they are hauled before congressional committees to explain election night: Relatively small savings in areas that aren't even used every day can have long-term consequences on the image and positioning of the parent corporation. Responsibility for understanding the implications of future cuts in news and other high-profile areas should be shared by the board members, chairman, and CEO, and not left to some divisional underling. And if that happens, then at least one small good thing will have come out of this national morass. ■

ILLUSTRATION: CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

the large states. But the news that VNS was correcting its models on election day had some network employees worried. At CNN, Judy Woodruff remembers when she was told about the 2:47 P.M. ET alert. "There was a report that VNS was relooking at its models....It was a signal to me that something was different about this election," she says. "The fact that VNS, that we and others were paying a lot of money to subscribe to this, and the fact that on election day they were looking at whether their model was correct, it told me that something different was going on this year. It wasn't coming out the way they expected."

NBC announces that George W. Bush has become the 43rd president of the United States.

This apprehension—the sense that VNS's models might be faulty or that the results weren't going to be as easily analyzed as the relatively lopsided races of 1992 and 1996—was not new to election day. Some former network executives believe that VNS's model, which had never been tested on a close election, was doomed to blow up in a race tighter than Clinton-Bush in 1992.

But none of these concerns was shared with viewers. In the early evening, Dan Rather assured the CBS audience that "if we say somebody's carried a state you can pretty much take it to the bank, book it, that that's true." He said, "Let's get one thing straight from the get-go. We would rather be last in reporting returns than to be wrong. And again, our record demonstrates that [to be] true. If you hear someplace else that somebody's carried a state and you're off, as you shouldn't be, watching them, then come back here."

By 5 P.M. CT, the temperature in Austin had dropped further, and the press tent had filled up. The three large-screen TVs were tuned to CNN. "In the 7 P.M. eastern hour," political analyst Bill Schneider was saying, "polls close in nine more states—Florida, Georgia, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, and West Virginia." These states were as good a sampling as journalists could hope for: Florida, New Hampshire, and Ohio were all hotly contested; West Virginia had been traditionally Democratic but looked like a possible pickup for Bush; and the four other southern states would indicate whether Bush was "making his numbers" in parts of the country in which he was favored. At the time it didn't look good for the Texas governor: He wasn't doing well in the South, and all the swing states remained in play.

While VNS was supplying data and analysis, the networks were supplying on-air commentary. At 7 P.M. ET, every network was talking about the poll closings in nine states. And every network was wrong: The polls were closing in only eight states. Not a single network seemed to realize that the Florida panhandle is in the central time zone and the rest of the state is in the eastern time zone. The polls in that heavily Republican part of the state wouldn't close for another hour—8 P.M. ET. That wasn't the only factual error the networks made on election night, mistakes that in other years would have been quickly forgotten but that heighten a sense that the networks weren't as prepared or informed as they should have been.

In the Austin press tent, no one was thinking about the Florida panhandle. That the state wasn't called immediately was a signal that the race there was tight. As Schneider ran down the poll closings across the country, he had warned CNN viewers that Florida might not be decided until after midnight. Rather was saying the same thing on CBS: "We're waiting on a possible decision in Florida, but you've got time to put on another cup of coffee and pour it because, in Florida, it's generally considered to be so close that it may be a long while before anybody is able to call it."

Back at the decision desks, analysts knew it wouldn't be that long. By 7:30 P.M. ET, the state was looking like it could tip for Gore. By 7:40, it was almost ready to call. VNS had one bad precinct, and VNS's model estimated that Gore would carry the state 51.1 percent to 46.5 percent. In general, VNS methodology dictates that to call a state, a candidate's "crits," or individualized projections based on VNS data and analysis, should be at least 2.7; at that point, there is less than a 1 in 200 risk of error. At 7:40, Gore's minimum crit was 2.7; his most important crit indicator was at 3.3. The indicators were based on a combination of exit polls from 45 precincts, a small amount of the state's tabulated raw vote, county models, past voting patterns, current projections, and a smattering of unofficial countywide results supplied to VNS by poll workers at 120 precincts. (There are 5,885 precincts in Florida.) VNS gave Florida a CALL status.

Warren Mitofsky, the founding head of VNS and a decision desk analyst for CBS and CNN, recalls the scene: "The exit poll was showing a very small lead for Gore. When you combine it with real returns, it's showing a real lead for Gore. When you look at the exit-poll calculation of error and the first handful of county votes, they're all telling you that Gore is ahead....So now I'm looking at all of that, and I couldn't imagine a safer call if I had to make it up myself. A projection is not made [CONTINUED ON PAGE 150]

ANCHOR DAN RATHER, 4:10 A.M., NOVEMBER 8, CBS

Frankly, we don't know whether to run, to watch, or bark at the moon. We just don't know what to do here under these circumstances.

COMMENTATOR JONATHAN ALTER, 4:25 A.M., NOVEMBER 8, NBC

The state to watch now is California. If it turns out that Al Gore wins the popular vote nationally, there will be some intense pressure on in this country to have him become the president. Most people think the guy with the most votes wins.

ANCHOR PETER JENNINGS AND CORRESPONDENT GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS, 5:30 A.M., NOVEMBER 8, ABC

PETER JENNINGS: OK, I hate to tell you, we're also on fire here at the moment....Yes, please, go ahead. We're not always right, but we're very efficient. Thanks, gentlemen, very much. You know, it's a very—I mean, I realize at this late hour of the night we're probably broadcasting to ourselves in many respects, but it's a very good time for me to say thank you to the local fire department—

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS: Wow, the smell.

JENNINGS: You talk; I'll check the fire.

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

What made the local TV news in Columbus, Ohio, the week before the election? A topless car wash, shopping bargains, and senior citizens who don't understand safe sex.

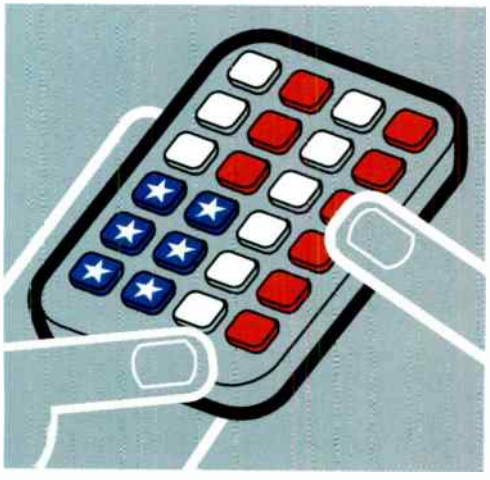
11 O'CLOCK BLUES

BY HEATHER MAHER

Given the number of studies that say most Americans get their news from local TV, *Brill's Content* was curious about what kind of news viewers saw the week before the 2000 election. We picked a city at random—Columbus, Ohio—and taped the 11 P.M. broadcasts of WSYX (ABC), WCMH (NBC), and WBNS (CBS) on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Monday before the November election.

We asked students of Professor Mary Rogus at Ohio University's E.W. Scripps School of Journalism to tape and log each show. Then we watched the tapes, categorized and clocked each story, and added up the times (see chart at right). We weren't expecting the depth of *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, but we were surprised to find that in the last days Columbus voters had to make up their minds before voting, local news gave them little to think about.

The hard numbers: Over four nights, the three stations covered the presidential campaign for a total of 22 minutes, 4 seconds (out of 253 minutes, 27 seconds of total programming). Contrast that with the combined 49 minutes, 22 seconds they spent on crime and the 23 minutes, 26 seconds devoted to accidents. The national political coverage consisted almost entirely of voice-overs during footage of rallies and graphics of the latest poll numbers. Only twice was an issue presented in detail: WCMH compared George W. Bush's and Al Gore's prescription-drug plans, and WSYX looked at the abortion issue. The rest of the stories focused on the thrill of the race, ticking off how many appearances the candidates made each day. (This isn't an aberration: In early 2000, the Project for Excellence in Journalism studied presidential-campaign stories at 49 stations and found that "93 percent...were about the horse race or tactics of the campaign, as opposed to what the candidates stood for [or] how their proposals might affect people locally....")



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Hyperbole was common. On November 6, WBNS opened its "Election 2000" segment with "Tonight, a dramatic change in the race for president." The change? Gore's 2-point increase in the latest poll, which had a 2-point margin of error.

Local political coverage was equally anemic. Judging by the number of ads for political candidates—including those running for the state legislature and Congress—several offices were up for grabs. There was no sign of this on any of the 12 broadcasts.

Instead of substantive political coverage, here's what local-TV-news viewers in Columbus got the week before the election.

BIZARRE NEWS: On November 1, the top story on WBNS was a trick-or-treater who had bitten into a Tootsie Roll and hit a needle. With a shot of a grinning jack-o'-lantern to provide atmosphere, the reporter reassured viewers that the needle wasn't enough to keep the boy from the rest of his Halloween haul. The same station sent an undercover camera into a topless car wash, where, the anchorwoman announced, female employees "are taking off the dirt, and they're not wearing shirts." On election eve, WCMH ended with footage of a chimpanzee that plays hockey.

FRIGHTENING "HEALTH" NEWS: WBNS swept through 20 stores, turned up six over-the-counter medicines with past-due expiration dates, and did a long piece on "treatments turned into time bombs by age." WSYX revealed that sexy single seniors are at a loss when it comes to preventing "the terror" of AIDS, syphilis, and herpes. "Casual sex could change your golden years into mortifying embarrassment, even early death," the reporter warned. WCMH spent several minutes exploring the phenomenon of "Rude Coworkers" who are "making workers sick in epidemic proportions." Two days earlier, it broke the news that crud in unwashed coffee cups can make you sick.

CRIME AND ACCIDENT STORIES: Besides covering robberies, murders, and fires, all three stations devoted time to injury-free incidents: A man drove off a hill and walked away (WCMH); police chased a car driven by cigarette thieves (WSYX and WCMH); authorities speculated that an imprisoned "sexual predator" might have been planning to move to Columbus if he was paroled—which, the report then noted, he wasn't (WBNS).

CONSUMER STORIES: There were stories about window blinds on which toddlers could hang themselves (WSYX), construction companies that might be building shoddy homes (WBNS), and the opening of a Filene's Basement (WSYX), featuring shots of bargain suits and the exhortation to "get those charge cards ready!"

WEATHER AND SPORTS: Newscasters talked about the weather at every opportunity; they previewed it, recapped it, and kidded each other about it. The election angle: Would it affect voter turnout? As for sports, political news was tackled by high-school football playoffs. On November 3, WCMH devoted 9 minutes, 49 seconds to "Football Fridaynite"—more than its total national campaign coverage on all four nights.

Did Columbus viewers learn the difference between the Gore and Bush environmental plans? No. But they did learn that apple seeds "bitten or crushed in large quantities...can kill"—a revelation that prompted the WSYX anchorman to exclaim, "My kids and I were eating apples today! This is so scary!"

So is local news sometimes. ■

11 P.M. LOCAL NEWS, COLUMBUS, OHIO

COVERAGE SHOWN IN MINUTES AND SECONDS		11/1	11/2	11/3	SUBTOTAL 11/6		TOTAL
NATIONAL POLITICS	WSYX	1:06	0:55	1:13	4:21	7:35	
	WBNS	1:04	0:45	1:05	4:09	7:03	22:04
	WCMH	0:42	0:47	0:00	5:57	7:26	
LOCAL ISSUES/ POLITICS	WSYX	0:44	0:00	0:00	4:13	4:57	
	WBNS	1:20	0:07	0:09	1:09	2:45	15:28
	WCMH	2:28	1:15	1:32	2:31	7:46	
OTHER NATIONAL NEWS	WSYX	0:00	0:00	0:00	2:49	2:49	
	WBNS	0:00	0:00	0:17	0:00	0:17	3:21
	WCMH	0:00	0:00	0:15	0:00	0:15	
WORLD NEWS	WSYX	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:29	0:29	
	WBNS	0:00	0:15	0:00	0:15	0:30	0:59
	WCMH	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	
CRIME	WSYX	2:10	5:05	4:26	1:26	13:07	
	WBNS	4:54	7:12	3:51	0:42	16:39	49:22
	WCMH	1:40	10:49	3:26	3:41	19:36	
ACCIDENTS	WSYX	1:11	3:45	0:26	0:49	6:11	
	WBNS	0:27	2:43	0:00	1:21	4:31	23:26
	WCMH	6:07	4:15	0:43	1:39	12:44	
CONSUMER NEWS	WSYX	6:13	2:35	3:40	0:39	13:07	
	WBNS	0:31	2:17	3:35	4:14	10:37	26:57
	WCMH	0:00	0:00	0:00	3:13	3:13	
HEALTH	WSYX	3:14	3:32	0:00	0:00	6:46	
	WBNS	1:34	0:00	0:00	0:00	1:34	10:12
	WCMH	1:52	0:00	0:00	0:00	1:52	
WEATHER	WSYX	2:39	2:34	2:15	2:51	10:19	
	WBNS	3:15	3:17	2:10	4:01	12:43	34:16
	WCMH	3:23	2:44	2:15	2:52	11:14	
SPORTS	WSYX	2:44	2:48	9:45	3:29	18:46	
	WBNS	6:22	4:08	6:35	3:40	20:45	59:17
	WCMH	3:35	2:43	9:49	3:39	19:46	
LIGHTER SIDE	WSYX	0:15	0:00	0:27	0:00	0:42	
	WBNS	1:03	0:00	0:00	0:00	1:03	8:05
	WCMH	2:49	0:00	3:05	0:26	6:20	

WSYX-ABC (COMBINED NEWSCAST WITH FOX); WBNS-CBS; WCMH-NBC

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

What if we threw a presidential campaign and nobody came? The Green Party's candidate explains how he tried to engage the press, and why it didn't work.

MY UNTOLD STORY

BY RALPH NADER

On the afternoon of February 21, 2000, I declared my candidacy for the Green Party presidential nomination at The Madison Hotel in Washington, D.C., before an impressive assemblage of media. All the major television networks, including CNN and PBS, were on hand, as were radio and print reporters. My announcement speech focused on the "democracy gap" in our country, which helps explain the gap between many systemic injustices and lost opportunities, on the one hand, and the solutions that are ignored because of an excessive concentration of power and wealth.

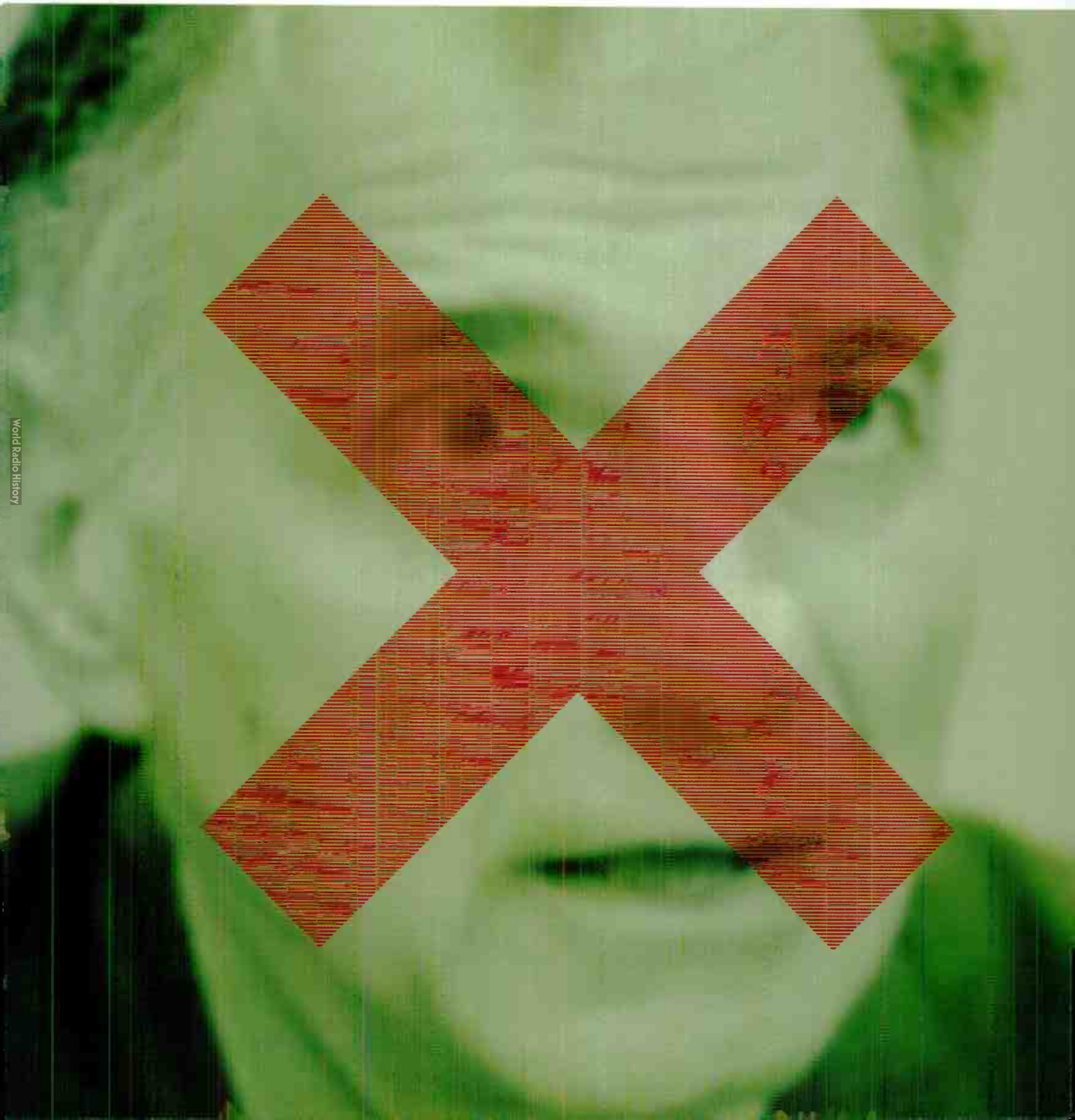
That evening, none of the broadcast networks reported that I had entered the race. The next morning *The New York Times* ran a short article, and the day after that *The Washington Post* carried a squib.

Challenging the entrenched two-party system under a winner-take-all rule is akin to climbing a sheer cliff with a slippery rope. Without instant runoff voting or proportional representation—voting mechanisms that can allow smaller political parties to share in government—it is a task far more difficult than in any other Western democracy. The Republican and Democratic parties command the money and wield the power to exclude other candidates from the presidential debates, and to erect formidable statutory barriers against competitors trying to get on the ballot in many states. But perhaps the most insurmountable obstacle of all is the virtual lock enjoyed by the two major parties on coverage in the national media.

The national press's insistence on focusing its attention on the horse race between the two major-party candidates creates a catch-22 for any third-party candidate who wants to inject previously ignored issues into the campaign dialogue: Without coverage, you can't make headway in the polls. And a poor showing in the polls in turn distances the media from the campaign. Meanwhile, the issues your campaign seeks to address remain below the radar of the major candidates and the campaign press. Having worked with the print and broadcast media throughout my career as a consumer advocate, I had no illusions when I launched my campaign about the difficulties I

Nader out of focus: "The media's lens does not see beyond the two-party duopoly."

ORIGINAL NADER PHOTO BY TIM BOYLE/NEWSMAKERS



Although *The Washington Post* provided ample space one day for an article headlined "Gore, Family Taking It Easy in N.C.," it barely took notice when we filled New York City's Madison Square Garden with one of our rallies.

would face in convincing reporters, editors, and producers for the major news outlets that my candidacy deserved their coverage.

As it turns out, the major media organizations did cover our campaign. But they consistently viewed it as an occasional feature story—a colorful, narrative dispatch from the trail with a marginal candidate—rather than a news story about my proposals or campaign events designed to focus attention on our agenda. During the months when I was traveling through the 50 states, the local press usually reported on the visits, but the national print and electronic media didn't. Instead, they'd parachute in a reporter to travel with us for a few days and file a profile of our campaign that focused on personality and the so-called spoiler issue rather than on substance. We were never a news beat, even when the margins narrowed between Al Gore and George W. Bush during the last month and made our voters more consequential.

Back in the spring, however, hope sprung eternal. In April, a Zogby America poll put us at 5 percent nationwide. Our audiences were growing, and we had an exhaustive agenda that was of compelling concern to millions of Americans. We supported a living wage; stronger trade-union organization laws; universal health insurance; strong environmental measures; redirection of public budgets from corporate welfare to neighborhood and community needs; a crackdown on corporate crime against consumers, especially those in ghettos; public funding of election campaigns; protection of the small-farm economy from giant agribusiness abuses; abolition of the death penalty; an alternative to the failed war on drugs; and a military and foreign policy that wages peace, justice, and democracy instead of preparing for war against no known major enemies.

These were issues that, over the years, many news outlets had reported on, investigated, and editorialized about. Bush and Gore were either ignoring the subjects altogether or taking positions opposite mine, and their respective records of failing to address them—well known to the media for years—gave further credibility to our agenda. We had a long track record, and we weren't offering easy rhetoric. Finally, as the weeks unfolded, the Nader/LaDuke ticket was qualifying on 44 state ballots, far exceeding any potential Electoral College majority.

Equipped with these arguments, I paid a visit in May to Jim Roberts, the political editor of *The New York Times*. Unlike some reporters and editors at the *Times*, Roberts appeared genuinely open to our requests for more regular coverage. I asked him whether the *Times* had any overall newsworthiness criteria for covering significant third-party candidates, and he allowed that there were no specific standards, implying that *Times* editors made judgment calls as events unfolded. When I asked for examples of what would qualify as a newsworthy event, he replied, "If you do anything with Pat Buchanan, or when you campaign in California, I'd be interested." At the time, California was considered a must-win state for Gore and favorable territory for our candidacy.

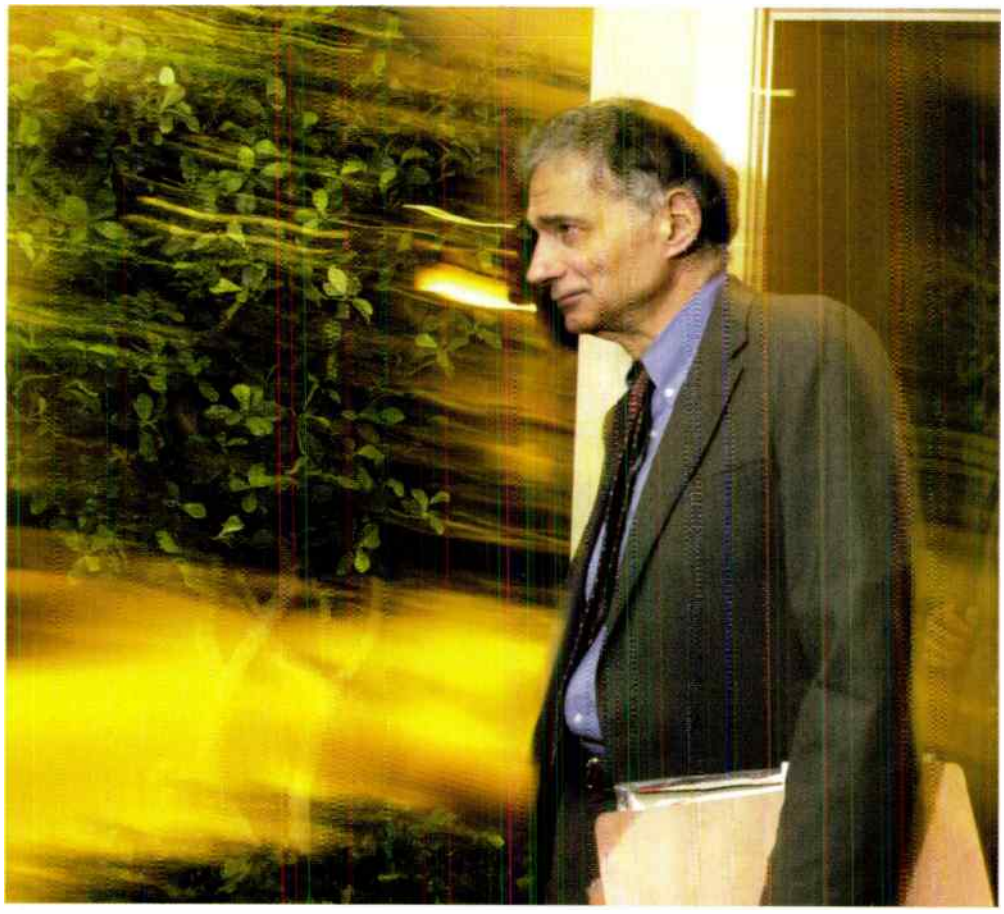
In the following weeks, I put this question about newsworthiness to the many newspaper editorial boards that I met with around the country and to other reporters, editors, and producers. The responses were either noncommittal or related to our impact on the Gore-Bush competition.

No matter what our campaign tried or accomplished, the media remained stuck in a cultural rut, covering the horse race and political tactics of Gore and Bush rather than the issues. This was the case in the reporting, the editorials, the television punditry, the columns, and even many of the political cartoons. We sent open letters to Bush and Gore, challenging them (in a nice way) to take positions that would enrich the presidential campaign dialogue—on farm policy, genetic engineering, corporate welfare, the living wage, even simply urging all members of Congress to post their voting records in an easily searchable fashion on their websites, as none currently does. There were no responses from Bush and Gore, and there was never, to my knowledge, one media attempt to elicit such.

The Washington Post was in one of the deepest ruts, to the point of amusement in our campaign office. Although the *Post* provided ample space (750 words or so) one day in early summer for an article headlined "Gore, Family Taking It Easy in N.C.," it barely took notice when we filled New York City's Madison Square Garden in October with one of our rallies. Nor could the *Post* find a reporter to cover one of our press conferences—held right across the street from the paper's headquarters—that exposed the phony crisis of Social Security being peddled, for different reasons, by Bush and Gore. (Being a news-reporting organization, The Associated Press sent the story over its wires.) Unlike the *Times*, however, the *Post* did invite me to an editorial board meeting, from which political correspondent David S. Broder produced an accurate article the next day. And the *Post*'s op-ed page, again unlike the *Times*—which delivered a string of hysterical editorials accusing my campaign of "cluttering" the field between Bush and Gore—invited me to write an op-ed piece. But by and large, the *Post* covered the campaign with a feature, not a news, mentality, as did the other major papers.

The *Post*'s Dana Milbank, for instance, followed us in California for four days in August and produced a story for the paper's "Style" section that made much of the fact that radical leftists don't think I'm sufficiently committed to identity politics, that the host of a San Diego fund-raiser served "soy cheese quesadillas," and that we stayed at a wealthy friend's house in Santa Barbara. Milbank didn't, however, mention any of our policy proposals or, for instance, the discussion I led in San Diego on border issues, at which he was present. He ended his visit with our campaign by driving north to San Francisco to, he said, meet up with some of his Yale buddies before catching a flight. Had he stayed on, he could have attended a meeting we held to show support for California's migrant farmworkers.

There were reporters, like Maria Recio of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and Tom Squitieri of *USA Today*, who saw early on the significance of our campaign both directly for its agenda and indirectly for its impact on the major-party candidates, and who persuaded their editors to



Nader during a post-campaign visit to the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York last December

DAVID LA SPINA

allow more regular travel with the campaign. Their sense of the campaign's importance was shared by Tim Russert of NBC's *Meet the Press*, who invited me on his show five times, and Chris Matthews of MSNBC's *Hardball With Chris Matthews*, who had me on three times.

We kept trying. Bill Hillsman, the Minneapolis media consultant whose ads helped Jesse Ventura win Minnesota's gubernatorial race in 1998, produced our first political advertisement, a parody of the MasterCard "priceless" ad. It received widespread accolades in the media for its accuracy, its humor, and its focus on getting included in the debates. MasterCard's foolish lawsuit for copyright infringement only focused more attention on the ad and the campaign it represented.

Our press office suggested issuing immediate responses to stands taken by the major candidates. We would, for example, offer a prompt comment on positions taken by Gore or Bush on rising energy prices—a topic we have worked on for many years—but nary a paragraph would appear in the lead stories reflecting our response or alternative proposal.

Our next campaign step, one that we believed would surely catapult the ticket to more regular national news coverage, was holding what we liked to call Super Rallies. Starting with a jam-packed Portland Coliseum, we launched a series of rallies held in coliseums in Minneapolis, Seattle, Boston, Chicago, New York City, Oakland, Long Beach, and Washington, D.C. The audiences, which paid for tickets (starting at $7) to the events, ranged from around 9,000 to 15,000 people, and the events received good local media coverage.

Having by far the largest paid political rallies of any presidential candidate, however, still did not break through the national media's focus on the horse race, though it did encourage more questions about my being a "spoiler." The question became so repetitive that the reporters would preface themselves by saying, "I know you've been asked about this a thousand times" before asking me how I felt about possibly causing Al Gore to lose the election. I would reply that only Al Gore can defeat Al Gore, and he's been doing a pretty good job at that. Then I would add that we are trying to build a long-range political reform movement to dislodge the control of our government from the grip of the permanent corporate government in Washington, D.C., represented by more than 16,000 lobbyists swarming over the city, with their nearly 1,600 corporate political action committees and soft-money contributions, fueling both parties with equal-opportunity corruption.

Still, if the major news outlets really believed that we had a chance of taking the election out of Gore's hands (in the last weeks of the campaign, one radio reporter even asked me how it felt to be the most powerful politician in the country, implying that I was about to hand the election to Bush), they didn't reflect that in their coverage. We had rented a campaign van with 14 seats to accommodate an expected increase in the number of reporters traveling with us. Needless to say, we had empty seats in the van.

Notwithstanding rigorous campaigning in urban, suburban, and rural areas, there was no way to reach the public without getting into the presidential debates. Despite editorials in nearly a dozen major newspapers urging my inclusion, not to mention several national polls indicating that the majority of the public wanted me to participate, the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) limited the debates to the Democratic and Republican candidates. The CPD is a private corporation created by members of the Republican and Democratic parties. It is co-chaired by a Republican and a Democrat, has been funded largely by corporate funds (beer, auto, telecommunications, tobacco, etc.), and holds the keys to reaching tens [CONTINUED ON PAGE 153]

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

Were the candidates victims of the press, or did they get off easy? We invent a formula for measuring the sharpness of the press's hatchet.

THE HATCHET METER

There may not be a science to determining if the press was too hard or too soft on the presidential candidates, but that didn't stop us from trying. In this where-else-but–*Brill's Content* feature, we developed a Hatchet Meter (patent pending) to measure—in an admittedly subjective way—the extent to which candidates were victims of a hatchet-wielding press.

The method to our madness: We identified campaign charges, revelations, or developments with negative connotations for the two major players in the presidential election, such as the notion that George W. Bush isn't smart enough to be president or that Al Gore violated campaign finance laws in 1996. We assigned a value of 1 to 5, weighing the importance of each negative story (X). Then, we assigned a number from 1 to 5, rating the amount of coverage each story received (Y). By dividing Y by X, we derived the Hatchet Index. In other words, we're comparing the amount of negative coverage with the importance of the story. A result of 1 means the coverage was in proportion to the event. Results below 1 mean the candidates escaped close scrutiny; the lower the number, the easier the press. Results above 1 mean the press overdid it; the higher the number, the sharper the hatchet.

To complicate matters, we introduced a "certainty factor"—call it Z. If the facts of a story are debatable, we multiply its importance rank (X) by 0.5. If the story is probably untrue or highly exaggerated, we multiply X by 0.25. The results of our experiment show that the Democratic ticket was hatcheted more than the Republicans (1.535 to 1.445). Confused? Read on—not only will you see how our Hatchet Meter works, but you can try it yourself at home. ■

THE HATCHET INDEX EQUATION

$$\frac{Y}{(X \times Z)} = H$$

Y: Amount of Coverage
X: Importance
Z: Certainty Factor
H: Hatchet Index

UNFAIR COVERAGE

BALANCED COVERAGE

GOT OFF LIGHTLY

GEORGE W. BUSH

BUSH'S HMO BULL

Hatchet Index 0.33 $\frac{1}{3} = 0.33$

Periodically during the campaign, Bush claimed credit for Texas HMO reform, even though he had vetoed a patients' bill of rights and declined to sign the bill, which became law. Misleading the public is a big deal (we rate it a 3), but the press barely batted an eye (1). That works out to a 0.33, which means the media let Bush off easy.

COKE IS IT

Hatchet Index 5.33 $\frac{4}{(3 \times 0.25)} = 5.33$

When rumors surfaced that Bush had used cocaine as a twentysomething, the media had a level 4 conniption. The obligatory scrum of reporters surrounded Bush, while more than 1,000 newspaper stories circulated the rumor. Had the rumor proved true, it would have been a magnitude 3 issue because of what would have been Bush's hypocrisy in pushing for tougher drug laws while being an abuser himself. But the story was never supported by hard facts; far from it. So we multiply X (importance) by 0.25, and the Hatchet Meter comes in at a scalp factor of 5.33.

SUPREMACIST-COURTING

Hatchet Index 1.33 $\frac{4}{3} = 1.33$

When Bush last year spoke at Bob Jones University, a conservative Christian institution that then barred interracial dating and preaches that Catholics must be saved, he stepped on a media minefield, and his campaign was blown away by level 4 coverage. We think visiting a bastion of bigotry without challenging its offensive ideas is a magnitude 3 story. The Hatchet Meter registers 1.33.

DRUNKEN BUMBLING

Hatchet Index 0.66 $\frac{2}{3} = 0.66$

It took the national press corps until November to report that Bush was arrested for driving under the influence when he was 30. Since it happened a long time ago, the story is a misdemeanor of magnitude 3. Even though the press jumped on the 11th-hour revelation, competent reporting would've unearthed the issue earlier, so the coverage scores a 2. The Hatchet Meter flashes a 0.66, which means Bush was let off with a slap on the wrist.

AL GORE

BUSHISMS

Hatchet Index 1.5 | $\frac{3}{2} = 1.5$

"Families is where our nation finds hope, where wings take dream." You know what we mean. Throughout the campaign, the press paid level 3 attention to Bush's tortured syntax, rarely letting a verbal miscue go unremarked. In our view, jumbling the occasional sentence is no more than a scale 2 flub, so Bush felt the hatchet's sharp edge.

UNINSURED CANARD

Hatchet Index 0.25 | $\frac{1}{4} = 0.25$

Several times during the debates, Bush claimed Texas spends $4.7 billion annually on the uninsured. Actually, most of that amount comes from charities and other entities. Deceptive statements involving important public-policy issues matter, and we give the offense a 4. We found fewer than 50 newspaper stories addressing Bush's boo-boo—amounting to level 1 coverage. The Hatchet Meter measures 0.25, meaning Bush got away with this one.

