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BRILL'S

CONTENT

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INFORMATION AGE

MARCH 1999

JFK Jr. gets personal with *George*

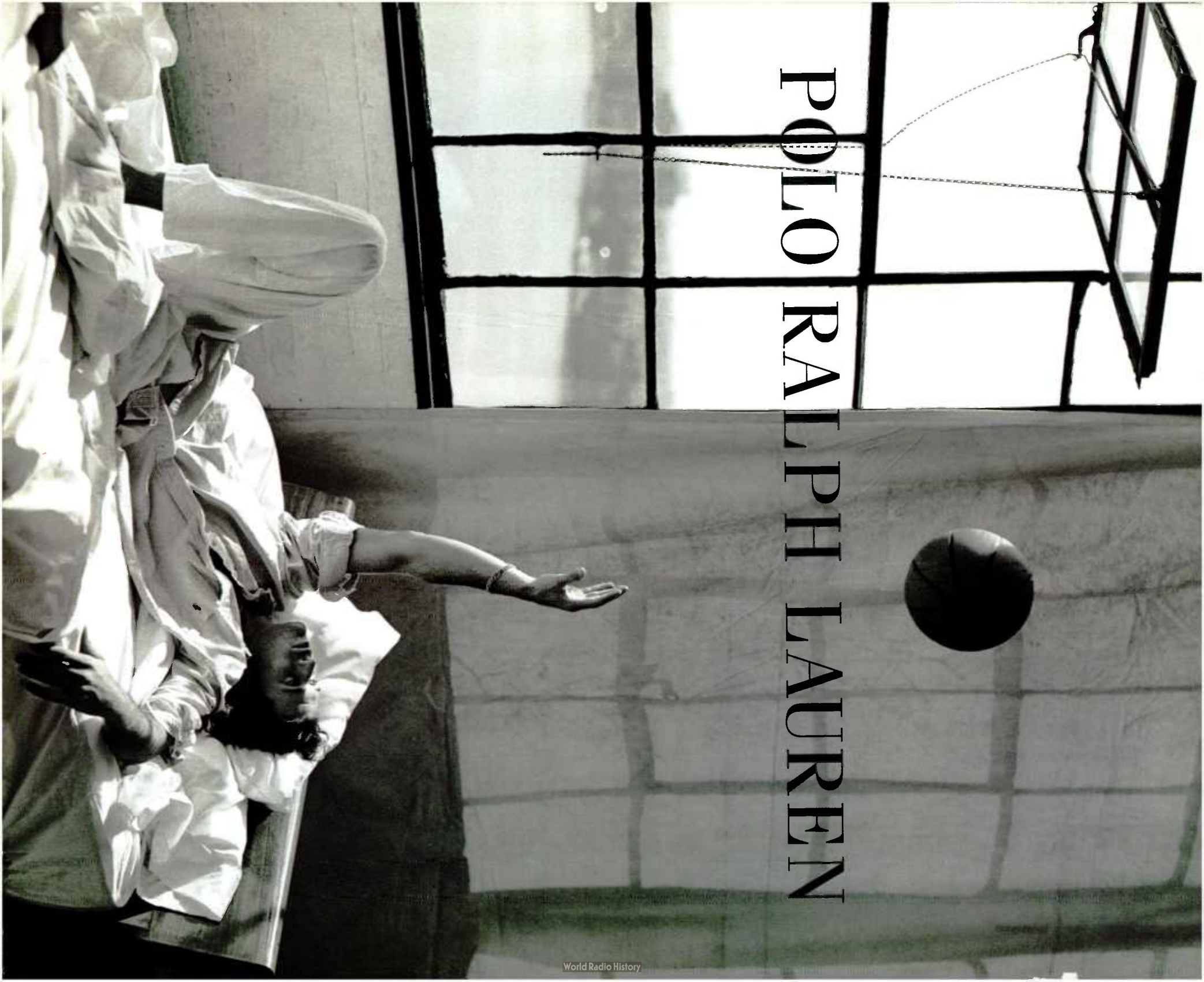
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THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

The World As Israel marks 50 years of statehood, a founder still waits to be invited back home. **5**

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SERB DOUBTS

Living in cross hairs of NATO

by Justin Brown

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

WBELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA — WHEN an earthquake hit northern Serbia last week, the people of Belgrade thought it was the Big One — not a natural disaster, but the bomb attack NATO had been threatening after seven months of violence down in Kosovo.

I was in that southern province at the time, just a three-hour drive away, and my phone began to ring. One caller was Ana, my best friend

Idaho Battles Image as Haven for Hate

A white-supremacist group marched here July 18. State has most hate groups per capita.

by Brad Kruekerbocker
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

COEUR D'ALENE, IDAHO— When someone says "Idaho," do you think: "First state with a Jewish governor; first state where a native American won statewide office; fourth state to allow women the right to vote; first state to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)?"

Or do you think: "Site of the shoot-out with white separatist Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge; home of James "Bo" Gritz, ex-Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke's running mate in the 1992 presidential race; place



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

HOW DO YOU JUDGE A MAGAZINE? THAT'S NOT a simple question, but let's make it even harder: How do you judge a magazine when its founder and top editor is among that tiny elite who have passed from the status of merely famous to iconic? These are the questions we confronted when we looked into *George*, the political "lifestyle" magazine launched some three years ago by John F. Kennedy, Jr.

The conventional wisdom among the political and media establishment has been that *George* (like its creator) can mostly be dismissed as being no deeper than skin. But what if we judge *George* by asking how well it delivers on what it promises—better yet, what if we ask its readers how *they* feel about it?

That's the approach senior writer Abigail Pogrebin followed—and probed more deeply, along with editor in chief Steven Brill—in an extensive interview with Kennedy. Pogrebin's article (page 92) and Kennedy in his own words (page 99) place *George* in a more subtle light. What emerges is the picture of a magazine and a man for whom politics and celebrity—and the costs each exacts—have taken on new meaning, and even some poignancy.

A very different kind of journalist and a very different kind of journalism is the focus of another feature in this issue.

You've never heard of sportswriter Ron Lemasters—unless you live in Muncie, Indiana, in which case you likely revere him. That's because Lemasters, as portrayed by staff writer Katherine Rosman (page 78), has managed to touch his readers by virtue of the decidedly unglamorous accomplishments of mastering his beat, understanding his community, and maintaining his standards.

That notion of standards is a tricky and elusive one in today's media environment, and it's sometimes tempting to conclude that it's all one big trashy mess. But the fact is, behind the news and

information we see, real people are making real decisions, often, it should be said, with good motives. One of the goals of this magazine is to find those people, illuminate those motives, and make us all smarter about what to believe and whom to trust.

When pornographer Larry Flynt wanted to publicize the marital infidelities of politicians, he couldn't do it alone. Would the press pick up on his charges? Staff writer Ted Rose sat in with the editors of *The Des Moines Register* as they grappled with a dilemma that would have been hard to imagine just a few years ago. Rose's story (page 118) provides an inside look at how all that trash is, or isn't, spread around.

At *Brill's Content*, we're always on the lookout for trash as well as gems, and we get a lot of our best leads from our readers. So keep on hounding and honoring us with your ideas and feedback, and we'll keep trying to sort it all out.



ERIC EFFRON
EDITOR

CORRECTION

In "Surfing The Skies" [December/January], we reported that Microsoft's Expedia travel guide creates all of its own content. That assertion, based on information we got from Expedia, is misleading. In fact, Expedia licenses travel and cultural material from three sources—Fielding Worldwide, Inc., Moon Publications, Inc., and Brigham Young University—which it then edits for its World Guide.

We regret the error.

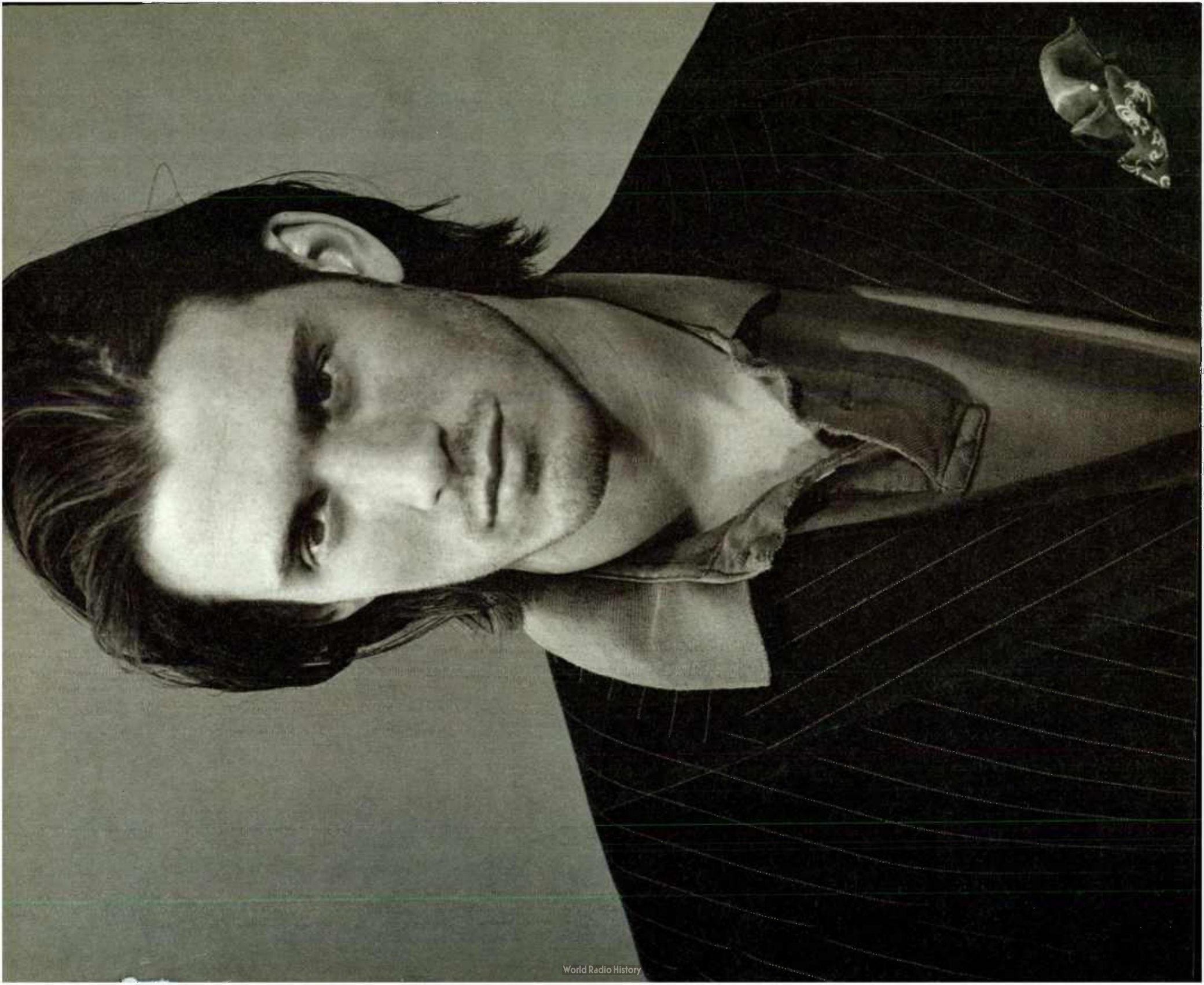
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1. ACCURACY: *Brill's Content* is about all that purports to be nonfiction. So it should be no surprise that our first principle is that anything that purports to be nonfiction should be true. Which means it should be accurate in fact and in context.

2. 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.

3. 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.

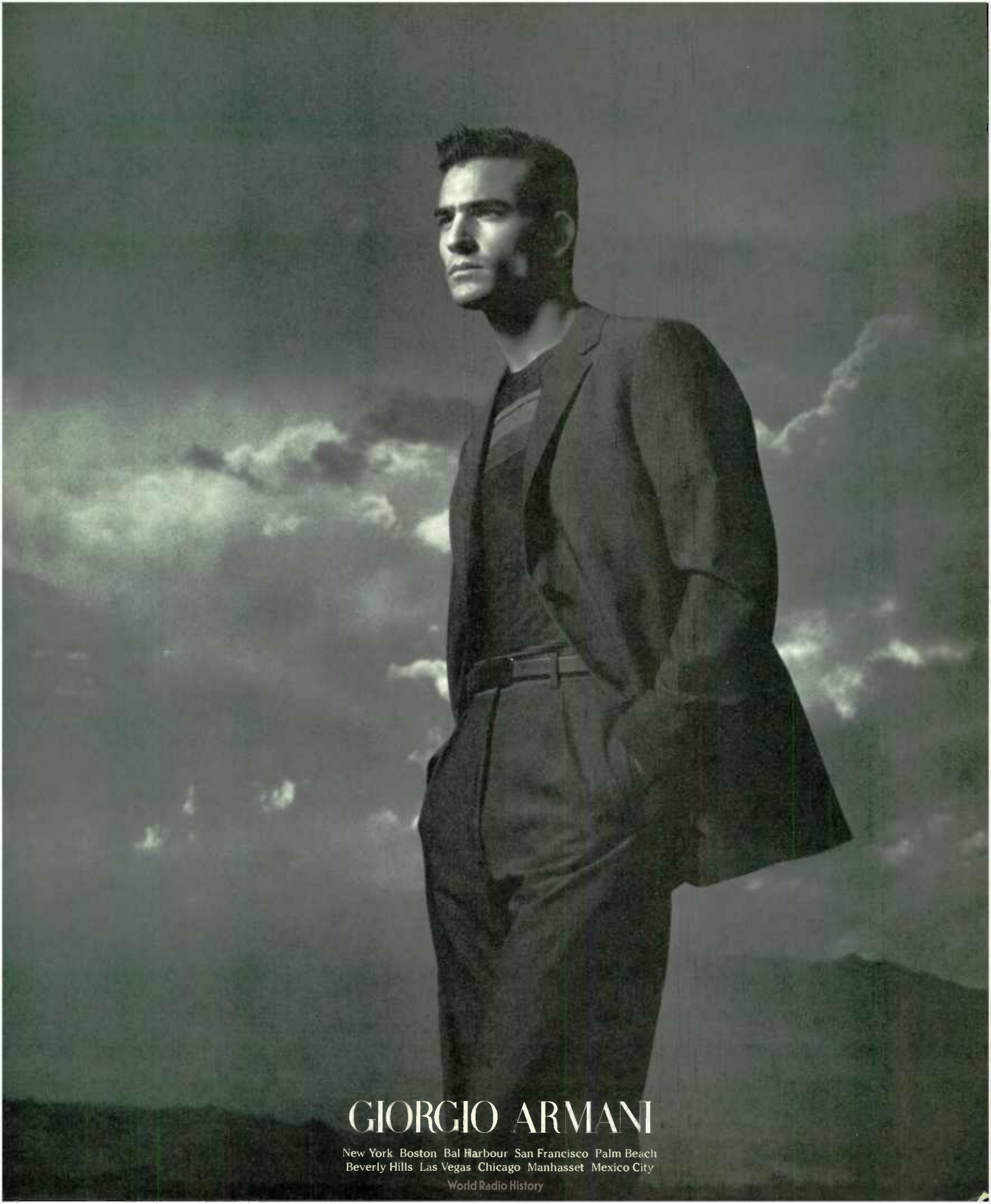
4. ACCOUNTABILITY: We believe that journalists should hold themselves as accountable as any of the subjects they write about. They should be eager to receive complaints about their work, to investigate complaints diligently, and to correct mistakes of fact, context, and fairness prominently and clearly.



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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INFORMATION AGE

MARCH 1999 • VOLUME TWO • NUMBER TWO

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BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

Fans of John Kennedy, Jr.'s *George* buy the magazine for the very same reason it's dismissed by Washington politicians: its emphasis on the personal, nonpartisan side of politics. Can 400,000 readers be wrong?

99 Q&A With JFK, Jr.

John Kennedy, Jr., talks about his role at the magazine, the carping of his critics, and why he thinks, after three-plus years, he's proving them wrong.

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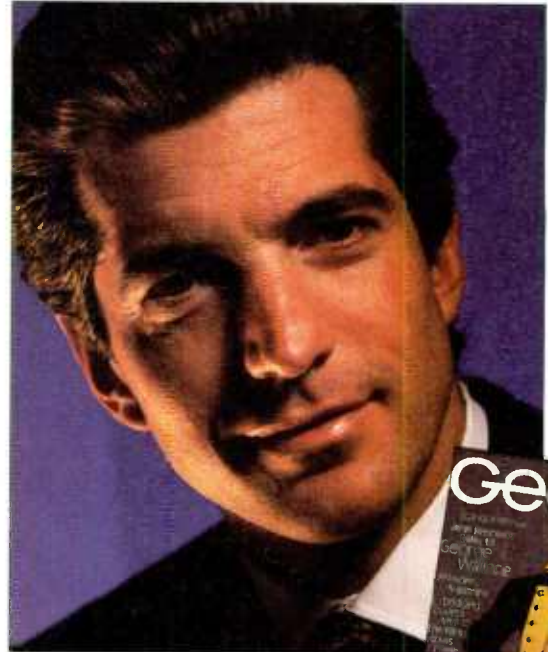
Ron Lemasters, a sportswriter in Muncie, Indiana, has reported on high school basketball for almost 40 years. As the recorder of his community's most beloved institution, Lemasters has become one himself.

ON OUR COVER:

John Kennedy, Jr., photographed for *Brill's Content* by Gregory Heisler on January 8, 1999, in New York.

92

Since its inaugural issue with Cindy Crawford on the cover, John F. Kennedy, Jr.'s *George* has been a whipping boy for the cognoscenti, but has drawn a solid reader base of more than 400,000.



72

The U.S. Air Force did not give *Broken Arrow*, starring John Travolta and Howie Long (at left), its seal of approval, but still helped influence some details.



78

Ron Lemasters (right) of *The Star Press* in Muncie, Indiana, has been covering high school basketball for 37 years.





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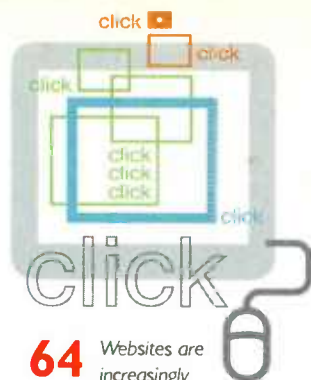
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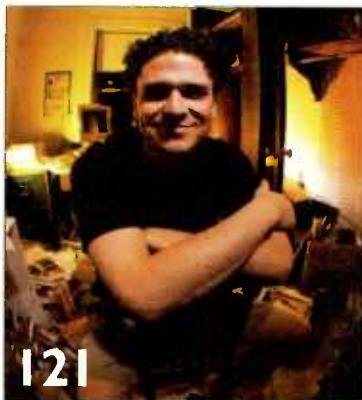
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C O R R E C T I O N S P O L I C Y

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.

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ON SMOKE, WEATHER, AND THOSE FABULOUS FIFTIES

EVERY STORY WE PUBLISH ATTRACTS SOME WRITTEN RESPONSE, BUT NICHOLAS Varchaver's December/January article on how the press has covered the issue of secondhand smoke continues to stand out as something of a lightning rod. One reader labeled it "excellent," while another described it as doing a "serious disservice to the understanding of the debate about secondhand smoke." Those letters and (in the case of the latter) Varchaver's response are printed below. *All letters published in this section with an asterisk have been edited for space. The full text of each can be found at our America Online site (keyword: brills) and at our website (www.brillcontent.com). Other letters to the editor not published here can be found at our AOL site.



DEBUNKER MENTALITY

*Were we supposed to laugh or cry when we read Ben Stein's "Those Fabulous Fifties" ["The Debunker," February]? In comparing writers and composers who were producing in the fifties with [those whose] work came in subsequent decades, Stein found the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties sadly lacking. Stein made the mistake of naming Pulitzer Prize-winning novels and plays as examples of the fine work produced in the fifties, as though the Pulitzer Prize were the ultimate criterion. Let's not forget that *Harvey*, a slight little comedy about a drunk and a six-foot tall rabbit, won the Pulitzer Prize. Stein named Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and William Faulkner's *A Fable* as examples of the great writing of the fifties, and he actually calls Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* one of the classic dramas of all time. *Kismet*, *The Pajama Game*, and *Damn Yankees* have tunes, says Stein, "that will be hummed fifty years hence." Could he mean "Stranger in Paradise," "Hey, There," and "Whatever Lola Wants"? Aw, c'mon.

WILLIAM BERNELL
San Francisco, CA

NOT HER FAULT

*Why Marcia ["Rewind," February]? Because we feel we know [Marcia Clark]. We like her and she's doing a fine job. Regarding *People v. Simpson*: The case was micromanaged by [Los Angeles] district attorney Gil Garcetti. Marcia had the case, but not alone. Without a doubt, you're scapegoating.

TANYA WREN
Long Beach, CA
(via e-mail)

WEATHER OR NOT

*I found myself quite distressed at the news that AccuWeather has such a huge impact on meteorologic information ["Meet Your Weatherman," December/January]. It burst the bubble surrounding the local weatherperson who not only announces the temperature but lets Joe Bob in the smallest town in the county share the rainfall by his chicken coop during their broadcast. As someone whose sole interest in weather is "coat" or "no coat," my normal choice of weather information is how the forecasts are presented. Tonight, though, I will click between the two non-AccuWeather stations in

my area. I would rather get my weather information from someone whose skills reach beyond reading a fax, clicking through a Power Point presentation, and looking attractive.

JESSICA OKON
Raleigh, NC
(via e-mail)

POLICE THYSELF

*Re[garding] your November article "Covering Sex, Then And Next Time," the most worrisome statement was John Alter's "Should the press be a character cop? [W]e have to try to be." Who appointed him, or anyone in the press, a character cop? What is Alter's education, training, expertise, in judging character? What kind of character does he have? We would need to stick our noses into every facet of his personal and professional life before we could appoint him a character cop. The job of a journalist or news reporter is to report the news, not judge someone's character.

M.K. COLLINS
San Francisco, CA

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

*Given the "You did so! I did not!" nature of the dialogue between Jonathan Broder and David Talbot ["Ugly Tactics Indeed," "Talk Back," November], I can tell that we're better off without journalists like Broder.

First, the Hyde incident did turn out to be newsworthy, because we discovered that Hyde is probably shading the truth to this very day.



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More important than that, Broder's "practical" reason for suppressing the story—his fear that Republicans would retaliate by not



Jonathan Broder Henry Hyde

returning his calls—is an excuse to suppress any story unfavorable to a powerful politician. It goes to the heart of the problem: So many reporters in Washington are captives of the politicians they cover.

STEVEN J. CORRELL
San Mateo, CA
(via e-mail)

PARTIES OF THREE

*"Sins of Omission" ["The Notebook," December/January] makes a valid point. But it gets worse when you consider the number of op-eds ghost-written by third parties.

In November, *The Boston Globe* received an op-ed on global warming supposedly authored by George Woodwell of the Woods Hole Research Center (not to be confused with the famous Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute). The op-ed was submitted not from Woods Hole, Massachusetts, but from Washington, D.C., via the activist group Ozone Action. The *Globe* turned it down, but the same op-ed turned up at the *International Herald Tribune*, with the name of Harvard professor and Nobel laureate John Holdren tacked on as the coauthor. The published *Tribune* version made no mention of Ozone Action.

That the op-ed was being submitted (and likely drafted) by a third party was known to the op-ed editor. Readers should have been told or the op-ed should have been rejected.

CANDACE CRANDALL
Fairfax, VA
(via e-mail)

Editor's note: We checked out the above claim. It's true. The *Globe* rejected the piece and the *Tribune* ran it, without mentioning Ozone Action. Editors at both publications declined to comment on the piece.

NOT SO HEROIC

*In your December/January issue you chose to highlight the work of a CBS News reporter who confronted a Supreme Court justice on the street ["Honor Roll"]. As to why her three minutes of "No comment" was worth commending and not the actual report done by *USA Today* is a mystery to me. Aren't the print writers the ones who actually did the impressive reporting?

ADAM LEVINE
Brooklyn, NY
(via e-mail)

Editor's note: The article in question reported that CBS News was following up on a *USA Today* report.

WHO'S HE KIDDING?

*I laughed out loud when I read your piece about Arsenio Hall, CNN, and the Clinton-Lewinsky affair ["CNN Loses Control," "The Notebook," November]. What was funny, however, was that you allowed Ben Stein, of all people, to criticize someone else for turning time before a TV camera into "an advertisement of himself."

ERIK MILSTONE
St. Petersburg, FL
(via e-mail)

SOUND INSULATION

*I must take to task Stephanie Lambidakis, as quoted in your "Honor Roll" [December/January]. To assert that [there] is something sinister or unjust in the fact that the Supreme Court is "exempt from a lot of laws," and that "[i]f they were a private company...[they wouldn't] get away with" certain things is to show a distressing ignorance of constitutional principle and law.

It is the lack of accountability which is one of the Supreme Court's primary strengths. The position of Supreme Court justice is the only significant [government] post wherein the officeholder holds the job for life. The

purpose for such a[n] institution is that it is insulated against politics.

While the converse effect of this institutional isolation may be that the Court is somewhat behind the times in many ways—and this is a big issue—the solution does not lie in making the Court more susceptible to the law.

SERGE BURBANK
Gambier, OH

\$20 MILLION QUESTION

*In "Mugged by the Six O'Clock News" ["Lynched," December/January], which criticizes WCBS-TV for inaccurately reporting that [New York City police commissioner Howard] Safir had eaten at a restaurant off-limits to police, you repeat uncritically that Safir is suing WCBS-TV and various others for \$20 million.



Howard Safir

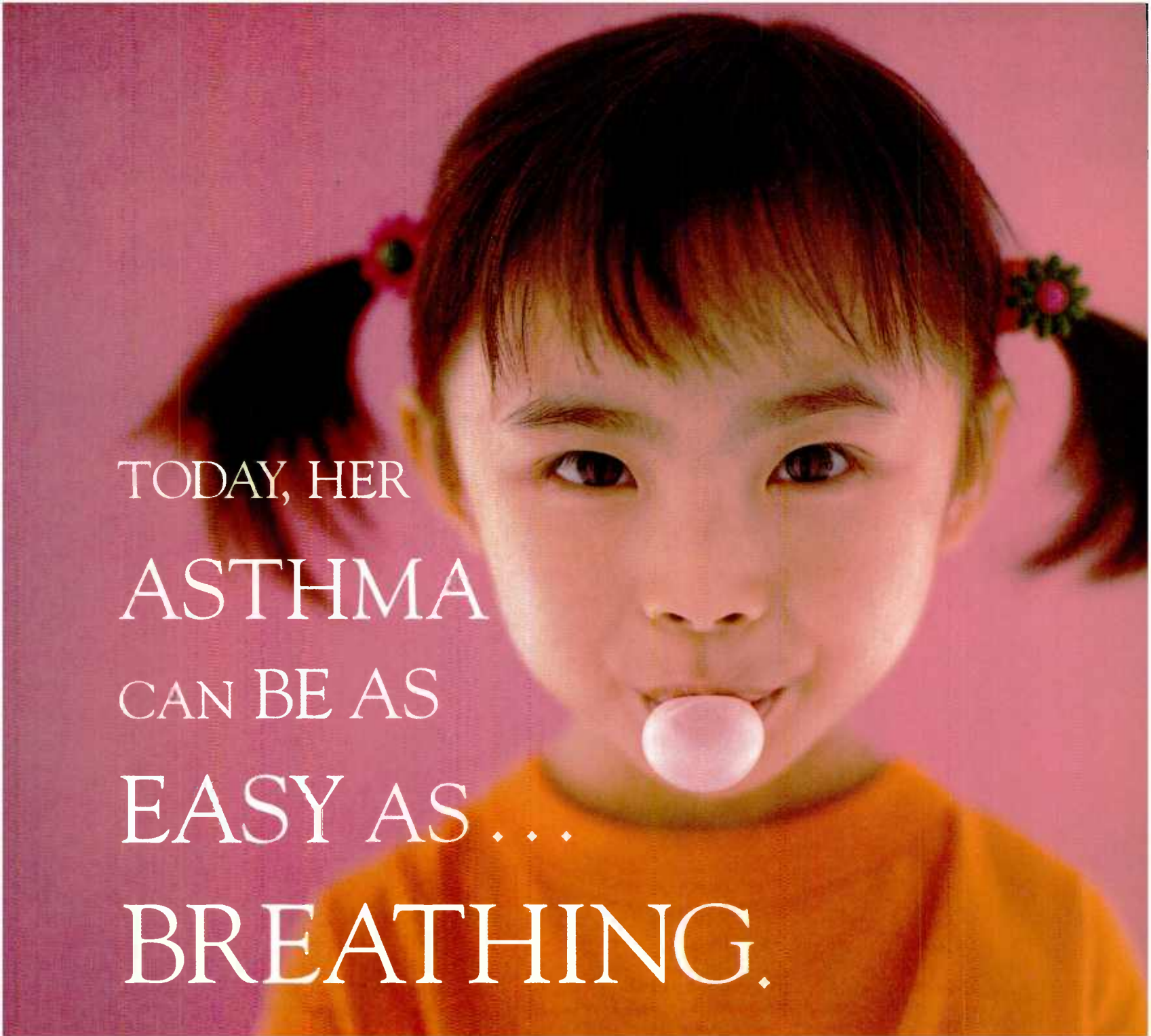
Does anyone seriously believe that WCBS's apparent error cost Safir \$20 million, \$2 million, \$200,000, \$20,000 or, for that matter, any money at all? Undoubtedly, the \$20 million figure is a random number generated by Safir's lawyers. If Safir actually believes he ought to be paid anything close to \$20 million over this incident, it raises serious questions concerning his fitness to hold an office that requires sensitivity to the press.

PAUL J. SLEVEN
New York, NY

THE HACHETTE MAN

*While I can't say that I've ever actually read an entire copy of a [women's] magazine, I have been extremely interested in your continuing coverage of the blurred line between editorial and advertising in their pages. I wanted to take [issue] with Hachette Filipacchi CEO David Pecker's comments ["The Enforcer," "Gatekeepers," December/January] about the controversy of *Premiere's* having to kill an exposé on Planet Hollywood: "*Premiere* (continued on page 127)

RICHARD ELLIS/NEWSMAKERS (BRODER); KENNEDY/KRT (HYDE); MONTESIER/AP/WORLD WIDE (SAFIR)

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark hair styled in two pigtails with pink and green floral hair ties. She is wearing an orange sweater and blowing a large, pink bubble. The background is a soft, out-of-focus pink.

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World Radio History



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK RICKMAN/MATRIX
World Radio History



how they got that **SHOT**

TEN FORWARD SOMERSAULTS, TEN BACKWARD SOMERSAULTS. Take a breath and then exhale slowly as your body sinks to the bottom, push off until you bob to the surface while both arms and legs are tied. Don't panic, or you can't get air. These U.S. Navy SEAL trainees are learning "drownproofing." The taped-over face masks lying at the pool's bottom are used to train the SEALs to handle murky water or the darkness of night.

Photojournalist Rick Rickman spent eight months shooting SEAL (short for Sea, Air, Land) training, mostly at a U.S. Naval base near San Diego, returning day after day to shoot images of the men in underwater-demolition training activities. No photo agency or magazine sent him; he went on his own, compelled by his father's stories of his days as a paratroop drill instructor during World War II and the Korean War. Rickman wanted his pictures to convey the drama of his father's experience and to capture the challenges and perils facing Navy SEALs. "I tried some of the exercises and nearly drowned," he says. At one point he had to be rescued by one of the instructors. "Seeing how tough these guys are pushed me both professionally and physically," says Rickman. "They are fascinating human beings, as good as the myth."

Shooting underwater isn't easy. "You can barely tell if your image is in focus because your eye is so far away from the lens," says Rickman, who had to wear a face mask. "Water also distorts the perspective and colors."

When *U.S. News & World Report* director of photography MaryAnne Golon brought Rickman's work to her editors, she had no story to accompany it. The editors suggested pairing the photos with a story on the future of the U.S. Special Forces that was then in progress. The piece ran in the November 3, 1997, issue. "It's so rare that you find a magazine that will commit to eight consecutive pages of pictures," says Rickman. "I'm really grateful." —*Miriam Hsia*



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World Radio History

Be careful what you tell Larry King; Ken Starr may be watching.....Powerless “powers that be”.....Drudge goes scoopless.....Howard Kurtz’s disclosure problem.....

THE DANGERS OF LARRY KING

One of the more amusing aspects of Kenneth Starr’s indictment of Julie Hiatt Steele (the friend of alleged other-other-woman Kathleen Willey) is that one of the criminal acts Starr alleges is that “on or about August 7, 1998, Defendant Steele appeared on the *Larry King Live* television show...[and] knowingly made a number of important false and misleading statements.”

It appears from the rest of the atrociously written indictment that Starr is claiming that by lying to Larry King, Steele was attempting to mislead FBI agents investigating the case (who presumably were watching the show for clues), or that she was trying to mislead other potential grand-jury witnesses or even witnesses in the Paula Jones case, who also presumably tune in to Larry and would, as a result, change their testimony. (The indictment cites the King appearance as an example of Steele trying to obstruct justice in the Jones case.) Or, perhaps, as the indictment suggests elsewhere, by asking the grand jurors to view a tape of her King appearance after she testified before them, she was guilty of trying to mislead them.

Whatever the rationale, this could be a major media story. Guests in politics and showbiz—who have heretofore regarded Larry’s just-tell-us-your-side-of-it show as a safe harbor in the world of TV talk—now have fair warning. Ken Starr is watching.

Indeed, maybe a good post-Monica gig for Starr and his deputies would be to set up an office just outside King’s studio. Some nights, they’d nab those Hollywood hoods who conspire to commit fraud in interstate commerce when they troop onto the show to say how captivated they were with the part they played in their new movie and how much they loved working with a costar whom they actually loathed. Other nights they’d pull up the paddy wagon and lock up the pols who commit interstate wire fraud (cable is delivered over wires) by saying they haven’t decided to run for president when they already have.

THE POWERS THAT AREN’T

In 1979, David Halberstam wrote *The Powers That Be*, one of the most important books ever about the media. Halberstam’s premise was that the organizations he was profiling—*The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time* magazine, and CBS, plus a few other media elites, such as *The*

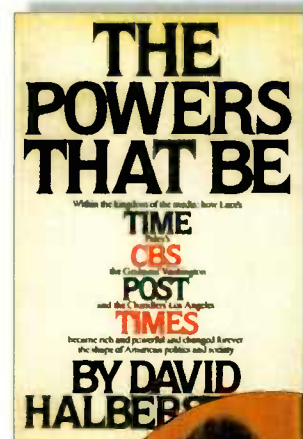
New York Times—set the news agenda for the nation and the world. It was when these “powers that be” began to cover the civil-rights movement in the South, for example, or took the Watergate break-in seriously, or turned on the administration’s Vietnam policy, that the country’s take on these momentous issues changed.

It was a great book. And Halberstam is still one of the world’s great journalists. But he couldn’t write anywhere near the same book today. For, despite the conglomeration of media into a world in which a few corporate giants seem to control so much of everything that liberal columnists can never run out of corporate media conspiracies real and imagined, there are no real “powers that be” anymore.

“One of the interesting things about today,” says Halberstam, “is how powerless everybody feels....There is no sense of norms, no sense of an agenda that anyone can observe, or hold on to....The legitimacy of any story only came through the elite press and was then amplified by the broadcast networks. That is now all gone.”

Proof? Ask Henry Hyde, or Robert Livingston. Or maybe even Bill Clinton. Or O.J. Simpson and the Menendez brothers.

Let’s take Halberstam’s scenario to the extreme. Suppose every Monday morning the editors of *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* met with the editors of *Time* and *Newsweek* and the heads of CBS, NBC, ABC. Eight people in all (seven of whom are white men, by the way), they’d chew over the issue of the day and, kind of like an OPEC of news, they’d decide which stuff was so beneath them and the nation that it should not be covered or at least not be headlined. A prominent congressman’s 30-year-old affair? No way. An African-American former football player’s alleged murder of his blonde wife? A few paragraphs at best. Two spoiled Beverly Hills brats killing their parents? Are you kidding? We need to keep people focused, they’d agree, on real issues like nuclear proliferation, health-care finance,



Halberstam’s classic (top) could not be written today. The Menendez brothers: both tabloid and mainstream fare.

dwindling natural resources, or the changing world economy.

The fact is that such a meeting today just plain wouldn't matter because there are so many alternative sources of news power. If the broadcast networks ignore a story, there's always CNN or Fox News or the tabloid TV shows. If the establishment press ignores a story, it'll break out in other newspapers (such as *USA Today*) and on to the wires. And, of course, if all of the press and all of TV deep-sixes or misses a story, there's always the Internet, from which we got the original Clinton-Lewinsky and Henry Hyde "scoops."

More important, because all of the establishment press are now part of large, publicly held, highly competitive corporations, none of them are willing or able to be statesmen (if that's the correct term for stifling any or all of these stories). They have to chase the competition. Thus, the Menendez brothers began on Court TV and became a mainstream story; and Robert Livingston bowed out as speaker of the House presumably because he knew his indiscretions were not going to become known only to readers of Larry Flynt's *Hustler*.

This means that in this Information Age, we've gone from being a kind of representative republic, in which certain industry leaders—or wise men—decide what we should know, to being a more pure information democracy, in which all the information is put out there and we decide what we want and in what quantities. Call it the ultimate marketplace of ideas, with the caveat that O.J. and Larry Flynt might not have been what Justice William Brennan, Jr., had in mind when he coined that high-minded phrase.

This seems like a good thing, just as we know it *wasn't* such a good thing when the "powers that be" didn't tell us soon enough about what was going on in Vietnam, or chose to ignore racism. Then again, we're learning lately that in news, as in politics, a pure democracy or unbridled marketplace is not without its costs.

IS DRUDGE DEAD?

Was he ever alive?

I'm beginning to share the view held by many of our readers that we made too much out of Internet "journalist" Matt Drudge when we put him on our cover in November. It seems that he's a one-trick pony. In a time when we've seen the impeachment of a president, an election, two House speakers go down, a war in Iraq, the early jockeying for campaign 2000, and lots of other news, devotees of Drudge's website have found not one scoop. Nada. Every time I turn there, I get his usual splashy headlines and exclamation points, but when I click, I'm taken to some other publication's story. It's enough to make one believe that all Drudge ever had was a pipeline into the Lucianne Goldberg-Linda Tripp camp from whence the story that made him famous sprung. It's not that Internet journalism, or the idea that one man with a modem

can level the media playing field, is a bust. It's that Drudge is.

CONFLICTED OUT?

Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post* may be the best, most influential reporter covering media full time in America today. His questioning of media practices is almost always on the money and usually gets picked up by other reporters across the country; he consistently drives people around here crazy by coming up with story ideas before we do; and he's amazingly prolific. But it's the last point—how prolific he is—that is the problem. His energies have now taken him well beyond the *Post* to work for many—arguably most—of the media entities he writes about or that compete with those he writes about.

James Warren of the *Chicago Tribune* and Susan Crabtree in the monthly *Capital Style* have mentioned Kurtz's conflicts before, but it's now become a more acute problem, because lately he's moved from paid panelist to higher-paid cohost of CNN's weekly *Reliable Sources* talk show about the media, and he's written as a paid freelancer for *Vanity Fair*, *George*, and, yes, this magazine, and a well-paid best-selling author (*Spin Cycle*) for The Free Press, a Simon & Schuster division of media conglomerate Viacom.

On the one hand, it's unfair to restrict a writer, especially one as good and as clearly honest as Kurtz, from plying his trade. "A media reporter shouldn't have to live like a monk," Kurtz says. Indeed, a journalist covering drugs or cars can easily write for other magazines about drugs or cars, but a media reporter can't write for outside publications without risking conflicts.

On the other hand, every time Kurtz writes about CBS News or NBC, he's writing about a competitor of one of his employers (CNN), and nowhere in these *Washington Post* pieces does he disclose the conflict. When he writes about ABC he's not only writing about a competitor but also about a company from which he took a freelance

fee last year for a story he produced on *Nightline*. And when he writes about any magazine the odds are high that he's writing about a competitor of the Condé Nast magazine chain (of which *Vanity Fair* is a part), or he's writing about another Condé Nast title, such as *The New Yorker*.

Kurtz says he deals with these conflicts *ad hoc*, based on his gut feeling about each situation. In some cases, as with writing about this magazine since its launch, he has recused himself from stories if they involve an employer. In situations where he might be writing about CNN, however, he says that except in rare cases, which he did not specify, he doesn't recuse himself because so much of his beat involves CNN, but that he discloses the conflict if the story is mainly about CNN. But if a *Post* story is about a competitor of CNN or about one of his



Matt Drudge (top) has been scoopless of late. Howard Kurtz (bottom) juggles potential conflicts.

freelance employers, he says, he doesn't disclose the conflict, because "You can stretch things to the point of ridiculousness....Should I put my résumé at the bottom of every column?"

We all have conflicts, and disclosing them in print or otherwise as a kind of ritual often would seem just plain silly. Should *The Wall Street Journal* have to disclose to its readers every time it runs a story on General Motors that GM advertises in the paper?

Yet some conflicts are more real than others, and this one is. Kurtz's readers should know that he has a financial interest in pleasing (or at least not bitterly displeasing) the people and entities that have a financial interest in the stories he writes, just as readers of the *Post's* coverage of the drug or automobile industries would want to know if a reporter writing about SmithKline Beecham or DaimlerChrysler was a paid consultant for Pfizer or Ford. These are, in fact, the stuff of great Kurtz stories, and the standards of someone writing about media ethics should be at least as high as those of reporters who cover these kinds of other beats.

This is not an accusation of wrongdoing. My sense is that in Kurtz's case the effect, if any, may be that he sometimes strains to be tougher on those who pay him (which nonetheless means that the *Post's* readers may be deprived of his unfettered take on things). Kurtz rightly points out that some of his toughest *Washington Post* stories have been the ones in which he's made the *Post* look bad, just as some of his most critical commentary when he appears on CNN has been about CNN.

According to Kurtz, his editors at the *Post* "have to approve his outside work in advance, but they're real good about that, and they pretty much leave it up to me what to disclose....I'm more of a stickler on this than they are."

Over at *The New York Times* there is a conflicts policy that would probably drive Kurtz nuts. Because no reporter can take any compensation from any entity he or she might write about, reporters who cover magazines or newspapers can't write for magazines or newspapers, and reporters covering TV news can't do paid television appearances, according to *Times* spokeswoman Nancy Nielsen. "I could never, ever do that now that I'm writing about magazines," says Alex Kuczynski, who covers media for *The New York Times*, when asked about freelancing.

"The fact is," Kurtz adds, "that I already get made fun of sometimes for disclosing what I disclose. To do more would be stretching things beyond the point of practicality and reality. You could make a case that I'd have to do it in almost every piece I write."

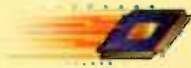
But maybe this suggests a good rule of thumb about disclosing conflicts: If disclosing them is awkward or embarrassing, perhaps that says something about the conflict rather than about the act of disclosure. To take an example that Washington reporters like Kurtz will understand, suppose any congressman voting on a bill had to disclose at the time of the vote—on the floor of the House and on C-SPAN—that he had taken a direct or indirect (from a PAC) contribution from a corporation or individual that stood to benefit directly and particularly from the vote. Awkward? Yes. Embarrassing? Yes. Might the most prolific disclosers get made fun of? Probably. But I'll bet that the congressman's constituents and the reporters writing about him would say that that has more to do with the congressman or the campaign-finance system than with the idea of disclosure. ■

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the notebook

IT DEPENDS ON THE MEANING OF THE WORD "WATCHED"

LAST DECEMBER, WHEN ABC BEGAN AN on-air promotion declaring it was "watched by more people than any other network," executives at CBS were understandably alarmed. Relying on ratings data showing that CBS had pulled ahead in terms of average audience size, CBS had already ordered ads for its own early 1999 promotion proclaiming itself "the most watched network."

Executives at ABC and CBS say that both networks' ad claims passed muster with Nielsen Media Research (see "Meet the Niensens," page 86). But how could they both be true?

CBS's "most watched" campaign is based on the network's average audience share, which executive vice-president David Poltrack says is the most meaningful measure of viewership. "When you add up the total number of people watching and divide that by the total number of minutes viewed, the CBS audience is higher," he says. ABC tallied "unduplicated viewers" to back up its "watched by more people" claim. According to a statement, ABC calculates it has a greater "reach"—meaning that in any given week, a larger and more diverse group of viewers watch at least



six minutes of one ABC show. (Nielsen tracks both "reach" and "average-audience" data.)

ABC's edge in the "reach" category—driven in part by children's programming on the Disney-owned network and its *Monday Night Football*—is nonetheless slim. ABC's claimed 154.8 million total unduplicated viewers represents a 60.3 percent of the total audience, as compared to 58.3 percent for CBS. "Such small differences over the course of a week of television are really statistically insignificant," grumbles CBS's Poltrack, who says that even

some network executives find the dueling ad campaigns baffling. "From a consumer standpoint," he argues, "ABC's claim is deceptive."

Indeed, the ad claim tiff, reported in *Daily Variety* in December, provoked a flurry of questions at a network press tour in January. There, ABC senior vice-president Alan Wurtzel insisted his network's use of the "reach" numbers was not confusing, and emphasized that ABC's claim was fundamentally different from CBS's. "I think people are smart enough to understand the difference," Wurtzel says, adding, "We appeal to more people than CBS does." —D.M. Osborne

Pundit SCORECARD

IN THIS, THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF OUR accuracy-rating of Sunday talk show prophets, we update our tallies for the members of *The McLaughlin Group* (below) and add new entries for the panelists on ABC's *This Week with Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts* (right). The rules are the same: we've checked the results of every prediction the pundits made between August 1 and December 1, counting only those with outcomes that could be verified. Next month we'll update these results and add new contestants. —Matthew Heimer

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Eleanor Clift (24 of 43) | .558 |
| Tony Blankley (21 of 38) | .553 |
| Pat Buchanan (20 of 42) | .476 |
| Michael Barone (13 of 29) | .448 |
| John McLaughlin (14 of 36)..... | .389 |



Bill Kristol

Bats right
Average: .531 (17 of 32)

Editor and publisher, *The Weekly Standard*; ABC News analyst

HOME RUN

Correctly anticipates that Newt Gingrich will face a "leadership challenge" if election results disappoint Republicans (November 1).

STRIKEOUT

Promises the same week that the GOP will win 15 House seats. After the GOP's five-seat loss, Kristol joins the other *This Week* regulars—all of whom had also predicted Republican gains—in a rare breakfast of humble pie (November 8).



Cokie Roberts

Switch-hitter
Average: .455 (5 of 11)

Coanchor, *This Week*; ABC News chief congressional analyst; NPR political analyst

HOME RUN

Well ahead of the pack in foreseeing the timing of the House Judiciary Committee vote on holding an impeachment inquiry (August 16).

STRIKEOUT

Predicts that articles of impeachment "will be defeated" by the full House (November 22). The day after the vote, Roberts ignores her boo-boo and blithely issues new predictions. Would she let a politician get away with that?

DEAR EDITOR: PLEASE DON'T MANGLE THIS



THE NEW YORK TIMES RECEIVES ABOUT 1,700 letters, faxes, and e-mails daily and publishes about 15 of them. When a letter is considered for publication, an editor calls the author to obtain sources for fact checking; all changes to the letter are subject to the approval of the author. At least, that's the way it's supposed to happen.

On November 3, Seattle resident Jeff Gustafson sent the *Times* an e-mail calling for an end to UN sanctions against Iraq. He cited a statistic from a UNICEF report: "[E]ven with the oil for food program, over 90,000 [Iraqis] die every year as a direct result of the economic sanctions, over half of which are children."

Times deputy letters editor Mary Drohan called him the next day and asked for verification for the UNICEF statistic. Gustafson directed her to the complete UNICEF study on-line, referred her to a *Times* article citing the study, and faxed her

the summary of a related 1996 Harvard Team report. Drohan promised to e-mail him an edited version of the letter before publication.

But Gustafson didn't see the edited version until the next morning when he opened the *Times*. His letter had been cut from 146 words to 86 and the UNICEF statistic was replaced with words he had never written: "According to Iraqi officials, half a million children have died since the Persian Gulf war in 1991 for reasons that are related to the economic sanctions."

Gustafson says that when he called Drohan that day, she was "bellicose and unhelpful," and denied that the *Times* had done anything improper. All of *Brill's Content's* calls to Drohan, acting letters editor Norma Sosa, and letters editor and acting deputy op-ed editor Toby Harshaw were referred to *Times* spokeswoman Nancy Nielsen, who refused to comment on Drohan

and Gustafson's conversation.

The next Monday, Sosa and Gustafson spoke by phone and she offered to run a second letter in lieu of a correction. "It wasn't an apology per se, but she admitted that a mistake had been made," says Gustafson. He submitted a letter written by his brother Erik, a founder of the Education for Peace in Iraq Center, that ran slightly edited—and approved by Erik Gustafson—on November 11.

The apology, Jeff Gustafson says, came a few days later, from Harshaw, the letters editor. "He kind of blew me away with how nice he was," he says. "He said, 'I totally understand where you're coming from, and I'd be horrified, too, if I were in your position.' He was sincere in his apology."

Nielsen says that the *Times* takes full responsibility. "It was a miscommunication on our end. The letter was printed prematurely before the checking process was complete." —Ari Voukydis



George Stephanopoulos

Bats left
Average: .455 (15 of 33)

ABC News analyst; former Clinton adviser

HOME RUN

Correctly anticipates that President Clinton will admit a relationship with Lewinsky to Starr grand jury but will divulge no details (August 9).

STRIKEOUT

Says public opinion will favor an impeachment inquiry (September 6). When that proves false, he claims (October 18) that public opinion will keep the House from voting for impeachment. The one-time spinmaster is better at forging public opinion than gauging it.



