FALL TV PREVIEW: WHY OUR CRITICS LOVE ROSIE, CONAN, MTV'S *FANatic*, AND RON INSANA

BRILL'S CONTENT™

THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO THE INFORMATION AGE

WHAT BOB WOODWARD WON'T TELL US

WE PUT *CONSUMER REPORTS* THROUGH OUR TEST LAB

INSIDE THE *AUSTIN POWERS* SPIN MACHINE

FROM IMUS TO THE TABS TO THE *TIMES*: The 10 NY media heavies Hillary will have to overcome

PAYING JOCKS TO COMMENT

SEPTE

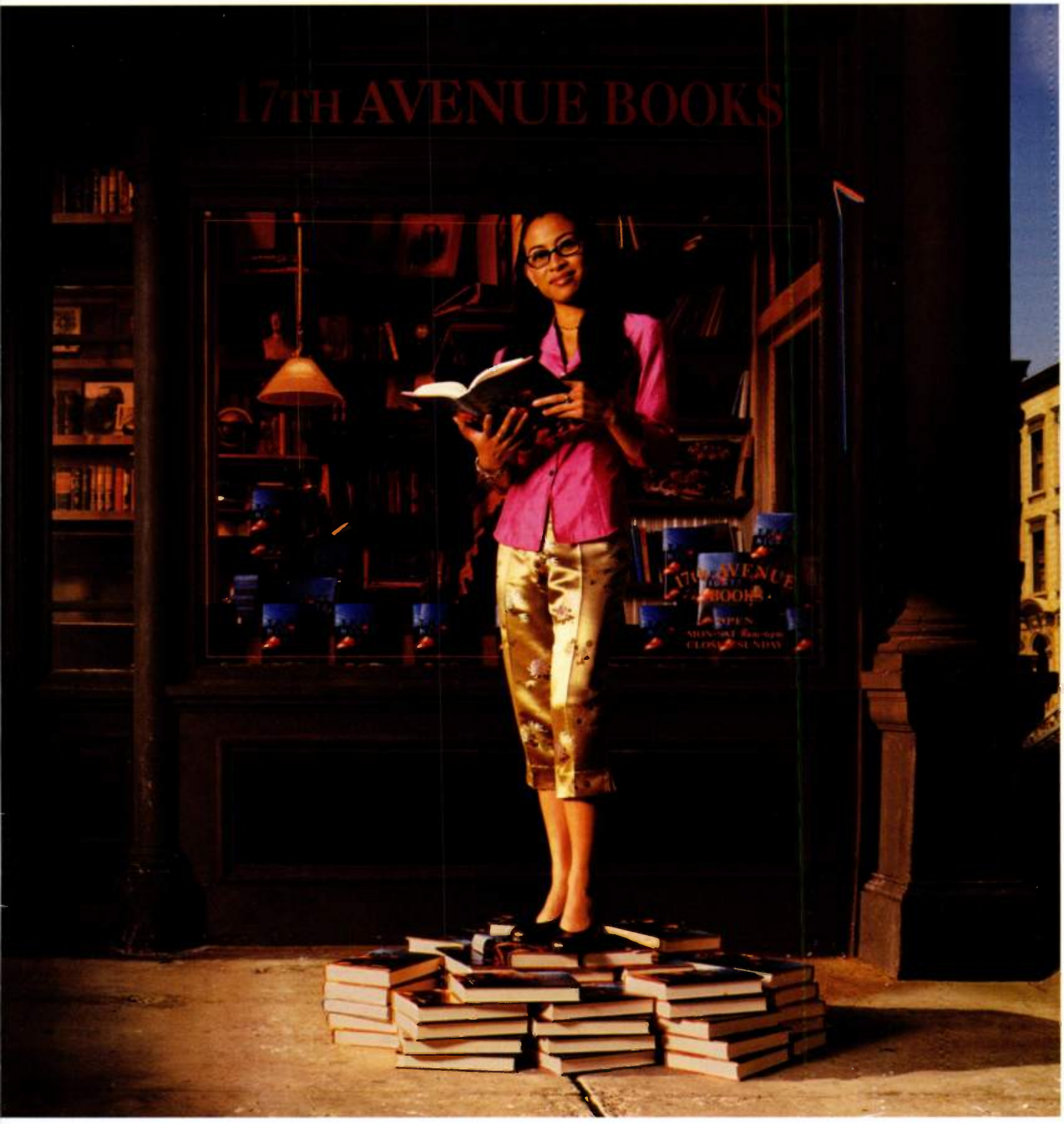
SCREAM TV

- How Chris Matthews built a career on it
- Jack Germond on why he quit it
- Deborah Tannen on what's wrong with it

RATING THE DIGITAL TV PLAYBACK TOYS

ONE PAPER'S QUESTIONABLE PULITZER

Hardball's Chris Matthews



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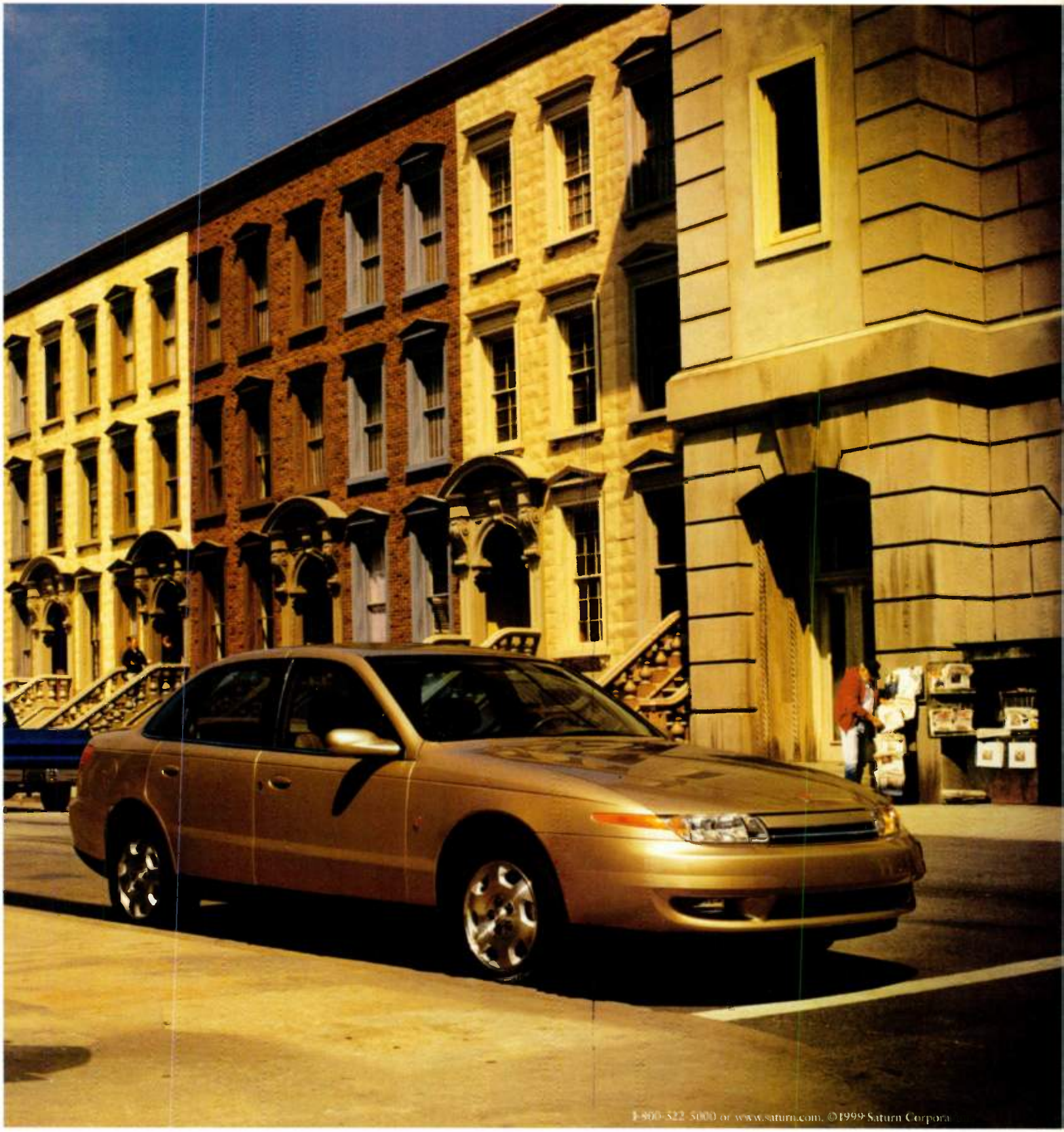