BUSH'S BRAIN

Hatchet Index 1.6 | $\frac{4}{(5 \times 0.5)} = 1.6$

More than 300 stories addressed whether Bush is smart enough to govern. That's magnitude 4 coverage. A candidate's intelligence is hugely important—a 5—but we never saw hard evidence of Bush's mental limitations, so we are employing a debatability factor of 0.5. The Hatchet Meter shows a 1.6, which means Bush was burned on the brainpower issue.

CHENEY'S PALEOCONSERVATIVE ERA

Hatchet Index 1 | $\frac{3}{3} = 1$

During his tenure in the House of Representatives, Dick Cheney voted against Head Start and against urging the release of Nelson Mandela. His House record is certainty notable, but since it was a while ago and vice-presidents rarely get to set the agenda, we rate his old votes a magnitude 3 story. The press response—with more than 200 stories in a fairly concentrated period—also rates a 3. Fairness reigned.

PARACHUTE

Hatchet Index 1 | $\frac{3}{3} = 1$

When Cheney relinquished the helm of Halliburton Company to join the Bush ticket, the energy-services company reportedly allowed him to keep 400,000 unvested stock options. The conflict-of-interest angle made Cheney's big-time retirement package magnitude 3 in importance. And the media jumped in with magnitude 3 coverage. Again, the harmonious 1.

BUDDHIST TEMPLE TEMPEST

Hatchet Index 1 | $\frac{4}{4} = 1$

During the 1996 campaign, Al Gore paid a notorious fund-raising-related visit to a California Buddhist temple. Ever since, magazines, newspapers, and talk shows have been squawking about the incident. The ill-considered event and Gore's stubborn refusal to admit the mistake add up to a magnitude 4 misdeed, and the full-throttle coverage measured a 4. So the press got it right.

ALPHA MAKEOVER

Hatchet Index 2.66 | $\frac{4}{(3 \times 0.5)} = 2.66$

In November 1999, *Time* magazine revealed that feminist author Naomi Wolf was advising Gore—at best, a story of 3 importance. Yet more than 300 newspaper articles and more than 80 TV news programs chewed over her role. That's level 4 coverage. Employing the "certainty factor," we reduce the importance by half because her campaign contributions were caricatured as advice on how to act like an alpha male or dress in earth tones. The Hatchet Meter records a 2.66. Not fair.

GORE'S HEAVY BREATHING

Hatchet Index 1.5 | $\frac{3}{2} = 1.5$

During the first presidential debate, Gore loudly sighed whenever Bush said something the vice-president found irksome. Audibly sighing isn't presidential, and we agree the Gore soundtrack was distracting, but it's no crime; we rank it a magnitude 2. Eventually, 500 newspaper stories touched on Gore's heavy breathing. That's level 3 coverage, which puts the Hatchet Meter at 1.5—proof that the media were engaged in too much heavy breathing over Gore's insolent exhalations.

FANNING THE FLAMES

Hatchet Index 1.5 | $\frac{3}{2} = 1.5$

During the first debate, Gore mistakenly stated that he visited Bush's home state of Texas with James Lee Witt, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, during a 1998 fire outbreak. Actually, the trip in question involved a different FEMA official. More than 100 stories mentioned the slip, making it a 3-alarm story. But the mistake seemed innocent enough, and we rate it a 2 in importance. So on Wittgate, Gore got hatcheted.

INTERNET INVENTION

Hatchet Index 4 | $\frac{5}{(5 \times 0.25)} = 4$

On March 9, 1999, Gore told CNN he "took the initiative in creating the Internet." From that grandiose statement flowed more than 1,000 television mentions. That's tsunami coverage—a full 5. But Gore didn't really say he "invented the Internet," as many stories alleged, and he *did* play a role in speeding development of the Web. So we multiply the importance value (5) by 0.25 (the underlying claim is highly exaggerated). The Hatchet Meter records a 4, indicating a high-tech lynching.

THE SLUMLORD SLUR

Hatchet Index 0.66 | $\frac{2}{3} = 0.66$

When Gore tenant Tracy Mayberry's plumbing backed up, she complained but didn't get a speedy response from Gore's property manager in Carthage, Tennessee. With the GOP gleefully trumpeting the story, Gore as "slumlord" gained some traction, although mostly in local stories, rating a 2 for coverage. We view this tale of absentee landlording of magnitude 3 importance because this was an instance where Gore could have shown he cared about working-class folk, so the Hatchet Meter shows Gore got away with this one.

THE ARTIFICIAL FACTOR

Hatchet Index 1 | $\frac{4}{4} = 1$

Ever since Gore's emergence on the national stage, the press has criticized his standoffish manner. The campaign season was no exception. More than 1,000 stories and news shows mentioned the "stiffness" issue. That's level 4 coverage. Wooden public presentation inhibits Gore's ability to use the bully pulpit, making it a factor 4 issue. So the press paid proportionate attention to priggishness.

FARRAKHAN DÉTENTE

Hatchet Index 1 | $\frac{2}{2} = 1$

In late September, Joseph Lieberman expressed a willingness to meet with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Since Farrakhan has been widely derided as an anti-Semite, we consider the proposed meeting of level 2 importance. His conciliatory gesture sparked a small firestorm of stories, magnitude 2 coverage. The press got it right.

DISCORDANCE OF OPINION

Hatchet Index 0.5 | $\frac{1}{2} = 0.5$

Once Gore picked him, Lieberman ran to the left on school vouchers, Social Security, and affirmative action. Compromising core beliefs is serious business, but since he was out only for the second spot, we're rating it a 2. The press didn't do much to explore Lieberman's policy drift—rating a 1. The media let Gore-Lieberman off the hook on this one.

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

In an attempt to set the record straight on Richard Nixon's 1960 concession, one historian takes on the media's formidable sound-bite mentality.

GRACIOUS LOSER? HARDLY.

BY DAVID GREENBERG

At moments of high political drama—a drive to impeach a president, an election unresolved weeks after the votes are cast—journalists and historians alike often turn to history for perspective, insight, and guidance. During the 1998 Republican campaign to oust President Clinton, we learned much about the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, as well as the near-impeachment (and ultimate resignation) of Richard Nixon. This past fall, we were treated to lessons about the disputed elections of 1800, 1824, 1876, and 1960, among other episodes from the American past.

But if journalists and historians share a wish to bring the past to bear on the present, the two groups see the utility of history quite differently. Journalists delight in finding clear, harmonic echoes of the past in current events. They love an analogy, even a facile one; last spring, for example, they endlessly compared John McCain to Theodore Roosevelt—rugged soldiers and nationalists who bucked their parties' power brokers. (Alas, that's as far as the likeness goes, since McCain shares none of the belief in strong federal government that earned Roosevelt his place in history.) Journalists seize upon alleged patterns from yesteryear to venture predictions about the future. To them, the past furnishes ready-made characters and stories, usually with ready-made lessons.

Although many historians agree that history should inform political discussions, they typically find the deep differences between the past and the present more informative than the superficial similarities. They debunk analogies and resist predictions. The past is a foreign country, as the historian David Lowenthal has written, and like a knowledge of other cultures, an understanding of history is valuable because in revealing the surprising and various ways that others handled crises and challenges, history may suggest unconsidered routes that lie before us. It can expand our intellectual horizons but offers no road maps.

I am both a journalist and a historian, a writer for *Slate*, among other publications, and a doctoral candidate at Columbia University. The dual role often leaves me with divided impulses: The journalist in me searches for the relevance of historians' scholarly work, trying to see how it can enrich our understanding of today's world; the historian in me shouts back that forcing history into contemporary debates can violate its integrity and that, like a well-wrought poem, history should be palpable and mute, like globed fruit. Though I frequently write about historical matters for the popular press, I often find myself warning readers against using history as a source of instruction.

In the great political story of 2000—the Al Gore/George W. Bush sudden-death overtime match—my scholarly and journalistic roles dovetailed serendipitously. The subject of my expertise, Richard Nixon, appeared, as he often does, to hover over a national controversy, and I found myself struggling to contribute to a fast and furious national conversation a small piece of history that I considered important. In the end, I had some success in getting my contribution

The author puts the magnifying glass on Nixon's 1960 concession. Illustration by Phillip Burke

Left: Richard Nixon, with wife Pat, conceding in the 1960 election. Above: Nixon (right) and John F. Kennedy in Palm Beach, Florida, in 1960.

heard, yet I wound up discouraged about the capacity of today's news media to take history seriously. I still believe that historians should join public debates, but I'm no longer hopeful that, in the current climate, we are capable of making much difference.

I'm writing a book about Nixon—not a biography but a history of what he symbolized during his five decades on the national stage. More than any other political figure, I think, Nixon has been at the epicenter of our most polarizing controversies, from the Red Scare and the Cold War to Vietnam and Watergate to numerous other events and issues. So it didn't surprise me that during this year's post-election fracas, Nixon—tanned, rested, and ready—returned to the fray.

When Nixon resurfaces in our public debates, it's usually in the context of arrant villainy. The "gate" suffix clings to the moniker of any new scandal, reminding us that Nixon set the modern standard for presidential malfeasance. During the saga of Bill Clinton's impeachment, Watergate served as an ever-present backdrop, helping President Clinton to prevail, one might argue, because the memory of Nixon's epic crimes made his successor's offenses seem so trifling. Movies from *Nixon* to *The Ice Storm* to *Dick* confirm this image over and over.

This November, however, Nixon returned in a different guise: a role model of public spiritedness. Pundits and partisans alike—it was hard to know who was following whom—dusted off a story Nixon had told in his two memoirs, *Six Crises* and *RN*: After barely losing the 1960 election to John F. Kennedy, he nobly ignored rumors of election fraud and refused to contest the outcome. In the hours after the election, canny Bush advisers, self-assured editorialists, and quote-happy talking heads all propounded this wonderfully ironic anecdote. Bush family consigliere James Baker brandished the Nixon example in an early press conference, while reporter R.W. Apple cited it on the front page of *The New York Times* two days after the election. Journalist-historian Richard Reeves, who's writing a book on Nixon, dealt with it in a lengthy and widely read op-ed for the *Times*. Matt Drudge ran with it, too. Implicitly or explicitly, the Nixon-mentioners called on Vice-President Al Gore likewise to throw in the towel. Some even suggested Gore would become a hero; just as Nixon had reached the White House eight years later, they predicted, so an early Gore concession would position him for a triumphant return. The man who claimed he asked himself "What would Jesus do?" was now being counseled to ask "What would Nixon do?"

From Gore's point of view, all this charitable advice had one flaw. The vice-president believed that once Florida's votes were accurately tallied, he would emerge the winner. Florida law mandated a recount because of Bush's tiny preliminary lead, and, the logic went, once you factored in the thousands of pro-Gore ballots that were discarded on technicalities or missed by the vote-counting machines, it was obvious that a majority

As a historian, I had a different problem with the allusions to Nixon's behavior in 1960. The problem was that the allusions were historically wrong.

L. RALPH CRANE/TIME PIX R. LYNN PELHAM/TIME PIX

of Floridians had actually preferred the vice-president. Knowing this, Gore must have wondered if the calls for him to abdicate weren't a wee bit disingenuous. As a Gore supporter who believes he rightfully won Florida (and the presidency), I myself had that reaction.

As a historian, however, I had a different problem with the allusions to Nixon's behavior in 1960. The problem was that the allusions were historically wrong. It's perilous enough when people seek solutions to political troubles in the pages of history, but it's especially perilous when they seek solutions in bad history. So I decided to join the debate.

Some weeks before the election, I had contributed a piece to *Slate* about the 1960 election. In October, with the Bush-Gore race shaping up as a squeaker, people were already making glib comparisons to the neck-and-neck 1960 contest, which Kennedy won by 119,000 votes. For my column, I wanted to go beyond the clichés (charisma-free vice-president upset in the debates by callow, ingratiating challenger, etc.) and explore just how close that race had been. In particular I proposed to examine the rumors I'd heard so often but had never seen substantiated: that Lyndon Johnson's cronies in Texas and Mayor Richard J. Daley's machine in Chicago "stole" the election in those two states, handing Kennedy the presidency.

I did some digging in newspapers and other sources, but on the stolen-election question I came to no definitive conclusion. This didn't surprise me. Hard to prove immediately after the fact, fraud is especially hard to prove 40 years after the fact.

Yet along the way I found something else that surprised me—not about the rumors of cheating but about the Republican Party's reaction to them. It turned out that far from rolling over in the wake of Kennedy's victory, as I had always believed they did, Republican officials, including some of Nixon's closest aides, waged aggressive challenges in 11 states.

Like the purloined letter, this information was hidden in plain view—in the pages of America's leading newspapers. A front-page story in *The New York Times* on November 12, 1960, stated that Thruston B. Morton, a Kentucky senator and chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC), sent telegrams to various state party officials urging them to pursue recounts. Another story a week later reported that Leonard W. Hall, Robert H. Finch, and Fred C. Scribner—described as "top strategy planners in Mr. Nixon's campaign against apparently victorious senator John F. Kennedy"—were directing the inquiries in 8 of the 11 contested states. In late November, RNC general counsel Meade Alcorn was still predicting (again on the *Times*'s front page) that Nixon, at the end of the day, would win Illinois. The Republicans' campaign, in fact, didn't really end until December 12, when, as a front-page item in *The Washington Post* reported, they lost lawsuits in both Illinois and Texas—two states whose electoral votes they needed to make Nixon the winner. And even then, commentators worried about the newly apparent precariousness of the presidential election system; *The Washington Post* on December 14 ran an editorial titled "Flirting With Uncertainty," cautioning: "Every new phase of the dramatic electoral vote controversy of 1960 seems to strengthen the case for a broad study of the presidential election process."

In my *Slate* piece, I mentioned these widely forgotten Republican challenges and in passing noted how [CONTINUED ON PAGE 154]

BRINKLEY: CHRISTOPHER FELVER DALLEK: ALAN BEALE'S GOODWIN: RICHARD GOODWIN

CHECKING THE RECORD

The presidential-election conundrum made television regulars of several historians. What qualified them to exercise their historical hindsight in front of millions? Here are their backgrounds.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS

Media affiliation: ABC News analyst/presidential historian; regular commentator, PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* **Current academic affiliation:** None **Education:** MBA, Harvard Business School (1980); BA, political science, Williams College (1977) **Selected books authored:** *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960–1963* (1991); *Eisenhower: A Centennial Life* (1990)

Televised election appearances in November: 9 on ABC, 3 on PBS, 1 on CNBC **Note:** Intended to use business degree to manage nonprofits but then was hired by the Smithsonian Institution as a historian

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY

Media affiliation: Regular commentator, NPR **Current academic affiliation:** Director, Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans; professor of history, University of New Orleans **Education:** PhD, U.S. military and diplomatic history, Georgetown University (1989); MA, American history, Georgetown University (1983); BA, history, Ohio State University (1982) **Selected books authored:** *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House* (1999); *American Heritage: History of the United States* (1998)

Televised election appearances in November: 6 on CBS, 3 on CNN, 2 on CNBC, 2 on Fox News **Note:** Not to be confused with Columbia University historian Alan Brinkley, son of David

ROBERT DALLEK

Media affiliation: None **Current academic affiliation:** Professor of modern American history, Boston University **Education:** PhD, history, Columbia University (1964); MA, history, Columbia University (1957); BA, history, University of Illinois (1955) **Selected books authored:** *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (1995); *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908–1960* (1991)

Televised election appearances in November: 7 on CNN, 1 on CNBC **Note:** Shares the title with Robert Caro as the definitive Lyndon Johnson biographer

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN

Media affiliation: NBC News analyst; regular panelist, PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* **Current academic affiliation:** None **Education:** PhD, political science, Harvard University (1968); BA, government, Colby College (1964) **Selected books authored:** *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Homefront in World War II* (1995); *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (1991)

Televised election appearances in November: 12 on NBC, 4 on CNBC, 3 on PBS **Note:** Moonlights as a baseball historian; was a White House Fellow during Lyndon Johnson's presidency before helping him with his memoirs

RICHARD SHENKMAN

Media affiliation: None **Current academic affiliation:** Adjunct lecturer in journalism, American University **Education:** BA, history, Vassar College (1976) **Selected books authored:** *Presidential Ambition: How the Presidents Gained Power, Kept Power and Got Things Done* (1999); *Legends, Lies & Cherished Myths of World History* (1994)

Televised election appearances in November: 5 on CNN, 2 on CNNfn **Note:** Former managing editor for CBS affiliate in Seattle

Compiled by Stephen Totilo

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

An exclusive *Brill's Content* poll conducted on the heels of the presidential election reveals how our political identities relate to our media diets.

DIVIDED WE WATCH

BY EVE GERBER

The presidential contest didn't immediately produce a clear winner, but the political-news contest did. Television was the undisputed winner during this past election cycle—it provided voters with the most campaign information, and the margin of victory wasn't even close. According to an exclusive *Brill's Content* poll, 63 percent of voters turned to TV for their primary source of political news, and 56 percent of those tuned in to cable for political updates. The poll also reveals a stunning sign of how divided we are according to our news consumption: Where we get most of our political news varies significantly, depending on our age, education, and ideology.

To find out how we as a nation gather our watercooler wisdom about politics, *Brill's Content* commissioned Frank Luntz—a pollster who works mostly for corporate and media clients but in the past handled political (largely Republican) clients—to query 800 randomly selected voters and 400 nonvoters about their primary political-news sources. The telephone survey, conducted during the second week of November, is a snapshot of how America used the media during the 2000 election cycle. (The margin of error for the voters is plus or minus 3.5 percent, for the nonvoters plus or minus 4.9 percent.)

Conventional wisdom has it that American voters no longer turn to newspapers for political news, but our poll shows that certain groups of the electorate still rely on print. Twenty-two percent of voters primarily read newspapers for political information. Those who voted for Al Gore were more likely to rely on the dailies than those who voted for George W. Bush—25 percent versus 20 percent. And elderly voters trust print as their primary source even more: 30 percent of senior citizens rely on newspapers for political news, compared with only 16 percent of voters under 30.

33% **43%**

Fewer conservatives consult the Web for political news than liberals

But people began to rely more on cable in this election. "News traditionalists may still prefer the networks, but political junkies are clearly turning to cable to get their campaign fix," Luntz says. "That means 24-hour cable news stations are here to stay."

In fact, the screaming-match political talk shows on cable networks are threatening to eclipse all other sources of campaign information. When voters want political news, they are more likely to watch all-news cable networks than broadcast networks. Thirty-five percent said that their primary source of political news was a cable channel, such as CNN, Fox News Channel, or MSNBC. Only 28 percent said they were more inclined to watch ABC, CBS, or NBC.

The all-news channels' most loyal audience is made up of the least-educated consumers of news. Forty percent of voters without any college education chose cable as their primary political source, compared with 34 percent with some college and 32 percent with degrees. Presidential preference was a strong indicator of the political-news outlet voters chose. Bush voters strongly preferred all-news cable over broadcast channels, 38 percent to 25 percent; Gore voters, however, preferred broadcast to cable, 32 percent to 30 percent.

Anyone who has ever watched an hour of Fox's *The O'Reilly Factor* could predict that Fox's most loyal viewers are conservatives. Nevertheless, the rightward bent of Fox's audience is remarkable. Bush voters were much more likely than Gore voters—13 percent to 6 percent—to depend on the all-news channel that Rupert Murdoch built. And self-described conservatives are exponentially more likely than self-described liberals to turn to Fox first: 18 percent versus 3 percent. In another indication of how ideological Fox loyalists are, the channel was much more popular among party stalwarts than faint-of-heart voters. And straight party-line voters were more likely than ticket-splitters to rely on Fox for campaign news: 10 percent to 6 percent.

Our poll suggests that what some have

WHICH VOTERS WERE LEAST LIKELY TO GIVE THE MEDIA A FAILING GRADE?

LIBERALS	3%*
DEMOCRATS	4%
GORE VOTERS	4%
DEMOCRATIC VOTERS	4%
INCOME < 29K	4%

WHICH VOTERS WERE MOST LIKELY TO GIVE THE MEDIA A FAILING GRADE?

REPUBLICAN VOTERS	16%*
CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICANS	16%
CONSERVATIVES	15%
INDEPENDENTS	14%
BUSH VOTERS	14%

*PERCENTAGE OF EACH GROUP WHO GAVE THE MEDIA AN "F"

13% OF THE VOTERS GAVE THE MEDIA AN "A–" OR HIGHER. HERE'S WHICH MEDIA OUTLETS THEY USED:

ALL-NEWS CABLE	46%*
TRADITIONAL NETWORKS	29%
NEWSPAPERS	16%
RADIO	7%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED TO ANSWER	2%

*PERCENTAGE OF ALL VOTERS WHO GAVE THE MEDIA AT LEAST AN "A–"

WHERE BUSH AND GORE VOTERS GOT THEIR NEWS

	ALL-NEWS CABLE	TRADITIONAL NETWORKS	NEWSPAPERS	RADIO	DON'T KNOW
BUSH	38%	25%	20%	12%	5%
GORE	30%	32%	25%	11%	2%

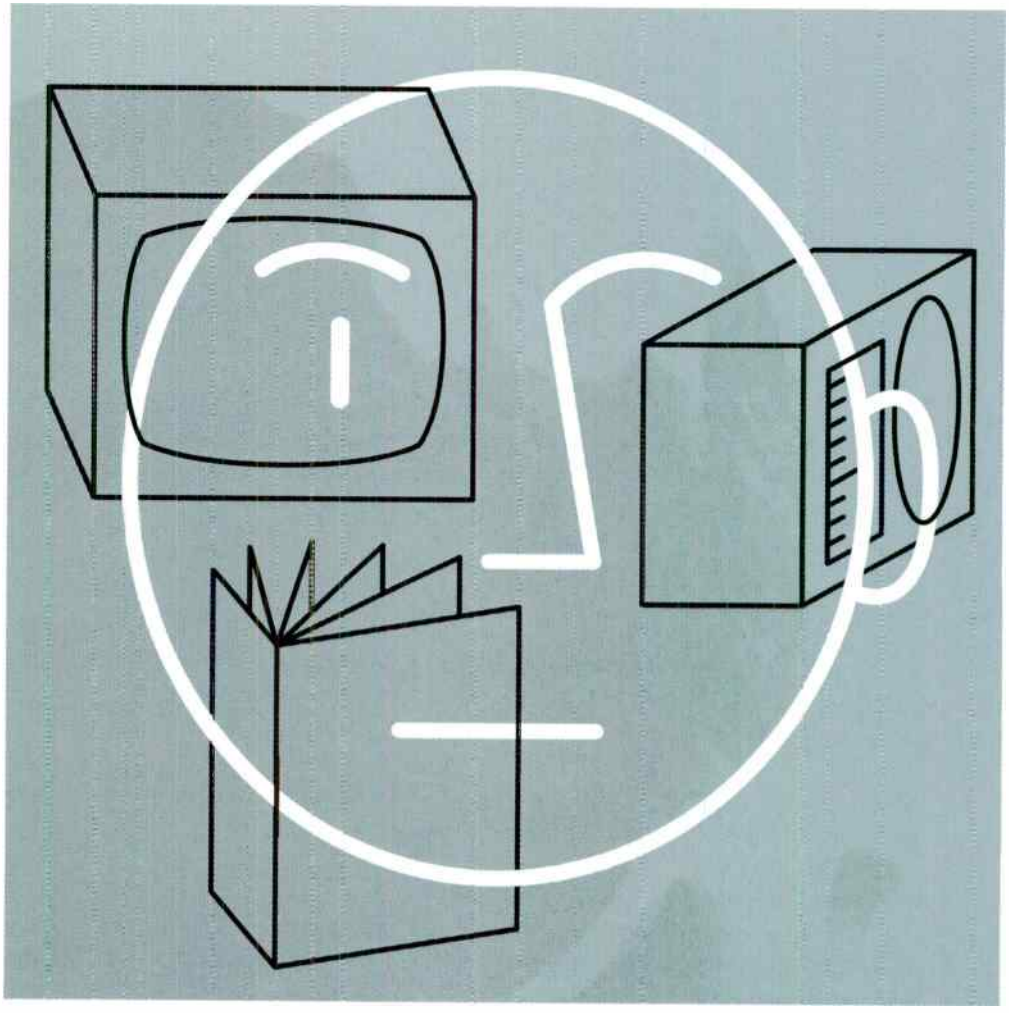
perceived to be Fox's strategy of tailoring cable news to conservative tastes—or at least non-liberal tastes—is working. Ratings offer further proof: According to *Multichannel News*, a trade journal that covers the television industry, Fox News Channel's ratings doubled during the past year, and in October the network matched CNN's ratings for the first time since its launch, four years ago. Luntz is convinced that Fox's growth spurt is no coincidence. "The traditional conservative bent of the talk-radio listener is apparently being translated to talk television," Luntz says. "The people who listen to Rush Limbaugh and Gordon Liddy now watch Fox." In fact, regular talk-radio listeners are far more likely than non-listeners to rely on Fox News Channel for their political news. Nineteen percent of those who tuned in to talk radio for at least six hours depended on Fox for their political news, compared with only 3 percent of those who said they never get their political news from the radio.

57% **34%**

More liberals than conservatives say they don't listen to talk radio for political news

Not surprisingly, given radio programming that leans to the right, self-described conservatives were much more likely than liberals to tune in to radio for political news: 13 percent of those conservatives relied on radio, compared with 8 percent of self-described liberals. Sixteen percent of Republicans said that radio was an important outlet for campaign information, compared with 9 percent of Democrats.

The amount of time conservatives devote to talk radio is an even stronger indication of radio's appeal to the right. Sixty-five percent of self-described conservative voters listened to at least one hour of talk radio a week; 57 percent of self-described liberals never listened to talk radio. Twenty-two percent of those conservatives tuned in for at least six hours a week, and 11 percent for more than 15 hours a week.



Ideological differences are also apparent online, with self-described liberals more likely to go to the Web for information than conservatives. Forty-three percent of self-described liberals said they checked the Web for political news at least once a week, while only 33 percent of conservatives said they went online for a political fix. Regardless of this difference, few voters relied on the Web for their campaign information. Only 13 percent of voters checked the Internet for political data more than five times a week. And those who did are a specific subset of the general population, says Luntz. "The Web has yet to penetrate the public political psyche," he says. "It is still a tool for only the youngest and best-educated voters." Sixteen percent of under-30 voters and 14 percent of college grads frequently (ten times or more per week) surfed for election news.

When Luntz asked voters how they would grade the media they consume, he found that the most generous judges were the least educated. Voters who never entered college were more likely than college graduates to give the media at least an "A-minus": 24 percent to 9 percent. And, despite the Republican-leaning tendencies of many cable-news devotees, all-news-channel fans were much more likely to give the media high marks than those who depend on other news sources. For instance, 46 percent of voters who gave the media at least an "A-minus" were the ones watching cable news. Only 16 percent of those giving the media high marks were reading newspapers.

13% **6%**

Bush voters were more likely to tune in to Fox News Channel than Gore voters

The relative satisfaction of cable-news consumers suggests that niche news-watching might be the political wave of the future. ■

WHICH NETWORKS DID VOTERS WATCH FOR THEIR POLITICAL NEWS?

CNN/HEADLINE NEWS	30%*
NBC	18%
ABC	14%
FOX NEWS CHANNEL	9%
CBS	8%
MSNBC	4%
CNBC	3%
C-SPAN/C-SPAN 2	1%
OTHER	6%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED TO ANSWER	7%

*PERCENTAGE OF VOTERS WHO CHOSE EACH NETWORK

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Left and right: Bill Maher. "There is an attempt to quash the male spirit," says Maher. "And it's working." Photographed by Miranda Penn Turin

BILL MAHER'S CAMPAIGN

BY MARK BOAL

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

Bill Maher, host of the hit show *Politically Incorrect*, makes no apologies for voting for Ralph Nader—or for believing that men have lost the war between the sexes.

Look at Bill Maher. It's seconds before the cameras start rolling for an episode of *Politically Incorrect*, and the man is frozen. He's standing in a narrow passageway behind the soundstage. He's alone, still. His eyes are closed. His fingers press into his temples.

Then the announcer cries, "Ladies and gentlemen...the star of *Politically Incorrect*...Biiill Maaaherrrr!!"

He starts moving on the "B." He charges through the stage door and strides onto the set, drawn into the spotlight by the sound of his own name.

The lights crisscross in the air, dance on the set, then land on Maher. He's wearing a shiny gray suit, a checkered black tie, and a smirk. He looks into the spotlight and then beyond to the audience; he looks right at them and not at them at all, still smirking.

Yesterday, the presidential election ended without a winner, and 24 hours later, the media still haven't found a way to frame the moment. Reporters are flummoxed by the ambiguity, and pundits strain to be sage, but Maher thrives on the chaos. Rising on his toes, Maher turns to the camera and says, "As of 8 o'clock Eastern time, when we're taping this, there still is no winner, and the country is still in a state of confusion and not knowing." Beat. "Well, I guess the Bush era has begun."

As Maher rides the laughter through his monologue, his guests for this evening's episode (officially called *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, it airs weeknights on ABC after *Nightline*) prepare for their turns in the hot seat. Upstairs in the greenroom, they are not eating the platters of raw vegetables and skewered chicken. Jason Alexander, who played George on *Seinfeld*, chats with Dennis Prager, a tall, affable, blazer-and-khakis conservative with his own radio show.

Alexander leans against a television set. He looks vacantly at Prager, forces a smile, and says, "I listen to your show all the time."

"Really?" Prager replies, assuming he's found a fan. "I've just moved stations."

Jewel, the singer, glides in, her blond hair turning heads. Then comes *ER*'s Laura Innes, looking smart in a black turtleneck and silver pendant. They all talk to each other, easing the tension with aimless chitchat, until a stagehand walks up and shepherds them to the stage.

Brought together for this synthesis of late-night glitz and Sunday-morning gravitas, now the conservative, the comedian, the singer, and the actress sit in a semicircle around Maher as he tosses off barbed questions. Jewel and Innes hang back, but Alexander and Prager spar over which political party is more patriotic. Prager says that Republicans, more often than not, hang the American flag on the Fourth of July. Alexander interjects: "But how many are showing the Confederate flag at the same time?" Prager partially concedes: "Good line. Not true, but it's a *good* line."

It's all back-and-forth, tit-for-tat, until Prager holds his hands wide in the air, as if to contain the breadth of his thought, and says, "What black Americans need is a values change."

Jewel, glancing at her hands, jumps on this one. "But you know what, help doesn't hurt. I don't think hardly any Republican I know, including Bush, was ever homeless, was ever in need of prescription health. And I think that if you are out of touch that you don't realize how important that is to people...."

"Well, Mr. Gore was never in touch with that, he was wealthy from the beginning," Prager says.

Jewel is looking at her hands, and from the audience, where I'm standing next to a security guard, I see a black blur, the suggestion of ink on flesh, but I can't be sure. Later, I review the tape over and over, and finally it becomes clear: Jewel had notes written on her hand.

If only she had stuck to promoting her album. But when Jewel talked politics, she stumbled into the gray zone between entertainment and commentary. There's a fear running through the culture of pundits and commentators that this zone is expanding, and in a small way, Jewel played into that fear and made it seem quaint. She wasn't the first celebrity to talk politics on an entertainment show—since 1993, musicians and politicians have been equals before the camera on *Politically Incorrect*—and she certainly won't be the last.

If Leno tames his politics with bonhomie and Letterman softens his with goofball antics, then Maher's blunt, bullet-between-the-eyes delivery leaves no room for neutrality.

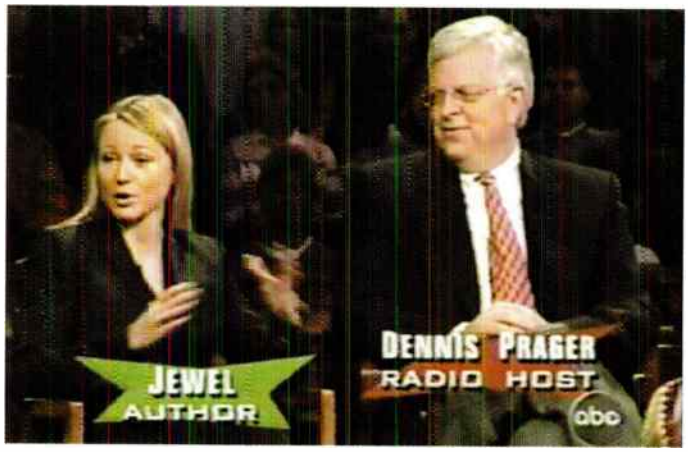
Bill Maher, more libertine than Libertarian

Maher, who is gentle with celebrities, never mentions the notes on Jewel's hand. (A spokesperson for Jewel declined to comment.) With a conductor's ear for the symphony of voices around him, Maher coddles Jewel and drubs Prager—and anybody else who challenges him.

"I hate this guy George Bush," Maher complains, "but people like him."

"I like him; why don't you?" says Prager defiantly. It took Maher years of bombing in ratty clubs to polish his bone-dry delivery style, which drives him now to his forceful comeback: "A little humility about not paying your dues would be nice."

Feel the anger in that line—sublimated, sure, but anger nonetheless, roiling under the wit. Anger is the prime mover in Maher's persona, and when his anger collides with his intelligence, he's funny. Nobody can precisely explain humor like this, but when it works, it's visceral.



Singer Jewel and radio host Dennis Prager discuss the election.

Maher is talking, letting the bitterness rise: "I have been getting faxes; I have been getting letters; I have been getting e-mails...blaming me, because I voted for Nader." He pauses to acknowledge the laughs and polite applause. "I personally am going to make sure that women can't get an abortion next week. That's what it comes down to." The applause grows, and Alexander sees the setup: "And I understand you are going to be responsible for them needing an abortion."

"Let me tell ya," Maher says, laughing, grateful for the line, "last night, when they took Florida away from Gore"—he points to his crotch—"I checked to see if the condom was on."

Later, the conversation slows and Maher calls for a commercial break. The stage lights dim as a small crew swarms the set. There's Michelle Daurio, the makeup woman, standing on Maher's right, and Billy Martin, the head writer, crouching low on his left; she powders his face, he talks into Maher's ear. She applies cover-up to his forehead ("How about we do this next...," Martin murmurs); brushes hair ("You want a joke?..."); picks lint from lapel ("Great stuff...."). Meanwhile, a producer pep-talks the guests to keep the rhythm moving: "We're going to talk about the bad campaign....Just butt in, don't wait for Bill to finish....Doing great." The crew pulls back, the lights go up, and we're back.

Maher steers the conversation. He rails about Gore's "bad campaign" and criticizes Gore for distancing himself from Bill Clinton. "I don't apologize for voting for Ralph Nader—he was the only candidate that didn't make me cringe," he says. And when he does, Maher abandons the artifice of objectivity that Leno and Letterman try to maintain, and becomes the only late-night host to reveal his vote for president. If Leno tames his politics with bonhomie and Letterman softens his with goofball antics, then Maher's blunt, bullet-between-the-eyes delivery leaves no room for neutrality.