Sam Donaldson

Switch-hitter
Average: .364 (4 of 11)

Coanchor, *This Week* and *20/20*; ABC News chief White House correspondent

HOME RUN

Foresees Iraq bombing (November 15).

STRIKEOUT

You'd think Donaldson would have learned after his January 1998 promise that "Clinton will resign, perhaps this week." But that didn't stop him from vowing (September 6) that impeachment "will be settled before the election." One upside to resolving the president's case: Sam can't make any more predictions about it.



George Will

Bats right
Average: .111 (1 of 9)

Columnist and contributing editor, *Newsweek*

HOME RUN

With stock markets jittery over Asian turmoil, Will assures viewers that the U.S. economy "is not about to go into free fall" (August 30).

STRIKEOUT

The noted baseball fan would be riding the pines with his anemic average. He takes a big whiff on the Starr report. Will forecasts that "If [it's] a 400-page report, it might be page 350 before you get to Monica Lewinsky" (August 2). And that call might be 349 pages off.



MEDIA DIET

HUGO SONNENSCHN

We asked Hugo Sonnenschein, president of the University of Chicago, to tell us about his media diet. Here's what he consumes.

MAGAZINES READ MOST OFTEN:

Newsweek, *The Economist* ("It's much more than facts, it's intellectually challenging"), and *Adirondac*, the Adirondack Mountain Club's magazine, to plan hiking and biking trips.

TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMS WATCHED MOST OFTEN:

The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, talk show *Chicago Tonight* on PBS station WTTW ("[Host] John Callaway is a wonderful interviewer").

BOOK CURRENTLY READING:

The Poisonwood Bible, Barbara Kingsolver's novel about a missionary family in the Congo ("It was recommended to me by Toni Morrison").

FAVORITE RADIO STATION:

"I listen to public radio [Chicago's **WBEZ-FM**] almost exclusively—talk and classical."

NEWSPAPERS READ MOST OFTEN:

The Chicago Tribune, and "*The New York Times*, every day, habitually since I was five or six years old growing up in Brooklyn....Life hasn't really happened unless I've seen it in *The New York Times*."

FAVORITE WEBSITES:

Uses the Web to find travel information, although he can't remember which sites he visits.

GLOSSARY

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Journalists, like everyone else, love a good shortcut on the job. Why go through the trouble of telling it like it is when it's easier to grab a clever-sounding catchphrase, a tricky euphemism, a dramatic generalization? Time for a reality check. With the help of *TheStreet.com*'s James J. Cramer, *Institutional Investor*'s Tom Lamont, and best-selling finance author Andrew Tobias, we compiled a glossary of financial journalism's most overused phrases, complete with definitions for the real world.

—compiled by Ari Voukydis

■ **"BROAD-BASED DISTRIBUTION"** of an Initial Public Offering (IPO) means a whole plethora of special-interest customers got in on the deal.

■ **"BUY":** An analyst who says "buy" means it's okay to be in the passive, low-risk, low-payoff dividend reinvestment plan. Similarly, if he says "hold," he means sell, and if he says "sell," the company is most likely already in Chapter 11. If he really wants you to buy, he'll be described as "pounding on the table."

■ **"COSMOPOLITAN":** A "cosmopolitan" trader is one who uses utensils to eat spaghetti.

■ **"DOWNSIDE RISK":** Just plain old risk with an affectation.

■ **"DUE TO INVESTOR DEMAND":** A deal increased at the offer "due to investor demand" is one that was either grossly underpriced or the product of grandstanding by the lead underwriter.

■ **"HIGH-FLYING INTERNET STOCKS":** A meaningless term. There are very few "low-flying" Internet stocks.

■ **"INNOVATIVE FINANCING TECHNIQUE":** An IRS penalty waiting to happen.

■ **"LEAVES TO PURSUE OTHER INTERESTS":** Canned.

■ **"PRODUCT":** A reporter who refers to a financial investment as a "product" or "vehicle" has either been mesmerized by the marketer pushing the product, or has no clue what he's writing

about—or probably both.

■ **"PRUDENT CONTROL":** A lead underwriter exercising "prudent control" over distribution is pigging the whole deal for himself.

■ **"RECORD EARNINGS,"** far from being exciting, are exactly what you would expect a decently managed company to have each year. Even you, with \$1,000 in a savings bank, should be able to produce "record earnings" each year as that capital—and the interest it generates—grows.

■ **"REITERATE":** An analyst who "reiterates" a recommendation is one whose original forecast was way off the mark and is seeking to assuage investors by getting them to buy more to lower their overall cost per share.

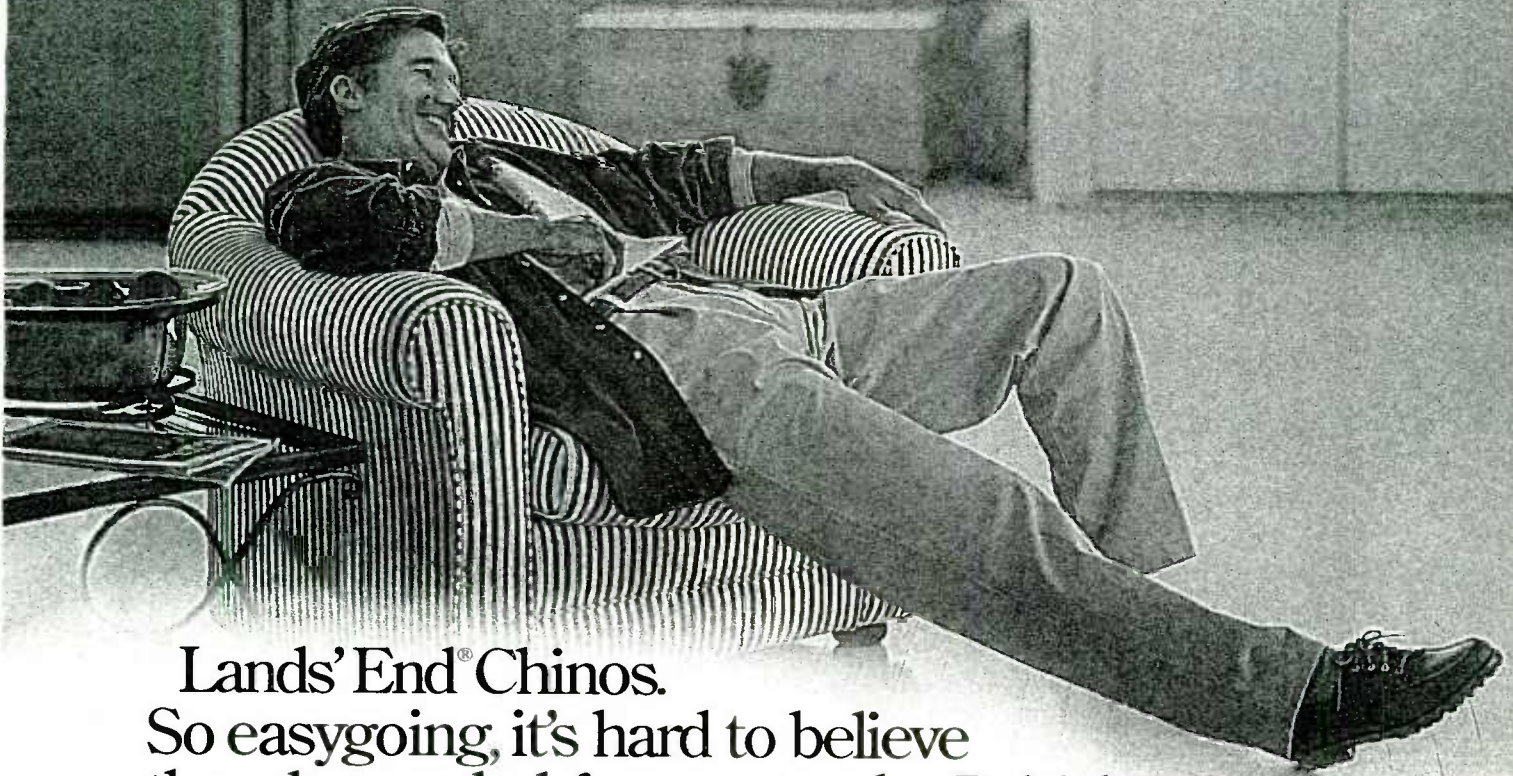
■ **"SAVVY":** A "savvy" chief financial officer is one who can count past 10 without taking off his shoes.

■ **"SENSE OF FAIR PLAY":** An investment banker with a "sense of fair play" is one who honks before running over his competitor's grandmother.

■ **"SOARED":** Generally means "went up a percentage or two," but rarely means "soared." Likewise "plunged," only in reverse.

■ **"TECH-HEAVY NASDAQ":** Redundant. The NASDAQ is where newer companies—such as most tech companies—trade. The NASDAQ is tech-heavy in the way a forest is tree-intensive.





Lands' End® Chinos. So easygoing, it's hard to believe they descended from a starchy British officer in the Punjab.

Actually, they're descended from his pajamas.

It was 1846. And Lt. Harry Lumsden sweltered in the heat of the Punjab, on India's northwest frontier. His scarlet tunic—a heavy felt—gave no relief.

So, the inventive Lieutenant reached for the most comfortable clothes in his locker, a pair of cotton PJ's. He dyed them a tawny color: the Hindi word for it was *khaki*.

And casual clothing has never been the same, since.

How khakis turned into chinos, and then into Lands' End Combed Cotton Chinos—that takes explaining.

Combed first, then dunked

The fabric in chinos has always been a woven cotton twill—a fabric that's medium in weight but sturdy.

That's what led the U.S. Army to adopt it for summer uniforms. (Before World War I, Uncle Sam bought a lot from China—hence, the name chinos.)

But our chinos are made from a softer, easygoing twill. The cotton has been *combed*, giving a fine “hand,” or feel to it.

Then, the chinos are dunked in a friendly enzyme wash. So that right from the package, ours feel broken in—more comfortable than Lt. Lumsden's PJ's.

Of course, fabric alone does not a pair of chinos make. It's also a matter of fit and tailoring.



Tailoring and tweaking

Our fit is traditional. Casual, but not baggy or droopy. We even contour the belt line just a touch, so the pants sit better on your hips.

And we never stop *tweaking* our chinos. For example, not long ago we added more belt loops, and made the pockets deeper, among other things.

All of which makes our chinos well worth the price we ask—\$32.50, with or without pleats.

In fact, we'll put them up against some that go for \$60. And we hem ours for free.

Of course, there's lots more classically-styled clothing in the Lands' End catalog. And it's all just as well thought out.

We'd be happy to send you our free catalog. It's kind of relaxed and easygoing, too.

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296

OUR READ ON BOOKSTORES

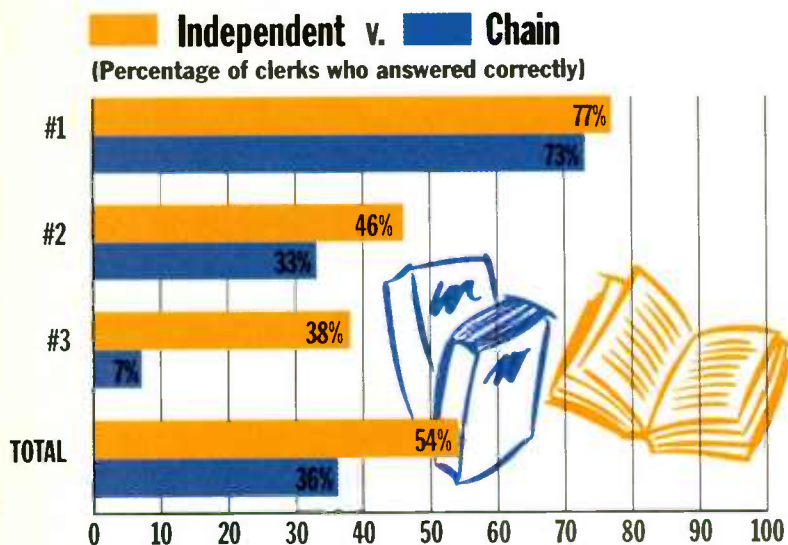
AS BOOKSTORE CHAINS CONTINUE THEIR MARCH TOWARD NATIONWIDE domination, it's become trendy to bemoan the death of the independent bookstore. Witness the film *You've Got Mail*, in which Meg Ryan's character rails against chain stores, claiming that the people who work there hardly know a thing about the books they sell. Is this myth or reality? We conducted an unscientific survey of 28 bookstores in nine states, Washington, D.C., and Canada to find out.

Brill's Content asked clerks at 15 chain and 13 independent bookstores to answer the following three questions. If they used a computer or looked up the answer, we did not give them credit.

1) What's the name of that new novel about Atlanta by that guy who wrote *The Bonfire of the Vanities*? [Answer: *A Man in Full*, by Tom Wolfe.]

2) Who wrote that famous book about the president's men? Maybe it has something to do with Nixon or perhaps Reagan? [Answer: Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein wrote *All the President's Men*.]

3) Which novel won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1998? [Answer: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*.]



It turns out that sales clerks at both kinds of stores have a lot to learn. Although independents did better overall—and much better on the third question—even the independents only got 54 percent of the answers right. Chain-store employees usually nailed the question about *A Man in Full*. When they missed, though, they really missed. A clerk at a B. Dalton Bookseller in Spokane said, "I should know that, it's my job, but I don't." A copy of the best-seller was on display right behind him.

Ignoring the writing on the wall isn't half as bad as telling us the question itself was wrong. A saleswoman at The Book Mark, an independent bookshop in Tucson, explained that the author of *The Bonfire of the Vanities* was, in fact, Tom Robbins and she didn't think he had a new book out. She did offer to show our staffer a travel guide for Atlanta.

The most impressive performance came from Canada. Sales clerks at two Toronto stores—an independent and a chain—went six for six, each answering all three questions correctly.

—Michael Kadish

A CIVIL INFOMERCIAL

ON JANUARY 8, while moviegoers flocked to theaters to see the legal drama *A Civil Action*, television viewers might have caught a show that premiered on Court TV* about the making of the movie. The hour-long program, *A Civil Action: In Pursuit of Justice*, was billed as a "documentary," and promised "interviews with the actual people involved" in the case and "personal thoughts from the actors who portray them."

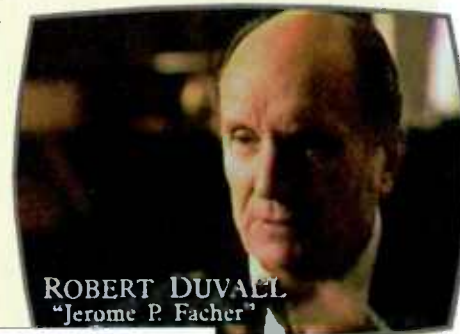
What viewers may not have realized, and what wasn't mentioned in the promos or during the "documentary," was that Disney, whose Touchstone Pictures pro-

duced the movie, also produced the Court TV show via its Buena Vista Television division. According to an item in the January 4 issue of *Broadcasting & Cable*, "Court TV has teamed up with Touchstone Pictures to coproduce a special about the landmark trial that is the subject of Touchstone's upcoming theatrical release."

Except for a brief flash of the Buena Vista Television logo after all the credits had rolled, the program made no other reference to its backing by Disney.

Brill's Content attempted to find out who paid for the documentary. Calls and faxes to Court TV executives, includ-

ing president and CEO Henry Schleiff and executive vice-president and executive producer Sheilagh McGee, were forwarded to Court TV spokeswoman Frederika Brookfield. "It wasn't a coproduction," she says. "I believe it was a collaboration." She declines to explain the difference. Faxed a specific question about whether Disney had paid for the Court TV



show, executive producer McGee and CEO Schleiff refused to comment.

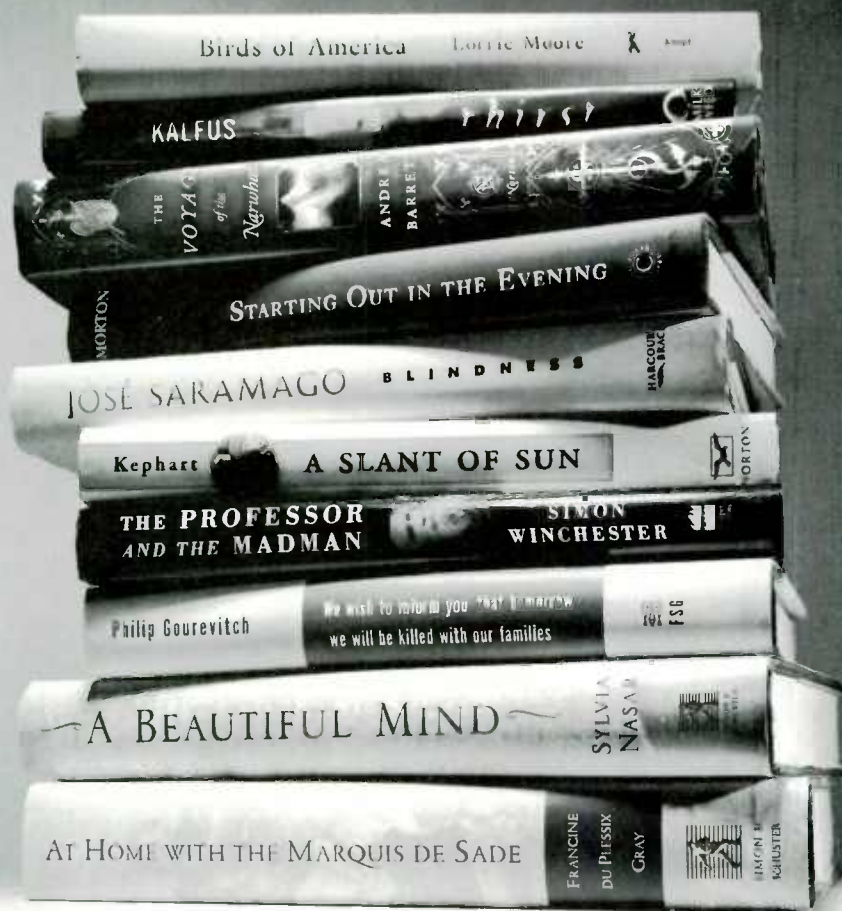
Independent producer Donna Kanter, of Los Angeles-based Weller/Grossman Productions, says Disney hired her company to produce the documentary and that it "came out of Disney's marketing division." Calls to Buena Vista Pictures producer Michele Bornheim, who is listed as "supervising producer" in the documentary credits, were not returned.

—Dimitra Kessenides

**Brill's Content* editor in chief Steven Brill founded Court TV but is no longer affiliated with the cable channel.

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World Radio History



MEDIA DIET

RICHARD LEVIN

This month, we asked Richard Levin, president of Yale University, to talk to us about his media diet. Here's what he consumes.

MAGAZINES READ MOST OFTEN:

The New Yorker, *The New Republic*, and "I must confess—*Sports Illustrated*, every week. I'm an indiscriminate sports fan, all sports, but I'm particularly fond of baseball."

TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMS WATCHED MOST OFTEN:

"I'm not a TV person... Once in a while I'll turn on a Sunday-morning talk show while I'm on the exercise bike."

BOOK CURRENTLY READING:

The Illustrated Longitude, by Dava Sobel and William J. H. Andrewes, the tale of an eighteenth-century breakthrough in navigation. "History and novels are what I'm drawn to most."

FAVORITE RADIO STATION:

"I really only listen when I'm driving short distances. ... I'll listen to NPR news—that or 'The Fan' [New York sports-talk station WFAN-AM]."

NEWSPAPERS READ MOST OFTEN:

"[I read] *The New York Times* for national and international news... the *New Haven Register* for local and regional news—and the *Yale Daily News*."

FAVORITE WEBSITES:

"My main surfing is to check ESPN sports [ESPN.com] for a breaking score."

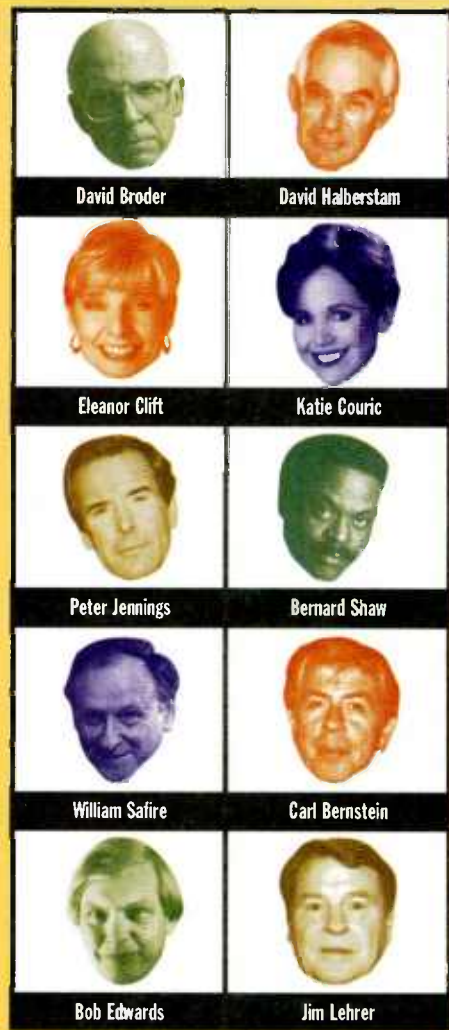
QUIZ

Everyone's got to start somewhere. We asked famous journalists what their first jobs out of school were. Can you match the name to the job?—compiled by Kimberly Conniff

- A. Dropped out of Syracuse University to take a job as a researcher for a column at the New York Herald Tribune syndicate.
- B. Started as a copy boy at the *Washington Star* at age 16; never finished college.
- C. Left high school at age 16 to work as a bank teller. Then took a job as a disc jockey and newscaster at a Canadian radio station.
- D. Reporter at the *Daily Times Leader* in West Point, Mississippi.
- E. Enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and worked on *The Boot*, the newspaper of the Parris Island Marine Recruit Depot in South Carolina.
- F. After Korean War service, covered two rural communities for the Bloomington, Illinois, *Pantagraph*.
- G. No college degree. Went to night school for two years while working as a secretary at Household Finance Corporation, a consumer-finance company.
- H. Desk assistant at ABC's Washington, D.C., bureau after graduating from the University of Virginia.
- I. Anchor-reporter for WNUS radio in Chicago.
- J. Disc jockey at WHEL radio in New Albany, Indiana, before, during, and after attending the University of Louisville.

ANSWERS

A. Bob Edwards (NPR); B. David Broder (NBC News); C. David Halberstam (Vanity Fair); D. Peter Jennings (ABC News); E. Jim Lehrer (PBS); F. Katie Couric (NBC News); G. Eleanor Clift (Newsweek); H. William Safire (The Washington Post); I. Carl Bernstein (NY Times); J. Bernard Shaw (CNN).



Fortune's eye-catching photo

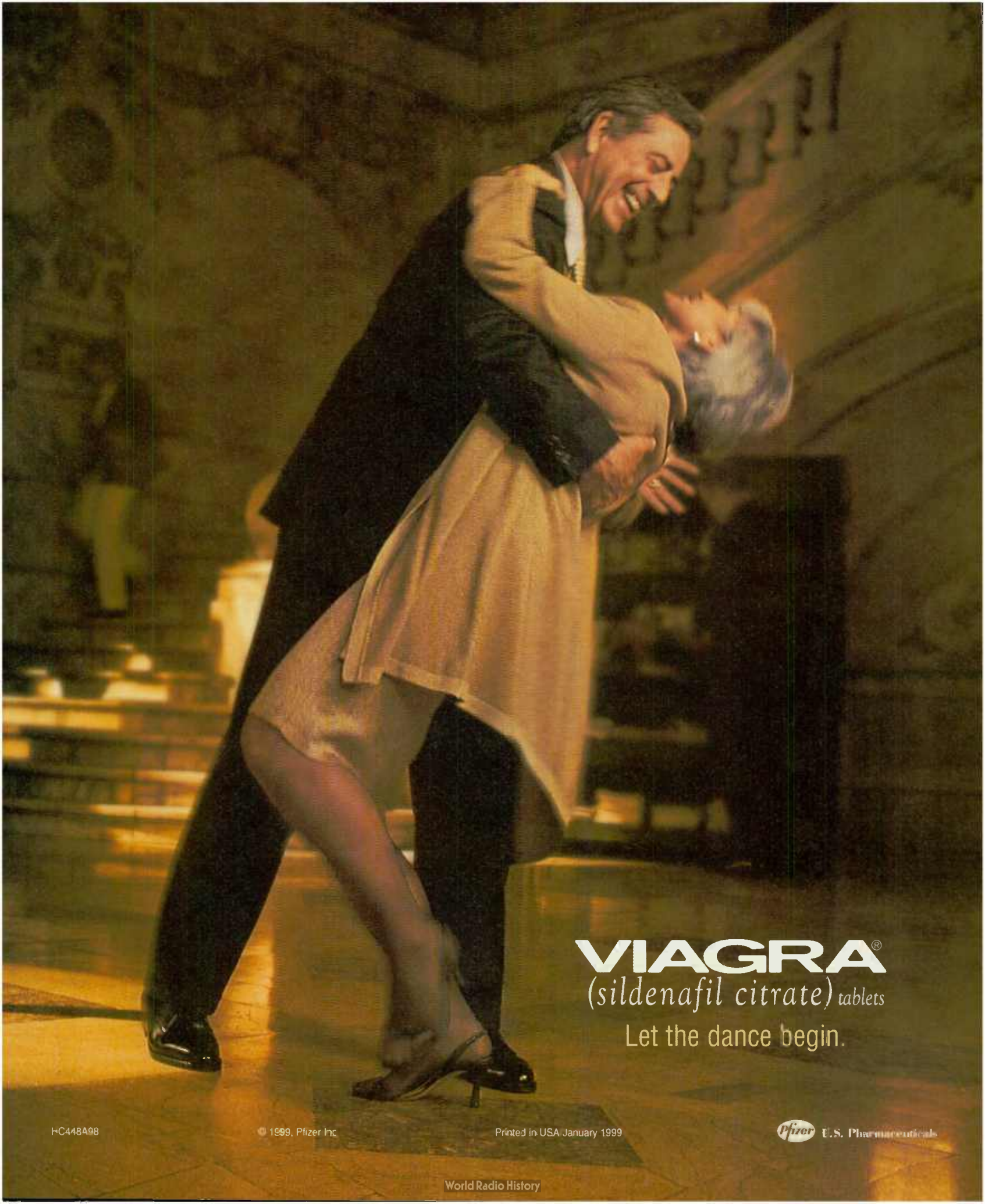
YOU CAN'T FAULT *FORTUNE* FOR TRYING TO SPICE up those bland-looking business stories. In a recent feature, the magazine went with something offbeat: topless women. The photo in question showed two dozen women from the Trobriand Islands, off the coast of Papua New Guinea, at their Yam Harvest Festival. But the yams in their outstretched hands and in baskets atop their heads weren't what caught the viewer's eye. It was their attire—or lack of it—that left the breasts of several women plainly visible. The story it illustrated: an article about finding the right job.

In his November 9 story, Matt Siegel wrote

that on the Pacific island of Pohnpei, a man's status is based on the size of the yams he grows. But on the nearby Trobriand Islands, people value the *number* and *quality* of a man's yams. Corporations, you see, have their "yams" too, Siegel suggested, and a job seeker should know which "yams" are important before signing on.

Those bared breasts raised eyebrows at the magazine, where some feared that the way the photo was used was gratuitous and racially insensitive. "I was just wrong about this," says editorial director Geoffrey Colvin, who approved the choice. —Jennifer Greenstein

MICHAEL MARSLAND (TALE); WOLFF (BRODER); UTSUMI/UTL/IASON (HALBERSTAM); COURTESY NEWSWEEK (CLIFT); COURTESY NBC (COURIC); ABC/AP/WIDE WORLD (JENNINGS); BORRIS/OUTLINE (SHAW); FINEMAN/STYGM (SAFIRE); SOMMOZA/OUTLINE (BERNSTEIN); COURTESY NPR (EDWARDS); CEDENO/SABA (LEHRER)




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World Radio History

From Nerdy To Naughty

CONDÉ NAST SEXES UP WIRED MAGAZINE

A strange thing happened last summer. *Wired* magazine, the digerati bible, turned sexy. In early May, Condé Nast Publications Inc. acquired the techno-geek monthly for a reported \$80 million. By September, the magazine's heretofore PG-rated covers had been spiced up with tabloid-style innuendo. The old *Wired* featured such coverlines as "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Geek" (May 1997) and "How Big Media stole \$70 billion of bandwidth" (August 1997). Recent *Wired* covers have trumpeted such lines as "Drop Your Pants! Tales of a Software Salesman," "Live Nude Trades!" and "Technolust." Katrina Heron, who became *Wired*'s new editor last spring, says racier covers were something "I had wanted to do...all along." Compare the January cover to a pre-Condé Nast cover of Microsoft chairman Bill Gates (below). Note that some sexy coverlines promise more than they deliver. January's table of contents listed another story that didn't make the cover: "How to give good cell phone." Sounds like fun. —Michael Kadish



pre-Condé Nast

post-Condé Nast

William Gibson Reveals His Secret eBay Obsession

Gibson's secret obsession is a popular on-line auction house.

The Truth About Vibrators

Surprise! This really is a history of the vibrator.

Phone Sects: What Happened When the Amish Went Wireless

A story about cell phone use among the usually Luddite Amish community, not about their new erotic habits.

Salon's Web Dream

A story on *Salon* editor David Talbot's plans for on-line expansion, not an exposé on the magazine's X-rated nocturnal activities.

THE DUMPLING RETURNS ON ABC

IN NOVEMBER, *THE NEW YORK TIMES* RAN A STORY about how U.S. movie titles are translated for foreign release. In China, for example, *Batman and Robin* became *Come to My Cave and Wear this Rubber Codpiece, Cute Boy*. And *Babe* became *The Happy Dumpling-To-Be Who Talks and Solves Agricultural Problems*. The *Times* later admitted that it had mistakenly quoted fake titles from a humor website [see "Spoof Snafu," *The Notebook*, February].

On January 5, ABC's *World News Tonight* offered viewers funny Chinese translations of American movie titles. Among the five that Peter Jennings listed was the one for *Babe*: *The Happy Dumpling-To-Be Who Talks and Solves Agricultural Problems*.

On January 7, ABC News spokeswoman Eileen Murphy said



ABC knew about the spoofed titles, but that "[we] reported what we found based on translations provided to us by our bureaus in Hong Kong and Beijing."

Then on the January 18 show, Jennings admitted that the *Babe* translation was wrong. The real Chinese title, he said, is *I May Be a Pig, But I Am Not Stupid*. (Universal Pictures, which released the film in Hong Kong, confirms this.)

While Polygram Filmed Entertainment confirmed ABC's translation for *Fargo*, Twentieth Century Fox says that *The Full Monty* and *Home Alone 3*, which Jennings also mentioned on January 5, weren't officially released in China—although ABC could be reporting on pirated versions. (We couldn't get confirmation on *Nixon*, the fifth title Jennings named.) Murphy says ABC News stands behind its other translations. —Ted Rose and Leslie Heilbrunn

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t h e s e c r e t a d v a n t a g e

Bloomberg
PERSONAL FINANCE
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SYNERGY WATCH

Because *TV Guide* is owned by News Corporation, Fox Broadcasting's parent, one might expect the weekly to tout Fox shows. But, on its covers at least, *TV Guide* does not give preferential treatment to its corporate parent's TV network.

Of the 52 *TV Guide* covers that ran nationally in 1998, excluding the four covers distributed only in specific areas of the country, just five spotlighted Fox TV shows, seven showcased NBC shows, five covered ABC shows, and three covered CBS shows. Of seven movie-related issues, one carried *The X-Files* movie (which turned out to be a disappointment), and four others were about multiple films; all included movies produced or distributed by Fox.

—Noah Robischon

CHARLIE ROSE TALK METER



In our continuing Charlie Rose watch, we viewed five random January installments of his late-night interview show to see how much he talked compared with his guests. The tally was exactly the same as last month's, with Rose claiming just 23 percent of the talk time. Tune in next month to see if the meter's changed.

The Full Oscar

IT'S ONE OF THOSE FAMILIAR FACTOIDS THAT THE media love: One billion people watch the Academy Awards show. Last year, Oscar host Billy Crystal joked about it and media organizations, including ABC News, the Associated Press, CNN, *Entertainment Weekly*, and NBC News repeated it. But it's just not true.

The 1999 Oscars will air Sunday, March 21, on ABC. Last year's show received a 34.9 domestic rating from Nielsen Media Research, which means that about 34 million households (out of a possible 98 million) watched. According to Nielsen, the U.S. audience was about 55,250,000 people. But ABC estimated an all-time-high U.S. audience of 87 million viewers by counting every viewer who watched at least six minutes of the nearly three-hour show. AC Nielsen Canada reported a Canadian audience of 6.6 million. That still leaves over 900 million people outside the U.S. and Canada who supposedly tuned in.

ABC says the 1998 show was licensed to 139 foreign TV markets, of which a record 125 carried the show live. But ABC's list doesn't include some mighty big markets—China and Indonesia, for

example. That's almost one and a half billion people (out of a global population of about 6 billion) who weren't watching.

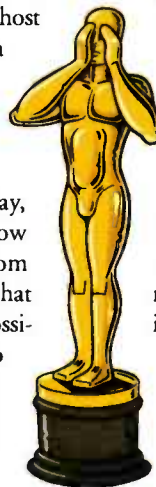
ABC's Oscar spokesman Daniel Doran says, "It is virtually impossible to know how many people watched."

Because of time zones, a live show starting at 8 P.M. in Los Angeles would air at 4 A.M. in Great Britain, 5 A.M. in France, 6 A.M. in South Africa, 7 A.M. in Moscow, and 1 P.M. the following day in Japan. How many Muscovites got up at 7 A.M. to find out if Matt Damon and Ben Affleck would win?

Last year, *Buzz* magazine questioned Oscar's audience and concluded that given how few people in the world actually own or have access to a TV receiving the show, the total audience, including the U.S., was probably less than 100 million.

This year, publicists from neither the Academy nor ABC are using the 1 billion-viewer myth to promote the show. In the past, ABC used the statistic to describe "the potential audience," says Doran, but other shows began claiming even bigger numbers until "it got so silly everybody decided let's not do that anymore."

—Michael Kadish



TRACKING THE "CLINTON LOVE CHILD" STORY

How does the media food chain work? On January 1, Matt Drudge broke his "world exclusive". *Star* magazine had arranged for a 13-year-old Arkansas boy to undergo a DNA test to see if he was President Clinton's son. Here is a list of the U.S. news organizations that spread what we now know to be the bogus "love child" story (and when they did so) by either reporting the rumor or reporting on the media frenzy it caused—before there was any evidence to support the claim. On January 9, *TIME Daily*—*Time* magazine's website—broke further news: The DNA test had revealed that the president and the boy are unrelated.

| | |
|---|-----|
| Drudge Report | 1/1 |
| Drudge (on Fox News Channel) | 1/2 |
| New York Post • New York Daily News | 1/3 |
| The O'Reilly Factor (Fox News Channel) • Rivera Live (CNBC) | 1/4 |
| Pittsburgh Post-Gazette • Boston Herald | 1/5 |
| The Washington Times | 1/6 |
| The Arizona Republic • The Hotline | 1/7 |
| The O'Reilly Factor calls it "the most ridiculous" item of the day. | 1/8 |

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THE
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NATURE'S LITTLE SECRETS

World Radio History

New D.C. Shocker

The author discovers that members of the Washington press corps—unlike most Americans—actually believe politicians tell the truth.

WHEN I READ SALLY QUINN'S *WASHINGTON Post* piece explaining why the capital establishment is almost beside itself with hatred for Bill Clinton, I was surprised to learn that prominent Washington journalists are shocked and offended by having to deal with a politician who has not always been truthful. Reading that was like being in a reporters' hangout at the moment

some grizzled old foreign correspondent—someone who seemed to have fallen into a doze over his Scotch—suddenly steps back from the bar and declares his absolute horror at growing evidence that customs officers in certain Middle Eastern countries may be vulnerable to small bribes. "I'm shocked and angry and, more than anything, disappointed,"

he says, and then returns to his Scotch, shaking his head in

sad resignation as he orders another double. When David Broder, who is often spoken of as the dean of Washington columnists, was asked why President Clinton was in such bad odor among the people who are sometimes called the permanent government in Washington, he said, "We don't like being lied to." Could it be, I thought when I read those words, that Broder has been under the impression all of these years that people in Washington were telling him the truth? From that moment on, I decided, I would approach his columns with particular wariness.

The *Post* piece included a more fevered response to lying from Chris Matthews of CNBC, who has always been among the leading contenders in the shouting contest I hold regularly among television's Sabbath Gasbags. Every Sunday evening, the person who has spoken at the highest decibel level that week gets an award I used to call the Drownout Prize. For a while, I wasn't having much fun judging the contest, because John McLaughlin won every week. Then I realized that I could follow the policy I had turned to some years ago when the same company always seemed to win the contest I held for the ugliest building erected each year in the United States; I simply made that company ineligible and recognized its contribution to the field by calling the award the Marriott Cup. Most weeks, Matthews wins the McLaughlin Cup.

When Sally Quinn asked Matthews about the president, he said, presumably at a decibel level that caused her to back up a couple of feet, "There has to be a functional trust by reporters of the person they're covering. Clinton lies knowing that you know he's lying. It's brutal and it subjugates the person who's being lied to. I resent deeply being constantly lied to." I could imagine an earnest bureaucrat employed by some United Nations commission on brutality and subjugation—a commission that usually deals with the plight of small children who have been sold into slavery in places like the Sudan—reading that quote and rushing to Washington, only to find that the victims of this particular brutality and subjugation are

Contributing editor Calvin Trillin is the author of Family Man, published last June by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He is also a columnist for Time, a staff writer for The New Yorker, and a contributor to The Nation.

ROBERT DE MICHELL



a bunch of self-assured white men with designer suits and large expense accounts.

In the early sixties, I worked briefly as the junior reporter in a newsmagazine bureau in Washington—I was the unlucky fellow who fielded the queries from New York asking for official Washington reactions to news that was breaking elsewhere—and my routine description of what I was up to on a given day was “I’ve got a call in to the State Department because New York wants some lies about Cuba” or “I have to collect some lies about the economy from the White House.” I was not deeply resentful—a bit bored, maybe, but not deeply resentful. I would have thought that any reporter who deeply resents being constantly lied to would have decided a long time ago to get into another line of work. Years ago, Russell Baker used to tell a story about how he decided to switch from reporting to being a columnist. He was covering Congress at the time, and he used to spend hours sitting on the marble floor in front of House committee rooms, waiting

for an executive session to end so that some congressman could come out and lie to him. Baker said that he knew the congressman was lying and the congressman knew that he knew the congressman was lying and Baker knew the congressman knew he knew the congressman was lying. Furthermore, Baker said, having grown up partly in Baltimore, where a lot of people who lived in row houses passed mild afternoons sitting on marble stoops, he happened to know that long-term sitting on marble could give you piles. He decided to become a columnist.

If, say, John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr., had been caught in a perjury trap having to do with extramarital sex—and, particularly in the case of King, J. Edgar Hoover would have presumably been willing to give his favorite prom gown to pull off such a maneu-

ver—there may have been reporters who would have expected them to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (“Although I’m sorry that this has come up, the fact that I’m under oath requires me to say that between Fiddle and Faddle, the girls who used to frolic nude in the White House pool, Fiddle, through some perfectly marvelous gifts of physique, was able to...”). But I think most reporters would have expected some tap-dancing, or perhaps the sort of outright lies they hear when a congressman is forced to explain why he tacked a

tax break for a big contributor onto a bill whose ostensible purpose was to regulate the international market in oil seeds. Reporters do become more irritated than most people about being lied to; to them, mendacity is not only wrong but inconvenient, since an uncaught lie can mess up the story. I always thought the way it worked, though, was that reporters were strict about writing the truth themselves and unsurprised at finding that the people they talked to in the line of duty had a tendency

to do some shading here and there.

Could it be that this is no longer the case in Washington? Could it be that reporters no longer take it as part of their job to sort through a collection of rationalizations and self-serving mistruths and casual fibs and flat-out lies? Maybe. Next year, in the hotel bar in Des Moines where reporters tend to collect during the Iowa caucuses, maybe Chris Matthews will burst in to let the assembled scribblers know of his suspicion that a particular candidate is not actually telling the truth about the reasons he switched to a strict anti-abortion stand. Maybe the drinkers will look up in genuine alarm. “My word!” someone will say. “Land sakes alive!” Maybe most of the assembled, finding themselves too upset at the news to continue drinking, will settle up their bills and troop off to bed. ■

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FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY READ, WATCH AND LISTEN TO

Sixties Minutes

Why NBC wants you to tune in, turn on—and bring back the sit-in. Plus: Larry Flynt works his beat. And CNN quickly comes clean.

IF SOME LOCAL NEWS STORIES LATELY HAVE LEFT you feeling warm and nostalgic about that groovy time known as the 1960s, you can thank (or blame) the far-out people who work for NBC's promotions department.

In a bid to drum up interest in what looked to be an exceedingly cheesy miniseries on that most overhyped of decades, the network helpfully provided its affiliates with a package of news tie-ins (that's right, "news," which, in this case, means promotional ideas overflowing with peace signs). If any of the stations followed through, it would be a real bummer.

The '60s, a two-part, four-hour program (scheduled to air February 7 and 8 on NBC), promised to capture the decade by telling the fictional story of "two American families—one white and one black—who are torn apart by the very real forces...

that once divided all of America and forever changed our world."

The publicity package apparently was aimed at getting the local stations in a sixties frame of mind. It included a glossary of "counterculture credos" including "Good vibes!," "Do your own thing," and everyone's favorite, "Better living through chemistry." Then there were those "memorable TV lines from the '60s," which, according to the promo package, included "Yabba, dabba, doo!" and "That's the way it is," which, the material tells us, was uttered by some guy named Walter



Crinkite" (guess he worked for another network).

Many of the ideas suggest that the people who came up with this stuff were smoking something—or were born long after the decade ended. One of the suggested "local news tie-in ideas": Interview Vietnam veterans or civil-rights leaders or, and I swear I'm quoting this, "visit with their descendants." Do they think this was the 1860s? Other gems include a recommendation to get the anchors (yes, the "news" anchors) to "dress up in fashions from the '60s."

But this one has to be the most mind-blowing of them all (and again, I'm quoting): "Coordinate with a local college campus to have a sit-in or student take-over in the administration building. They'd be wearing your station T-shirts and carrying a '60s [the show's] banner, of course."

Of course! I get it. Make publicity, not war.

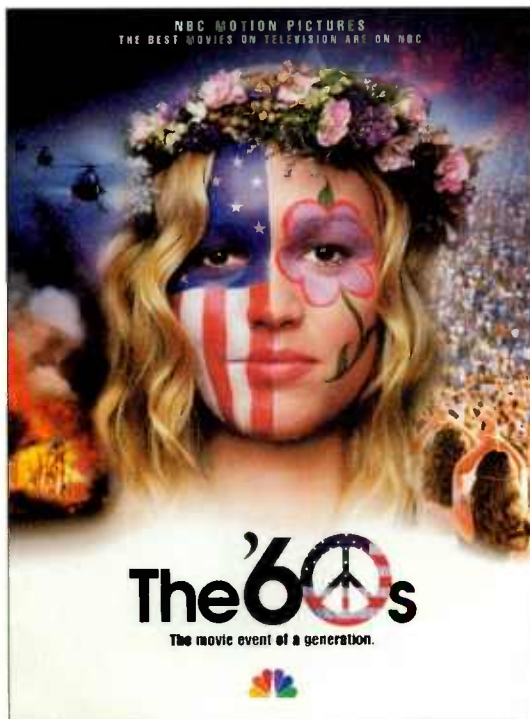
IBOUGHT THE MARCH ISSUE OF *HUSTLER*. I FELT IT WAS my civic and journalistic duty to check out the handiwork of *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt, who is, after all, now a leading American journalist. Not everyone thinks Flynt merits that designation, of course. *The Washington Post* has dubbed him an "investigative pornographer," while *The New York Times's* William Safire was inspired to decry the work of "pornalists."

But those are word games. Larry Flynt—vile, self-promoting, clownish Larry Flynt—saw a good story in Robert Livingston and some of his colleagues, and he apparently nailed it. He chose an historic moment to strike, and he changed a bit of history. "Real" journalists can take some comfort in distinguishing themselves from Larry Flynt. And from Matt Drudge. And (pay attention, it gets trickier now) from much of talk radio (though Don Imus sure is funny). And from Geraldo Rivera (when he goes too far). And from MSNBC (John Gibson but not Brian Williams). And from the on-line magazine *Salon* (at least on the Henry Hyde adultery story).

Journalists, I guess, know real journalism when they see it. (Reminds me of something a Supreme Court justice once

Editor Eric Effron lived through the sixties, though he was too young to take full advantage of its excesses.

Dig this: NBC promoted its '60s miniseries with a call to action.



famously said about pornography.) But the public can be excused for not being sure where the line between respectable and despicable is drawn any more. It was tough enough when the boundaries separating news and entertainment got fuzzy. Now news has blurred with entertainment's lowliest offspring, pornography (with President Bill Clinton and Ken Starr each giving major assists).

It's tempting to dismiss Flynt as a sleazeball and then move on. In editorializing about what it called the "Flynt Virus," for instance, the *Times* reminded readers that Flynt paid for some of his dirty information, so therefore his claims need to be greeted warily. Okay. But when Speaker of the House—designate Robert Livingston resigned from his prospective speakership in anticipation of being outed as a kinky adulterer by Flynt, that pretty much eliminated any doubt that Flynt had turned up something.

And let's say that instead of Flynt, the sexual shenanigans had been dredged up by *Newsweek* (only instead of offering its sources money, *Newsweek* had offered a more respectable setting in which the protagonists could tell their story). Or, instead of by *Salon*, the Henry Hyde story was broken by one of the supermarket tabloids. Any of these alternatives are easy enough to imagine. The point is, there's so much other media out there covering what the establishment press covers—and the establishment press is too fearful of the competition to ignore many of the same stories on which the more fringe outlets thrive. So yes, there's a blur, and citizens themselves must now take on the role of discerning consumers of information, making their own judgments about what's important and about whom to believe.

I, too, lament the "politics of personal destruction," and I sure wish I knew less about the sex lives of the president, Livingston, and many others. But that's a different debate. Just as, earlier in his career, Flynt made many of us uncomfortable when he emerged as an outspoken and legally triumphant advocate of the First Amendment, now we must seriously ask ourselves, *What are these journalistic standards Flynt is said to have violated?*

Flynt used controversial but hardly unheard-of means (such as paying for information, which the networks do when they put consultants on their payrolls and then trot them out as on-air experts) to uncover embarrassing information about the man then at the center of impeaching a president over the fallout from his own sexual escapades. He trumpeted his handiwork for maximum impact and publicity, just as real journalistic organizations now do with ever greater skill and budgets. And he even lamented the need to exhume people's private lives, but added that he had no choice because the impeachment story is, after all, a sex story, too. He was just working his beat, I suppose. Did Flynt drag us further into the mud, as many commentators have suggested, or did he simply jump into the mudbath in which we were already swimming? Who disappointed us more, Flynt, for running an advertisement in *The Washington Post* in



which he offered to pay for information about philandering politicians, or the *Post*, which ran the ad and became an estimated \$85,000 richer as a result?

As for *Hustler*, it's juvenile and raunchy and plays to our basest instincts. (See also the Starr Report.) Flynt says he will release his findings about the politicians' sexual shenanigans in a special onetime publication, but that's too bad in a way. It belongs, with much of the news coverage of the last year or so, right in the pages of *Hustler*.

No longer shunned? Did "investigative pornographer" Larry Flynt drag us into the mud or simply jump into the mudbath in which we were already swimming?

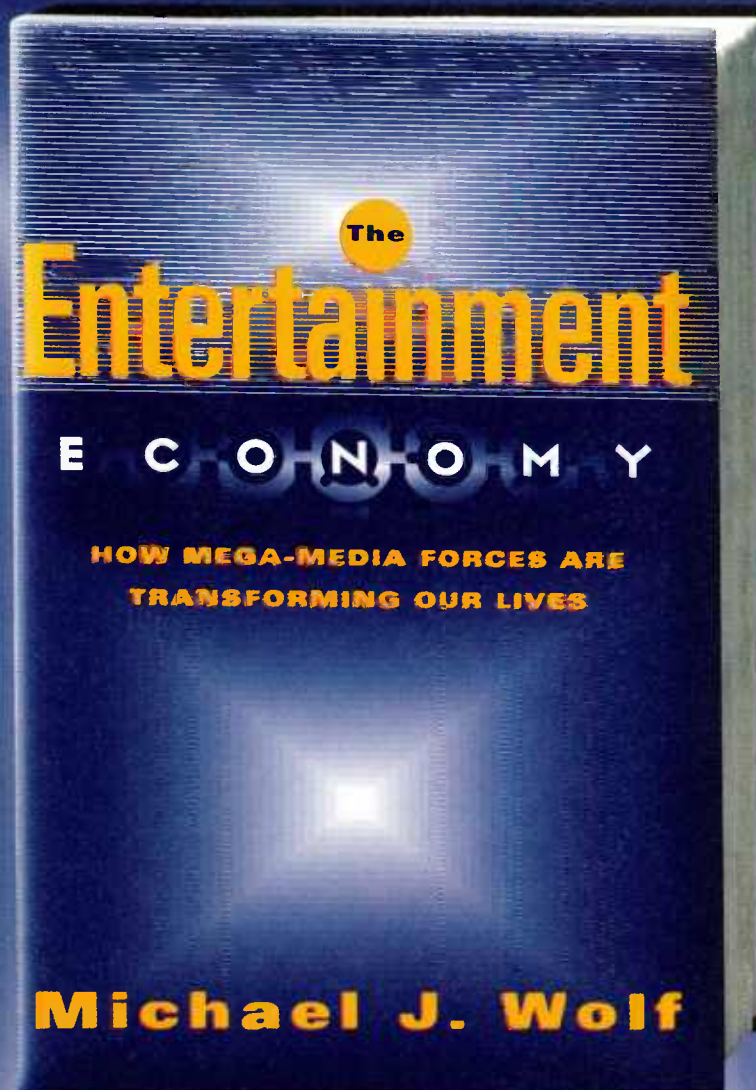
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A CYNIC OR A SOCIALIST to wonder about the independence of the journalistic arms of the corporate giants that control much of our mainstream media. One CNN viewer (and *Brill's Content* reader), Phil Weiss of Boise, Idaho, came forward with this observation.