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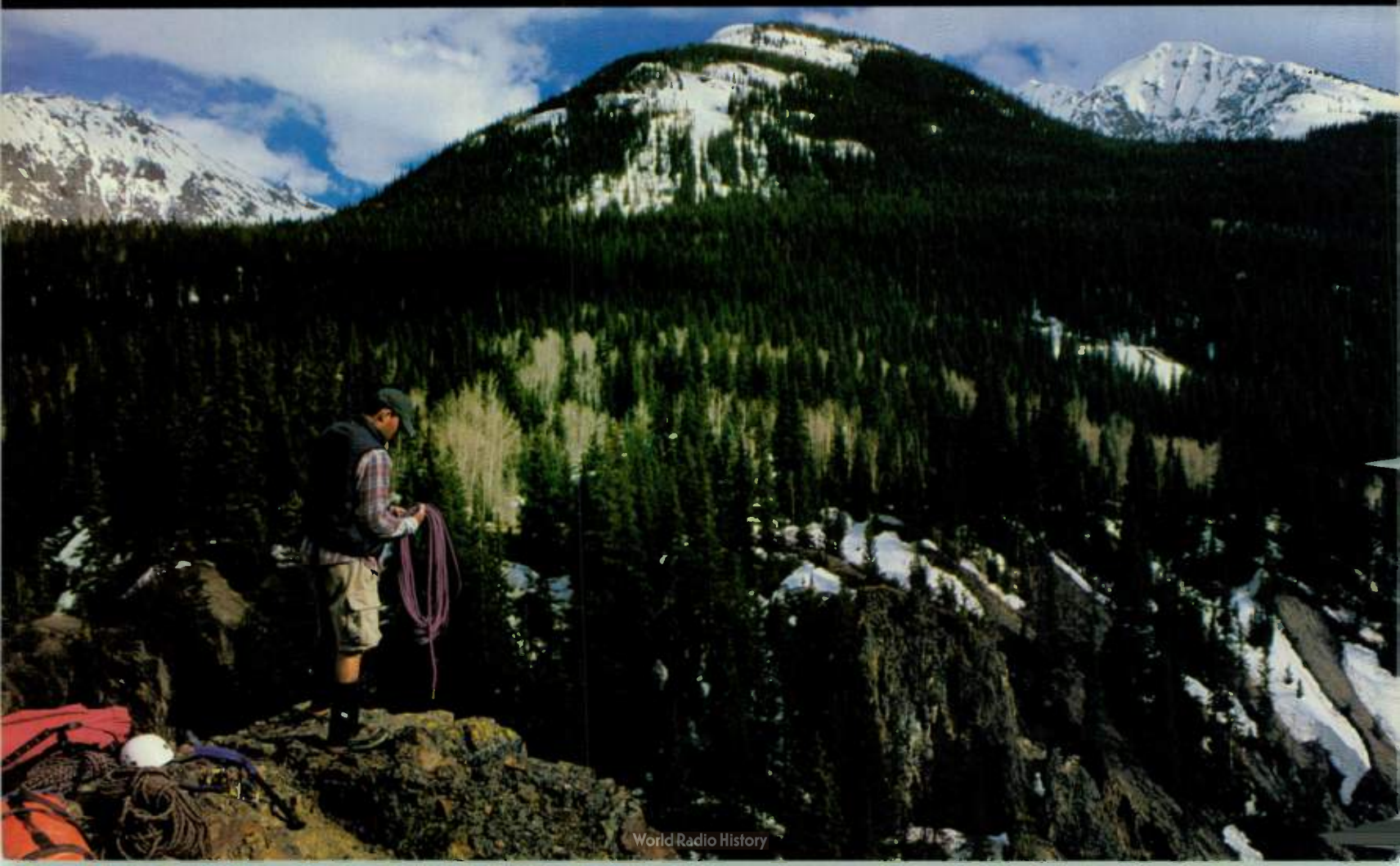
EXPLORERS, TRAVELERS, ADVENTURERS EST. 1987 REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.



[LETTER FROM THE EDITOR]

CHRIS MATTHEWS WON'T SHUT UP. THAT MUCH is pretty obvious to anyone who has tuned in to *Hardball with Chris Matthews,* his interruption-fest on CNBC. What's less obvious is a question that hovers over this growing genre of TV talk: It can be fun to watch, but does it make us smarter? Our cover package this month tackles this question from three different angles.

To some critics, Matthews epitomizes an unfortunate trend: the sacrificing of information and context on the altar of entertainment and personality. That criticism was foremost in the mind of senior writer Gay Jervey when she took up the challenge of profiling Matthews. That's part of her story, of course, but what Jervey also discovered in Matthews is an energy and passion that not only help explain the appeal of his show but also get to the heart of how this former Democratic operative became an outspoken basher of President Clinton.

"Matthews concedes that his mouth can take on a life of its own," writes Jervey, who in June contributed our cover story on *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd. "But if his shows tend toward much ado, he swears that it is much about ado *something.*" Jervey's piece starts on page 78.

Matthews may be thriving in the world of Scream TV, but the show that was the true pioneer of the genre was *The McLaughlin Group,* and for many years, Jack Germond made his sardonic, ink-stained presence felt as "the fat man in the middle seat," as he calls himself. Now, in an excerpt from his soon-to-be published memoir (page 84), Germond comes clean about his views on the value of the show, his stormy relationship with host John McLaughlin, and the power of television.

Germond delivers an insider's view of Scream TV, but author and linguistics professor Deborah Tannen is concerned about its broader impact on how we approach issues and culture. "In most television debates, the goal is not to understand," Tannen argues in an essay that starts on page 88, "but to win." As a result, we're often left with the impression that everything is polarized and that common ground is impossible to reach.

Whether you favor screaming media or the quieter variety, there's no question that we have more media choices than ever. Helping you sort through and judge all those options is one of the core missions of this magazine, and toward that end, our Fall TV Preview—an ambitious project directed by senior editor Lorne Manly—might help you discover some gems on the ever-expanding television dial. With that same goal of helping you make choices, we're also introducing two new features this month.

In "Tools," we'll be taking a no-nonsense, consumer-oriented look at all those new products coming onto the market that relate to how we receive and interact with media. Our columnist, John R. Quain—who has covered technology for CBS News, MSNBC, and *Fast Company* magazine, among others—has a simple mandate: Tell us what works and if it's worth the money. This month Quain tackles two competing versions of digital video recorders, which have been touted as having the potential to change the way we watch TV (page 64).

Also debuting is "Ivory Tower," in which we'll be reporting on what scholars and other experts are learning about how media affects us. Scholarship about media is often dry and indecipherable, but staff writer Jeff Pooley, a graduate student in communications at Columbia University, will be monitoring—and translating—academic output with a focus on what really matters to media consumers. In this month's effort (page 53), Pooley reports on what the academics are finding out about the meaning and impact of the Jerry Springers of the world. Grab a chair and check it out.