Maher's bluntness, common enough on talk radio, hasn't played this well on TV since the fifties, when the caustic comedian Mort Sahl spat in the face of Eisenhower's America. Maher follows Sahl's satirical mode and draws from Lenny Bruce, too, although Bruce's act landed him in jail and Maher's has put him on the Hollywood-Washington A-list. He got to the top by being sincere in an ironic age, by objecting to hypocrisy wherever he thinks he sees it. The presidential campaign was particularly galling. "Bill Clinton could have beaten this guy [Bush] with his penis tied behind his back," he says. It's a classic Maher joke, sex and policy folded into a one-liner, delivered with a dose of fury.

Maher's wrapping up the episode. "All right, whoever is president, the business of selling books and records goes on," he says, holding Jewel's plugs in his hand, "and Jewel has one of each. On tomorrow's episode...."

And then it's over. The audience files out. Maher poses for a group photo, then bounds into his dressing room.

The camera's embrace, the staff of acolytes, the crowd applauding his venom—it all lingers on him as he climbs into a big black Mercedes.

All the things he always wanted.

The first time I met Bill Maher in person, he asked me if I planned to have sex with him. I'd flown from New York to Los Angeles, poked around the set for a day, and was then directed to his office for an interview. It's a sparse, narrow place; on the wall, *Time* magazine covers bear the faces of his idols, Hugh Hefner and Johnny Carson. Maher was behind a desk, talking on the phone, when I came in. He was wearing jeans and a polo shirt and though he looked smaller than on TV, his forehead appeared higher, his nose more bulbous.

He got off the phone, moved around the desk, and as I glanced at his minibar, he said, "We don't have to go to a fancy restaurant, do we? I mean, it's not like you're trying to f--- me, right?"

Maher was anxious to leave. As we drove to a diner he frequents, we chatted about the news revelation of the day, that George W. Bush had been arrested once on a drunk-driving charge.

"I once had a D.U.I. I don't know if George Bush got out of his," he wondered aloud as we waited for a light to change. "I am sure he did get out of it easier than I got out of mine, because mine was a nightmare. But that was a different era, when he had his. His was in the seventies. Back then...*mothers* were for drunk driving. And in the fifties you could drink and wave to a cop as you were gliding by in your Buick Roadmaster....If you got in trouble, you know the judge would say, 'Were you drinking?' 'Yes.' 'Well, why didn't you say so?—Get out of here; well then you have a good reason for killing those children; you were drinking,

and why didn't you just say so?' But boy, the time I got mine, it was so serious. And I had to go to AA meetings, which I highly resented, because I am not a drunk." The anecdote reminded me of the comedian Sam Kinison, who dealt with the politics of drunk driving in many routines, defending his right to party in a primal scream until he was killed in a car crash in 1992. But whereas Kinison was nearly antisocial and atavistic in his rage, Maher harnesses his emotion to a political agenda, and the result is nuanced enough to entertain nearly 3 million viewers night after night.

After a waitress seated us at a booth in the back of the diner, I started the interview by mentioning an incident over a joke that ABC's Broadcast Standards and Practices department had censored a few days before. The punch line was about Al Gore being President Clinton's "sloppy seconds." Maher had stormed through the hallway when he heard the censor's decision. "I want recompense for that joke," he had said with a snarl, slamming a door. So I asked him if censorship is a recurring problem. "We have had knock-down, drag-out fights about censorship," Maher said.

Laura Innes, Jason Alexander, and Bill Maher on *Politically Incorrect*

Like the other networks, ABC censors salacious material. But Maher's situation is distinct, because when he tells a joke, he's often not kidding so much as making a statement that's more controversial than it is obscene. He's an outspoken critic of the war on drugs, for example, and recently produced a video parody about smoking marijuana that ABC refused to air. "They are using standards that were prevalent five or ten years ago," he complained, "but as a country and as a network, I think we have really moved on from there. They are damn hard to figure out, the censors." Maher stopped and paused. It's not, he said, that he doesn't understand the perspective of the ABC executives. "If I wasn't the person doing the show and I stood back, I actually admire sometimes what they do. I admire that in principle, a network saying, 'You know what, we don't have to do what everybody else is doing just because they are doing it.'"

Maher runs afoul of ABC's censors weekly. Besides drug jokes, it's his sexual-political jokes that most often get cut. Maher says to "push my craft" beyond ABC, he created a stand-up routine, which he took on the road in the summer of 2000. One performance aired last June as an HBO special called *Be More Cynical*.

On *Be More Cynical* Maher lets loose. He defends rap music's misogyny but attacks its narcissism. "I've attacked rap music for the ego there," Maher told me over dinner. "The problem with rap is not the misogyny. It's not the violence. It's the ego. It's this constant braggadocio....If you listen to rap music, it's all guys talking about how great they are, and that to me is a much worse influence on kids than anything else in rap.

"But I defend rap," he continued, "because pop music was always about the female agenda and it was hypocritical the way singers are going, 'I'll meet you on the mountaintop; I'll be your lover forever'....Rap was at least honest about the male agenda. Rap was 'Back that ass up.' And that's the male agenda. Women want love before sex, and we want sex before love."

This difference between a "male agenda" and a "female agenda" underlies Maher's sensibility. Maher believes that men have lost the war of the sexes. Though he holds this conviction strongly, it doesn't always come across clearly on the show, when five people are sometimes speaking all at once. When I asked Maher about the male agenda, he said, "If I could sum up what much of my theme is when we have men/women issues on the show, it's having to feel like I should apologize for the male agenda simply because it is different from the female agenda. Women used to accept men much more for who they are and the way they were. This is not to say they would condone the husband cheating, but it was much more 'Well, men are that way.' Now it's like men are wrong for being that way. And the goal in life is to get them to be more like us. And I reject that. We are biologically different, and we are hard-wired in a different way."

Sexual politics has always been a strong part of Maher's work. One of his earliest jokes teased the free-love movement. "The first girl I ever slept with was a hippie," Maher begins in a stand-up routine recorded in his book *True Story*. "I'll never forget the first time we were in bed, and she said—in that real hippie voice—'When we make love, there's no you and no me—it's like our bodies are one continuous being.' I said, 'Okay, but how about paying some attention to OUR d--k?'"

Maher made his name in the early years of *PI*, the nineties, by riding the macho backlash against political correctness. That backlash, although often waged in the name of free speech, was at root an anxious response to women gaining new power. It's no coincidence that the Angry White Male grew most apoplectic at a time when sexual-harassment laws were giving women new protection in the workplace and soccer moms were playing a pivotal role in presidential elections.

But now that these realities are no longer new, now that women are more of an accepted part of the political landscape, the question is what to make of artists like Maher who continue to act as if feminism happened yesterday. Comedy is such a highly transitory art form, so it's not an easy question to answer. What's funny becomes cute, then banal, in a matter of a few years. And even the most outrageous

comedy routines are tamed over the span of several decades.

For evidence that the *intellectual* center of the culture has moved on from worrying about male and female differences, look no further than the cognoscenti's mostly critical response to cultural critic Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, which chronicled men struggling to define their masculinity in a new era of gender relations.

But when it comes to the *emotional* reality of some men, Maher strikes a still-relevant chord. How else to explain the recent crop of hypermacho male artists? Andrew Dice Clay's sadistic stand-up may have been booed off the mass media in the eighties, but rapper Eminem has replaced him in the public arena, selling platinum records by mining the same vein. And with considerably more grace and sophistication, filmmakers like Neil LaBute and David Fincher still find reason to make movies such as *In the Company of Men* and *Fight Club*, which peer into the shadows of male psychology.

Maher's "male agenda" act falls on a continuum between Eminem's teasing, ironic misogyny and LaBute's unflinchingly moral dissection of male aggression. Although neither a ranter nor a moralist, Maher shares with Eminem and LaBute the idea that, as he says, the "culture has been feminized." When I asked him to compare himself with Eminem and LaBute, he said, "We are all working in the same area, which is that there is an attempt to quash the male spirit—and it's working." Then he went on, "There are a few places, like Eminem's records and [Labute's] movies and whatever, where the backlash is, and it's inevitable. Not all of us are going down this quietly."

Considering that Maher is such a vocal gender warrior, one might expect to find the roots of his militarism in a childhood trauma of some sort. But Maher's life story does not lend itself to pop-Freudianism—if anything, the source of his anger is a mystery. The story begins in River Vale, New Jersey, which, in the fifties and sixties, was an unremarkable town of about 11,000. Maher recalls his childhood there as a "*Leave It to Beaver*" experience and, when talking about it, spins postcard-perfect tableaux: a proud father who sparked his son's passion for politics over the dinner table (they talked about summit meetings when Maher was 5 years old), a warm and kind mother to whom Maher remains close. From the start, Maher says, he wanted to be a comedian. And after graduating from Cornell University, he moved to New York City to play the comedy clubs that proliferated in the city in the eighties. At an early gig, Maher bounced jokes off a kid named Eddie Murphy. Later, he partied with a crowd that would become the leading lights of comedy, including Paul Reiser, Jerry Seinfeld, and Gilbert Gottfried.

The group drank together and all left New York for L.A. at about the same time. While playing the clubs in L.A., Maher was spotted by a scout for *The Tonight Show*. On his first appearance on Johnny Carson's stage, Maher told a joke about Leonid Brezhnev, and Carson loved it. "Carson really kept him in the public eye for ten years," says Jim Vallely, a friend who now writes for *The Geena Davis Show*. Despite his *Tonight Show* appearances, though, Maher sat on the sidelines while Seinfeld and Reiser became stars. He worked as an actor in forgettable movies, and a sitcom he appeared in was quickly canceled. By 1991, Maher was, as he says, "getting into his thirties and getting worried" that he'd never make a splash. Taking the measure of his dead ends, Maher decided he was a writer, but the novel he wrote, *True Story*, received mixed reviews. In 1992, he returned to political comedy and found, finally, the vehicle for his talent. The day after the '92 elections, he pitched *Politically Incorrect* to Comedy Central, which bought the show. In 1997, the show was picked up by ABC. It was the perfect venue for Maher's gendered agenda.

When Maher launched *Politically Incorrect*, he introduced a new meme into the history of late-night television. In the late fifties and early sixties, when Jack Paar hosted NBC's late show, he included serious discussions with such guests as John F. Kennedy, Fidel Castro, and Richard Nixon. But when Carson took over, he turned the hour into a vaudeville act, complete with magic tricks, jumping lions, musical numbers, and comedy sketches—starring himself as ringmaster. David Letterman, Jay Leno, and Conan O'Brien followed in Carson's footsteps, as did other late-night shows. But *Politically Incorrect* veered away from the prescribed format. On Maher's show, guests would talk to one another—and the host—all at once. The conversation would strive to mingle Paar's seriousness with Carson's panache by switching without segue between insights and laughs. The inventiveness of this format gave ABC its first late-night entertainment franchise in 30 years and secured for Maher a stable perch opposite *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *Late Night with David Letterman*. Ratings in 2000 were 12 percent higher than 1999's, and the show beats Letterman in five out of the seven top-ten markets where they air head to head.

Maher's HBO special, *Be More Cynical*, opens with him onstage in black boots and a silk shirt—gone are the coordinated suits and ties of his TV show. This is Maher liberated. The casual attire signals an act that's too dark for ABC.

"Sexual prowess, that's what we do," begins Maher in one routine. "There's no greater feeling for a man to have than to have a dead woman in your bed," he says, hunched over the microphone. On tape, the audience's laughter sounds nervous and forced.

"I don't mean literally dead, I just mean f---ed into unconsciousness. In the last position you had her. She's just knocked out." The audience, relieved that Maher was kidding, laughs harder, and he begins to pace around the stage.

"You know," he says, throwing his hands into the air, "then you can putter around the house and make all the noise that you want. You can make eggs, have the TV on. Nothing is going to wake her up." Whatever social inhibitions Maher has are gone now. The id is out—and dominant.

"If you actually killed someone, that would be the greatest honor. The police would come," he says, holding up his hands as if to volunteer being handcuffed. "Take me away. No, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 157]

"If I could sum up what much of my theme is when we have men/women issues on the show," says Maher, "it's having to feel like I should apologize for the male agenda."

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PRESS

It's our Election Year Spectacular! Featuring all the dumb things your favorite pundits said during the campaign (and some of the smart ones, too). Plus: Lawrence O'Donnell, the wrongest man in America.

PUNDIT SCORECARD

Putting together the Pundit Scorecard is always a special experience for us at *Brill's Content*, but this time it's really special—we've taken a sweeping, comprehensive look at the state of punditry throughout the 2000 campaign season, from George W. Bush and Al Gore's dueling candidacy announcements in spring 1999 to the bitter end.

Here's how it works: First we gathered our usual suspects from the weekend talk shows, and then we handpicked an elite corps of additional talking heads who usually don't make the cut in your run-of-the-mill scorecard but whom we deemed worthy of scrutiny for this special Pundathlon. Then we identified nine key moments in the campaign about which any self-respecting pundit ought to have ventured a prediction, from Bush's pick for vice-president to what viewers could expect from the debates. Finally, we scoured the available record for any and all of our pundits' predictions—on TV, in writing, talking too loud in restaurants—around the time of each campaign event and rated them for accuracy.

COLOR CODE

Got it right

Got it wrong

THE WINNER

Fred Barnes

THE LOSER

Lawrence O'Donnell

As you might expect, it isn't pretty. Beltway Boy Fred Barnes takes the brass ring with a performance that can best be described as middling and chock-full of hedged bets. It goes quickly downhill from there. McLaughlin Groupie Lawrence O'Donnell brings up the rear, earning the title of the wrongest man of the 2000 campaign with his choices of Governor Evan Bayh as Al Gore's running mate and Rick Lazio as the newest senator from New York.

Although most of the predictions were simple matters of fact, in some cases we did make rather subjective judgments with which reasonable people might disagree. For instance, our number crunchers at the Pundit Scorecard decision desk have made a determination that the presidential debates had almost no impact on the race and really didn't matter too much. End of discussion.

A note on the scoring: Each correct prediction (in blue) can earn a pundit up to 3 points, and each miss can subtract up to 3 points. Your basic accurate call ("John McCain will win the New Hampshire primary") gets 2 points. If a pundit really goes out on a limb ("McCain will win in the double digits"), she gets 3. And if she hedges ("McCain will probably win"), she gets only 1 point. The same principle applies to wrong calls (in pink): Whoppers cost you 3 points, ordinary mistakes 2, and marginal errors 1 point. In scoring picks in congressional races, we counted as correct only dead-on calls; any deviation from the actual outcome lost a pundit points, depending on how far off she was. JOHN COOK

Research by Allison Benedikt, Emily Chenoweth, Lara Kate Cohen, Joseph Gomes, Joshua Nunberg, Anna Schneider-Mayerson, and Stephen Totilo

RANK	PUNDITS	SCORE	AS SEEN ON...*	GENERAL EARLY PREDICTIONS ON HOW THE RACE WILL SHAPE UP
1	FRED BARNES	9	Fox News Channel's *The Beltway Boys*	Gore will stress the economy; Bush will be more pro-life [+1]
2	MORTON KONDRACKE	8	*The Beltway Boys*, column in *Roll Call*	The race will be fought "in and for the center." [+3]
3	PAUL GIGOT	6	PBS's *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, column in *The Wall Street Journal*	Gore will "do and say whatever it takes to win." [+2]
4	MARGARET CARLSON	4	CNN's *The Capital Gang*, column in *Time* magazine	Candidates will fight over who's more religious [-2]
5	GEORGE WILL	4	ABC's *This Week With Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*, column in *Newsweek*	
6	CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER	3	*Inside Washington*, column in *The Washington Post*	"This is going to be an issueless campaign." [-2]
7	COKIE ROBERTS	3	*This Week With Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*, ABC News special election coverage	"We're going to be debating evolution in the year 2000." [-3]
8	DAN RATHER	3	*CBS Evening News*, CBS News special election coverage, online column, syndicated newspaper column	
9	TONY BLANKLEY	2	*The McLaughlin Group*, column in the *Washington Times*	It will be a low-octane-issues campaign on both sides [-2]
10	PETER JENNINGS	2	*ABC World News Tonight*, ABC News special election coverage, daily e-mail newsletter	
11	TOM BROKAW	1	*NBC Nightly News*, NBC News special election coverage	
12	JOHN McLAUGHLIN	0	*The McLaughlin Group*, *One on One With John McLaughlin*	
13	AL HUNT	-3	*The Capital Gang*; CNN's *Evans, Novak, Hunt & Shields*; column in *The Wall Street Journal*	Gore won't change during the campaign [-2]
14	DICK MORRIS	-3	Fox News Channel political analyst, columns in the *New York Post*, *The Hill*, and vote.com	
15	ELEANOR CLIFT	-4	*The McLaughlin Group*, column in *Newsweek*	Bush will face a right-wing challenge in the primary [-3]
16	CLARENCE PAGE	-5	*The McLaughlin Group*, column in the *Chicago Tribune*	Gore will be haunted by campaign finance scandals [-2]
17	SAM DONALDSON	-5	*This Week With Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*, ABC News special election coverage, Sam Donaldson @ABCNews.com (Webcast)	The race will be very tight [+2]
18	BILL KRISTOL	-6	Fox News Channel political analyst, column in the *Weekly Standard*	Bush and Gore will face strong primary challenges [+2]
19	CHRIS MATTHEWS	-7	MSNBC's *Hardball With Chris Matthews*, MSNBC special election coverage, column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (formerly in the *San Francisco Examiner*)	Gore will try to scare elderly voters; Bush will push tax cut [+2]
20	KATE O'BEIRNE	-7	*The Capital Gang*, column in the *National Review*	Rebuilding the military will be a big Republican issue [+3]
21	MARK SHIELDS	-7	*The Capital Gang*; *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*; *Evans, Novak, Hunt & Shields*; nationally syndicated column	Gore will exploit Bush's shabby environmental record in Texas [+1]
22	GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS	-8	*This Week With Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*, ABC's *Nightline*, ABC News election coverage	Health care will be an issue in the campaign [+1]
23	ROBERT NOVAK	-10	*The Capital Gang*; *Evans, Novak, Hunt & Shields*; column in the *Chicago Sun-Times*; *Evans-Novak Political Report*	Bush's greatest potential threat isn't Gore; it's Pat Buchanan [-2]
24	MICHAEL BARONE	-10	*The McLaughlin Group*, Fox News Channel political analyst, column in *U.S. News & World Report*	
25	LAWRENCE O'DONNELL	-13	*The McLaughlin Group*, column in *New York* magazine (discontinued)	Gore will win; Republicans will keep Senate [-3]

*NOT A COMPREHENSIVE LIST

JOHN McCAIN'S CHALLENGE TO BUSH IN THE NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARY**	BUSH'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION	GORE'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION	THE CONVENTIONS	THE DEBATES†
McCain will win by a hair [+1]	Bush will pick either Dick Cheney or Colin Powell [+2]		Bush's speech will focus on character over Republican issues [+2]	
McCain will win by a hair [+1]	Bush ought to pick Cheney [+2]	Gore will probably pick George Mitchell [-2]	GOP convention will be a "masquerade, a masked ball of moderation." [+1]	
	Democrats will say Cheney is a "lunatic right-winger." [+1]		PAUL GIGOT RANK: 3	Gore will try to be "warm and fuzzy." [+1]
McCain will win [+2]	Bush will pick McCain [-3]	"[T]he masterstroke would be to pick Sen. Joe Lieberman." [+3]		
New Hampshire doesn't matter; Bush will win South Carolina [+2]	Democrats will "try and make you frightened of Dick Cheney." [+1]		Gore's speech will focus on issues [+2]	Debates won't make a big difference; few will watch [+2]
For Bush to win, he has to paint McCain as a non-Republican [+2]		"His presence on the ticket will assure high Jewish turnout in...Florida." [+2]	Gore's speech solved his personality problem [-3]	
If McCain wins, Bush will move right in South Carolina, which will hurt in the general election [+3]	Bush will probably pick a governor [-1]	COKIE ROBERTS RANK: 7	Gore's speech will touch on Vietnam and the environment [+1]	
"You...bet Bush versus Vice-President Gore in the homestretch." [+1]				DAN RATHER RANK: 8
McCain will win with a slight margin [+1]	Cheney will be effective [+1]	Gore will pick Lieberman, and he'll attack Hollywood at convention [+3]		
	Cheney will get a good going-over in the press [+1]	PETER JENNINGS RANK: 10	Republicans will fondly recall defeating Saddam Hussein [+2]	Most important debate since Kennedy-Nixon [-2]
Bush's real danger is being pushed into positions he'll regret [+1]			Bush will drop Colin Powell's message of inclusiveness after conventions [+2]	Most important debate since Kennedy-Nixon [-2]
Bush will win [-2]			Bush will get a 5-point bounce in the polls from the convention [+2]	
After primary: Bush will probably still be the nominee [+1]	Bet on Sen. Chuck Hagel [-2]	Gore will pick Mitchell or Sen. John Kerry [-2]		
"If the front-runner trips up in New Hampshire, he lands safely in South Carolina." [+3]	"Elizabeth Dole. [W]hoever they nominate for president, she's going to be the vice-president." [-3]	"[I]f...Florida's out of reach, choosing a Jew on your ticket is not politically expedient. It's politically stupid." [-3]	"[Gore's] speech is going to work because it is directly out of a poll." [+2]	
McCain will win in a very tight race [+1]	A Bush-Cheney ticket could backfire "big-time." [-1]		ELEANOR CLIFT RANK: 15	Bush can't lose the debates; it will at least be a draw [+2]
Press will go clamoring back to Bush if McCain loses nomination [-1]		Lieberman gives Gore cover [-1]		
	It will be either Gov. Tom Ridge or Cheney [+2]	Gore will pick Gov. Evan Bayh [-3]	After convention: Now Bush will go on the attack [-2]	Debates matter because the campaign will hinge on likability [-2]
McCain will win by 5 or more points [+3]	Bush will pick McCain [-3]	Gore will pick Sen. Bob Kerrey [-3]	Gore will go populist at the convention [+2]	
Whoever wins, it will be close [-2]	If Bush picks Cheney, Democrats will "trash him for buckling to the religious right." [+1]	Gore will pick Kerry [-3]	The Al-and-Tipper kiss sealed the deal in winning over swing voters [-2]	CHRIS MATTHEWS RANK: 19
	Cheney's conservative voting record won't be an issue [-2]	Lieberman will serve to remind people of Clinton [-1]	Gore's class warfare won't sell [-1]	
	Cheney won't really help the campaign [-1]	Lieberman's press honeymoon won't last [-1]	Republicans won't let Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, or Tom DeLay "anywhere near a microphone." [+2]	Debates are enormously important; many will tune in [-2]
	Bush will pick a pro-lifer [+1]	Gore will pick George Mitchell, William Cohen, or Gov. Angus King [-3]	Gore erased doubts about his woodenness and insincerity [-3]	Swing voters will watch; debates will make a difference [-1]
ROBERT NOVAK RANK: 23	After selection: "I don't think you are going to hear much of Dick Cheney in this campaign." [-2]	Lieberman probably won't invigorate Gore's ticket; he'll be ignored and forgotten [-2]	Bush won't mention Bill Clinton much in his speech [-1]	
McCain is likely to win [+1]				
Bush is likely to win; if McCain wins he won't repeat elsewhere [-3]		"Best guess" is Sen. Bob Graham [-1]	Populism is a loser for Gore [-1]	
	Bush will probably pick Ridge [-2]	Gore will pick Bayh [-3]	Protesters could outnumber delegates at the Democratic convention [-2]	Gore will win: "There isn't any other possible outcome." [-1]

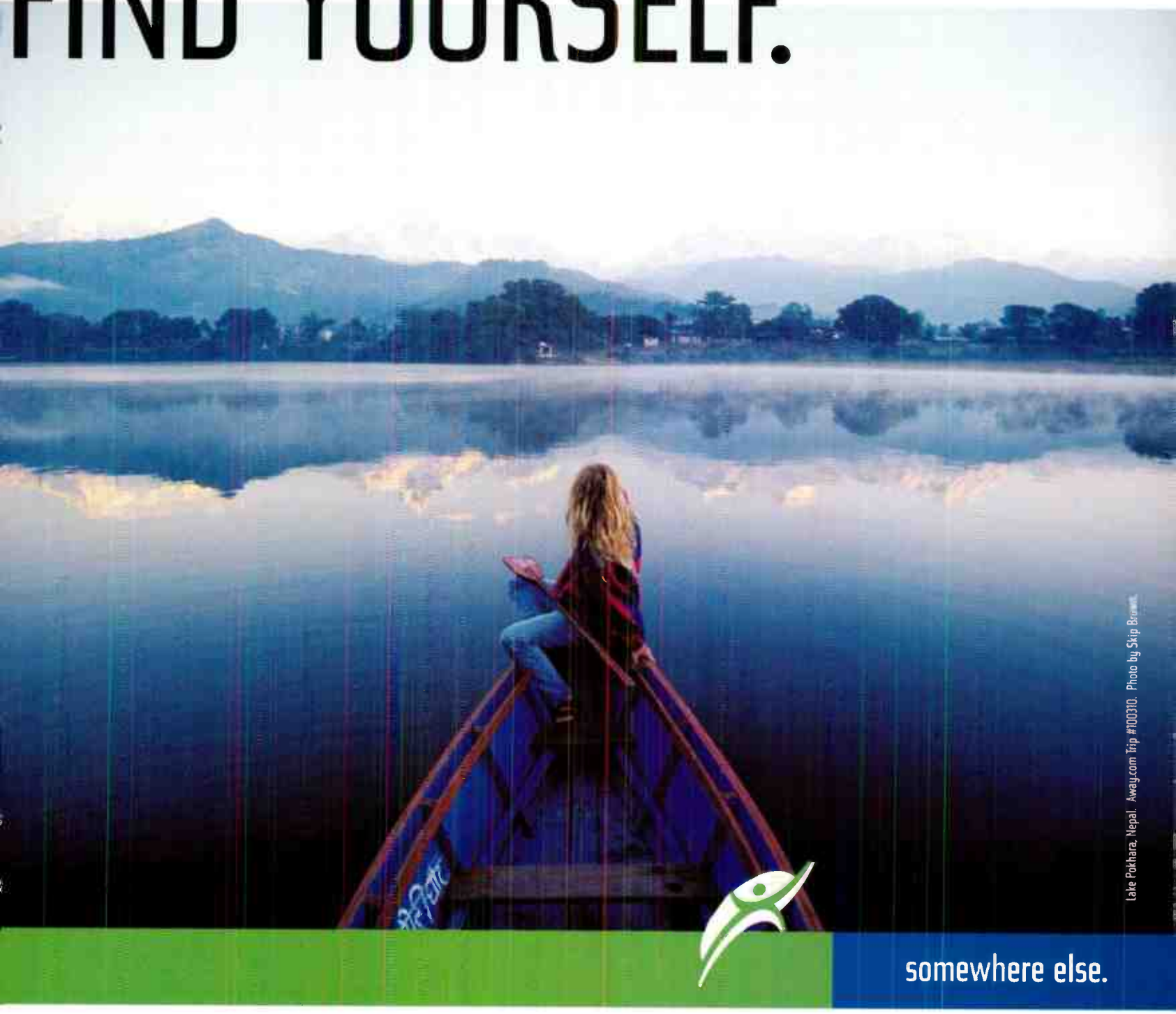
** JOHN McCAIN BEAT RUNNER-UP GEORGE W. BUSH BY AN 18-POINT MARGIN IN NEW HAMPSHIRE. BUSH WENT ON TO WIN SOUTH CAROLINA.

†THE BUSH-GORE DEBATES WERE WATCHED BY THE LOWEST PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN THE HISTORY OF TELEVISED DEBATES.

PUNDITS	HILLARY CLINTON'S SENATE RACE IN NEW YORK††	CONGRESSIONAL RACES Senate: GOP lost 4 seats House: GOP lost 2 seats	PRESIDENTIAL RACE Bush: 271 electoral votes, 48% of popular vote; Gore: 267 electoral votes, 48% of popular vote	PARTING WORDS OF WISDOM...
FRED BARNES	Chances are that Clinton will win [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 1 seat [-2] House: GOP loses 2 seats [+3]	Bush: 309 electoral votes Gore: 229 electoral votes [+1]	
MORTON KONDRACKE	Chances are that Clinton will win [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 1 seat [-2] House: GOP loses 2 seats [+3]	Bush: 309 electoral votes Gore: 229 electoral votes [+1]	
PAUL GIGOT	Clinton's alleged anti-Semitic slur won't hurt her [+1]		Bush will probably win [+1]	
MARGARET CARLSON	"She's going to win." [+2]	Senate: GOP loses 4 seats [+3]	Gore: 274 electoral votes Bush: 264 electoral votes [-1]	
GEORGE WILL			"The winner will be able to claim a robust mandate." [-3]	"[O]ur system is the most tested and vindicated of the world's methods of picking a chief executive."
CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER	"[W]hen [Lazio] crossed that stage in the debate, he lost. And that was a catastrophic error." [+2]		Bush: 274 electoral votes Gore: 264 electoral votes [+2]	"[T]hat kiss sexualized [Gore]...in a tame and controlled way. It gave him a touch of Clinton without the craziness."
COKIE ROBERTS		House: GOP loses "2 or 3" seats [+2]	Bush won't get 25 percent of the black vote [+1]	
DAN RATHER			It will be the tightest race since Kennedy-Nixon [+2]	"To the degree Lieberman's inclusion...can blunt [the] Republican attack, he will help Gore."
TONY BLANKLEY	Clinton will win by a hair [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 3 seats [-1] House: GOP loses 5 seats [-2]	Bush by "5 to 10 points" [+1]	
PETER JENNINGS			Bush must win Ohio [+1]	"John McCain [is] having a...good day. The polls are not... closed. We won't project winners until they are."
TOM BROKAW				"This is the sports equivalent of...Super Bowl time [and] your debut at the Metropolitan Opera House."
JOHN McLAUGHLIN	Clinton has a 7 in 10 chance of winning [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 2 seats [-2]	Bush wins in a "blowout" by 7 points [+1]	"Is the reason Gore lost the debate...that he was over-coached and he began to look like a seething Buddha?"
AL HUNT	"Hillary is going to win." [+2]	Senate: GOP loses 4 seats [+3] House: GOP loses 8 seats [-2]	Gore: 277 electoral votes Bush: 261 electoral votes [-1]	
DICK MORRIS	"[I] think [Rick] Lazio is...more likely to win it than Hillary." [-1]	Senate: GOP loses 2 seats [-2]	Bush will win popular vote and Electoral College [+1]	
ELEANOR CLIFT	Clinton will win in a "very, very tight" race [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 3 seats [-1] House: GOP loses 8 seats [-2]	Gore: 273 electoral votes Bush: 265 electoral votes [-1]	
CLARENCE PAGE	Clinton will win, barely [+1]	Senate: GOP loses 4 seats [+3] House: GOP loses 7 or 8 seats [-2]	Bush wins popular vote; Gore wins Electoral College [-3]	"Most kids look in Daddy's cabinet and they find liquor. George W....finds a vice-president."
SAM DONALDSON			Gore will win [-2]	Asked who will win: "I can tell you, the guy who gets the most votes."
BILL KRISTOL	Lazio will win [-2]	House: No change [-2]	Gore: 317 electoral votes Bush: 221 electoral votes [-3]	
CHRIS MATTHEWS	Clinton will win [+2]	House: GOP loses 7 seats [-2]	Bush will win popular vote by 1 point, but Gore will win [-3]	On John McCain: "[I]f he wins, he'll win."
KATE O'BEIRNE	Lazio will win [-2]	Senate: GOP loses 2 seats [-2] House: GOP picks up 2 seats [-3]	Bush: 315 electoral votes Gore: 223 electoral votes [+1]	Gore's trouble with young single female voters: "[He] reminds them...of every bad blind date they ever had."
MARK SHIELDS		Senate: GOP loses 5 seats [-1] House: GOP loses 10 seats [-2]	Gore: 297 electoral votes Bush: 241 electoral votes [-3]	"[Al Gore is] terminally cautious and circumspect and a base toucher and caressing the erogenous zones of the body politic."
GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS	Clinton won't run in the first place [-3]	Senate: GOP loses 2 seats [-2]	If it's a close election, expect legal challenges to the vote: "Bring the lawyers in." [+2]	
ROBERT NOVAK	Lazio will win [-2]	Senate: GOP loses 1 seat [-2] House: GOP loses 1 seat [-1]	Bush: 308 electoral votes Gore: 230 electoral votes [+1]	On Hillary Clinton: "I don't scare easily, but she scares the hell out of me. That's Madame Dufarge."
MICHAEL BARONE	Lazio will win [-2]	Senate: GOP loses 1 seat [-2] House: No change [-2]	Bush by 6 points [+1]	
LAWRENCE O'DONNELL	Lazio will win [-2]			"[Lieberman is] the Jewish version of the Christian right, so he'll get all those evangelicals."

††HILLARY CLINTON WON BY A 12 POINT MARGIN

FIND YOURSELF.



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BOOKS

A photojournalist's memoir of love on the front lines • The business of translations • The media-circus life of Ring Lardner Jr. • Sports broadcaster Dick Schaap, up close and personal • *All the Pretty Horses*: re-covering when a book becomes a film • Television journalist Garrick Utley reminisces • 60 years of presidential inaugurations with *New Yorker* writer Philip Hamburger

OF LOVERS AND LENSES

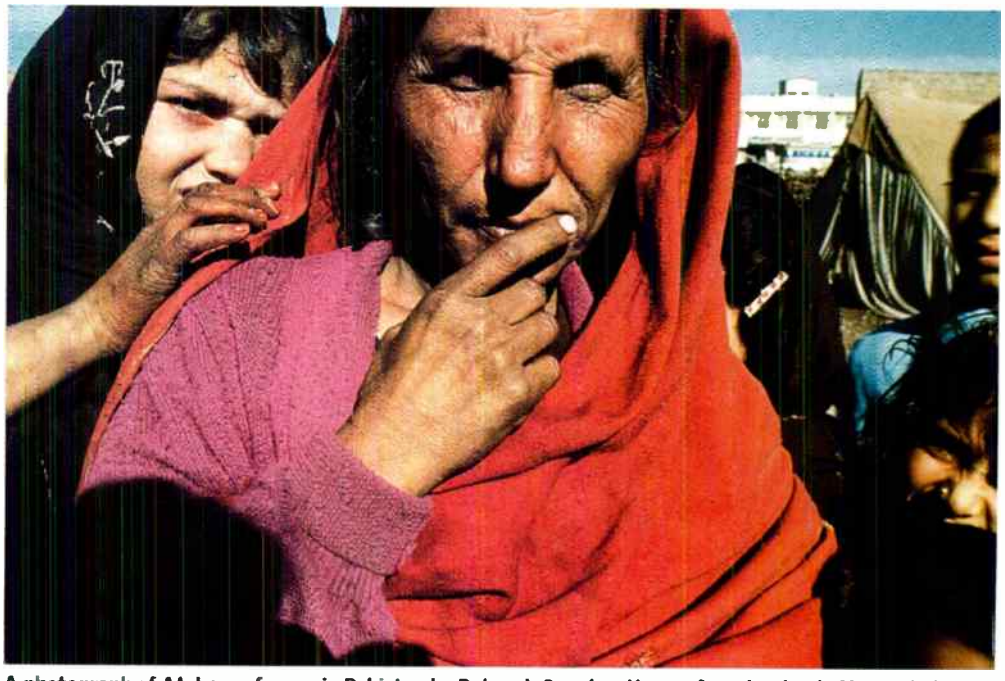
BY JUDITH SHULEVITZ

Photojournalism goes with sexual adventurism the way big-game hunting goes with colonial conquest. When I think of great photojournalists, Robert Capa, so dashing and daring and dead at 40, comes to mind, but so does Ingrid Bergman, the world-renowned beauty he seduced and abandoned. In the mythology of the profession, a photojournalist is a man who seeks scoops first, danger second, and sex third, each with the same intensity and urge to depart in the morning. Deborah Copaken Kogan is a woman who embraced this image wholeheartedly, not aiming to change anything about it except the rule that says only men get to act that way. That she should have pursued photojournalism and one-night stands only briefly before trading them in for marriage, motherhood, and a less risky line of work seems, somehow, inevitable. Being a woman does impose different rules and require other accommodations, and it isn't sexist—or Darwinian—to admit it.