Weiss told us he wrote to the cable network recently that "CNN really should disclose...its ownership interest in movies it reviews. For instance, you posted a laudatory review of *You've Got Mail* [on CNN.com]. The review did not disclose that Warner Brothers is the producer and distributor of the film." (Like CNN, Warner Brothers is part of Time Warner Inc.)

Weiss has a good point, and when we asked CNN about it, the network agreed. A spokesman characterized the omission as an oversight and a disclosure was added to the review by the next morning.

Although I can't guarantee those types of results. I encourage you to e-mail me at eeffron@brillscontent.com with any suggestions, tips, or observations on the Big Blur. Together we can try to let the sun shine in. ■

Every business is show business.



In the tradition of *Future Shock* and *Being Digital*, *The Entertainment Economy* shatters conventional views of our culture and economy, revealing that words like "image" and "celebrity" aren't just for actors and rock stars anymore.

Michael J. Wolf shows how everything in our world—from the airlines we fly to the malls we visit—is being transformed by ideas that come from the entertainment world. Exposing how the principles of MTV are used by companies like McDonald's and Citibank, Wolf shows how in our media-saturated society, corporations don't just sell products—they vie for our attention.

 TIMES BUSINESS

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Beauty and Brains

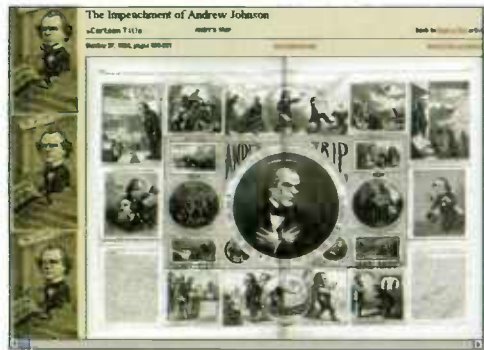
Allure magazine's "Letter From the Editor" brings uncommon intelligence to such matters as packing light and bikini waxes. Revealing that she never tells her husband about her waxing appointments, editor Linda Wells wrote, "Oh, sure, he's seen me in the most grueling moments of childbirth; that's different. The details of my defoliation are unnecessary in our relationship." Wells also brings insight to weightier topics like vanity and shame. Discussing a conversation among her friends, she wrote, "No one was truly willing to admit to vanity, but no one was ashamed of coveting wealth." No matter the topic, Wells cuts through the fluff.

—Katherine Rosman



A History Lesson On-line

FINALLY, AN IMPEACHMENT DRAMA WITH ALL OF THE INTRIGUE BUT NONE OF the DNA. Ironically, it's the medium that gave us the smuttiest details of the current White House crisis that provides its historical antidote: a site that features contemporaneous reports on the 1868 impeachment and trial of President Andrew Johnson (www.impeach-andrewjohnson.com). Learn about President Clinton's historical counterpart through the writing and etchings of *Harper's Weekly*, the nineteenth-century equivalent of *Time* magazine and the predecessor of *Harper's Magazine*. View a drawing of President Johnson receiving a summons from the Senate's sergeant at arms. Read about how those most titillated by the impeachment were (you guessed it) Washington's press corps. Sure, the language and some of the issues are a bit crusty, but the themes are disturbingly fresh. Go ahead, you deserve it.—Ted Rose



P.J. O'Rourke

He made his reputation in the Reagan era as Big Government's funniest critic, noting, among other things, that "giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys." Today,

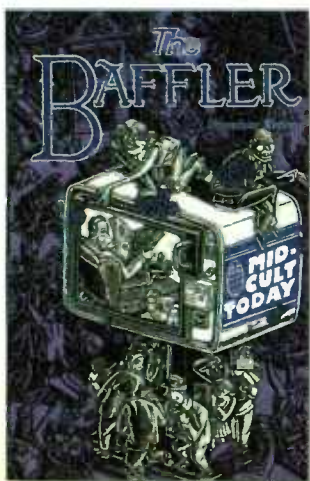
in his second decade as a roving correspondent for *Rolling Stone*, the 51-year-old P. J. O'ROURKE hasn't lost his mastery of the succinct satiric sentence. A self-described draft dodger turned "vast right-wing conspirator," O'Rourke does not reserve his gleefully disrespectful wit for left-leaning foes; his fellow conservatives feel its sting as well. In his foreign-affairs reports, O'Rourke writes from such disparate outposts as Albania, Tanzania, and Shanghai, blending social commentary with sharp observations. And his knowledge of politics and economics makes his columns and books as informative as they are funny.

—Matthew Heimer

Master Satirist

Crit With Wit

For the last ten years, *The Baffler* has aimed its scathing pen at the culture of business and the business of culture, masterfully satirizing the likes of Tom Peters, *Fast Company*, the Rotary Club, and *Details*. Read the fine print in this Chicago-based journal of cultural criticism, which is published sporadically and appears in a few scattered bookstores: The most recent issue, from the summer of 1998, was put together "without benefit of focus groups, town-hall meetings, phone polls, beeper studies, or, in fact, any input from the public at all. We call the research method that we use 'thinking.' We call our journalistic method 'writing.' For a couple ten thousand in foundation money, though, we'll gladly take up the standard of civic empowerment, start worrying about the problem of media cynicism, and conduct interactive double-blind placebo studies on the Internet." Write P.O. Box 378293, Chicago, IL, 60637 for a subscription, or pick up their excellent published collection *Commodity Your Dissent* (W.W. Norton, 1997).—Jeff Pooley



The View from **Russia**



The latest issue of the quarterly *Granta*—**RUSSIA: THE WILD EAST**—is full of essays, memoirs, reportage, and fiction about the vast land that continually engages our imagination. Writer Vitali Vitaliev's memoir, "The Last Eighteen Drops," about Russia's vodka culture and his personal experience with it, is a standout. "Few Russian phenomena are quite so distorted and misunderstood in the West as vodka," he writes. "As a thoroughly filtered product of distillation, a good vodka is designed to be the purest alcoholic drink on earth. Any additives, even ice cubes, immediately ruin its character." The issue—11 stories and 3 photo essays—examines a wide range of subjects, from a mother's efforts to find her missing son after the war in Chechnya to the burial last summer of the bones of Russia's last czar, Nicholas II, in Saint Petersburg. It's one magazine you'll want to keep on your bookshelf.—Dimitra Kessenides

The Best in Biz News

ENTREPRENEURS AND INVESTORS IN HIGH TECH AND THE medical sciences count on **Geoff's Gems** to deliver a daily e-mail mix of carefully chosen reports on major business developments. *Forbes ASAP* economics editor Geoff Baum sifts through 20-odd on-line and print publications to find a half-dozen or so articles, which his subscribers can view in full by clicking on handy hot links. "The goal, really, is to pick the best articles of the day, everyday, so that people don't have to go out on their own and find it," Baum says. Recent lists included articles from *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition*, *Fortune*, and *The Industry Standard*. For a preview, or to subscribe to the free e-mail list, go to www.garage.com/geoffsGems.shtml.—D.M. Osborne

CHEESY, CREEPY FUN

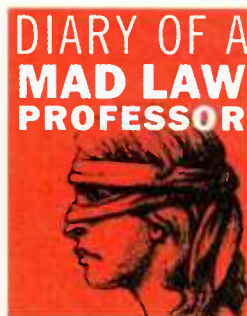
CBS is to air new episodes this spring, but *Unsolved Mysteries* may actually be more enjoyable as a syndicated late-night rerun on Lifetime (that's right; real men do watch the so-called women's network). Noir-ish writing, Robert Stack's clipped narration, and the 12:30 A.M. airtime heighten the dreamlike



atmosphere—at once cheesy and creepy—created by the show's signature combination of authentic footage, reenacted events, and interviews. Much of the appeal of

Unsolved Mysteries lies in its variety; it doesn't rely solely on true-crime stories. Featured in one sample episode: the alleged contract killing of a well-known race-car driver; the unclaimed fortune left in multiple Midwest bank accounts by a depositor who never returned; a \$130,000 bank heist made possible by a "fast-drying glue"; Bigfoot sightings near Pikes Peak; and the murder of a small-town cheerleader. And, oh yeah, a report on how a previous episode led to an escaped convict's capture. Mystery solved.—Ed Shanahan

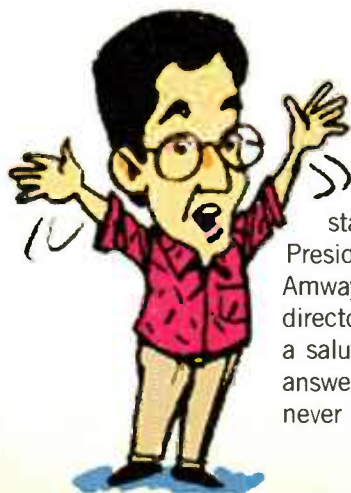
Legal Brief



Patricia Williams's column in *The Nation*, "Diary of a Mad Law Professor," offers a peek into the mind of a liberal academic. With sharp writing and witty commentary, the Columbia University professor takes on both well-trod and uncommon subjects, from Matthew Shepard, the young Wyoming man allegedly murdered because he was gay, to nineteenth-century legal cases in which moral character determined a mulatto's "whiteness." Williams's

November 23 column questioned journalists' speculation that Thomas Jefferson may have felt affection for his slave and mistress, Sally Hemings. "[S]ince slavery was the practice of absolute control," she wrote, "I wonder at the rush to embrace 'love' as the overarching feature of their bond." Williams's fresh subjects and bold opinions keep her from sounding merely like a mouthpiece for the left.

—Kimberly Conniff



A GROUCHO FOR US

Michael Feldman's *Whad'Ya Know* is a *You Bet Your Life* for the 1990s. Produced by Wisconsin Public Radio and broadcast each Saturday from Madison, the two-hour show starts with a topical monologue (Feldman's comment on Justice William Rehnquist at President Clinton's impeachment: "What is with the four stripes on his outfit? Marching band? Amway?"). Each show includes offbeat interviews (the deputy county treasurer of Toledo and a director of theatrical fight scenes have been subjects), and a weirdly challenging trivia quiz ("May a saluki dog mascot lift its leg to protest a call during a sporting event?" For the record, the answer is no). The real fun is Feldman's banter with the audience, which is always funny but never mean-spirited. He'd make Groucho proud.—Amy Bernstein

BUCK! BUCK!
BUCK!
BUCK!



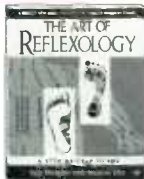
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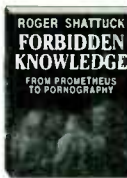
13-8519. Learn both the theories and practice of this effective healing alternative. QPB: \$12.95



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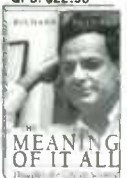
26-6067. This book challenges the idea that there are things we can know—but shouldn't. QPB: \$14.95



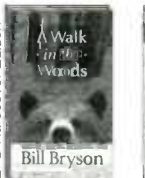
55-9741. A collection of prayers, blessings, and hymns, from around the world. QPB: \$18.95



96-9405. Three great novels from the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. (3-in-1 vol.) QPB: \$15.95



*05-8219. The Nobel Prize-winning physicist discusses science, religion, and more. Hardcover: \$22 QPB: \$14.95



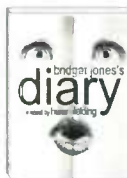
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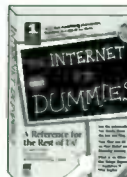
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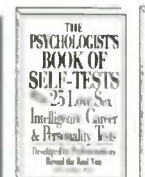
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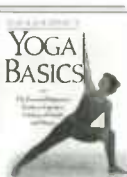
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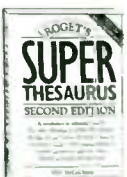
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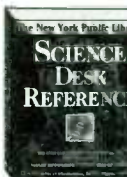
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Primary Mission

When presidential elections roll around, New Hampshire takes on a national responsibility. So does one of its community newspapers.

OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, THE PEOPLE WHO have enough money to run for president (and some who don't) will become familiar faces to the readers of the newspaper I edit, the *Concord Monitor*. The candidates will vie for our endorsement, pretending that the editorial board of a small newspaper in New Hampshire is important. Our reporters, many in their first jobs, will take to the campaign trail with energy and imagination, resisting the images the candidates seek to project while trying to portray them as they truly are.

Around the first of the year 2000, the national media pack will arrive (many of the area's hotel rooms are already booked) and turn the campaign into a circus. For the candidates, the trick will be to keep their eyes on the prize—New Hampshire voters—while playing to a national audience. For us, these final days will be a journalist's nirvana, a stretch when our now-savvy staff will play witness to whatever gravity-defying act the circus presents.

Politics is New Hampshire's number one participatory sport. Our children grow up with the sense that their voices make a difference, whether at town meetings or in deciding who is suited for the White House. In an age of apathy, voter turnout on the Republican side of the last two presidential primaries exceeded 70 percent; on the Democratic side in 1992, it was nearly 90 percent. Voters here take their role seriously, and candidates who want to keep talking after our primary must make a direct connection with them.

For the *Monitor*, the primary represents a special challenge. It is a national story that accelerates as Election Day approaches, but it is mostly a local story. It is set on our terrain, and it draws in our readers.

Perhaps the best way to describe how the *Monitor* will approach the 2000 primary is to examine the 1992 campaign. They're all different, but a look at 1992 offers insights into how the national and local story lines blend.

The 1992 campaign started late. The Gulf War made President George Bush seem invincible, and, one by one, potential Democratic challengers decided not to waste time and



money on the slim chance of dislodging him. The last holdout was then-New York governor Mario Cuomo. On the primary filing deadline, December 20, 1991, so many national reporters showed up in Concord to await Cuomo's grand entrance that the city auditorium had to be readied for the press conference.

Cuomo never showed. That left the Democrats with a field of Senators Tom Harkin and Bob Kerrey, former senator Paul Tsongas, Governor Bill Clinton and former governor Jerry Brown.

Our goal at the *Monitor* is to cover every appearance made in our circulation area by a major candidate. Periodically, we check in with voters, giving a real-life test to the themes the candidates are striking. We stick close to the grass roots, but we also hatch ambitious enterprise stories that would be difficult to report late in the campaign.

In 1992, the enterprise stories were obvious. A presidential candidacy is like a job application. Our role is to help those doing the hiring—the voters—examine the applicants' qualifications. Are they fit? What experiences have prepared them for the job? Tsongas was eager to demonstrate his recovery from lymphoma by providing photo ops in which he swam laps in his Speedo and bathing cap. Our reporter Deborah Snyder was assigned to investigate Tsongas's health and

Presidential candidate Bill Clinton, sick with the flu, revives himself before returning to the campaign trail in New Hampshire.

Mike Pride is the editor of the Concord Monitor, in Concord, New Hampshire. His column on editing a daily local newspaper appears regularly.

whether it might affect his ability to be president. Bill Clinton had been governor of Arkansas for 11 years. We sent reporter Felice Belman to Little Rock to examine his record. Her story cast the governor as “an innovator but not a china-breaker.”

All of the Democratic candidates actively sought the *Monitor's* endorsement. Some candidates resent or misread the endorsement process. In 1988, just before Democratic candidate Bruce Babbitt was due to meet with us, one of our editors overheard him tell his lunch companions: “Those editorial boards have a whiff of arrogance about them.” That same year, we were dissatisfied with both George Bush and Bob Dole’s inability to say why they wanted to be president. Our fallback for the GOP endorsement was Jack Kemp. Despite his babble about the gold standard, we convinced

A presidential candidacy is like a job application. Our role is to help those doing the hiring—the voters—examine the applicants’ qualifications.



Democratic presidential candidate Paul Tsongas shows the media he’s in good health after recovering from cancer treatments by swimming a few laps in a photo op during the 1992 New Hampshire primary.

endorsed Kemp. Later, one of Dole’s handlers, a respected insider, berated a *Monitor* columnist, saying that after all Dole had done to accommodate us, we owed him the endorsement.

Our 1992 choice on the Republican side was clear: We endorsed President Bush against the maverick Patrick Buchanan. On the Democratic side, we were interested in Tsongas, Kerrey, and Clinton. We met twice with each of them for long interviews and waged the sporadic internal discussions that would lead to our choice shortly before the February 18 primary.

Meanwhile, the *Star*, a grocery-store tabloid, made a media splash by alleging that Clinton had had several extramarital affairs. The *Star's* charges raised public debate about his character—a theme that has continued throughout the nation’s ordeal of the last year. A history professor working as a *Monitor* columnist wrote in January 1992 that the press has a legitimate role in examining the character of candidates, but he added: “The problem lies in how ‘character’ gets defined and how, increasingly, a focus on titillating details of people’s private lives has driven out serious consideration of candidates’ records, programs, and vision.”

On January 17, the *Monitor* ran its first story on the *Star's* allegations. The next day, we ran a wire story in which Clinton called the *Star* story a “totally bogus” attack by a

newspaper that “says Martians walk on the Earth and people have cows’ heads.”

The denials and deflections intensified during the next week, when the *Star* reported that Clinton had had a 12-year affair with Gennifer Flowers. “It didn’t happen,” he told reporters. The *Star* had a tape of a phone conversation in which Clinton told Flowers, “If they ever hit you with it, just say ‘No’ and go on.” Clinton disputed the *Star* editor’s contention that this statement was a cover-up effort. Clinton’s staff did acknowledge that the governor had tried to help Flowers get a job.

Meanwhile, Clinton’s poll numbers in New Hampshire only went up, especially after the Clintons’ post-Super Bowl *60 Minutes* appearance, during which he admitted past infidelity in vague terms. As they say, past is prologue.

The *Monitor* did no original reporting on Clinton’s sex life. We did, however, give the story prominent play. The day we put the Flowers allegations in the lead position on page A-1, I was a guest on the *MacNeill/Lehrer News Hour*. Roger Mudd asked me if the story belonged there. “I

don’t know,” I said. Because the source of the story was a supermarket tabloid, there had been internal dissension over its play. Readers would no doubt know about the Flowers story before they picked up the paper that day, but our job was to tell the Flowers story fully and play it in accordance with its importance. In my judgment, it was the most significant story of the day for the people who would soon be voting in the primary.

Meanwhile, Clinton was still meeting with enthusiastic crowds throughout the state. Voters asked him about the economy, health care, Social Security, and education. Our reporters wrote stories that conveyed how, even with a terrible case of the flu and faltering vocal cords, the man could talk up a storm and engage any audience. He took a second character hit when his draft record from the 1960s became an issue a few days before the vote, but still he continued to speak directly to people about their concerns and his aims. He was by far the most formidable Democrat in the race.

That is why, even though his campaign had hit such turbulence, the *Monitor* endorsed Bill Clinton. He called me the morning after the editorial ran to thank the paper for its support. I told him the endorsement would do him little good considering that his 1969 draft letter had just been released to the public, but he would have none of it. Don’t worry, he told me, he was pushing forward. He still believed in the electorate.

His faith was well founded. Clinton finished second, but, as often happens in New Hampshire, the second-place finisher left the state proclaiming victory.

I believe in the electorate, too. At the turn of the year, when the national media again arrive en masse in New Hampshire, the focus of the 2000 campaign will shift away from issues. Personality, image, polls, the telegenic moments—and maybe character—will drive the story line. The *Monitor* will help readers follow these events, but we’ll also stick with the local story we have already begun to tell: the story of engaged voters earnestly seeking their next leader. ■

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In 1997 our union paid \$40 million for the Diplomat’s 12.5 acre beachfront property and nearby golf course. Last April, we imploded the old landmark hotel to clear the way for the new Diplomat Resort & Country Club that will open in the year 2000.

Much of South Florida is as excited as we are. The property’s redevelopment will create 2,100 permanent jobs and invigorate business and tourism.

Prior to its closing seven years ago, the Diplomat was one of south Florida’s most popular hotels. It’s demise was a devastating blow to the region’s economy. Not only did it cost businesses millions of dollars, but workers lost good jobs and local governments were denied badly-needed tax revenues.

Our union is proud to be the engine that will generate an economic comeback of potentially historic proportions.

Let me tell you a little about the exciting new Diplomat: Imagine a 35-story hotel building with a huge portal in the center visually connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Intercoastal Waterway. What a spectacular view *that* is going to be! There will be a connecting conference center (with over 209,000 square feet of meeting space), plus retail shops, waterfront dining, marina, tennis center, world-class spa, and a newly designed and expanded 155-acre golf course.

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Martin J. Maddaloni
General President

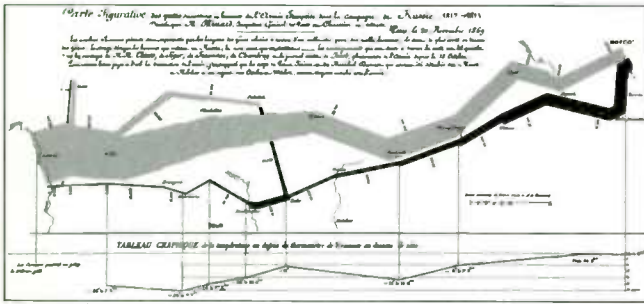


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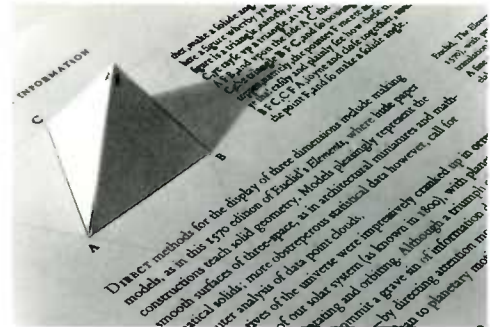


This map portrays the losses suffered by Napoleon's army in the Russian campaign of 1812. Beginning at the left on the Polish-Russian border near the Niemen, the thick band shows the size of the army (422,000 men) as it invaded Russia. The width of the band indicates the size of the army at each position. The army reached Moscow with 100,000 men. The path of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in the bitterly cold winter is depicted by the dark lower band, tied to a temperature/time scale. The Grande Armée struggled out of Russia with only 10,000 men. Six dimensions of data are displayed on the flat surface of the paper.

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Longing For The Butcher

Broadway hasn't been the same since *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich packed up his cleaver. Even some of his victims miss him.

WHEN FRANK RICH STEPPED DOWN AS chief theater critic of *The New York Times* in late 1993, the theatrical community cheered. The so-called Butcher of Broadway was moving on to the op-ed pages, and the theater would now be safe from his notoriously savage pen.

But a strange twist has occurred nearly six years later: an odd nostalgia has infected New York's theater world. "I'm surprised to find myself missing Frank Rich," says one veteran producer whose shows were panned by the critic more than once. The sentiment is echoed by a dozen theater types.

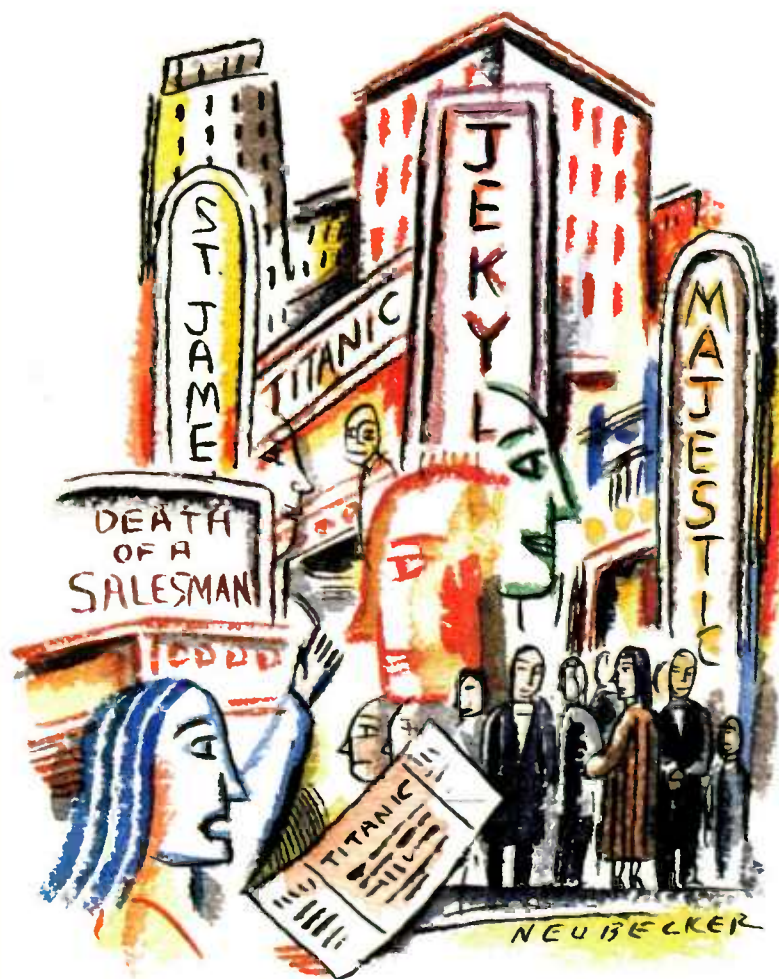
Perversely, it's that very power they miss. Ben Brantley, two and a half years into his tenure as Rich's successor and almost six years since beginning to review plays for the *Times*, is a force, of course, by dint of his position. But the paper's ability to turn a show into a hit has waned—and that bottom-line consideration explains the suddenly fond memories.

"You knew where you stood," the veteran producer says of Rich. "If he liked the show, it really sold a show....If he didn't like it, you didn't have to agonize over what to do."

Rich was gleeful in his turn of the knife. When he decided to gut a show, it became bloodsport. And *Times* readers were treated to some wickedly great writing. "What's the Polish word for fiasco?" asked Rich in his 1992 review of the hit Warsaw musical *Metro*. "[T]his show is *A Chorus Line* as it might have been produced by the Festrunk brothers, those wild and crazy Eastern European swingers that Dan Aykroyd and Steve Martin used to play on *Saturday Night Live*."

"Frank appeared to delight in the negative," says one *Times* editor. "That's what bothered people." The role of the *Times's* Alex Witchel, Rich's then girlfriend (now his wife) and theater columnist, also infuriated theater people. Complaints abounded that Witchel, no stranger to the verbal stiletto herself, would promote Rich's favorites and attack those he didn't care for. Rich and Witchel always denied the charges.

Brantley, by contrast, lacks that killer instinct. While he can be critical—he tends to find fault more than Rich even in his positive reviews—his nasty bon mots lack the vindictiveness of a truly great evisceration. The best Brantley could muster for the new musical *Footloose*, as easy a target as a critic will get, was a "flavorless marshmallow of a musical."



While some cheer that Brantley doesn't reduce criticism to a thumbs up—thumbs down dichotomy, others lament his more nuanced—and mixed—reviews. Readers usually knew what Rich thought one or two paragraphs into a review. That process takes much longer with Brantley, whose more dispassionate approach doesn't sell tickets the way a Rich sermon from the mount could.

But more than stylistic differences explain the dip in the power of the *Times* since Brantley replaced Rich. Theater today—particularly Broadway—is more criticproof than ever. "The ability of the *Times* to make it or break it for musical shows is lessening," says George A. Wachtel, president of Audience

Research & Analysis. Adds producer Elizabeth McCann: "I think the clout is less noticeable in musicals because [the producers increasingly] have the budget to swamp bad reviews."

During Rich's reign, the musical-as-spectacle trend began with shows such as *Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon*. Today, such extravaganzas dominate the Broadway landscape. Brantley called *Jekyll and Hyde* a "leaden, solemnly campy musical," yet marketing savvy made it a hit. And the flood of out-of-towners to New York brings millions more theatergoers who have no clue who Brantley is. For example, in the 1996-97 season, some 5.4 million people from outside the New York area saw Broadway shows, nearly 2 million greater than during the 1990-91 season.

There's no denying that Brantley and his number two, Peter Marks, still have power, particularly when it comes to championing smaller nonmusicals or out-of-town shows yearning for a Broadway transfer. But a Brantley cheer doesn't guarantee a successful run. Though Rich sometimes championed shows that never made it, Brantley's tastes have been less fervently embraced. Horton Foote's *The Young Man from Atlanta* and David Mamet's *The Old Neighborhood* fizzled despite Brantley's kind words.

Nor do his negative reviews necessarily hurt serious musicals or plays, the very type *Times* reviews could easily kill in the past. *Parade* got a more negative review from Brantley than from any other New York critic, but disaster didn't ensue at the box office.

And Brantley didn't like David Hare's much-hyped *Blue Room* when he saw it in London. The show still came to Broadway and all but sold out its limited run. Nicole Kidman's cellulite-free body was just too much for Brantley's words to overcome.

THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

After perusing a glowing review in *The New York Times Book Review*, readers often actually experience the desire to buy the book. Such was the case after a late-December rave for *Outsider, Insider: An Unlikely Success Story*, the memoir of former Time Inc. chief executive Andrew Heiskell. Yet when prospective purchasers searched their bookstores, their requests for the tales of a creator of *People* magazine and a fixture on the New York charity scene mostly met blank stares. The publisher, Marian-Darien Press, was so obscure it didn't belong to any organization of publishers. Even barnesandnoble.com, the official bookseller of the *Times's* website, had no link to the autobiography.

The explanation? *Outsider, Insider* is a self-published book, usually the last resort for wanna-be authors convinced that the only reason the public is being denied their life story is the arrogant elitism of publishers across the land. Accordingly, the *Times* doesn't usually review such books. Most important, says Charles McGrath, the editor of the *Book Review*, "there's no point in reviewing a book one can't buy." [For more on the *Book Review*, see "Making The Best-seller List," page 111.]

Heiskell, however, holds an advantage few can muster—he's married to Marian Sulzberger Dryfoos, whose family controls The New York Times Company. (Hence the Marian in the publisher's name; Darien refers to the Connecticut town

in which the couple lives.) "I would be dissembling if I said [Heiskell's name] had nothing to do with it," says McGrath. Despite the book's unknown publisher, Heiskell's corporate and marital pedigree prompted McGrath to select the volume from the avalanche that descends on the *Book Review* offices. "[But] all that doesn't automatically get a book reviewed," says McGrath. "We did make a decision on the merits."

Frequent *Times* contributor Judith Newman, who called *Outsider, Insider* "witty and charming" in her review, says she was given no marching orders to laud the book. An editor told her only that Heiskell had lived a fascinating life.

He has indeed—and, in fact, this is a fascinating book. Born in Naples, Heiskell didn't go to school until he was 10, never graduated from college, arrived in the U.S. at age 19 in the midst of the Depression, yet became the publisher of *Life* when he was 30. He went on to spend 42 years at Time Inc., 20 of them as its top business executive. His book is refreshingly different from most self-published dreck. An offshoot of an oral-history project at Columbia University that his family urged him to turn it into a book, Heiskell, 83, says he printed about 3,000 copies himself "because no publisher would take it." He also made some available to Amazon.com, and later to some New York-area bookstores.

Outsider, Insider displays a virtue often lacking in the memoirs of corporate chieftains: candor, sometimes withering. The death throes of *Life* and corporate backstabbing during the creation of *People* are both here. And Heiskell disputes the conventional view that Time Inc.'s 1989 merger with Warner Communications and the Hollywood values held by its chief, Steve Ross, destroyed Time Inc.'s values: "Time Inc. had already lost its heart and soul before Steve Ross appeared on the scene."

"I left my company in good shape," he writes, "financially, spiritually, ethically....Times change."

So do the traditions at the *Book Review*. McGrath says the editors will reexamine their policy on self-published books. Even those not written by members of the Sulzberger clan.

DON'T SWEAT THE CRITICS

If you think book reviewers march in critical lockstep, a cross-country survey of six media outlets' top-ten lists for 1998 will quickly disabuse you of that naive notion. No consensus exists on what were the best fiction and nonfiction books of last year, as judged by the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *Time*, *Salon*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. (The latter rated 11 books.)

Just one book landed on more than two of these lists, and that one was the most hyped novel of the year—Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*. Of the other 48 books that made these "best of" lists, a mere 10 showed up on 2.

If you needed any more proof that critical acclaim rarely leads to blockbuster status, check out *USA Today's* list of the 100 best sellers of 1998, the most comprehensive tally of actual sales. Just two works of fiction from the top-ten lists made the cut—*A Man in Full* and Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Neither cracked the top ten. That hallowed ground was occupied by the likes of self-help guide *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...and it's all small stuff* and John Grisham's *The Street Lawyer*. ■

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THE SILENT TREATMENT

That's what two *Boston Globe* columnists are getting from Fidelity Investments. It's not the company's first skirmish with the press. ● BY MATTHEW REED BAKER

IT TOOK ONLY ONE WORD TO SET the fire. Of course, when that word is *cheat*, it's not surprising that there would be an explosive reaction.

The word wasn't exactly buried, either. It was smack in the lead of a November 12 *Boston Globe* column on a mutual fund's success: "Question: How do you utterly blow away your benchmark if you are a fund manager? Answer: You cheat."

In the world of mutual funds, *them's fightin' words*. Throw in a notoriously sensitive company and you've got a big problem. So it came to be that Boston-based Fidelity Investments, the largest mutual-fund company in the U.S., is giving the silent treatment to two columnists at the *Globe*, its hometown paper. Steven Syre and Steve Bailey have been "barred from the clubhouse," as they put it. Fidelity is denying them access to fund managers and executives until they apologize.

The spat is just the latest conflict between Fidelity and the media. Notoriously prickly, Fidelity has chafed at the scrutiny of an ever-growing financial press, especially since the company's once-soaring funds fell to earth in the mid-nineties. Fidelity seems to have developed an ingrained antagonism to the press. "There was a kind of paranoia that existed there," says a former Fidelity employee familiar with its press relations, "and I think that's one of the issues that creates these situations."

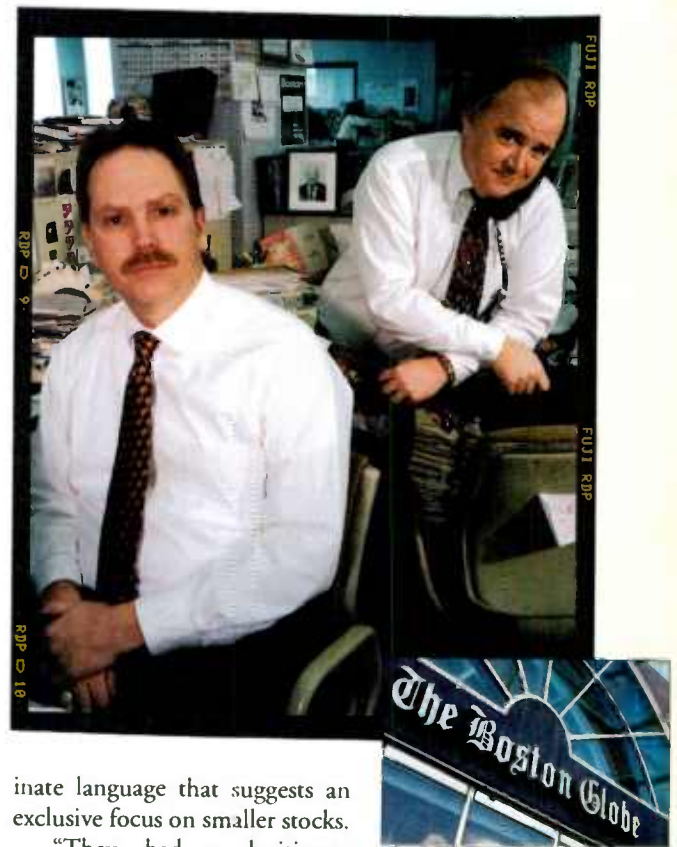
This is assistant editor Matthew Reed Baker's first article for Brill's Content.

FIDELITY OFTEN TURNS UP IN "BOSTON Capital," Syre and Bailey's four-times-a-week column. And, though known for their cheeky leads and blunt coverage of local business, the columnists praise Fidelity almost as often as not.

Ironically, even Fidelity doesn't question the general accuracy of the column that sparked the tiff. Syre and Bailey criticized the Fidelity Emerging Growth Fund for marketing itself as a fund that invests in small and mid-sized companies—despite being filled with the stocks of such behemoths as Microsoft Corporation and MCI WorldCom, Inc.

Fidelity had touted the fund's returns by comparing them to the performance of small- and medium-company stocks, which performed dramatically worse last year than those of big companies. So, for example, (using figures as of the time of Syre and Bailey's November column), Emerging Growth's 18.85 percent return looked spectacular compared to the 9.21 percent loss for the Russell 2000 Index of small-company stocks. (By contrast, Emerging Growth's numbers looked more modest when compared to the 18.33 percent return on the more applicable S&P 500 large-company index.)

"It's not that uncommon for a fund to heat its competitors by a few points if you're comparing apples to apples," says Syre. "But this thing was blowing them away." And, he and Bailey add, they were only revealing what Fidelity was already acknowledging to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Fidelity had filed to change the fund's name to "Aggressive Growth Fund," and to elim-

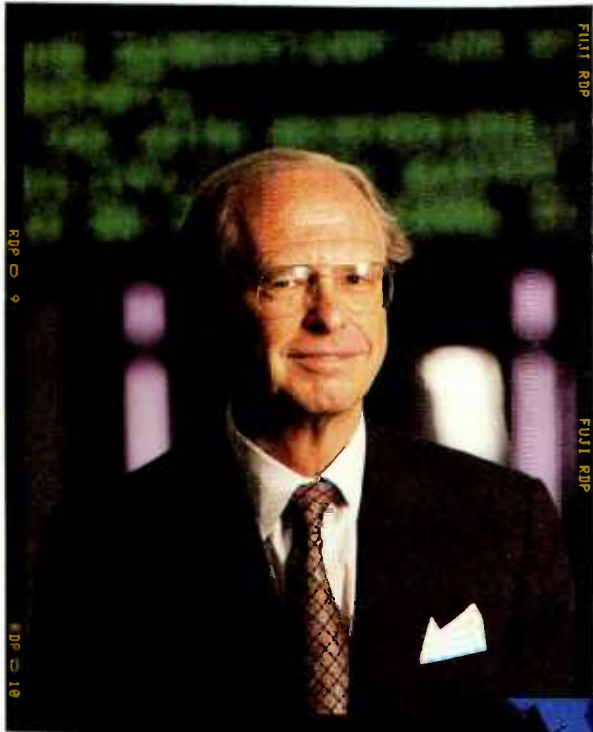


inate language that suggests an exclusive focus on smaller stocks.

"They had a legitimate point," concedes Thomas Eidson, senior vice-president and director of corporate affairs at Fidelity. He's just angry about *how* Syre and Bailey made it. "Their tack of attacking the fund manager and their way of setting it up was wrong." And Eidson charges the columnists with "doctoring" the fund's 33-page prospectus, which contains two sentences allowing investments in larger companies.

"If they had stuck to an interpretation of the prospectus and not used the word *cheat*...they would've never

Did their business coverage get personal? *Globe* columnists Steven Syre (above, left) and Steve Bailey accused a fund manager of cheating.



Fidelity CEO Ned Johnson (above) once told a *Fortune* reporter, "Are you people so f---ing bored that you have nothing better to write about than us?"

heard bupkus from me," Eidson says, stressing that Fidelity still cooperates with other *Globe* reporters.

One fund guru dismisses Eidson's view that a two-sentence disclaimer in a 33-page legal document lets Fidelity off the hook. "If it took twelve pages in the prospectus for Fidelity to get to it," says Don Phillips, chief executive of mutual-fund experts Morningstar, Inc.—and Syre and Bailey certainly weren't writing an article that long—then they "didn't have to include it in their few paragraphs." Though such a standard disclaimer is typically included in prospectuses, Phillips says, "99 percent of those managers don't elect to take use of that catchall phrase."

That didn't stop Fidelity's Eidson from dashing off an angry letter to the *Globe's* columnists—who printed it in full in their column—and blocking their access until they agree to apologize. "[Y]our column has stepped over the boundary of provocative journalism into the realm of personal insults..." argued the letter, which was printed with a response from the columnists. In it, Syre

and Bailey defended their work, denying they meant anything personal. They have no intention of apologizing, the columnists say, although Bailey admits he might not use the word *cheat* if he could do it over.

THE CONTRETEMPS MIGHT BE A FOOTNOTE if such things hadn't happened on multiple occasions. In fact, say seven journalists, Fidelity is known for being obstreperous with the press. In past years, it has pulled advertising from *The New York Times* and the *Globe* (though not on this recent occasion). In each case, Fidelity has done so after receiving critical coverage, denying each time that bad press prompted the decision.

Most recently, Fidelity yanked its advertising from *Fortune* after a June 1997 feature that asked the tough question "Has Fidelity Lost It?" on its cover. That article quoted Fidelity's chairman and co-owner Edward "Ned" Johnson III berating a *Fortune* reporter: "Are you people so f---ing bored that you have nothing better to write about than us?" (Fidelity has not returned as an advertiser.)

Eidson insists that Fidelity doesn't use advertising as a weapon. "There's a great mythology that follows this big old company," he continues. "It's almost like the gunslinger that has only two notches on his gun and yet people say he's shot one hundred people." Eidson gives two explanations for the company's reticence and the inaccessibility of Fidelity's fund managers (another complaint often voiced by journalists): the sheer volume of press calls—he estimates 15,000 in 1998—and the legacy of Jeffrey Vinik.

Vinik, the former manager of Fidelity's flagship Magellan fund, gained notoriety in 1995 and 1996 when his fund's returns lagged—after a disastrous bet on bonds—even as the stock market was booming. Long hailed by the press, the legendary fund took its first media pummeling.

That was exacerbated by the whiff of scandal. Vinik was blasted for praising Micron Technology stock in the media even as he reportedly sold it. To prevent further charges of stock hyping, Eidson says, the company curtailed media access to fund managers. Nevertheless, there was extensive coverage of the scandal and of Fidelity's \$10 million settlement with Micron shareholders. (The SEC, which looked at the matter, declined to open a formal investigation. Fidelity, meanwhile, has always denied any impropriety. And in May 1998 *Fortune's* Joseph Nocera wrote that court documents revealed that Vinik had also *bought* large amounts of Micron stock at the time he was selling shares.)

The negative press about Vinik ultimately spread to other Fidelity managers, and the company took a series of media blows in 1996 and 1997. Fidelity seemed to shrink into a protective crouch, where it has remained despite a comeback by its funds—and a corresponding increase in favorable coverage.

Fidelity's Eidson still recalls the opening words of Syre and Bailey's column at the height of the Vinik affair: "Mrs. Vinik, please don't punch us in the nose. But we have doubts your husband, Jeff, was telling us the truth about all those billions he had invested in technology stocks."

The language irks Eidson. "When... your wife and kids are going to open up the paper and it says your husband lied, it makes it a little different," he says. "It becomes more of a social cocktail party discussion. I think it stings a little more in the hometown paper..."

So far, Fidelity has maintained its current gag order on speaking to Syre and Bailey, who say it isn't affecting their reporting. (The tactic is of dubious effectiveness because much mutual-fund reporting relies on analyzing performance numbers, which are public.) As for Bailey, the new year brought him his own *Globe* column, "Downtown"; Syre continues to write "Boston Capital" on his own. In his farewell, printed December 24, Bailey gave thanks to Syre, his readers, and to "the many who have helped during my stay on Boston Capital, even you Fidelity Investments." ■



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Fed cuts key rate

The Fed moved Tuesday to cut the key fed funds rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 percent in a bid to cool off a global recession.

Let down: U.S. stocks dropped in the session after the Fed failed to cut rates as much as some had hoped.

Shrug-off: Overseas woes caused investors in Asia and Europe to shrug off a likely cut in U.S. interest rates.

Shake sentiment: Americans are getting jittery about their economy, the markets and the president.

Market seeks relief: Investors digested Chairman Bernanke's outlook and the Fed's next move.

Movers & Shakers: Adams Golf, Purring Pagoda, NeoCo2, United Document & more.

Into the E.R.: ESC Medical shares screamed down on an earnings warning.

Off the air: CBS shares slipped in heavy trading amid a cut profit outlook.

Paring it Painless: Slower and fewer orders at the software firm forced outlook.

Also: Peoplesoft, BMC in S&P.

Bundling up: AOL will include Macromedia products in its newest software.

Micro move: Micron Tech posted a dismal loss.

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YOUR EYE ON THE MARKET

Funny Bones To Pick

A humor writer laments “pure drivel,” “Kafka,” “shoplifting and stealing,” and other punch lines lost. ● BY SUSAN SHAPIRO

YOU WRITE THE PIECE, SELL IT, FIND OUT IT'S running on Thursday, and rush out to get a copy. Turning to the page, you see your byline, but under it you read sentences you've never written, containing phrases you would never use in what sounds conspicuously like the voice of your editor.

In my 17 years as a freelance humor writer, this has not been a rare occurrence. I've worked with editors at *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Village Voice* who have faxed me proofs before my pieces ran so we could discuss corrections. Others made changes with-

out checking with me. When they were for the better, I felt amazed that someone in the world was paid to make my words sound more eloquent. Yet humor is subjective and some of the changes were disastrous, revealing, and (only in retrospect) comical.

When it comes to editorial changes with moralistic motives, the Gray Lady has been a repeat offender. In my December 12, 1996, *New York Times* op-ed piece about K Mart opening a store in the East Village, “Learning to Love Superstores,” I wrote about how “I spent long afternoons with friends at Tel-12 Mall, hanging out with friends and shoplifting. Our targets were the cool clothes boutiques and music emporiums. We ignored K Mart. What good was stealing stuff so cheap and generic?” In print these lines read, “I spent long afternoons at the Tel-12 mall, shopping at the cool clothes boutiques and music emporiums. But I always ignored the K Mart. What good was anything so cheap and generic?” What happened to *shoplifting* and *stealing*, the verbs that, I thought, made the lead idiosyncratic? I deduced that you're not allowed to commit a crime on the op-ed page. My consolation was that my mother loved the piece and probably wouldn't have had I broadcast in the paper the dubious crimes of my youth.

In “My Mentor, Barbie,” a humorous “Endpaper” for the November 6, 1994, *New York Times Magazine* that I wrote when I was single, I listed reasons why Barbie was a feminist, including the line “Once she and Ken tied the knot, Barbie did not play around.” Imagine my surprise to find that my (married male) editor had added a sentence before it that read, “Marriage is one of Barbie's greatest achievements.” (Not any of my Barbies!) In an April 5, 1998, essay for the *Times's* “City” section called, “Barbie Moves to the Village,” (we all have our areas of expertise), I mentioned how, when I was a kid, my Barbie's Dream House wasn't big enough for all my dolls, so I used boot boxes and my mother's sanitary napkins as bunk beds. The (married male) editor was kind enough to fax me a proof, where I found he'd deleted “sanitary napkins” because, I learned, it was a family newspaper. But there'd be

Susan Shapiro teaches courses in journalism and humor writing at New York University and The New School for Social Research.



no family without sanitary napkins, I argued; my mother's Kotex triumphed.

In "A Trial That's A Little Bit Gothic," another *New York Times* op-ed piece that ran on February 10, 1996, I ranted about the Random House Joan Collins trial, in which the publisher paid the actress a \$1.2 million advance for two books, then sued because what she handed in was unacceptable. I wrote, "Were they expecting Kafka?" At 7 P.M., the night before it was to run, a *Times* editor called to tell me they'd changed "Kafka" to "Joyce Carol Oates" because they wanted an author who was contemporary. "But Joyce Carol Oates isn't funny," I said, "How about Salman Rushdie?" When I ran

to get the early edition of the next day's paper that night, it said "Joyce Carol Oates." The next day I bought another copy and found that "Oates" had been replaced by "Rushdie." But when an Ohio friend called to congratulate me on the piece, I asked if it read "Oates" or "Rushdie." He answered "Oates." It turned out that L.A., Michigan, and Chicago got the early edition with "Oates," while the rest of the world got "Rushdie." (I still preferred "Kafka.")

Names are also a source of conflict in "Up-Front," my March 1996 *Cosmopolitan* "On My Mind" column, which debated the deception of meeting a man while wearing the bust-enhancing Wonderbra. I wrote, "Would he be aghast to discover he'd picked up Dolly Parton but woke up next to Gloria Steinem?" The magazine printed "Would he be aghast to discover he'd picked up Dolly Parton but woke up next to Twiggy?"

My *New York Times* book review (September 13, 1998) of Steve Martin's humor book *Pure Drivel* originally ended with the lines "Although it's doubtful this work would have been published with such fanfare had Martin not been a famous performer, one is also pleasantly surprised that a Hollywood star can write more than pure dri-

vel." The editor changed it to "it's humor raised to the level of abstraction." The paper of record isn't the only one touchy about celebrity bashing. My *Los Angeles Times* book review (June 21, 1998) of Dennis Miller's *Ranting Again* included the line "As someone with well-publicized drug problems in his past, his zingers about addiction seem authentic." The editors changed it to "Miller's zingers about addiction are tinged with a been-there, done-that hipness."

Sometimes it's a matter of discretion. In "Smoke and Mirrors," a humor piece about addictions for the December 25, 1998, issue of the *Forward*, a Jewish weekly, I wrote of making my husband Aaron give

up "the pizza, pork buns and General Tso's chicken he ate on a regular basis." In the paper, "pork buns" was changed to "dumplings." (As if General Tso's chicken is kosher?) In "Madonna & Me," a *Forward* humor piece (May 10, 1996) about my imagined lifelong connection to the pop star, I wrote, "When I saw *Truth or Dare* I was amazed that she named her movie after the game I played at camp. And though I never dared to go down on an Evian bottle, I too would

have complied with ease." The editors deleted the phrase "went down on" because it was too racy. This was before oral sex became a subject covered on the front page of this nation's newspapers.