ERIC EFFRON
EDITOR

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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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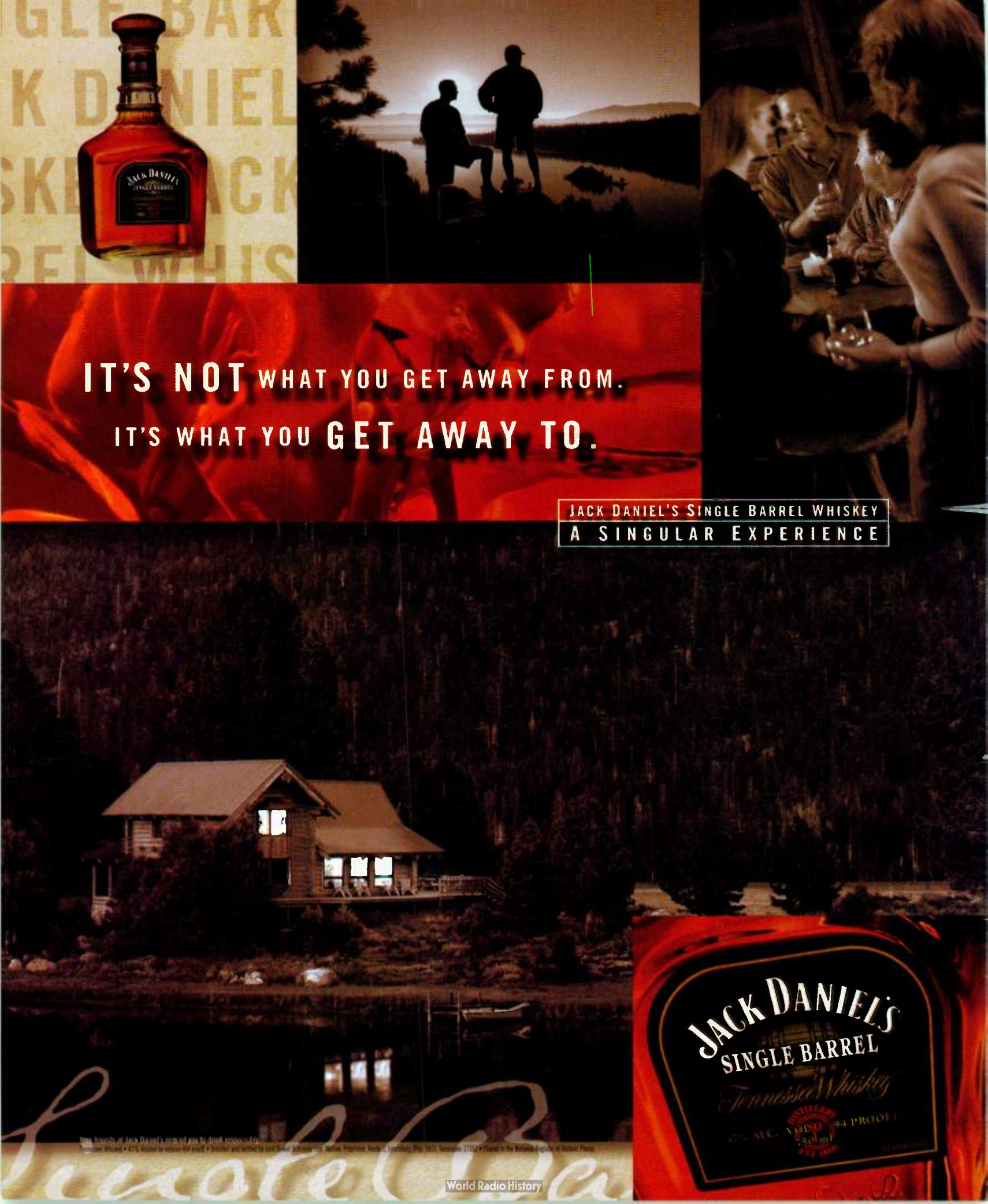


BRILL'S CONTENT™
THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE INFORMATION AGE

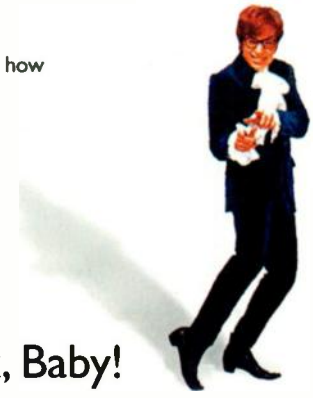
SEPTEMBER 1999 • VOLUME TWO • NUMBER SEVEN

FEATURES

SCREAM TV

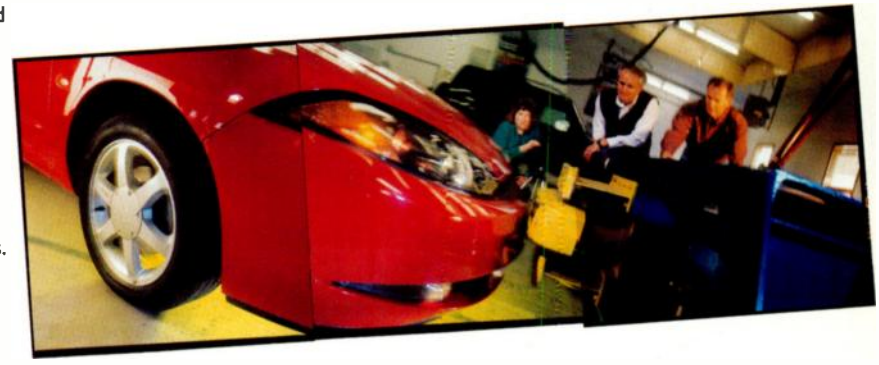
78

Hardball's *Chris Matthews schmoozes with presidential hopeful Dan Quayle (and Quayle's daughter) shortly before the pair spar for the cameras.*



66

All things Austin: More was spent to promote the summer hit than to produce it, but that's now movie business as usual.



70 Consumer Reports *is famed for its thoroughness and freedom from bias. But sometimes it falls short.*

ON OUR COVER:

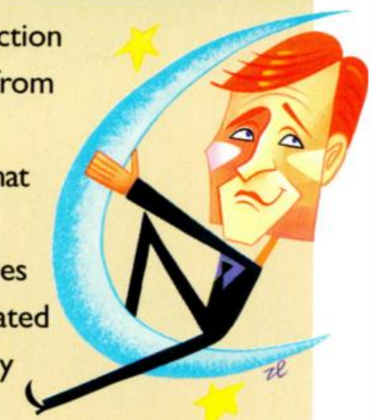
Chris Matthews sculpture by Robert Grossman; sculpture photo by Matthew Klein

CHRIS BUCK (MATTHEWS); DOUG LEVERE (CAR TEST)

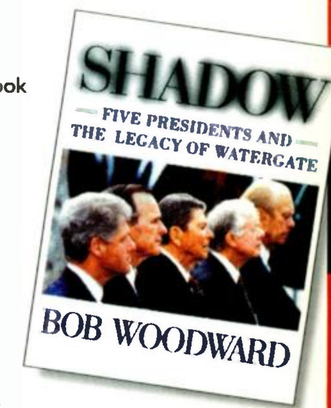
It's the face of Connie Pierce. She's married to her high school sweetheart, has twin daughters and a job she loves. She has also been fighting multiple sclerosis (MS) for a decade. She credits family support, a sense of humor and advances in medicines from America's pharmaceutical companies with helping to dramatically slow the progression of her MS. Pharmaceutical company researchers continue to make breakthroughs and won't stop until there's a cure. So people like Connie can live and love and laugh for years to come.