That appears to be the thrust of Kogan's argument in *Shutterbabe: Adventures in Love and War* (Villard)—that being a photojournalist is no way for a grown woman to live. The book is Kogan's combined sexual and professional coming-of-age story, beginning with her undergraduate years at Harvard, when she used her camera as entrée to the netherworlds of prostitution and drugs in Boston; moving on to her apprenticeship in Paris as an agency and magazine photographer; and ending in full adulthood in her late twenties, when she was back in New York, married and with two children. By that time she had sold her cameras and become a producer for *Dateline*, working assiduously, if with some boredom, toward the female holy grail of flextime. When the book ends, NBC has refused to allow her to go part-time so that she can care for her children, and she has quit. This, presumably, is what gave her the leisure and incentive to write a memoir in her early thirties—an odd thing for a young photojournalist to do, and made even odder by the relative dearth of photographs in the book. But Kogan has plenty of war stories to fill it with and a style likable and honest enough to tell them well.

These are literally war stories, since Kogan broke into photojournalism by shooting in combat zones few other photojournalists were willing to enter. She starts her narrative with her best war story, in which, a year out of college, she hitched herself to a team of rebel Afghani mujahideen traveling through snowy mountains toward Kabul in time for the Soviets to surrender. (The year was 1989.) Not only did Kogan, who is short and skinny—and looked about 14 at the time—entrust herself to Islamic holy warriors she didn't know, she had never covered a real war before and had no idea what she was in for. The answer was sleeping in freezing caves, eating liquefied mutton fat, contracting dysentery, seeing men whose legs had been blown off by mines, and encountering babies likely to die. Then there was the difficulty of taking pictures through a *burka*—a body-length women's veil she describes as something like a Halloween ghost costume—and the horror of losing her tampons in the mountains, so that her menstrual blood was left to drip into the snow.

Kogan is nicely self-mocking about the mortifying details of being female in a war zone,



DEBORAH COPAKEN KOGAN/CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

A photograph of Afghan refugees in Pakistan by Deborah Copaken Kogan, from her book *Shutterbabe*

playing down her own undeniable, if at moments insane, physical courage. She's also eloquent about the way a photojournalist becomes possessed by the hunt for the perfect picture; like Kogan, I was an aspiring documentary photographer in college, and hers is the best description I have ever read of the strangely addictive pleasure of taking and making pictures: "I loved to press the shutter, to freeze time, to turn little slices of life into rectangles rife with metaphor....[I] loved to dip a naked piece of white photographic paper into a bath of developer and watch the image miraculously materialize, watch life, a moment, reborn." There's a chase-scene-like thrill to her "how I got this picture" accounts, especially when she includes the photograph (though she doesn't always).

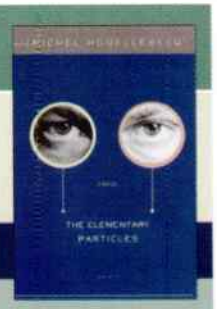
What's disconcerting about this book, though, is that the sheer love of adventure and photography doesn't seem to be a sufficient cause for Kogan's foolhardiness. As we put the pieces of her life together, we begin to suspect that she was in search of some other, more elusive emotional prize; she alludes to it in quasi-feminist terms as "a personal mission" for sexual equality, but I'm not so sure.

For example, Kogan wound up in Afghanistan not only because of her professional interest in the war but also as a result of her obsession with a gorgeous French photojournalist named Pascal. (That her experiences with men count more heavily for Kogan than her career is hinted at by the book's chapter titles: "Pascal" is the first, and the rest are also the names of men she loved or had flings with.) One night at a party in his Paris apartment, she and Pascal were flirting in the living room while his girlfriend cooked steaks in the kitchen. Pascal proposed that they go to Peshawar together so that he could take her "inside"—meaning into the hinterlands where the war was being fought. Kogan quickly said yes. Thereafter, playing the tough guy, she tries to pass off what is clearly an affair as a bit of mutually agreed-upon exploitation: She figured he had better contacts than she did and could afford to pay for a hotel room, and she

Author Kogan in Peshawar, Pakistan, 1989

BEHIND THE BOOK

THE BUSINESS



LOST IN TRANSLATION Only about 3 percent of books published in the United States each year were originally written in a foreign language; of those, most were hits abroad. Frenchman Michel Houellebecq, for example, is a literary star at home—he graced the cover of the Gallic edition of his novel (pictured at right with the U.S. edition beside it). Below are some recent titles whose American sales have yet to rival those in their homelands. KAJA PERINA

TITLE AND AUTHOR	ORIGINAL COUNTRY AND SALES	U.S. PUBLISHER, SALES OR FIRST PRINTING	NOTES
One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate, by Tom Segev	Israel (published in 1999), 65,000	Metropolitan Books (November 2000), first printing fewer than 15,000	Renewed violence in the Middle East and front-page attention in *The New York Times Book Review*—which later named it one of the best books of the year—sent this title back to press three times.
The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi, by Arthur Japin	The Netherlands (1997), 100,000	Alfred A. Knopf (November 2000), first printing 7,000	According to the author, the native success of his first novel—set in nineteenth-century West Africa, Indonesia, and Holland—reflects the Dutch desire to confront a colonial past.
The Elementary Particles, by Michel Houellebecq	France (1998), 300,000	Alfred A. Knopf (November 2000), first printing 20,000	The French are so in love with Houellebecq that a literary movement—*deprimisme*, or "depressivism"—has been coined for his oeuvre.
All the Names, by José Saramago	Portugal (1997), 70,000	Harcourt (September 2000), more than 30,000 sold	Saramago had five books published in English before breaking through stateside with *Blindness* in 1998, the year he received the Nobel Prize for Literature.
What We Don't Know About Children, by Simona Vinci	Italy (1997), 35,000	Alfred A. Knopf (June 2000), fewer than 5,000 sold	Vinci, who won Italy's Elsa Morante Prize for best first novel, writes of graphic sex and violence perpetrated by and on children; Italian outrage at the book was akin to America's reception of Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 novel, *American Psycho*.
Crazy, by Benjamin Lebert	Germany (1999), more than 200,000	Alfred A. Knopf (April 2000), 30,000 sold	The 16-year-old Lebert saddled *Crazy*'s protagonist with the author's own name and age—a decision he says he regrets. Nonetheless, Knopf played up his youth, calling the book an "amazing debut."
Caracol Beach, by Eliseo Alberto	Spain (1998), 100,000	Alfred A. Knopf (May 2000), fewer than 10,000 sold	The author, a Cuban poet and journalist, won the inaugural $175,000 Alfaguara Prize for Spanish-language fiction.
The Case of Doctor Sachs, by Martin Winckler	France (1997), more than 500,000	Seven Stories Press (November 2000), first printing 7,500	This doctor's novel (his first to be published in English) won the Prix du Livre Inter (a readers' choice award) and was made into a movie—honored at the Chicago International Film Festival—which has yet to find a U.S. distributor.

DEBORAH COPAKEN KOGAN/CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

couldn't. What's left unsaid is the fact that her end of the bargain consisted of sex. But she was not as firmly in control of her feelings—or his—as she claims to have been, and the relationship deteriorated to the point where he beat and nearly raped her, and left her to find her way "inside" on her own.

Kogan is not fully in control of the story as she tells it, either. One senses that she still doesn't understand why she was drawn to creeps like Pascal; this liaison is just one among several—there were also Aidan, Sean, Jack—that end in rape, near-rape, or some other form of violence.

She complains about the hypocrisy of sexual double standards, but even if Kogan were a man, one would suspect her of self-destructive tendencies. She went trustingly to hotel rooms with strangers, and specialized in sleeping with men who already had girlfriends. She doesn't appear to have thought too hard about the ethics of abetting cheating or of using men for professional ends. No self-professed feminist media professional would approve of a man exploiting a woman in that way; why brag about doing it to men?

Nor does Kogan grapple with the psychological implications of her need to entangle herself in potentially explosive sexual dynamics, particularly in foreign countries where sexual mores are fraught with pitfalls she barely seems able to understand. Her partners, meanwhile, come off as more confused than evil. Was Kogan naive, lacking self-respect, or just taking advantage of them? They dealt with their discomfiture the way creeps usually do—by becoming abusive.

Other photojournalists, reporters, and documentary filmmakers—female and male—protect themselves, or at least avoid unduly threatening situations while on dangerous assignments. Kogan either couldn't or wouldn't, which may be a better explanation for why she left the profession than its bias against women with husbands and children—though photojournalism probably is hard to reconcile with family life. Not to worry, though. Kogan has a bright—and, one hopes, safer—future ahead of her as a writer. ■

Ring Lardner Jr. (left) with attorney Robert Kenny at their appearance before HUAC, October 30, 1947

HOLLYWOOD ONE

BY ELIZABETH HELFGOTT

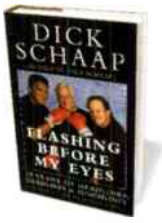
Until his death, last November, screenwriter Ring Lardner Jr. was the last surviving member of the blacklisted group known as the Hollywood Ten. His posthumous autobiography, *I'd Hate Myself in the Morning* (Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books), is charming and affecting, more so than you might expect a(nother) blacklist memoir to be. By now, we think, we are well aware of the disreputableness of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the studio executives who kowtowed to it, and we know all about those who defied the committee, ending up in jail, out of work, or both. (Lardner falls into the last camp and is typically wry about the experience: "Ever since my days as a convict, I have urged anyone considering a career as a lawbreaker to stick to breaking Federal ones, since the accommodations are so measurably superior to those at state or local jails.") Lardner's book demythologizes the Hollywood blacklist era and himself; he tells his life story to explain history, not to vilify, vindicate, or posture.

Lardner came from a literary family; his father, the renowned humorist Ring Lardner, introduced his four sons to the writing life and such luminaries as Dorothy Parker and F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. All of the sons became reporters and, to varying extents, leftists. Ring Jr., who wrote his first feature for the newly launched *Esquire* magazine in 1933 (when he was 17), worked at the New York *Daily Mirror* before making the leap to Hollywood in 1935. His biggest pre-HUAC achievement was the screenplay (cowritten with Michael Kanin) for *Woman of the Year*, for which he shared the 1942 Academy Award. (He won his second Oscar for *M*A*S*H*, in 1970.)

Lardner was involved in the Screen Writers Guild, the Anti-Nazi League, and the Communist Party, among other activist organizations. In 1947, these associations landed him in front of HUAC. When asked the infamous question "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" Lardner replied, "I could answer it, but if I did, I would hate myself in the morning." This statement made Lardner something of a legend, but in this memoir he strongly resists any such regard. He would far prefer to be remembered for his writing and wishes only that he'd been able to do more. ■

A SPORTING LIFE

BY STEPHEN TOTILO



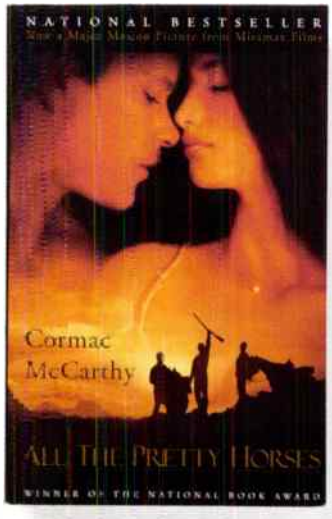
Veteran sports reporter Dick Schaap, after an amazing run of 33 books—including 12 "as told to" autobiographies (those of Bo Jackson, Joe Namath, Joe Montana, and Hank Aaron, among others), several on the Green Bay Packers, and a dozen-odd other works—has finally written his own memoir, *Flashing Before My Eyes: 50 Years of*

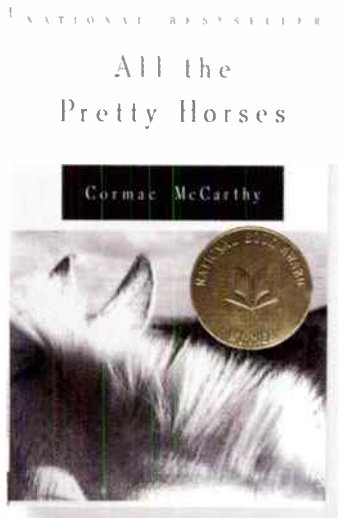
FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

When a novel gets made into a movie, publishers commonly reissue the paperback using the film's promotional poster for the cover, as they did with Cormac McCarthy's 1992 classic *All the Pretty Horses*. (The film adaptation opened in December.) Regardless of a book's critical acclaim, its incarnation as a movie brings "a new audience" for it, says Russell Perreault, vice-president for publicity at Vintage Books, publisher of the movie tie-in edition of *All the Pretty Horses* (near right). "It doesn't matter if the film was a great film or a bad film or whether it was well received....all the exposure the movie gets often helps book sales. When we did *Dead Man Walking*, the book sales in the first two years were something like 20,000 in paperback," recalls Perreault. "Then the movie came out, and in the first two months we sold 200,000 copies. It can be that dramatic."

Chip Kidd, the designer of the book's original cover (far right), says he was looking for something ambiguous, something that "felt" like the book. "Sort of an alchemic instant where it all kind of blooms into being." Kidd is wary of having his original cover image replaced with the movie art. "Hallmark ghetto," he says, but acknowledges that the repackaging is more market-driven than aesthetic.

JOSEPH GOMES





Matt Damon and Penelope Cruz grace the movie tie-in (left, beside the original).

[TOP: BYRON ROLLINS/AP PHOTO; BOTTOM: PETER BERSON]

Headlines, Deadlines & Punchlines (William Morrow & Company).

Schaap, who hosts *The Sports Reporters*, ESPN's version of *Meet the Press*, and critiques theater in the predawn hours on ABC, has a long and busy journalistic history. At 15 he was a reporter at a local Long Island paper. His boss there was Jimmy Breslin and the two started a lifelong friendship before working at the *New York Herald Tribune*, where Schaap's colleagues included New Journalists Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese.

His style is that of the consummate networker—Schaap's drive, as he calls it, is "to collect people." Throughout *Flashing Before My Eyes*, he's in cocktail-party mode, and the laid-back conversational style suits him. An observant reporter—who serendipitously wound up in Watts when the riots broke out and in Ethel Kennedy's basement when she was attacked by a "raccoon-like creature"—Schaap turns out to be a sportswriter with a lot more to talk about than sports, and a journalist who sees buddying up with a subject not so much as a conflict of interest as a job well done. He describes his life in the media accurately when he declares, near the end of the book, that "[s]ix degrees of separation is an exaggeration." ◘

ON CAMERA

BY JULIE SCELFO

Garrick Utley

Television journalist Garrick Utley's memoir, *You Should Have Been Here Yesterday: A Life in Television News* (PublicAffairs), follows, chapter by chapter, the progress of his long career. Utley begins with his first visit to an NBC newsroom, in 1947, when, as a 7-year-old awed by the mechanisms of radio, he was shocked to find out that the woman behind the voice of his favorite Aunt Jemima commercial was actually a "middle-aged, skinny, white bandannaless imposter."

Luckily for readers, Utley maintained his fascination with journalism and the media throughout his career: first in the early sixties as a $62.50-a-week office assistant for John Chancellor in Brussels, then as a war correspondent in Vietnam, then as an anchor in New York, working in the company of such TV titans as Walter Cronkite and Tom Brokaw. In addition to telling great stories about the excitement of international reporting—on everything from war and disease to expensive food, drugs, and even topless women—Utley, now a contributor to CNN, smartly weaves into this book commentary on the seismic changes in journalism and television that have paralleled his career.

Given the overabundance of existing media memoirs, this isn't a must-read, but it's well written, thoughtful, and refreshingly unpretentious. ◘

BEHIND THE BOOK

AUTHOR Q&A

INAUGURATION DAYS

Philip Hamburger is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, which has published his profiles and pieces about politics, music, and foreign affairs since 1939. He has written eight books, including *Friends Talking in the Night*, a selection of 60 years of his work. Hamburger's newest book, *Matters of State* (Counterpoint), collects his political writings, including his famous "Talk of the Town" pieces on presidential inaugurations, which he has covered since he began his career. Here, Hamburger discusses his new book.

You wrote about seeing FDR's first inauguration in 1933, and how you didn't have a ticket and sat in a tree.

I was still in college, thus the tree-climbing. It turns out, of course—it was not a deliberate metaphor, but it is a metaphor—that the entire country was up a tree. There was a gorgeous redhead in the tree and we became very, very good friends, and there was a woman in rags, and there was an old man wearing tweed. It was the terrible depth of the Depression. That was my first inauguration. Then Truman came along, and I happened to have a very, very good friend who worked in the State Department. We were very close friends, and as a result of that I had some pretty good access. We got wonderful seats and went to the Inaugural Ball. Then I got to know Harry Truman.

Philip Hamburger at home in New York

Which of the pieces in *Matters of State* is your favorite?

One of the pieces that I like best is about the first Nixon inauguration. [I wrote,] "There was a great flurry of motorcycles, and sirens, and revolving red lights, and the President-elect swept out of the driveway, trying to communicate with a small knot of people gathered on the street, his face almost pressed against the window of his limousine as he waved and waved again, and then he was gone....The White Tower [restaurant] across the street was warmer in spirit. There was a sense of skill here, a wonderment that the dark-skinned lady in charge of the sizzling grill knew precisely what she was doing every single moment with her patties of meat." That to me is America. People get up every day and do their jobs. You're doing your job now; I'm doing my job now. And I was so impressed with this extraordinary skill with the hamburger! It was fabulous just to watch somebody do their job. That's life! Life isn't Sam Donaldson, George Stephanopoulos, punditry. Life is work. People doing their jobs.

How has politics changed since the introduction of television?

I wrote about both the Democratic and the Republican conventions in 1952. There's no question that those were the last ones in which the people really saw anything [on television] that took place. We don't see anything anymore. Now it's all prearranged; it's all set up. You know who the nominee is going to be long before the convention. When you had something like Eisenhower fighting Taft, or you had Kennedy fighting all kinds of other people, you didn't have the foggiest idea who was going to be nominated. Now it's all cut-and-dried. I once wrote, "I am willing to wager a new Philco refrigerator, complete with cheese keeper, against a Westinghouse ice tray that the 1952 Republican National Convention will henceforth be known as the Television Convention."

You also once said that television brought a sense of transparency to politics.

I was dead wrong! I thought it was going to be a force for real good, for participation. It's worked out so that if you don't have the money you can't run for office, and this might have something to do with the quality of some of the people who are running.

What specific effects do you think television has had on politics?

Well, I think it had a tremendous effect. It reduces, to begin with, the magnificence of the conventions. It turned what was a strictly political event into an entertainment event. And this is very serious. The idea that you would vote for somebody because he is cute on Jay Leno's program, or on Letterman's program—it's bewildering. We turn it into a popularity contest. And of course it's dangerous to democracy because you don't get talking about life-and-death issues. You can't blame television for it. If we're going to elect a Nixon twice, we did it. The American people did it.

What about the explosion of punditry?

All these pundits take themselves so goddamn seriously! It's counter-democratic to begin with. It seems to me that you assume in a democracy that anybody who is old enough to vote is old enough to make up their own mind and doesn't have to be told by a columnist or a pundit. The biggest creeps of all, and they really are national menaces, are these Sunday pundits on television. I don't think they're as important as they do. They're all selling chewing gum, and Ex-Lax, and...

Books?

Books, yes. Big advances. I don't think guys like Cronkite and Murrow took themselves that seriously. John Chancellor was a good friend of mine, and he didn't take himself seriously. They're really impressed by themselves.

Why do you watch them?

I watch them because I'm so goddamn curious about everything. I can't stop. It's a kind of disease. There's no question that the press is in trouble with gossip instead of information. If you lose the sense of information in a democracy, you're lost.

What's the best advice an editor ever gave you?

[*New Yorker* founding editor] Harold Ross said to me, "Never go cosmic on me, Hamburger." And that avoids punditry. He meant it. Just stick to the facts, man!

ANDY YOUNG

UTLEY: SIGRID ESTRADA; HAMBURGER: ANNE HALL

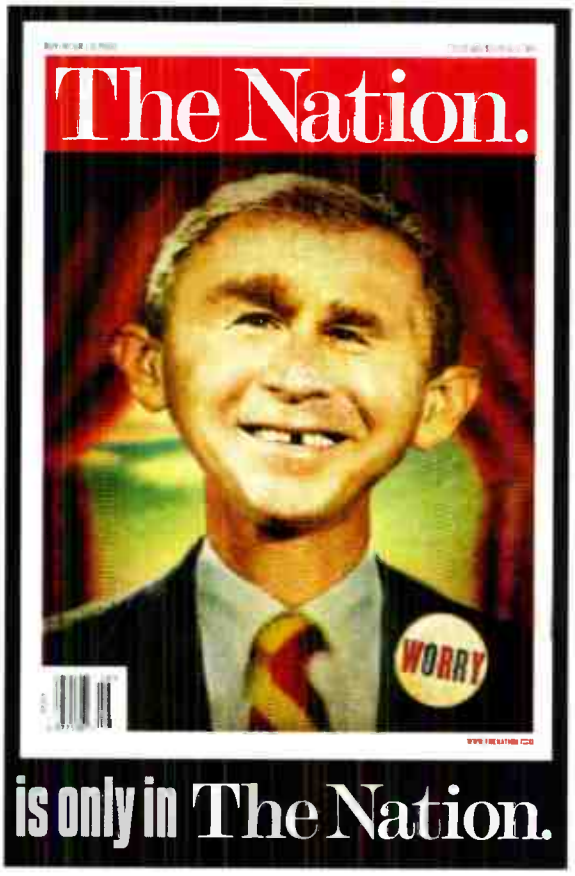
WHAT THE MEDIA ISN'T TELLING YOU

About Bertelsmann's Hidden Nazi Past In an exposé trumpeted coast to coast, *The Nation* revealed that Bertelsmann - the largest book publisher in the U.S. - has carefully hidden its stalwart complicity with the Third Reich.

About the Secret History of Lead In an exhaustive special report, *The Nation* showed how General Motors, Standard Oil and Du Pont colluded to make and market gasoline containing lead - a deadly poison - although there were safe alternatives. Abetted by the US government, they suppressed scientific evidence that lead kills. Still sold in countries all over the world, leaded gasoline continues to poison the planet.

About *The Wall Street Journal* Contrary to its self-assessment as "the world's most important publication," Gore Vidal noted for *The Nation* "just how unknown this cheery neofascist paper is to the majority of Americans."

About Arts Funding As columnist Katha Pollitt wrote, "the right-wing attack on the National Endowment for the Arts is playing to a small, if ferocious, constituency. Contrary to stereotype, Americans *like* the arts, and the more access they have to them, the more they like them."



About The Battle in Seattle. "Seattle was indeed a milestone of a new kind of politics. Labor shed its nationalism for a new rhetoric of internationalism and solidarity. Progressives replaced their apologetic demeanor of the past twenty years with confidence, style and wit."

About The Battle Beyond Seattle. As William Greider put it in his debut as *The Nation*'s national affairs correspondent, "Arrogance designed the WTO; arrogance will doubtless defend it. In the meantime, the WTO can serve as a splendid rallying point for popular resistance."

About The F.B.I. An intensive investigation for *The Nation* turned up everything from slovenly casework to massively skewed priorities. Example: Number of convictions for health and safety violations against employees in a single year: one. Number of telephone taps: 1.3 million.

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A PUBLISHING ODD COUPLE

A feisty muckraker broke a story helping the cause of an ex–Morgan Stanley analyst embroiled in a racially charged clash with his firm. Now they're in business together—just the latest twist in a twisted tale. By Abigail Pogrebin

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

Black Star's office is sweltering on this crisp November day, and the ceiling is collapsing. "They're going to fix it," says Allimadi, the paper's founder and editor in chief, a soft-spoken 38-year-old who, despite the heat, looks cool in a simple brown turtleneck. It's a wonder the floor isn't sagging along with the ceiling, considering the volume of books, papers, and boxes Allimadi has crammed into this tiny space; there are teetering piles of files and clothing wedged around his bed, two televisions (one tuned to CNN), a computer, a printer, and a phone. There's no place to sit but the bed, where Ben Otunu, the paper's business manager and an associate publisher, is perched on a ratty brown blanket, hunched over the computer.

It seems a ramshackle operation, but Allimadi says he wants a "big-impact paper," one that will right wrongs. He sees journalism as missionary work; the soul of *Black Star*, he says, is each story that he believes the mainstream newspapers neglect or ignore. Allimadi's proclaimed sense of journalistic duty and responsibility is perhaps attributable to his upbringing; his politically active Ugandan family moved to Tanzania to escape Idi Amin's regime and landed in America in 1980. Allimadi went to Syracuse University before graduating from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism in 1992. "He could have written his own ticket with the demand for African-American and Latino students coming out of the J school," says Columbia journalism professor Samuel G. Freedman, who speaks admiringly of Allimadi. But Allimadi had his eye on *The City Sun*, a black weekly newspaper, now defunct, whose budget at the time was too slim to offer a full-time position. So he contributed to the publication while interning at *The Journal of Commerce* and *The Wall Street Journal* before doing legwork for *The New York Times* (a freelance position that involved hanging out at crime scenes to try to get scraps of information). In 1995, *The City Sun* found the money to bring him on staff; he eventually became its deputy editor.

BLACK STAR'S TABLOID-READY ARTICLE PUT THE PAPER IN THE NEWS—AND MIGHT CHANGE ITS FORTUNES PERMANENTLY.

At the *Sun*, Allimadi says, he learned the kind of reporting that he wants to make the hallmark of *The Black Star News*. "*The City Sun* actually broke news," he says, contrasting it—perhaps grandiosely—with the 91-year-old *Amsterdam News*, the venerable New York African-American weekly, which, he claims, "does a lot of fluffy stuff and press releases and photos of people smiling." (*The Amsterdam News*'s publisher and editor in chief, Elinor Tatum, notes that "the African-American community does so many positive things, and if we weren't to cover it, no one else would.") *The City Sun*, says Allimadi, was different, not just a blind cheerleader for the African-American community: "It was trying to draw in the younger reader who did not see everything in strictly black and white, and who was willing to criticize black leaders who the paper thought were not delivering....I don't want my readers to be 'Amen' types. I want them to broaden their scope."

When the *Sun* folded in 1996 for lack of funds, Allimadi decided he'd start his own paper. "I think that speaks to his commitment," says Freedman, who adds that Allimadi clearly wasn't interested in joining the biggest paper or securing the largest salary. Freedman says that he'll never forget Allimadi's master's thesis on print media's coverage of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s and before. From *The New York Times*'s archives, Allimadi had unearthed wire cables—many laced with offhand racist remarks—between the correspondents and their editors in New York. "It was really an absolutely amazing piece of work," says Freedman.

In 1996, Allimadi made a fund-raising plea to some 50 wealthy African-Americans (including Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan) in which he sought seed money to found a successor to *The City Sun*. The only people to respond were Bill and Camille Cosby, who pledged an initial $10,000 and, according to a spokesperson for the Cosbys, have continued to give the same amount each year. (Allimadi and the Cosbys have never spoken personally.) But Allimadi was never able to find significant financial support for the privately held paper, and after three years, *The Black Star News* remains an obscure, one-man show. Aside from serving as its primary writer and editor, Allimadi is also the paper's design director, ad sales rep, and production editor. He gets occasional help from his friends from journalism school and *The City Sun*, many of whom write for free or for a nominal sum of $75 to $100.

The Black Star News, a $1-per-issue weekly that, according to Allimadi, has a 15,000-copy print run (the paper's official circulation numbers aren't audited, but Allimadi claims that 60 percent of the copies are bought), does carry a smattering of ads—for a downtown boxing gym and a lawyer hawking his malpractice expertise—but the amount is not significant enough to make the paper profitable. Its 1999 operating expenses were $350,000, and when the paper's bank account gets low, as it does every six months or so, Allimadi takes a "day job" writing for technology magazines. One can't help feeling that Allimadi is more of a bona fide journalist than *The Black Star News* is a bona fide newspaper.

The kinds of articles Allimadi typically researches and publishes in *The Black Star News* are generally less sensational than the tabloid-ready piece that put his paper in the news and might change its fortunes permanently. *Black Star* has published a series about a white New York Port Authority officer who claims he was fired when he tried to expose his fellow officers' racial profiling. Allimadi chronicled what he found to be the bias in the mainstream media's reporting on Africa, the story he began documenting in his journalism school thesis in the early nineties, for which he won the school's award for best essay on an international topic. He reported on the confidential proposal written by the high-profile Washington, D.C., law and lobbying firm Patton Boggs LLP, which offered its services—privatizing key companies, improving international public opinion, even "opportunities to overturn trade sanctions"—to the corruption-plagued Nigerian government.

In 1998, *Black Star* had its biggest scoop:

Photographs by Erin Patrice O'Brien

Milton Allimadi, left, and Christian Curry in Allimadi's apartment (which doubles as *The Black Star News*'s office). Curry will become the paper's new publisher.

documentation that securities giant Morgan Stanley Dean Witter had paid an informant who provided information that suggested Christian Curry, an African-American employee the firm had recently fired, appeared to be taking illegal measures to embarrass Morgan Stanley and buttress his potential discrimination case against the company.

Black Star's scoop didn't spark coverage from mainstream newspapers, but Curry was paying attention. Suddenly, his suit had new ammunition. "My attorneys learned a lot from *The Black Star News*," Curry says.

After two years of legal wrangling, Morgan Stanley announced last September that it had reached an agreement with Curry. The firm would make a $1 million donation to the National Urban League, but Curry himself would not be compensated.

Ten days later, however, the *New York Post* reported that "various sources" put Curry's settlement with Morgan Stanley in the neighborhood of $20 million. *The Black Star News* reported it as even higher: $29.7 million.

Morgan Stanley's official press release, however, includes a statement from Curry acknowledging that "[w]hile I will receive no payment, I am pleased with the result," and the firm's current spokesman, Raymond O'Rourke, insists that's accurate. "Christian Curry got nothing," O'Rourke says flatly. "That was true then and remains true today." An in-house memorandum to the entire staff from Morgan Stanley's chief legal officer states it even more bluntly: "Mr. Curry has not and will not receive one cent. In short, the firm gave no money to Mr. Curry....No ifs, ands or buts about it."

But a source familiar with the agreement suggests that Morgan Stanley circumvented any direct payment to Curry by compensating three other litigants, all of whom were also suing the firm for discrimination in actions filed shortly after Curry's, and all of whom were also represented by Curry's attorney, Benedict Morelli. This source contends that Morgan Stanley paid a large sum to settle the other cases, leaving it up to Morelli to parcel out the money among his clients. A condition of the agreement, the source says, required that Curry state publicly that he received nothing from Morgan Stanley and that Morelli state that he had determined Curry's discrimination case against the firm was groundless. The source explains that such an arrangement would allow Morgan Stanley to claim "complete vindication" (as the firm did in its press release), as well as maintain that it paid Curry nothing. Morelli would not return four calls seeking comment, but when Morgan Stanley's O'Rourke is asked if Curry was compensated through his attorney, he denies it adamantly. When asked whether Morelli was paid a lump sum to compensate the three other litigants with suits against Morgan Stanley, O'Rourke declines to answer. "No comment on that in terms of that settlement or those settlements," he says.

"CHRISTIAN CURRY GOT NOTHING," SAYS A SPOKESMAN FOR MORGAN STANLEY. "THAT WAS TRUE THEN AND REMAINS TRUE TODAY."

As strange as Curry's tangled lawsuit and apparent subsequent settlement are, what happened next is even more bizarre. Last October, Curry announced that he was purchasing a majority of the stock in *The Black Star News* for a reported $2 million. Nearly two years after Allimadi started researching Curry's story, writer and subject are on their way to working together as editor and publisher.

***Black Star*'s small office. Editor Milton Allimadi says that although it seems ramshackle, he wants a "big-impact paper."**

IT'S A RAINY AFTERNOON at the swanky Jean Georges restaurant on Central Park West, and Curry, who is 26 and a lanky six feet two inches, shows up sporting a large diamond-stud earring and looking suave. He has a boyish, pouty face and a confident swagger, and tends not to make eye contact. In articles about his case in *New York* magazine and *Newsweek*, he came across as contrite, but now that his ordeal has ended, he's ebullient, eager to talk about everything except his settlement: his new private equity fund, his movie-producing ambitions ("Spike Lee may be interested"), and his upcoming party for Utah Jazz basketball player John Starks's college fund for disadvantaged youth.

Curry is accompanied by his equally buoyant publicist, David Granoff, who is trendily unshaven, wears sunglasses inside, and boasts of his clients Anna Nicole Smith and the supermodel Esther Cañadas. As Curry talks, Granoff nods approvingly, dipping in and out of the conversation between bites of his "egg caviar"—a lightly scrambled egg sprinkled with beluga caviar. They order glasses of champagne and Kir Royales and keep checking their cell phones for messages.

Some two years ago, though, Curry wasn't sipping champagne but was instead ruing a youthful indiscretion. While an undergraduate at Columbia, Curry—the Westchester County–raised son of a respected Manhattan surgeon—had posed nude (and aroused) for a photographer who told him he'd be able to help him launch a modeling career.