Then there are the occasional moments of redemption. My *New York Times Magazine* profile of outspoken publisher Judith Regan was cleansed of much amusing profanity. Yet I was pleased that one provocative quote remained. In describing how she filed a suit after she was strip-searched by police after making an illegal left turn in Utah, Regan said, "You can no longer get fingered for minor traffic infractions in Utah, thank you, Judith Regan." I asked my editor how "fingered" made it through *Times* censors. "We thought it meant nabbed," the editor said. ■

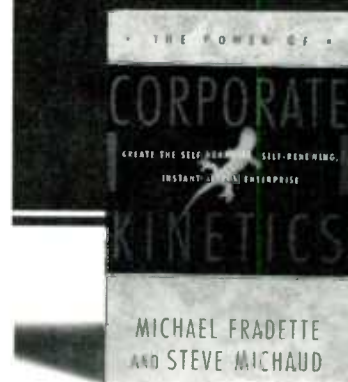
In the *Forward*, a Jewish weekly, I wrote of "pork buns and General Tso's chicken." "Pork buns" was changed to "dumplings." (As if General Tso's chicken is kosher?)

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still being
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for it.

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IGNORING THE DEED, THEY CALL IT GREED

The press lambasted lawyers for accepting millions of dollars in payment for the tobacco settlement. Shouldn't we be thanking them for saving lives? ● BY BEN STEIN

NOW FOR A FEW WORDS about cigarettes, money, and the absence of that old killjoy, context, from the national media rage at trial lawyers. I warn you, if you hate lawyers, you won't like this piece.

Let's start with a front-page article in *The New York Times* on December 15, 1998. The article, written by reporter Barry Meier with a mocking, outraged air, was about a law firm in San Diego that had been a party to the tobacco cases. It was considering asking for a fee of \$50 million, but "alarm bells went off" when the firm saw the gigantic fees that the other tobacco plaintiffs' firms sought, and the firm's fee request "shot up like a fever."

The *Times* piece was but one wave in a

vast storm of media comments—almost always negative and often scathing—about the fees connected to the tobacco cases. "Throw a chunk of raw meat into the ocean," wrote *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, "and you don't have to be Jacques Cousteau to predict that the sharks will quickly gather in a frenzy." Readers of *The Dallas Morning News* saw lawyers' fees described as turning "outrageous into an art form."

I happened to pay particular note to the *Times* piece because it was about a law firm that represented disgruntled stock- and bondholders in a number of cases involving the old investment bank Drexel Burnham Lambert Inc. The firm had employed me several times as an expert witness in those cases (I offer full disclosure here). I was beguiled because the article seemed to miss the whole gestalt of what happened in the tobacco cases.

First, the *Times* piece showed scant recognition that the case written about, *Mangini v. R.J. Reynolds*, was a pathbreaking event. The Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach law firm was arguing for the plaintiff, joined by 17 California cities and counties, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose. It argued that the ad campaign featuring the Joe Camel cartoon character violated a California law against advertising tobacco to children.

Prior to this case, the big-tobacco litigation machine had a well-nigh flawless record of defending tobac-

co companies. The companies argued that smokers assumed the risk knowingly and therefore could not sue. There were many other arguments, as well, about commercial free speech, cigarettes being a legal product, and the lack of a clear connection between ad campaigns and smoking.

But in *Mangini*, thanks to what looked to me like a heroically persuasive argument by the plaintiffs' lawyer, William Lerach, the highest court in California ruled that the case against RJR could go forward and that Joe Camel was indeed advertising to children. The court also bought the argument that the tobacco companies killed so many of their best customers year by year that they constantly had to drum up new business, and the most fertile ground for finding nicotine addicts was among the teenage population, and that was what Joe Camel was about.

The result was an agreement under which RJR would not use Joe Camel in California any longer, would pay \$10 million for anti-smoking ads and education, and would turn over to the public a vast trove of documents about its research and ad campaigns. The studies showed such clear contempt for the health of young Americans that they helped to change the whole national climate about the debate on regulating smoking. In particular, the California Supreme Court's decision and the documents it uncovered led to the rash of state tobacco lawsuits. The documents were so damning that the whole edifice of legal protection the tobacco companies had erected cracked.

Ben Stein is a professor of law. His game show, Win Ben Stein's Money, appears on Comedy Central.



Well-regarded researchers hired by the plaintiffs have asserted that by banning Joe Camel in California, *Mangini* would save between 9,000 and 10,000 American lives per year for a protracted period. The Milberg Weiss law firm said that it should get a certain sum for that work. Then came the national agreement in the fall of 1998 among 46 state attorneys general and the tobacco companies. That agreement provided hundreds of billions of dollars for anti-smoking campaigns, reimbursement of health-care costs of smokers incurred by taxpayers, and other anti-smoking measures. It also provided staggering sums for the lawyers who argued and negotiated the nationwide tobacco settlement, sums that might reach into the tens of billions of dollars. Milberg Weiss said, in effect, *Hey, if all of this money is being passed out, we want our share, too. Mangini started the ball rolling.* Thus, Milberg Weiss enlarged its fee request for *Mangini* by a factor of about ten.

Human beings are made largely of envy, so there has been a lot of yelling and screaming about the settlements and the fees involved. The common theme in the media is that the tobacco lawyers' fees are "unconscionable," as *The Buffalo News* put it.

But this palaver misses the basics of what happened. First, tobacco really is bad for you. Its use is lethal. Second, if the tobacco settlements and the anti-smoking provisions save even a small fraction of the 400,000-plus lives prematurely lost to smoking each year, they will have done a gigantic national service. If the tobacco settlements save 50,000 lives a year, one eighth of those lost to tobacco, is that worth \$10,000 a life, or the \$500 million a year that tobacco lawyers stand to get?

It seems cheap to me. To cover the price the tobacco lawyers are going to be paid, without noting that they worked against the number-one preventable cause of death in America, is the height of lack of context.

To be sure, there is intense argument about how much effect the tobacco settlements will have. But few doubt a large number of lives will be saved. That is what the lawyers are getting

paid for, not for robbing a bank, even though an opinion piece in *USA Today* called legal fees in the tobacco cases "outright theft."

But there is a far bigger context story here that has been ignored. My pals in the conservative media are screamingly upset that trial lawyers will get a huge pot of money that will, so it is said, be used to fund Democratic candidates. "So much deftly balanced hypocrisy has

If the tobacco settlements save 50,000 lives a year...is that worth \$10,000 a life, or the \$500 million a year that tobacco lawyers stand to get?

been brought to us by the trial bar, our new fourth branch of government, and its political wing, the Democratic Party," *The Wall Street Journal* complained. What is glossed over is that the GOP in Congress set the trap for itself by torpedoing the federal tobacco settlements that were originally going to be enacted.

One originally proposed bill was going to have a far larger pot of money to pay for health-care costs caused by tobacco, and far smaller fees for lawyers. The costs were to be covered by a large new tax on cigarettes. To be sure, the anti-smoking zealots played a big part in killing that plan by loading the bill with extras and surcharges far beyond what big tobacco had ever agreed to. But big tobacco appealed to its pals in the GOP to block it, and the GOP did. Their rallying cry was that the increased tax on tobacco would go against their pledge of being anti-tax.

But the states were still in court suing the tobacco companies. Decisions were starting to go against big tobacco. Tobacco companies feared hundreds of thousands of cases, each involving huge losses. They still wanted to settle with the states.

Who was there to broker the deal that would never have happened if a federal settlement had gone through? The trial lawyers. Who agreed to a de-facto tax increase in the form of a large per-pack price increase for cigarettes? The same tobacco companies who had fought a federal tax hike. But in this state agreement, the trial lawyers were

there for a fifth or more of the take.

Maybe there was cronyism with state attorneys general—in fact, I would say it's a sure thing. Maybe some of the tobacco lawyers got an unheard-of windfall, some for doing almost no work. But the wheels were set in motion by the GOP Congress. For members of the media to bewail the wealth of the trial bar is to forget who set up the whole train of events.

And finally, in media coverage of the

tobacco lawyers, there is a general tone of complaint about the greed and swinishness of people who would take so much money for helping with a public-health issue. "This isn't about sick people," scoffed the *Chicago Tribune*. "It's business and politics and legal loopholes." But that's not the real cynicism.

Every president and Congress has known since the mid-1950s that cigarettes are poisonous. The response of the federal government has been wildly inadequate to the ongoing disaster. Perhaps this is because it has a largely unacknowledged conflict of interest on the issue: Namely, it has a huge stake in keeping middle-aged people smoking, a stake as great as if the feds owned some part of the tobacco companies, without any of the litigation exposure. That stake is Social Security. If tobacco smoking did not kill millions of Americans before they were old enough to collect Social Security, the system would be in even greater jeopardy than it already is.

The real disgrace of the smoking controversy is not the greed of tobacco companies or even of lawyers. It is the federal government's shameful conflict of interest. Rather than raise Social Security taxes or cut benefits to the wealthy enough to make the system solvent, the powers that be in the federal government—liberals and conservatives, Democrats and GOP—have allowed tobacco and its friend, the grim reaper, to do their dirty work.

That is the scandal. ■

THE LONG AND WINDING READ

Why sites spread a story over six pages when three would do. • BY JOHN DODGE

WHEN PERUSING AN on-line news site, do you ever mutter to yourself “Just give me the damn story”?

Delays and detours in getting to promised content are a fact of life with some on-line news sites. Stories that could easily fit on two or three pages instead appear on many more. Each click, which downloads another page, feasts on your time and, not incidentally, pushes another ad in front of your eyes while boosting the number of pageviews the site can claim. The greater the number of pageviews, the busier a site looks—a plus if you’re trying to attract advertising to your website. And the more pages a site produces, the more places there are to put ads.

Imagine having to stop in Pittsburgh and Dallas flying from New York to Los Angeles when cheap nonstops abound. There’s a faster way to get there. You’re probably downloading more pages than necessary if, every couple of hundred words, you encounter a message telling you to click to continue reading. Some editors call this the “nosering” effect, because you, the reader, are being led around like a witless bovine.

John Dodge is editor of PC Week and a weekly columnist writing on electronic commerce for The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition.

Lurking behind these tricks and inefficiencies are a slew of metrics that measure a website’s popularity—everything from the number of monthly impressions (i.e., pageviews) to the number of unique visitors to the number of single-page visits.

CNET, a high-technology news website, often chops up stories into three or four paragraph modules, each occupying its own page. CNET’S feature “Setting up a home

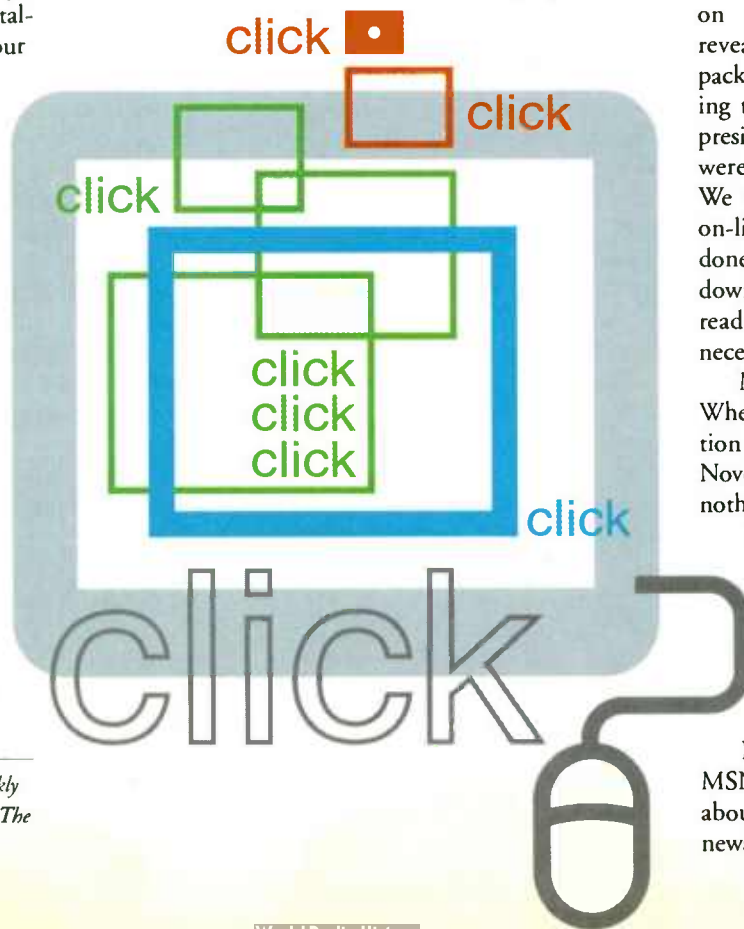
theater—10 questions answered” is spread across six web pages when it could have been done in three or even two pages. Judiciously splitting up a 2,000-word story can relieve tedium, but putting just three, four, or five paragraphs on a page is a waste of the reader’s time. The same approach was applied to CNET’S Microsoft Windows 98 and Internet Explorer 5.0 coverage.

CNET made a conscious decision to reduce the amount of content it put on each page after focus groups revealed that readers dislike pages packed with too much content, according to Alice Hill, CNET Online vice-president and editorial director. “We were building really long pages. We were just taking print, putting it on-line, adding a toolbar, and we were done,” she says. “Readers hate scrolling down.” That may be true, but some readers—including me—dislike unnecessary downloads more.

MSNBC tries something else. When I clicked on the Technology section button from its homepage on November 25, up came a page bearing nothing but an ad. That’s not so bad.

Lord knows how difficult it is to make money selling news on the Web. But directly beneath the ad, it said “Click to go directly to MSNBC Technology,” which is what I wanted to do in the first place. James

Kinsella, president and CEO of MSNBC on the Internet, is realistic about his business. “We’re selling news,” he says, by way of justifying the





CNET's "Setting up the ideal home theater" feature is spread across six short pages. CNET decided to reduce the amount of content per page after focus groups revealed that readers hate scrolling down.

of News.com bear out his assertion. Former University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism dean Ben Bagdikian says those serving up news on the Web are repeating some of the mistakes of their print predecessors. "It's like early newspapers, which had all sorts of screaming headlines," Bagdikian says. "You had to wade through them to find what you wanted and after a while you had diminished respect for that newspaper."

He compares the Web to TV, where to watch what you want, you have to put up with commercials. "When you request something specific on-line, you want it. If you have to jump through hoops to get it, it

detours. Much of MSNBC's content is good, and sooner or later you do get to it. Few begrudge MSNBC's right to turn a profit and probe the new medium. After all, most on-line news and features are free; on-line news organizations have to support themselves somehow.

The Boston Globe has embraced a different strategy. Editors there decided last spring to forego pages with little content—known as "pass-through" pages. "There are too many pass-through pages on the Web," contends Lincoln Millstein, chief executive officer of Boston.com, the *Globe's* website. "They generate traffic and that is currency in the eyes of Wall Street. Some sites are very inefficient, but Wall Street rewards them even though it takes fifty pageviews to find anything."

Millstein is convinced that sites that create unnecessary pages are taking the short view by trading user satisfaction for artificially inflated traffic numbers. "We made a strategic decision to make our home page much more content rich." Indeed, traffic—the number of pageviews, not unique visitors—at Boston.com declined after Millstein and company concentrated more content on the site's homepage, he says.

Charles Cooper, senior executive

news editor of ZDNet News, attributes the dawdling and detours to experimentation. Taking a reader from a single headline to a page with many related content choices is not entirely bad, he believes. "We always put the [promised] story headline on top of a well-designed special report page," he says. ZDNet, of which ZDNews is a part, has pass-through pages.

SOME EDITORS TAKE A DIM view of anything other than delivering a story via a single click. One of them is Jai Singh, editor of News.com, the news arm of CNET. "We don't split a story up unless it's 1,500 or 2,000 words," says Singh. "We don't make readers click on three or four pages to get to the story. Readers are too smart for that." Several checks

dilutes the concentration of what you want in the first place," he says.

The on-line news business, barely five years old, is still trying to figure out the rules, and for now users are willing to overlook tricks and artifice. "Remember, no one came into [the Web] with a playbook," says ZDNet's Cooper. The goal is to find the right balance between economic viability and user convenience. "You want to drive impressions [to support] the underlying business model," says ZDNet vice-president and editor in chief Daniel Farber, "but not at the expense of the user experience." ■



NEW MEDIA'S TRIAL RUN

For coverage of the Microsoft case, on-line news leads the pack. • BY ROBERT SCHMIDT

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S antitrust suit against the Microsoft Corporation has not offered the standard headline-grabbing fare—especially in the Age of Monica. But readers who want to find out what is going on inside the Washington, D.C., federal courtroom have an abundance of stories to choose from—as long as they go on-line. While TV has largely ignored the trial and only a few daily newspapers have given it any regular space, there are more than 15 news organizations that carry comprehensive coverage on their websites. The trial has

Senior writer Robert Schmidt, who is based in Washington, D.C., wrote about Columbia Journalism School dean Tom Goldstein in the February issue.

given on-line news organizations an unprecedented opportunity to strut their stuff and, for the most part, they've outclassed their old-media rivals.

The biggest difference between old and new-media news coverage is in its pace and prominence. Websites like CNET News.com and Ziff-Davis's ZDNet News update their stories as often as four times a day and almost always run them on the front page. MSNBC and CNN (through its CNNfn site) also post regular stories from the trial and both have created special areas for trial coverage. Major daily newspapers and weekly magazines, such as *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, and *Business Week* are covering the trial more extensively on their websites than they are in their print editions.

So which sites carry the best trial coverage? Trial junkies praise the *Mercury News*, News.com, and ZDNet for their frequent updates. "Our lawyers go to CNET [News.com] first, because it is updated frequently and it has easy access from the front door," says Lisa Poulson,

a spokeswoman for Sun Microsystems, Inc., a Palo Alto, California-based Microsoft competitor. The *Mercury News* also wins points for its analysis.

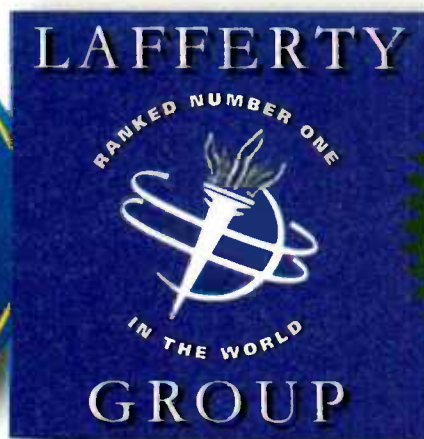
MSNBC also gets high marks for its coverage; reporters covering the trial praise its stories and say MSNBC's balance has dispelled any fear that the Microsoft-backed news site would go easy on its parent company. "MSNBC has done an admirable job reporting on its co-owner's missteps," commented Media Grok, a daily on-line feature from *The Industry Standard*, a trade publication that evaluates media coverage of the Internet.

The print media are hardly irrelevant on this story; the Microsoft-trial press corps still regards the major national dailies as required reading. "In general I think the perspective of coverage is still being driven by the traditional standard bearers—*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*—to some extent," says *Mercury News* Washington reporter David Wilson.

Traditional media can't compete with the Web on the extras, though. Many sites offer extensive archives of court documents, readers' polls, and video clips of Microsoft CEO Bill Gates's deposition. The *Mercury News* stands out for its "virtual courtroom," where readers can see inside the courtroom and click to get more information on witnesses, the trial schedule, or trial evidence. ZDNet features a running scorecard of the "hits," "runs," and "errors" that the lawyers for each side have scored each day.

The Internet, however, also proves that one can be an information provider without doing any actual reporting. Both Microsoft and the Justice Department have their own sites devoted to the trial. The Justice Department page gives readers all of its court filings and its witnesses' prepared testimony. Microsoft's area, called PressPass, provides the company's press statements, legal filings, and trial updates that look surprisingly like news stories but are always pro-Microsoft.

The software giant, while it may be trying to spin the news, is not attempting to hide what is happening in the courtroom: It also posts complete daily transcripts from the trial.



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A QUESTION OF TRUST

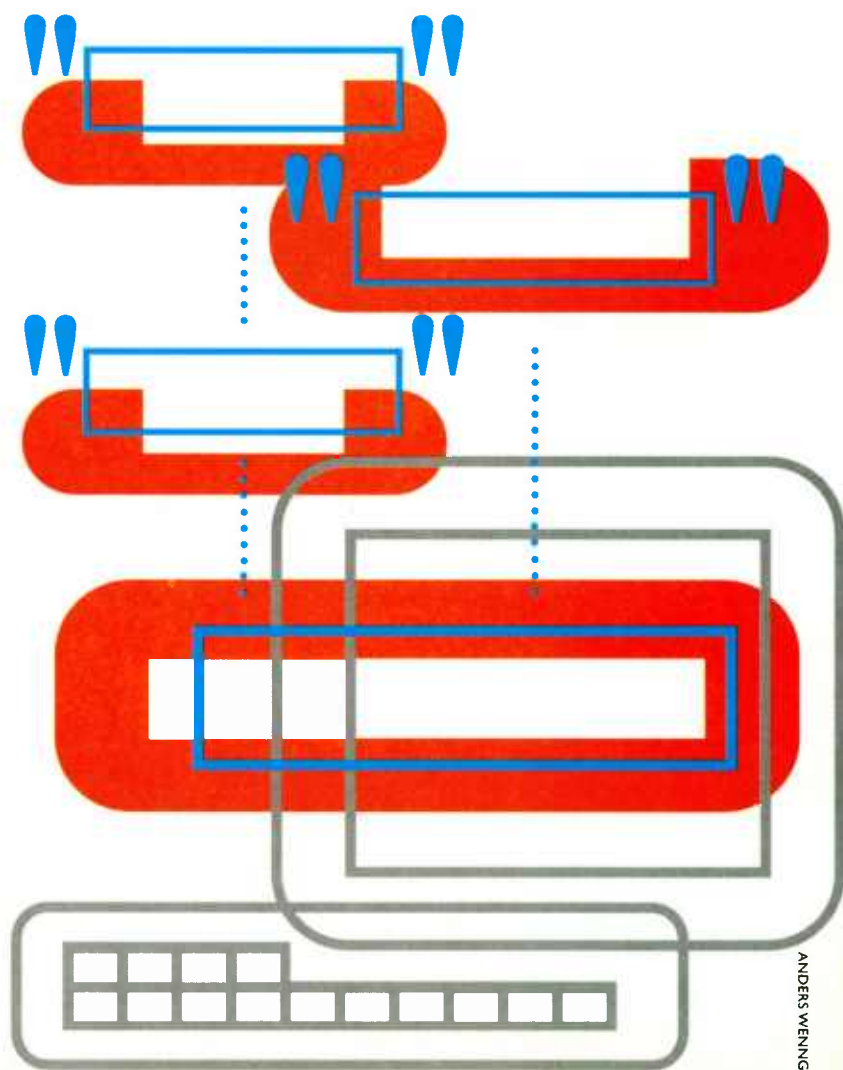
How do we know whether information on the Internet is trustworthy? A citation index would help. • BY EDWIN SCHLOSSBERG

WHAT MAKES INFORMATION trustworthy? The Internet changed the way we assess trustworthiness. Should it? I was struck by the conclusions drawn in a recent Duke University study of high school and college students who use the Internet. One significant conclusion was that students define a "trustworthy site" as one with useful links to other sites. Trustworthiness did not depend on traditional standards such as familiar voices or established information sources. Trustworthiness emerged from linkage rather than lineage.

The Internet was originally created to provide research scientists with a way to communicate among themselves. The connection made it possible for them to publish their thoughts and findings and to encourage their colleagues to respond to their work, thus creating a community that collaborated on ideas. One benefit of bringing so many people into the process was that the overall quality of scientific work being conducted in the United States improved.

By making everyone's work accessible, the Internet can create a climate of collective composition. People outside of the scientific community, however, rarely use the Internet to collaborate on ideas. We still use historic voices and brand names—familiar periodicals, for

Edwin Schlossberg is a designer specializing in interactive public environments. His book, Interactive Excellence: Defining and Developing New Standards for the Twenty-first Century, was published last July.



Civic Journalism is ...

About rebuilding our credibility.

In 1960, I received the Pulitzer Prize for my coverage of the Milledgeville (Georgia) State Hospital. At the time, it was the nation's largest mental institution, with 12,500 patients and just 48 doctors. Conditions were deplorable. It was a snakepit, a warehouse for humans.

My Milledgeville reporting taught me an important journalism lesson: You should always follow up reports exposing bad conditions with additional reports on proposals to reform or correct the conditions. After the Atlanta Constitution published the Milledgeville series, an editor assigned me to go to Kansas and write a series about its outstanding mental health reform program. I wasn't enthusiastic but my editor was right. The Kansas series demonstrated that the newspaper cared as much about reform as it did about an expose. And it served as a blueprint for reforming Georgia's mental health program.

Too often today much of the news media seems obsessed with reporting problems – almost to the extent of ignoring or excluding solutions.

Civic journalism is an attempt to bring the average citizen into the process of journalism to solve social problems. It brings in people who would not normally be involved in governmental solutions and engages people who are normally left out of the process.

And that helps improve the credibility of newspapers, which is very important. The popularity of newspapers is the lowest it's been at any time in my career. Not that we're looking for popularity, but when you're as unpopular as we are, you need to look for what's wrong. I think part of what's wrong is that we look too much at problems and not enough at what to do about them. Civic journalism is a remedy.



Photo: Al Stephenson

Jack Nelson
Former Washington Bureau Chief
Los Angeles Times

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism is pleased to present this message, first in a series on how journalists are working to improve news coverage by involving citizens and to improve the community through their journalism. For more information, call 202-331-3200.



Pew Center for Civic Journalism

Jan Schaffer
director

Jack Nelson
chairman

1101 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 420
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example—as the identifiers of trustworthy information. We assume that most publishers have a sense of responsibility about what they publish. This assumption worked as long as publishing was part of a community that could and did exert pressure on a publisher to tell the truth. But as the size and scale of communities has grown, publishing in any medium has become more general and less responsive to the cultural norms of any one community.

Appropriately, the issues and concerns expressed in the *Vineyard Gazette*, the local paper on Martha's Vineyard, reflect a different world than those expressed in *USA Today*. Publishers who cover local subjects express their notions of responsibility toward their community by attempting to report stories accurately and by including more than one viewpoint. The Martha's Vineyard community, in turn, reviews the trustworthiness of the *Vineyard Gazette*.

Publishers who cover vast subjects and areas of the world express their values through what they cover. Because *USA*

it confusing us so much that we do not know how to create new tools to correct the problem?

SCIENTISTS WERE FACED WITH SIMILAR PROBLEMS when the Internet was introduced nearly 30 years ago, and we can learn from their experience. The scientific community created a "citation index," which is now maintained by a privately operated company—the Institute for Scientific Information—that earns money tracking how and where and when a piece of research or analysis is cited. If an article is cited just once, that is noted. If it is cited and recited many times as the basis for other research that has succeeded, then it gains trustworthiness. The laboratories and scientists who have been cited successfully in turn become validating voices for other articles when they cite them. What happens is that a peer-review process, done electronically, uses the tested validity of information as its evaluative criterion. If other people test an idea and it proves true, then it gains value, both as information and as a voice.

That's the way we should evaluate all information on the Internet. A source of information that uses some spin doctor's line without checking it should not be considered trustworthy. But how can we know? The answer is that we need to develop a citation index for information on the Internet, one that lists responses to ideas posted on-line and that helps us see if the information provided is useful and trustworthy. The astonishing speed and connectivity of the Internet provides the opportunity

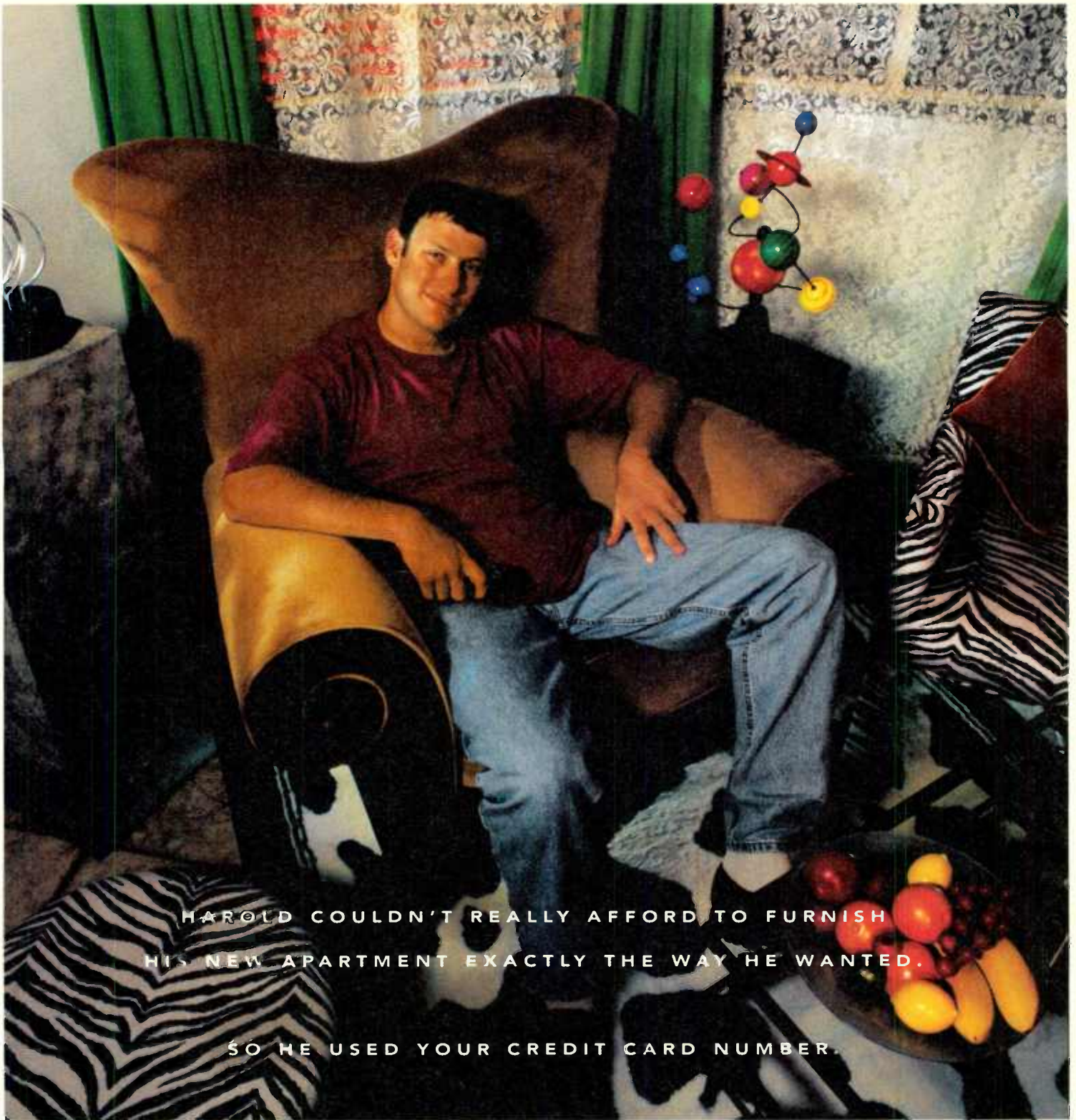
for the on-line community to become more adept at evaluating the truth of what they are told, the meaning of what they see, and the conclusions that can be drawn from the material. If a scientist fakes an experiment and posts the results on the Internet, many other scientists will test it and will immediately post their own results. That's the way it should work with all ideas. This kind of collective response expands all our knowledge simultaneously.

Having to check a source's validity every time you read or hear an idea seems at odds with the old habits of daily life when you could rely pretty much exclusively on one paper or one newscast. But the pursuit of the truth, of learning, of really knowing about the world is the responsibility of each of us. An Internet citation index would provide the opportunity to make the process more inclusive and responsive to a complex social and cultural world. ■

Contemporary technology challenges us to recognize trustworthiness without the usual name-brand information sources or community standards.

Today covers the entire country, rather than a local community like Martha's Vineyard, its reporters and the news organization itself have become the community that reviews the trustworthiness of the reporting that appears in their paper.

Contemporary technology challenges us to recognize trustworthiness without the usual name-brand information sources or community standards. We are searching for knowledge and comprehension in a medium that can draw information from millions of sources and present access to them simultaneously and without hierarchy. How then do we judge if the information presented on-line is trustworthy? How can we test it, as scientists do when they get a description of an experiment and then want to repeat it? How can we know if this new explosion of sources is helping us know the world and ourselves? Is it destroying our ability to rely on what we read and see? Is it weakening our ability to know anything? Is



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THE PENTAGON GOES

ILLUSTRATION BY TODD L.W. DONEY





IT WAS A TYPICAL HOLLYWOOD negotiation, with a twist. Producer Merrill Karpf wanted to shoot scenes for his 1997 NBC television miniseries *Asteroid* at Buckley Air National Guard Base in Colorado. To do this, naturally, Karpf needed the military's permission. Karpf had submitted the script to Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Gillman, the Air Force's Los Angeles liaison-office chief, whose job it is to make sure his service is portrayed accurately—and favorably—in movies.

Gillman had a few concerns. He didn't think the Air Force got enough screen time. More important, though, the script called for a U.S. space shuttle, loaded with nuclear weapons, to rocket into space and blast an asteroid that was threatening the world. Given that the United States is party to a treaty promising not to introduce nuclear weapons into space, Gillman didn't want U.S. forces—even in a TV movie—to be seen violating a treaty.

Gillman suggested that *Asteroid* employ the Air Force's new laser-weapon system, which is mounted on Boeing 747s and will soon be able to blow up intercontinental ballistic missiles. Simulated turbulence, Gillman continued, would add drama to the scene. While Karpf pondered the laser idea for a few days, Gillman's team gathered material and lobbied for its use.

Karpf was dubious, according to Gillman: "I just don't feel that the passenger plane is sexy enough." So Gillman countered by proposing that the movie use Air Force F-16s. "They're fighter aircraft," Gillman recalls telling the producer, and the laser system "would never be mounted on that but, hey, that's the poetic license. That's the beauty of making movies!"

Twenty pages of script revisions later, the laser-equipped F-16s became a fictional reality, along with a beefed-up Air Force role in the movie. In return, the Air Force ponied up access to the air base and provided an F-16, complete with Air Force pilots who risked tens of millions of dollars worth of U.S.-owned equipment—not to mention their lives. To Lt. Col. Gillman's delight, *Asteroid* pulled in the highest ratings among made-

HOLLYWOOD

By Leslie Heilbrunn

World Radio History

Movies have long lent glamour to the armed forces in return for equipment and expertise. But the Pentagon's film officers do more than answer technical questions. They shape blockbusters.

for-TV movies in 1997, giving the Air Force a great showcase for its high-tech, high-performance hardware.

The U.S. armed forces have been assisting Hollywood producers for almost as long as there have been Hollywood producers. Beginning in 1915 with *The Birth of a Nation* and then with the 1926 movie *Wings*, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps (and later the Air Force) have worked to “project and protect” their images by providing film and televi-



John Travolta wears a black shirt in *Broken Arrow* (at right, above) because the Air Force didn't want the “bad guy” seen in uniform. At right, F-15s in *Air Force One*.

sion productions with a wide range of assistance. The services, which wielded unprecedented Hollywood power during World War II, receded in influence after the war. But beginning with their most famous success in recent decades—the 1986 Tom Cruise movie, *Top Gun*, which riveted audiences with dramatic images of soaring Navy fighter jets—the services have made a Hollywood comeback.

These days the military's film officers no longer merely respond to producers who've decided to make a movie with combat action. People such as Gillman knock on doors, propose the use of equipment, suggest characters or plotlines, and sometimes even push movie ideas. And, as the *Asteroid* example suggests, the military is less concerned with strict accuracy than it is with burnishing its image.

It's a good deal for both sides. The Pentagon gets a promotional bonanza that reaches millions of taxpayers and potential recruits, all of whom see the military in its glory, with heroic soldiers and awesome weapons on display.

Producers, meanwhile, crave the realism that genuine military equipment confers, a realism that audiences expect

Staff writer Leslie Heilbrunn assessed the quality of diet and nutritional information sources for the February issue.

these days. Equally important, producers save millions of dollars. They get, in some cases, virtually free use of prohibitively expensive military equipment, operated by highly trained military personnel (except for reservists and National Guardsmen, who are paid by the moviemakers). The producers have to pick up only minor charges, such as fuel and running time for the planes they use.

The military insists this program doesn't cost taxpayers a penny because the soldiers' salaries have to be paid anyway. But those wages *are* coming from the taxpayer-funded U.S. budget. Knowing that your tax dollars are helping to fund Hollywood productions may add a whole new dimension to that feeling that comes when you walk out of a theater wondering why you wasted your money on a high-action, low-quality dud.

ALL FOUR SERVICES, PLUS THE COAST GUARD, maintain public affairs offices in Los Angeles that help moviemakers in any number of ways. They read scripts and correct errors. They answer a huge range of questions: Is Arnold Schwarzenegger's commando outfit true to life? What color is U.S. tracer? What flight jargon should Mel Gibson use when he's playing a pilot? Call up the services and you'll get the answer.

The process is more elaborate if you want, for example, the Air Force to provide planes for a movie. In that case, the



script is also kicked up to the Pentagon, where a civilian, Philip Strub, presides over the film operation from his office along a movie-poster-lined hallway. While the individual services focus on how they're portrayed, Strub homes in on how the Defense Department comes across. If the script doesn't pass muster with Strub or the services, they will explain the problems. Depending on how much the writer or producer wants military support—and how much they are willing to change their story line—they'll negotiate script changes.

Accuracy, say members of the military's film team, is what they're looking for. But, says Strub, “when I say ‘accurate,’ naturally that refers to whether the portrayals are positive or

Gillman took producers and writers to an Air Force base, where they saw cutting-edge planes and manned the rudder in F-16 flight simulators. They even got survival training in the woods and dined commando-style on meals ready to eat.

negative, because for somebody like myself who tends to think of the military as a positive thing, if the characters portrayed are unrelentingly bad, I'm going to consider that to be unrealistic and inauthentic."

A look at the Air Force's Hollywood operation offers insight into the process. The office's current director, Lt. Col. Gillman, took over in 1996. A 20-year veteran of the Air Force who has a degree in Arts Management from the City University of New York, Gillman has spent his career working in public affairs. He has transformed the Air Force from one of the least accessible services into one of the most approachable. Instead of assigning just one person to work with the entertainment industry, for example, Gillman shed the office's traditional news-media responsibilities (the only one of the four services to have done so), and focused all four staffers on its pop-culture image machine.

Even with four people, there are more projects than the office can handle. The Air Force receives more than 100 scripts a year, though it can actively work on only a dozen productions in any 12-month period. Right now, the Air Force is involved in 30 projects somewhere in the production pipeline.

Gillman has been aggressive about letting the entertainment industry know that, as he puts it, "we're here, we're open for business, we'll help you cut through red tape, we are interested in participating." He attends Hollywood trade shows and industry workshops. He promotes the Air Force in trade publications like the Directors Guild's magazine. Gillman speaks to student filmmakers at the University of California Los Angeles film school. And he scours industry trade magazines and entertainment websites to see what projects are coming up.

Gillman also organizes open houses to introduce film executives to military people. For example, he recently worked with Sony to arrange an event for top Air Force brass, including acting secretary F. Whitten Peters, to meet studio honchos on the *Wheel of Fortune* set.

Although the services have always arranged group trips to showcase their hardware and equipment, Gillman has increased the number of junkets his service organizes. Last June, Gillman took a group of 20 producers, writers, and network representatives to Edwards Air Force base in California. Their eyes popped at demonstrations of cutting-edge, remote-controlled, pilotless planes (used for missions too dangerous for humans). Gillman let his guests man the rudder in flight simulators for F-22s, F-16s, and F-15s, and took them into a Benefield anechoic chamber, which simulates the radar and other effects aboard high-tech aircraft. The group was then whisked by government plane to the Air Force's survival school in Spokane, where they got survival training in the woods and dined commando style on MREs (meals ready to eat). Finally,

during the flight home, the guests got to experience midair refueling, a technique used only by military planes. Throughout the process, Gillman chatted with the movie people. "At this point," Gillman explains, "we're not selling a specific character or story line. We're talking about the mission that we do and a bigger-picture kind of thing." As he puts it, the extravaganza is "a tickler. It gets people interested."

The techniques work. Gillman says a TV producer (whom he declines to identify) recently contacted him after an earlier tour. The producer was reading a script for an upcoming network TV movie that involves a rescue operation when he suddenly remembered a training session he attended with Gillman in which pararescue men worked with helicopters. The producer asked Gillman if such a team could be used for a civilian rescue operation. Gillman told him it could, and proceeded to take the writer to Moffett Federal Air Field, south of San Francisco, to watch Air Force rescue training. According to Gillman, the writer subsequently rewrote the script to include the Air Force pararescuers. Now, instead of no representation in the film, Gillman says the Air Force appears in 10 to 15 percent of it.

Perhaps Gillman's most important asset is his schmoozing ability. "He's very comfortable working with producers, being around celebrities. He's savvy," explains producer Karpf. "He knows how to talk to people; he's not awkward. He knows how to present his point of view, or the Air Force's point of view."

Gillman and his team are flexible in dealing with producers. When blockbuster producer Jerry Bruckheimer approached the Air Force to get support for *Armageddon*, Gillman and Charles Davis, a civilian member of Gillman's team, wanted to increase the Air Force's presence in the film. Davis suggested that Bruce Willis's character be a retired Air Force technician. But Bruckheimer says he refused because he "didn't think it was right for the character. If he was in any service it would have been the Marines." They compromised by making another member of the drill team a retired Air Force commando, which was noted in the film as proof that they were indeed a capable asteroid-busting lot. The Air Force got more screen time by having Air Force soldiers retrieve Willis's character from his oil rig. They also won more of an Air Force presence by filming at Edwards Air Force Base.

As Gillman did with *Asteroid*, the film officers from the other services often influence key plot points. For example, the Marines' film team routinely wins changes on the plot of the syndicated TV series *Pensacola: Wings of Gold*. Last year the Marines' liaison-office chief, Major Thomas Johnson, clashed with the show's producers over whether the show could portray a Marine instructor pilot leading a trainee to fly at a prohibited low altitude. The Marines objected, argu-



Hollywood horse-trading: To win Air Force support, producer Jerry Bruckheimer agreed to add the Air Force into a scene in *Armageddon*.

ing that such a thing would never happen. Eventually, the sides compromised: The instructor did violate the flying level, but was reprimanded for it in a later scene. Also, the flight instructor's motivation was changed: Instead of breaking the rule in a moment of competitiveness with the student, as happened in the original script, the final script had the flight instructor fly below the level without intending that the trainee follow him.

Even when the services don't give an official seal of approval, officers such as Gillman often try to shape a script that they think will portray their service in a negative light. "If we can't support something because of the story line," Gillman says, "should we turn around and not help at all so that the people's uniforms are foolish? I mean, that doesn't serve anyone's purpose." For example, the Air Force knew that the 1996 film *Broken Arrow*, with John Travolta and Christian Slater, was going to be a big draw for recruiting-age men. The Pentagon turned down *Broken Arrow's* request for full assistance because it thought the premise—that a nuclear weapon could be stolen—was unbelievable. But the Air Force's Davis still gave advice to the film's costumers. At his suggestion, the "bad" Air Force pilot played by Travolta immediately takes off his flight suit in favor of a black turtleneck (the classic color for the costumes worn by evil characters). Davis preferred that the bad guy not be too closely associated with the Air Force. Meanwhile, Slater, who plays the "good" pilot, remains in his flight suit throughout the movie.

WHY ARE PRODUCERS SO WILLING TO CEDE creative input to the military? "Production value," say Gillman and his counterparts in the other services, alluding to the increased verisimilitude a film gains when it uses authentic soldiers, military installations, and weaponry. Gone are the days when audiences would accept papier-mâché models of battleships.

Substantial financial savings loom almost as large as a consideration. If the makers of *Air Force One* hadn't worked with the Pentagon, "it clearly would've cost us a fortune," says Gail Katz, the film's producer. When the Army declined

assistance for Katz's film *Outbreak*, the producer had to spend a total of \$2.9 million for items including rent and maintenance for trucks, tanks, airplanes, and helicopters—which all had to be painted to look like Army equipment—as well as computer simulation to create the planes they couldn't rent. "It becomes hundreds of thousands of dollars right off the bat," says Duncan Henderson, who worked with Katz on *Outbreak*. "You become your own military."

When working with the U.S. armed forces, producers have to pay only for items that the Defense Department considers to be of additional expense to taxpayers. If the military is doing something that it considers part of its normal duty and the filmmakers are able to capture it, there's no charge. For example, shots of Air Force planes flying over Cape Canaveral in *Armageddon* were filmed gratis, because the planes were practicing for an upcoming air show.

Sometimes the military goes to great lengths to classify military action in such a way that producers don't have to pay for it. For example, *Air Force One* producers paid almost nothing to use six Air Force F-15s, according to Brian McNulty, the film's technical adviser, because producers "piggy-backed" onto a training mission. Because pilots need to fly a certain amount each year, the movie scenes were deemed training, as were flights between the pilots' home base in Florida and Ohio, where filming took place.

A look at the logistics for just one type of equipment for this scene shows the economic advantages of using U.S. government equipment. What would *Air Force One* have done if Air Force F-15s weren't provided? First, such equipment isn't exactly available at every used car lot. The producers would have had to transport an entire crew to Israel—incurring tens of thousands of dollars in costs for airfare, food, and lodging—where the Israeli military would rent the six F-15s needed. Rental costs for the planes alone: a combined \$90,000 to \$150,000 per hour, according to James Gavin, who advises Hollywood productions on renting such equipment. *Air Force One's* six hours of filming for that scene would have cost \$540,000 to \$900,000 for the fighter planes, plus the expenses of bringing the crew to Israel. Compare that to the \$7,839.93 that the movie was actually billed by the U.S. government and it's not hard to understand why producers try to get the military on board. And that, after all, is just for one scene.

OF COURSE, MILITARY PEOPLE ARE THRILLED WITH this arrangement. Last summer the Air Force's Davis heard of director Wolfgang Petersen's plans to make Sebastian Junger's true-life thriller *The Perfect Storm* into a film. Davis read the best-seller because he knew the Air Force made a brief appearance in a heroic rescue operation. Davis later picked up a copy of *Airman* magazine, which he describes as the Air Force's version of *People*, and read a detailed profile of the Air Force men briefly mentioned in the book. Seeing the article as a way to increase the Air Force's role in the movie version of *The Perfect Storm*, Davis immediately called Petersen's office to offer the newly unearthed details about that role. He followed up by express-mailing a copy of the *Airman* article in late December. If the movie, scheduled to be released in the next year, has more than a passing reference to the Air Force's role, Davis and his boss, Bruce Gillman, will be smiling. ■

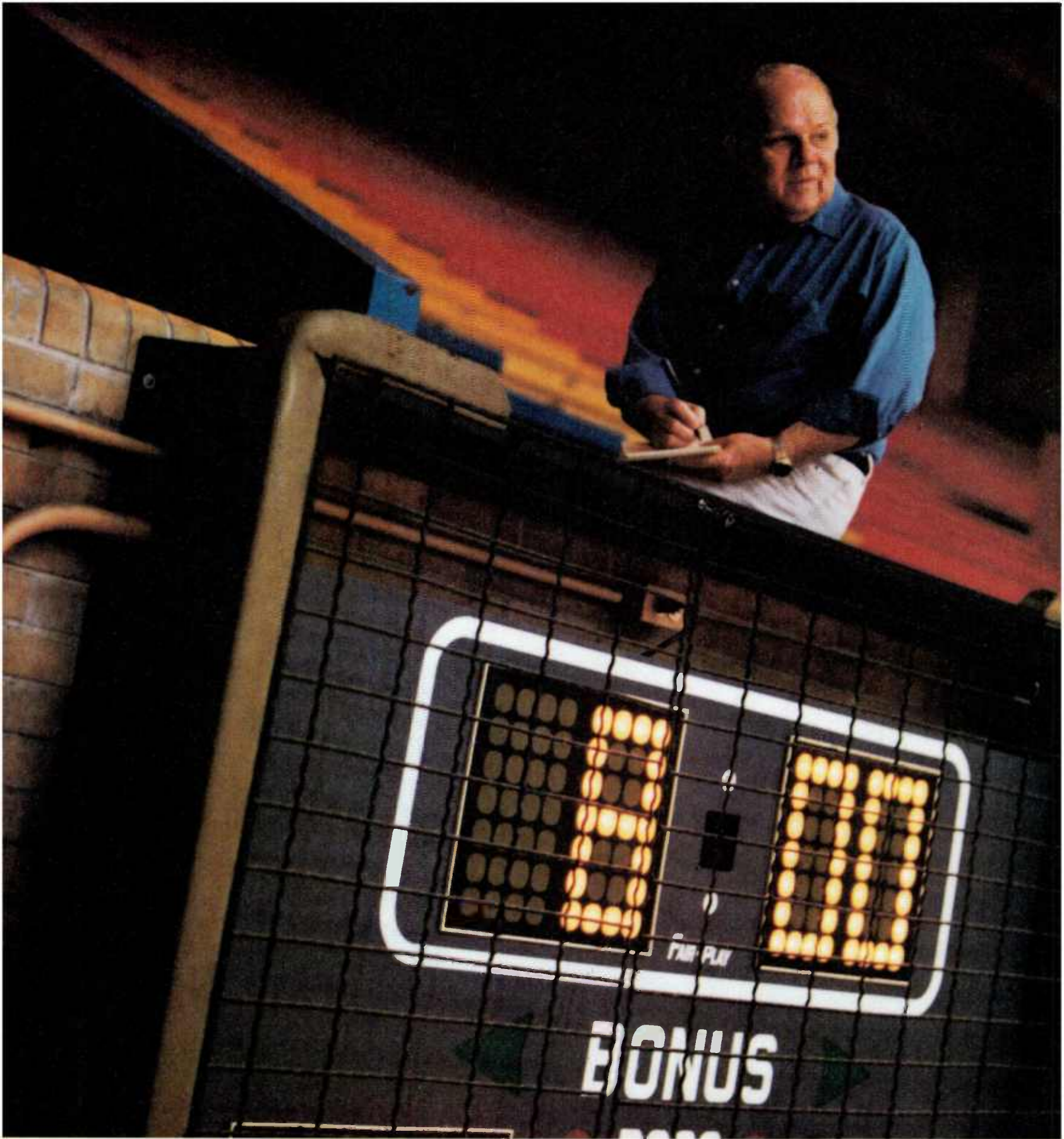


The general populace isn't merely lacking culture, it's lacking calcium. In fact, 70% of men and 90% of women don't get enough. The enlightened among us, however, drink 3 glasses of milk a day. A practice that can prevent a Freudian condition known as "calcium envy."

got milk?