America's Pharmaceutical Companies

Leading the way in the search for cures

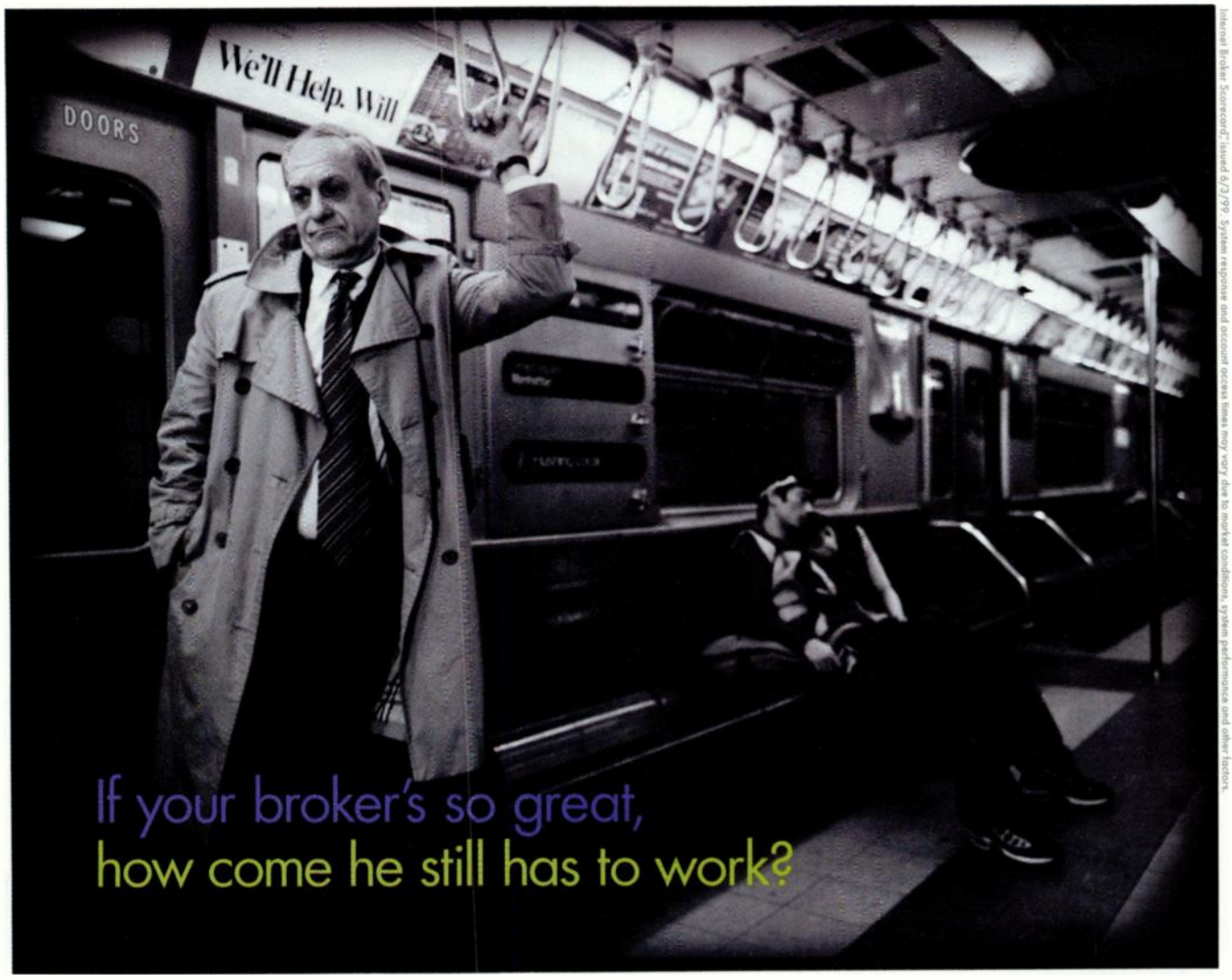


COLUMNS



44 *Media neophyte Paula Johnson, holding a photo of the girl she has raised as her daughter since a hospital inadvertently switched her with another newborn. Here's how Johnson learned to use the press to her advantage.*

TIM BOWER (O'DONNELL); ROBERT DE MICHIELL (O'BRIEN); AP (JOHNSON)



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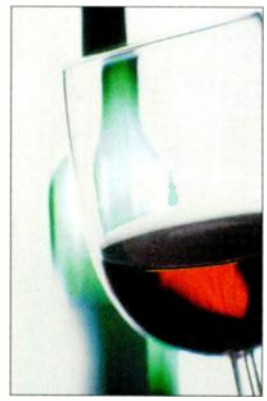
DEPARTMENTS

122 *The recipe for success in teen fiction? Gritty tales of sex, incest, and drug abuse.*



117

Brill's Content serves up the best books, websites, and magazines for oenophiles.

NEXT 62

Two new devices promise to change the way we watch and record television programs. Which one works best?

CORRECTIONS POLICY

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

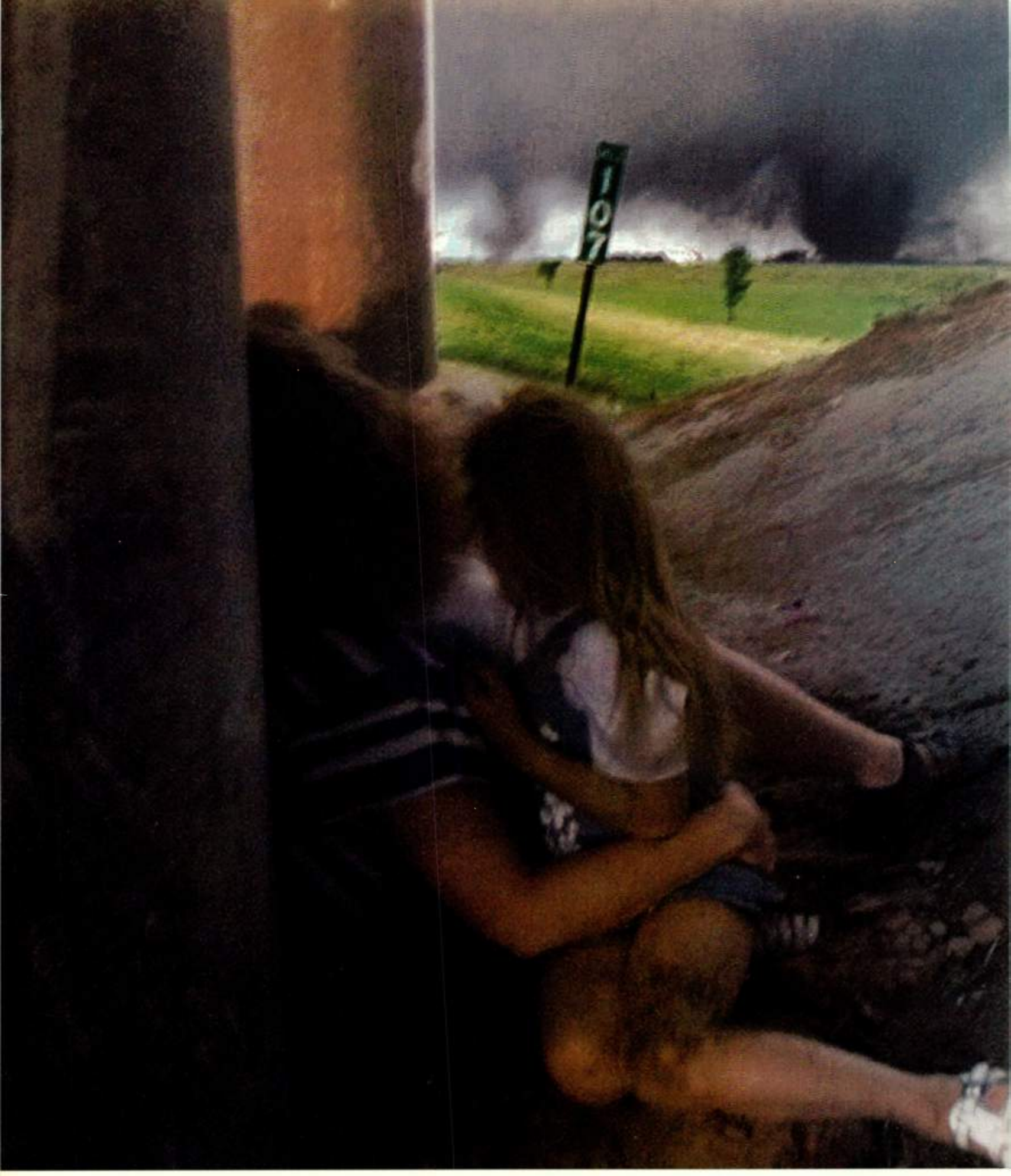
2. We are eager to make corrections quickly and candidly.

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

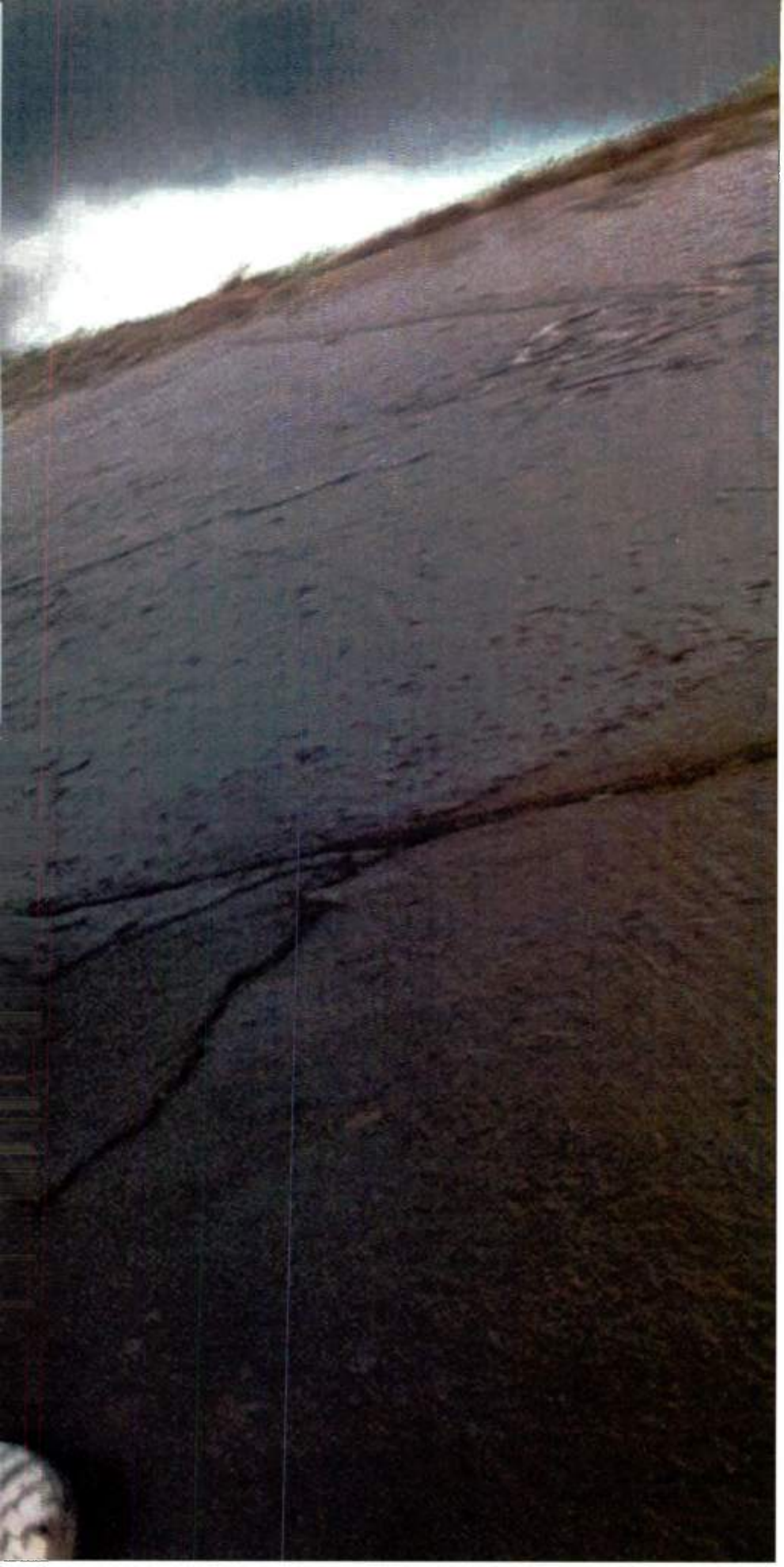
4. Our corrections policy should not be mistaken for a policy of accommodating readers who are simply unhappy about a story that has been published.