Three years later, in 1998, the photos resurfaced in the gay pornographic magazines *Playguy* and *Black Inches*, which were passed enthusiastically around Morgan Stanley's offices, where Curry had worked in the real-estate finance division for nine months. Five days after the pictures surfaced, Curry was fired. Morgan Stanley said Curry was fired for expense-account abuses—transgressions Curry did not deny at the time but, he claimed, were common within the firm. In press accounts, Curry maintained he was really fired because he is black and because the pictures' inclusion in gay magazines implied he was gay (Curry says he's not) and embarrassed Morgan Stanley. He notified the firm of his intention to sue for discrimination based on race and sexual orientation.

On August 20, 1998, Curry was arrested in a park near Grand Central Terminal and charged with five felony counts, including conspiracy and forgery. Curry paid $200 to a man Morelli has said Curry believed was a Morgan Stanley computer hacker whom, he'd been told by Charles Joseph Luethke, an old college acquaintance, had access to racist e-mails that existed in the firm's system and that might bolster Curry's discrimination case. But the "hacker" was really an undercover police officer whom Luethke had contacted. Luethke had approached Morgan Stanley with a tip that Curry was planning to plant racist e-mails in the firm's system; Morgan Stanley was aware of the sting. After Curry was arrested, Luethke sought compensation. Morgan Stanley wired $10,000 to an account to which Luethke had access.

Black Star was the first paper to report it: A few weeks after Luethke collected his fee from the firm, Luethke called Allimadi. The two men knew each other from Allimadi's *City Sun* days, when, in 1995, Allimadi had been the beneficiary of another Luethke tip. Allimadi

says Luethke is a slippery source but can't be completely dismissed. "The most annoying thing with him," complains Allimadi, "is every time you meet with him, he gives you little pieces of information, and in the process you end up buying him a meal."

Allimadi decided to feed Luethke on the cheap—"McDonald's mostly," says Allimadi with a laugh—and his source proved to be worth the burgers. "He had information only an insider could have," says Allimadi. "The question was how to prove it—how to prove this ex-employee [Curry] may have been set up. Someone had been paid to do the deed."

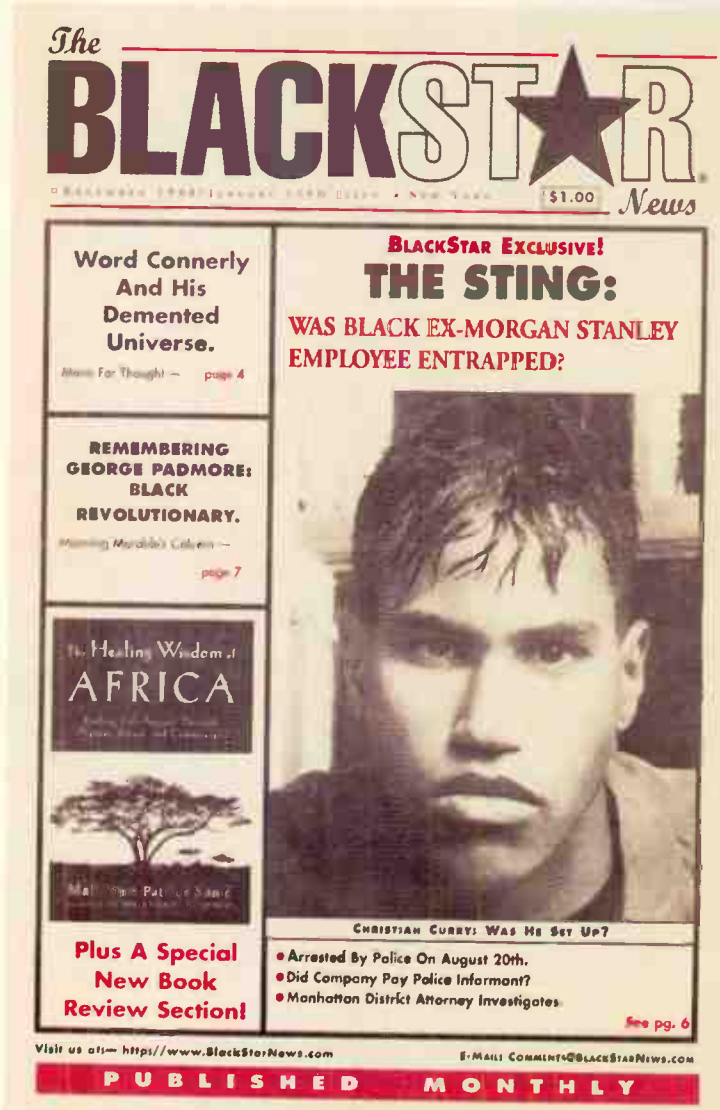
Luethke finally produced the smoking document. The fax, which was addressed to Luethke, revealed the amount of money that had been wired to him from Morgan Stanley as well as the name of the employee who arranged it. "He showed me an account number," Allimadi says, "where the money had been wired [from Morgan Stanley to Luethke] for the purpose of gathering information from Curry; but he held it at a distance and would not give it to me." Allimadi knew he needed a copy to fireproof his story. "At this point I can't say how I got it," says Allimadi carefully, "but I got it legally."

When Allimadi called one of Morgan Stanley's senior attorneys, Monroe Sonnenborn, and confronted him with evidence that Morgan Stanley had paid someone to discredit Curry, he thought for a moment Sonnenborn had hung up. "He sort of froze," recalls Allimadi. "To the point where I said, 'Hello? Are you still there?'" Allimadi ran his "exclusive" on the *Black Star News* website immediately.

To this day, few in the journalism and finance industries realize that Allimadi nailed the Luethke scoop first. *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other newspapers didn't report the Luethke angle until May 1999, five months after *The Black Star News* ran its story, when the Manhattan district attorney's office announced it was dropping all charges against Curry—ostensibly because Luethke's involvement and payment tarnished any potential prosecution.

Last fall, Curry and Morgan Stanley settled out of court, agreeing to drop their respective suits—Curry's discrimination claim and Morgan Stanley's counterclaim of fraud. The firm's chief legal officer, along with attorney Sonnenborn, resigned in the wake of the suit. Except for a mention in *The Wall Street Journal*, nobody credited *The Black Star News*.

"I NEED TO MARRY A LAWYER," Curry says jokingly. In fact, he's engaged to a law student, Marisa Wheeler (a.k.a. "Snuggles"). Though he says his two-year legal battle was "devastating," he shows no signs of its toll. He acknowledges the nude pictures were "stupid," but notes in the next breath that they're still available for viewing on a pornographic website. He honors the agreement not to discuss his settlement, but he's not at all shy about the trophies that suggest a newfound wealth: two Ferraris (when asked, he says the convertible cost $140,000, the hardtop $240,000), the $12 million apartment he claims he is bidding on in Trump International Hotel & Tower, a bigger engagement diamond for Snuggles ("I told her to stop wearing the other one," Curry says with a smile), his $100,000 donation to the John Starks Foundation (a spokesperson says Curry has delivered the check). "I'm just trying to pursue the American dream," he says by way of explanation, "by being another brotha' trying to get by." (He specifies how "brotha'" should be spelled.) Curry also says he's house-hunting in the Hamptons, and a December 14, 2000, *New York Post* item reported that he was interested in assuming the lease on a Southampton nightclub. (Despite Curry's laundry list of acquisitions and months of press, the only proof of purchase *Brill's Content* has seen is the bill of sale and registration in Curry's name for his candy-red convertible Ferrari.)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PUBLISHED MONTHLY

The *Black Star* edition that reported Luethke's involvement in the case

"MY WHOLE LIFE, I'VE WANTED TO OWN A NEWSpaper, have a column," Curry says. "I didn't realize how powerful the media was until I was in it all the time, until it was trashing me all the time." Now, of course, Curry himself is, in the words of the *New York Post*, a "newspaperman." For Curry, *The Black Star News* is a kind of status symbol, and he clearly considers himself a budding media mogul. "If you're really The Man or The Woman," he continues, "[one of the] two things you have to own in Manhattan is either a newspaper or a sports team." He bristles when *The Black Star News* is referred to as a black newspaper. "We're not going to be a typical black newspaper where we trash white people," he explains. "We're not just going to cater to blacks....I don't want to be just a little black newspaper up in Harlem."

Other than penning a regular column called "Curry's Corner" (his first one extolled the movie *Gladiator*), Curry says that he will have minimal involvement in the paper's editorial content; he'll leave that to Allimadi. "He's going to be controlling the editorial stuff," Curry adds. "He's much more experienced than me and knowledgeable and 12 years older than me....I don't have time to do the nitpicky stuff. I'm just going to be the publisher."

That seems to suit Allimadi. A year ago, he was paying off the paper's $50,000 deficit on his credit cards and printing his page proofs at Kinko's. The terms of the paper's sale, he says, call for Curry to pay him monthly installments of $72,916 over the next 24 months. (Allimadi explains that he and Curry arrived at the $2 million purchase price based upon the paper's projected future earnings and cash flow.)

"The investment comes with a huge relief," Allimadi says. "Running a one-man show almost killed me." Luethke, who arrives for a meeting with a silent entourage whom he won't introduce, implies that the *Black Star* deal may be murkier than either Curry or Allimadi is willing or able to discuss. A letter Luethke sends to *Brill's Content* suggests he is fond of conspiracy theories; indeed, he implies in con-

versation that Allimadi's coverage of Curry's case was his half of a quid pro quo exchange—in return, Curry would buy the cash-starved paper. Allimadi scoffs at this. "I was completely surprised at [Curry's] offer," he says, adding that Luethke's theory doesn't make sense: "How would I know what the outcome was going to be? How would I know there was going to be a settlement?"

Although Allimadi says he has received his first payment from Curry, he says the confidential nature of his agreement with Curry prevents him from showing *Brill's Content* any documentation of their business deal. He seems confident that the deal will proceed smoothly, and that the funding will permit him to concentrate on reporting, the very thing that he says led him to found *The Black Star News* in the first place. "This will now allow us to do some marketing and promotion for the paper, buy some equipment, move into an office, and expand distribution into New Jersey and Long Island," he says. "The investment still only represents only a third of what we need to become a competitive paper in New York in terms of hiring eight full-time reporters, two copy editors, a webmaster, and a sufficient number of advertising salespeople. But this is a beginning."

Curry wants to expand the political and metro sections and add more spice. "We're going to do a little gossip entertainment section," he explains, "because what people really want to read about, are, like, celebrities."

Allimadi is diplomatic when asked about Curry's plan. "It depends on how you define it," he says. "Will we have a 'Page Six' [the *New York Post*'s gossip column]? I doubt it." It's clear Allimadi needs to sharpen the paper's prose and give it more editorial heft; he seems to believe it's within his grasp. "I want this to be like the *Village Voice* of the 1960s in terms of every week people would be looking for what major scoop do they have this week?...[S]o we can be taken seriously in the political discussions in New York City and also seriously by major advertisers."

"I DON'T HAVE TIME TO DO THE NITPICKY STUFF," SAYS CURRY, WHO ADDS HE WILL HAVE MINIMAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL CONTENT. "I'M JUST GOING TO BE THE PUBLISHER."

WHEN CURRY ANNOUNCED he was buying *The Black Star News*, his press release trumpeted plans to move the operation to offices at the ritzy Trump address. Publicist Granoff joked that the restaurant Jean Georges, which is located downstairs, would soon be the paper's regular take-out joint. But Curry says Trump didn't want a commercial tenant (Trump's spokesperson says the building is purely residential), so Curry is now looking at spaces in Harlem.

Forty blocks from his new publication's current "offices"—which Curry visited for the first time for this article's photo shoot—the lunch at Jean Georges is winding down. Curry asks the waiter to tell "my friend Mr. Georges" he was in, apparently unaware that the owner's last name is actually Vongerichten. Curry's fiancée arrives with her mother, and Curry orders them champagne.

"We have time for a little dessert," Granoff says, glancing at his watch. Curry's next appointment of the day is with the Wilhelmina modeling agency, which Granoff says may sign Curry and Snuggles to their "celebrity division." Granoff adds that Calvin Klein's company expressed interest in getting Curry to pose for an underwear shot. A Calvin Klein spokesperson couldn't confirm it, but Granoff says the advertisement would have been one of those massive Times Square billboards, those giant photographs that loom above Morgan Stanley's midtown headquarters, aglow with its digital ticker tape. ■

dept. SOURCES

LOVE STORIES

Looking for love in all the wrong places? We identify the best sources for advice on romance and relationships. By Emily Chenoweth

Lonely? Smitten? Heartbroken? Searching for new love or trying to revitalize an old one? In the spirit of Valentine's Day, we've combed bookshelves, magazine racks, the Internet, and TV listings to bring you the best resources for advice on love and relationships—whether you seek poetic inspiration for a love letter, ruminations on the nature of human attraction, or lessons on how not to behave on a first date.

MAGAZINES/ NEWSPAPERS

ELLE

'ASK E. JEAN' COLUMN

(HACHETTE FILIPACCHI, $3.50/ISSUE)

Eight years ago, when *Elle* asked E. Jean Carroll to write a monthly advice column, it was, Carroll says, "like a Häagen-Dazs truck backing up to my house and delivering a barrel of my favorite flavor." Vibrant, funny, and outrageous: The words describe both the column and Carroll herself. She calls her readers "dolls," reminds them that "fate loves the fearless," and acknowledges that while "advice columns are one of the great achievements in the history of literature," not everyone requires "old Eeeee's self-improvement crap."

Though the problems may not differ much ("It's always about love," she says), the advice-seekers do, and Carroll insists that this is what makes her column so interesting rather than her rhetorically flamboyant but ultimately sensible counsel. Her best advice, she says, is often as simple as "Lighten up" and "Do what makes you happy." These suggestions may seem familiar, but they sound brand-new when they come in the voice of E. Jean, cheerleader of the female heart. (See "Method To Her Madness," by Katherine Rosman, *Brill's Content*, November 1999.)

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

'RELATIONSHIPS' PAGE

(SUSSEX PUBLISHERS, INC., $3.50/ISSUE)

With headlines such as "We're Animals in Bed," "The Ties That Unbind," and "Our Cheating Hearts" appearing over short, snappy articles, *Psychology Today*'s bimonthly "Relationships" page certainly demands your attention. Though it aims to address human relationships of all kinds, it tends to focus on romance. This, says news editor Carin Gorrell, is what people most want to read. The information is culled from recent psychological and medical research and is presented in a way intended to be both thought-provoking and practical. "We're basically a conduit for the people who are actually making discoveries in this field," Gorrell says. "We're offering useful information to our readers—something they can learn from, something they can apply to their own lives to better their relationships." Though the articles are too brief to fully explain their subject matter, they're eye-opening ("If you're planning to seduce your date at the end of a night out, don't see a slasher flick first," advises one; "Living with a partner before tying the knot may help you pay the rent, but it could cost you the relationship," another reports) and point you to further reading if you're so inclined.

'SAVAGE LOVE' COLUMN

BY DAN SAVAGE

(FREE, ARCHIVED AT THESTRANGER.COM)

The syndicated column "Savage Love" is not for puritans or prudes. It's about desire, confusion, betrayal, and sex, sex, sex—in other words, the messier side of amour. Its author is skeptical about his role as adviser to the distraught: "I don't have illusions about what it is that I do," Savage says. "The job of the column is to entertain the readers, make them laugh and titillate them, stuff them with schadenfreude and let them get on with their day." Despite this blasé assessment, people seem to love his advice. The column, which speaks to the widest possible audience—male, female, gay, straight, bisexual, questioning, celibate, and promiscuous—runs in 50 alternative weekly newspapers and prompts 500 letters a week. Savage does not make gentle suggestions, either in tone ("If you can't see that this wasn't a relationship you were in, but a prison, well, then you're past help") or in content ("If you wanna be a whore, be a whore"), and he can be quite irreverent. Yet he does stress the importance of long-term relationships. "I write about the relationships and the mess they really are," he says. "It's not cynical; it's realistic."

BOOKS

MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS

BY JOHN GRAY

(HARPERCOLLINS, 1992, $25)

It's the book that launched an entire industry, with more than half a dozen subsequent titles (*Mars and Venus on a Date*, *...in the Bedroom*, etc.), instructional videos, a Broadway show, and a television program. Gray's central argument is that men and women not only communicate differently but also "think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently." Hence, they hail from different planets. Though the Martian/Venusian analogy can be cloying, it allows Gray to weave a continuous narrative through the book—a kind of fairy-tale warp to the self-help woof—which makes for an interesting read. Gray also offers plenty of analysis, with salient points in large type, and practical advice, such as how to "score points with the opposite sex" (there's even a chart) and how to ask for support and get it. Gray's strict division of male and female characteristics is undoubtedly reductive, and some may initially balk at that, but he has tapped into an enduring cultural frustration, and even many skeptics have found in this book bits of wisdom about how men and women interact.

GETTING THE LOVE YOU WANT: A GUIDE FOR COUPLES

BY HARVILLE HENDRIX

(HARPERPERENNIAL, 1990, $14)

When Harville Hendrix got divorced 25 years ago, he was, ironically, teaching a seminar on marriage and family and working as a marital therapist. What

PETER BERSON

These sources of love advice get to the heart of the matter.

could have damaged his credibility, however, led instead to *Getting The Love You Want*, a book about "the theory and practice of becoming passionate friends."

The thesis: "Most issues in marriage really arise out of unresolved childhood issues with one's parents," Hendrix says. "And divorce doesn't solve anything—it just transfers the problems to the next relationship." Hendrix's Imago Relationship Therapy posits that we each have a mental image of our caretakers and that we will fall in love with someone who resembles that image—a person who will inevitably disappoint and hurt us unless we confront the reasons behind our attraction. The book analyzes the struggles of many couples and offers ten steps to help people "create a conscious marriage in which they are deliberately committed to helping each other finish their childhoods." In doing so, Hendrix says, "they will create the marriage of their dreams." That's a bold prediction, but Hendrix's belief in the powers of reason and effective communication is, in the end, both compelling and reassuring.

WING TO WING, OAR TO OAR: READINGS ON COURTING AND MARRYING

EDITED BY AMY A. KASS AND LEON R. KASS
(UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS, 2000, $15)

For those exploring the path to the altar, this anthology by the husband-and-wife team of Leon and Amy Kass is particularly appropriate. The 600-plus-page book is the couple's response to what they call the "cultural silence" surrounding courtship and marriage in the modern world. *Wing to Wing* offers readings and commentary to encourage reflection upon the "meaning, purpose, and virtues of marriage, and, especially, about how one might go about finding and winning the right one to marry." The included authors range from the canonical (Homer, Shakespeare, Rousseau, Kant) to the everyday (Judith Martin, a.k.a. Miss Manners; the Kasses themselves). It's a seminar in book form: Almost every selection—Darwin's list of the pros and cons of marriage, The Song of Songs, Robert Frost's poem to his daughter on the occasion of her wedding—is prefaced with questions for readers to consider. These are largely unobjectionable (and, indeed, often quite interesting), but readers may bristle at the Kasses' old-school attitudes—that, for example, feminism and contraception "hamper courtship and marriage" and that men are naturally wayward. Still, whatever you make of these arguments, the readings themselves offer insight on the subject of love.

LOVE LETTERS

EDITED BY PETER WASHINGTON (EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY POCKET POETS, 1996, $12.50)

For poetic inspiration, for examples of the pleasures and vagaries of love, or for sheer nosiness, one can engage in the time-honored tradition of reading other people's intimate correspondence. This charming little book offers more than 100 letters, dating from the 12th century to the 20th.

The well-known authors—poets, playwrights, kings—express their love with fervor, desperation, and wit. "I could never do without you," writes Zelda to F. Scott Fitzgerald, "if you hated me and were covered in sores like a leper." To Lord Alfred Douglas, Oscar Wilde pens: "You are the divine thing I want, the thing of grace and beauty." Some of the best letters are those that dispense with typical lovers' vocabulary, such as Evelyn Waugh's missive to Laura Herbert, the woman who would become his second wife, in which he contends that though he may be "moody & misanthropic & lazy," he is nevertheless a fine catch. The letters are organized by theme (invitation, flirtation, intoxication, confession, parting) and are not all uplifting. Journalist Dorothy Thompson refuses to give Sinclair Lewis the divorce he desires; Franz Kafka despairs of ever receiving another word from his beloved. This is a gem of an anthology, containing expressions of common feelings in uncommon prose.

WEBSITES

NERVE.COM

NERVECENTER

Those who prefer a participatory approach might want to log on to Nerve.com's NerveCenter message boards. Nerve.com was launched almost four years ago, to be, as the editors proclaim, the first "smart, honest magazine on sex." The message boards expand on that mission by providing a forum for discussion on a wide range of provocative subjects related to sex and relationships. On the "Public (and Private) Relations" board (which, unlike many of the other boards, is not primarily about sex), topics include "Flirting," "The Art (or Science) of Seduction," "Kiss and Tell," and "The Private Relations Free-for-All."

***Blind Date*'s Roger Lodge treats viewers to others' dating travails.**

Though participants often have curious screen names (skinwalker, prettykitty, jenuwin), the discussions—part contemplation, part confession, part commiseration—are thoughtful and articulate, and the advice is offered with warmth and consideration. "It's a special, tight-knit, supportive group," says Lorelei Sharkey, who directs NerveCenter with Emma Taylor. Both Sharkey and Taylor also offer their own clever suggestions via an advice column, "The Em & Lo Down: Advice from Near Experts." You can read the best NerveCenter exchanges in the website's bimonthly print spin-off, *Nerve* magazine. Check out, too, *Nerve*'s most recent book, *Nerve: The New Nude*, a collection of nude photography by contemporary artists, edited by *Nerve* cofounder Genevieve Field. Registration for NerveCenter is free and anonymous.

SALON.COM

'MR. BLUE' COLUMN BY GARRISON KEILLOR

If there were a school for advice columnists, the No. 1 rule might be: Establish an attitude—scathing, flip, New Agey, whatever—and cling to it. Everything else is secondary. Happily, this is a lesson Garrison Keillor never learned. He has no tonal shtick, and his weekly "Mr. Blue" column for Salon.com is a rare pleasure: love advice that's entertaining, useful, and varied. Mr. Blue generally responds to an equal number of men and women, and although most of these epistolary cris de coeur are love-related, he also counsels folks who are tired of living in Texas, exhausted by writer's block, or frustrated by an incompetent coworker. The heartbroken are encouraged to forget their anguish by cleaning their houses, making piles of money, or writing the obituary of their problematic lover. Mr. Blue sympathizes with shy geeks and aging virgins, and chides snobs and fools. Although his prose is colorful (he explains to a man who still wants to marry the woman who abandoned him that doing so would be comparable to "moving into a mobile home in Houston in August and boarding the rottweilers of recovering coke addicts"), it never masks the sincerity of the advice.

TELEVISION

BLIND DATE

SYNDICATED BY UNIVERSAL WORLDWIDE TELEVISION

Blind Date, said host Roger Lodge on a recent broadcast, is "the show that lets you experience the fun of a blind date without the fear of rejection." This statement isn't entirely accurate: The program tends to reaffirm that "blind date" and "fun" are generally incompatible, and although viewers don't risk rejection, there's plenty of opportunity to empathize with the participants. That said, *Blind Date*, which airs five nights a week in most of the markets where it is broadcast, is undeniably hilarious.

Each half-hour show features two couples: The typically twenty-something participants begin with solo camera time, in which they talk about themselves; next comes the date; and then, alone again, each shares his or her opinion of the evening. "It vicariously puts viewers into the experience of dating," says cocreator and executive producer Thomas Klein, "and through that process, they see everybody else's mistakes—and occasionally they also get to see people do things right." Watching two strangers eat dinner together is guaranteed to produce laughter, sympathy, and the occasional cringe. To maximize contestants' embarrassment—and our viewing pleasure—little pop-up icons and thought bubbles illustrate their reactions, their friends' gossip, and Therapist Joe's take on their behavior. In short: viewing recommended, participation not. Find local airtimes at blinddate.excite.com. ■

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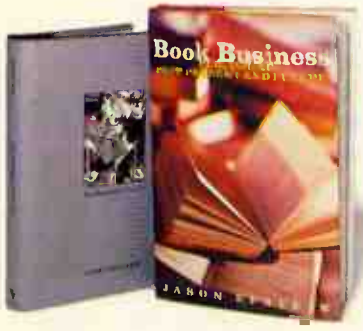
PUBLISH AND PERISH?

In the era of e-books and multimedia conglomerates, two controversial figures of American book publishing look back on that world's lively past and speculate on its future—if it has one. By James Atlas

The transformation of American publishing from an eccentric cottage industry into a huge global business dominated by a handful of conglomerates has produced many casualties, not least among them the figure of the brilliant, dotty "character" who haunted the halls of the great houses, creating legends as well as books. Although the old guard may have vanished, this season has yielded two slim but robust testimonies, by two noted publishing figures, recalling the glory years of American publishing—and they are as divergent in tone and style as their titles are similar. Jason Epstein's *Book Business* and André Schiffrin's *The Business of Books* constitute, respectively, an elegy and an epitaph. For both Epstein and Schiffrin, men of roughly the same generation—Schiffrin is 65, Epstein 70—publishing as we know it is dead; a new, potentially book-threatening order, dominated by book chains, the Internet, e-books, and other vaguely menacing developments, is at hand. Epstein, however, manages to conjure up a hopeful, phoenixlike scenario; his subtitle, *Publishing: Past, Present, and Future*, suggests that he thinks the industry *has* a future. Schiffrin isn't quite so optimistic; like a lot of old-timers in just about any business, he's convinced that publishing is over because he's over.

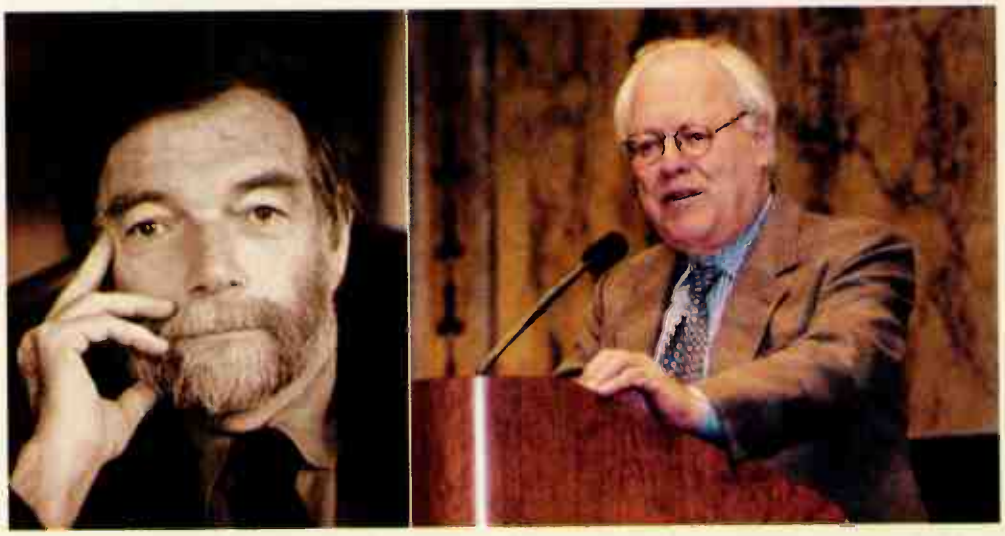


André Schiffrin's *The Business of Books* (left) and Jason Epstein's *Book Business* (right) assess the publishing worlds of yesterday and today.

Oddly enough, this stark divergence becomes manifest only toward the end of their books, when the two publishers offer their views on where the business is going. At the outset, their narratives are virtually parallel—in spirit if not in the biographical details. Both Epstein and Schiffrin apprenticed themselves to the trade in a time when postwar New York was suffused with infinite possibility, when the literary life had a sheen of wealth and power that has long since vanished from the scene. It was a world, Epstein recalls, in which publishers "stroll[ed] along Fifth Avenue on Sunday mornings in their topcoats and hats from Locke [and] dined at Chambord and the Colony" (not that I've ever heard of either, but the very names give off an air of starchy civility). To Schiffrin, it was a world in which his father, a Russian-born French refugee from Hitler's Europe, who had been a revered member of the Paris publishing firm of Editions Gallimard, could install himself in a Georgian townhouse on Washington Square and help start Pantheon Books. And authors mattered in those days. Epstein invokes memories of "John O'Hara in a three-piece suit showing off his Rolls-Royce in the courtyard on a sunny day; Ralph Ellison...smoking a cigar and explaining with his hands how Thelonius Monk developed his chords." Schiffrin name-drops Hannah Arendt, who used to stop by the office for high-minded conversation. I trust their rose-colored recollections; it's hard not to idealize an era when a publisher could feature among the main titles on his list Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil* and the Surrealist poetry of Louis Aragon.

For Epstein and Schiffrin, publishing was an almost priestly vocation—"a personal college," writes Epstein, "in which my authors have been my teachers and their works in progress my curriculum." Literature, he declares with a fervor surprising in a man known for his dour disposition, "is not a pastime like golf or bridge but a kind of religion whose god is manifest in the works of great writers." The Eighth Street Bookstore run by the Wilentz brothers, Ted and Eli, was "a bibliographer's paradise" where fledgling publishers hung around learning their trade. No bibliophile over the age of 50 will remain unmoved by Epstein's Homeric catalog of the books that mattered to him in his youth, books whose very titles evoke "the same intensity of feeling as that aroused by old songs": *After Strange Gods*, *The Age of Anxiety*, *The American Scene*, *Practical Criticism*, *The Wound and the Bow*. The equally bookish Schiffrin began his career in the marketing department of New American Library, the American arm of the U.K. publisher Penguin Books, whose editors had the bright idea of publishing, and offering in drugstore-rack size, highbrow paperbacks—James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the works of Faulkner and Jack London—alongside the mass-market fare of Mickey Spillane and Erskine Caldwell. For both men, the motivating principle was pretty straightforward, however revolutionary it may seem to us now: to publish good books and make a reasonably decent living.

It was an ambition that could be realized when Epstein and Schiffrin got into the business: There were no chains, no conglomerates gobbling up publishers. Agents were gentlemen and played a minor role in the literary culture. (Nowadays the major agents supervise the careers of their authors—referred to as "clients"—and even edit their manuscripts, in essence superseding the once almost-sacred bond between author and



Although they are of the same generation and have had similar careers, book-publishing veterans André Schiffrin (left) and Jason Epstein (right) offer up different scenarios of their profession.

BOOKS PETER BERSON SCHIFFRIN MICHELINE PELLETIER EPSTEIN DON POLLARD

Left to right: Random House owners Donald Klopfer, Robert Haas, and Bennett Cerf in the Villard mansion headquarters of Random House in New York City. Klopfer and Cerf are shown here at their famous partners desk, from which they ran Random House for more than 40 years.

editor.) Book clubs shipped out their monthly choices in huge quantities; independent bookstores thrived. Editors edited—there was no such thing as an "acquiring editor," an executive who signs up books and leaves others to do the donkeywork of seeing them through the press—and tended to stay at the same house for their whole careers. In Epstein's case, after eight years at Doubleday, he moved on to Random House, where he remained for 40 years. In 1961, Schiffrin went to work for Pantheon, founded by the legendary émigré couple Kurt and Helen Wolff, who had joined forces with Schiffrin's father after the war. He would remain there for three decades, until he was fired or resigned. After several close readings of his account, I still can't figure out exactly what happened.

Why does Schiffrin elide this key event, referring obliquely to "discussions" at which his fate was sealed? I suspect it's because the whole episode is still too painful to contemplate, too raw. Instead he creates cartoonlike heroes and villains. As he relates it, the trouble started when magazine magnate S.I. Newhouse Jr. acquired Random House in 1980; Pantheon, a Random House imprint, came as part of the deal. Despite assurances of editorial independence, there was soon pressure to improve the bottom line by trimming the list and cutting staff. A herd of Pantheon editors followed Schiffrin out the door. A heroic tale, and perhaps true—but the significant issue a decade later is that, even then, not everyone in the industry was willing to go along with Schiffrin's martyrdom. Certain editors in the company—notably Ashbel Green of Alfred A. Knopf and Epstein himself—circulated a petition distancing themselves from Schiffrin's woes and making the case that it was possible to reconcile profit and a quality list. Schiffrin devotes a whole chapter to the fate of his band of "courageous" editors without ever addressing the question raised in that infamous petition.

For Epstein, corporate greed was something to be worked around—even harnessed to one's own purposes—not walked away from in a huff. Sure, publishing was a stuffy world of bibulous lunches and white-haired senior editors slumped over their desks, and snoring away the afternoons, but that just made it easier to innovate. For an enterprising young man like Epstein, the informality of the book business when he entered, in the 1950s, left the field open to anyone with brains and energy. His aim—as he puts it with touching solemnity—was "to restore and extend the ancien régime of literature."

The bulky, rumpled figure mumbling behind a podium in The Celeste Bartos Forum of The New York Public Library, where Epstein gave the lectures from which *Book Business* has been cobbled, is in fact a shrewd entrepreneur. At the precocious age of 22, while he was probably still trying to find the men's room at Doubleday, he dreamed up the notion of quality paperbacks, works of high literary merit that could have a long life in paperback form. Epstein's insight was that a large audience existed—or could be found—not just for the so-called classics that the New American Library was publishing in paperback but for books of real intellectual sophistication and heft. Thus was born Anchor Books, inaugurated with *To the*

COURTESY RANDOM HOUSE ARCHIVES

Finland Station, Edmund Wilson's classic on the intellectual sources of the Russian and French Revolutions; D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*; novels by André Gide, Joseph Conrad, and Stendhal; and seven other titles.

One night, a decade later, during the *New York Times* strike of 1963, Epstein and his then wife, Barbara, were sitting around with Elizabeth Hardwick and Robert Lowell when they had an epiphany about the defiantly middlebrow *New York Times Book Review*: Nobody missed it. They raised some money, lured the brilliant young editor Robert Silvers away from Harper's, and launched *The New York Review of Books*, which would eventually become another profitable sideline. (When it was sold in 1984, each of its original investors reportedly reaped a dividend of about a million dollars.) Epstein was also the catalyst of The Library of America, the Garden Book Club, and the Reader's Catalog, a phone-book-sized precursor to the Internet from which you could order just about any book in print. Epstein tells us that throughout his half-century in the publishing business, he kept his office walls bare and his desk drawers empty: "I was prepared to flee in an instant without a backward glance." But it's that very openness to change, to contingency, combined with an ability to seize whatever opportunities come his way, that has made him such a protean—and financially successful—figure in the history of publishing. In a November 1999 *New York* magazine profile of Epstein, the media columnist Michael Wolff made note of Epstein's grandly proportioned apartment in the Police Building on the edge of SoHo, and concluded that "he has demonstrably made money." How many people in publishing can say that?

Schiffrin hasn't exactly been idle, either, though I doubt his various enterprises have made him rich, demonstrably or otherwise. At Pantheon, he published a number of groundbreaking titles, among them R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self*, Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, and, more recently, Art Spiegelman's comic-book masterpiece about the Holocaust, *Maus* (he also more or less discovered Studs Terkel). He made Pantheon a publishing house with intellectual credibility.