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World Radio History



Ron Lemasters (above), a reporter for *The Star Press*, watches over Muncie high school basketball. He's been doing it for 37 years.



A

Town's Memory

Photographs by
Greg Whitaker

Ron Lemasters, a sportswriter in Muncie, Indiana, has reported on high school basketball for the same newspaper for almost 40 years. As the recorder of his community's most beloved institution, he's become one himself.

ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THE PALACE HANG THE FLAGS. PURPLE AND EDGED IN white, they fall from the four-story ceiling, emblazoned with white words that speak to the kingdom's reign.

MUNCIE CENTRAL STATE CHAMPS.

1928. 1931. 1951. 1952. 1963. 1978. 1979. 1988.

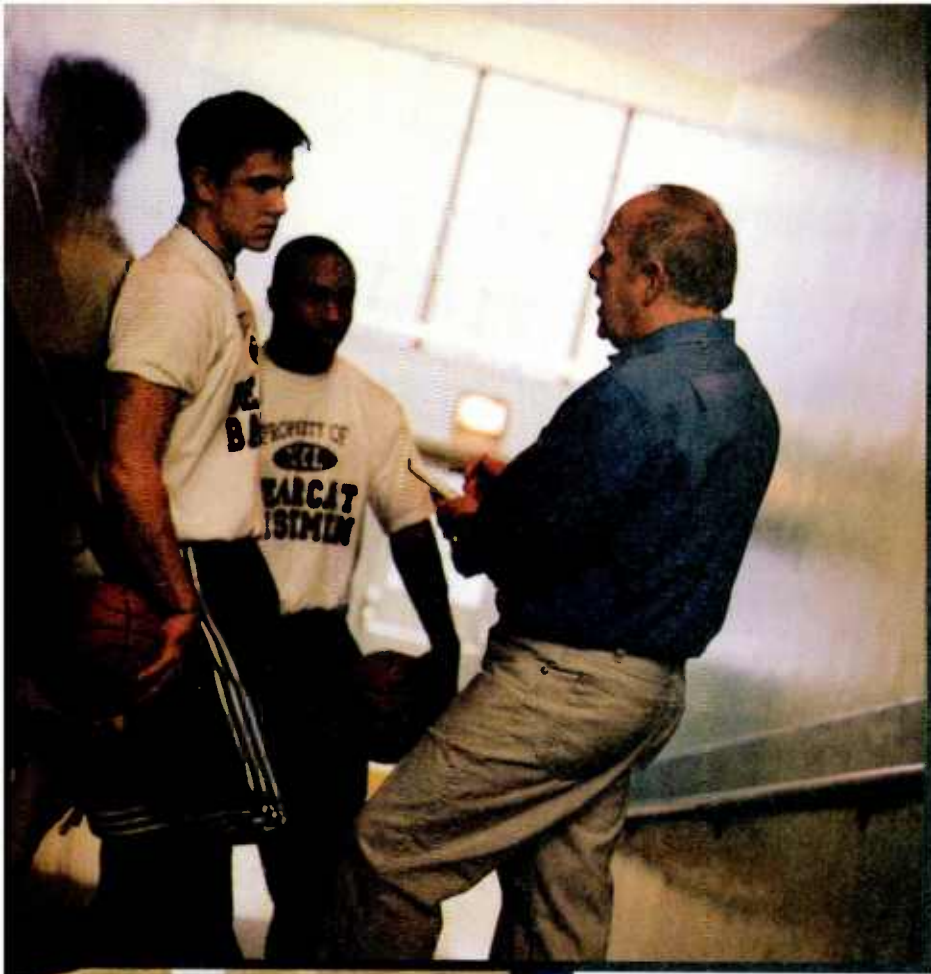
There are eight nearly identical flags. The five oldest have faded to lavender. The remaining three are deep purple, as yet undimmed by the sunlight that streams in from the opposite wall's two-story windows. Each flag represents a different year for the basketball powerhouse that is Muncie Central High School, each flag a reminder of a different fight for the throne.

Muncie is a small Rust Belt city of about 71,000 in central eastern Indiana—a state gripped by basketball fever. With eight championships in six decades, Muncie Central is a bona fide basketball dynasty. Players and cheerleaders graduate and coaches retire, of course, but there has been one constant at Muncie Central, one man who has been the tie binding the aged to the young, the faded to the bright.

He is Ron Lemasters, 60, a sportswriter for Muncie's *The Star Press*. For 37 years, he has stood at the foot of transient royalty—becoming an institution's Boswell, a town's memoirist. In an age in which journalism seems increasingly distant and impersonal, Lemasters is a vestige of a time when a community's newspaper was a town's link to itself, and when nothing bound people together more than the local team.

FROM THE NEWSROOM, AN OPEN, SQUARE SPACE WITH BURNT-ORANGE WALLS AND tabled work spaces littered with artifacts, Ron Lemasters records local history. He looks like a shorter, jollier Anthony Hopkins, sitting at his perch in the center of the sports department. At a cluttered desk, he pecks away at his computer, with his eyes continually traveling from keyboard to monitor, index and middle fingers extended,

By Katherine Rosman



Lemasters arrives at the field house long before tip-off so he can interview athletes (top) and coaches (bottom).

pecking out features, game stories, and columns.

The newspaper, housed in a beige brick building in downtown Muncie that sits next to a church and across the street from a bus station, is the only home-grown daily serving the city. The paper's daily circulation is 37,500; on Sundays it's 42,500. Almost everyone in Muncie who can read, reads *The Star Press*. It's truly a community newspaper.

For small papers, local news is more important than ever because it represents the only content that can't be easily found on spiraling cable and Internet news services. "Local news is the franchise of community newspapers," explains Larry Lough, editor of *The Star Press*.

In Muncie, local news means high school sports. "High school sports?" says Joe Edwards, a former judge in Muncie who now owns Smokin' Joe's Cigar Emporium. "People here are bonkers about it." Scott Underwood, the paper's sports editor, says that during the school year, *The Star Press* devotes about 35 percent of its sports section to high school games.

Lemasters's stories, in a way that most journalists only dream their work can be, often are the talk of the town. "First thing you do when you get up in the morning after a basketball game is read [Lemasters's] story," says Bill Harrell, a former

coach of Muncie Central who led the school to state championships in 1978, 1979, and 1988. Louis Church, who goes to nearly every Muncie Central game though his kids have long since graduated, says that Lemasters's articles frequently are the subject of water-cooler chatter. "Anyone who wants to pay attention to sports in Muncie reads his articles," Church says.

In Indiana, high school basketball isn't any old sport: it carries the same cultural import as Capitol Hill intrigue does in Washington. "This is an area where basketball is a hot issue. This is an area where readers want and expect good information on Saturday and Sunday morning" after game nights, explains Lough. "No matter how good a reporter or a writer you have, it's absolutely invaluable to have someone who can really provide a context to a big part of your culture. We're sort of doing history on a daily basis."

And no one at the paper has a greater depth of historical knowledge than Lemasters. Commenting, for instance, on a current player, Rick Jones of New Castle Chrysler High School, he notes that "Ricky looks just like his dad"—Rick senior, who, as Lemasters recounts with quick-spit recall, was both a part of the 1963 Muncie Central State Championship team and named "Mr. Basketball" that same year. When Lemasters provides that kind of context and such details of touching intimacy, editor Lough says, he mixes the past with present and imbues his reporting with a sense of tradition rarely found in today's media. Or, as a modern ad tag line might read, it's journalism that truly connects with the reader.

That connection with history, explains Rick Jones, Sr., can't be overstated. "You have to understand Indiana," he says. "We're a tradition state....It's kind of what Indiana basketball is about—tradition." Lemasters brings that element home to his readers, not only because he understands that tradition but because he's a part of it.

ON GAME NIGHTS LIKE TONIGHT, LEMASTERS GETS TO the field house at 6:30 P.M., an hour and a half before the varsity-game tip-off. That gives him a chance to get his supplies in order on the press table between the two teams' benches, interview the coaches, and catch the last half of the junior varsity game.

It also gives him a chance to receive his public. Tom Jarvis, a game announcer whom Lemasters covered when he was a high school player, stops by to say hello. Jim Romack, president of Muncie Central's booster club, approaches the table to see what Lemasters has to say about the latest NASCAR races (which he also covers). Coach Harrell stops by too.

"When Ron goes to a game," Lough says, "he's something of a celebrity. He's the local treasure of the high school basketball culture." It's not just the old-timers who pay homage. Youngsters come by to inquire about how Lemasters fills out his game sheets; radio broadcasters seek him out for a quick interview. Others in the basketball community, too, have shown their reverence for Lemasters. He was cited for distinguished service by the Indiana High School Athletic Association in 1991 and by the Indiana Basketball Coaches Association in 1993. His colleagues have paid their respects by naming Lemasters Indiana Sportswriter of the Year in 1985 and 1991.

To Lemasters, who has two grown sons with his wife of 38 years, these relationships and awards are not about notoriety or celebrity but about community. Because he works nights

In February, staff writer Katherine Rosman profiled New York Times crossword-puzzle editor Will Shortz.

and weekends, he has missed the chance to become involved in local charities and clubs (though he did organize the demolition derby for seven years for the The Lions Delaware County Fair). So game nights are his nights to shoot the breeze with his neighbors.

But when the buzzer sounds announcing that tip-off is imminent, and the cheerleaders, ponytails a-bob and purple pom-poms flying, scurry to the sidelines, it's time to work. He returns to his seat, puts on his bifocals, folds the program so each team's roster is visible, and triple-checks to make sure his game sheet, notepad, and three pens are at the ready.

As the announcer reads off the starting lineups, Lemasters jots the players' names in blue on his game sheet. A purple pen records rebounds, points, and fouls. The red pen keeps track of three-pointers. "I grew up in the era before the three-point shot," he says. "It's just my way of coping."

The referee throws the brown ball in the air, the centers leap with their arms skyward and scrawny legs dangling below, and Lemasters enters a trance. His head swivels left and right and then left again as he follows the path of the ball. When a dribbler from either team nears the basket, Lemasters's lips part. And as the ball arches toward the hoop, it looks like he's mouthing the word *wow*. At one point in the third period, number 54, who has come off the bench for Muncie Central, awkwardly tosses the ball up and it lands in the basket. Lemasters, without raising his hand from the table, pumps his fist. Realizing his excitement has been noticed, he turns and says, "He's a good kid and I'm glad to see him get a couple of buckets. I don't usually cheer."

It's a telling moment: Lemasters's journalistic instincts take a backseat to civic pride. That's a stance that is hardly typical of sportswriters in this scandal-plagued era, but it's clearly part of Lemasters's appeal. Unlike so many other sportswriters, who look for hype rather than glory, observes spectator Louis Church, "Ron recognizes that it's still a game."

THAT HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL IS STILL A GAME, AND not a multimillion-dollar industry, has kept Lemasters interested in his beat all these years. "You've got a bunch of kids out there playing for the love of the game," he says wistfully. "The skill level varies quite a bit at the high school level....On a single team you've got three or four players who are quite good and then you've got some that aren't that good. But they're out there giving their dead-level best every game." Lemasters considers professional basketball to be irreversibly tainted by money and arrogance and sees college ball heading toward a similar fate. Professional and much of college ball, he says, is "almost theatrical. It's so far removed in style of play [from what] I'm used to seeing in the high schools." High school ball, he says, "is what I grew up knowing basketball to be."

That, too, is changing. Last year, Indiana became one of the last states in the nation to change from a single-class system, in which schools of all sizes compete and just one is crowned state champ (think of the classic 1986 film *Hoosiers*, which was, in fact, about a game that pitted Milan High School against Muncie Central High School) to a four-tiered system that matches similarly sized schools.

Attendance figures also show that times have changed. Back in the sixties and seventies, the 6,600-seat Muncie Field

House was packed on game nights, Lemasters remembers. Season tickets sold out every year and waiting lists were so long, he says, that people fought over rights to season tickets in divorce settlements and bequeathed them in wills.

Now, attendance is down to an average of 2,200 spectators per game. To Lemasters, the decrease is emblematic of a generational shift. Nowadays, he says, kids have more money, more mobility, and more to do at night. "There's just so much competition for entertainment dollars," he explains. Rather than walk over to the high school on a Friday night, teenagers can now hop in their cars and drive to the mall or rent a video or absorb the flash and trash talk of an NBA game.

In Muncie, local news means high school sports, high school sports means basketball, and basketball means Ron Lemasters.

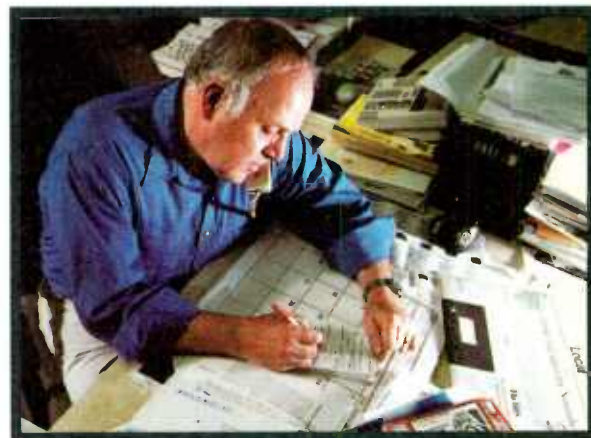
Smaller crowds, however, haven't deterred Lemasters. It's now Saturday night, December 19, and he's ensconced on the sidelines of Muncie Central's crosstown rival, New Castle Chrysler High School. The game is at the New Castle Field House (adjacent to the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame and considered "The Largest and Finest High School Field House in the World," according to a mural on one wall); about 3,000 of the 7,829 seats are filled.

The junior varsity game is in its final period, so Lemasters is getting organized, checking for his pens and score sheet. But it's difficult to focus because this is Impeachment Saturday and his thoughts, inevitably, turn to the historical significance of a presidential impeachment.

"I remember covering a Muncie Central game the night of November 22, 1963," Lemasters says. He recalls few details from the game held the night of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, only that the field house was packed with spectators who came not to see the game but to mourn among their neighbors. It was, he says, the most somber crowd he's ever seen.

Tonight he remarks on the contrast, on how unaffected the crowd seems by the first impeachment of an elected president. Lemasters is in the unique position to reflect upon the difference. He understands his community better than most because, for nearly four decades, he's looked at it from the same vantage point, from beneath the flags that hang in the high school basketball field house.

But nothing is forever, not even a town's memory. Next year, Ron Lemasters plans to retire from *The Star Press*. "Thirty-seven years into it, I've probably done just about everything I've wanted to do," he says nostalgically. "It's gonna be time to let go and let the kids do their thing." ■




Lemasters (shown at his desk in the newsroom) says he prefers high school ball to the college and professional versions "because it's what I grew up knowing basketball to be."

just add color

If you're a minority, *The Greenville News* would like to quote you. In fact, including minority voices is a rule throughout the Gannett news empire. Is that progress—or political correctness run amok?



By Jennifer Greenstein

 COURTNEY SHIVES WAS BEING INTERVIEWED BY A REPORTER from his local paper, *The Greenville News*, two and a half years ago for an article about his recovery from a terrifying accident. It was the kind of human interest story that is the staple of many newspapers. Shives explained how a car had slammed into him as he was biking, crippling his left leg so badly it had to be amputated above the knee. Reporter Deb Richardson-Moore asked all the predictable questions: How long did your recuperation take? How did you cope with it emotionally? How have you dealt with the pain?

But the reporter had one more query: "Was there anybody involved in your rehabilitation who is a minority?"

Shives was taken aback. "You're doing a story on me and my recovery," he remembers thinking. "Why are you looking for a minor-

ity to tie in?" Since then, Shives has discovered the question is common at the *News*: "I've been interviewed for several stories and they always ask me, 'Is there a minority connection for this story?'"


It's not a coincidence. The Greenville, South Carolina, paper, part of the Gannett newspaper empire, is dead serious about including comments from, or references to, minorities in each day's edition. Gannett has mandated the practice, which it calls "mainstreaming," at the 75 papers it owns around the country. It's "a positive inclusion [of minorities] in stories that are not necessarily about race—including minorities in stories about the weather, banking, or government," says Wanda Lloyd, the *News's* managing editor for features and administration.

It's hard to quarrel with the goal. Incorporating people of every race into news coverage is unquestionably good journalism. Says

Chris Weston, the paper's managing editor for local news, "If you lived in a community—whether you're a white female or a black male or whatever—[and] you picked up the newspaper every day, and all you saw quoted and featured and participating in stories were people of another race and color, before long you'd get the idea that this newspaper is not written for me. It's very healthy to open that up."

That's particularly true in Greenville, a midsized city that sees itself as a beacon of the New South. Greenville is a forward-looking place, with a gleaming new BMW plant that symbolizes the modernization of a city once dependent on the textile industry. But Greenville is also socially conservative. Like much of the South, it has struggled to overcome the legacy of racism. In that context, the *News's* attempt to broaden the racial palette of its coverage is more than an academic exercise. And it raises a fundamental question: Does quoting more minorities add up to better coverage of minorities?

It's not clear that it does. Some Greenville residents say the answer is "yes." But some *News* reporters wonder if they aren't simply adding a veneer of racial balance to news coverage that fundamentally hasn't changed. Along the way, reporters sometimes go to absurd lengths to include a sliver of a comment from a minority. Some of those quotations come from people whose ethnic groups barely exist in Greenville, where 99 percent of the population is either white or black. Staff writer Mike Foley says he "probably made an extra thirty phone calls" before finally tracking down an Asian astronomer in Utah for an article on a solar eclipse. "When you're doing that," Foley says, "you're like, okay, that's a quota. Put it on the tally sheet and send it to Gannett. What is that doing to help our readers?"

 QUOTING MINORITIES CERTAINLY WAS NOT A PRIORITY when I worked for *The Greenville News* four years ago, before its parent company was bought by Gannett. Back then the paper belonged to a wealthy Greenville family (through its controlling interest in Multimedia), and I was a young reporter in my first job out of journalism school. The *News* wasn't an exciting paper. It was filled with staid reporting about crime, schools, and government, and generally relied on official pronouncements. When I worked there, my editor never once asked if I had included a minority in a story, and I don't recall ever making a



conscious effort to ensure that I had.

That changed after Gannett bought the paper in December 1995. The company is deeply committed to racial inclusion in its articles—it even grades its newspapers on how well they do it. Using federal government definitions, which divide minorities into blacks, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, the company spot-checks from three to more than a dozen issues of each paper annually. Local editors highlight stories that have been mainstreamed. (Minority hiring also counts toward the score. The *News's* editorial staff is 20 percent minority, roughly on a par with the Greenville area's 19.5 percent minority population.)

The Greenville News has made it quickly to the top of the Gannett class, scoring 9 out of a possible 10 in the 1998 All-American Contest, as the mainstreaming competition is known. "Three other newspapers also received 9.0s, but no one had a higher score," executive editor John Pittman wrote in an e-mail congratulating the staff. How has the paper done so well? By taking Gannett's philosophy to an

extreme, reporters say. "If Gannett had a Bible," says former staff writer Melinda Young, "*The Greenville News* would be the fundamentalist version."

The *News* has instituted two rules to meet its racial minimums, according to 11 current and former reporters. Each section's front page must have at least one minority quote every day—which means such comments invariably turn up in the first several paragraphs of an article. And all stories that aren't prompted by breaking news must quote at least one minority. Executive editor Pittman says those are goals, not requirements, and insists that no quota exists. "We really want the mainstreaming question asked of all stories," he says.



IF REPORTERS ARE LUCKY, THEY'LL FIND THE PERSON THEY need in a list the paper keeps with the names and phone numbers of 1,000 nonwhite sources. If not, the search begins. Most of the 20 current and former reporters interviewed for this article say they have gone to extreme lengths to track down such comments.

"I've had some really embarrassing moments with the mainstreaming," says staff writer Tilly Lavenás. She describes once having to search for a minority source for a story about food for Hanukkah. Because religious minorities don't qualify, Lavenás tried to find someone who was both Jewish and a racial minority—no mean feat in Greenville. "I could not find any Ethiopian Jews," she says. "I called the synagogue and asked if they had any African Jews. They said no." (An editor, recognizing the futility of the quest, let Lavenás off the hook.)

Last fall Lavenás, who is Hispanic, found herself devoting an entire day to hunting for a nonwhite to quote in a story on gourmet dog biscuits. She started with the 50 members of her Hispanic women's group, but "not one of them had dogs," Lavenás says.



"Finally, I remembered this Indian woman I'd interviewed, and remembered she had a German shepherd." Bingo. "She was very good-natured," Lavenás recalls. "I call her for all kinds of things."

The constant search for minorities means that if you live in Greenville, and you've got an appropriately "ethnic" last name, chances are you've heard from a *News* reporter. Consider Yuri Tsuzuki, the director of a small Japanese cultural center. Tsuzuki was quoted three times in 13 days last September. On September 14, she weighed in on the popularity of a local jogging path: "It's inspiring to me." On September 19, she appeared in the "Lifestyle" section, expounding on



Symbols of the old Greenville (right) and the new (top). Above, the often-quoted Yuri Tsuzuki, one of the News's favorite sources.

the virtues of changing an area rug each season: "It's very important to respect the seasons." A week later, her comments on an upcoming Elton John concert made the front page: "I think it's a good follow-up after Janet Jackson." Never mind that Tsuzuki isn't an Elton John fan, and doesn't have any particular expertise on jogging or area rugs. She fit the bill. Her experience suggests that the fervor to quote minorities can narrow the diversity of voices in the paper instead of broadening it.

When reporters can't turn up a Yuri Tsuzuki, they're instructed to buckle down and look again. Former staff writer Melinda Young was stumped by a January 1996 assignment on a small community in northern Greenville County whose water supply was about to be cut off. The suburban enclave had only 23 homes, and Young couldn't turn up any residents who weren't white. "I told the editors there were no minority sources—I had checked—and they said, 'That's unacceptable.'...I said, 'We'll have to make an exception,' and they said no." So she called Ralph Anderson, a black state legislator. Anderson had never even heard of the community (which isn't in his district), much less its water problems. "But he gave me a standard quote," Young says. "We ran it."

The quest gets even more challenging when the reporter needs a person with specific technical expertise. Young, for example, says it was almost impossible to find minorities in Greenville with the requisite scientific knowledge on environmental issues, which she used to cover. She was reduced to combing through directories of national environmental groups, hoping the photos might reveal an expert with the desired skin color.

Finding the person was only half the battle, Young says. Once located, the minority sources would sometimes try to steer her away, claiming ignorance on the subject at hand. "I would sweet-talk them into giving me a comment," Young recalls. "They'd say, 'I don't know anything about it, why don't you talk to so and so,' and I would say, 'Well, I've already got you on the phone.' I never wanted to say, 'I need

Staff writer Jennifer Greenstein covered business and education for a bureau of The Greenville News in 1994 and 1995.

to quote you because you're Hispanic."

Managing editor Weston shows little sympathy for his reporters' travails. "I'm not put off by the notion of someone having to work hard to find the best mainstreaming source," Weston says. "I don't really make any apologies for that." He also argues that quoting a nonwhite who lives thousands of miles away still achieves mainstreaming's goal of reflecting the diversity of Greenville's community "if they have expertise about what you're writing about."



More important, though, he denies that mainstreaming constitutes tokenism. "We're not talking about quoting a minority just for the sake of quoting a minority," Weston insists. But when asked about the often-quoted Yuri Tsuzuki, he acknowledges, "I'm sure there are bad examples....I think if you've got one person you're continu-

ously quoting for no real good reason, then I'd have to agree, that's probably not a good thing."

Mainstreaming, executive editor Pittman claims, is helping to bring black readers to the paper. Even if that's true—Pittman doesn't have specific figures—that gain hasn't been enough to offset a drop in overall readership. Circulation has dipped from 102,110 to 97,407 since Gannett bought the paper in December 1995.



BEYOND ITS POTENTIAL APPEAL TO MINORITY readers, has the newspaper's heightened race consciousness improved coverage where it really counts, in stories about the issues that affect Greenville's minority residents? It's a fuzzy picture—one that suggests that addressing deep-seated issues of race requires more than a daily quotient of quotations. Like most Southern towns, Greenville bears the scars of segregation. One episode in the civil-rights struggles played out there after baseball legend Jackie Robinson was barred from the whites-only waiting room at Greenville airport in 1959. The incident provoked a suit by the NAACP that led a court to find the practice unconstitutional.

Like all institutions, *The Greenville News* has had to struggle with this difficult legacy. "Three years ago, I found it repulsive to even read it," says Ennis Fant, president of the local chapter of the NAACP. "It was very conservative. Minorities and poor people...were never portrayed in a posi-

tive light.” But Fant says coverage of minorities has improved since Gannett bought the *News*. “The paper is certainly more balanced now than it used to be. They have a commitment to diversity....Now it really goes to great lengths to make sure that the total community is heard.”

Eleven of the 17 Greenville residents interviewed for this article—shopkeepers, politicians, and students among them—say they have noticed more coverage of the minority community. The paper “has made a more conscious effort to do more positive stories on blacks,” says Fletcher Smith, a black Greenville lawyer.

The change is visible, agrees Sam Zimmerman, who became the first black reporter at the *News*'s sister paper, *The Piedmont*, in the late 1950s. For example, he says, photos of black homeowners are routinely seen in the “Homes” section: “My wife has commented frequently to me, ‘There are people with dark skin’” in the newspaper.

Certainly, the paper is willing to address racial issues

Instead, its coverage consisted mainly of accounts of suits being filed, protests being held, or officials calling for investigations, and relied heavily on the NAACP's Fant to raise questions about the official version of events. “They didn't do a lot of independent investigations themselves,” says Fant, “but they covered our press conferences.”

The paper dutifully reported the conclusions of a local task force that found no pattern of abuse by guards. But eight months after Radcliff's death, the U.S. Department of Justice, which had undertaken its own investigation and had won access to records denied to the local task force, came to the opposite conclusion. It found that county jail guards routinely used excessive force, denied inmates their constitutional rights, and subdued prisoners by “hog-tying” them, a practice federal officials said “can be life-threatening” and is “rarely, if ever, justified.” Radcliff's death, the report found, was “a tragic example” of these conditions.

Only after the Justice Department's report in late May

If you live in Greenville, and you've got an appropriately “ethnic” last name, chances are you've heard from a *News* reporter. Just ask Yuri Tsuzuki. She was quoted three times in 13 days last fall. It didn't matter that she had no particular expertise. Tsuzuki fit the bill.



when they are noncontroversial. On October 7, for example, the *News* trumpeted the less-than-shocking revelation that, as its top-of-the-front-page headline read, “Americans find value in diversity.”

But the *News* shows a reluctance to delve into sensitive racial issues. For example, it tiptoed around a controversy that galvanized the black community when a black man died shortly after being arrested in 1997.

The conduct of guards at the county jail became a hot-button issue after the August 21, 1997, death of Jamel Radcliff. He had been booked for failing to show up for a court hearing on a four-year-old gun charge and died about six hours later after a confrontation with jail guards. At first, it looked as if the *News* would pursue the case aggressively. It ran the story of Radcliff's death on the front page and published an article the next day that included the account of his brother, who had witnessed the confrontation and was critical of the guards.

But the paper backed off, seemingly waiting for the authorities to reach conclusions rather than digging on its own. In the ensuing months the newspaper did little besides report official developments (albeit usually on the front page). In one article during that period, the *News* noted that civil-rights groups had received more than 200 letters of complaint about conditions at the jail, a prime—but wasted—opportunity for the paper to make news by uncovering a pattern of abuse.

1998 did the paper break ground with its coverage. Reporter Scott Wyman produced some commendable work, obtaining an unreleased state report on the death and reviewing records that demonstrated that the jail's internal investigations cleared guards accused of using excessive force most of the time. But these stories merely served to buttress the Justice Department findings. Wyman explains the paper's approach this way: “When you look at this area,” he says, “you have a fairly conservative population. If you give them anecdotal information, you're going to have many readers who will just dismiss it, whereas if you can back it up in records and facts and statistics, it's going to be a lot more sound and have a lot more weight with people.”

Those people, it seems, include the *News*'s editors. In fact the paper *had* assigned a reporter, Mike Foley, to this story well before any of the authorities weighed in. Foley interviewed some two dozen current and former inmates—many of them black—about conditions at the jail where Radcliff had died, and gathered accounts that pointed in the same direction as the conclusion ultimately reached by the Justice Department. (Top editors Pittman and Weston declined to comment on Foley's jail stories.) Ultimately, the paper never ran the articles that Foley wrote—despite the fact that they were filled with more quotes from minorities than would ever be included in a “mainstreamed” article. ■



Meet The Nielsens



The Nielsen ratings determine which shows you see and don't see on TV. The trouble is, the numbers are shaky.

By Elizabeth Jensen

IT'S A NEVER-ENDING TASK BEING A NIELSEN FAMILY. Want to watch TV? First you turn the set on, then you punch a button telling Nielsen Media Research that it's you, a 27-year-old college-educated male making \$59,000 a year, sitting there in front of the tube. Then you can choose your channel. Walk into the room where your 25-year-old wife is already engrossed in *Friends*? Push the button to tell Nielsen you're there. Run to the bathroom during the commercial? Yep, that button should be pushed again, as it should be yet again when you return.

And if you have a baby, once she hits two, she too will have to learn to push her own special Nielsen button. The whole family will do this for two years, all for a token reward.

Television's power lies in its ability to reach tens of millions of viewers at a time. But whether the second night of *60 Minutes* or the fledgling Animal Planet cable channel survives depends on just a handful of people—not television executives, but the anonymous button-pushing families whose viewing gets translated into the ubiquitous Nielsen ratings.

The numbers aren't just fodder for TV columnists and *Entertainment Tonight*. They determine how some \$48 billion is spent annually on television advertising. And as the number of channels multiplies and the Internet threatens to nibble away at time spent in front of the tube, each and every viewer has become precious in a fiercely competitive business.

From network shows to cable networks to local newscasts, one tenth of a rating point up or down can determine life or death. That makes Nielsen, the sole provider of those numbers in the United States, a key player in determining what viewers see. And with its numbers drawing increasing scrutiny, Nielsen is causing the TV industry a lot of angst.

Although Nielsen has 5,000 households—more than 12,000 people—in its core national sample that determines the fate of most national shows and networks, some critical numbers frequently come down to just one or two households, even one or

PHOTO: COMPOSITE OF CORBIS BETTMANN (FAMILY); PHOTODISC (MONITOR)

two people. Tiny cable network Court TV, for example, on a recent December night, drew an average 0.1 rating—equal to three homes—between 8 P.M. and midnight. If one of those household members forgot to push that button, the numbers would swing wildly. And because advertisers want to target specific demographic groups, even hit shows can lose revenue if a few men or women in prized age brackets go missing.

Whether Nielsen's system works in such a competitive era has become the subject of much debate. Not that television outlets have much choice: Nielsen, which has been measuring TV viewing since 1950, has had a monopoly on tracking the national numbers—as well as on nearly all of the 210 local markets it monitors—for much of the past decade. (The numbers are paid for largely by the TV networks, stations, and syndicators that sell the airtime; advertisers, which use the ratings to determine what ad time to buy, pay just a fraction of what broadcast and cable outlets spend for the same data.) Nielsen, which became a stand-alone publicly traded company last summer, has invested millions expanding its sample and retrofitting its systems to keep pace with the technological changes tearing up the television landscape, and has spent more than \$50 million on the development of a new meter capable of measuring the coming digital channels. Critics say that, so far, however, Nielsen's efforts have fallen

short. "It's a forty-year-old system that ran out of acceptability ten to twenty years ago," says Nicholas Schiavone, senior vice-president, research, at NBC.

SCHIAVONE'S CONCERNS ARE ECHOED BY MANY IN THE industry. Advertisers, local stations, and broadcast and cable networks all have gripes with the ratings company, and even Nielsen admits that certain parts of its system are less reliable than others. What difference does it make if Nielsen misses a few viewers here and there? For start-up cable networks, it can mean the difference between success and failure—and Nielsen's sample is so small that if just one or two homes go missing, a lightly viewed cable network's ratings can plummet. And Schiavone estimates that each of the four broadcast networks loses tens of millions of dollars annually because of all of the viewers Nielsen is missing—viewers for which the networks can't charge advertisers.

What really has the industry worried, though, is that the situation threatens to get worse before it gets better.

"The environment that is coming our way, of digital channels and multiplexing, will be so difficult to measure, it will multiply the issues by five-fold," says Alan Wurtzel, senior vice-president of media development, brand management, and research at ABC, Inc., noting that viewers will get their video in

CHASING THE YOUNG AUDIENCE

ONCE THEY HAVE THEIR PRECIOUS NIELSEN ratings in hand, TV outlets and advertisers begin slicing and dicing the audience into chunks, some more valuable than others. This quest has put ever more pressure on Nielsen to measure smaller and smaller subsets of the population.

It wasn't always so: Historically, networks sold—and advertisers based their decisions on—the number of households tuning in to a specific show. That legacy dated from an era when the woman of the house did most of the household's buying, and families did their TV-watching as a single unit. All an advertiser cared about was whether the set was on in the home and what channel it was tuned to.

About 15 years ago, advertisers started to "realize that it's not households that buy products, it's people that buy products," says Paul Schulman, whose Schulman/Advanswers NY is one of the largest buyers of network-TV ad time. Today, Junior holes up in his room to watch his own TV, and won't be caught dead wearing clothes he didn't buy himself. Advertisers now ferret out ever-more-specific subsets of viewers, such as, say, 13-to-17-year-olds in households with incomes above \$100,000.

TV networks, in turn, chase the audience niches that advertisers want. It makes sense for a new cable network to tailor programming to a narrow audience. It's not as easy for the tradition-

al broadcast networks, which built their business on the premise that they reach a wide, diverse audience, and, in the process, played a role in creating far-reaching brands such as Coca-Cola. Still, the result of this narrowing focus has been more network shows such as *Ally McBeal* that appeal to 20- and 30-year-olds and command high ad rates, and fewer shows such as *Murder, She Wrote*, which was popular among older viewers.

In recent years, the demographic chase has been roughest on CBS. A fourth-quarter 1998 study of prime-time viewers by TN Media pegged the median age of the CBS viewer at 52.5 years, compared to 42.9 for NBC, 41.7 for ABC, 37.4 for UPN, 34.1 for Fox, and 26.6 for WB. That means CBS, which from September 21 through January 10 reached more households during prime time than any of its competitors, is at a disadvantage when vying for the advertising dollars targeted at 18-to-49-year-olds—a full half of all the money spent on national TV advertising, estimates CBS.

Advertisers insist that there are sound reasons for paying a premium to reach younger adults. For one, younger viewers are simply harder to find, says Steve Sternberg, senior vice-president and director of broadcast research at TN Media. As for the 50-plus audience, "you can't get out of their way," agrees Schulman. A February 1997 Nielsen Media Research study showed men 18 to 24 years old watched an average 20 hours

and 40 minutes of television each week, compared to 35 hours and 17 minutes for men 55 and up; a similar pattern holds for women.

Conventional advertising wisdom argues that younger consumers change brands more readily and will be consumers for life once they find a preferred brand of, say, toothpaste. "When you target younger viewers, some seeds are planted," says Schulman. On their own, teens and adults up to age 24 earn a combined \$320 billion in disposable income, a figure that is growing between 4.5 percent and 5 percent annually, faster than the 2 percent to 3 percent growth in disposable income for the nation as a whole, says Ken Boss, a senior analyst for investment banker Ladenburg Thalmann & Co.

David Poltrack, executive vice-president of research and planning at CBS, counters with a 1993 Nielsen Marketing Research study showing that, on average, 67 percent of female heads of household aged 18-to-34 were willing to sample new brands, versus 70 percent for female household-heads in the 35-to-64-year-old bracket. And, according to a 1992 survey by J.D. Power and Associates, older drivers were more likely to switch brands when buying a replacement car than younger drivers. Poltrack can't dispute that younger viewers are harder to track down, but even so, he says, advertisers who ignore older viewers are missing a growing group—and one with the most discretionary income. —EJ

lots of different ways—they'll watch ABC at the same time as they're downloading video clips on their computer, for example.

Fractionalizing the audience will make measurement harder, "yet the need is greater," says Wurtzel. "Anybody interested in being in the measurement business has to be at the top of their game."

Says one media researcher who asked not to be named: "Nielsen is the coin of the realm, it's the way TV is bought and sold. The question that many of the industry organizations are asking Nielsen is: At what level do we really get nervous? Is it now, a year from now? Can you turn this thing around?"

Nielsen dismisses the sniping as posturing on the part of media outlets trying to find their way in an increasingly competitive environment, noting that much of the criticism comes from broadcast networks that are rapidly losing market share. "Television audience-measurement data is among the best data for business use out there," says John Dimling, Nielsen's president and chief executive.

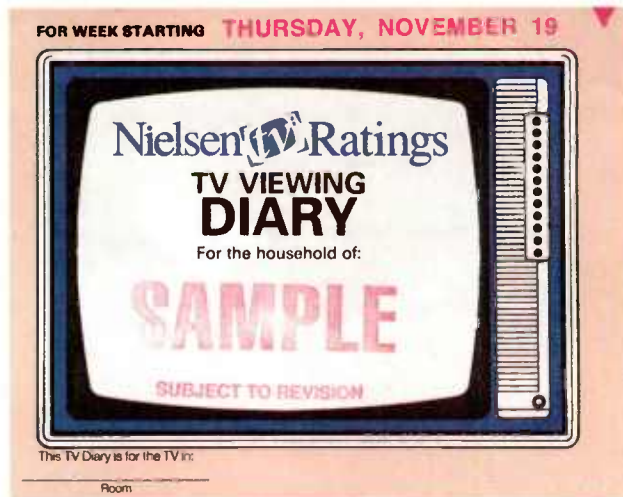
Still, in an extraordinary move, many of Nielsen's clients, held hostage by Nielsen's monopoly, have tentatively agreed to back up their complaints with action. Twenty-four heavyweight Nielsen users—the four main broadcast networks, three cable networks, a syndicator, 13 advertising agencies, and three advertisers—Procter & Gamble, Kraft Foods, Inc., and The Coca-Cola Company—signed letters of intent over the past year to support a rival service, dubbed S•M•A•R•T (Systems for Measuring and Reporting Television), that is trying to get off the ground. Dimling says Nielsen would welcome the competition.

Nielsen has three main components for measuring television viewing. First, there's the national ratings service compiled from the 5,000-home panel, which uses electronic meters to tell who is watching programs available nationwide. It is used by advertisers who want to buy time on national networks such as CBS and the Discovery Network, as well as on syndicated shows. Second, in 44 local markets including New York and Detroit, Nielsen uses a combination of TV-set meters—which simply track what channel is on—and paper diaries to figure out which viewers are watching. Third, an additional 166 smaller markets are measured using paper diaries alone. The local market data is used by advertisers—such as car dealers—that want to buy time in just a single market, and by larger advertisers—such as regional grocery chains—that want to reach specific cities across the country.

NIELSEN'S CRITICS RATTLE OFF A RAFT OF EXCRUCIATINGLY technical measures in which the ratings service is deficient, from response rates in "telephone frame surveys" to "in-tab rates" for households with numerous TV sets. But parts of Nielsen's methodology also defy common sense, even to those without an advanced degree in statistics.

Take the paper diaries that Nielsen uses to determine viewership in markets such as Saginaw, Michigan, and Worcester, Massachusetts, during the so-called sweeps months of February, May, July, and November. Residents are contacted by phone; if they agree to keep diaries, they fill out

Elizabeth Jensen, a former senior writer at Brill's Content, covers television for the Los Angeles Times.



Nielsen's measuring tools: (top to bottom) TV viewing diary used in local markets; an early people-meter (circa mid-1980s); Hispanic people-meter, with Spanish labels; remote-control people-meter, now in use in the national survey; a set tuning meter

one book for each TV set in their home, marking down, in 15-minute blocks for a week, who is watching and what they are watching.

The diary method worked well in the 1960s, when the system was refined. There were only a handful of channels then, and the whole family gathered round a single set. Today, however, it's just not reasonable to expect seven-year-old Johnny and four-year-old Mary to recall exactly which cartoons they watched early Saturday morning and when, so Mom can fill in a diary for the TV in the basement rec room. And if Dad doesn't fill out his weekly diary every evening, how will he possibly remember a few days later just which cable network he landed on as he went clicking through the nearly 100 offerings available on his cable box? (In fact, a recent survey showed that a full 20 percent of the homes keeping Nielsen diaries receive 120 or more cable channels.)

Then there are Nielsen's rules for determining which channel gets credit in a diary. If Dad spends less than five minutes on a specific channel in any given 15 minute block, then that channel gets no credit for any of that time. If he watches five minutes or more, however, then the channel gets a windfall: credit for a full 15-minutes. So someone who watches five min-





Nielsen chief John Dimling says his company's ratings are reliable.

utes each of, say, MTV, VH-1, and NBC in a single quarter-hour will be recorded as having watched 15 minutes of each, consistently overstating the size of the audience in local markets.

Then there are the problems—*not* Nielsen's doing but problems, nonetheless—in figuring out just what a viewer was watching. Diaries come to Nielsen's Dunedin, Florida, operations center marked with such entries as "Watched the news with the nice-looking anchor with glasses." Or viewers name a station and channel number, but name the anchor from a rival station. Or they'll say they watched a show, but write down the wrong time. Nielsen's workers, many of them retirees who work part-time during Nielsen sweeps

periods, must decipher the conflicting information. And Nielsen can do nothing about the viewers who lie when filling out their diaries—saying they watched the news, for example, when they were really tuned to the Playboy Channel.

Much of the criticism of Nielsen these days revolves around its problem getting viewers to cooperate. Deluged by telemarketers and increasingly time-stressed, TV viewers simply aren't agreeing to fill out diaries or accept meters when Nielsen calls, leading to record-low "response rates." During the May 1998 measurement period, one study showed that just 31.7 percent of those contacted agreed to fill out diaries, a 22 percent decline from 1994. And last year, an average of 13 percent of St. Louis viewers agreed to accept local meters when Nielsen asked. "You might as well throw darts," says NBC's Schiavone. Still, the choices made by that 13 percent were treated as representative of all TV viewers in the market.

Another problem plaguing Nielsen: the so-called "in-tab rates," which are also dropping sharply in some areas. In-tab rates refer to the number of people who agree to participate and actually fill out and return a diary, or whose meters are functioning day-to-day.

In its national sample of 5,000 homes, Nielsen has dramatically improved its in-tab rates in the last two years, after

complaints reached a fever pitch, and as the rival S•M•A•R•T experiment began to gain ground. But Nielsen's clients continue to find areas of concern: This fall, Nielsen has reported an 8 percent drop in viewing by 18-to-34-year-old adults, a key constituency for networks such as Fox. The networks attribute the unusual drop to an underrepresentation of such viewers in Nielsen's sample; Nielsen counters that young viewers are just watching less television, a decline that has been consistent since 1991.

Other areas of concern include low cooperation rates among Hispanics and African-Americans in Nielsen's local measurement. And some of Nielsen's biggest cooperation problems come from homes with more than one TV set—the kinds of viewers that the TV industry would like to have measured, because with more sets, they are likely to be watching more TV.

OTHER CRITICISMS OF NIELSEN ARE ALL OVER THE MAP. One longstanding complaint: the ratings that Nielsen compiles for viewers as young as two. In fact, that's one place where the diary probably holds up—a parent fills in the information for a child. But to get its national ratings, Nielsen requires each viewer in its 5,000 homes to push a pre-assigned button on a remote-control device known as a people-meter to let the set know who is actually watching. Young children simply don't remember to push the buttons each time, studies have shown.

Nielsen also doesn't measure out-of-home viewing in places like vacation homes, day-care centers, or college dorms, depriving, say, soap operas of their college-age viewers.

Nielsen concedes some problems, but blames many on the industry itself, which can't agree on which changes should be made—and generally won't pay for improvements.

For example, Nielsen doesn't dispute that its diary has problems. The company has experimented with minor changes to the diary method, testing one-day diaries and having each household member fill out a book, instead of having a book for each TV set. But Nielsen spokesman Jack Loftus says he doesn't expect big changes. "It's still going to be a diary, with all the blemishes it's always had," he says. "It's not

HOW FOUR VIEWERS CAN BE WORTH \$50 MILLION

FOX'S QUIRKY HIT *ALLY MCBEAL* DOESN'T SUFFER from a lack of viewers, and her short skirts and confused love life appeal particularly to the 18- to 49-year-olds advertisers love.

Yet, even *Ally* could benefit from one thing both Nielsen and its critics agree on: the need for larger Nielsen sample sizes.

On November 9, 1998, *Ally* was the second-ranked prime-time show among adults aged 18 to 49, with an 8.2 rating. That translated into 8.2 percent of all adults in that age group. Moreover, the show drew 10.2 percent of all women 18 to 49.

But viewed in terms of Nielsen's sample, the strong showing looks more arbitrary. That week, in Nielsen's 5,000-home sample, there were an

average 6,352 adults between the ages of 18 and 49, of whom 3,303 were women. But that week, fewer than 85 percent of those sample members were "in-tab," or actually returning usable data to Nielsen (among men 18 to 34, just 80 percent were in-tab). That means 5,259 adults were producing the ratings, of whom 2,764 were women.

So *Ally*'s 8.2 rating was produced by 431 sample viewers tuning in; during an average minute; for the 10.2 rating among women 18 to 49, just 282 women of that age in the sample tuned in.

To make that rating change by one-tenth of a rating point—which is considered significant—just three women would have had to tune in, or not tune in, during an average minute. The adult rating

could have been changed by a mere four adults.

What does a tenth of a rating point mean? Well, if one of the Big Four broadcast networks lost just one-tenth of a rating point across its entire prime-time schedule over the course of a year, it might miss out on as much as \$50 million in ad revenues, at current average network ad prices, according to one network executive. That's \$50 million in the hands of just a few of Nielsen's sample members.

As for a cable channel that averages a .3 or .4 rating, as many do, that same handful of people—equal to one-tenth of a rating point—could cause the channel's ratings, and thus its revenues, to swing by 25 to 33 percent either way. —EJ

a medium friendly to cable or independent stations.”

Nielsen would prefer instead that its local-market clients spend extra to install more reliable electronic set meters, and the company blames the industry for perpetuating the diary method. In some ways, the industry has only itself to blame, as some players with a vested interest cling to diaries, despite the fact that they are outmoded. The diaries rely heavily on viewers' ability to recall what they watched during the week, and thus favor big, established, mostly network stations over upstarts. But Nielsen charges its clients three times more for set meters, which are more reliable than diaries, and many stations refuse to subscribe. Without a way to recoup the costs, Nielsen won't make the switch.

As for response rates and in-tab rates, Nielsen says it shares its critics' concerns. "Nobody can deny that we've been attempting to improve cooperation," says Dimling, pointing to improved recruiter training for the national sample as well as to a new Nielsen test to recruit respondents in local set-metered markets by going to their homes instead of just calling them.

However, Dimling says many of the complaints—that a handful of homes can determine the fate of small cable networks, for example—could be solved by expanding the size of the sample, thus reducing the error rate. "Sometimes, we as an industry expect too much of samples," he says. "All things being equal, we would rather have a larger sample size....It's in the interests of a lot of people to find the resources to do that." But not everyone is willing to pay for that expansion, and Nielsen argues that it can't shoulder the burden alone.

The fast-approaching digital era, which many Nielsen clients dread, may be a boon to Nielsen. The company is testing a new meter, in development since 1991. Called the A/P (for active/passive) meter, the device is designed to measure the complex digital environment by reading audio and video codes embedded in a program's signal. (With a couple of exceptions, the current system simply measures which channel number the TV is tuned to, and then compares that to a market-by-market list of which network or program airs on that channel at that time.) The new A/P meter is easier to install than Nielsen's existing meters, meaning less disruption for the homes that agree to take the meters and less time that Nielsen will have to spend on installation.

FOR MANY CLIENTS, HOWEVER, THE CHANGES ARE COMING too late. With their frustration at a boiling point, five years ago ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox gave \$40 million to a company called Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI), which had developed what it said was a better way to measure national audiences, with a people-meter that is easier to use and less intrusive to install. The experiment was derided by Nielsen, as well as by many advertisers and cable networks, who feared that it was meant to produce ratings that favored the beleaguered broadcasters.

But S•M•A•R•T persisted. SRI set up a 500-home test in Philadelphia, with results that convinced an extraordinary coalition of networks, both broadcast and cable, and advertisers to sign on as sponsors, and, later, sign letters of intent to support the system if it goes into the marketplace.