5. Information about corrections or complaints should be directed to editor in chief Steven Brill. He may be reached by mail at 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY, 10175; by fax at 212-824-1950; or by e-mail at comments@brillscontent.com.

6. Separately or in addition, readers are invited to contact our outside ombudsman, Bill Kovach, who will investigate and report on specific complaints about the work of the magazine. He may be reached by voice mail at 212-824-1981; by fax at 212-824-1940; by e-mail at bkovach@brillscontent.com; or by mail at 1 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA, 02138.



PHOTOGRAPH BY J. PAT CARTER/AP



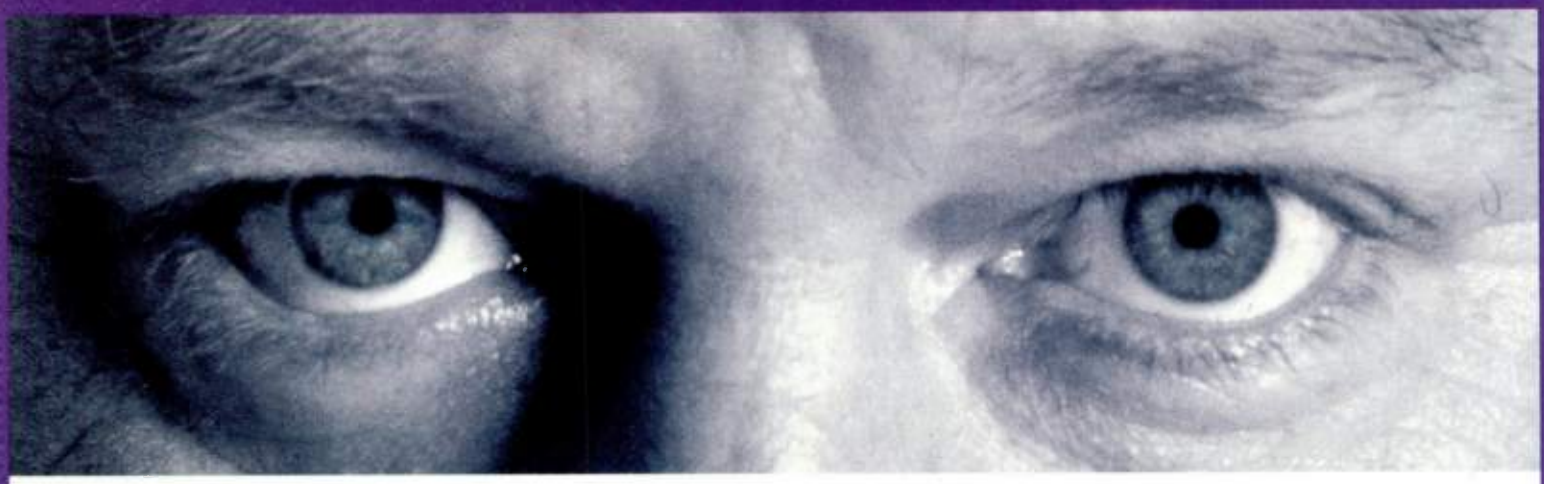
how they got that SHOT

J. PAT CARTER HAS SPENT MUCH OF THE PAST 27 YEARS photographing disasters of one sort or another—Three Mile Island in 1979, the Air Florida plane that crashed into Washington's 14th Street Bridge in 1982, the Jonesboro school shooting in 1998—but the picture at left represents the closest he has ever come to a tornado. On May 3, at about 7 P.M., Carter received a call from his editor at The Associated Press, who requested that he get some shots of a tornado that was forming just outside Oklahoma City, Carter's home base. Having shot many such storms in his career as a news photographer, Carter knew to set off directly toward the dark clouds he saw gathering in the distance. "I drove into the tornado and let the funnel get half to three quarters of a mile in front of me," he says. "I tried to get enough distance so I could shoot a little bit then drive a little bit." He did that for about ten miles until he realized that the storm was catching up to him.

Carter was looking for shelter beneath an underpass when he saw a woman standing by the side of the road. "I yelled for her to get cover," says Carter. But the woman was trying to free her two daughters from inside a nearby van, struggling with the high winds that made it nearly impossible to open the vehicle's door. Eventually, Carter pried open the door and retrieved the two- and six-year-old girls. The four took shelter beneath the underpass shown in this photo. While the woman pictured here held tight to her younger daughter, the 210-pound Carter says he pushed the six-year-old on top of her mother and sister and sat on them to keep them from being blown away.

The photographer isn't sure what happened next, but does remember seeing debris flying all around him. "It happened so quickly I don't even know if it was terrifying." Once the tornado passed over the bridge, Carter again began shooting. The funnel was about 150 to 200 feet away from him when Carter captured it using a wide-angle zoom lens on his digital camera. "The camera was waving so fast I couldn't hold it steady," he says. The picture ran in *Time* magazine's May 17 issue.

Carter admits that what he feared most was watching the funnel head away from the underpass and in the direction of Oklahoma City, where he lives with his wife. The tornado, which damaged close to 2,000 homes in and around the city, left both Carter's family and home unharmed. —*Bridget Samburg*



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ON WAR, AWARDS, AND CHIPPY THE CHIMP

THE COVER OF OUR JULY/AUGUST ISSUE (SEEN AT RIGHT) DREW SOME STRONG reaction, as did the story it illustrated, Steven Brill's take on how the Information Age media machine covered the war in Kosovo. Also provoking a vigorous response (in this case, from those at the center of the story): Brill's piece in the same issue about how much fact checking the judges who hand out journalism awards do. The editor in chief wasn't the only one whose work got readers writing; our new political seer, Chippy the chimp, has followers, too. Letters published with an asterisk have been edited for space. The full text appears at our website (www.brillscontent.com).

IN POOR TASTE

If I were the editor of *Brill's Content* I would fire (design consultant) Milton Glaser and (associate art director) Josh McKible. Such disgusting poor taste as [displayed by] that cover ["War Gets The Monica Treatment," July/August] does nothing for your worth in my eyes and, I am sure many others of your readers will agree.

CATHARINE VELKOFF
State College, PA

WHAT'S THE POINT?

*Steven Brill's exposé of malfeasance at *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* is superb. Yet even here the power of Brill's intelligent and informed analysis is vitiated by his unwillingness to carry the argument to its obvious and proper conclusions. When he does draw a sobering final conclusion about the behavior of the press in our "new media age"—a conclusion fully justified by the behavior he has reported ("[W]e're depending on a process that is anything but dependable...and hoping that Americans can have the good sense to survive their media rather than rely on it")—he has so hedged, palliated, rationalized, and excused that very behavior that one can only ask, in disbelief, *Then why did you bother to write the story?*

GERALD TRETT
Charlottesville, VA

CHECK THE TAPE

You made a serious editorial error in "War Gets The Monica Treatment."

You wrote "...on May 9, [Tim] Russert teased his show [*Meet the Press*] with this introduction, based apparently on nothing: "Is the Clinton Administration on the verge of retreat on Kosovo?"