Epstein and Schiffrin came of age in the book business in the shadows of the great names of publishing lore—Charles Scribner and Horace Liveright, Dick Simon and Max Schuster, and Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer, the founders of Random House. These were men whose exploits—literary and otherwise—merited whole books of their own. Liveright, whose weakness for strong drink and babes eventually left him penniless, has been the subject of a full-scale biography, *Firebrand*, by Tom Dardis. A Wall Street speculator who made publishing a high-wire act during the Roaring Twenties, Liveright turned the brownstone offices of his firm on West 48th Street into a virtual speakeasy, replete with its own bar, an Italian Renaissance–style reception room outfitted with a grand piano, and a full complement of chorus girls who came and went at all hours of the day and night; in addition to being a publisher, Liveright was a major investor in Broadway shows. His life was so dramatic that Ben Hecht wrote and directed a film based on it, called *The Scoundrel*. (Sample anecdote from Dardis's book: "Horace fell from a fast-moving open car after a late-hour party, breaking his arm.") It's too bad there's no word for a name that's the opposite of its owner's character; if there were, "Liveright" would be a prime example. But Liveright had a genuine literary bent: He published Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Freud's *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. For a decade, until he lost his company and ended up loitering disconsolately in its waiting room, he was a major force in American publishing.

Alfred A. Knopf with the original borzoi—his publishing house's logo—in an undated photograph

COURTESY KNOPF

Liveright wasn't some larger-than-life anomaly: he was the kind of person publishing used to attract, the kind Epstein and Schiffrin wanted to be. Cerf, who started out in the business as a vice president in Liveright's "three-ring circus"—as a colleague described his operation—published a lively memoir, *At Random*, of his adventures in building Random House that made clear (without his having to boast) that he was a man of prodigious energy. While founding the greatest publishing empire of his day, he managed to turn out a column for the *Saturday Review*, write books, and appear weekly on the popular TV show *What's My Line?* *At Random* is a rich trove of lore: Cerf knew and published everyone, from George Bernard Shaw to Irwin Shaw, Faulkner to Gertrude Stein. One day, he recounts, Liveright invited him to have lunch at the Ritz with his star author, Theodore Dreiser; Liveright had just sold *An American Tragedy* to Hollywood for $85,000, an unheard-of sum in those days, and was eager to report his triumph. When he reminded the exultant and formerly impoverished novelist that he would have to share the proceeds—they had agreed to split any profits after the first $50,000—Dreiser threw a steaming cup of coffee in Liveright's face. "Bennett, let this be a lesson to you," Liveright told his acolyte, coffee dripping down his shirtfront. "Every author is a son of a bitch."

Like Cerf and Liveright, Dick Simon and Max Schuster—creators of a rival industry monolith—were eccentric, visionary, and fiercely independent. The neurotic antics of Simon and Schuster animate some of the liveliest pages of their disciple Michael Korda's engaging account of his publishing days, *Another Life*. Simon was a womanizer who chain-smoked and drank himself to death at the age of 61; Schuster, a stammering bundle of tics, pushed the buzzer on his desk so compulsively that he was rumored to have provoked one of his assistants to hurl himself out a window. But they got the job done.

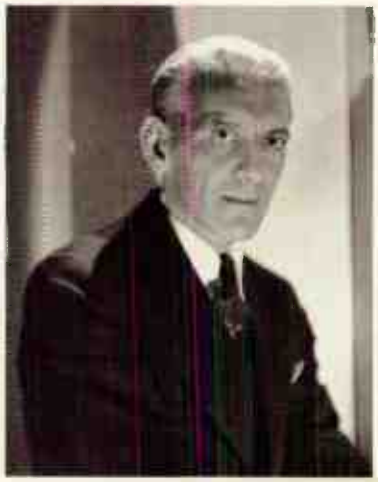
Sadly, I'm describing an obsolete type. When Korda entered the business, in 1958, publishing was still dominated by "houses that were owned by Jews who were willing to take risks, knew how to promote and market books, and, however seriously they might take themselves, thought that publishing ought to be fun." More than four decades later, he remains at his post, and can still be seen, a graybeard now, lunching at the Four Seasons. But Korda himself has become the last—or one of the last, along with Epstein and Schiffrin—of a dying breed. By the sixties, he writes, "the age of the entrepreneurial publisher, whose drive and personal taste was enough to make publishing grow and thrive, was over." The business had changed. The mom-and-pop shops—

or pop-and-pop: Klopfer and Cerf at their famous facing desks would be the model here—were rapidly being transformed by "a combination of success and undercapitalization" into monolithic public companies. In the old days, you could start a publishing house with Dad's money—Cerf's original stake was $25,000—and make a go of it. Today only giant media companies can afford to get into the business.

Korda and Epstein are right: It is a different world. I'm no reflexive nostalgist—I find myself as stimulated by stories of e-book startups as by colorful anecdotes about Faulkner stumbling drunkenly through the halls of Random House. But it's a fact that the major publishing houses, the ones whose colophons still adorn a vast percentage of the books published today—Doubleday, Random House, Simon & Schuster, Charles Scribner's Sons—bear no resemblance to their namesakes. The strong-willed dinosaurs who built these companies would be astonished and appalled by the landscape of literary Manhattan in the year 2001: a Benetton in the former premises of the handsome Scribner's flagship store on Fifth Avenue, its wood-carved windows filled with khakis; the Villard mansion once occupied by the offices of Random House squatting ignominiously beneath a high-rise, its air rights auctioned off to The New York Palace Hotel. Simon & Schuster, bought by Gulf + Western, which changed its name to Paramount, which was in turn bought by Viacom, works out of faceless quarters in Rockefeller Center. The consolidation of publishers proceeds apace. The German behemoth Bertelsmann owns Knopf, Doubleday, and Random House. Holtzbrink, another huge German firm, owns Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Henry Holt and Company, and St. Martin's Press. Harcourt (formerly Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, then just Harcourt Brace) has just been sold to Reed Elsevier, a British-Dutch publisher. Viking, Penguin, Dutton, and Putnam are all part of the Penguin Putnam Group, which is owned by the British firm Pearson PLC, which also owns the newspaper *Financial Times*. HarperCollins—once Harper & Row—is a division of Rupert Murdoch's multinational News Corporation, along with Fox television, the 20th Century Fox film studio, and almost two dozen newspapers. The old culture of publishing is gone, too; the ornate brownstones have been torn down, replaced by glass-walled office towers. The day of the chorus girl and the speakeasy is dead.

So what happened? Where did it all go wrong? Why is publishing in the troubled state it's in today? Both Epstein and Schiffrin come up with essentially the same explanations: a concentration of the market in the chains such as Barnes & Noble and Borders, themselves overextended by their rapid expansion in a tight real-estate market; technological innovations that threaten to render traditional publishing obsolete; conglomerates buying into an industry they don't understand and demanding higher profits from a low-margin business. The bottom line is that there is no bottom line. Books are simply not profitable—or at best only modestly so. You can't expect a return on investment of 15 percent in a business that has returned 3 or 4 percent for as long as anyone can remember.

To make this point, Schiffrin fingers all the usual suspects: grasping foreign publishers trying to make a buck in the American market; philistine accountants and conformist CEOs who don't appreciate the eccentric nature of the business; the take-no-prisoners consequences of globalization. "We cannot speak of open competition or a free market in American publishing today," he maintains. "We are faced with a classic situation of oligopoly, approaching monopoly." Yeah, yeah. Maybe Schiffrin should have cited another problem: too many books that are ill conceived and ill produced. His own book is a perfect example of how shoddy publishing has become. It's disgracefully unedited. He writes "James Branch Campbell" when he means James Branch Cabell and "Wallace Shawn" when he means William Shawn; the names of the Marxist sociologist Tom Bottomore and the American editor Elisabeth Sifton are misspelled; maybe a third of the names cited in the text are omitted from the index (and who is "Singer," listed in the index without a first name?); the *Modern Masters* series was published in England by Fontana, not Oxford; Princeton is not the best-endowed university in America (Harvard is, by several billion dollars); and instances of wretched grammar abound ("a similar running 'P & L' is now kept on the editor themselves"). And so on.



THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT THERE IS NO BOTTOM LINE. BOOKS ARE SIMPLY NOT PROFITABLE.

Clockwise from top: Horace Liveright in the 1930s; Max Schuster and Dick Simon in the 1920s, with their first success, *The Cross Word Puzzle Book*

Epstein's book, by contrast, is elegant in appearance and crisp in argument. Nor is it a whine. Like Schiffrin, Epstein is alarmed by the big new corporate publishers' emphasis on profits, but he's also full of schemes, ideas, big-picture stuff. The Internet, he giddily proposes, "offers the possibility of almost limitless choice and foreshadows a literary culture thrilling in its potential diversity." He doesn't have a clue about how this scenario might actually play out, but who does? Epstein's brainstorm—forming a consortium of publishers to sell their own books directly over the Internet—proved unworkable, he's candid enough to admit: For one thing, it would alienate retailers; for another, he encountered resistance from a group that he rather mysteriously identifies as "conglomerate managers." In any event, Epstein's consortium was a nonstarter, and he doesn't have much else to suggest apart from delivering an uncharacteristically upbeat paean to "the World Wide Web," which will cause the old, obsolete forms of production and distribution—like Karl Marx's state—to "wither away."

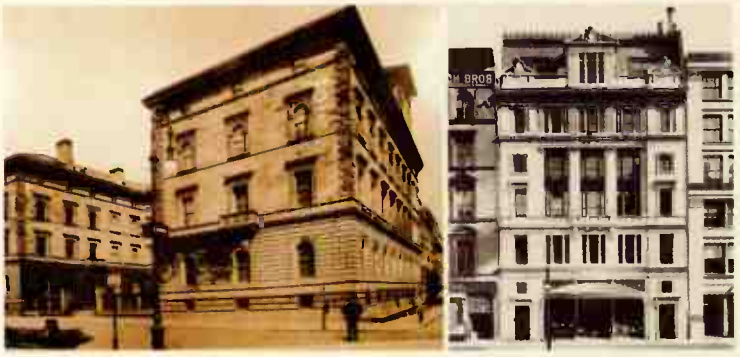
Even the depressive Schiffrin sees a ray of light in the university presses and small literary houses like Copper Canyon Press, Graywolf Press, and—no doubt—the publisher of his own book, Verso, which puts out what it calls "Books With a Critical Edge." But he's less convinced about e-books and the Internet. One of his solutions, not surprisingly, is subsidized publishing—in other words, Schiffrin's own outfit, The New Press, which he founded in the wake of his "departure" from Pantheon. The New Press is "a not-for-profit alternative to the large, commercial publishing houses currently dominating the book publishing industry," according to its current catalog. It lists a board of directors, which includes many prominent academics, and acknowledges support from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and numerous other institutions. Its agenda is political: The New Press is a vestige of the Old Left. Among its recent titles: *A People's History of the United States*, *Growing Up Poor: A Literary Anthology*, and *Lessons from the Mississippi*

LIVERIGHT: CULVER PICTURES

Freedom Schools. Nothing wrong with that, but it's not publishing as we know it. The New Press has more in common with the publications arm of The Carnegie Foundation than with a commercial house. Schiffrin's enterprise reminds me of Robert Frost's definition of free verse: playing tennis with the net down. It's no fun to publish books without a thought to their potential profitability. If you're going to be in the game, you have to play by the rules—in this case, the rules of free-market capitalism.

Are things as bad as Schiffrin thinks? Even now, there is concrete evidence that the chains' hegemony is drawing to a close; last October, it was reported that both Amazon and Barnes & Noble were curtailing discounts, improving the odds for independent bookstores. Epstein predicts that the conglomerates will eventually realize they're in the wrong business, that you can't "grow" publishing companies the way you grow a semiconductor business. The way he sees it, the once-distinguished imprints languishing in midtown Manhattan office buildings where they don't belong will be sold off or dissolved and their departure will be no great loss. The familiar brands don't carry as much weight as they once did; having lost their identities—among the old-line houses, only Epstein's publisher, the employee-owned W.W. Norton & Company, remains a private firm—the big publishing houses have lost their raison d'être. This isn't a happy development, to be sure, but it opens the way for new ones to get a footing in the business. Crisis is the gateway to opportunity.

Having been on the business side of publishing for a mere four years, I haven't had the stuffing knocked out of me yet. The "Penguin Lives" line of short biographies I started with my partner, the investment banker and film producer Kenneth Lipper, has several hundred thousand copies in print. We've kept advances low and stayed away from high-priced auctions, avoided the expense of having to build a whole new company from scratch by entering into joint ventures with established publishers, made sure each book we publish is worth publishing—a simple formula but, so far, an effective one.



Left: The Villard mansion, now the New York Palace Hotel, once home to Random House; right: the Scribner building, which is now a Benetton store.

It's my belief that we're at a highly promising moment in publishing; because change is mandated, change will come. The returns system, by which publishers absorb the costs of having unused stock sent back to them by the booksellers, will be phased out as on-demand printing of books takes hold. Meanwhile, the developing technologies will become more refined. In a recent essay in *Publishers Weekly*, James Lichtenberg, president of Lightspeed, LLC, one of the multiple companies venturing into the brave new world of e-books, wrote: "The issue is not the fineness of the product or about the 'end of the book.' Rather, the issue is a change in the way that the function, utility and price of a product combine in the mind of the user as a result of new technologies, prompting new decisions about purchase." Consumers will buy e-books, but they'll also continue to buy book-books.

It would be nice to live in the world that Cerf, Korda, and—however belatedly—Epstein and Schiffrin evoke with such charm in their memoirs. But we don't live in that world anymore. Does this mean we're finished? I don't think so, and neither does Epstein: In November, he published a piece in *The New York Review of Books* with the portentous title "The Coming Revolution" in which he explored the ramifications of Stephen King's highly publicized foray into the e-book realm, marketing a novella in digitized form. Did this spell the end of publishing as we know it? What role would conventional publishers play in the future if their services as manufacturers and distributors were no longer required? What about print-on-demand publishing, devices that could issue a single copy of a book? The technology exists: I saw it on display at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Epstein sounded a serene note: "This highly segmented electronic marketplace, where books can be kept in print, so to speak, indefinitely, will be far more efficient than its predecessor. It will also restore some of the intimacy that once prevailed between writer and reader as networks of linked websites expand and become established over time."

Just a month earlier, Schiffrin had been invited to participate in an online discussion of the future of publishing with John Donatich of Basic Books and Dave Eggers, the iconoclastic author of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and editor of *McSweeney's*, a weird and hip literary journal with headquarters in Brooklyn. Eggers and Donatich were upbeat: They saw new possibilities everywhere. As Eggers put it, "the power of the large houses has peaked, and in the next ten years, we'll see a growing democratization of the publishing world." They pushed hard at these themes. So what did Schiffrin do? He "declined to participate" in the second half of the discussion, according to the moderator in *Feed*, the online journal where it appeared. He quit and walked away.

If you can't take the heat... ◘

Celebrating the Knopf-Random House merger, 1960 (left to right): Alfred A. Knopf, Bennett Cerf, Blanche Knopf, and Donald Klopfer

VILLARD COURTESY RANDOM HOUSE ARCHIVES. SCRIBNERS SCRIBNER ARCHIVES. PETER STACKPOLE/TIMEPIX

ANOTHER WORLD

Editor Mimi Torchin was a contrarian diva in the quirky universe of soap-opera magazines—until she was fired and replaced by her archrival, Lynn Leahey. These are the days of their lives. By Jim Edwards

The tenth-anniversary party for *Soap Opera Weekly* was, by all accounts, a delirious affair. It was held at the Russian Tea Room, a decadent, faux-czarist monstrosity in midtown Manhattan that features, among other extravagances, displays of Venetian glass eggs and a 15-foot-tall aquarium in the shape of a bear. One by one, daytime television's most beautiful and famous arrived, culminating, amid a barrage of flashbulbs, with the Queen of Soap herself—*All My Children*'s Susan Lucci. They had come to honor Mimi Torchin, the most respected editor in the frothy world of soap journalism.

For the diminutive, gamine Torchin, the November 1999 gala was a night to remember. She had founded *Soap Opera Weekly* in 1989 with a budget of "pocket change and lint," as the *Weekly*'s press bio put it. Over the ensuing decade, the magazine became a supermarket-checkout staple, with a readership, at its pinnacle in the mid-nineties, of more than 500,000.

Within a year of the soiree, however, Torchin was fired. And the $100 million soap-magazine industry—in which journalism takes a backseat to puffery—lost what many considered to be one of its few independent, critical voices. "She brought a great deal of dignity to a business that has a lot of indignity," says Louise Sorel, who played Vivian on *Days of Our Lives*. (Torchin, 54, declined to comment for this article. A former colleague says, "She can't defend herself right now. She's probably negotiating [a severance package].")

The tale of Torchin's undoing reveals the extraordinarily cozy relationship between soap magazines and their sources. Torchin's *Weekly* dared to criticize the programs her competitors unapologetically adore, and often challenged devoted viewers. What's more, her quixotic stab at editorial independence—declaring, for instance, that soap operas trap female characters in degrading relationships—alienated the networks, which spoon-feed plot twists and story tips to the magazines. "Because of the nature of the closeness of our relationship, [the magazines] rarely write anything that is not going to be supportive of the industry," says Sallie Schoneboom, vice-president of ABC daytime media and talent relations. "If the shows fail, *they* fail."

News of Torchin's forced departure last October raced through the incestuous soap-opera community. The drama escalated, in true soap style, when Torchin was immediately replaced by Lynn Leahey, 41, the editor in chief of the *Weekly*'s main competitor, *Soap Opera Digest*. The move shocked *Weekly* staffers, who fancy themselves the brainy underdogs to the softer *Digest*, which comes in a handy, *TV Guide* size and has a readership of more than 1 million. Both magazines, however, are owned by the same company, Primedia Inc. (Disclosure: Primedia is a partner in Contentville, an e-commerce venture in which an affiliate of this magazine's parent company is also a partner.)

When Leahey, a polished blonde who has a reputation for publishing fluff, took over the *Weekly* last fall, it was also announced that she would continue to edit the *Digest*. "The purpose of the new leadership is to reinvigorate the properties," says Primedia's vice-president of investor relations, Warren Bimblick. The *Weekly*'s circulation has dropped by nearly a third over the past few years. Although readership has fallen at every soap magazine—mainly because of the daytime dramas' dwindling ratings—Torchin's numbers were especially troubling.

TORCHIN'S *WEEKLY* DARED TO CRITICIZE THE PROGRAMS HER COMPETITORS UNAPOLOGETICALLY ADORE, AND OFTEN CHALLENGED DEVOTED VIEWERS.

Journalistically, the stakes are, well, low. After all, these are fan magazines. Readers hardly expect groundbreaking exposés, and many have complained about any critical coverage of their favorite programs. The magazines rely on plot spoilers ("Andy Learns He's Hope's Father on ATWT"—that's *As The World Turns*), plot recaps, gossip on the stars (two full pages!), and photos of unsettlingly perfect-looking actors.

Torchin, however, brought an edge to her work. "She ruled that magazine with a strong—how shall I say it—velvet-covered hammer," says Kristoff St. John, who plays Neil Winters on *The Young & The Restless*. Torchin honed that edge in her pre-*Weekly* days. Having worked as a publicist for Yves Saint Laurent, she became the theater editor at *Cue*, the pioneering entertainment-listings magazine in New York. When *Cue* was sold and absorbed into *New York* magazine in 1980, Torchin was hired to write a column for *Soap Opera Digest*, which she would later compete against. At the time, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp owned the biweekly *Digest*, which was founded in 1975. In 1989 Murdoch decided that soap viewers would snap up a weekly, so he started *Soap Opera Weekly*, and Torchin was named editor in chief. (Murdoch sold both publications to Primedia in 1991.)

Between "Hip Star of the Week" and the ads for telephone psychics, Torchin carved a voice that was intelligent and, on occasion, guided by principle. In January 2000, she refused to bow to *Days of Our Lives* when the show's producers blacklisted the *Weekly*: They stopped divulging plotlines and suggested that the show's actors turn down the magazine's interview requests. Torchin's sin? The *Weekly* had run a piece titled "*General Hospital* is Boring," by columnist Marlena De Lacroix, who is partly responsible for the *Weekly*'s reputation for sophistication. "I've given bad reviews every week for the last 11 years," she says. You might think *Days of Our Lives* producers would appreciate the dig at their rivals. But in the cliquish culture of daytime TV, the *Days* gang felt impugned by extension.

Torchin didn't give in. "All serious art forms and entertainment are subject to a critical eye and ear. Why should soaps be any different?" she wrote in her weekly column, "Speaking My Mind," after the *Days* crackdown. "Pandering to the soaps by serving only as mindless cheerleaders does nothing to advance or help daytime. Who will listen to us when we praise a show's virtues if we express no honest opinions to the contrary?" The shunning of the *Weekly* continued for nearly a year—until Torchin was fired and Lynn Leahey was installed.

Jonathan Reiner, a former assistant managing editor at the *Weekly*, says, "[Torchin] doesn't shy away from sharing her opinions. And just like anyone with that sort of personality it sometimes gets her into trouble." In 1994 Torchin told the *Boston Herald* that the daytime-TV industry "preys on women" with storylines in which female stars fall in love with their rapists. When she heard speculation that *One Life to Live*'s Susan Haskell (Marty) might develop a relationship with one of the frat boys who

Mimi Torchin (left) and Susan Lucci, who plays Erica on *All My Children*, at the tenth-anniversary bash for *Soap Opera Weekly*, in November 1999

Lynn Leahey (far right) with Susan Lucci (far left) and *All My Children*'s creator, Agnes Nixon, at the 14th annual *Soap Opera Digest* Awards

L. FRANK TRAPPER/CORBIS SYGMA P. ROBIN PLATZER/TWIN IMAGES

had gang-raped her, Torchin told the *Herald* it was "the sickest thing I've ever heard." And yet, during the *Days of Our Lives* tiff, Torchin wrote in her column that *Soap Opera Weekly* is "fully aware that we serve at the pleasure of the industry we cover."

Leahey disagrees. "The people we serve are the fans," she says. She should know. In college, Leahey adjusted her class schedule around *Guiding Light* and sent her first postgraduation résumé to the *Digest*. The magazine turned her down, but in 1984, after working for a few years at *McCall's Needlework and Crafts* magazine, Leahey managed to snag an entry-level position at the *Digest*. By 1991, she had become editor in chief. Under her tenure, the magazine has made even less room for the critical coverage that occasionally appeared in the *Weekly*. "The *Digest*'s aim has always been to draw in every soap fan that we possibly can," says Leahey. She has succeeded: *Soap Opera Digest* is the 800-pound gorilla of the industry—its circulation is more than three times that of its nearest competitor, *Soap Opera Weekly*.

Although the two magazines cover the same ground, the *Digest*'s articles are shorter and easier to read. But it is the *Digest*'s sycophantic style that current and former Primedia employees find most grating. Leahey's editorials set the touchy-feely tone—she comes across as an overeager soccer mom and frequently references her family and friends. A recent issue introduced "Pet Set," a Q&A feature on the critters of the stars (which abuts an ad for Eukanuba dog food).

"WE NEED TO MAKE IT A FRIENDLIER MAGAZINE," SAYS LYNN LEAHEY. "WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE EASY ON THE SHOWS, BUT MORE COLOR, BRIGHTER."

The magazines differed, too, in their responses to the *Days of Our Lives* gambit. Whereas Torchin blasted *Days* for shutting out the *Weekly*, Leahey's *Digest* ran a short story in the November 21, 2000, issue that consisted almost entirely of a quote from Ken Corday, a *Days* executive producer who led the blacklisting. Corday explained why soap magazines should not be critical. "That is not why people buy soap magazines," he argued. "They buy soap journals to get inside stories about actors they don't know about...not to be told that their show stinks." Leahey recalls that when she was hired, she called Corday, who told her, "'We'll be working together.'" (Eight other staffers at the *Digest* didn't return calls or declined to comment.)

Although the *Digest* is not in the business of breaking big news, the magazine has made the headlines. In 1998 newspapers reported that staff from ABC's *General Hospital* tried to stuff ballots for the 14th annual *Soap Opera Digest* Awards, and NBC threatened to cancel its broadcast of the show. (There was no evidence of any wrongdoing by *Digest* employees.)

LEAHEY'S *DIGEST* AND Torchin's *Weekly* coexisted peacefully for most of the 1990s, but the rivalry heated up in 1997 when the *Digest* moved from biweekly to weekly, and the circulations of both magazines fell. Between 1996 and 2000, the *Digest*'s readership slipped from 1.36 million to 1.1 million; during the same period, the *Weekly* lost a larger proportion of its circulation, dropping from 500,000 to 320,000.

Bimblick, the Primedia executive, doesn't think the magazines are cannibalizing one another but does believe that the audience for such magazines is shrinking. "There have been soap operas that have been canceled in this period," he says. The result is "lower levels of interest in the whole category. That has been going on for a few years."

Both magazines, however, remain lucrative for Primedia, which owns *Seventeen* and *New York* magazines, the Internet resource guide About.com, and a raft of obscure but profitable trade titles such as *National Hog Farmer* and *National Real Estate Investor*. Bimblick won't discuss how much money the soap magazines make, but the *Digest*'s annual sales—it shares a percentage with retailers—are roughly $90 million. The *Weekly*'s figures are more modest, about $28 million a year.

Although the *Digest* makes more money, its editorial philosophy worries *Weekly* staffers now that the magazines share the same boss. "The *Digest* is a kind of puffy, puffy publication. They celebrate the soaps. The *Weekly* is more intellectual," says *Weekly* columnist De Lacroix. The illustration beside her column depicts her as a flame-haired, white-boa-wearing socialite. Her real identity, however, is Connie Passalacqua, a bookish adjunct professor of journalism at New York University who wants you to know that she also writes for more serious publications, such as the *Los Angeles Times* (about soaps, it turns out).

LEAHEY IS STILL TRYING TO win the loyalty of her new staff, and her initial reviews are on the polite side of lukewarm. The *Weekly*'s West Coast editor, Janet Di Lauro, described Leahey as "very reassuring and very nice" but Torchin's firing as "jarring."

With Leahey at the helm, the *Weekly*'s stories are getting shorter, and the photos are getting bigger, just like the *Digest*'s. "It's going to be more of a *People*-type magazine," says Di Lauro. "More pictures, more on-the-scenes coverage of events and parties."

The *Weekly*'s tenth-anniversary cake, in 1999

ROBIN PLATZER/TWIN IMAGES

Leahey promises that Torchin's contrarian attitude will endure. But soon after Torchin left the *Weekly*, Leahey replaced Torchin's "Speaking My Mind" column with a series of more subdued pieces, including "Speaking Up," a column in which editors offered breathless anecdotes about their most inspiring star interviews. Special projects editor Tonya Lensch, for example, reminisced about interviewing country music singer Trisha Yearwood. "We discussed her career and upcoming album, then dished *Days* and her favorite couple, Bo and Hope," Lensch wrote. "It amazes me how many people in all walks of life are touched by soaps."

"We need to make it a friendlier magazine," says Leahey. "We're not going to be easy on the shows, but more color, brighter."

After a few months on the job, Leahey says that she wants the magazines to "keep their separate identities" but acknowledges that "right now they look and feel the same." So why doesn't Primedia just combine them? Impossible: "[T]here are two separate audiences out there," says Leahey. "And [Primedia] feels that they really can make both magazines a solid proposition." Passalacqua disagrees: "I think eventually they'll fold into one another, but that's just my opinion."

Perhaps the most telling indication of the *Weekly*'s evolving editorial sensibility can be found in "Duelling Divas," a November 28, 2000, column. In it, Carolyn Hinsey, who is executive editor of the *Digest* and now also an "editorial consultant" at the *Weekly*, debated *Weekly* deputy editor Linda Susman. The topic: Does the world of politics have any place in soap operas? Taking the negative position, Hinsey could have been writing about Leahey's editorial priorities. "Give me entertainment," she wrote. "I'll stick to CNN and the newspapers when I feel the need to be educated." ◘

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33] zeal and were fully prepared to abandon the story if we found that Haner's mistakes weren't real or that Simon was alone in his concerns. But we discovered that the mistakes were serious. We discovered that Haner, Carroll, and Marimow refused to explain how the errors happened or what was done about them. We found a newsroom deeply divided about management's treatment of Haner and about the severity of his missteps. And we found important members of the community who were miffed about their treatment by Haner and *The Sun*. Contrary to Mr. Gartner's blast, the article does not rely on murky anonymous sources, and it does not violate our standards on such quotes. Our policy is to be as clear as possible about the biases of a source. Pogrebin's article makes it clear that Haner's critics within the paper were all from the pre–Carroll/Marimow era, and the piece described the internecine tensions at the paper. Other Haner critics are on the record, including high-ranking Baltimore officials and, of course, Simon.

Mr. Gartner also endorses Marimow's contention that Pogrebin was "as careless as she accused Mr. Haner and *The Sun* of being." The evidence of this carelessness? That some matters that were checked in the fact-checking process proved to be incorrect. Sorry, but this is ludicrous. We have an elaborate and aggressive fact-checking process to make our pieces as accurate as possible, and it sounds to us like it worked pretty well. (A mistake that did get published, regarding the page number a *Sun* correction ran on, is corrected in this issue.) Aha, but Mr. Gartner anticipates that this will be our answer and goes on to include John Carroll's suggestion that the clarifications on the fact issues that occurred during fact-checking did not change the tone or thesis of the piece, therefore showing a disregard for the truth. This happens not to be true. Changes, both tonally and, of course, substantively, were made because of the additional vetting. And we should note that Pogrebin is one of those reporters who embrace the fact-checking process wholeheartedly and whose meticulous notes and annotation make her a favorite of the fact-checkers. To imply that the facts were some kind of inconvenience to her is just off base.

FACT-CHECKERS ARE A GREAT ASSET FOR *BRILL'S CONTENT*, THOUGH OF COURSE THEY CAN'T VALIDATE AND VERIFY A STORY'S TONE AND BALANCE.

Since Mr. Gartner discusses some specifics about issues that arose during fact-checking, we'd like to address them.

Regarding the Marimow quote that Pogrebin is alleged to have tried to twist for her own purposes, here is what happened: Our fact-checker informed Pogrebin that Marimow disputed that a quote he gave Pogrebin—which criticized a Haner critic—was about any staff member who was criticizing Haner anonymously. He said he meant it to be only about Simon. That's not how Pogrebin remembered the comment, but we gave him the benefit of the doubt and did not include the quote. As for the anecdote that we didn't end up using: Yes, we withdrew it, because in the final analysis it didn't check out to our satisfaction. Again, Mr. Gartner seems to buy into our critics' contention that this proves something about our fairness. It does, but it proves the opposite of what Mr. Gartner suggests.

Throughout the process of assigning, writing, and editing this piece, we were keenly aware of the impact an article like this can have on a reporter's reputation. That's why we went to such extraordinary lengths to learn all sides, and that's why we included so many comments from Haner's supporters. It's regrettable that Haner and *The Sun* weren't then—and still aren't—more forthcoming in explaining how the mistakes happened and what was being done about them.

Michael Gartner responds: Two things: First, I did not "[endorse] Marimow's contention that Pogrebin was 'as careless as she accused Mr. Haner and *The Sun* of being.'" I reported that contention. There's a difference between reporting and endorsing.

Second, I did not "buy into our critics' contention" that *Brill's Content*'s adjustments in the story after the fact-checking "proves something about our fairness." I merely reported what happened. There's a difference between reporting and buying in.

BLIND QUOTES

Two more items on anonymous sources.

First: As noted here before, the *Brill's Content* "guidelines for editorial employees" admonish: "Be careful of blind quotes: It's unfair to have your most negative quote about someone be anonymous. Don't do it."

Someone should give a copy to *Brill's* senior correspondent Gay Jervey and her editors. In an interesting article in the January issue on George Stephanopoulos, she and her editors let this in:

"Last week, I was in a van, a motorcade, and Stephanopoulos's name came up," this source says. "And just about everybody saw him as a rat. Even the Secret Service guy weighed in...."

What is it about "Don't do it" that is so hard to grasp?

Second: An edited note from Bruce Smith, the editor and publisher of the *Yakima Valley Business Times* in Yakima, Washington:

"You note: 'The problem with anonymity is twofold: First, what weight and credence should the reader give the blind quotes.... Second, to whom does the attacked person respond?'

"You missed a very important third reason to source quotes, especially opinionated quotes. Sourced quotes are seldom invented by reporters, [while] unsourced quotes may well be concocted quotes. Unattributed quotes will always call into question the source. Did a legitimate person make this statement, or did the reporter create the quote to spice up or balance the story? I'm sure most journalists will be 'shocked, shocked' to hear such heresy, but I assure you the general public does not trust most media."

JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

As the Haner story proves, fact-checkers are a great asset for *Brill's Content*. They validate and verify the details in stories, though of course they can't validate and verify a story's tone and balance. Oddly, they are prohibited from reading back to a source any direct quote attributed to that source.

The reason, apparently, is that on hearing his words a source may have second thoughts and deny he said it or claim he is being misquoted. But a source should have that opportunity—sometimes people really are misquoted or quoted out of context—and if the reporter is sure of himself, he simply can show his editor his notes or play his tapes.

It's silly to let a person verify the color of her eyes but not the tenor of her thoughts.

Brill's should rethink its policy.

**&%#$!!

Finally, William Marimow of *The Sun* didn't really say, "I thought this was utter bull."

He said: "I thought this was utter bulls**t." ■

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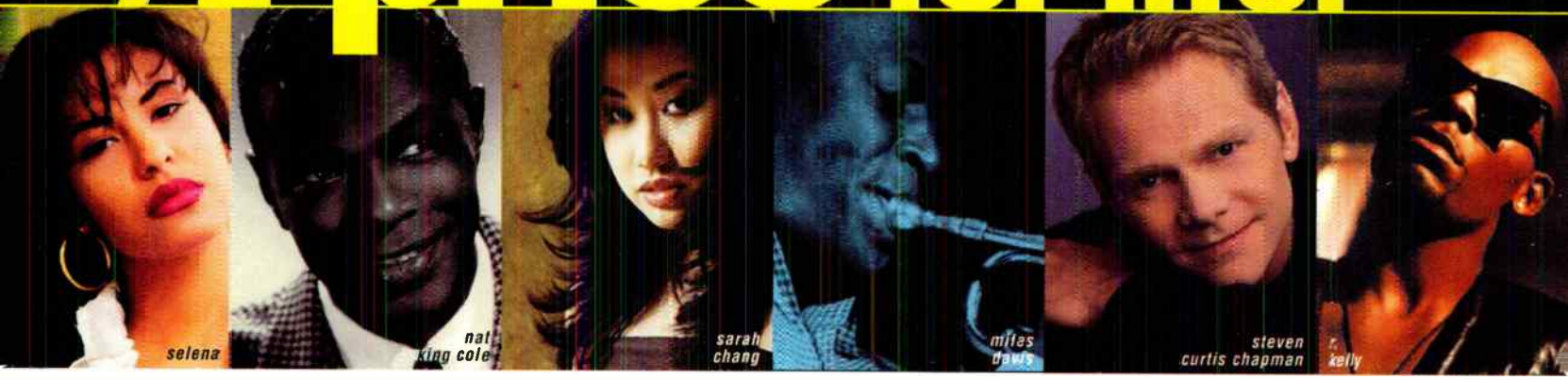

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BILL CLINTON, PRESS CRITIC

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 93] and if the participants didn't feel that they had to always disagree. You get the feeling that if Bill Press ever looked at Bob Novak or Mary Matalin and said, you know, you might be right about that, old Press would have to leave his job. And Mary would be run out of the Republican Party if she said to Bill Press, well you've got a good point there....