Some have supported S•M•A•R•T for its methodology, but others simply like the fact that S•M•A•R•T promises to give its clients all of its data, so they themselves can generate

the specialized reports for which Nielsen charges extra—but often takes months to produce. (Nielsen has recently promised a similar system, but is months late in delivering it.) Still others are concerned that without a rival, Nielsen will be able to jack up its prices with abandon.

S•M•A•R•T has already served a purpose: "Almost every improvement [Nielsen has] made recently is tied to SRI," says David Poltrack, CBS's executive vice-president of research and planning, in the same way that Nielsen only introduced its people-meters in 1987 after a rival, AGB, a British audience research firm, tried to launch a U.S. people-meter service.

AGB's ultimately frustrating experience may foreshadow the death of S•M•A•R•T, however. The British company lost \$67 million before it was forced to shut down its American effort in 1988 for lack of widespread support from companies who felt they could only afford to subscribe to a single service.

SRI, mindful that AGB and other Nielsen wanna-bes have lost an estimated \$200 million in the last 15 years, has been searching for backers to put up the \$100 million needed to get off the ground. Originally, ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox were to put in almost all of the seed money, but the broadcasters have backed away from that plan as their profit mar-

MUCH OF THE CRITICISM CENTERS ON NIELSEN'S PROBLEM GETTING VIEWERS TO COOPERATE. TV VIEWERS AREN'T AGREEING TO FILL OUT DIARIES AND ACCEPT METERS WHEN NIELSEN CALLS.

gins tumbled. Decisions on whether to proceed are imminent.

If S•M•A•R•T gets off the ground, its service would initially only be national, which wouldn't address concerns with the local-market measurement systems. Two large cable operators, Tele-Communications, Inc., and MediaOne, are experimenting with systems designed to measure local cable viewing. And an increasing number of advanced cable boxes are able to provide exact tuning numbers for every channel every minute of the day. Nielsen may soon be able to access at least some of that data under recent agreements it made with cable-system owner Time Warner Inc., and others. Those numbers won't be a cure-all for ratings woes, however, because they won't measure who is sitting in front of the sets, or what the 24 percent of the nation's viewers without cable or satellite programming are watching.

So, for the moment, clients' main recourse seems to be pressuring Nielsen to do better. At least two networks have flirted in recent years with suing Nielsen for not meeting its obligations, and just last fall the Media Ratings Council, a congressionally mandated watchdog of the ratings services, contemplated the almost unthinkable action of withdrawing its accreditation of Nielsen's local-market service. The December vote ultimately fell short. And while losing accreditation would have been embarrassing for Nielsen, it wouldn't have changed much for the industry, which still needs numbers—even numbers it doesn't like—to sell its ads. ■



IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE OF WHAT HE CALLS HIS POLITICAL "LIFESTYLE" MAGAZINE, *George* founder and editor in chief John F. Kennedy, Jr. featured a profile of Eleanor Mondale, the leggy daughter of former vice-president and presidential candidate Walter Mondale. It was racy, gossipy, fun to read, and, like many *George* profiles, had but the barest link to politics. It hinted that Mondale, said to be a jogging buddy of President Clinton's, is actually much more. In a sultry two-page photograph, she was pictured horizontal on a leather couch, wearing leather pants, her cleavage prominent. Author Lisa DePaulo retold with relish the thin story of why Mondale became a Ken Starr witness (a Mondale visit to the Oval Office allegedly enraged Monica Lewinsky, who was trying to get in to see the president at the same time). DePaulo also described Mondale's "chubby" fiancé and the time Mondale tongue-kissed diminutive financier Ronald Perelman in public (he was on his

tiptoes). And yes, there was a bit about what it was like being the wild teenage daughter of the straight-arrow vice-president.

The same mix of sex and substance, in varying degrees, could be found throughout the February issue. An article about Rupert Murdoch began with the silver-haired Fox mogul shacking up in SoHo with his new, young love, before moving on to a sophisticated discussion of his business empire. A piece about Congressman Barney Frank's reputation as "the smartest person in Congress" segued to Frank's open homosexuality and the sex scandal that embarrassed him ten years ago. A feature on the Sultan of Brunei, "Sultan of Swing," opened with a lurid description of his brother's private brothel parties where "scantly dressed" women sang karaoke and were allegedly groped. And a strong profile of Congressman Tom DeLay, which would have looked right at home in *Time* or *Newsweek*, veered off to recount the Texas Republican's days as "Hot Tub Tom."

Indeed, the issue's menu of sex, Hollywood, and Washington exemplifies the formula that Kennedy has settled on so far and that his readers seem to be taking to (even as the Washington cognoscenti continue to dismiss the magazine): Politics should be more about personalities than policy. People want their government with a splash of humor, rumor, and fun.

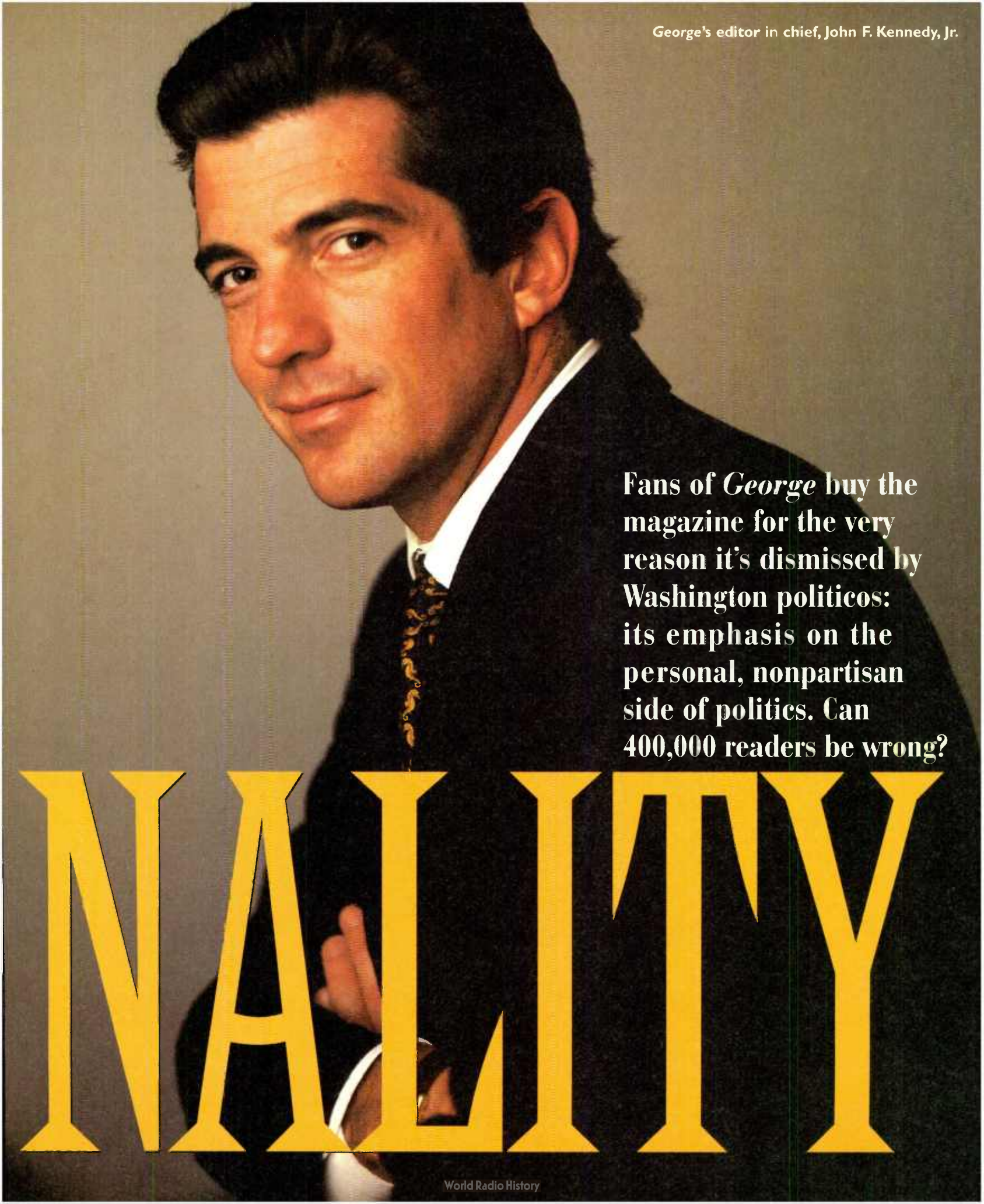
BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

The Politics of

PEPERSO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY HEISLER

World Radio History

A close-up portrait of John F. Kennedy, Jr. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He has dark hair and is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a subtle smile.

George's editor in chief, John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Fans of *George* buy the magazine for the very reason it's dismissed by Washington politicians: its emphasis on the personal, nonpartisan side of politics. Can 400,000 readers be wrong?

NALITY

“One of the reasons I don’t subscribe,” says one fan, “is that a lot of times their covers are pretty bawdy, so I’m embarrassed to have it in my house.”



Sitting down to talk with Kennedy over a wide expanse of conference table in *George's* New York office, the first thing that registers is his unabashedness about *George's* editorial sensibility and its target audience. He's unfazed by the predictable questions about what constitutes legitimate political reporting. Dressed in a blue chalk-striped suit, there's no obvious squirming, except for his absentminded twisting of a paper clip around his finger to the point where his circulation appears to be nearly cut off.

So what's Kennedy trying to do with *George*? For starters, he isn't trying to please his newfound press "colleagues." Nor, he says, is he trying to create a platform for his own run at political office. Rather, he's trying to build a magazine and a business based on his own worldview. His is a world, after all, in which politics and celebrity have been entwined since birth.

The Mondale piece is a good example. For this editor to have approved an article about the sex life of a famous politician's kid was either an act of incredible hypocrisy and tone-deafness—didn't he expect the inevitable question *How could you, of all people, do that?*—or an act of bold unselfconsciousness. A truly strong editor edits from the gut, and Kennedy certainly seems to trust his. To take another example, he says that when he wrote his 1997 editor's note about his cousins (more on that later), it was something he felt he had to do. "If a magazine is not reflective of one person's soul," says Kennedy, "then it probably stinks." Sometimes, he says, "depending on how I'm feeling, I just kind of let it loose. Otherwise, what's the point, right? What's the point for me

Senior writer Abigail Pogrebin wrote about NBC News and its president, Andrew Lack, in the February issue.

to have a magazine if I'm not going to use it in some way that is personal?"

And if Ms. Mondale calls to complain that *George* violated her privacy? "I'd say 'Hey, man, you know, I've been there,'" says Kennedy. "It's a pain in the neck, but you know, it ain't as bad as all that."

For all his realism about what sells magazines and what public figures must put up with from the press, Kennedy admits that having grown up under hyperscrutiny has made him a different kind of journalist. He errs on the side of fairness—sometimes, he concedes, to the point of taking the bite out of a story. And when it comes to the questions he asks for his own interview features, he intentionally doesn't push too hard. "It's not my nature to be inquisitorial. I think it is my nature to be curious," Kennedy says. "I find interviews difficult because I don't like to really do them [as the subject] and I know...what makes me uncomfortable and what makes me feel noncooperative....Which is sort of a sense that a reporter has an idea already about what he wants this to come to. That you're not just sitting down in a conversation and seeing where it will lead. There's sort of a setup going on."

By all accounts, Kennedy is a more involved editor than most people think. He's a more seasoned entrepreneur than most people know. And when it comes right down to it, he's got a more successful magazine than he gets credit for.

FOR THE SO-CALLED MEDIA ELITE, *GEORGE* HAS BEEN an easy punching bag. Its architect is the nation's unofficial heartthrob, who has no prior experience in the magazine business. Critics say *George's* articles are so short and digestible, that they're forgettable; little new information sticks to your ribs. It regularly features models and movie stars in various states of undress. (Kennedy himself disrobed once for the picture that appeared alongside that famous editor's note.) Washington insiders say they rarely read the magazine, don't know anybody who does, and feel perfectly well informed without it. They say that *George* doesn't matter, that its articles don't make news or waves on the cocktail circuit, that it's not clear what it's trying to be.

But mention the circulation—419,214—and the pundits pause. *Hmm*. That's respectable. If *nobody* reads *George*, who are all these readers? By comparison, *The New Republic*, a more respected political weekly, sells just under 100,000 copies. The *Weekly Standard*, which was launched the same autumn as *George*, manages just half that. (By contrast, *Vanity Fair*, *George's* main glossy competitor, leaves it in the dust with more than 1 million readers.)

So does this mean *George* is a player after all? Nina Totenberg, legal-affairs correspondent for National Public Radio, says, "I don't want to sound culturally illiterate, but I've never read it. I don't mean to sound snippy, but why should I?" She says her reading list is an exercise in "triage,"

and *George* doesn't make the cut. "I spend my life feeling guilty about what I'm not reading. *George* isn't one of the ones I feel guilty about." Does the fact that so many Americans put *George* in their reading pile tell her anything about the country's political appetite? "I don't think *George* magazine is a political magazine," says Totenberg.

Veteran *Washington Post* columnist David Broder says *George*'s journalism lacks heft. "I'm not sure I've ever ripped a piece out of *George* magazine and stuck it in my files," he says, "which is what I do with magazines when something is exceptionally well reported or gives me new insight to something I may be writing on."

"I've never heard anyone talk about a *George* piece," says Michael Kelly, the editor of *National Journal*, a 6,500-circulation political weekly, who says he hasn't read the magazine since he perused the first few issues. "It's pretty consciously not serious. It's not intended for people who actually know anything about politics or Washington....It's finding a new vehicle to exploit the celebrity culture. That seems to be its editorial mission." Kelly says *George* plays it so safe that there are no surprises: "It seems to be a magazine the point of which is to reassure readers that James Carville really is James Carville and Newt Gingrich really is Newt Gingrich—with two new anecdotes."

The bashing rankles Kennedy. But he says he expected the early obituaries, and he claims they've stopped. "We're like the Conan O'Brien of magazines," he laughs. "We're still here."

MORE IMPORTANT, KENNEDY INSISTS THE AUDIENCE that dismisses *George* is not the audience he set out to engage. "We didn't want to be the *National Journal*....When you have in your inaugural issue Madonna talking about 'If I were president,' clearly it had not been our objective to woo the folks in Washington."

Outside the Beltway, plenty of "folks" say they're wooed. When we tracked down some subscribers by contacting those who have written letters to the editor, (admittedly a subset of the most involved readers), we heard very un-Washington characterizations of *George*. People called it "irreverent," "interesting," "balanced," "entertaining," "insightful," "fun." One message rang loud and unmistakable: They like it.

Jim Eskin, a self-employed public-affairs strategist in San Antonio, sent an e-mail that echoed the sentiments of many others we spoke to:

"1. It is visually alive....It has a wonderful design. Starting with the cover, each page grabs your attention and pulls you in.

"2. The contents are balanced. *George* is not afraid to take shots at everyone—Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives.

"3. I like the way it lets us into the political thinking of nonpolitical people.

"4. I'm a U.S. history buff so I enjoy the way the magazine looks back and helps us learn from the past."

So what's the disconnect? Are the journalists and the subscribers reading the same magazine? Are subscribers blinded by the stardom of *George*'s editor and its celebrity profiles, or so dumb they don't know a bad magazine when they read one? Maybe it's the press that's out of touch—an ornery, snobby bunch who delight in drubbing a magazine they've hardly read, who don't think a publication matters unless they're in it?

The answer may be much simpler: It seems that *George* appeals to readers for exactly the reasons its creators intended, which are also the reasons journalists disparage it. It's not overly demanding. It's more entertaining than educational. It puts Hollywood and Washington in bed together, where many Americans believe they've always been. It bets on the fact that people are curious about celebrities' opinions—for instance, Robert Duvall's griping about the hypocrisy of feminists, or Bruce Willis's praising of Louis Farrakhan. And every once in a while it lands a first-rate article that *Vanity Fair* or *The New Yorker* would be proud to feature.

It looks like *George* has connected on its own terms, winning the following it was after: the educated American consumer—not Joe Six Pack, but Josie White-Wine Spritzer, the junior software executive, the retiree, the armchair senator. The magazine says 55 percent of its readers are women. Its median reader is 37 and has an average household income of \$73,400. Our informal survey found them to be people who want to keep up on current events, who subscribe to magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*, and who think a magazine should be a pastime, not a chore.

Elaine Benken, a 34-year-old graphic designer in Indianapolis, says, "It's intelligent, but not so intelligent that it's hard to get through."

Retired librarian Mary Dreksler of Satellite Beach, Florida, says *George* is portable fare. "If you're watching TV or you're in the car, you can pick it up and put it down."



The *George* bashing rankles Kennedy. But he claims the premature obituaries have stopped. "We're like the Conan O'Brien of magazines," he laughs. "We're still here."

George's first issue sold out but drew mixed reviews from the press: "A vanity-press vehicle," wrote one paper. "Trenchant," countered another.

Holly Guinan, a 41-year-old teacher in Guildhall, Vermont, says she hates the society pictures that appear in the front of each issue, but admits to poring over every one. A self-described liberal, Guinan says *George* offers a dose of what the opposition is thinking. "It gives me just enough so that I don't get nauseous, and then I know enough what the enemy's argument is."

David Graf, a 44-year-old computer programmer from Chicago, buys the magazine on the newsstand. "One of the reasons I don't subscribe is that a lot of times their covers are pretty bawdy so I'm embarrassed to have it in my house," he says. "It's a shame, because sometimes the cover doesn't have a real connection with what's in the rest of the magazine."

Kennedy doesn't disagree. "To the extent that we've put people on the cover in the past that have not been sufficiently political, I think, perhaps was an error on one or two covers. I don't want to offend her, but I think [August cover subject] Charlize Theron was arguably one of those."

Of course, not every reader loves it. R.T. Castleberry, a poet in Houston, says he doesn't plan to renew his subscription. "I subscribed initially because I thought it might be a good general-interest political magazine, with an outsider or irreverent point of view. Sadly, it's closer to a *People* or *Entertainment Weekly* version of politics than I'd expected."

But Brown University student Todd Auwarter says *George* delivers as advertised. "*George* strikes a good balance between substance and entertainment. I don't think it was promised to be a hard-hitting investigative journal...and I don't think it was intended to be a tabloid-trash paper either."

AUWARTER'S NOT FAR OFF THE MARK. WHEN JOHN Kennedy, then 34, and his erstwhile partner Michael Berman, 37, pitched their magazine idea to media conglomerate Hachette Filipacchi Magazines in 1994, the pair envisioned a modest-sized political magazine for the apolitical post-baby boomer, whom they believed could be jazzed about politics if presented à la David Letterman.

Kennedy wanted to make Washington accessible, so that young people would "talk about politics with the same sort of informed casualness that they might talk about the new movie coming out, or a new record," he says. "And the way that we figured is the best way to do that is really through the people



Kennedy fields a question at the 1995 press conference for *George's* launch.

that inhabit the political process, to sort of bring them to life."

Hachette's president and CEO, David Pecker, urged Kennedy and Berman to think big and glossy. Hachette is not known for its scholarly fare. Its stable of 28 publications includes *Elle*, *Premiere*, *Road & Track*, *Boating*, and *Metropolitan Home*, most of which fall into the "lifestyle" or "shelter" categories. *George* was not an obvious match for Hachette, except for the allure of John Kennedy, whose fame and pedigree could justify the \$25 million Pecker pledged

to invest for half-ownership of the magazine. (Kennedy's Random Ventures owns the other half.) But industry experts warned that even Kennedy's cachet wouldn't float a political magazine; political magazines lose money. Pecker didn't listen.

On September 7, 1995, Kennedy's unveiling of the first cover—which showed model Cindy Crawford in full George Washington regalia (plus a bare midriff)—was a blockbuster media event. Reporters thronged Federal Hall in Manhattan, where the first president was inaugurated. "I don't think that I have seen as many of you in one place since they announced the results of my first bar exams," Kennedy joked, alluding to his widely reported difficulties in passing the test. Kennedy laid out *George's* mission in his first editor's note, promising that the magazine would "define politics extravagantly, from elected officials to media moguls to movie stars to ordinary citizens." He told the press, "*George* doesn't just cover politics, it celebrates it."

The first issue sold out its 500,000-copy press run. The fat, 280-page debut included an unprecedented 175 ad pages bought by such high-end advertisers as General Motors Corp., the Ford Motor Co., Versace, and Movado. Articles included a profile of FBI director Louis Freeh, Kennedy's interview with George Wallace, and a story on Julia Roberts's trip to Haiti on behalf of UNICEF.

In shorter features, then presidential candidate Lamar Alexander was asked about his favorite vegetable (okra) and his favorite Beatle (Ringo). Cindy Crawford and designer Isaac Mizrahi snickered together over the sorry fashion sense of Newt Gingrich and the first lady. (Mizrahi: "If Hillary Clinton had a really good charcoal-gray suit and wore it every day, I would respect her so much.")

The reviews varied. *The Wall Street Journal* called it "a vanity-press vehicle for celebrities who want to see themselves repackaged as intellectuals." *The Boston Globe* dismissed it as "disappointingly vapid." But *The Associated Press* dubbed it "smart-alecky," and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* described it as

"Trenchant. Informative. Cutting-edge. And maybe even important."

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd wrote, "Mr. Kennedy is right that culture drives politics. But journalism must regard that phenomenon critically—not complicity.... Celebrity distorts democracy by giving the rich, beautiful, and famous more authority than they deserve."

One reader disagrees. "I think politics has done that. I don't think the magazine has done that," says subscriber Penny Coppedge, an education administrator in Cimarron, New Mexico. "I think *George* is reflecting what is truly happening."

Kennedy thinks Dowd's take on Washington just affirms his own. "Maureen Dowd writes, as far as I can tell, mostly about the personal, about celebrity, and about the personally trivial.... The reason why she's interesting is because she writes about the most provocative, personal points of people in politics. And so that comment seems sort of freighted with contradiction coming from where it does."

It's only fair to point out that *George* has had its share of first-rate articles. Highlights include Lisa DePaulo's acid portrait of former *New Republic* writer (and serial plagiarist) Ruth Shalit, Kennedy's interview with Clinton nemesis Richard Mellon Scaife, and Elizabeth Kaye's nuanced dissection of the case of Mary Kay Letourneau, the Seattle teacher convicted of statutory rape, who, it turns out, is the daughter of a former right-wing congressman brought down by a similar sex scandal.

But these features aren't what typically brings in the crowds. And even stars and sex appeal haven't managed to boost *George*'s stagnant circulation numbers and ad sales. *George* guarantees advertisers 400,000 readers, and so far, they haven't nudged much beyond that. But if *George*'s renewal rate is as high as Kennedy says it is—between 55 and 57 percent—it's above the industry average; and with additional investments in direct-mail solicitation it should be able to grow. Kennedy says the magazine needs to get to a circulation of 600,000 before it's profitable.

Pecker claims *George*'s advertising revenue approached \$20 million last year, but because Hachette negotiates ad packages that guarantee advertisers multiple placements in their various magazines, and because discounts have become commonplace, it's impossible to gauge from ad-page counts how much ad revenue *George* actually pulls in. Pecker says he expects *George* to become profitable in 2001. (He was more optimistic in a *New York Times* interview two years ago, predicting that the magazine would be in the black this year.)

There is some disagreement in the ad world about whether *George* is a "hot" or even a strong media buy. The magazine still boasts desirable advertisers—fashion, automobiles, liquor—but ad pages stayed flat last year (although Pecker claims ad revenue rose significantly).

"*George* has the young, upscale, slightly female-skewed demographic that we want to address," says Dennis Donlin of DMB&B ad agency in Detroit, which has been placing Cadillac advertising in *George* since the premiere issue.

Bob Mancini, executive director of Ford Motor Media, likes that *George* doesn't come on too strong. "It's very neutral," Mancini says.

But two top advertising agency directors say it's still

not clear how good a magazine *George* is or why they should recommend it to clients. "Nobody says I *have* to be in *George*," says one of them, "none of our advertisers."

THERE IS ALWAYS SKEPTICISM ABOUT HOW LONG Kennedy will run his magazine. He predicts he'll still be there five years from now, and acknowledges—without offering details—that there is some discussion about creating a companion television show, with him as the host. Clearly, he is weary of being asked how hands-on he really is. "Frankly, I'm not sure I want to dignify it with an answer," he says bluntly. "This enterprise has consumed almost now six years of my life. It came at considerable personal kind of risk. There were a lot of people that would have loved to see this be a farce, and it hasn't been. And I don't really care what people think as far as my involvement. I care what the people who work here think."

His colleagues, past and present, insist he's underestimated. Former associate editor Hugo Lindgren, now an editor at the *New York Times Magazine*, says, "Everybody assumed he was just a celebrity vehicle.... But John really works hard at it, and not just in a symbolic way. I think people don't believe that or understand it."

David Kuhn, executive editor of Tina Brown's new magazine, *Talk*, was a consultant to *George* in its planning stages, and says Kennedy's strengths as an editor seem partly derived from his unique life experience. "He's someone who has a built-in bullshit detector, and a very good read on people and

Kennedy toyed with sensitive family history when a *George* cover winked at Marilyn Monroe's birthday serenade to his father.



their motives. And understanding and untangling people's motives is the way you sometimes identify a good story and help the writer see it too."

But obviously Kennedy is no ordinary magazine editor. His star is fixed in the nation's firmament, whether he interviews George Wallace or goes skiing in Sun Valley, Idaho. Subscribers admit they signed up initially because of him, and advertisers chuckle that if Kennedy ever made a sales call, the floor would cave in. (He's actually made more than a few.) But readers hoping for a personal glimpse of America's royal family have been mostly disappointed. Kennedy cracked the window when he put Drew Barrymore on the September '96 cover posing as Marilyn Monroe, with the headline "Happy Birthday, Mr. President"—obviously toying with sensitive Kennedy history.

More explosive was his editor's letter a year later, in which Kennedy posed with no visible clothing (and appropriate shadows) for a picture accompanying his brief essay about temptation and public reproach. He singled out cousin Joe Kennedy's marriage annulment and cousin Michael Kennedy's reported affair with an underage babysitter, describing his relatives as "poster boys for bad behavior." It was perceived as a startling trespass against the family's fierce loyalty.

The issue was *George's* best-seller, but Kennedy says that wasn't his goal. "I did that because that was something I wanted to say and something that I had felt strongly about, which is that we judge harshly people in the public eye for being human." He says he felt he somehow had to make himself vul-

surprising to find a small item in February's issue that quoted a source who said resigned House speaker-elect Robert Livingston's wife was an avid collector of JFK memorabilia until "she found out that Kennedy was a womanizer.")

For a man whose father represented for many the paradigm of public service, Kennedy seems sobered by the fact that more and more Americans no longer respect the people they elect. "I think that people don't think of politicians as role models anymore," he says. "When my father was president, there were thirty people covering the White House. There are now three thousand, and they're all chasing the same rabbit. So it becomes very difficult to maintain perfection under that kind of scrutiny." Kennedy says perfection is too much to ask. "You're putting an impossible burden on them—and you're setting yourself up for a sense of failure about the political system. And I think that that burden is unfair, and it makes good people stay away from government."

Kennedy may opine about the state of politics, but you won't hear his political opinions. When he started *George*, Kennedy made clear that its coverage wouldn't "be colored by any partisan perspective—not even mine." Some say that was his first mistake, that *George* would benefit from a point of view, that it would give the magazine a spine, an edge, a mission.

But Kennedy says reaction to the Monica Lewinsky saga disproves that. "The current political imbroglio has indicated that real people across America do not have the same investment in partisan politics as people in Washington do," he says. "A lot of people expected [*George*] would turn into John

Kennedy's soapbox. And it can't be that."

Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*—the quintessential ideological, unprofitable, political journal—thinks toothless news is in fashion. "It's a period of press-light,

impeachment-light, politics-light for many people who are disconnected. *George* fits into it." She thinks an apolitical political magazine is an oxymoron, doomed to irrelevance. "It doesn't quite know what it is," she says. "It has a cachet, but that doesn't translate into influence, political weight, being part of a political conversation."

Subscribers, however, like that *George* doesn't take sides. "It's everyday, good old horse sense," says retired postmaster Broox Sledge of Macon, Mississippi. "Just plow the middle."

Chalk up another disconnect: The media want an attitude, the subscribers want a draw. The gulf between the two may not be a reliable barometer of success, but Kennedy admits he'd like to close the gap a little. "I would like to reach the skeptics in Washington. I would like it if they felt *George* was a must-read," he says. "No one likes to have their hard work dismissed, but I don't lose sleep over that....I never look for approval from the journalistic community. If it comes, great. But I didn't really see that as the group that I had to answer to." ■

George "won't be colored by any partisan perspective," Kennedy has always insisted. "A lot of people expected [it] would turn into John Kennedy's soapbox. And it can't be that."

nerable so as not to appear holier-than-thou. "The picture had to accompany the letter because otherwise the letter would have looked like I was being judgmental....It was not an exhibitionist thing. There are forty photographers in Hyannis during the summer that photograph me swimming [in a way that is] far more revealing."

So *George* may be the ultimate tug-of-war for John F. Kennedy, Jr.: a public voice for a private person, one who is trying to honor a legacy that either elevates or burdens his every editorial impulse. In some ways, he's being more honest than people realize.

His recent February editor's note, for example, confronted the issue of the day—public service versus private sin—an issue that applies to his father. "As far as I can tell," he wrote, "there is no good reason to hold public officials to a stricter standard of personal conduct than we do the folks whose triumphs and tragedies are the stuff of tabloids and television shows....We are constantly confronted with the human frailties of our public officials, but what does that have to do with the faithful execution of their public duties?" (Kennedy is obviously wary of discussing his father in this context [see interview, p. 99], so it's



JOHN KENNEDY, JR. ON GEORGE AND CELEBRITY Q & A



John Kennedy, Jr. shrugging off the inside the Beltway criticism, believes *George* speaks to readers tired of partisan politics.

John Kennedy, Jr., was famous even before he left the womb, and his 38 years in the media glare as the son of one of this country's most legendary politicians has informed his ideas about how politics and its players should be covered by his magazine.

On January 8, Kennedy sat down for an interview with editor in chief Steven Brill and senior writer Abigail Pogrebin at the New York headquarters of Hachette Filipacchi Magazines. Kennedy explained why *George* fills a gap in political journalism and where he thinks it has strayed. He didn't duck questions about how personal his involvement is in the magazine, how he weathers the carping of critics who say *George* is irrelevant, and why he thinks, after three-plus years, he's proving them wrong.

Edited excerpts of the approximately 70-minute interview follow. The full conversation can be read at our America Online site (keyword: brills) and at our website (www.brillscontent.com).

STEVEN BRILL: What are you trying to do with the magazine?

JOHN KENNEDY, JR.: When we started, there [had] never really been a political magazine for the general public in America that [had] been commercially successful. So, basically, the idea was to create a lifestyle magazine that was grounded in politics and American history for a broad audience, particularly with reference to people who hadn't really been drawn to political magazines before—women and young people.

BRILL: But what's a political lifestyle magazine?

KENNEDY: The idea was to make it accessible, and to make it visual, and to make it entertaining—as opposed to something you had to read in order to be literate in your job and conversant in the environment that you work [in]. Which I think the *National Journals* or the *National Review* or *The New Republics* are, for the most part. And that it has the visual cues of a lifestyle magazine—that it be visually driven, that there be photographs, that there be color, that there be a sense of vibrancy and a kind of contemporary modern look, that are evocative of a fashion magazine or an *Entertainment Weekly*.

Fundamentally, one of the big problems with political magazines before [was] that they really had not changed the way that they looked in 40 years. They're text driven, they're black-and-white,

they're written mostly by men, mostly for men. And they don't reflect a modern sensibility, which is to try to grab people's attention and say, *This is interesting. Politics is interesting. You should know about it. Come read our magazine.*

BRILL: So I read *George* this month, and I'm a 27-year-old middle manager at Microsoft. Your perfect [reader], right? I read *George* this month, and what do I know that I didn't know [before]?

KENNEDY: That's a difficult question. There might be certain facts that are in the magazine that you didn't know. But the thing that we really wanted to do was, for any well-rounded person, politics is something one should be literate about, and people want to be. Our idea was to make politics accessible to people who wanted to have it close by, who wanted to read it and pick it up, who could talk about politics with the same sort of informed casualness that they might talk about the new movie coming out, or a new record, or the NBA strike, or whatever. And the way that we figured is the best way to do that is really through the people that inhabit the political process, and to deal with them as compelling personalities.

BRILL: Give me an example of an article—particularly in recent issues—that you think really is emblematic of the mission.

KENNEDY: I think that there are two main kinds of articles [that] do that for us. One is a piece which has not appeared yet [on Minnesota Democratic Senator] Paul Wellstone. [He] is not a terribly well-known senator, but yet [was] probably going to run for president. [He] is known as this kind of quirky eccentric within the Senate, very liberal. And not much has been reported on him. And he's had a fascinating life. He came from a very interesting background, quite passionate, quite aggressive, and feisty. He was a boxer, and that informs all his sensibilities. And you read about him, and all of a sudden, instead of just a guy you see who's in the Senate, you have a sense that you have a proximity to him as a person, to his lifestyle, to his upbringing—that you didn't have before—that I think only a magazine can do [and] TV can't.



No one likes to have their hard work dismissed. But I don't lose sleep over it. We are the largest political magazine in the country now, which is an achievement.

Conversely, when you have familiar people who have a proven ability to get the attention of the masses—like a John Travolta—talking about politics, talking about what he thinks about it, I think people are interested in that. Maybe not the Washington cognoscenti, but I think that it's interesting for the kind of people who we're going for to have that exchange. To hear politicians talk about popular culture, [such as Ohio Republican Congressman] John Kasich talking about his first Grateful Dead concert, which [was] in an article that we had before, or Tony Blankley [Newt Gingrich's former press secretary] on what it was like to be a conservative who smoked marijuana in a university in the late sixties.

BRILL: You just mentioned the difference between the cognoscenti and everybody else. There seems to be a gap, in terms of the perception of this magazine. Washington insiders say this magazine does not have the inside story; there's no buzz about it on Capitol Hill. But when we talk to the people who subscribe to it, they like it. Does that bother you that there's that gap? Is that gap bridgeable?

KENNEDY: We didn't want to be the *National Journal*. We've had one politician on our cover, Newt Gingrich, and we've had an old photograph of Richard Nixon. And when you have in your inaugural issue Madonna talking about, "If I were President," clearly it had not been our objective to woo the folks in Washington. They have *The Hotline*, they have C-SPAN, they have *The [Weekly] Standard*, they have *The New Republic*. They have their own discourse, their own conversations.

BRILL: Do you care if they dismiss it?

KENNEDY: Sure. No one likes to have their hard work dismissed. But I don't lose sleep over that. [We] are the largest political magazine in the country now, which is, after three years, an achievement. We have the numbers, and we have the audience that we wanted to get. And if the two shall meet, great—and I think, occasionally, that they do.

I also think *George* is a little bit of a closet read. There's a sense of *George*, particularly [for] younger staffers, younger people on the Hill, [being] a paradigm of politics that they understand. And if they don't read it to get the latest on the budget debate, that's fine. But if

they read it because it's [got] an interesting article on Wellstone, or someone got an interesting thing on [Arizona Republican Senator] John McCain, and there's some great photographs that have never been there before, then I think we've done our job.

BRILL: What do you think your biggest mistake has been, editorially? What would you take back?

KENNEDY: (Pause) I think the magazine is more explicitly political now. We maybe shoehorned, forced, the popular-culture stuff in.

BRILL: What's an example?

KENNEDY: I don't want to name names. Well, why not? Demi Moore was doing, I think it was *Striptease*, right? That was going to be a big movie. She has an affair in the movie with a senator, I think, or something like that, so there was, tangentially, a political aspect to it. And so we had her on the cover talking about sexual politics. And that's not what people really want to hear about from her. You can't just take any movie, and you can't just take any person, 'cause people smell when you're trying to give them a bait and switch. So now we confine ourselves to what movies are dealing with a political topic, sort of a compelling

social issue. For instance, *A Civil Action*. There were other, more glamorous folks we could have put on the cover, but they weren't going to be about a political movie. And we sort of made the choice: We're going to confine ourselves to these things. And we're not just going to put someone in a string bikini on the cover.

ABIGAIL POGREBIN: But when you say it's more explicitly political now, do you mean it also has more politics?

KENNEDY: Yeah. Because what we've found from researching was that people like the proximity of the popular-culture aspects to it. They got it. A lot of our reader mail is people who said, *I never thought I would like a political magazine before. I never bought one. I'm really starting to understand it. I appreciate the nonbiased aspect of it.* But they don't want too much pop-culture stuff in there. Just like in *Rolling Stone*, they don't want too much politics. They want mostly music and a little bit of politics. In our magazine they want mostly politics and a little bit of popular culture. And when the balance gets out of whack, I think it [becomes] a problem. Which is good for me, because actually I know more about the political world than I do about the entertainment world.

BRILL: Tell me about your own involvement in the editorial process. If I look through a table of contents, how many of the stories in there—big or little—would be your ideas?

KENNEDY: It depends. Some issues more than others.

BRILL: In the current issue you've got [former] President Reagan on the cover. Is that something where you said, *Let's do that?*

KENNEDY: What really happens is, we have meetings with the senior staff, and there are things that interest me, and there are things that interest them, and we talk about them. And, in a kind of Socratic method, we vet the ideas. And the ones that stand up under that scrutiny, and the ones [for] which we have a writer that can deliver it, get done in the magazine. There was always, from the beginning of this magazine, a certain skepticism of me. Was I [the] front man for this?

BRILL: That's why I'm asking.

KENNEDY: Frankly, I'm not sure I want to dignify it with an answer.

BRILL: That's why I didn't ask it directly.

KENNEDY: (Laughs) This enterprise has consumed almost now six years of my life. It came at considerable, personal kind of risk.

There [were] a lot of people that would have loved to see this be a farce, and it hasn't been. And I don't really care what people think as far as my involvement. I care what the people who work here think. And it works, and our readers seem to [think] we put out a good product. So I'm as involved as [an] editor in chief should be.

BRILL: Do you read everything that's in the magazine?

KENNEDY: Do I read every word? Mmm, no. I'll skim stories, and I'll get very involved in some stories that I think are important, and really line-edit [them]. And other ones—for instance, the columnists—I don't get as involved in, because they work with separate editors.

BRILL: What about on the business side?

KENNEDY: Well, I'm an owner, and not many editor in chiefs are owners. And I think that since part of the mission of the magazine is the challenge of *Could you really marry the commercial opportunities that magazines really need to live by and politics?*, [then] it's appropriate that I be the spokesman.

BRILL: You sound defensive.

KENNEDY: Oh, I'm not defensive. But I think it's quite important that I proselytize, that I make the case for *George*.

BRILL: And that includes making the case to advertisers?

KENNEDY: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

BRILL: One ingredient it seems you've avoided is [what] I'll call "Your Tax Dollars at Work"—or anything about how the government really works. Why doesn't a magazine about politics have that kind of thing in the mix?

KENNEDY: Well, I'm not sure I really agree that there isn't a process aspect to the magazine because, actually, I think there is. And particularly in the front of the book there is more [of that] kind of the arcana of government and politics. The government-waste thing is an old faithful, everyone does it. We do these top tens every now and then that are sort of government excesses, or bad laws, or failed bills, or what the do-nothing Congress didn't do. But we don't want to fall back in a reflexive, antigovernment, the-government-is-fleeing-you, politicians-are-fleeing-you position. There's enough of that and we would rather sort of focus on the things that are exclusive to us.

POGREBIN: What about investigative pieces? Do you feel that's something you want more of?

KENNEDY: Yeah, I would love more. I mean, as you probably have found, we did one on Scientology in Germany. We've done a couple on the drug industry. Investigative pieces are difficult. We tried to do one on the Apollo Theater [in New York]; it didn't pan out. And I find that investigative reporters are a really unique batch. And that for every eight or ten that you assign, maybe you get two that really work and really deliver the goods.

BRILL: I always tell people that if I were running a journalism school, I would get rid of the whole curriculum. And the only thing that would happen is that the students would be written about. The best training for any journalist is to have someone write a profile on you, and have it published in your hometown newspa-

per. Then you understand everything about journalism. If I'm right, that makes you the best qualified journalist on the planet.

KENNEDY: (Laughs) Right.

BRILL: How do you think your life makes you—or doesn't make you—a more sensitive journalist, or [does it just make] you want to be more vengeful?

KENNEDY: I think, to be honest, it's an advantage and a disadvantage. I have a perspective on politics that I would say is unique, and one [that] I created a magazine around. There's been enough written about my family that I have notions about journalism, when it's practiced well and when it's not. However, I think good journalism has a very strong point of view, and downplays facts which go against you and plays up facts which support you.

BRILL: A good piece should downplay facts that go against you?

KENNEDY: Yeah, like in a good argument. Like a lawyer makes a good argument. You are trying to persuade, and you craft an argument accordingly. So I think that my own experience has made me probably more sensitive to a fairness issue. And perhaps the pieces have suffered, in that it's fun to read a really harsh, mean piece about somebody.

POGREBIN: What [does] it mean to you that something is non-partisan or postpartisan, words that you have used to describe the magazine?

KENNEDY: I think the current political imbroglio has indicated that real people across America do not have the same investment in partisan politics as people in Washington do. And I think that you find people want solutions, people want government to work, they want to feel good about politics. And they'll vote the person rather than the issue a lot of the time. And I think that happens increasingly. Part of the reason why I think the Washington community maybe has not embraced *George* to the extent that readers across America have [is that] there is a populist element to it. We are interested in exploring the outsider sensibility about politics. And that is kind of postpartisan—or it's a lot more nonpartisan than it is in Washington.

POGREBIN: What I heard a lot from the [political and media] elite was, if [*George*] had a point of view it would have more edge, it would count more, it would matter more. But the readers said they like it. They don't feel like anybody is coming down on one side, and they're tired of that. But it does also feel like it's in no-man's-land. Does that bother you?



I think the current political imbroglio has indicated that real people across America do not have the same investment in partisan politics as people in Washington do.

KENNEDY: It is something which is the essential challenge of this magazine. I think a lot of people expected there would be a brief flurry of mouthing about [being] nonpartisan, and then it would turn into John Kennedy's soapbox. And it can't be that. The way you address that is, your stories have strong points of view, and strong sensibilities, but that you have a variety of different ones in there. The thing that people really respond to the most is that they do feel that they are not being led around by the nose. And in terms of Washington, we get a

lot of access. Maybe they just think that we'll just be nice to everybody. But I do think that they think that there is an element of fairness, which, given my own experience, is very important.

BRILL: Suppose the magazine assigns a piece about somebody, and that somebody doesn't want to pose for a photo. Would you assign a photographer to ambush that person?

KENNEDY: It would never be necessary, because there's so much pickup [photos available from agencies] of the people that we do. I know what the question is—would I assign a paparazzi? And it's sort of a trite question, because you don't have to.

BRILL: Let's see if I can make it a little less trite. Most of the pickup you'd buy would be from those same paparazzi.

KENNEDY: No, not necessarily.

BRILL: But you wouldn't buy one of those shots, or you would?

KENNEDY: No, I would buy them. I would get the best pickup that was available that I could.

BRILL: Even if it's [a] photographer who ambushed someone?

KENNEDY: I'm not a big moralizer about the paparazzi. I may not like it, and it may be a difficult aspect of my life, but it's my problem.

BRILL: You don't begrudge them doing the job they do?

KENNEDY: It's not something that I think is worth talking [about].

already about what he wants this to come to. That you're not just sitting down in a conversation and see[ing] where it will lead; there's sort of a setup going on. And I just find the people I interview are people whom I'm interested in. I worked in the Reagan Justice Department during law school, I clerked for William Bradford Reynolds in the civil-rights division. Not because I agreed with him, but because I was just interested in how they thought, which was obviously completely opposite to what I had grown up with.

So I just go in to an interview, and I just ask questions that I am curious about. And, more often than not, it starts out stilted, but, [as with] Richard Mellon Scaife, he just felt comfortable, and he just talked. It's not my nature to be inquisitorial; I think it is my nature to be curious. I'm thinking about the people who read us. You're sort of being a proxy for them.

BRILL: Doesn't it drive you crazy to read the stuff that belittles you and the magazine, when you're actually coming to work every day?

KENNEDY: Well, there's a lot less of it now than there was in the beginning.

BRILL: Did you ever think, *Why did I get into this?*

KENNEDY: No, because I knew that was going to happen. I knew that it would irritate people no end—the supreme irony of me

going and joining a media conglomerate to be a journalist! And then to have it kind of work fairly well? I mean, we're still in business, you know?

BRILL: But you like to be liked.

KENNEDY: I don't really like to be liked. I never look for approval from the journalistic community. If it comes, great. But I didn't really see that as the group that I had to answer to. And then the

more condescending it got, the more that I knew that I was doing the right thing. But that has stopped now, I think. I mean, we're like the Conan O'Brien of magazines. You know, we're still here.

BRILL: In your column in the [February] issue, you [wrote] something about how the idea of politicians as role models is a fraud. That's what you think?

KENNEDY: No. I think that people don't think of politicians as role models anymore, that there is an inherent contradiction. On one side, we perpetuate the notion that politicians should be role models, and on the other, we don't treat them as such.

BRILL: Don't you think they can be, should be?

KENNEDY: I think they are, merely by doing what they're doing. And if they have a marital infidelity or if they did something in college that they wouldn't do 20 years later, I don't think that makes them a role model. But I think for an industry now that has been [as] demarketed as politics, who wants to go into politics now anymore? People just roll their eyes, and I think that's really sad.

When my father was president, there were 30 people covering the White House. There are now 3,000, and they're all chasing the same rabbit. So it becomes very difficult to maintain perfection under that kind of scrutiny. You're putting an impossible burden on them—and you're setting yourself up for a sense of failure about the political system. And I think that that burden is unfair, and it makes good people stay away from government.

BRILL: I've got to ask you one snide, condescending question.

KENNEDY: Sure.

BRILL: Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro, John Travolta, Tom



If a magazine is not reflective of one person's soul, then it probably stinks. What's the point of me having a magazine if I'm not going to use it in some way that is personal?

It's not a pressing public principle.

BRILL: If you were the editor of *Salon*, would you have reported on the sex life of [Illinois Republican Congressman] Henry Hyde?

KENNEDY: We may not have done it, but was I dismayed that it happened? No. Because I think that any time there is an element of hypocrisy lingering, it's interesting to read about it.

BRILL: So you would or would not have done it?

KENNEDY: I really don't know. For us to do it, it would have looked weird. You know, it's inconsistent. There are obviously my own family issues in which it looks hypocritical. It looks too partisan. So would I have done it in our magazine? No. *Salon* is obviously a magazine you know where they're coming from. They're fighting that fight. So was it appropriate for them to do it? Yeah, I think so. It's not as appropriate for us to do it.

POGREBIN: When you sat down to do a Richard Mellon Scaife interview, [a lot of reporters called it] a coup. Everybody wanted [to talk to the millionaire well known for funding right-wing publications and think tanks]. And some people have said that you have a kind of Larry King style of letting people's words speak for themselves, but not necessarily nailing them to the wall. Is that something that is conscious?

KENNEDY: Well, I'm very flattered by the comparison. (Laughs) I find interviews difficult, because I don't like to really do them, present situation excluded, and I know, having done a few of them, what makes me uncomfortable and what makes me feel noncooperative.

BRILL: Which is what?

KENNEDY: Which is sort of a sense that a reporter has an idea

Hanks, Christy Turlington, Johnny Depp. You're getting the point, right?

KENNEDY: Mmm-hmm.

BRILL: Bruce Willis, Charlize Theron, whoever she is.

KENNEDY: Hey, she's on the cover of *Vanity Fair* this month, and we had her first.

BRILL: Well, okay, fair enough. My point is, if you take the last year of covers,

with all of the movie stars, that package doesn't say this is a magazine about politics. Are you doing with the magazine what people get frustrated and angry at politicians for, which is doing something that's popular, that brings in a crowd, and then, after the election, changing the message on them?

KENNEDY: I started this as a business, and my objective is that this be a real business. Because if it's not a business then there's no point in doing it. And I don't shy away from that. Having familiar people from popular culture integrated within the political content of our magazine, that is the essence of what the magazine is, which is that politics has migrated into the realm of popular culture. And in order to maintain the attention and the interests of Americans, or viewers, they have to use the same kind of attention-getting device as popular culture, that politicians have to become personalities, in the show-business sense. And by virtue of the fact that there's been an explosion of media, personalities have an opportunity to become political. And that's really the germ of what *George* magazine is saying. I think we've made, perhaps, an error on one or two covers. I don't want to offend her, but Charlize Theron I think was arguably one of those. We were doing a thing about American folklore, and she was commenting about America.

It would really be unsatisfying to me to have some somber politician on the cover, and we gather dust in the back of some newsstand somewhere. I mean, if I sell 180,000 copies of a political magazine—man, I am happy. And so I could do something else, with some drawing of [South Carolina Republican Senator] Strom Thurmond and sell 20[,000], and maybe I'm serious and consequential in Washington. But if the people that I'm trying to reach are passing me by, then that's a failure.

POGREBIN: What about Maureen Dowd's quote: "Celebrity distorts democracy, by giving the rich, beautiful and famous more authority than they deserve?" The idea that it's one thing to sell magazines, but to give celebrities any sense of weight, [for instance] what Pamela [Anderson] Lee has to say, is taking it a step further than you should?

KENNEDY: Maureen Dowd writes, as far as I can tell, mostly about the personal, about celebrity, and about the personally trivial. And it makes for interesting [reading]. The reason why she's interesting is because she writes about the most kind of provocative personal points of people in politics. And so that comment seems sort of freighted with contradiction coming from where it does.

BRILL: Should the media report about the sex lives of kids of politicians?

KENNEDY: It depends how interesting their sex lives are.

BRILL: You really mean that?

KENNEDY: I think it's a broad question. I think you should give me a context.