Based apparently on nothing? You apparently did not watch the program. At the precise moment Mr. Russert read the introduction, an article written by Bob Dole entitled, "Clinton, NATO flash signs they'll take peace at any price," appeared on the screen. In fact, Senator Dole's first sentence reads "Are we on the verge of a retreat in Kosovo?" The reason Senator Dole was invited on *Meet the Press* was to defend the views expressed in this article!

You compound your mistake by suggesting Mr. Russert was covering "supposed internal disagreement" and he "questioned the viability of the war effort."

What? Mr. Russert never mentioned "internal disagreement" and

CORRECTIONS

IN THE JUNE "HONOR ROLL" BY ASSISTANT editor Matthew Reed Baker, the name of Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., was misspelled.

In June's "In Search Of Maureen Dowd," by senior writer Gay Jervey, author and television personality Barbara Howar's name was misspelled.

In a June "Stuff We Like" by staff writer Michael Kadish, actress Barbra Streisand's name was misspelled.

In June's "Deconstructing Power," by senior writer D.M. Osborne, *Car and Driver* editor in chief Csaba Csere's name was misspelled. In the same story, the location of a Hilton hotel at which J.D. Power III gave a 1981 speech was incorrectly identified as Northfield, Michigan. The hotel is located in Southfield, Michigan.

In July/August's "Stinging The Cops," by senior writer D.M. Osborne, the town of Jamesburg, New Jersey, was incorrectly referred to as Jamestown, New Jersey, in one instance.

In the July/August "Letters" section, in responding to a letter from *Barron's* columnist Alan Abelson, staff writer Matthew Heimer misidentified *Barron's* mutual-funds editor Sandra Ward as Susan Ward.

A July/August "Stuff We Like" by assistant editor Julie Scelfo failed to note that the url for the U.S. Department of Energy's Computer Incident Advisory Capability website *must* be typed in exactly as it was published: (ciac.llnl.gov/ciac/CIACHoaxes.html).

In July/August's "Fearless Predictions: The Content World, 2005," by Michael J. Wolf and Geoffrey Sands of the Booz•Allen &Hamilton consulting firm, we incorrectly identified the American Society of Newspaper Editors as the Association of Newspaper Editors. We

(continued on page 18)

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offered no opinions about the viability of the war effort. The discussion focused on Senator Dole's comments about NATO and President Clinton.

Even worse, you spun out a wild hypothesis about "ratings" and "profit" and "cynical and negative journalism," all based on your misrepresentation of Mr. Russert's introduction being "based on nothing," when it was clear to any viewer the introduction was based on Mr. Dole's essay. Very sloppy reporting by you and your staff created a very unfair perception of our program.

I assume you will acknowledge your mistakes, correct the record, and apologize to Mr. Russert and *Meet the Press*.

NANCY NATHAN
Executive producer
Meet the Press
Washington, DC

Steven Brill responds: Ms. Nathan is right; my reference was wrong. And I apologize. I should have checked the tape, but instead relied on the transcript of the program supplied by NBC, which did not mention the visual image of the headline that accompanied Tim Russert's introduction.

I wish Tim Russert had taken my call to him seeking comment on this, so he could have pointed out that he was referring to the *USA Today* article, in which case I'd have simply used his intro to buttress my point about his stressing the negative rather than the positive.

WHY HE READS

*Your detailed and incisive inquest into just two of the cases of Age of Monica reporting is exactly what impelled me to subscribe to *Brill's Content*. [It was a] far better use of space than devoting pages and pages to the feckless and inane Chatty Cathy of punditry, Maureen Dowd ["In Search of Maureen Dowd," June].

JAMES O'SHEA WADE
Yorktown Heights, NY

FIRING BACK

[Near] the end of your interesting and persuasive article on press coverage of the Kosovo war in the July/August issue, I was surprised to see you making a wholly gratuitous and inaccurate reference to the unfortunate incident last year in which *The Dallas Morning News* retracted a story during the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Talking about the impact an anonymous source can have in a highly competitive news environment, you say that occurred during the Monica scandal "as with Matt Drudge, or *The Dallas Morning News*'s false story about a supposed Secret Service witness to President Clinton's indiscretions."

Even allowing for journalistic shorthand, that reference is not only irrelevant but highly inaccurate. The story in question, retracted because the principal source reneged between deadlines, was not "false" but in fact true. As the later-released grand jury testimony showed, there was in fact such a witness. The story was withdrawn solely because it was so dependent on a single source that when he said he had been mistaken, we had no choice as a responsible newspaper but to withdraw a story we believed then and believe today was true.

At the time you did your lengthy story on this matter, I told you that I could not say who the source was but that the account you presented from attorney Joseph diGenova was "not the way it happened." That response was not included in your account despite your goal, as restated in the current issue, "of giving you the straight story about everything and everyone in the Information Age."

We've taken our lumps and deservedly so for the way we handled the initial story. But this latest shot seems as unnecessary as it is inaccurate.

CARL P. LEUBSDORF
Washington bureau chief
The Dallas Morning News
Washington, DC

SB responds: The grand jury testimony that Mr. Leubsdorf refers to does not rehabilitate the *Morning News* story. Secret Service officer

(continued on page 124)

CORRECTIONS

(continued from page 17)
also incorrectly reported that the group's April 13 meeting took place in May.

In the July/August "Honor Roll" by staff writer Leslie Heilbrunn, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was incorrectly identified as the Canadian Broadcasting Company.

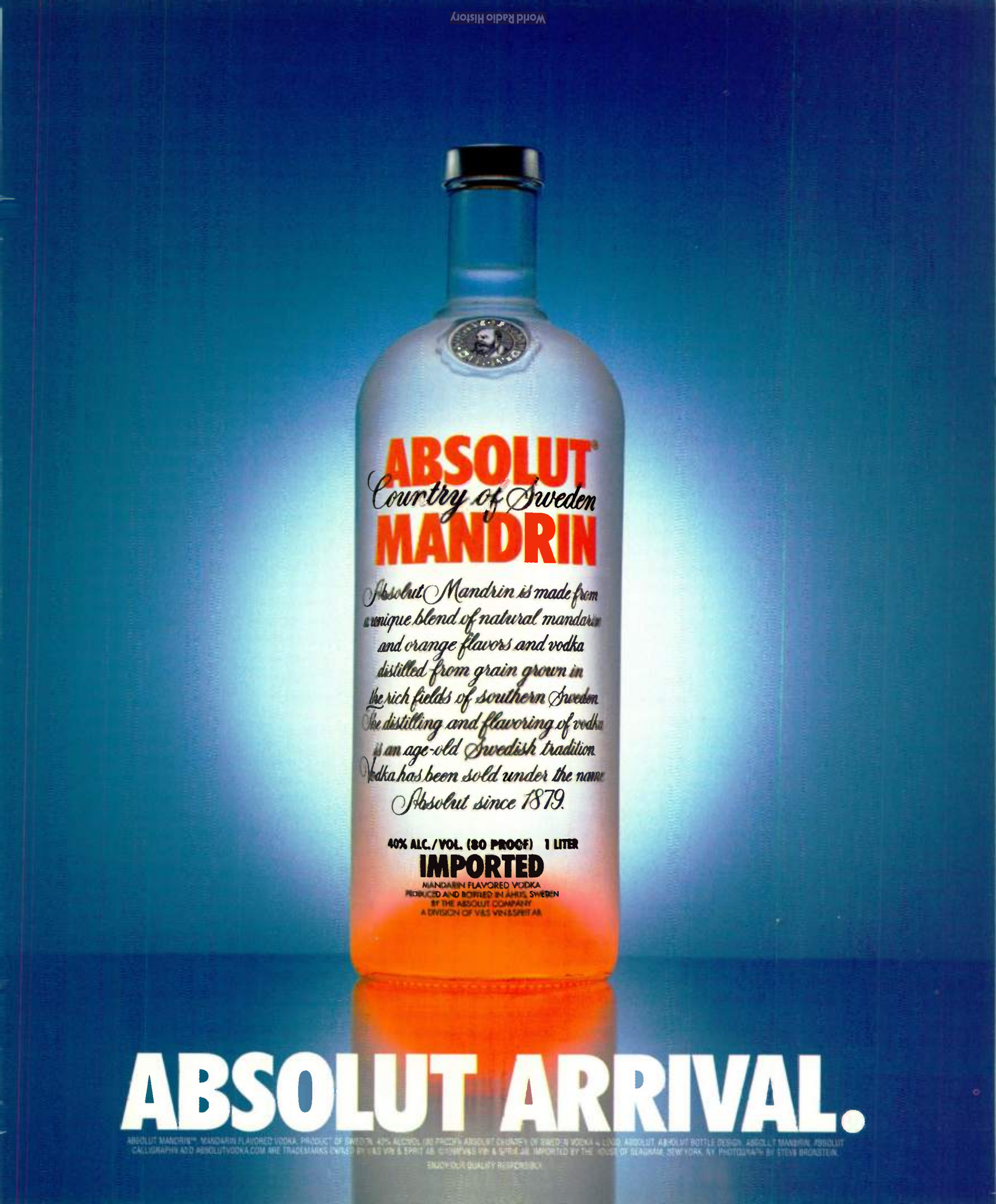
In July/August's "The Cultural Elite," by senior editor Lorne Manly, the painter Lucian Freud was incorrectly identified as Clement Freud.