What I wish they had is a section where they argue their points over something they had complete disagreement with and then I wish they would talk about something that's really important but they are not quite sure what they think and just bring their different perspectives and have a conversation....

That's what I'd like to see, because the truth is, the country has a lot of big challenges that no one has a complete answer to. And I think that we even see it in this election dispute. Where, you know, sometimes you think you are going to win if you just get enough guys to pound on the other one.

BRILL: Let me ask you one question about the difference in the presidency and the press today. We all know that President Kennedy had a regular ongoing relationship with lots of journalists. He was also able at one point to call up *The New York Times* and get them to hold off on a story on, I guess it was the Cuban missile crisis.

Would you be able to do that today? Or, I guess I should ask, have you ever done that or tried to do it?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't think so.

BRILL: Would you be able to?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...I don't believe we ever have. I think if it were a serious national security problem and I was asking for somebody to hold something up for 24 hours, and they didn't have any reason to believe that somebody else was about to break it, maybe. If it were something that was seriously in the national interest, the consequences would be dire and it was only for a very limited time, maybe I could.

BRILL: But wouldn't they also have an excuse today that, gee, it's already in our newsroom and if it's in our newsroom, and we know that there's this guy Drudge who can put it out there?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, yes, it would be much harder today....One thing I really sympathize with a lot of people in the press about is that there's so much competition coming from everywhere and a breaking story is a breaking story, even if it appears on the Internet and 10,000 people know it. It's just as if 100 million people saw it on the evening news, to the people who are in the press. Because, you know, it's sort of out of the box.

It makes doing thoughtful pieces on the evening news more difficult because whatever is breaking that day has probably been on CNN for four hours and then it's just that much harder, if you are writing for a newspaper the next day....So I have a lot of sympathy for...some of the challenges, judgment calls that a lot of these folks in the press have to make.

BRILL: During the worst of times in the administration, with the press the roughest, did you still read the stuff, watch it on television?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Depending on what it was. During the impeachment thing, I read almost nothing and watched nothing on television, even if people defended me. I just didn't. Because, I just didn't think that had anything to do with me doing my job for the American people and I thought it would distract me. That if I'd gotten mad or angry or something, there just was no point in it.

I didn't do very much watching or reading on that. In the first couple of years, we had a lot of rough going on policy stuff. I read, I scanned the papers every day and then if there was a column that was critical substantively, I often read that. And I still do. If somebody said, I don't agree with what the president did on this, that, or the other policy, I think they are really wrong about this, I would read that.

Because I think that you need to know if people are disagreeing with you in good faith. You ought to know what they think and why and ask yourself if whether they might be right.

BRILL: Do you have a problem with people in the White House writing memoirs that include conversations they might have had with you, and internal deliberations here? It's going to happen now, right?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I guess the answer is that it depends. Some of the things that I have read already I don't think are quite accurate....

BRILL: But what if someone is leaving the office [every day] and keeping a little notebook and ends up writing something that's accurate but if you'd known they were doing it when you were in the room talking to them, you wouldn't have said what you've said? Do you have a problem with that?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I wouldn't do that if I were working in the White House with someone else.

BRILL: So in *your* memoirs, will you have any conversations with people where you think it would embarrass them?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I doubt if I'll do that. Unless I think it's necessary to correct something on the record that those people have put in.

BRILL: Do you think that the press, as a general matter, makes your job harder than it might have made, let's say President Kennedy or President Roosevelt's?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Yes, in some ways it does.

BRILL: Do you think that's good?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Sometimes, I think, in some ways. But I think that...it may make it harder to get things done....After Gingrich won in Congress and they were saying just terrible things about us all the time, I used to urge people not to read that stuff and not be affected by it.

When you get hired to work for the American people, you are not supposed to have feelings. Not like that, not personal feelings. You are supposed to have feelings for people and problems. But if people are dumping on you, you know...that can't affect how you do your job every day and if you let it, it would really warp your capacity to advance the public interest.

ON MAUREEN DOWD: "[S]he is one of the most brilliant people writing. I think the writing that she's done on this election controversy has been good....She's been more funny and...more effective than some of her earlier columns on me and others, where the personal venom is so deep I think it sort of blocked the impact of what she was saying."

BRILL: Do you think the Tim Russert question to the first lady during the debate was fair? You know the question I'm talking about [the one asking Mrs. Clinton whether she felt she should apologize to the American people for "misleading" them about the Lewinsky affair]?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No. But I think it helped her because she handled it with dignity and strength. So, just like everything that happens in life, most of it is how you respond. And I think she did a terrific job. I think she came out ahead.

BRILL: ...You live in a world where there's all kinds of balance of powers....Is there any mechanism we should have, even if it's a voluntary complaint process or accountability process...that should be done to balance the power [of the press]? Or do you think it's just about right?...

PRESIDENT CLINTON: First of all I am in a poor position to complain because the American public has given me pretty good ratings. I think two things. Number one, if a person in public life believes that the press is unfair, then I think that you do have a microphone, you can put out to your side. And normally, you'll get your side reported.

BRILL: [What about that] Whitewater/Pillsbury Madison report?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: But in cases like that, I think that's where you come in. If I ran a big newspaper or I were running a television network, I would have some sort of ombudsman....I would tell them their job was to come and say when they thought something had been done wrong....That's what I would do.

Because I know, for example, if I were hired to run a network, I would try to be fair but I know that I've lived a lifetime with a certain predisposition towards certain issues...and I wouldn't be, I couldn't be, completely free of bias....

[And] if I were in the newspaper business, I would be glad that—and I am not just pandering to you because I told you this before—you are doing this and I would be grateful every now and then if you popped my outlet whatever it is, a network or television or newspaper, because nobody can be right all the time.

President Bill Clinton presides over a White House press conference in December 1999.

And since we have a First Amendment that basically has kept fewer restrictions on the press here than virtually any place in the world and since I believe that's right...the more freedom you have in life, the more responsible you are supposed to be with it. And most of us have made mistakes if we live long enough, where we didn't show responsibility where we should have.

So it always helps to have somebody nudging you to be responsible.

BRILL: Do you think the press is by and large more liberal than not?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No. I think that, on some issues maybe reporters tend to be more Democratic than Republican.

But I'm not sure about that. But I think in some ways, there's sort of an institutional bias which favors [some] kind of conventional wisdom or establishment, in politics....

And of course, you know, most of the people that own these outlets are Republicans. So I think that it's very hard to make a case that there is a liberal press.

However, there's a big conservative press unabashedly, and for the Democrats and even people to the left of the Democratic Party, there's almost virtually no outlets that can compare with the vast array of conservative press that's out there.

BRILL: The Wen Ho Lee case, you were a little bit critical of how you thought that was handled by the press....As a general matter, do you think the press tends to take more from prosecutors than they should on faith, especially if it comes as [the result of] a leak, a subject you might also be familiar with in another context.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I don't know about it as a general matter but, I know that in high-profile cases, where the stakes seem high, and you know, you want to get more leaks out of the prosecutor, it's hard not to play up the leaks you do get, I think that's a lot of pressure....

What I think is important is, that even if a story is breaking news, and you have a leak from a prosecutor, the stories need to be written with a little grain of salt. Like you can't not expect a reporter to report something that is a leak, I guess....But the grain of salt needs to be in there.

BRILL: ...If you could change, if there's any moment in any story, leaving aside the Whitewater/Pillsbury Madison story which you've cited, what else comes to mind as something where you just thought the balance was wrong and the accountability wasn't there and the system wasn't working?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: ...We had two or three, particularly in the first term, where I thought the whole direction of the story was wrong....I'll give you one example right now. Because I was talking to a guy today who didn't know anything about this.

There was the perception, this is when we were—but I think I didn't handle this well. But I would have had to conduct virtually a guerrilla war to get it right, I think. When I first came in, there was the perception in the minds of the American people based on the reporting, that the first issue I wanted to deal with was gays in the military. Would you agree with that?

BRILL: [Yes].

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Okay. Here are the facts. Number one, I wanted to take six months, work the military and work through it. Senator Dole brought it up first, not me. He brought it up and he said, "This is a terrible thing, we are going to do it." First thing out of the box, resolution in the Senate. Then the Joint Chiefs said, oh we have to meet about this. So the whole story was, that I brought it up.

Then the whole story was that I caved on the gay community. That also wasn't true. We knew, everybody knew there were over 300 votes in the House to reverse the policy if I put it in. The Senate was more open to it. There was a big debate, in which Barbara Boxer was leading the side for my position and the Senate voted 68 to 32, which meant that both houses had a veto-proof majority against this policy.

It was then and only then that I worked out with Colin Powell, the compromise, don't ask, don't tell. So I wind up with the worst of both worlds. Number one, people, a lot of people thought I was nuts. Even some of my friends in the gay community, "Why would you bring this up first." I didn't, Bob Dole did.

Number two, then a lot of people thought I caved on them. When I didn't. The door had been shut first and I didn't make that clear....

So, I think that's the best example I can think of. But...I was very, very green then about the ways this town works and how the press works with the presidency. So if I had done a better job, perhaps I could have clarified it. That's one where I think that on both, I sort of lost on both sides there because of the way the story was written. And I think that if I had known then what I know now, I could have come out of it a little better anyway.

BRILL: Do you think Maureen Dowd has been fair to you?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I think that she has by and large written what she believed. I think the only nice column she ever wrote was when I went to Ireland, which shows that even she is subject to her, uh, [pauses] whatever.

Let me say this though. I think, Maureen, let me just say what I think of Maureen Dowd. I think she is one of the most brilliant people writing. I think the writing that she's done on this election controversy has been good. But if you read it, she hasn't been as personally mean.

She's been more funny and I think she's been more effective than some of her earlier columns on me and others, where the personal venom is so deep I think it sort of blocked the impact of what she was saying.

BRILL: ...Who [is one journalist who] generally gets it right,

MARSHALL/NEWSMAKERS

BILL CLINTON, PRESS CRITIC

explains what the issues are, and what's going on in the country?

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

BRILL: No, come on.

[Laughter]

PRESIDENT CLINTON [to Siewert]: Don't you think I would? You don't want me to answer that do you?

I will kill him. He would never get the Pulitzer Prize if I did that. But it's [*Los Angeles Times* political writer Ronald] Brownstein. ■

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 98] until the chances of making a mistake are at 1 in 200 or less. And when we called Florida, just before 8, it was significantly less than that."

At 7:55 P.M., VNS changed Florida from a CALL to a WIN GORE; at this point, NBC, CBS, and CNN had already declared Gore the winner there. Gore still had to win both Pennsylvania and Michigan to have a decent shot at the presidency—what the networks were referring to as the "trifecta"—but that was looking increasingly possible.

Within minutes, Mary Matalin, the conservative CNN commentator, began raising doubts about the Florida call. "Well, you're—I'm going to go out on a limb here," she said on-air. "We have early data. The spread is 2 percent. The raw total is 4,000 votes at this point. If it continues at this pace, there are half a million absentee ballots out there. I'm just telling you, this reminds me of [Governor George] Deukmejian in California [in 1982]: lost on Tuesday, won on Thursday." But Matalin was dismissed as a partisan stalwart. "Well, when we do call the state, we've taken the absentee ballot count into account," Schneider said. "When we call the state, we're pretty sure that state is going to go for the winner."

Matalin wasn't the only person questioning Florida. Over the next couple of hours, members of Bush's team in Austin spoke up as well. Karl Rove, Bush's chief political strategist, went on NBC at about 9:30 P.M. ET and admonished the network. "I would also suggest that Florida has been prematurely called," he said. Rove pointed out that Florida has two time zones. "First of all, I thought it was a little bit irresponsible of the networks to call it before the polls closed in the western part of Florida. Florida is still split among two time zones, eastern and central. You all called it before the polls had closed in the central part of the country."

Despite the fact that they were sharing data, the networks had acted as if they were alone in projecting winners. But after Rove's chastising—and a defiant appearance by Bush—anchors strained to point out that if there was a mistake, everyone had made it. Right before 10 P.M. ET, Peter Jennings said on ABC, "You know that we have projected Florida for Mr. Gore. I think everybody's now projected Mr. Gore winning in Florida. Mr. Bush says he's not yet ready to concede Florida."

"Let's pause and take a deep breath, appreciate it for what it is. This is the dance of democracy. This is as close as we come to a kind of sacred time in this country," said CBS's Dan Rather on election night.

In fact, as Jennings was talking, the networks had known for almost an hour that Florida was in trouble. "I can't tell you what a bad feeling that was," Mitofsky says. "But when you start to notice that the margin you felt was there starts to decline, you don't immediately yell 'Pull it off the air.' So we watched it for a short time to make sure we were going to be wrong. We wanted to make sure some aberrant piece of data didn't come in." Around 9:30 P.M. ET, VNS began warning subscribers about bad data in Florida. At 9:38, VNS sent a message that read, "We are canceling the vote in Cnty 16—Duval Cnty, FL—vote is strange."

"It did look like it wasn't going for Gore," Mitofsky says. "I don't remember how small the margin was, but...it didn't look like he was going to eke out a small victory either. We sure had no confidence that Gore was going to hold on to a small lead, and this was too important a decision to let it sit there." Mitofsky, in a conference call with CNN and CBS, told them to pull back Florida.

On CNN, Jeff Greenfield was talking when Bernard Shaw broke in.

Shaw: "Stand by, stand by—CNN right now is moving our earlier declaration of Florida back to the too-close-to-call...."
Greenfield: "Oh, waiter..."
Shaw: "Into the too-close-to-call column."
Greenfield: "One order of crow."
Bill Schneider: "One order of crow, yes."

Woodruff, who was also on CNN at the time, remembers when Tom Hannon, the executive producer on election night, spoke into her earpiece. "It was very direct," Woodruff says. "Tom is always very succinct. He just said, 'We've got to pull back Florida.' And that was it. I just thought, *Oh, my God, how horrible.* I was not aware so much of what other nets were doing. We have to crane our necks to look all the way across the newsroom, and so I could sort of make it out, but I couldn't tell exactly who they were calling. I was concerned about us. I didn't want us to be making mistakes."

At CBS, Rather was aware of what was going on at the other networks, and he was careful to share the blame: "Based on what we believed, and most other people believed at the time—I know of nobody who didn't believe it.... It turns out some of the data is suspect."

Indeed, there were some suspect data, most notably in Duval County, but that didn't seem to be the main problem; in fact, VNS's correction of the Duval County vote probably increased the time it took to pull Florida back from Gore. The main problem, as Matalin had indicated, seemed to be that VNS underestimated the number of absentee ballots, both in Florida and the rest of the country. That was the reason VNS gave to its subscribers for pulling back Florida. In a computer message that went out at 10:13 P.M. ET, VNS said, "We are retracting our call in FL because we don't have the confidence we did and we are still examining the absentee vote." This was followed up by the November 14 memo to the VNS board from Edelman, who wrote, "I still believe the biggest problem in the model is that we did not correctly anticipate the impact of the absentee vote."

Although Edelman's postmortem memo addresses only Florida—and most of the country's attention was focused on Florida—VNS muffed a number of other calls around the country. At about the same time that the networks pulled Florida back from Gore, they awarded New Mexico to the vice-president, only to retract it later. VNS also declared Maria Cantwell the winner of a Senate seat from Washington state, saying she had beaten incumbent Slade Gorton, only to call back that race later. Here's the VNS message, which went out to subscribers at 4:58 A.M. ET on November 8, that explained the pullback: "We have to retract Washington Senate—a good part of the absentee vote remains to be counted over the next 10 days. The current margin for Cantwell is not enough to maintain the call over that period." On CNN at about 5 A.M. ET, Shaw explained, "Officials in Washington state say the absentee ballots are being counted and they're not finished counting, so we back off." (Although it looks as

if, ultimately, both the New Mexico and Washington calls were correct, they weren't accurate calls at the time. New Mexico went back and forth for weeks, and Cantwell wasn't declared the winner in Washington until December 1.)

These mistakes combine to paint a picture of VNS's model as seriously flawed. On the basis of about 30 close races nationwide—senatorial, gubernatorial, and statewide presidential races that were decided by 5 percentage points or less—VNS fumbled three calls, or 10 percent of those it was hired to make.

Fox News was the first network to announce Bush the winner of Florida and the presidency.

On election night, the early Florida gaffe was pushed to the side in what became an increasingly tense drama. There hasn't been a close presidential election in more than 20 years, and the television anchors, as well as the journalists assembled in Austin and Nashville, where Gore was holed up, were feeding off the excitement. In the press tent, reporters, who had "electoral calculators" on their screens, were figuring out which combination of states would translate into 270 electoral votes for one candidate or the other. *The Washington Post*'s website was printing raw vote totals as they came in, and I toggled among screens: the Missouri Senate race, in which the incumbent, John Ashcroft, was locked in a tight battle with a dead man. Mel Carnahan; the Washington, Oregon, Iowa, and Florida presidential vote totals; the national vote totals. It was freezing in the press tent—Reuters's Patsy Wilson had wrapped one of the paper tablecloths around her for warmth. Rain was pouring down on the increasingly intoxicated crowd that had gathered in front of the governor's mansion. Just before 11 P.M. CT, Rather said, "Welcome back to CBS News election headquarters. Let's pause and take a deep breath, appreciate it for what it is. This is the dance of democracy. This is as close as we come to a kind of sacred time in this country."

The crowd in Austin had expected Bush to win ever since Florida had been pulled back from Gore. But people were wet and tired and cold, and enthusiasm waned as the night wore on. At 11:30 P.M. CT, Jeb Bush's eldest son, George P. Bush, tried to pump up the crowd, exhorting "guys" and "females" to chant "We want Florida." Barely anyone responded. But people did respond to the vote totals, and in Florida, Bush was flirting with a 100,000-vote lead.

At 2:05 A.M. ET—1:05 in Austin—with 96 percent of the vote counted, VNS showed Bush with a 29,386-vote lead in Florida, with 185,157 votes not yet counted. Gore would need 57 percent of those votes to win, which was possible but unlikely. Networks were discussing a Bush presidency. By 2:15, VNS was showing that Bush's lead had jumped to 47,861 votes, with 102,204 to be counted. Now Gore needed 72.4 percent of the remaining votes to win. VNS divided Florida into five regions; Gore was doing best in the "Miami/Gold Coast," in southern Florida, but was drawing just 60.1 percent of the vote there. VNS said it was 99.9 percent certain that Gore would lose Florida—the state on which the presidency hinged. A minute later, Fox made the call. Brit Hume was on-air at the time: "Got to interrupt you. We are now calling—Fox News now projects George W. Bush the winner in Florida, and thus it appears the winner of the presidency of the United States. Fox News projects George W. Bush the winner of the presidency of the United States based on the call we now make in the state of Florida. And, so there it is, Bush the apparent winner. I must tell you, everybody, after all this, all night long, we put Bush at 271, Gore at 243. I feel a little bit apprehensive about the whole thing. I have no reason to doubt our decision desk, but there it is."

The other networks followed suit. Doris Kearns Goodwin, the presidential historian, was speaking on NBC when Tom Brokaw interrupted her.

> Brokaw: "Stop. Stop. Doris, Doris, Doris. Doris, Doris, Doris."
> Goodwin: "Uh-oh; something's happened."
> Brokaw: "George Bush is the president-elect of the United States. He has won the state of Florida."

On ABC, Jennings asked Cokie Roberts if "this is it?" She replied, "Yes. It's been a very cautious night, Peter, after the initial first bad call, and so I think that, unlike other times, instead of rushing to make calls, here it is, what, 2:30 in the morning. So this is likely to be it. Yes."

CNN made its call after cutting to correspondent Candy Crowley in Austin; viewers could see the crowd celebrating the announcement on Fox, though CNN had not made a call of its own. By 2:20 A.M. ET, every network had declared Bush the winner. The media filed out of the press tent and into the holding pen in front of the governor's mansion. Red, white, and blue lights bathed the white columns. A Bush video set to Stevie Wonder's "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" showed on the JumboTron, and a young woman sang "America the Beautiful." As the JumboTron flitted from image to image, the beery crowd—Bud and Bud Light had been selling for $3 a cup—cheered at dissonant images: A defiant Ralph Nader got some lusty applause, as did a shot of the depressed, equally wet crowd outside the War Memorial in Nashville.

On the basis of about 30 close races nationwide, Voter News Service fumbled three calls, or 10 percent of the calls it was hired to make.

Then we waited in the cold. Mark McKinnon, a former Democrat who had helped craft Bush's media strategy, made a tipsy appearance on CNN, then went back, he said, to "have some more tequila." The networks began their postmortems, and the dailies scrambled to get in one last dispatch. And unbeknownst to the reporters huddled outside in Austin, Bush's lead was dropping.

By 3:15 A.M. ET—2:15 in Austin—I began to wonder what was going on. The crowd had been told 45 minutes earlier that Bush would be making an appearance in about 20 minutes, and hadn't been told anything since. I walked past the security guards and back to the press tent. I saw that Bush's lead had dropped to about 11,000 votes. On NBC, Brokaw was talking about a recount: "You know, it's—it's technically possible that there could be a recount that could flip that [11,000-vote Bush lead]....And we haven't seen Vice-President Al Gore. Perhaps they're waiting for all the votes to be counted, all the—all the *i*'s to be dotted, all the *t*'s to be crossed. That would be something if the networks managed to blow it twice in one night."

On CNN, Shaw and Woodruff were getting anxious while waiting for Gore's concession speech.

> Woodruff: "I think we've waited now a sufficient number of minutes since we know his motorcade arrived at this location; it is appropriate for us to ask questions about what is the delay all about...."
> Shaw: "He could be talking..."
> Woodruff: "...because presumably there were remarks that were prepared either before he left the hotel or on the way over."
> Shaw: "Well, John [King, CNN's correspondent in Nashville]

reported that he wanted to add—that he actually wanted to put some finishing touches to his remarks. He could be on the phone with Bill Clinton."

Bush's lead continued to drop, and reporters in Austin, in Nashville, and on the networks were talking about figures from the Florida secretary of state's office; those numbers showed an even smaller lead for Bush. On-air at ABC, political director Mark Halperin began to question the call. "I—I feel like I'm the sole person here standing in the way of the Bush transition," he said. "But, you know, we see here, the Florida State Department Division of Elections website shows a very small margin—this is brought to our attention by, amongst other people, the Democrats down in Nashville, who say they look in their computer at this website and they see 48.9 to 48.9, a very small margin of a thousand votes between the two men...." But Jennings told Halperin to ignore the website: "And I think I'm hearing in my ear that we believe that the Voter News Service is ahead of the Florida Department of State's numbers at this point." But at VNS headquarters in Manhattan, folks weren't so sure. A 3:27 A.M. ET message from VNS to subscribers read, "Florida—The Sec of State website has a much narrower margin for Bush. We are comparing county by county trying to determine discrepancies."

Back on CNN, Shaw, Woodruff, and Schneider were talking about what was now a 600-vote margin, a figure that, as Schneider pointed out, "is like one floor of a condominium in South Florida. It's a very, very small number of people."

Then word came down that Gore's campaign manager, William Daley, would make a statement. As Daley walked onstage, Woodruff said, "Before he speaks, John, CNN will confirm there will be a recount in the state of Florida. And CNN moves it to the undecided column and back from George W. Bush."

Daley was succinct. "Just an hour or so ago, the TV networks called this race for Governor Bush. It now appears that their call was premature," he said. Reporters in Austin were speechless, clustered around the television sets in the press tent. "Let me be very clear about this....Without being certain of the results in Florida, we simply cannot be certain of the results of this national election....And until the results—the recount—is concluded and the results in Florida become official, our campaign continues."

After Daley left the stage in Nashville, Jennings announced that ABC was moving Florida back to the too-close-to-call column. "So now we have our second major switch of the night," he said.

On CBS, Rather pleaded with his audience not to blame him for this second huge gaffe: "I'm always reminded of those west Texas saloons where they had a sign that says, 'Please don't shoot the piano player; he's doing the best he can,'" he said. "That's been pretty much the case here tonight over this election."

While we waited in the cold in Austin, the networks continued to scramble. On ABC, Jennings and Halperin were trying to figure out what would happen next; they finally decided that the Florida secretary of state would oversee the recount. Jennings asked Halperin for the name of the secretary of state. "Her name is Katherine Harris," Halperin responded. "She's a Republican, and we're going to learn all about her. Fourth-generation Floridian." Around 3:30 A.M. Austin time—4:30 in New York and D.C.—we realized that this was not going to be resolved soon. There were 224 votes separating Bush and Gore in Florida: 2,902,733 to 2,902,509—a difference of about four one-hundredths of 1 percent.

CNN's Judy Woodruff says that during the election coverage, she "only got up once to go to the bathroom in those 13 hours."

Over the next hour, the press tent cleared out, and the TV anchors who had been on-air through the night finally were replaced. In Atlanta, Judy Woodruff left the CNN studio at 6 A.M. ET; she had been "sitting in those seats" since 4:45 P.M. the day before. "I only got up once to go to the bathroom in those 13 hours," Woodruff says. "You couldn't take your eye off this story. You knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime thing."

In the days and weeks following November 7, plenty of blame went around for the bad calls made on election night. John Ellis, a cousin of George W. Bush's and the head of Fox's decision desk, was accused of pressing his fingers to the scale: In this scenario, Fox's call, the first among the networks', prompted everyone else to follow suit. But Ellis had no control over the VNS numbers that showed it was 99.9 percent definite that Gore would lose. As Mitofsky says, "this business about Fox pressuring other people to call, I never made a projection in my life because of some other network. When I heard they put it out there, I was disappointed, because I wanted to do it, but I was in the process of reviewing the counties, one at a time....I wanted to make sure there were no bad numbers. We were about to make the projection."

Mitofsky also says calling Florida for Bush would have happened—and happened unanimously—even if there wasn't one polling consortium. "That second call would have happened no matter what," he says. Looking back at the VNS data from election night, I'm not sure I agree. At 2:05 A.M. ET, Bush was leading by 30,000 with 185,000 votes left to be counted. At 2:10 A.M., VNS reported that Bush's lead had increased to 51,000 votes, with only 180,000 left to be counted—meaning Bush had picked up 21,000 votes, even though only 5,000 additional votes had been counted, according to VNS's calculations. That discrepancy seems to have been overlooked in the rush; it was the 2:15 A.M. VNS data that prompted the final call. But if every network had been number-crunching independently instead of just interpreting the same batch of data, it's conceivable someone would have caught the apparent 16,000 phantom votes.

ABC's Electoral College map shows Bush winning Florida and the presidency.

As it turns out, it was those 16,000 votes that led to the faulty call. In his memo to the VNS board, Murray Edelman, the polling group's director, talks about those votes: "There was a 'correction' in Volusia County at 2:08 that showed a major drop in votes for Gore. The screen at 2:05, just prior to the change in Volusia County, showed a lead of 29,386 for Gore [sic—the lead was actually for Bush] which increased to 51,433 five minutes later." At 2:15, VNS was showing that there were 1,405 votes remaining to be counted in Volusia County; Gore would pick up about 21,000 of those votes, or almost 20,000 more votes than VNS thought were outstanding. As Edelman explains in his memo, "This 'correction' was corrected at 2:48. At the 2:50 time

point, the [Bush] lead dropped." And more votes remained to be counted: "At 2:10," Edelman writes, "the end of the night model estimated 179,713 votes outstanding. This turned out to be an underestimate since there were over 359,000 votes yet to come in." Volusia County was not the only county that VNS had miscalculated. The VNS model projected 41,000 votes outstanding in Palm Beach County at 2:10. "[B]ut 129,000 votes actually came in. This difference could have been due to errors in the county or because many absentee ballots were included at the end. It could also have been that the very large precincts in the county reported at the end."

After reading this explanation, Mitofsky's claim that Florida would have been called for Bush even if each network had its own polling operation is even less persuasive. It seems clear that a major problem with VNS's models is that they failed to take into account that how Americans vote has changed dramatically since 1996. Many more people vote by absentee ballot, which was as easy to anticipate as it was neglected. Absentee ballots skew exit polls: People using those ballots don't show up at the local school on election day and can't be asked how they voted. Jeff Gralnick, a former executive at ABC and CNN, says the VNS system was "waiting to explode." He compares the networks' faith in the reliability of the VNS exit-poll models with the pre-Challenger mind-set at NASA. "They were launching space shuttles," he says. "Nothing can go wrong. You become so secure in your belief in your own technology that you just keep doing it until it blows up." ◘

With additional research by Justina Kessler

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 103] of millions of voters who watch the presidential debates. The CPD sets the format for each debate, selects the moderator (in this case, Jim Lehrer), and sets the unrealistically high admission barrier of 15 percent support in polls conducted by subsidiaries of the major media corporations—the same media corporations whose editors, reporters, and producers determine the level of coverage for third-party candidates—thus excluding any competitors from the stage.

There was remarkably little news coverage of, or challenge to, this cleverly exclusionary device, which indirectly places access to the debates in the hands of the media. No coverage, no poll movement. Giving the CPD a monopoly of access to the American people on behalf of the Republican and Democratic candidates was a default of major magnitude by the television networks. Other institutions could have sponsored multicandidate debates that Gore and Bush could not have afforded to ignore. I wrote open letters to the networks and to several industrial unions suggesting such sponsorship. The unions did not reply, and Fox News Channel, ABC, and MSNBC sent noncommittal responses or offered unacceptable alternatives that didn't include participation by Bush and Gore. Our efforts in this regard received no coverage or commentary.

Nader gets wired for audio before an interview at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport in October.

TIM BOYLE/NEWSMAKERS

Given the media's largely showcase coverage of the two major candidates, redundantly reporting the same mantras and slogans day after day, the CPD's shutdown role was crucially destructive of what could have been a more diverse, competitive, and interesting presidential campaign year. The CPD has learned what being in the debates did for John Anderson in 1980, Ross Perot in 1992, and Jesse Ventura (on the state level) in 1998. It was not about to advance the political visibility of any more third-party or independent candidacies. This did not upset the commercial media very much, though it did galvanize progressive community weeklies and independent media outlets into making the "Let Ralph Debate" movement prominent within their relatively small audiences.

Interestingly enough, talk radio was far more open to hearing and questioning the candidates through audience call-ins than all the other mainstream media combined. This was one forum where sentences and even paragraphs could be introduced to the airways without the pressure of sound-bite management. Again and again, the hosts would complain to me that their invitations to Gore and Bush to come on the show had been turned down or simply ignored. The handlers of their scripted campaigns do not find the unmanaged radio talk show congenial to the force fields erected around their candidates.

The one tenet of our campaign that the established commentators and reporters wrote about most often was what reformers call "dirty money politics." I read with amazement one editorial after another in the *Times*, the *Post*, and regional papers excoriating the soft-money binges, the lavish fund-raisers, the Niagara of money flowing into both major-party coffers at countless events, including the Republican and Democratic conventions, which were both billboarded with corporate logos. Yet rarely did my campaign or any other Green Party candidates for lesser offices receive any recognition for refusing to take soft money, corporate money, PAC money, or any such contributions to our national nominating convention in June. We set an example widely desired by media commentators and were ignored, which demonstrates once again that the media's lens does not see beyond the two-party duopoly.

In October, we tried one more way of persuading editors and producers to pay attention to the corporate power abuses that we were highlighting. Our researchers compiled nearly 200 investigative articles and television exposés on subjects that were related to our agenda. They ranged from the brilliant 1998 *Time* magazine cover story on corporate welfare by Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele to prominent stories about environmental, consumer, investor, taxpayer, and worker injustices committed by major corporations and reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, The Associated Press, *60 Minutes*, *The Boston Globe*, and others.

We pointed out to these papers and programs that their own reporters had written these articles but that the policy questions they raised had not found their way into the presidential campaign dialogue. I asked one *Time* magazine staffer why campaign reporters didn't raise the subject of corporate welfare with Bush and Gore. His reply was "It is hard on the trail to reach the candidates, and when you do break through, they don't answer the question." Well, what about when Gore and Bush went on the Sunday interview shows or granted long interviews to major papers and magazines or answered their questionnaires? Or at the debates? Or during the more accessible primary season? There are opportunities for a determined press corps, particularly a press corps that demands regular press conferences, to force answers on these questions. Instead they settle for exclusive snip-

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pets or asides on the campaign plane.

After all the pages written about Bush and Gore—their youths, their early years in politics, their position papers for their campaigns, their daily sound bites, their sallies against each other—precious little came to the public's attention about their actual records, in contrast to their rhetoric. In July 1999, the *Post*'s Broder wrote that Bush's "five-year record in public office is largely unexamined." Gore was a media escapee when it came to separating his speeches from his record on things as varied as the environment, drug prices here and abroad, corporate subsidies, and his continuing daily promise to fight "big oil," "big HMOs," insurance companies, and the big chemical companies. His record is rich in surrender to or support of those and other big-business interests, including car companies, the biotechnology industry, the oil giants, and the banking, agribusiness, and telecommunications goliaths. The contrasts between the records of these two men and their campaign-trail verbiage begged for media examination. Only a few articles in small magazines such as *The Nation* and *Mother Jones*, together with infrequent mass-media asides, rose to the occasion.

Former *Washington Post* reporter Morton Mintz summed up the situation this way: "The issues owed serious, sustained coverage are predominately the issues that the candidates select, usually in their own self-interest."

But there is also a self-interest on the part of the major media conglomerates. They are, after all, businesses that rely on advertising revenue and the goodwill of the surrounding business community. The increasing concentration of the media business ensures that standardized, homogenized material is squeezed into the narrow news slots on television. The decline in the quality of the networks' news coverage of the presidential campaigns has been unrelenting every four years, a slide that is not made up by their much smaller cable affiliates, such as MSNBC.