BRILL: Eleanor Mondale [the daughter of former vice-president Walter Mondale and the subject of a gossip February story that



Do I feel a frustration about being an observer [of politics], not a participant? Yeah, that's what I have in my blood. But would I want to go in, with the hell that would envelop my life?

had little connection to politics]. That's the context.

KENNEDY: Listen, I understand the irony in that story appearing in *George*. But that's kind of a racy, fun story, and something that I would read.

BRILL: And if she calls you up and says, "How can you, of all people, publish a story like that?"

KENNEDY: I'd say: "Hey, man—you know, I've been there. It's a pain in the neck, but, you know, it ain't as bad as all that."

POGREBIN: Looking back on your famous editor's note [in which Kennedy wrote about two of his cousins' marital problems and posed tastefully nude for an accompanying picture], would you do anything differently?

KENNEDY: That's almost one of [our] best-selling issues ever, so I don't think so. Without reinterpreting the letter, because hopefully the letter [spoke] for itself, though it was deliberately oblique, I did that because that was something I wanted to say and something that I had felt strongly about, which is, we judge harshly people in the public eye for being human. The picture had to accompany the letter, because otherwise the letter would have looked like I was being judgmental. And the picture had to accompany the letter because the picture exposed me to judgment.

And it was not an exhibitionistic thing. There [are] 40 photographers in Hyannis during the summer that photograph me swimming [and the photos are] far more revealing. The reason I [talked] about myself in the letter was just to reinforce [that] I was not exempting myself from what I was talking about.

BRILL: So you came into the office and said I have this really great idea, *I'm going to write this piece and it's going to be accompanied with a nude picture of me*, [and everyone said], *Great idea, John*.

KENNEDY: They were horrified. This is how I have to do it. Listen, your magazine is obviously the product of some strong opinions you have. And if a magazine is not reflective of one person's soul, then it probably stinks. And sometimes, depending on how I'm feeling, I just kind of let it loose. Otherwise, what's the point, right? What's the point for me to have a magazine if I'm not going to use it in some way that is personal?

BRILL: You seem not overwhelmingly thrilled about being in the public spotlight. Why do people keep saying that you're going to run for office?

KENNEDY: (Laughs) I don't know.

BRILL: Do you think you ever will?

KENNEDY: I don't have any immediate desire to. Obviously this magazine brings you right up against politics, and I like that. However, do I feel a frustration about being an observer, not a participant, sometimes? Yeah, because that's my background, that's what I have in my blood. But, yet, would I want to go in, with the hell that would envelop my life? Not at this juncture of my life. I just got married. I like my privacy. ■

FOX PLAYS COP

Fox Files doesn't just report on Internet pedophiles, it helps put them away. Why just cover the justice system when you can be part of it? ● BY JEFF POOLEY

JOHAN HANCOCK IS ON HIS WAY to a bust, bouncing along in the back of a surveillance van. "We're all journalists, everybody here," he declares over the static of a cell phone. Hancock is news director of the Investigative News Network, a Los Angeles-based contractor whose main client is Fox Television. "There are very few [news shows] that do heavy felonies," he explains. "That's our specialty."

One of Hancock's freelancers, Jennifer Hersey, is set to rendezvous with a man she met over the Internet. INN's hidden cameras and microphones will record the whole thing.

Hersey, 22, poses as a 13-year-old on the Web, posting her picture in chat rooms for adoles-

Jennifer Hersey, 22, poses on line as a 13-year-old and agrees to meet adult men—while Fox's secret cameras roll.

cents. When leering men contact her in cyberspace, Hersey plays along, exchanging messages and—if it gets serious—agreeing to meet them. With Hancock's cameras rolling, INN gets the footage it needs for its client, Fox. And police get their arrest.

"She looks about thirteen years old," says Hancock, boasting that "she's done over thirty" such stings for Fox.

Hancock wants the conviction. INN gathers "whatever is necessary to prosecute," he explains, and then hands it all—e-mail, chat-room transcripts, videotapes of meetings, the results of background checks—over to the police. Says Hancock: "We build an entire case first from the ground up."

To call this a new role for journalists—who are typically reluctant to give information to the police—would be an understatement.

HANCOCK AND INN ARE GATHERING material for *Fox Files*, the network's newsmagazine. "Stopping The Stalkers" headlined its December 17 episode. The segment, an update of a story that ran during *Fox Files*'s summer test run, chronicled ten Fox busts. (The stings premiered on local Fox newscasts in 1997.)

"Stalkers" opens with trademark bluster: A man shouts, "Nobody told me Fox was the one that did this to me!" Then comes a voice-over: "*Fox Files* took Internet stalkers from their PCs and put them in prison cells. We're at it again, catching

more perverts who trap children in their web. Busted! We're stopping the stalkers."

These are not idle boasts. Of the ten men featured in the story, two are currently serving prison time; three others are on probation. Four more are on trial or awaiting a court date. The charges range from trafficking in child pornography (which often follows Hersey's Internet contact with the men) to violating laws that make it a felony to solicit a person you think is a minor—even if that person turns out to be an adult.

"It's an ongoing project," Hancock explains. "Fox is dedicated pretty much to this kind of thing."

FOX FILES IS THE NETWORK'S FIRST FORAY into the profitable newsmagazine business since the 1996 birth of the Fox News Channel. *Fox Files*'s ratings are roughly one-third of those earned by top-rated *60 Minutes*. But its young audience—at 36, its median viewer is about 20 years younger than a *60 Minutes* viewer—is coveted by advertisers.

"We are real and very street," says Pamela Browne, the show's senior producer. "We will show you parts of America that others might not spend enough time looking into." Calls to the show's correspondent, Eric Shawn, and cohost, Catherine Crier, were returned by Fox News spokesman Robert Zimmerman, who said the two would not comment. "They're just the faces and names here," he says of their roles in the Internet segments. "They have

Assistant editor Jeff Pooley wrote in February about an Oregon reporter who exposed the use of child farm labor.



no editorial input, anyway.” (Fox’s promotional materials tout the fact that Crier is a former state judge.)

Stories on hard-edged topics like teenage strippers, gang rituals, and methamphetamine overdoses testify to the *Fox Files* formula: Expose the underbelly of urban America. Of course, lighter fare also abounds, with stories on Princess Diana, the Spice Girls, and the World Wrestling Federation.

But *Fox Files*’s police-type role is what most sets it apart. It represents a quantum leap forward from another example of Fox’s “reality” programming: *America’s Most Wanted*. On that show, producers accept tips from police and viewers and prepare segments in the hope that viewers will recognize the perpetrators and alert the police.

But *Fox Files* doesn’t wait for the cops. “They contacted us,” says Michael McCann, a Framingham, Massachusetts, detective. “We talked daily,” says McCann, who arrested a man in a Fox sting. Hancock “is acting as a police officer, as far as I’m concerned.”

Defense attorneys for the accused men are indignant and cry entrapment. Robert Boyce, a San Diego attorney who represents former kindergarten teacher David Hatch, argues that “[Hersey] essentially used the abilities of a 22-year-old to entice this guy into a relationship....She does everything she can to lure him into breaking the law.” Hersey was aggressively flirtatious, he says, and suggested the meetings herself. “He’s essentially lost his career,” Boyce charges, “so that she could make hers.”

The unedited video of that meeting shows Hersey prodding Hatch about sex 14 times as the two sit at an outdoor table. “Are we gonna have sex tomorrow?” the supposed 13-year-old asks at one point. Hatch’s response: “I doubt it.” Hersey is undaunted: “I would if you wanted me to.” After he repeatedly demurs, Hersey asks him to expose himself. “I want to see it,” she says. Hatch seems amenable but insists on moving to the privacy of his car, where he allows Hersey to take snap-

shots of his genitals.

In the edited *Fox Files* broadcast, by contrast, a narrator insists that it was Hatch who was pushing for sex. “When that didn’t work,” the narrator continues, “Hatch had her come over to his car for a little show and tell.”

The video shifts to Hatch, whose groin has been intentionally blurred. “He showed,” the narrator continues. “She told.” The video then cuts to Hersey on the witness stand. “He started to masturbate,” she testifies.

“In the Hatch case, [INN] pretty much did everything,” says Patricia



Tale of the tape: Fox’s raw video doesn’t quite match its account of this sting.

Atwill, a San Diego deputy district attorney who is prosecuting the case. “They’ve been very cooperative.” Hersey, she adds, is the prosecution’s “main witness.” Hatch has pleaded not guilty to 23 charges, including an attempted lewd act with a child.

“I was always of the opinion that journalists don’t create the story,” complains Carl Cornwell, who represented a man who sent Hersey money and a plane ticket so she could meet him in Kansas.

His client’s conduct was reprehensible, Cornwell concedes, but would not have occurred if Hersey hadn’t been forward: “Jennifer kept saying, ‘I want to meet you. I want to meet you.’”

“We thought about [an entrapment defense], but it wasn’t a government agency,” he says. According to Cornwell and two other lawyers, entrapment does not apply when a private organization is

gathering the evidence. (Cornwell’s client pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography in May and is serving a 41-month sentence.)

INN’s Hancock denies any entrapment: “We never, ever make the first contact.” Hersey waits for men to approach her. Then, says Hancock, “we’ll answer a question with a question....We simply mirror what they say....They have to be the aggressor.” He adds: “These guys are making a conscious decision to destroy a child’s life.”

“Everything that airs on *Fox Files* adheres to the standards of Fox News, and we’re responsible for it,” insists Browne, the show’s senior producer. “I have no problem with saying that I find [soliciting underage sex] an illegal activity and revolting as well....Gee, I think most people don’t like the idea of the Internet being used by pedophiles.”

Besides, Browne argues, when Hersey—“our undercover agent”—is sent child pornography, she is legally obligated to turn it over to police.

BUT ARE THESE TACTICS—POSING AS underage, setting up police stings, handing over evidence, testifying for prosecutors—overstepping the bounds of reporting? “The more active the involvement, the greater the risk to the resulting story,” says David Logan, a Wake Forest University law professor who specializes in media law and ethics. “You run the risk of changing the behavior to support a preconceived story line.”

Brant Houston, executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., a trade group, worries about the erosion of press independence: “Is the public going to feel comfortable about going to journalists about cop problems if the journalists are working so closely with police?”

Keene, New Hampshire, detective James McLaughlin is also skeptical. McLaughlin, whose Internet police work has led to 112 arrests, says he would be reluctant to cooperate with a news outlet: “It’s one of those cases where you feel uncomfortable with it but you don’t know why.”

Carl Cornwell, the defense attorney, has a hunch: “Fox tapped into people’s darkest recesses, and exploited it.” ■



People who have faced adversity lend *The New York Times's* Rick Bragg their voices. "The personalities are complicated," he says of his story subjects, "but the themes are simple."

RICK BRAGG KNOWS WHERE TO FIND A STORY. It's not in the glare of TV cameras or amid crowds of reporters swarming in peoples front yards. A story, his work shows, is in the people who are living it.

Lately, Bragg, 39, has commanded considerable attention for his memoir, *All Over But the Shoutin'*, about growing up poor in rural Alabama. But his most revealing work appears in the pages of *The New York Times*, where he has covered the South since 1994. Bragg has visited misery many times over, looking for regular people affected by catastrophic events. In the past four years, he has written about Susan Smith murdering her children, the deadly blast in Oklahoma City, the Jonesboro, Arkansas, school killings, hurricanes, floods, and fires. Instead of rehashing events or giving in to sentimentalism, his pieces resonate with the

When hardship strikes, Rick Bragg tells the stories of those whose lives have changed.

BRAGGING Rights

BY KIMBERLY CONNIFF

voices of people working through tragedy.

"The beauty of Rick Bragg is that he can report a straight hard-news story," says Bill Kovach, curator of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, where Bragg had a fellowship in 1993 (Kovach is also this magazine's ombudsman). "But he has the ability to write that story so you think it's a feature story. It just happens to be written by a wordsmith."

A day after the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, for example, Bragg sketched a portrait of the town's reaction to the blast. "Before the dust and the rage had a chance to settle," he penned, "a chilly rain started to fall on the blasted-out wreck of what had once been an office building, and on the shoulders of the small army of police, firefighters, and medical technicians....They were not used to this, if anyone is." He revisited the story when Timothy McVeigh was convicted in a Denver federal court two years later: "After the explosion, people learned to write left-handed, to tie just one shoe....They learned, in homes where children had played, to stand the

quiet. They learned to sleep with pills, to sleep alone."

Last March, when two preteen boys killed five people at a school in Jonesboro, Bragg talked to locals who became unsuspecting players in the event's aftermath: paramedics, a radio deejay popular with teenagers, and a flower-shop owner whose 75 arrangements a day suddenly became 200. "This is a place that has learned to cherish a slow day," he began. After former Alabama governor George Wallace's death in September, Bragg went to Birmingham and gave equal time to the former anti-integrationist's friends, foes, and the surprising number of people (black and white) who had forgiven him.

But Rick Bragg's most enduring pieces, says *New York Times* national editor Dean Baquet, are the ones he finds himself—stories unconnected to breaking news events.

On All Saint's Day last year, for example, Bragg wrote about mourners in a poor man's cemetery in New Orleans, where "the dead are housed not in ornate crypts but buried in the soil." In this "boneyard for paupers," wrote Bragg, people "cannot change the fact that, in death as in life, people with money can sleep easier." And last November, he profiled a man who served 30 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit before being acquitted. "In the long, narrow house on Lopez Street...every inside door is ajar, cabinets are open, kitchen drawers are pulled half open," Bragg wrote. "[Hayes Williams] is not messy....He is just a man who knows what the inside of a box looks like, when it closes shut."

Perhaps because he has seen hardship himself, people who have faced adversity lend Bragg their voices. "He draws people out in ways that show up in his reporting," says Paul Tash, executive editor of the *St. Petersburg Times* and Bragg's former boss. This quality earned Bragg the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 1996.

The people Bragg writes about are perhaps the best judges of his effectiveness. "[Bragg's story] was proof...that maybe to some degree I didn't suffer for nothing," says Hayes Williams, the former prison inmate. "[Now] maybe people understand the injustice that happened."

Bragg says he is genuinely concerned with those he covers, but he also knows he can't let their despair take over. "I don't think anything that happens to us in covering those stories is remotely as painful as it is to [those living it]," says Bragg. "So I don't think we have a right to claim to be victims." He has been known to let his passion for a pretty phrase overwhelm his prose, but Bragg's colleagues say he is able to write about tragedy without letting his stories bleed with emotion. "Writing that stuff and not being maudlin is really difficult," says Baquet.

Bragg, who recently moved to the *Times's* Miami bureau, says he just lets people speak for themselves. "The personalities are complicated, but the themes are simple," he says, "You're just in there trying to understand." ■

Assistant editor Kimberly Conniff wrote about investigative journalist and author Hector Feliciano in the February issue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN SMITH

World Radio History

TOM DUBOCQ

REPORTER TOM DUBOCQ OF *The Miami Herald* believes the best stories he finds on his so-called public-money beat are those that use familiar objects to spark reader outrage over government waste. "I try to look at situations that I think exemplify bad public spending and policy that people can identify with," he says.



The Miami Herald's Tom Dubocq exposes governmental waste of public money.

Dubocq, a member of the paper's investigations team, did just that with a December 20 article about how the annual cost of portable toilets leased by the Miami-Dade County government for use by Miami International Airport workers had "soared like a jet" in just two years to nearly \$600,000. Even more revealing was his discovery that—though much of the money went to cleaning the units twice a day, seven days a week—ground crews found them too filthy to use.

The toilet exposé was the latest in a series of Dubocq stories that have called attention to questionable airport spending. Among his previous efforts: a September article about how the cost of a car wash had almost tripled over its original estimate and a November piece about how a plan to recycle wooden cargo pallets turned into a "money pit."

"For years, we've tried to tackle the subject of runaway cost at the airport," says Dubocq, 46, who, with the exception of a four-month

stint in Dayton, has spent his two-decade journalism career in south Florida. Those efforts failed, Dubocq says, because their scope was too broad. Portable toilets may not be grand, but they're easily understood. "The public responds to these little things."

So, it turns out, does government. Upon touring the toilets with Dubocq, then airport-maintenance chief John Hamill told the reporter he planned to demand improved performance from the contractor.

Herald competitors, though quick to knock the paper for missing plenty of stories, agree that Dubocq is among the paper's bright stars. "At a newspaper that's fallen on hard times, he continues to do stellar work," says Charles Strouse, managing editor of the weekly *Miami New Times*. Adds Edward Wasserman, chairman and editor in chief of the *Daily Business Review*, "I think he's done a good job of helping to keep the flame of good, solid investigative reporting alive over there."

It isn't just Dubocq's rivals who respect his talents. County auditors have invited Dubocq to conduct a seminar for them. "They want," he says, "to know a little bit about how I do my job." —*Ed Shanahan*

SUSAN WATTS

FOR SUSAN WATTS, 1998 WAS turning out to be a very good year. In February, the New York *Daily News* staff photographer received two awards in the World Press Photo contest for her series of pictures depicting the life of a Bronx, New York, prostitute. Then, in

June, Watts got a bit of sweet justice when she received a personal apology from New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani for her arrest during a construction workers' protest in Manhattan. She had been photographing the rally for the *Daily News* when a police officer pulled her aside and arrested her.

There were other milestones, as well. In July, Watts, 30, completed her first year as president of the New York Press Photographers Association, the first woman elected to the post. And, in September, her work

was featured at the prestigious Visa Pour l'Image photojournalism festival in France.

But in mid-November, Watts's fortune turned. Together with *Life* senior writer Charles Hirshberg, Watts traveled to Honduras to document the devastation wrought by Hurricane Mitch on the Central American nation and the relief efforts of volunteer U.S. military personnel. A week into the assignment, as the two traveled from a military base outside the capital, they were abducted and robbed by two gunmen. Hirshberg and Watts came face to face with the barrel of a pistol, but in a moment of confusion, the journalists took a chance and escaped. Watts's bags containing her equipment and exposed film were stolen.

Within a day, Hirshberg and Watts returned safely to New York, but they were distraught over the stolen film and the story that would never appear. "All the pictures I'd made kept running through my mind," she says. "It was horrifying, thinking about the people we met and the hopes they had that we were going to bring this story back here."

At the suggestion of a local hotel manager, *Life* posted a reward for the stolen bags. On December 31, Hirshberg and Watts received word that some bags containing almost all of their film had been retrieved and sent to New York City.

As of mid-January, the journalists were back at work on the story, which is slated for *Life's* March issue. How do the pictures look? Wait and see, they say, though Hirshberg adds, "You look at these pictures, and you just want to cry." —*Dimitra Kessenides*



Life senior writer Charles Hirshberg and photographer Susan Watts were kidnapped and robbed in Honduras.

Lights, Camera, (*A Civil*) Action

Touchstone Pictures's January release of *A Civil Action*, based on Jonathan Harr's 1995 book of the same title, has put the infamous Woburn case back in the news. In 1979, eight Massachusetts families sued corporate giants W.R. Grace & Co. and Beatrice Foods for their alleged contamination of local water supplies. The families, who lost five children and one adult to leukemia, claimed the deaths were caused by exposure to the tainted water. Discrepancies between the book and the movie—detailed below—show that it's probably best to watch the movie for its entertainment value, not for its accuracy. ● BY DIMITRA KESSENIDES AND BRIDGET SAMBURG

The Book



Comprehensive scientific exploration from both sides of the case: Experts provide evidence that supports *and* refutes the theory that contaminants from local factories entered the city's water supplies and caused the incidences of leukemia in the community.

The Movie



Simplistic presentation of the scientific and environmental evidence supporting the plaintiffs' case and no evidence refuting it whatsoever.

The Environmental Issue

Jan Schlichtmann



Plaintiffs' counsel Schlichtmann, the star of the book, is portrayed as a compassionate yet flawed personal-injury lawyer. While he plays a significant role in the suit, other lawyers, especially partner Kevin Conway, are central to the case's development.



Schlichtmann, a consultant on the movie, is portrayed as a hero who loses everything in his quest for the truth. With a "Get rich by doing good" motto, he spends his own and his partners' last penny. His work is exaggerated, while his partners' efforts are downplayed.

Jerome Facher

Facher, who represents Beatrice, is characterized as a talented, highly accomplished attorney who ultimately wins the case because of his skills, which Harr describes at length. He is respectful of his colleagues.

Eccentric, offbeat. Dismissive of both Schlichtmann and W.R. Grace attorney William Cheeseman.

William Cheeseman

A respected, competent attorney who goes after opposing counsel in a ruthless manner. Serves as counsel to W.R. Grace but is not the lead trial lawyer.

Bumbling, inept. Serves as W.R. Grace's lead trial lawyer. Name repeatedly mocked by lawyers and even the judge.

Judge Walter Skinner

Skinner, who oversees the litigation, is harsh and unbending, relentlessly attacking Schlichtmann. The question of Skinner's fairness remains ambiguous.

Biased against Schlichtmann and the plaintiffs. Hot-tempered and impatient, with no interest in fairness.

The Trial

Divided into two parts at the start of the proceedings. The plaintiffs never attend the proceedings.

Skinner separates the trial into two parts *after* the proceedings begin. Plaintiffs appear in the courtroom throughout the trial.

The Resolution

The Environmental Protection Agency begins investigating Woburn's water supplies in the seventies, long before the suit would be filed. Information revealed during the case contributes to the EPA's findings and its 1989 decision to fine Grace and Beatrice for the contamination. Harr details the trial and the appeals process that followed two years later. After the jury finds in favor of Beatrice and against Grace, Skinner sets the Grace verdict aside and orders a new trial. The plaintiffs accept a settlement offered by Grace of \$8 million but are given no apology.

As in the book, the plaintiffs and Grace reach an \$8 million settlement after the trial. But just before the jury reaches its verdict, Facher proposes settling the case for \$20 million. Schlichtmann does not accept. Broke and abandoned by his partners, Schlichtmann does not give up. In the end, he refers the matter to the EPA. Cheeseman says, "In the movie, it appeared as if the EPA had no interest in [the case] and knew nothing about it until Jan Schlichtmann notified them. Jan jumped on the bandwagon long after the EPA was doing its thing."



THE LAWYERS

ILLUSTRATIONS: SEK LEUNG; SNYDER/REUTERS (SCHLICHTMANN); D. JAMES (TRAVOLTA)



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MAKING THE BEST-SELLER LIST

The *New York Times* best-seller list is the most prestigious and important in publishing, but no one knows how it's put together. ● BY CHARLES KAISER

ONCE UPON A TIME, A book that made it onto a best-seller list had to be on sale in a store.

No more.

At 5:50 P.M. Eastern Time on January 3, 1999, the number-two book on Amazon.com's "Hot 100" list (updated hourly) was John Grisham's new novel, *The Testament*—even though the first copy would not be available commercially anywhere until four weeks later.

Welcome to the brave new world of best-seller lists.

Just as the Internet has revolutionized the decision-making process in the news business by accelerating the speed at which information flies around the globe, it has transformed the way book sales are tabulated in every medium.

A decade ago, the only available sales figures lagged two weeks behind reality; no one paid much attention to anything called a best-seller unless it had been so certified by *The New York Times*, and only 34 hardcover books had a chance of winning that distinction in any single week.

None of that is true in 1999.

On its website, the *Times* now lists 370 best-sellers in 12 different categories, including six groupings created specifically to soothe the bruised egos of independent booksellers. The main difference between the print and web versions of the *Times* lists is that in each of the major categories for hardcovers

In the December/January issue, Charles Kaiser wrote about how editors at The Buffalo News decide what goes on the front page.

and paperbacks, in fiction and non-fiction, the web version lists the top 35 sellers instead of just the top 15.

But these statistics are dwarfed by those produced by Amazon.com: The on-line retailer ranks several hundred thousand titles by sales; and hundreds of these are also ranked in 1 or more of 23 categories ranging from "Literature and Fiction" and "Kids" to regional best-sellers in New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Brazil. And unlike most other record keepers, Amazon starts taking orders (and tabulating them) weeks before a book is published; hence the high position of the Grisham novel four weeks before it was even available.

As a result, authors now have dozens of new opportunities to enter the once-exclusive club of best-sellerdom. But even with the new tabulations, the list that still matters most is the one printed every Sunday in *The New York Times Book Review*, the list that tries hardest to retain an aura of mystery around its methodology—hardly surprising in a business as notoriously un-businesslike as book publishing. "That's the Mount Everest that every aspiring author wants to climb," says Stuart Applebaum, a senior vice-president at Random House Inc. The list's methodology is "as closely guarded as the Coca-Cola formula—and knowing it would slake a lot

of thirst for knowledge among publishing people," Applebaum says.

For many reasons, the list the *Times* publishes in the *Book Review* remains vastly more influential than the longer lists posted on its website. First, far more people read the printed list than they do its electronic counterparts. Second, it is posted in thousands of bookstores around the country. Third, and most important, "it becomes self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating," says Applebaum, because a book's appearance on the list will often determine its location in stores, as well as whether—and how much—it will be discounted.

The list is periodically refined, often after some highly publicized attempt to manipulate its findings. Responsibility for compiling it was shifted to the then new *Times* political-polling unit in the 1970s. Always the subject of elaborate speculation in the publishing world, its managers publicly admit to only two official prejudices: "We decided right at the start to leave out Shakespeare and the Bible," *Times* news-surveys editor Michael Kagay explains.

But plenty of other factors guarantee that some authors whose books sell in the hundreds of thousands will never be graced by the imprimatur of the printed *Times* list.

The tiny type that appears below the list only tells you which outlets get included—not



which get left out. Just how those statistics are weighted is the source of endless conspiracy theories, most of them unfounded.

That's because most people don't understand that the list was never intended to reflect the sales of all books; its purpose is to track titles sold only in general-interest outlets. That means a book that sells big in gay bookstores or religious bookstores without crossing over into mainstream outlets will always be ignored. Also omitted are books like *The Breadman's Healthy Bread Book* (225,000 copies in print), because it is mostly sold in specialty stores, or *In the Kitchen With Bob* (239,000 copies), because most of its copies were sold through QVC, where author Bob Bowersox is a host.

Deborah Hofmann, Kagay's assistant in charge of all of the *Times's* lists, concedes these limitations. She calls the QVC example "plausible," because the *Times* is only trying to reflect the taste of a person who is "going into a bookstore and has a choice of many, many different books, and not just

being targeted with a few books. That's the same reason we don't deal with direct mail or literary clubs....And we don't use just limited-interest bookstores."

Other books barely appear on the *Times* list because of the whim of the editor of the *Book Review*, who decides which are pure nonfiction and which belong in the "Advice, How-to, and Miscellaneous" category. The third list was actually created in the 1980s after publishers lobbied for a separate category for such books, a glut of which was keeping more substantial volumes off the list. "It always bothered me that the serious books that belonged on the best-seller list were not appearing there because of the craze for how-to books," says Arthur Gelb, who oversaw cultural coverage at the *Times* when the change was made. He denies that the third list was added in response to pressure from publishers.

But in the book business, no good turn ever goes unprotested. Last winter, Nan Talese, who runs her own imprint at Doubleday, was baffled when *Great Political Wit*, edited by Bob Dole, still hadn't appeared on the nonfiction list,

even though there were over 100,000 copies in print and the book was selling rapidly. "We asked why it wasn't there, and they told us it had been put into the how-to category," says Talese. That list only has 4 slots, compared with 15 for the nonfiction list. Eventually, Dole's book appeared for just one week in the how-to category—a shorter run than it would have notched on the longer list.

THE RISE OF THE big chains such as Barnes & Noble, Inc., and Borders Books and Music has meant a sharp decline in the number of independent bookstores. In the last seven years, membership in the American Booksellers Association has dropped from 4,400 to 3,300 members, according to an ABA spokesman. The big chains—and big publishers—have increasingly focused their resources on making huge sales from a much smaller number of "super authors." And since lists like the *Times's* measure the velocity of sales, rather than their aggregate totals, this has dramati-



| This Week | Fiction | Last Week | Weeks On List |
|-----------|---|-----------|---------------|
| 1 | A MAN IN FULL , by Tom Wolfe. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.95.) Life in Atlanta on the cusp of the millennium, as Old South values collide with a new world. | 1 | 7 |
| 2 | BAG OF BONES , by Stephen King. (Scribner, \$28.) A series of terrifying events besets a best-selling novelist four years after his wife's sudden death. | 2 | 13 |
| 3 | RAINBOW SIX , by Tom Clancy. (Putnam, \$27.95.) John Clark, heading an international task force, investigates terrorist incidents in Switzerland, Germany and Spain. | 5 | 20 |
| 4 | MIRROR IMAGE , by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte, \$26.95.) Identical twin sisters experience quite dissimilar lives in New York and France early in this century. | 4 | 7 |
| 5 | THE SIMPLE TRUTH , by David Baldacci. (Warner, \$25.) The appeal by a man serving a life sentence for murder creates chaos in Washington's legal community. | 3 | 5 |

| This Week | Nonfiction | Last Week | Weeks On List |
|-----------|---|-----------|---------------|
| 1 | THE GREATEST GENERATION , by Tom Brokaw. (Random House, \$24.95.) The lives of men and women who came of age during the Depression and World War II. | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | THE CENTURY , by Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster. (Doubleday, \$60.) An account of the 20th century, complete with photographs and first-person narratives. | 2 | 5 |
| 3 | TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE , by Mitch Albom. (Doubleday, \$19.95.) A sportswriter tells of his weekly visits to his old college mentor, who was near death's door. | 3 | 63 |
| 4 | BLIND MAN'S BLUFF , by Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew with Annette Lawrence Drew. (Public Affairs, \$25.) American submarine espionage. | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN , by Simon Winchester. (HarperCollins, \$22.) How a murderer helped compile the Oxford English Dictionary. | 5 | 14 |

The *New York Times Book Review's* best-seller list was never meant to reflect all book sales; it tracks titles sold only in general-interest outlets—books sold in specialty stores, through book clubs, or on TV are not counted. Its rankings "reflect sales...at almost 4,000 bookstores plus wholesalers serving 60,000 retailers...statistically weighted to represent all such outlets nationwide." How those figures, which are 15 days old by the time they're published, are weighted is a closely guarded secret.

The *Times* list is actually six lists: fiction, nonfiction (15 books each), and "Advice, How-to, and Miscellaneous" (four books) in hard- and softcovers. (Sometimes the *Times* adds a 16th book to the fiction or nonfiction list and a fifth to the advice list when the last book's sales are barely distinguishable from those of the one above it.) Shown here is the hardcover list for January 3.

cally changed what appears on the lists and for how long.

For example, when Talese published Pat Conroy's *The Prince of Tides* in 1986, it sold 235,000 copies in hardcover and stayed on the *Times* list for 51 weeks. Nine years later, she published *Beach Music*, by the same author; it sold 700,000 copies but lasted on the list for only 22 weeks because Conroy devotees snapped up the book so quickly. "The length of time on a best-seller list is influenced by whether the writer is already well-known," says Talese.

"Established authors today may sell three times as many copies of a book as they did a few years ago but these titles spend fewer weeks on the best-seller list," Talese explains. "If you're Danielle Steele, readers are waiting for the new book, and they absolutely vacuum it up." With so many people buying the books of famous authors off the Net even before they are published, and so many others picking them up at the chains as soon as they come out, an enormous buying burst when a book first appears followed by a drop-off can mean that it spends less time on the best-seller list.

THE HUGE SALES THAT ARE USUALLY necessary to push a book onto the *Times* list have made it more and more difficult to manipulate—because the absolute number of books you need to buy to affect a title's placement is generally much higher than it used to be. But authors are still periodically accused of trying to beat the system.

In 1989, when Allen Neuharth, the former chairman of the Gannett Co., published his autobiography, *Confessions of an S.O.B.*, the Gannett Foundation, which Neuharth then headed, spent \$40,000 to get editors of Gannett papers to buy a total of 2,000 copies of the book at stores across the country. Even in 1989, 2,000 copies wasn't a very large number, but if all of the copies were purchased the same week—and all of them came from stores reporting to the *Times*—the mass purchase could conceivably affect the title's placement on the list.

The book spent six weeks on the *Times* best-seller list, but Neuharth denied that that was the intent of his unusual purchasing plan. *The Washington Post* reported that Neuharth said the

expenditure was justified because the books were being donated to college libraries and journalism schools. (Gannett editors said they were instructed to buy the books and sell them back to the foundation.) But with an author's traditional 50 percent discount, Neuharth could have purchased twice as many copies of his book by buying them directly from Doubleday, Inc., his publisher.

Six years later, *Business Week* reported a similar scheme by business consultants Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema, the authors of *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, published by Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. The authors reportedly spent more than \$250,000 to buy 10,000 copies of the book at bookstores across the country. The book spent 15 weeks on the *Times* list, and eventually sold more than 250,000 copies.

The publisher claimed that the sales had been spread across the country as part of its Triangle program to give individual bookstores a cut of corporate sales. Treacy said he and his fellow author routinely bought the books for clients and prospects and to use in seminars. But bookstore owners said the plan was

| INDEPENDENTS FICTION | This Week | CHAINS FICTION |
|--|--------------|--|
| A MAN IN FULL , by Tom Wolfe. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.95.) | 1 | A MAN IN FULL , by Tom Wolfe. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.95.) |
| HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE , by J. K. Rowling. (Levine/Scholastic Press, \$16.95.) | 2 | BAG OF BONES , by Stephen King. (Scribner, \$28.) |
| THE POISONWOOD BIBLE , by Barbara Kingsolver. (Harper Flamingo, \$26.) | 3 | RAINBOW SIX , by Tom Clancy. (Putnam, \$27.95.) |
| CHARMING BILLY , by Alice McDermott. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$22.) | 4 | MIRROR IMAGE , by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte, \$26.95.) |
| MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA , by Arthur Golden. (Knopf, \$25.) | 5 | THE SIMPLE TRUTH , by David Baldacci. (Warner, \$25.) |

| This Week | NONFICTION HARDCOVER | Last Week | Weeks On List |
|--------------|---|--------------|------------------|
| 1 | THE GREATEST GENERATION , by Tom Brkew. (Random House, \$24.95.) The lives of men and women who came of age during the Depression and World War II. First Chapter. | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | THE CENTURY , by Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster. (Doubleday, \$60.) An account of the 20th century, complete with photographs and first-person narratives. | 2 | 5 |
| 3 | TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE , by Mitch Albom. (Doubleday, \$19.95.) A sportswriter tells of his weekly visits to his old college mentor, who was near death's door. First Chapter. | 3 | 63 |
| 4 | BLIND MAN'S BLUFF , by Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew with Annette Lawrence Drew. (Public Affairs, \$25.) American submarine espionage. First Chapter. | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN , by Simon Winchester. (HarperCollins, \$22.) How a murderer helped compile the Oxford English Dictionary. | 5 | 14 |

The *New York Times*'s on-line list is more inclusive than its printed counterpart, ranking 370 best-sellers in 12 categories. The overall fiction and nonfiction (above) lists differ from the print version in the number of books included—35, rather than 15—and are posted the Friday before the newspaper version appears. Breaking out the sales figures of independent and chain stores (right) changes the rankings. These lists are for the week of January 3.

Books

January 6, 1999

Best Sellers Plus

| INDEPENDENTS | CHAINS |
|--|--|
| A MAN IN FULL , by Tom Wolfe. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.95.) | A MAN IN FULL , by Tom Wolfe. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28.95.) |
| HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE , by J. K. Rowling. (Levine/Scholastic Press, \$16.95.) | BAG OF BONES , by Stephen King. (Scribner, \$28.) |
| THE POISONWOOD BIBLE , by Barbara Kingsolver. (Harper Flamingo, \$26.) | RAINBOW SIX , by Tom Clancy. (Putnam, \$27.95.) |
| CHARMING BILLY , by Alice McDermott. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$22.) | MIRROR IMAGE , by Danielle Steel. (Delacorte, \$26.95.) |
| MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA , by Arthur Golden. (Knopf, \$25.) | THE SIMPLE TRUTH , by David Baldacci. (Warner, \$25.) |

Books

Steer your investments

January 6, 1999

Best Sellers Plus

| NONFICTION HARDCOVER | Last Week | Weeks On List |
|---|--------------|------------------|
| THE GREATEST GENERATION , by Tom Brkew. (Random House, \$24.95.) The lives of men and women who came of age during the Depression and World War II. First Chapter. | 1 | 3 |
| THE CENTURY , by Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster. (Doubleday, \$60.) An account of the 20th century, complete with photographs and first-person narratives. | 2 | 5 |
| TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE , by Mitch Albom. (Doubleday, \$19.95.) A sportswriter tells of his weekly visits to his old college mentor, who was near death's door. First Chapter. | 3 | 63 |
| BLIND MAN'S BLUFF , by Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew with Annette Lawrence Drew. (Public Affairs, \$25.) American submarine espionage. First Chapter. | 4 | 5 |
| THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN , by Simon Winchester. (HarperCollins, \$22.) How a murderer helped compile the Oxford English Dictionary. | 5 | 14 |

clearly intended to manipulate the *Times* list, and other sources told *Business Week* that the authors had specifically sought out stores that they knew reported to the *Times*. (Store owners are supposed to keep that a secret, but often brag about it anyway.) The authors denied any impropriety. "Did we aggressively and energetically market the book? You bet," Treacy told *Business Week*. "Did we cross the line? Absolutely not."

At the *Times*, Michael Kagay told *Business Week* that the paper had been aware of the bulk sales for months; he said the polling unit found out during regular interviews with owners of stores that report sales to the paper. Kagay said the *Times* had compensated for them in its calculations. "We are confident that our list has not been manipulated," he declared. But *Business Week* was unable

to locate any store owners who said the *Times* had queried them about bulk sales. The incident did result in a subtle change. The *Times* now places a dagger next to any

title when substantial bulk sales are being reported at individual stores. "We decided after consulting with the publisher and [executive editor] Joe Lelyveld that we owed it to our readers to tell them what we knew," says Deborah Hofmann, Kagay's assistant.

The accuracy of the *Times* list depends largely on the honesty of individual booksellers, who are sent a form with 350 hard- and softcover titles that the *Times* has determined are candidates for the list from the previous week's tabulations. Then there are spaces for write-ins. When Tom Wolfe's *A Man In Full* appeared last fall, it started out as a write-in on the *Times* list—probably at hundreds of stores in a single week. "Every book on the list started out as a write-in," says Kagay. But what if a bookseller decides to promote a favorite title of his own by exaggerating its sales? Kagay says the *Times* would spot that because the number would be out of whack with the historical records for that particular store.

THE INCREASING CLOUT OF THE BIG chains has made the smaller stores more and more nervous about anything that

appears to give the chains another advantage. So when the *Times* made a deal with barnesandnoble.com that gave the bookseller an icon on the paper's website allowing anyone perusing its best-seller lists to purchase a book instantly from the chain, it touched off an uproar.

According to Hut Landon, executive director of the Northern California Independent Booksellers Association, "at least thirty" California independents stopped reporting to the *Times* in fall 1997 to protest the barnesandnoble.com link—even though the *Times* had offered something similar to the independents before it inked the deal with Barnes & Noble. But the independents did not have a single website that would permit the same kind of instantaneous sales that barnesandnoble.com was offering.

American Booksellers Association president Richard Howorth, who owns Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi, guesses that as many as half of all major independent stores may have boycotted the *Times* list. "I don't think most booksellers are ever going to get over



Amazon.com, the on-line bookseller, ranks several hundred thousand titles by sales; hundreds of these titles are also ranked in 1 or more of 23 categories ranging from "Literature and Fiction" to sales leaders in New Zealand. Amazon's "Hot 100" list (right, for January 8), covers the retailer's sales for the previous 24 hours, updated every hour. Its fiction and nonfiction lists cover one week and are updated every Wednesday.



Both *The Wall Street Journal* (opposite, left) and *USA Today* lists (opposite, right) cover one week ending the previous Saturday. The *USA Today* list of the top 50 books—hard- and softcover, in fiction and nonfiction, all appear on one list—comes out on Thursday; the *Journal* list—the 15 top-sellers each in fiction, nonfiction, and business—on Friday. The *Journal* surveys more than 2,500 stores from 16 chains and lists all 16 in a footnote. *USA Today* analyzes "1 million volumes from about 3,000 independent, chain, discount and on-line booksellers," according to the list's footnote. (Amazon.com, which is a *USA Today* source, gives the paper figures only for actual shipment, not for unavailable books.) The paper also prints a partial list of participating stores each week.

what the *Times* did," he says. "They took an asset which we had helped them create freely...and sold it for their benefit and the benefit of Barnes & Noble."

Not all of the independents felt they could afford to participate in the protest. "There are bookstores that do a lot of author events and they have been told by publishers' sales reps unofficially that if they were not reporting to the *Times*, it would affect whether authors would appear there," Landon explains.

Times Book Review editor Charles McGrath wrote to store owners who informed him that they had joined the boycott to advise them that the *Times* would institute new lists on its website to give the smaller stores more visibility, by breaking sales down between two categories—chains and independents. Landon was unmoved. He says "an independents' list on the Web only affects maybe 10 percent of our customers."

Bill Goldstein, books editor for the *Times* web edition, says the *Times* had actually been in discussion with the independents for more than a year before it made the deal with Barnes & Noble. And even after that agreement, the *Times*

continued to ask the ABA to collaborate on a list of independent bookstores that could be searched by zip code. So far the ABA has spurned that offer.

TIMES COMPETITORS think they have devised a more accurate way of gauging actual sales. *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* pride themselves on reporting actual sales, rather than weighting them; unlike the *Times*, each also publishes a list every week identifying the stores that supply them with most of their data.

Richard Tofel developed the *Wall Street Journal's* list in 1994, when he was an assistant managing editor there. "The theory was that we could bring some advantages to a best-seller list," says Tofel, who is now vice-president for corporate communications at Dow Jones & Co. One was "transparency; ours was the first list to say all the stores that were in it, so you know if your purchase is or isn't reflected in our list. Second, there's no weighting in our list. It's just raw sales." Tofel says

that accurate weighting is only possible if you know the size of the entire market: "With public-opinion polls you can do it reliably because every ten years you can do a census. There is nothing like that for this; so statistical weighting becomes at best highly problematic." (At the *Times*, Kagay disputes that; he says the paper adjusts its sample and weighting based on a survey of all book outlets that it conducts every three years or so.) Tofel said the *Journal's* list "is always exactly right because it's always what we say it is. The only way to manipulate this list is to go to a store."

As long as the *Times* continues to conceal the details of its weighting formula, there will always be skeptics who doubt its precision. But editors there don't pay much attention to its critics.

"Our list tries as hard as it can to be honest and accurate," says Martin Arnold, the *Times's* book columnist and a senior editor in culture news. "And it is. Unfortunately a lot of people in the book business don't want to believe it—particularly when one of their books doesn't make the list." ■

Best Selling Books

| Fiction | | | |
|---------|---|---------------------------|-----------|
| RANK | TITLE / AUTHOR / PUBLISHER | WSJ SALES INDEX THIS WEEK | LAST WEEK |
| 1 | A Man In Full Tom Wolfe / Farrar, Straus & Giroux | 78 | 289 |
| 2 | Seize the Night Dean Koontz / Bantam | 66 | New |
| 3 | Billy Straight Jonathan Kellerman / Random House | 49 | New |
| 4 | When the Wind Blows James Patterson / Little, Brown | 43 | 120 |
| 5 | The Simple Truth David Baldacci / Warner Books | 42 | 120 |

| Nonfiction | | | |
|------------|--|---------------------------|-----------|
| RANK | TITLE / AUTHOR / PUBLISHER | WSJ SALES INDEX THIS WEEK | LAST WEEK |
| 1 | The Greatest Generation Tom Brokaw / Random House | 149 | 679 |
| 2 | Tuesdays with Morrie Mitch Albom / Doubleday | 69 | 219 |
| 3 | The Century P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 53 | 330 |
| 4 | Nine Steps to Financial . . . Suzie Orman / Crown | 48 | 104 |
| 5 | Simple Abundance Sarah Ban Breathnach / Warner Books | 46 | 99 |

| Best Selling Books | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Fiction | Nonfiction | Business | Reference |
| 1 A Man In Full Tom Wolfe / Farrar, Straus & Giroux | 1 The Greatest Generation Tom Brokaw / Random House | 1 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 1 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday |
| 2 Seize the Night Dean Koontz / Bantam | 2 Tuesdays with Morrie Mitch Albom / Doubleday | 2 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 2 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday |
| 3 Billy Straight Jonathan Kellerman / Random House | 3 The Century P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 3 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 3 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday |
| 4 When the Wind Blows James Patterson / Little, Brown | 4 Nine Steps to Financial . . . Suzie Orman / Crown | 4 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 4 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday |
| 5 The Simple Truth David Baldacci / Warner Books | 5 Simple Abundance Sarah Ban Breathnach / Warner Books | 5 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday | 5 The 12 Steps to Financial Freedom P. Jennings, T. Brewster / Doubleday |

What sets the *Journal* list apart is its "sales index," a number that appears after each title. An index figure of 100 is the median number of copies of the number-one fiction best-seller sold each week during the previous year.

Hardcover books; others are paperback. New — Not among top 300 last week. I

| This wk. | Last wk. | Book/author | Description (F/NF) |
|----------|----------|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | 8 | Where the Heart Is/Billie Letts | Pregnant teen is abandoned |
| 2 | 1 | The Greatest Generation/Tom Brokaw | Stories of coming of age d |
| 3 | 55 | Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution/Robert C. Atkins | How to change your metab |
| 4 | 23 | The Seat of the Soul/Gary Zukav | Becoming alive with rever |
| 5 | 15 | Inner Harbor/Nora Roberts | Romance: Quinn family is t |

USA TODAY BEST-SELLING BOOKS

A book of sonnets by another name

| Rank | Title | Author | Genre |
|------|--|------------------|------------|
| 1 | Where the Heart Is | Billie Letts | Fiction |
| 2 | The Greatest Generation | Tom Brokaw | Nonfiction |
| 3 | Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution | Robert C. Atkins | Nonfiction |
| 4 | The Seat of the Soul | Gary Zukav | Nonfiction |
| 5 | Inner Harbor | Nora Roberts | Fiction |

Hardcover books unless otherwise noted. New — Not among top 300 last week. F = Fiction, NF = Nonfiction.

10-12-99: WSJ #100171 replaced by #100172 when...
10-12-99: WSJ #100171 replaced by #100172 when...
10-12-99: WSJ #100171 replaced by #100172 when...

SERVANT TO THE SERPENT

Rosemary Mahoney's account of a summer spent with Lillian Hellman reveals a side of Hellman the public never knew. Plus: The past is more than prologue.

WHEN ROSEMARY MAHONEY eagerly accepted a summer job in 1978 with Lillian Hellman at the author's home on Martha's Vineyard, the then-17-year-old had no idea what she was in for. The aspiring young writer anticipated that the summer with her idol would be rich in conversation and insight into the literary world. Instead, Mahoney found herself humiliated and mocked by the woman whom she had spent so long admiring.

Mahoney's experiences culminate in *A Likely Story: One Summer with Lillian Hellman*, a vivid account of a girl discovering only disillusionment in the woman she hoped to call a friend and mentor. Scorned by Hellman, Mahoney spent her days preparing meals, chauffeuring, cleaning, and being scolded for forgetting to refill the salt shaker. Still, she wrote, "Each day I woke thinking maybe this will be the day that she talks to me, or asks me who I am, or tells me something about myself."

Anxious to flee her own troubled world, Mahoney hoped a summer with Hellman would provide escape. The teen wanted to distance herself from a disabled alcoholic mother who, although loving, required much care. But Mahoney found no comfort in the aging Hellman, who, self-absorbed and bitter, openly mocked Mahoney's Irish back-

ground and scolded her for imagined mistakes.

To the public, Hellman was an empowered and brilliant woman; privately, her obstinate behavior and constant bickering alienated even many of the celebrities who regularly visited her. Mahoney left the island that summer feeling defeated. Ironically, the encounter provided the material she needed for this poignant and intriguing tale about a side of Lillian Hellman few would ever know.

—Bridget Samburg



A NEW CENTURY IS A WATER-

shed event. As such, it serves as a great opportunity for any society to reflect on where it stands, how it got there, and what the future may hold. Judy Crichton's *America 1900: The Turning Point* does this with a twist. Instead of looking at the century that is now coming to a close, Crichton creates a lively and entertaining month-by-month account of the state of the union during the single year that preceded it all. Using vivid photos and news clips to aid her effort, the author depicts a portrait of America during the last turn of the century that does more than inform

our current place in the world—it adds perspective to it.

Then, as now, America was a dynamic country that fostered technological feats, the creation of unprecedented wealth, and hope in its people. It was also a country facing natural disasters, such as the Galveston, Texas, hurricane that killed 6,000 people, and man-made problems, including racism and a growing income disparity between the rich and poor. This spectrum of American life is vividly rendered through stories of the political and cultural elite—such as Teddy Roosevelt, J.P. Morgan, and the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar—that are interspersed with tales of miners risking their lives daily as they head into the dark, dusty caverns, and immigrant street peddlers in New York City quickly learning the ropes.

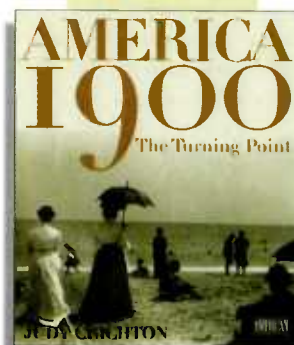
Through stories like these, Crichton sets the stage for the twentieth century and reveals a society that is vibrant yet complex. It is a world that is simultaneously foreign and startlingly recognizable—it's a world from 100 years ago, and it is our world today. —Leslie Heilbrunn



FOR 22 YEARS, OUTSIDE magazine has showcased great writing about travel, adventure, sports, and anything remotely connected to getting off your duff and exploring the great outdoors.