In July/August's "In Their Backyard," by assistant editor Julie Scelfo, the names of Deb Goeken, the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*'s assistant managing editor for news, and Tom DeFeo, the paper's deputy managing editor, were misspelled.

In July/August's "Hugging The Spotlight," by senior writer Jessica Seigel, Fox News Channel reporter Alicia Acuña was incorrectly identified as a producer.

A clarification: In the July/August issue, we published two feature stories related to media coverage of the Columbine High School shooting. In "In Their Backyard," we reported on *Denver Rocky Mountain News* staffers following "the leads and stories [that] kept coming," including "the emergence of a videotape that the killers had made." In "Hugging The Spotlight," we reported that "[n]o one ever found [that] video." Both reports are true. What should have been made clearer was that the existence of such a tape fell into the "leads"—not "stories"—category.

We regret these errors.



ABSOLUT ARRIVAL.

REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

BY BILL KOVACH

VANITY FARE A piece titled "Pulitzer Self-Promotion" that appeared in June's "The Notebook" called deserved attention to the habit of newspapers using their front pages, which most would never sell to outside interests, to advertise themselves when Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism's Pulitzer Prize Board awards them a prize.

In the article, staff writer Jeff Pooley pointed out how nine of the ten newspapers to win such awards this year squeezed other stories that might have been of much more general interest to their readers off the front page in order to "dole out praise" to themselves.

The article generally let the newspapers speak for themselves by quoting from the stories of self-congratulation, which often described festive celebrations inside the winning newsrooms. The article quotes *The Miami Herald*, for instance, describing its own work as "[a] hard-hitting series of reports that overcame numerous hurdles...." The newspaper relegated the other winners to a small box on the inside.

On the other hand the article described *The New York Times* as "understated and evenhanded in treating the news of both its own and the other awards."

Overall this article faithfully reflected the behavior of the award winners, but one line near the end of the story, reporting on the reaction of the *Los Angeles Times*, caused me to wonder if Mr. Pooley had read the same newspaper.

The line in question: "The *Los Angeles Times*, which won for reporting on corruption in the entertainment business, did describe other winners, *but used the bulk of its coverage to counter the perception that it's soft on the hometown industry.*" (I added the italics so the phrase would jump out at you the way it jumped out at me when I read it).

That characterization is just not right. The story I read in the *Los Angeles Times* was nearly 1,800 words long. By my count it had one partial quote in one sentence in the second paragraph that mentioned the newspaper's reputation for being soft on the movie industry. The *L.A. Times*'s Pulitzer was not mentioned again for 21 paragraphs, while other prize winners *were* described. One other reference to the newspaper's history of covering Hollywood, in a partial quote, appeared deep in the story. In fact, of the 34 paragraphs that made up the story (written by David Shaw, the newspaper's well-respected media critic), only 12 mentioned the *Times*; and 5 of those were biographical material about the two reporters whose work won the prize.

The *Los Angeles Times* has absorbed a lot of criticism from myself and from other journalists over the past two years because of a radical reorganization of the relationship between the news and the advertising departments of the newspaper. Much of the criticism reflected concerns that the reorganization indicates a greater interest in the needs of advertisers than in the needs of readers. Given the fact that this year's Pulitzer recognized the paper for breaking a long pattern of being less than aggressive in covering a local industry as powerful as the movie business, those modest mentions hardly seem unjustified. They are more properly characterized as statements of fact than examples of self-celebration and don't justify the claim that "the bulk of its coverage" was bent toward countering a long-standing reputation.

Just so you know, I come to this general subject with less than clean hands. When I was a newspaper editor I was guilty of the same self-congratulating behavior. I have to admit that it is much easier to see the disingenuousness of these sorts of news judgments when you aren't making them yourself. It is hard to imagine that readers don't notice how differently these celebration awards are handled than, say, the annual magazine awards. With the exception of this unfortunate phrase about the *Los Angeles Times* Mr. Pooley has done a service for editors everywhere by raising a question about just whose interests are served by this kind of self-promotion.

Editor's Note: We indeed erred in reporting that the "bulk" of the Los Angeles Times *article in question was about its reputation, and we apologize.*

HOW TO REACH HIM

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GRAPHIC CONFUSION "Shame, shame, shame," Challiss E. McDonough e-mailed from Washington, D.C. "You know better. Problems with the graphs on page 110 of the July/August issue ["Fearless Predictions: The Content World, 2005"] practically jumped off the page at me—skewed statistics all over the place! Is this a test?"

The first graph that Ms. McDonough refers to is not wrong in what it depicts, but is a little deceptive. The line graph charts the decline in household network-news ratings since 1970, a substantial slide for all three broadcast network news programs. I'll let Ms. McDonough describe the problem:

Bill Kovach, curator of Harvard's Nieman Foundation for Journalism, was formerly editor of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution *and a* New York Times *editor.*

"What you've done is give the same weight to the data from 1996 alone as you've given to the five years between 1990 and 1995. If you're going to change your time increment, you *must* also change the distance between marks on the axis. Otherwise, even though the data may still be accurate, it gives the reader a skewed impression of any trend established. In this case, it doesn't look like the change makes too much difference, but that doesn't mean it's OK."

She's right. While the information is accurate, had the time line of the graphic been consistent, the uptick in household ratings for NBC and CBS from 1995 to 1997 would have been slightly steeper as would the down tick for ABC during the same time period.

The second graph in question purported to show in a bar format that "[l]ocal news is the most regularly watched news on television." But there seemed to be a problem, as Ms. McDonough points out: the graph compared all local news not to all broadcast or all cable news but to each of the three broadcast networks and to each of the four all-news cable networks. It seems to be the old case of comparing apples and oranges. Had all broadcast-news viewing been combined, as the local-news viewing was, it would have shown broadcast-news viewing narrowly beating out local-news viewing. Had all cable-news watching been similarly combined, it would have been a clear winner, nearly double the local-news viewing. This sort of confusion defeats the purpose of the graphic presentation of information.

Asked to respond to Ms. McDonough's complaint, the Booz•Allen & Hamilton Inc. consulting firm, which produced the story and accompanying graphics, offered the following: "We're pleased that the reader has paid such careful attention to the graphics that illustrate our 'Fearless Predictions.' We could have chosen other data to illustrate our point about the popularity of local television news. Other national surveys, most notably one by The Pew Research Center, have shown that more viewers watch local news regularly than national and world news. We stand by our prediction that local news will thrive."

Maybe so, but why do our readers have to take that on faith?

WHO OWNS WHAT? Sarah Wernick forwarded to me a message that she saw on the Compuserve Journalism Forum, which she said was "all abuzz about this."

The message posted on the "freelancers" section of the forum by assistant systems operator Teresa Mears reads: "There's an interesting story in the current *Brill's Content* ["Talk Back," June] by Josh Greenfeld about his efforts to get [*The New York Times*] to either withhold his book review from an anthology or pay him for it.

"It seems to me an ideal opening for someone who's seen the *Brill's Content* contract to write a letter to the ombudsman pointing out that *Brill's Content* doesn't accept any stories unless writers are willing to [give] them the right to reprint them forever without ever paying the writer again."

When I asked editor in chief Steven Brill about this he wrote: "Our policy is that we try to buy all the rights, yes. But we don't assume we own them, as the *Times* apparently does. And depending on the author—i.e., how much we want it—we negotiate. The point of the Greenfeld piece is that the *Times* just assumes it owns what it wants to own....

"If we ask someone to write a piece for us and it's our idea, we want all the rights. If it is their idea, we usually now only offer to have them help our writers with the research for a fee, because we have so much trouble getting freelancers to comply with our standards of reporting. So, for an idea (and a writer) that comes in over the transom, we pretty much just don't do straight freelance deals.