Whatever the desires of reporters and their editors, the top echelons of these companies are simply not eager to examine the consequences of concentrated corporate power in the context of political campaign coverage. Policies on street crime regularly make the evening news; policies on corporate crime don't. Welfare reform proposals are always newsworthy, corporate welfare reform rarely. There are not many mainstream, big-time magazines like *Business Week*, which prominently displayed its journalistic acumen and integrity on the cover of its September 11, 2000, edition. "Too Much Corporate Power?" asked the cover story. Inside, in pages of devastating details, *Business Week* replied "Yes" and then, in a remarkable editorial, urged corporations to "get out of politics."

Whatever the desires of reporters and their editors, the top echelons of these companies are not eager to examine the consequences of corporate power in the context of political campaign coverage.

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

There were other efforts in the last campaign to get the media and the major candidates to address substantive issues, notably Morton Mintz's series of 28 cogent and concise articles for TomPaine.com on a wide range of subjects "that powerfully affect us all" and were aimed at "Mr. or Ms. Presidential, Vice Presidential, or Senate or House candidate." The series received substantial visibility when one of Mintz's pieces was excerpted in an advertorial on *The New York Times*'s op-ed page. Still, his work came largely to naught: "I didn't get a single reaction of any kind from any political editor or reporter involved in covering the campaigns," he told me. The lesson of that silence is clear: No democracy worth its salt should rely so pervasively on the commercial media. And no seriously pro-democracy campaign will ever get an even break, or adequate coverage, from that media. ◘

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 109] they conflicted with Nixon's oft-told version of events. My timing was lucky. The arcane matter of Nixon's post-election behavior in 1960, which had never before carried much historical significance, suddenly became relevant after this past Election Day. The next day, references to Nixon's "selfless" and "patriotic" behavior, from both Bush allies and TV analysts, spewed forth like a gusher from an uncapped fire hydrant. A colleague of mine at *Slate*, Jack Shafer, promptly posted an item tweaking the reporters—skeptics who never used to believe a word Nixon said—who now slavishly parroted his memoirs. I, too, joined the melee, writing an op-ed piece for the *Los Angeles Times* that addressed the question of Nixon's "statesmanlike" behavior in November 1960.

My point wasn't to bash Nixon or to succor the Gore forces. I wanted to correct the historical record, which I believed was being twisted and wrenched from context for expedience. It seemed to me that if pundits were going to cite the 1960 election as a precedent, they ought at least to know all the facts. Those included the formation of a Nixon Recount Committee that raised at least $100,000, inflammatory statements by top RNC officials ("The more we dig into this election, the clearer it becomes that fraud was widespread," the RNC's Morton said on December 1), and lawsuits filed in at least New Jersey, Texas, and Illinois. If Nixon appeared unconcerned about the recount efforts, some of his aides were lathered up. Peter Flanigan, who coordinated regional volunteers for Nixon, told his Chicago point man, William Fetridge: "Something should be done about it. Damn it—demand a recount. Get into it. You, Bill, should lead the way." All of this, I thought, put the Nixon-as-gracious-loser yarns in a different light. I also thought it interesting that while all the pundits were demanding a quick resolution to the Bush-Gore dispute, fearing disaster should it extend so much as a week, the bickering between Nixon's and Kennedy's camps had continued well into December 1960. I hoped my article would prod people to revisit the episode and see it in a fuller historical context.

I entertained fantasies that I was going to set the historical record straight, that other historians would start scouring the sources, forging beyond the self-serving memoirs and timeworn memories to piece together the neglected story of the 1960 election aftermath.

For a moment, the *Los Angeles Times* piece seemed to strike gold. I received inquiries about my research from ABC's *20/20* and *Inside Edition*, MSNBC's *Hardball*, and NBC's *Nightly News*. On the Friday the *Times* piece ran, a booker from *20/20* asked me to drop everything and prepare to head down to the studio to be interviewed by Barbara Walters. Over the weekend, an MSNBC producer e-mailed, expressing interest and wanting

to know if I could recommend any "sources online" for further research. *Inside Edition* phoned next and even offered to come up to Columbia, though I was a little suspicious when the producer I spoke to kept reminding me that I didn't have to make it "too intellectual." ("We're not *60 Minutes*," he joked.) Only NBC was interested in seeing my notes and photocopied newspaper clips, many of which it painstakingly videotaped for broadcast. Print reporters called, too. *The New Yorker* and *The Washington Times* phoned to ask about my research, while many others cited my *Slate* or *Times* columns. E-mail messages poured in, including the following note:

> *Thanks for keeping the record straight. I have always been suspect of RN's claim re 1960. I would be interested in your documentation for too many are relying on RN's misinformation. I'm sure you saw the Richard Reeves OpEd piece in today's NYT. If you'd be interested in discussing this further, please let me know where I might call you. Also, if I can be of any assistance in your broader endeavor, I'd be happy to discuss it. I have more information about the man than I wish. If you are studying Nixon, I need not explain who I am, or how I happen to have such information.*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *John W. Dean*

The reaction induced some delusions of grandeur. I entertained fantasies that I was going to set the historical record straight, that other historians would start scouring the sources, forging beyond the self-serving memoirs and timeworn memories to piece together the neglected story of the 1960 election aftermath. Good information would drive out bad, and whatever would become of electoral accuracy in this affair, historical accuracy would at least claim a small victory.

I was mistaken. *Hardball* and *20/20* chose not to pursue my findings. Others showed little interest in the nuances of the issue. *Inside Edition*, it turned out, wanted me to talk about the "irony" (their term) that Gore's campaign manager, William Daley, is the son of Richard Daley. Why they needed a historian for that, I don't know—and besides, Daley family lore is not my specialty any more than the 1960 election is James Baker's. Still others, including one amiable journalist who writes for the alternative press in Los Angeles, nudged me to state more than the record allowed—to assert unequivocally that Nixon was directing the Republicans' recount efforts, something about which I could only speculate.

Richard Nixon giving a speech in the aftermath of the 1960 election

LYNN PELHAM/TIME PIX

For every pundit who corrected the record about Nixon—and several did—dozens more rehashed the canned version of events. Like a hapless gardener, I would root out one weed only to have more sprout elsewhere. Then, within a few days, the press pack moved on to other matters, from butterfly ballots to dimpled chads to rent-a-mobs. Dented but not derailed, the conventional-wisdom juggernaut rolled on.

Why did so many people keep repeating distorted versions of history even after they might have known better? The answers are complicated. Several groups disseminated the Nixon myth—Republican partisans, media pundits, network newsmagazines, and historians—each, I think, for its own reasons.

PARTISANS: In the case of the Republican party hacks and flacks who propounded the Nixon story, there's little to explain. Party stalwarts such as James Baker, Jim Nicholson, Bob Dole, Bill Kristol, and Peggy Noonan naturally wanted to pressure Gore to concede. Many of them, surely, recognized the incongruity of holding up Nixon as a role model. Some may have even taken a special glee in rubbing liberal noses in the behavior of their long-hated foe. These comments, although the most cynical, were also the least disturbing because they carried little weight. When I heard Newt Gingrich talking on the Fox News Network about Nixon's "statesmanlike approach," I could think only: Would you buy a used anecdote from this man?

PUNDITS: More troubling was the pundits' lockstep march to praise Nixon. Well-known analysts, local-newspaper editorialists, and cable-TV pontificators from across the spectrum all recited the story of Nixon's nobility, often adding that Gore should step aside. Offenders included syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington, *The Boston Globe*'s David Nyhan, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*'s Cynthia Tucker, and the editorial writers at *The Economist*.

In the case of the pundits, the bias was rooted, I think, not in ideology but in how they do their job. Newspeople love a good story, and the tale of Nixon's magnanimity teems with irresistible irony: Nixon, the king of dirty tricks and resentment, displays unwonted class, while the presumably classy Kennedy wins the White House via the low road. The story also lends the pundits a veneer of credibility and fair-mindedness: They can show everyone that they're neither knee-jerk Nixon haters nor congenital JFK courtiers.

Everyone knows, of course, that research isn't in a pundit's job description. For most, a spin of the Rolodex and a vigorous Nexis search make for a proud day's work. And so we might forgive them their trespasses on unfamiliar historical terrain. But there's a danger in their idleness. Nowadays a story that enters the Nexis database quickly assumes the stature of fact. Because many people regard a handful of Nexis citations as proof of a story's veracity, false information spreads like a virus through the columns of the Nexis users, amassing unearned authority with each repetition. The press's propensity to whip up what Frank Rich of *The New York Times* has called "mediathons"—barrages of round-the-clock coverage, analysis, and spin—creates a similar echo-chamber effect for information repeated on TV yakfests. With the Nixon story, a few pundits began recounting it—Apple's piece in the *Times* was influential—giving others license to repeat it, no research required.

TELEVISION NEWS REPORTERS: We put little stock in the spin of partisans, slightly more in the opinions of pundits, and even more in the reports of TV news journalists. So what was most troubling to me in this whole affair was the behavior of ABC's *20/20*, which I saw as reflective of the shoddy way in which TV news is sometimes reported.

My experience with *20/20* makes for a revealing case study. The day my *Los Angeles Times* piece ran, a booker at ABC phoned me to set up an interview. I was eager to cooperate—not so much because I wished to talk to Barbara Walters but because I wanted to contribute to a public discussion of history. I told the people at *20/20* that whether or not they interviewed me, they ought to look at my documentation or send a researcher to the library. A few hours later, though, the booker claimed she wasn't sure if ABC was going to run the segment. As it turned out, she was, I suspect, simply embarrassed that she had jerked me around. The news program wound up running a segment that showcased the flawed, familiar claims of Nixon's old pals, and I'm guessing that it was hard for her to break that news to a revisionist, which is what I had become.

Apparently, ABC did make a halfhearted attempt to check out my story. At one point in the afternoon, a production associate at *20/20* faxed

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my article to Robert Dallek, the Boston University historian and biographer of Lyndon Johnson. Somewhat presumptuously, as he recalled, she directed him to verify my research for her. In effect, a multimillion-dollar news division was asking a prizewinning historian to serve as its unpaid fact-checker. Although a bit put off, Dallek read the article and told me later that he found it persuasive—but no one at ABC ever called him back. Dallek told me that ABC didn't seem terribly concerned about getting its facts straight. "There was something very slapdash about it," he said of the approach.

I tried to get ABC's side of the story, but none of the producers or assistants I called—Alice Pifer, Karen Burnes, Trish Arico, or Jennifer Senan—phoned me back with an explanation. I did reach the booker, who explained that her bosses wouldn't talk to me and that she herself might lose her job if she spoke to me. She pleaded with me not to print her name and later told me she couldn't even give me a videotape of the segment as she had agreed to do earlier. Yet she tried her best to present ABC's side of the story. They were working under a deadline, she explained; calls had gone out to a bunch of people, and they were crashing the story. In other words, there wasn't time to find out what had really happened in the 1960 election. It was easier to run with a familiar story (even one demonstrably untrue) than to take time to consider new information.

Weeks later, as this article was being fact-checked, ABC contacted *Brill's Content* to express concern that I was writing about my interactions with the booker. Shortly before the piece closed, Jeffrey Schneider, vice-president of media relations at ABC News, agreed to talk to me on the record. The explanation he gave me for ABC's decisions was the same as the booker's. "We're talking about putting a story together in a matter of hours," he said, "and the aspiration of the piece was to ascertain the viewpoints of two men who had access to Nixon and who were eyewitnesses to this historic happening. I think the piece succeeded in presenting what it set out to present. If there had been many more days to put it together, we would have done an expanded look at this historic event." When I asked him about their attempt to reach Dallek, he said, "A lot of people were reached out to. But we're not talking about putting on a *Frontline* documentary where people have six months to do the research." He also maintained that the producers had relied on an article written by the journalist David Halberstam—even after I told him no such article existed. (However, as this piece went to press, an abashed and apologetic ABC executive explained that it was Richard Reeves's piece that *20/20* had in fact consulted.)

The episode made me reassess the value of the newsmagazines, which I'd considered a cut above other television news. In fact, while these shows purport to do "in-depth" research and present information unavailable elsewhere on TV, they also patch their shows together on the fly. Their deadline pressures, especially during fast-changing events like the election dispute, rarely make for the kind of careful sifting and sorting of evidence that history demands.

HISTORIANS: A final group of people bears some responsibility for promoting the Nixon legend—historians. To their credit, some of them, including *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* regulars Doris Kearns Goodwin (who moonlights for NBC) and Michael Beschloss (who moonlights for ABC), did accurately place Nixon's concession in context. But others, who should have known better, botched the story. On NBC on election night, Nixon biographer Stephen E. Ambrose relayed Nixon's version of events, intoning that Nixon "thought it would be a terrible thing if the world's leading democracy had a contested election." On CBS, Douglas Brinkley extolled Nixon for "one of his rare acts of great statesmanship." In his *New York Times* op-ed piece, Reeves, a biographer whom Kennedy often looked to for historical authority, opined that "whatever else he was, Nixon was a patriot." In the *Los Angeles Times*, political scientist Larry Sabato said of Nixon that "he bowed out relatively gracefully," while on National Public Radio Theodore Lowi stated, "I think [Nixon's behavior is] a lesson for Al Gore."

How could so many scholars—some quite eminent—bungle this story? The error, I think, reflects less on these individuals than on the conflicting demands of journalism and history. History requires lots of time and rejects neat answers; journalism operates on deadline and usually favors clear, simple arguments or stories. Lowi, a Cornell University political scientist and author of the classic book *The End of Liberalism*, says he often gets calls from journalists, but seldom do they truly want to hear his opinions. Rather, they want him to utter a quote that will support a point they've already chosen to make. "They want filler," Lowi says. If he doesn't utter what they want, he won't get quoted.

Historian Stanley Kutler of the University of Wisconsin, author of *The Wars of Watergate*, agrees: "I find that they have their story in mind when they call, and they want people to confirm what they already believe." During President Clinton's impeachment drama, Kutler says, he got into a shouting match with a big-time, nationally known reporter who pressed him to liken the Monica Lewinsky affair to Nixon's transgressions. Kutler repeatedly refused to acknowledge any similarities between the two scandals; the reporter simply left Kutler's point of view on the cutting-room floor. Kutler adds that he prefers doing live television to talking to print reporters, because "on TV you can at least say, 'I don't agree with that.' You can have the final word." Better yet, says Princeton historian Sean Wilentz, you can write up your own ideas for op-ed pages and magazines like *The New Republic*.

Constrained by the demand for sound bites, the allure of neat historical lessons, and the culture of competitive deadline journalism, most newspeople place getting a good story above honoring the richness and fullness of history.

Still, most journalists enlist a historian not on his or her own terms but on their terms. Journalists seek not to get a lengthier, more subtle, and more complicated take on the past, but to borrow the aura of authority that emanates from a "historian" and thus be relieved of having to make sense of history for themselves.

Hence, a strange irony: The "experts" the TV shows rely on are often far from expert in the topics they're asked to speak about. "Very rarely does anyone call who's really familiar with my work," Lowi says. "They may call Cornell looking for a historian and they're told, 'Well, there's always old Lowi.'" Dallek, too, says that since he's become a go-to guy for the TV shows, he's often conscripted to comment on matters far afield from those he's written about. But trotting out regular faces instead of tracking down actual experts (or doing the time-consuming research) can be hazardous. No historian is so well informed across the board that he or she will have all the relevant information readily available whenever a booker calls. Lowi tells me that when he spoke about Nixon on NPR in November, he simply didn't know the full story of what the Republicans did after the 1960 election. "They drag out historians to prove a certain point," Lowi says, "and maybe that's what happened to me."

In the case of the 1960 election and its aftermath, I was lucky, since I had recently done research using primary sources to find out what had happened, and what I discovered had been omitted from the standard accounts. But few among the stable of regular TV historians had had occasion to read my *Slate* article or to do much research themselves. When asked to comment about Nixon and

1960, most historians naturally relied on a handful of incomplete accounts—just as I would have done. After all, there was never any reason to question those accounts. What we deem to be historically significant changes from era to era, varying with the new concerns of the present, and although it's long been recognized that the 1960 election was important, never, until November 2000, was the aftermath of the 1960 election deemed relevant. So even historians went with faulty, unchecked accounts.

I was, of course, gratified to see my evidence and arguments about the 1960 election aftermath make their way into the public discussion—just as I was discouraged, three weeks after the election, to see Bob Dole still invoking Nixon's noble behavior in the op-ed pages of *The New York Times*. But after the whole Nixon brouhaha subsided, I was struck by another irony. Although several commentators had reported my findings, few inquired into my sources, looked at my research, or quizzed me about how I knew what I knew. In other words, many of those who adopted my argument were as guilty as those who repeated the tales of Nixon's magnanimity. They, too, uncritically accepted what I said simply because I wear the label of historian.

Princeton's Wilentz suggests that this problem goes to the heart, once more, of two different conceptions of history. Historians view their work as a matter of interpretation. But the news media, especially television, have a hard time accepting that dissimilar historians may interpret the past in radically divergent ways. "In politics, they understand that people of different parties have different points of view. But they don't understand the idea of historical differences," Wilentz says. Journalists tend to treat history as a vast encyclopedia of information and historians simply as people who can tell you that information without having to look it up. Of the handful of "media historians" who appear so often on television, Wilentz says, "they're overexposed and underutilized"—overexposed because they appear so often these days, underutilized because they're rarely asked to provide more than color commentary, seldom solicited for the original interpretations they're surely capable of offering.

For some years now, the news media have been pretending that they are enriching discussions of politics with the weighty stuff of history. Often, though, they are passing off as history versions of the past that are incomplete, inaccurate, shorn of their interpretive framework, and plucked from necessary context. Where historians pride themselves on offering complexity, the media more commonly use them to find simplicity. Constrained by the demand for sound bites, the allure of neat historical lessons, and the culture of competitive deadline journalism, most newspeople place getting a good story above honoring the richness and fullness of history. They rarely track down the right experts, or air competing points of view, or linger over wrinkles in an argument. They don't make room for the immense amounts of research, the careful sifting of evidence, and the nuanced verdicts of which history consists.

I don't doubt that in making these decisions, reporters are following the ratings. Nor, as a journalist, do I deny the virtues of ironic anecdotes, illuminating analogies, or instructive lessons from the past. Rather, I submit that the quick-hit treatment the press accords history is unnecessary.

Around us, there is evidence of a public appetite for history. PBS, The History Channel, and other networks broadcast intelligent, subtle historical material; Ken Burns's documentaries, although sometimes cloying or formulaic, are nonetheless thoughtful, deeply researched, and sensitive to differing interpretations of history. Newspapers across the country are picking up history-related columns distributed by the History News Service, a syndicate run by the distinguished historians Joyce Appleby and James Banner, which recruits academics to comment on historical matters within their expertise. On the Internet, TomPaine.com and other websites publish informative articles about the American past. And judging from its ubiquitous advertisements, the History Book Club seems to be doing just fine.

Surely it's possible for the media to get history right and find an audience. What that requires is time, patience, care, and a willingness to suspend one's opinions and hold one's tongue until more has been learned. In calmly waiting out the results of Florida's presidential election and forswearing a rush to judgment, most of the public exhibited these traits. When it comes to learning from history, we in the media—both public historians and history-minded journalists—should do no less. ◘

BILL MAHER'S CAMPAIGN

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 117] no, I confess, I did it. Right there, I did it. I killed her with my d--k, thank you very much. She said she couldn't take any more, but like the other 23 hours of the day, I thought she was full of s--t. All right, thank you very much. Oh, I can sit in the front seat, thank you very much, that's very kind of you, officer. Tom, is it? Tom, thank you, Tom."

Like many other male comedians whose acts play with sadism and sexuality, Maher is often accused of misogyny. After I saw his video, I asked him if he considers himself hostile to women. He found the idea absurd. "People sometimes say I am anti-women, which couldn't be more ridiculous. If anything, I choose to spend my time with women because I like them." Was it his storied dating life, chronicled in the pages of magazines like *Us Weekly*, that fueled this perception? Maher trotted out an answer he's given to the press before. He compared himself to Dred Scott, the slave whose Supreme Court case helped ignite the Civil War. "I feel like that's how women look at me," says Maher. "Especially married women. I am like Dred Scott. I have made it to freedom and I'm setting a very bad example for all the other men out there."

On the day before the election, CNN dispatched reporter Jim Moret to interview Maher on the set of his show. Moret, with his all-American face and pink tie, had the sleek, manicured look of someone who makes a living in front of the camera. He asked Maher about a recent episode of *The Tonight Show* in which Jay Leno edited George W. Bush's appearance when the candidate flubbed a line. Maher roundly criticized Leno, saying, "When you have a candidate on, even if you are an entertainment show, you are the press." Then Moret played a tape of Bush campaigning. "Bo Derek was in Michigan over the weekend, campaigning for George W. Bush," he began. "Clearly, these candidates are trying to enlist help where they feel it will be helping the most." They traded blank looks. Maher shrugged and said, "Bo Derek has always been a very strong Republican, although her nipples are Libertarian. Not many people know that." Moret broke up, and added that perhaps Maher had forgotten that they were on daytime TV, where the obscenity standards are stricter than those for evening TV. Maher shot back, "Well, you can say 'Libertarian.'"

Politically Incorrect's staff works out of office space the show rents in CBS Television City, an imposing square building painted black and white, which looms over L.A.'s Fairfax Avenue. Inside, cavernous hallways open onto soundstages, around which greenrooms and offices are clustered.

I dropped by the morning before the episode with Jewel and Jason Alexander. At 8:30 A.M., the staff started to trickle in. The bookers were first to arrive, hurrying to lock in last-minute guests, trying to assemble a panel that's balanced enough so that Maher can vent against conservatives and liberals with equal rigor. Bookers strive to assemble a

conservative, a comedian, and one or two "faces," or recognizable celebrities. Booking top-shelf celebrities is challenging. The more famous they are, the more they have to lose by appearing on a show that pries them from their handlers and promotional scripts. "When you come here—even though we are becoming more promotional—there are five people in a half-hour, which is really 22 minutes," said coordinating producer Joy Dolce, who came to *PI* after working on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. "And so Tom Hanks's publicist says, 'You know Tom loves the show, but he really does not have enough time, because he's going to do *Leno* and *Letterman* and then he's going away with his family.' We hear it all the time."

The staff tries to give guests a list of topics Maher plans to discuss, along with accompanying news stories that provide background information. But *Politically Incorrect*'s writers often don't finalize a list of topics until the night before the show. "They [the guests] want the topics in advance as far as possible. In some cases, because a certain person is on and that person represents a certain issue—it could be Charlton Heston, guns—then I would be able to say, 'Look, Heston is on, we are definitely getting to the NRA,'" said Dolce.

Bill Maher on the *PI* set with, left to right: Innes, Alexander, Jewel (obscured), and Prager.

Earlier, I had passed Dolce in the hall. "We've got Tim Matheson, and that's just perfect," she told me excitedly. "Because Tim will be fine with the political issues, plus he's got one of the hottest shows on TV [*The West Wing*], and it happens to be about politics. That's a perfect booking."

Fielding conservative talent, on the other hand, is especially difficult. I spoke about this with Marilyn Wilson, *Politically Incorrect*'s executive producer. "Hollywood being so liberal, there just aren't that many people who are conservative and willing to be open about it," she explained.

Later that afternoon, the writers meet to plot the evening's episode. Billy Martin, the head writer, stands by a conference room and rubs his hands. "What a great day for *Politically Incorrect*!" he says to Kevin Bleyer, one of the younger writers on the team. "I can't believe this election is going to be decided by Jews who voted for a Nazi," he continues, referring to reports that Palm Beach residents accidentally voted for Pat Buchanan. "You're such a racist," Bleyer replies, smiling approvingly.

As the other writers file in for their weekly half-hour meeting, the repartee builds into a competition—a roomful of comedians, each not-so-subtly trying to outdo each other. They're ranking on one another in this room with no windows. Around them, gray bulletin boards hang on the walls, each cluttered with three-by-five-inch index cards, hundreds of them, with "issues" for the show written on them: THOSE AGAINST SEX ED NEED IT MOST, CO-ED WRESTLING, BUYING SLAVES, FRONTIER GUNS, ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM, SPECIALLY ABLED CROSS BOWS, GHETTOIZATION OF TV, NO SPANKING ZONE, SOCIAL ENGINEERING THROUGH TAXES. For each card, there is a corresponding "issues" file, a long memorandum containing background material and jokes.

After a while, Maher walks in. He looks tired. The joking stops. Martin, who was a stand-up comedian for 15 years before landing at *PI* six years ago, begins pitching Maher ideas for a sketch-comedy bit. "You're calling 2004 for Hillary," Martin begins, talking fast. "The joke is how early they called Florida, almost irresponsibly....They were wrong about a couple of things they had to retract. So the big story this week is that Hillary Clinton will be facing George W. Bush in 2004." Then Martin pretends he's a news anchor: "'We have some early returns here.' It's you behind a desk; you're projecting like these pundits have been doing. It's been so galling...."

Maher had been looking at the desk as Martin talked, and now he looks up. "I think that's a little arch, at this point," he says, sounding a bit arch himself.

"Okay," says Martin. "Another thing is you giving a kind of 'my-bad' speech: Abortion is going to be illegal because of you." Maher laughs. Martin smiles, glad that his joke took. "Because you supported Nader," Martin adds.

Maher builds on the line with "I was having sex during the returns and when I heard he lost Florida I checked the rubber." That gets a big laugh. A writer asks, "Is that the first time you've ever said 'Is this thing on?' in bed?" Another writer chips in with "You had sex with someone else?" A third says, "A JAP is someone who put abortion on layaway."

Maher tires of the riff. "All right," he says grumpily, "so what else is there?"

Martin runs through two other ideas. Maher doesn't like either. Then Martin tries a recurring theme on *Politically Incorrect*, that "the people are stupid" about their politics and voted for the wrong guy.

But this time Maher doesn't agree. "No, I don't buy that. The people wanted Bush. We've done it before. We've elected people who probably were not the best candidates, and we've eliminated the best candidates in the primaries, before they even get to this stage. That's what they want." He pauses. "[Bush] is not the idiot everybody thinks he is....I don't take responsibility by voting for Nader; I am still proud of voting for Nader. This guy [Gore] ran on a social-security platform; he couldn't win Florida."

Maher looks around the room for a moment, then leans forward and continues. "Okay, so I go back to my original thing that I said many years ago—you wouldn't know who was president, and you still wouldn't, if you didn't pick up the papers for the next four years. None of you guys would tell the difference, there are people who will, because they are much closer to the edge than you are. But if you don't pick up the paper, you wouldn't know. It's not like your taxes will double. It's not like the Gestapo is coming to your door." He pauses again, and then says wearily, "[Bush] is not a reformer with results. He's a plodder."

The staff appears shell-shocked by this speech, but Martin quickly recovers and moves on. They discuss limiting oil drilling in the Alaskan wilderness. The writers must consider how guests might approach the subject. "You'll be with Jewel," says Martin.

"I'd like to get in touch with her pristine wilderness," a writer chimes in. Maher chuckles.

"One last thing," says Martin. "The Electoral College...."

A writer interjects, "Don't know if you know this, but *Playboy* is going to do a 'Girls of the Electoral College' spread."

"Noooo," says Maher. "Let's do the military voting for Bush. That's what I'm angry about."

"Then that's what we do," says Martin. The meeting is adjourned.

A little-known fact about Bill Maher is that he has a close relationship with filing cabinets. He has 16 state-of-the-art fireproof filing cabinets in his home, and few items pass through Maher's life without being categorized, named, and filed in alphabetical order. He has kept a detailed file for every year of his life since 1978. He saves movie

tickets, napkins, and receipts—the random detritus of the everyday—and he saves jokes, comedy sketches, ideas for sketches, ideas about ideas, and press clippings about his television show. His office contains another set of files on recurring themes in politics and culture. Maher's own politics are subject to some dispute. He identifies himself as a Libertarian, but *Vogue* has called him a "conservative pit-viper," while the conservative *National Review* says he "plays by the Left's rules," and *Vanity Fair* deems him a "throbbing-boner libertarian." The truth is that Maher is all of these and none of them. More of a libertine than a Libertarian, Maher resents above all government regulation of morality. The rest of his politics are syncretic and postpartisan. He's pro-choice yet also pro-death-penalty; he adamantly opposes the war on drugs, yet advocates gun control.

Maher's sexual politics are, depending on your perspective, either pre- or post-feminist—but one thing they are not is Iron John masculinist. "I am not one of these let's-feel-sorry-for-the-male. The male still has plenty of power. But I do think the male has pretty much thrown in the towel," he said. As evidence of this, he told me about a bit he is working on that he calls "Making Women Nod." "If you ever watch *Oprah*, or any show that is for women in the daytime, they cut to the audience an awful lot, and what you see is women in the audience nodding. Because the person on the show, whether it's an author, or an Al Gore or a George Bush, or whoever, he had better be saying things that make women nod. And of course they always do. Al Gore says that family time comes first, before anything—cuts to audience—yes, women nodding," he said with a laugh.

"And this is my big theme now, that American men have really become so whipped that all they want to do is just avoid the fight, make the woman nod, and have peace."

On *Be More Cynical*, Maher deals directly with an issue that he says "makes women nod": family. "This obsession we have with kids," Maher says, pacing the stage. "What ever happened to people? You know, the veterans of childhood. Those of us who made it out. Don't we count anymore? Must everything be for and about the children, our most precious resource?" Maher closes his eyes, shakes his head. "I promise you, our most precious resource is petroleum."

His reputation as a witty commentator on America's political dramas captures everything about Maher except that deep reserve of anger, from which he draws the most energy. "I don't really work by looking for the joke. My theory is that the humor will rise from the passion," says Maher. "People always told me that I'm funny when I get angry." The angry side comes out in flashes on the show, a bit more strongly in person, and with vivid force in his stand-up work. When he's onstage, it is unavoidable, unapologetic, and, finally, authentic.

In *Be More Cynical*, Maher says, "I am and always have been pro-death. Anyone here pro-death?" Dead silence in the audience. "I am. I am pro-death-penalty, I'm pro-choice, I'm pro-assisted-suicide. I'm pro-regular-suicide. I'm for anything that gets the freeway moving faster." The applause is loud. "I'll clue you in on a secret: Death is not the worst thing that can happen to you." Pause. "I know we think that; we are the first society to think that. It's not worse than dishonor. It's not worse than losing your freedom. It's not worse than losing a sense of personal responsibility." Maher stops again. "Do you know that the first payment went out recently to someone who sued the tobacco companies *after* the warning label appeared on the pack...but [the label] didn't mention her by name. You see, that was the crux of the case."

The night before the election, the comedian Elayne Boosler arrives on set with only minutes to spare. Her brown hair is in a frizz—she's been stumping nonstop for Al Gore. After Maher and the writers agree on a set of topics, the writers brief the guests and suggest controversial topics the guests might want to discuss. Today, Billy Martin briefs Boosler in the hallway as she stands, compact in hand, applying lipstick. They trade hellos.

"Bill wants to talk about Rosie [O'Donnell] today putting Barbra Streisand's four-minute videotape endorsement of Gore on the air."

"She did that?" asks Boosler, still looking in the mirror.

Martin glances at papers in his hand and says, "Do you think that Rosie did anything wrong or unethical by using her power as a talk-show host?"

Boosler looks up from her mirror. "No. Someone has to combat talk radio, and it's all right-wing and pro-Bush, and I hear nothing for Gore on radio."

"Oh, that's great," says Martin, giving her a grin.

"This obsession we have with kids," says Maher. "Must everything be for and about the children, our most precious resource?" Maher closes his eyes, shakes his head. "I promise you, our most precious resource is petroleum."

"So I hear nothing for Gore, so I see no problem with that," Boosler continues. "And Rupert Murdoch, who doesn't even live here...." As she speaks, a frenetic scene plays out behind her. A stagehand untangles a knot of wires; an agent and a manager, both holding cell phones, circle each other; a producer dashes down the hall.

"Do you think the D.U.I. was dirty tricks, dirty politics?"

"Do I? I don't..." Boosler says, and launches into a long riff about George W. Bush, a riff that sounds too well crafted to be off the cuff. Martin, happy and relieved, says, "You came just how I was hoping you'd come, ready to...."

"I haven't slept since Friday," says Boosler, ending the conversation.

After she was briefed, Boosler went down to the set. Maher strolled up, full of energy. "Hey, your stump must be tired!" he said. They hugged and laughed together for a moment, and then Boosler was called to her place.

Maher was left alone again, and as a warm-up comedian tried to juice the crowd, he settled into his preshow stance. I was off to the side, beyond his line of vision. In a moment, he'd hear the cue "Ladies and gentlemen..."—and then he'd run to the empty stage.

Watching him get into his zone, I couldn't help remembering what he'd told me on the phone the night before.

We were talking about his career and the difficulty of finding a voice in a time when the airwaves are so choked with information. I'd asked him again about anger, and whether it wasn't the source of his success. His response was blunt and to the point. "I tell agents when we need to hire writers that the quality I want to find is that pissed-off guy that is missing from society these days. Where's that angry guy?" he asked. Then Maher grew reflective. "He's hard to find, and it's too bad—because there was a time when there were a lot of angry people." ■

BRILL'S CONTENT (ISSN 1099-5234) (GST 866176886) is published monthly except combined issues in December/January and July/August by Brill Media Ventures, L.P., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Subscriptions are $16.95 for one year in the U.S., $21.95 in Canada, and $26.95 in all other countries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BRILL'S CONTENT, PO Box 37523, Boone, IA 50037-0523. Vol. 4, No. 1, February 2001.

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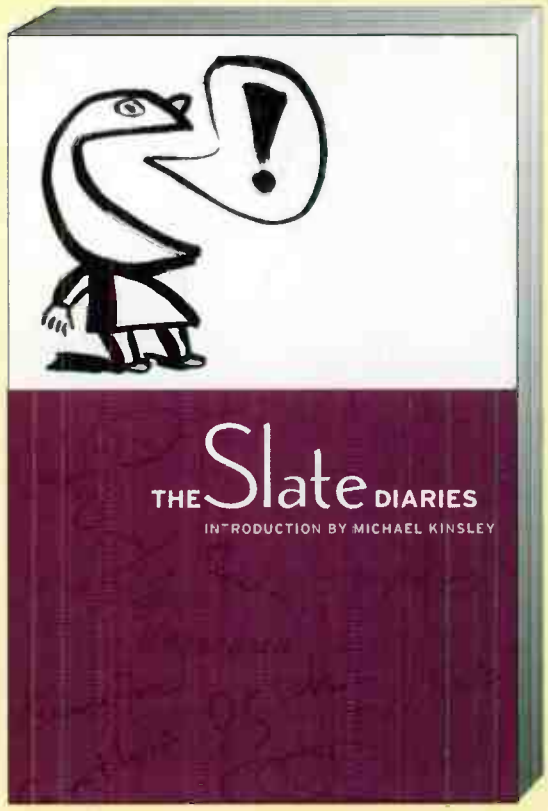

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