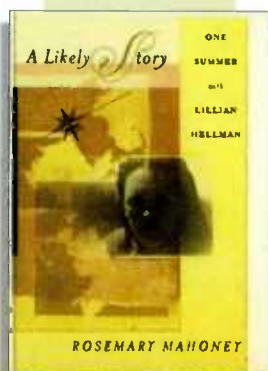
AMERICA 1900: THE TURNING POINT

Judy Crichton
Henry Holt &
Company
(November 1998)
PRINT RUN:
Not Available



A LIKELY STORY: ONE SUMMER WITH LILLIAN HELLMAN

Rosemary
Mahoney
Doubleday
(October 1998)
PRINT RUN:
Not Available



But this is no *Travel and Leisure*. In a collection of articles dubbed *The Best of Outside* by the magazine's editors, stories about trekking through Africa and vacationing in Belize rub shoulders with high-powered tales of scaling Mount Everest, battling runaway forest fires, and scouting Komodo dragons.

Exceptional writing is the norm: "Haiti, much like the Balkans, is a place where history has a parasitic look on the present, where everyday life crashes back and forth across slippery moral thresholds, shattering and reshaping values, identities, hearts," writes Bob Shacochis in "There Must be a God in Haiti." But in *Outside*, elegant writing doesn't overrule solid journalism. In his piece about venturing to Haiti with his wife eight years after he covered the American occupation of the island, Shacochis weaves in bits of Haiti's social and political history from the past two centuries.

Not all the tales in *Outside* involve extreme travel. Some are profiles of rare characters, such as Susan Orlean's "La Matadora Revisa Su Maquillaje (The Bullfighter Checks Her Make-Up)," about the first woman to become a full *matador de toros* in Spain. In other stories, the beauty of the outdoors causes writers to wax philosophical: William Finnegan reflects on his past and present surfing days in "Life Among the Swells," and Annick Smith works through her husband's death amid the Montana landscape in "The Blackfoot Years." Some articles are downright bizarre, like Donald R. Katz's hilarious tale of an encounter with "ferret-legging," a sport that involves "the tying of a competitor's trousers at the ankles and subsequent insertion into those trousers

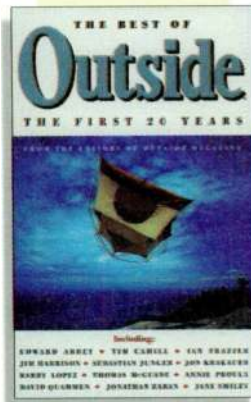
of a couple of peculiarly vicious fur-coated, foot-long carnivores called ferrets."

The entire collection of 31 stories is the perfect elixir for the armchair adventurer. But don't jump around the book—as any veteran traveler will tell you, some of the gems are hidden where you least expect them.

—Kimberly Conniff



THE BEST OF OUTSIDE
Vintage Departures
(Paperback)
(September 1998)
PRINT RUN:
16,500



IN MEDICINE'S 10

Greatest Discoveries, doctors Meyer Friedman and Gerald W. Friedland have transformed what could have been a deadly dull topic into a highly readable and occasionally laugh-out-loud-funny collection of medical biographies.

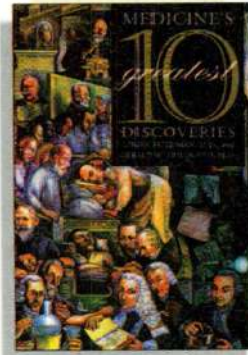
"Shortly after his wedding," the authors write of anesthesia innovator Crawford Long, "several of the young men of Jefferson [Georgia, Long's hometown] asked him to make some nitrous oxide for them, so that they could have laughing-gas parties. Long's response was that ether was just as good, and he promptly made some, which they all tried. The jollity was infectious, and ether frolics soon became fashionable in Jefferson and its environs." Soon after this, surgical anesthesia was born.

Friedman and Friedland document the achievements of such other medical pacesetters as Antony Leeuwenhoek (a haberdasher with a passion for building microscopes who discovered bacteria in a drop of rainwater) and Andreas Vesalius (who fought graveyard battles with savage dogs to recover corpses on his way to becoming the father of the modern study of human anatomy). But they do much more, describing events leading up to each of these historic discoveries, what followed in their wake, and even the occasional skirmishes that broke out over who should get the credit.

In their final chapter, Friedman and Friedland choose the greatest of their top 10 medical hits and pick the discoverer

MEDICINE'S 10 GREATEST DISCOVERIES

Meyer Friedman, M.D., and Gerald W. Friedland, M.D.
Yale University Press
(November 1998)
PRINT RUN:
6,000



with whom they would most like to spend time. It's a fitting kicker to a book rich with human elements.

—Ed Shanahan



"I DID NOT GRIEVE FOR Diana." These words open British writer Sarah Benton's missive on the Princess Diana spectacle with a flippancy that sets her apart from the intense public emoting that gripped both shores of the Atlantic after Diana's death. Benton is not alone. Flippancy is abundant among the other contributors to *After Diana: Irreverent Elegies*.

The volume's 23 essays are a collective expression of bewilderment at Diana's swift canonization by the press. They range from firsthand accounts of the flower-flooded royal gates to bitter polemics aimed at Diana and the culture of celebrity she came to personify.

Some essayists offer chilling analyses of the orgy of grief that followed the "People's Princess." Oxford don Peter Gosh chalks it all up to what might be called a "wag the remote" scenario: The BBC and other news outlets fanned the flames of public mourning by trumping up the spectacle of national grief.

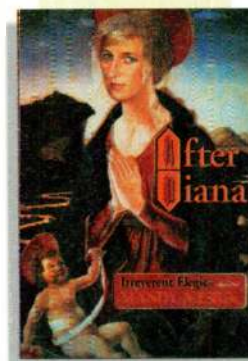
Others credit the show of emotion to Diana's entrancing malleability. "Soap opera characters must invite the identification of an audience if they are to be truly successful, and Diana was perfect for this, since she embodied in her person a number of contradictory, even incompatible roles," offers academic Elizabeth Wilson.

After all, Diana photos "constitute a vast resource from which one can construct any image one likes of her," observes Benton. "Mum; shy ingenue; jet-setting Glam Queen; weeping, therapised anorexic; heroic campaigner against land-mines; neurotic narcissist." This excellent, often witty collection spares none of these Dianas.

—Jeff Pooley

AFTER DIANA: IRREVERENT ELEGIES

Edited by Mandy Merck
Verso
(September 1998)
PRINT RUN:
8,000



THE FLYNT FACTOR

With Larry Flynt poised to strike and its deadline looming, *The Des Moines Register* confronted difficult questions about news standards and sex. ● BY TED ROSE

ON THE FIRST WEEKEND of 1999, a snowstorm swept across Iowa, paralyzing the capital city of Des Moines. Dennis Ryerson didn't mind. He took the chance to relax and watch a movie: *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. The film wasn't just entertainment, though. Ryerson, editor of *The Des Moines Register*, was preparing for his own showdown with Flynt.

"Desperate times require desperate measures," Flynt chanted in the closing weeks of 1998. The pornographer was promising to deliver the fruit born of his October advertisement in *The Washington Post*, in which he offered up to \$1 million for any information on sexual affairs of members of Congress. He wanted to expose Republican politicians as hypocrites for criticizing President Bill Clinton



Editor Dennis Ryerson of *The Des Moines Register* (below, center) guides the discussion over how to handle the Flynt revelations.

for his personal transgressions.

But Flynt couldn't make his point to most Americans (excepting loyal *Hustler* readers) without help. Not just any story makes it into the mainstream media, though it's sometimes hard to tell. Newspaper editors and television producers stand *between* the people and Larry Flynt, justifying to themselves and their audiences why a particular story is newsworthy. For *The Des Moines Register's* 163,085 daily readers, that journalist is Dennis Ryerson.

IT'S JANUARY 11, AND FLYNT HAS promised to embarrass a "big fish" at a California press conference tonight. This morning, Ryerson, a tall, long-faced fellow with a disarming wink, reveals his secret wish: that the politician in question will step forward today on his own. That's what happened with House speaker-not-to-be Robert Livingston, who offered a preemptive apology to congressional Republicans after learning about

Flynt's investigation of his extramarital affairs. Livingston's public reaction became the story, saving Ryerson and others from judging the credibility and value of Flynt's information. Today, however, no politician will make it easy for Ryerson.

It is eleven o'clock in the morning as Ryerson meets with a group of editors to discuss upcoming stories. Coverage is set for the opening of the Iowa legislature later today and the governor's inauguration later in the week. Eventually, Ryerson mentions Flynt.

For a bunch of newshounds, the group knows next to nothing about this. One editor passes on gossip from a Washington reporter who says the target is a Senate Republican leader; Ryerson says he's heard Flynt will implicate a certain House GOP leader. (Neither name, it turns out, will be on Flynt's lips at the end of the day.) What this group does know is that Flynt hasn't given them much time to make a decision. The press conference will begin at 10 P.M. Central Time as the first edition of the paper rolls off the presses, 30 minutes before the news pages close for the *Register's* second edition, and two hours before the close of the final edition. Ryerson will be hard-pressed to get a

Staff writer Ted Rose wrote about local weather forecasting in the December/January issue.



story in the second edition.

"I can't see us letting Larry Flynt edit our newspaper," says Ryerson. A few years ago, that notion would have been beyond ridiculous. Flynt's "news" probably would have flunked every standard of journalism. For starters, Flynt has paid for the information, casting doubt on the motives of those bringing it forward. In addition, his subject matter—the sex lives of public officials—is generally considered off-limits in the mainstream media. But Ryerson, in an earlier phone interview, suggests that the impeachment debate has made him question that standard. "When you have the morality of the president under such incredible debate," he asks, "can you ignore that issue if you have large numbers of people in Congress who are guilty of the same type of behavior?" If Flynt delivered the names of 15 alleged adulterers, Ryerson says, he'd probably print those names.

But the question about dignifying a sex story doesn't come up at this meeting. Randy Essex, the editor who oversees the paper's three-person Washington bureau, says the group should plan on running a piece inside the paper and consider a front-page story if the allegations involve either an Iowa or a presidential candidate running in Iowa's bellwether caucuses. Ryerson is still worried that the paper won't have time to substantiate Flynt's allegations and get comment from the accused.

At the same time, the news will probably be bouncing around other media outlets, making the press conference hard to ignore. Ryerson floats the notion of running a story reporting that the press conference occurred, but withholding names—and explaining the decision in an editor's note. Randy Evans, the assistant managing editor, points out that such caution is rare. "We run allegations all the time that we have no more idea than a hog what kind of reporting reputation some supplemental wire service reporting has," says Evans. Besides, Evans remarks, "Larry's batting average right now is pretty good. He's one-for-one."

As Evans's comment suggests, much of the reporting in the *Register* is not generated by staff reporters; the paper relies on roughly ten wire services to

deliver the bulk of its national and foreign stories. If the paper runs a story on Flynt's allegations, it will likely be a wire story. Charles Harpster, a 27-year *Register* veteran, is the editor responsible for sorting through the wires with an eye to any possible Iowa connection. But in the early afternoon the wires aren't saying anything about Flynt. "They're just trying to pretend it's not there," Harpster explains.

The editors return for the 2:30 P.M. meeting, still concerned about Flynt's timing. But the group reaches a consensus: Either the paper will run a substantiated story with a response from Flynt's target or a more circumspect item simply noting that the event occurred. The story will probably run on the inside pages. Ryerson leaves the building as the first pages close around 6:30 P.M., but intends to return later.

AS IT TURNS OUT, THE *Register* staff doesn't have to wait until 10 P.M. to examine Flynt's findings. Nor, for that matter, does the rest of cable-ready America. At 8 P.M. Central Time, Geraldo Rivera conducts a live interview with Flynt on CNBC. With a buildup befitting the lottery numbers, Flynt reveals today's target: Republican Representative Bob Barr of Georgia, one of President Clinton's earliest critics and a House impeachment manager. Rivera treats Flynt's accusation as a misdemeanor charge of hypocrisy. Rivera displays documents related to Barr's divorce proceedings that suggest Barr used legal technicalities to avoid answering questions about marital infidelity. (He prevents Flynt from discussing evidence he will present at his news conference that suggests Barr paid for his ex-wife to receive an abortion, contradicting Barr's public statements on the subject.) Harpster stares at his small television, clearly underwhelmed.

"What's the gist?" asks the news editor on duty. Harpster explains, virtually parroting Rivera's opinion.



Meet the press: Larry Flynt unloads his findings during a January 11 news conference in Beverly Hills, California.

"That's it?" she asks. A few minutes later Harpster finds something to get excited about: an Iowa connection. "Bob Barr was born in Iowa City!" The wires have not sent a story, but the consensus in Des Moines seems clear: the news merits a short story on an inside page.

Ten o'clock arrives and passes without much notice. Editor Ryerson has reappeared, but he's in his office cleaning his desk before a vacation. The press conference may be starting, but that's not obvious in Des Moines. There's no live television coverage and the wires remain silent.

At 11:27 P.M., *The Washington Post* syndicate sends an account of Flynt's CNBC appearance that includes a denial from Barr. Consistent with the earlier meetings, the newspaper runs the story on page three of the city edition.

The next morning, Ryerson pronounces himself satisfied with the way his paper handled its late-night tussle with Larry Flynt. But his appraisal of Flynt's information is somewhat surprising: "As far as I'm concerned, it's a non-story." The story's lack of substance is, ironically, what provided its news value, says Ryerson. Flynt promised a bombshell and delivered a dud. The story, as he sees it, discredits Flynt more than Barr.

Elsewhere, other editors and producers differ the next morning on how to handle Flynt. *The New York Times* makes no mention of him or his charges. Both CBS's *This Morning* and ABC's *Good Morning America* feature interviews with Flynt, but NBC—whose sister network CNBC threw down the red carpet for Flynt on Rivera's show—does not mention the allegations on its *Today* program.

Ryerson's choice appears to have been right down the middle. "There is no perfect solution," he says. ■ 119



Memo:

TO: THE MEDIA AND THOSE THEY COVER

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Reveling In The Anti-Buzz

David Eggers has rejected the mainstream to create his own small magazines—where unabashed satire dares to bite back. • BY MICHAEL COLTON

DAVID EGGERS SAYS HE harbors no ill will toward the folks at *Esquire*, the men's magazine he left in September 1998 after a year-long stint as editor at large. He left on amicable terms, he says, and was even asked to write more feature stories. He makes sure to applaud the recent direction of the monthly, calling the magazine's November 1998 cover featuring children's television favorite Mr. Rogers "genius."

Of course, it's easy to call a truce after you've already thrown your punches.

Eggers's punches, in this case, have come in the form of a devastating satire in his curious web magazine, *Timothy McSweeney's Internet Tendency* (www.mcsweeneys.net). Attracting an average of several thousand hits a day

*Michael Colton is a staff writer at The New York Observer and formerly a staff writer at The Washington Post. He once contributed to *Might* magazine, for which he was compensated with a T-shirt.*

from magazine insiders and college kids well versed in irony, *McSweeney's* features an ongoing satirical chronicle, called "The Service Industry," that provides an insider view of life at *Man: The Magazine for Men*, an oddly familiar but fictitious New York glossy:

"Lately, *Man: The Magazine for Men* was on a roll.... In September, against a stark white background, *Man* featured the busty model Laetitia Casta, over which ran the now-famous coverline: 'Hey, Are Those Tits Talking to Us?' In October, there was the Not-Hot, But-Very-Warm Black Actor Chris 'Not Chris Rock' Tucker (who they shot playing basketball and for whom they were lucky to find a Black Writer to do the profile)."

Those who read *Esquire* will recognize Laetitia Casta as Christy Turlington, the model who graced the cover of the November 1997 issue against a stark white background with the coverline, "Because Beauty Has Something to Say." Chris Tucker is Denzel Washington, who was profiled last May by John Edgar Wideman, a genuine

Editor David Eggers has embraced the world of small, offbeat, unconventional magazines.

"Black Writer." One former *Esquire* editor, who did not want his name used, says that the satire contains seemingly "word-for-word" descriptions of *Esquire* editorial meetings.

Eggers quit *Esquire* after what he felt was a turbulent tenure, and his *McSweeney's* attacks represent his distaste for the industry. Other installments have included a story about domestic violence that is killed by a women's magazine because the victims are not pretty enough and a sarcastic take on monotonous celebrity worship: "One two-pronged question, above all others, hovered over each prospective profile: a) In person, is this actor or actress *like* the characters they have played on television or film? Or b) Is this actor or actress *different* from the characters they have played on television or film? Daunting, sure, but a writer had a responsibility to find out."

But Eggers has not totally soured on print as a magazine medium. Beginning last fall, he returned to what he considers the eminently more satisfying, incredibly less lucrative, and

decidedly anti-buzz world of tiny print magazines with the virtually invisible *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. Though it has a meager 2,500 print run, the publication has amused and bemused anyone who's managed to score a copy by subscription or at an independent bookstore. (The website on which the *Esquire* satire appears is a

"After a few months, no one listened to me," says Eggers. "I was always complaining about misogyny and stupidity. I was a lunatic screaming from the woods."

separate project, with some different content than the printed version.) Virtually devoid of graphics, photos, or color, the quarterly is quirky, often incomprehensible, and occasionally hilarious. It is uncategorizable—an "antimagazine," as *Salon* magazine described it.

It's also pure Eggers, a reflection of his interests and dislikes. If you don't care for *McSweeney's*, you probably won't care for Eggers. In effect, he has shunned the 672,000-circulation *Esquire*, part of the Hearst empire, to publish this small, personal magazine. Few such publications, however, are printed in Iceland, resemble nineteenth-century journals, and carry the work of such novelists as Rick Moody, Mark O'Donnell, and David Foster Wallace.

EGGERS WORKS OUT OF HIS apartment in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, two cluttered floors filled with records, books, an empty gumball machine, unfinished paintings, and various cultural detritus. His latest fancy: *Soybean Digest*, a trade magazine that arrives addressed to his apartment's previous resident.

With his curly hair tucked under a baseball cap, Eggers looks younger than his 28 years. In 1992, after attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he studied painting and journalism, he moved to San Francisco and started designing for *SF Weekly* but longed for more control. With several high school friends, he

launched the groundbreaking *Might* magazine in 1994.

"Basically, we wanted to take over the world and save our generation," Eggers laughs. "That was quickly abandoned." What began as a Gen X magazine similar to the much-derided, recently defunct *Swing* evolved into something much more distinctive.

and *National Enquirer*—tried to follow up the story, only to learn they had been hoaxed.

Might's most clever stunt, and one that helps explain its ultimate failure, was the "sellout" issue, which featured a full-page ad for Goldschläger liquor on the front cover, album reviews written by record-company publicists, and sponsorship for each story within: "Miller Lite Ice welcomes you to page 52." On the last page was a reprint of a rejection letter *Might* received from Hearst Magazines Enterprises, in which Hearst president John Mack Carter wrote: "Not since the launch of *Wired* two years ago have I beheld such a consensus in the publishing industry that, when all the new startups of a given year are surveyed and evaluated, one so clearly towers above all others.

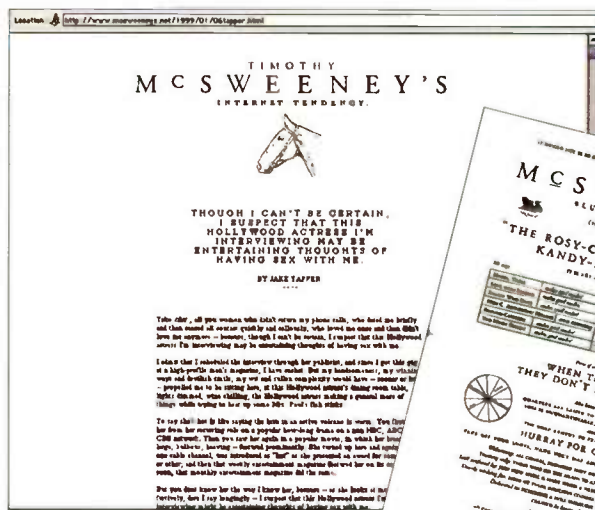
Here at Hearst, we're currently looking at new magazine ventures with circulation potential above 500,000. I'm afraid that eliminates the possibility of us being able to help *Might*. I wish you success in funding... and a mighty long reign as a shining star in the magazine world."

In 1997, *Might* folded. Its fans were hungry, but its print run remained stagnant at 30,000. "It was built to fail,"

says Eggers. The magazine never made money; freelancers were often compensated with *Might* T-shirts, and most of the staff worked other jobs. (Eggers edited and wrote media criticism for *Salon*.)

Advertisers never quite "got" *Might*. "When we talked to readers, writers, and the press, we said, 'We're not a Gen X magazine,'" says David Moodie, one of *Might's* cofounders and now the features editor at *Spin*. "But when we talked to advertisers, we had to say, 'We're the Gen X magazine.'"

Eggers marvels that *Might* lasted even 16 issues. "Magazines like *Might* are the most fundamentally flawed business model. They need honesty, innovation, and surprise to connect



In *McSweeney's*, stories appear in the form of letters, phone conversations, and even floor plans.

Might eschewed the usual topics of cars, clothes, and celebrities and instead published whatever the editors cared about, which included coverage of political and social issues and controversial essays ("College is for Suckers," "Are Black People Cooler Than White People?"). What set it apart, though, was its sharp tone—sly and smart, smug but self-deprecating—which earned it frequent comparisons to *Spy* magazine.

Might was merciless in its attacks on other magazines, including fake tables of contents ("Page 79—NAFTA: What Do Celebrities Think?") and a hilarious send-up of celebrity eulogies in the shape of a posthumous tribute to former child star Adam Rich, who was very much alive. Eggers says several news outlets—including *Hard Copy*

with readers. But then people say, 'The only way to make it profitable is 100,000 circulation at least. Better if it's a million.' Magazines turn into a top-down operation, where you start with \$10 million, focus groups, and test marketing. By the time you're done, you've lost touch with your readers." Eggers was especially saddened when he spoke to magazine-journalism students at the University of California at Berkeley while editing *Might*, and all their questions, he says, concerned market studies and demographics.

Given his sentiments, it's surprising that Eggers joined *Esquire* after *Might*'s demise. He had even described an issue of the magazine, in a 1996 missive for *Salon*, as "feeble," "dopey," and "horrible."

But after *Might* folded, its editors and writers were pursued by big-league magazines such as *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Spin*, and *New York*. (*Might*'s publisher, Lance Crapo, is now a sales representative for *Brill's Content*.) The promise of an expense account and an actual salary were tempting, as was money to pay writers. "At *Might* we couldn't send [writer] Bill Vollman to Somalia," Eggers says. "We couldn't even send someone around the corner."

And *Esquire*, which achieved its greatest notoriety in the sixties, retained its allure. "For a lot of people, *Esquire* in its heyday was really the high point of magazines," says Zev Borow, a contributing editor at *Spin* and former *Might* colleague. "The idea of going to that publication and having a chance to restore it to its former glory was really exciting to Dave at first."

Eggers says *Esquire*'s new editor, David Granger, who arrived there the same summer as Eggers, told him *Esquire* would be a first-rate magazine again. But Eggers says he and Granger, who did not return phone calls from *Brill's Content*, quickly became polar opposites in their thinking.

Eggers constantly fought with the art department. He hated both the celebrity chatter he had to write and what he calls the "dumbing down" of the magazine he cared about. He says editors even considered killing his beloved fiction issue, although *Esquire*'s deputy editor Peter Griffin denies it was ever seriously dis-

cussed. Still, Eggers describes a similar incident in "The Service Industry"—in that installment, the editor of the fictitious *Man* accidentally refers to his magazine as *Esquire*.

Following "the six hundredth crushing blow of frustration," Eggers says, he left. "After a few months, no one listened to me. I was always complaining about misogyny and stupidity. I was a lunatic screaming from the woods."

McSWEENEY'S IS A REACTION to—or, as Eggers says in his art-school lingo, is "informed by"—his *Esquire* experience. The journal, named for a deranged man who claimed to be a member of Eggers's family, provides him a forum to settle grudges, and it's also an attack on convention, an avoidance of the "feature-writing machine" that produces the familiar story arc so prevalent on newsstands. It is, Eggers says, "anti-timely, anti-sexy, and increasingly esoteric and obscure." Stories appear in the form

of letters, phone conversations, charts, and even floor plans. Some are printed unfinished, others after having been killed for various reasons by other publications. Some are, well, bad, but that's the nature of an experimental journal.

(As with *Might*, *McSweeney's* writers are uncompensated. Eggers supports the project with an advance from Simon & Schuster Inc. for a book he describes as "a memoir and a parody of a memoir at the same time.")

The most intriguing article *McSweeney's* has published so far is "Impressions," penned by Eggers under

the various pseudonyms "Stephen J. Shalit" and "Patricia Barnicle" after Stephen Glass, Ruth Shalit, Patricia Smith, and Mike Barnicle—writers who attained infamy for the journalistic crimes of plagiarism and/or fabrication. "Impressions" is told in three parts that run concurrently in columns down the page: The first is a meandering draft of a historical story about Egypt that Eggers had submitted to *Outside* magazine. The second is a humorous diary of Eggers's trip to Egypt and the difficulties he encountered there.

The third is an account of Eggers's experience trying to write the article that *Outside* never published, but it also contains alarming conclusions gleaned from Stephen Glass's downfall. Eggers quotes another magazine editor—not from *Outside*—nudging a writer who had submitted a mediocre story, "[A]re you sure that nothing else happened while you were there? Look back in your notes. Are you sure that, you know, there isn't anything that you've left out?"



Might magazine was often compared to *Spy* for its sly, smug tone.

McSweeney's, named for a deranged man who claimed to be a member of Eggers's family, provides him a forum to settle grudges.

Glass, who fabricated stories for *The New Republic* and other magazines, deserved his public ridicule, Eggers believes, but he did not act alone. Eggers shifts the blame from the individual to the system: Editors demand perfect anecdotes and impeccably neat narratives from young, eager-to-please journalists, even when such stories are unattainable; Glass was not "the Evil Mastermind," Eggers warns, but "the Guy Who Got Caught."

In the end, magazines may frustrate Eggers. But they provide him with plenty of ammunition.

Batter Up!

We've picked the best in the field of baseball information for the benefit of those of you scoring the game at home. ● BY ED SHANAHAN

SOON AFTER THIS ISSUE ARRIVES IN YOUR MAILBOX or on your newsstand, pitchers and catchers will be arriving at Grapefruit- and Cactus-league ballparks everywhere to open a 1999 baseball season that's got a tough act to follow. After all, the summer game was something of a comeback kid last year, with the champion New York Yankees finishing as the winningest team ever, Roger Clemens grabbing his fifth Cy Young Award, and, of course, a couple of guys named McGwire and Sosa obliterating the major-league home-run record, perhaps the best-known statistical sports measure of them all.

What will this year bring? No one can know for sure, but plenty of people will no doubt be keeping track. With that in mind, we've sorted through the mountain of available material (in the case of baseball, it's actually more like a mountain range) as a service to those interested in staying on top of the national pastime. So, as the great Ernie Banks would say, "Let's play two."



Yankee Stadium

in the bookstores:

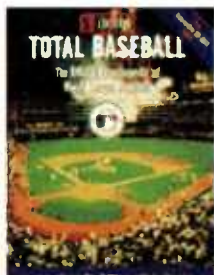


- The Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Definitive Record of Major League Baseball (Macmillan, \$59.95)—

Now in its tenth edition, this exhaustive compendium was considered a revelation to baseball fans when it first appeared in 1969. It offers career statistics for every major-league player since 1876 and is organized alphabetically in sections devoted to position players and pitchers. You'll also find chronological listings of teams, inning-by-inning summaries of every World Series and All-Star game, and more.

- Total Baseball: The Official Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball (Viking,

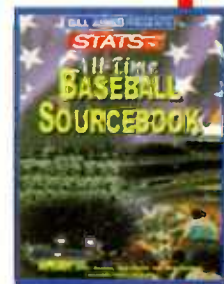
\$64.95)—The fifth edition, published in May 1997, is considered a step beyond the Macmillan tome because—in addition to a similarly vast array of statistics—*Total Baseball* is chockablock with essays on everything from team histories to Jewish players. This is not just the official reference book of Major League Baseball (a designation that's earned and paid for); it's also the reference book relied on in the production of Ken Burns's highly regarded PBS baseball documentary. "It's got a lot of great writing," says Lynn Novick, Burns's coproducer. The book also comes with CD-ROM software.



World Radio History

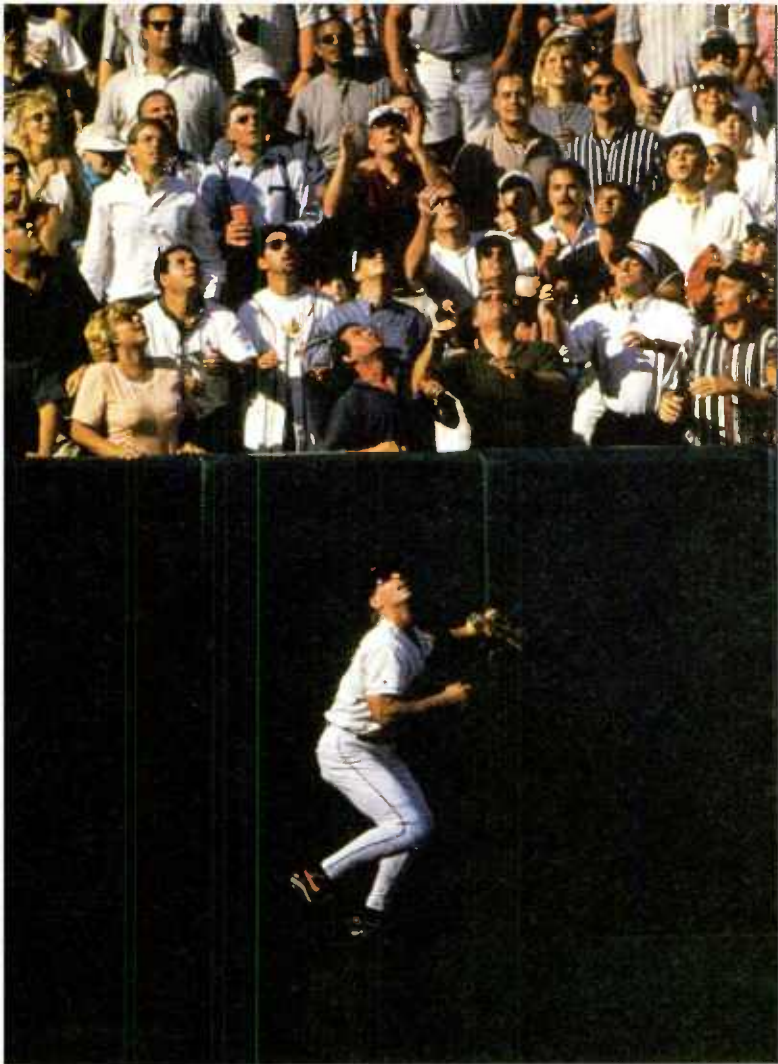
Time Major League Handbook and Bill James Presents STATS All-Time Baseball Sourcebook (STATS Inc., \$79.95 apiece)—Bill James, the master of baseball number crunching, has been plumbing the raw data of hits, runs, and errors since the late 1970s to come up with the richest possible understanding of each player's skills. Peter Gammons of *The Boston Globe* and ESPN uses one word to describe this pair: "Fabulous."

- Baseball Guide 1999: The Almanac of the 1998 Season and Baseball Register 1999 (both from *The Sporting News*, \$15.95 apiece). These are handy companions to any encyclopedia and among the best sources for 1998 stats.



STEVEN SUTTON/DUOMO (YANKEE STADIUM)





Baltimore's B.J. Surhoff goes for the ball at a 1996 Orioles-versus-Indians game.

on the tube:

When it comes to baseball information, nothing quite equals being able to watch an actual game (or maybe a couple hundred games). Of course, it isn't always easy to see the games you really want to see. Say, for instance, that you're a Cincinnati native and a lifelong Reds fan but you now live in Arizona. Somehow the Diamondbacks haven't quite filled that empty space in your life. Well, if you're willing to pay the price, wireless television may be what you're looking for. DirecTV (800-347-3288) and Primestar (800-738-8502) offer Major League Baseball deals that should allow you to get your fill of your favorite team or teams (you must, of course, already be paying to receive one of these services, which come in a range of prices). The DirecTV baseball package (\$139 for the season), for instance, lets you select up to 35 out-of-market games each week during the regular season (Primestar's deal is comparable). That means you can watch, say, five games a day, seven days a week. It's up to you to figure out how to squeeze in everything else—like sleep.

by telephone:

- The National Baseball Hall of Fame (607-547-0330). A must-visit for those who love the game, the Cooperstown, New York, shrine—into which George Brett, Nolan Ryan, and Robin Yount were voted in January—is a bit far to travel if you're looking for information from its library's vast archives. The phone call isn't free, but—if the question is simple and especially if it's related to a school project—the answer is. The charges for complicated research that requires substantial effort on the part of library staffers: \$25 per hour and 25 cents per photocopied page. Tim Wiles, the hall's director of research, says the museum gets some 80,000 queries a year (though not all of them by phone).

in the newsletters:

- The SABR Bulletin: The newsletter of the Society for American Baseball Research (216-575-0500, also at www.sabr.org; eight issues a year with a \$50 annual membership).

Nothing related to baseball is too arcane for the 7,000-plus-member Society for American Baseball Research, which was founded in 1971. The aim of this not-for-profit organization is to "foster interest in baseball and a more accurate history of the game and correct the record where necessary," according to executive director Morris Eckhouse. Bulletin features include reports from the society's 18 committees (Ballparks, Baseball Songs and Poems, Negro Leagues, and Women in Baseball among them) and regional groups. In addition to the newsletter, the membership fee buys two annual journals, *Baseball Research Journal* and *The National Pastime*, and at least one other special publication.

in the pages:

Though it may be old-fashioned in an era of cybercasts, seemingly endless cable sports reports, and the welter of analysis, many who follow baseball still consider those simple agate-type columns of names and numbers that fill the summer sports pages the best way to follow the game. "There's nothing quite like box scores in the newspapers," says syndicated sports-talk radio host Scott Ferrall, who likes to get his from *USA Today*, *USA Today Baseball Weekly*, and *The Sporting News*. Stats guru Bill James says he turned away from the latter during the eighties because he felt its quality was slipping but says the weekly has begun to regain its reputation.

NBC play-by-play man Bob Costas considers *USA Today* an authoritative national source, especially for late-breaking scores and stats. "A Dodgers game can end in Los Angeles



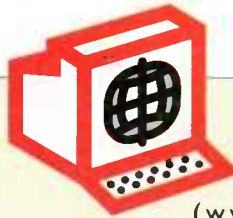
at 3 A.M. East Coast time, and the complete box score will be there in *USA Today* when you pick it up in New York in the morning," Costas says. Twice a year—during the season's opening week and then following the World Series—*USA Today* publishes the salaries of every major leaguer, with the postseason version factoring in added compensation, which comes in the form of bonuses and incentives.

If it's information related to sports finances you're looking for, *Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal* gets high marks. And when it comes to the major leaguers of

tomorrow—which is to say the minor leaguers of today—those who want to keep up with the hottest prospects turn to *Baseball America*, a biweekly that provides voluminous information about all those bent on making it to "The Show."



on the web:



Trying to round up baseball information on-line can be overwhelming. There are official pages, unofficial pages, fan sites, historical sites, statistical sites, and sites dedicated to defunct leagues, as well as sites geared to those people active in leagues destined to live only in the realm of fantasy. What follows are some of the good, useful, or just plain interesting ones.

John Skilton's Baseball Links

(www.baseball-links.com) A logical first on-line stop for all things baseball that you might not otherwise know where to find. The last time we stopped in, this site claimed to contain 4,349 links, broken down into such categories as Youth Baseball, Stats & Analysis, and Cards & Collectibles. "If you can't find what you're looking for," the homepage says, "it probably doesn't exist."

ESPN.com

(espn.go.com/mlb/index.html)

CNN-Baseball

(www.cnn.com/baseball/index.html)

CBS Sportsline-MLB

(www.sportsline.com/mlb/index.html)

On-line services from the major television and print players.

Fanlink

(www.fanlink.com) The website of *Baseball America*, the biweekly bible of minor league baseball.



Rich Johnson's Sportspages.com

(www.sportspages.com) The best way to follow a team is to read about it in the web edition of its local newspaper. Peter Gammons steered us to this two-year-old site, which provides web addresses of every big-city paper. Johnson says he modeled the site's front page in part on the *Drudge Report*.

Baseball Parent

(users.aol.com/baseparent/index.html) The on-line companion to a newsletter aimed at parents of kids who play ball. This site provides information on such subjects as youth leagues, youth camps, and how high school players can find the right college programs for them.

Little League BC Coaches Page

(www.yonahs.com/bc/ll/coaches.htm) This collection of links will hook you up with everything from the Little League main page to a page on "breaking in a new baseball glove."

Major League Baseball.com

(www.majorleaguebaseball.com) The official MLB site. This one links to sites for each team and, among its other features, offers the opportunity via RealPlayer software to listen to radio broadcasts of games on your computer.

Minor League Baseball.com

(www.minorleaguebaseball.com) The official site of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues. Follow the improvement of your favorite team's top prospects, or find schedule and stadium information for clubs that play in areas you plan to visit.

Sean Lahman's Baseball Archive

(www.baseball.com) This onetime *Entertainment Weekly* "site of the week" is loaded with information, including downloadable stats from no-charge databases.

Black Baseball's Negro Baseball Leagues

(www.blackbaseball.com) As the homepage puts it, "This website is dedicated to the generation of ballplayers who were denied the opportunity to play in the major leagues because of factors other than their ability to play."

Ron Shandler's Baseball HQ

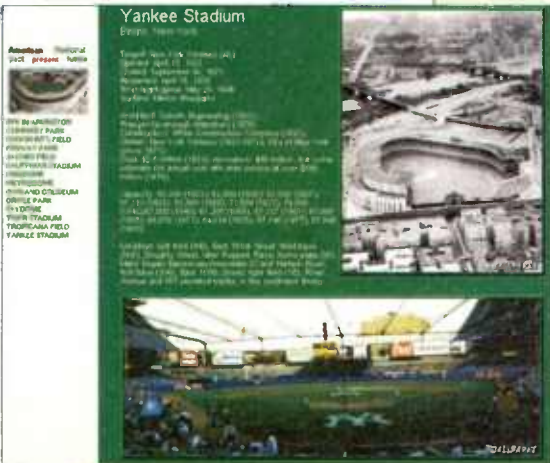
(www.baseballhq.com) This site is considered among the best by those willing to pay for their fantasy baseball information—or, as Michael MacCambridge, who wrote *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine*, refers to them, "the hardcore baseball geeks for whom there is no off-season."

Major League Players Association

(www.bigleaguers.tripod.com) The official ballplayers' site.

Ballparks by Munsey & Suppes

(www.ballparks.com) Everything you ever wanted to know about the ball yards inhabited by the major-league teams. In the works: detailed information on minor-league and college stadia.



(continued from page 18)

readers aren't interested in investigative journalism." His comment bothered me when I first read it years ago; seeing it in *Brill's Content* only bothers me more.

BOB RUGGIERO
Houston, TX

CLEAN LIVERS

Nicholas Varchaver's article on the media turning a blind eye to the suspect claims on the dangers of secondhand smoke was excellent ["Warning: Secondhand Smoke May *Not* Kill You," December/January]. Why did this happen? Because the whiskey-guzzling, nicotine-addicted reporters of old have given way to a new ilk of journalists who drink wine spritzers and live "clean" and are advocates [for] the anti-smoking movement.

DAVID LAMB
Hanoi, Vietnam
(via e-mail)

CONFIDENCE KILLER

The article by Nicholas Varchaver in your December/January issue, "Warning: Secondhand Smoke May *Not* Kill You," does a serious disservice to the understanding of the debate about secondhand smoke.

First, the article violates the admirable canons of journalistic integrity you have set forth. Nowhere are the supporters of the EPA report given an opportunity to discuss in detail the scientific support for the report.

Second, the article elides a fundamental fact about the secondhand-smoke debate. As the article points out (near the end, where, as you have suggested in your articles about TV news-magazine stories, it will have little impact), more than 90 percent of the deaths from secondhand smoke are caused by diseases other than cancer, primarily heart disease. Even if secondhand smoke had zero effect on lung cancer, the death rate from secondhand smoke would fall by less than 10 percent. The debate over the EPA report is thus a sideshow. What you

really mean is that *secondhand smoke may not kill you from cancer, but it will probably kill you from heart disease*. It is, of course, also true that it may not



kill you from heart disease. That's like saying that being shot point-blank by a .45 pistol may not kill you.

Third, I want to focus on the issue of the "95 percent confidence interval," because it has proven to be such a convenient hook for the tobacco industry to use in attacking the EPA report, and has proven persuasive with credulous journalists like Mr. Varchaver.

A common-sense understanding of what a confidence interval means should make it clear that it makes little difference whether we choose a 90 percent interval or a 95 percent interval. A confidence interval simply measures the level of confidence that we have that factor A is related to factor B. If you were standing in front of a firing squad and told, "There is only a 90 percent chance that those guns will fire," would you feel any great sense of relief?

JOHN V. WELLS
Washington, D.C.

Nicholas Varchaver responds: Our article did include comments in defense of the EPA's position on secondhand smoke. While those comments occupied a modest portion of the article, the article itself never argued that secondhand smoke isn't dangerous; it noted that "the vast majority of scientists con-

sider secondhand smoke a carcinogen." Rather, the article's core argument was that the doubts on the science hadn't been adequately aired in the press.

As to secondhand smoke deaths attributable to heart disease, we noted that the press often cites the figure even though the evidence for that claim is almost never provided, and the cited death statistics have not been endorsed by the government. There is scientific support for a heart-disease link; our point is that there are also questions, which are virtually never mentioned in the press. Finally, we focused on EPA findings on cancer deaths from secondhand smoke because its figures are the ones most often cited in news articles and by health organizations.

As for the issue of the confidence interval, the article didn't ascribe any significance to the use of a 90 percent confidence level. It criticized the *lowering* of the interval, a scientifically questionable maneuver that occurred because the scientists could not get statistically significant results without doing so.

CONSUMERS' REPORTS

We at Consumers Union, the publisher of *Consumer Reports*, are disappointed and baffled by Nicholas Varchaver's article "Warning: Secondhand Smoke May *Not* Kill You."

We are disappointed that, in his critique of media coverage of the controversy over secondhand smoke, Mr. Varchaver neglected to mention the seven-page cover story, "The Truth About Secondhand Smoke," which ran in the January 1995 issue of *Consumer Reports*.

LINDA M. WAGNER
Manager, public information
Consumers Union
Yonkers, NY

NV responds: *Consumer Reports* was indeed one of the few publications that took a comprehensive, serious look at the subject. As we noted in the article, there were exceptions to the media's passive approach on this subject.

7.5 million Number of printed copies of the 1997 and 1998 number one best-seller *Don't Sweat The Small Stuff...and it's all small stuff*, by Richard Carlson, Ph.D.

15 million Approximate number of copies of the *Titanic* video sold during its first week on the market¹

71 Number of times NASA was mentioned in nightly network newscasts in 1969, the year man first walked on the moon

150 Number of times NASA was mentioned in nightly newscasts in 1998, the year former U.S. senator John Glenn returned to space²

1 Ranking of weather among 15 topics rated by viewers according to their interest in hearing about them on local television news

11 Ranking of stories about local and state elections according to viewers taking part in the same survey³

70 Percentage of people who support allowing courts to fine journalists for inaccurate or biased reporting

50 Percentage of people who support changing libel laws to make it easier to sue the news media for inaccurate or biased reporting⁴

38 Number of years after its introduction that radio first attracted 50 million listeners

13 Number of years after its introduction that television first attracted 50 million viewers

4 Number of years after its introduction that the Internet first attracted 50 million users⁵

1 million Approximate number of listings on Yahoo!

80 Approximate number of editors who help produce listings for Yahoo!'s website directory⁶

\$35 million Amount of Tribune Company's losses related to on-line activities in 1998

\$23 million Amount of Knight Ridder's losses related to on-line activities in 1998

\$20 million Amount of The Times Mirror Company's losses related to on-line activities in 1998

\$10-\$15 million Amount of The New York Times Company's losses related to on-line activities in 1998⁷

21 Percentage of U.S. public libraries to offer staff-assisted Internet searches in 1994

65.1 Percentage of U.S. public libraries to offer staff-assisted Internet searches in 1997⁸

31 Percentage of adults who say they have been the subject of a news story or who have been interviewed by a newspaper reporter

24 Percentage of those respondents who say they were not quoted correctly

31 Percentage of those respondents who say they found errors in the resulting story

7 Percentage of those respondents who say they felt they suffered pain or embarrassment because of those errors⁹

24 Percentage increase between 1991 and 1998 of commercials and promos aired by the broadcast networks¹⁰

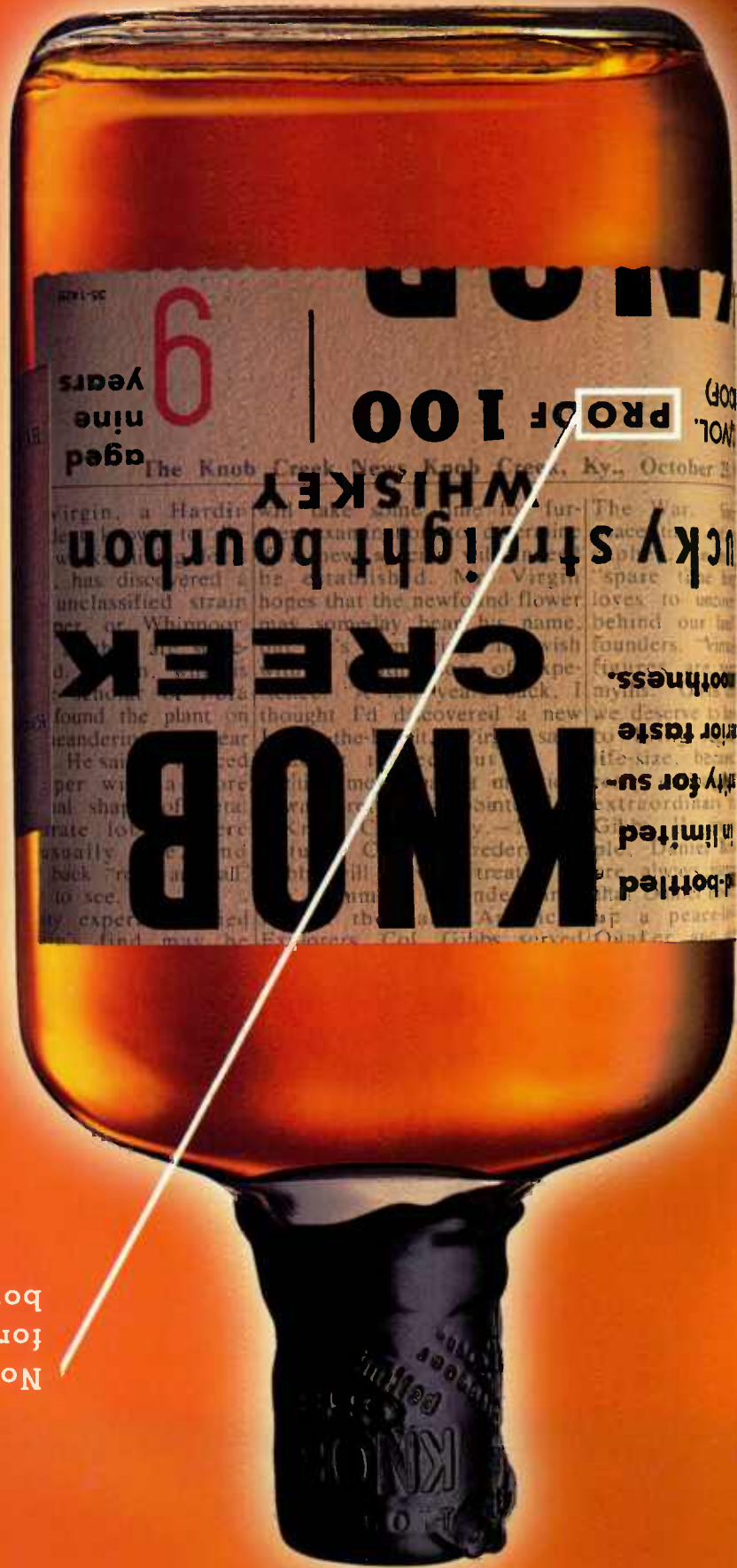
\$12.5 billion Estimated value of the digital television spectrum ceded at no cost to existing broadcasters

\$1.9 million Political action committee donations of the National Association of Broadcasters between 1993 and October 1998¹¹

NOTES: 1. Hyperion; *USA Today*; *Video Week* / 2. Vanderbilt University Television News Archive (1998 figure reflects broadcast networks, as well as CNN's *WorldView* and the weekend edition of *The World Today*) / 3. Radio & Television News Directors Foundation study, December 1998 / 4. *What The People Want From The Press*, Center For Media And Public Affairs / 5. *Yahoo! Internet Life* / 6. Search Engine Watch / 7. Editor & Publisher Interactive / 8. Internet Index; American Library Association, "Technology In Public Libraries" survey / 9. American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Why Newspaper Credibility Has Been Dropping," 1998 / 10. PhaseOne Communications LLC / 11. Congressional Budget Office; National Association of Broadcasters

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The Small Batch Bourbon Collection is Knob Creek, Booker's, Baker's, Booker's, Baker's and Basil Hayden's. To join the Kentucky Bourbon Circle, call 1-800-6KBCIRC.E. (You must be 21 years or older.)



Not exactly
for the
bourbon virgin.

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Quitting Smoking
Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.

**“I get enough
bull at work.
I don't need to smoke it.”**



No additives are in our
tobacco, for true taste.

16 mg. "tar", 1.1 mg. nicotine
av. per cigarette by FTC method.

**No Additives.
No Bull.**



TRUE TASTE