"In the rare event that we do, our starting point would be to keep all of the rights. What makes this a great country is that the writer doesn't have to accept those conditions; he or she can negotiate and try to get a better deal from us, and we can hold firm or give a little. But I need to emphasize to you that you can count on one hand the number of negotiations like that, [which] we would have in a given year, because we usually just don't use freelancers who come to us with their ideas."

Editor Eric Effron elaborated on the magazine's practices in an answer he sent to a query from Jack El-Hai of Minneapolis, Minnesota, who e-mailed that "[i]t took guts to publish Josh Greenfeld's principled 'Greenfeld's Complaint,' especially considering the complaints I've heard that your own magazine's apparently non-negotiable contract with freelance writers...."

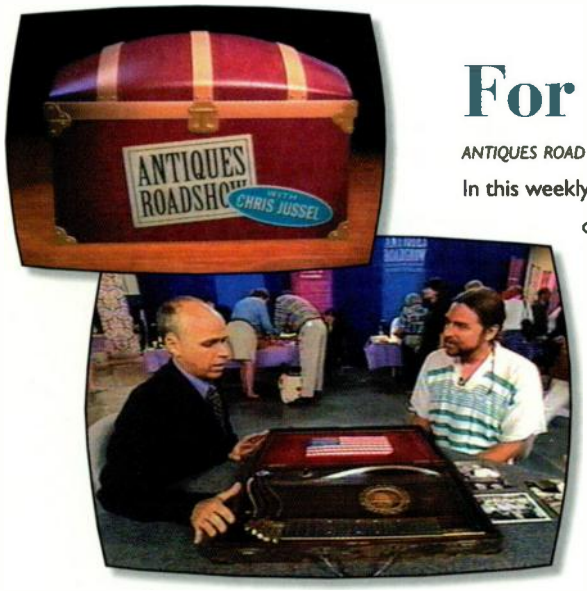
Effron's reply makes an important distinction:

"What Josh [Greenfeld] was complaining about is not at all analogous to any of our policies. He refused permission for the *Times* to run his piece, yet they did anyway, according to his telling. As for our policies toward freelancers, while we have a standard contract, we negotiate terms if it's necessary to get the piece or writer we really want. I should add that with a fairly large and growing staff of writers, we aren't using that much freelance work."

CLEANING UP MY OWN MESS I want to apologize to Gavin Edwards, of Brooklyn, New York, for confusing him by my lack of precision when criticizing what I called "writing-with-attitude" in the April issue, for use of the phrase "pinko ideals" to characterize *The Nation* magazine. I made a big mistake by not making it clear that I was criticizing the use of the phrase in a reported piece that appeared in "The Notebook" of that issue. As it happened there were two articles in the same issue referring to efforts by Victor Navasky, publisher and editorial director of *The Nation*, to find new ways to generate revenue for the magazine. The other one, the one Mr. Edwards read, was Calvin Trillin's "The Wry Side" column, which reported on a Caribbean cruise fund-raiser for the magazine. In his column, Trillin described *The Nation* as "a pinko magazine printed on very cheap paper." Mr. Edwards was rightly confused as to how I could expect those comments might be removed from the column, "since," as he writes, "the whole point of the column was how Trillin recast his prejudices about *The Nation*'s readership. Or is Kovach's point simply that first-person humor essays should be written without attitude and have all the funny bits carefully excised?"

Calvin Trillin hasn't complained, but I'll apologize to him anyway for taking the fun out of his column for at least one of his readers. ■

STUFF we LIKE



For What It's Worth

ANTIQUES ROAD SHOW COMBINES THE THRILL OF A TREASURE HUNT WITH THE SATISFACTION OF A GOOD HISTORY LESSON. In this weekly PBS series, experts from leading auction houses travel from city to city offering free appraisals of antiques and collectibles. People appear with everything from old hammers to fireplace mantels. The fun comes from watching guests learn that someone's teapot, a family heirloom, is actually an outstanding example of colonial-era silver work and might fetch close to $20,000 at auction (this really happened in one recent installment). Even when a vase turns out to be worth exactly the $5 it cost when it was purchased at a garage sale, the appraisers still provide entertaining background on each object's history and culture. —*Amy Bernstein*

DEATH WELL TOLD

SOME OF THE FINEST SHORT PROFILES AROUND CAN BE FOUND every week in *The Economist*'s "Obituary" section. The editors' selections are eclectic, and have included such figures as Jesus, King Hussein of Jordan, and Sir Alfred Ramsey (the "pride of English football"). A recent profile of Irving Stevens, "America's king of the hobos," even noted the difference between a tramp and a hobo: tramps "live by begging"; hobos are "wandering workers." These concise and sometimes quirky essays provide compelling and vivid portraits of men and women who made the world a more interesting place.

—*Michael Freedman*

The Economist

LOG ON, TYPE IN, FIND OUT

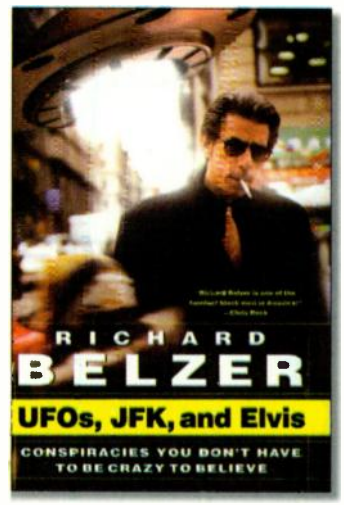
WANT TO TAKE A GANDER AT CHURCH OF Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's rap sheet or browse through the Unabomber's psychiatric report? If you have a taste for the tabloid, check out The Smoking Gun (www.thesmokinggun.com). Culled largely from government and law enforcement sources (and thanks in part to the Freedom of Information Act) the site's collected documents range from celebrity autopsy reports to unusual court rulings. An archive contains most of the goods, like sections of sixties LSD guru Timothy Leary's FBI file that detail his work as a government snitch. The Smoking Gun's editors claim everything is authentic. And there's even a Smoking Gun theme song. —*Chipp Winston*

BOXING THE BELTWAY'S EARS

IF THE WASHINGTON PRESS CORPS SETS YOUR TEETH ON EDGE, VISIT The Daily Howler (www.dailyhowler.com) to see reporters, columnists, and pundits chastised for their logic (often absent) and facts (routinely faulty). Written by humorist and one-time schoolteacher Bob Somerby (who once roomed at Harvard with Al Gore), the Howler gleefully boxes the ears of the Beltway media, revealing mistakes and distortions made by columnists such as *The New York Times*'s Maureen Dowd and talk-show hosts such as CNBC's Chris Matthews. Somerby goes beyond "gotchas," though, and raises questions about big stories. In May, for example, he deconstructed the *Times*'s coverage of the so-called China espionage scandal involving Wen Ho Lee, a former physicist at the U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories at Los Alamos, New Mexico. The Howler questioned the paper's putative evidence, noting that it reported the FBI got involved after "another Los Alamos scientist saw Mr. Lee being hugged by a visiting Chinese scientist in a manner that seemed suspiciously congratulatory." As Somerby put it, "And we agree—you catch a scientist hugging another, it inevitably makes you think he's been spying." Unlike much of the media, the Howler doesn't pretend to have the answers to such scandals, but it does have some great questions.

—Nicholas Varchaver

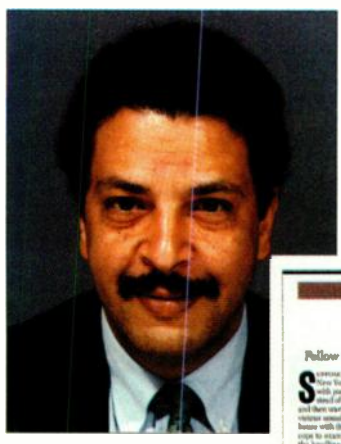
SO, TWO GUYS WALK ONTO A GRASSY KNOLL...



IT'S BEEN NEARLY 36 YEARS SINCE the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and many Americans still don't accept the U.S. government's official explanation of how he was killed. For those who like their paranoia laced with humor, comedian/actor Richard Belzer offers *UFOs, JFK, and Elvis: Conspiracies You Don't Have To Be Crazy To Believe* (Ballantine Books, May 1999). Belzer (Detective John Munch on the long-running *Homicide: Life on the Street*) knows President Kennedy was killed in Dallas on November 22, 1963, but he's still wondering who pulled the trigger. Mixing stand-up comedy with skeptical inquiry, Belzer catalogs the loose ends, odd characters, and bizarre coincidences that hover around the assassination. There's a sarcastic edge to his approach not associated with the dour obsessives generally found carrying this torch. Consider this on Lee Harvey Oswald's possible motive for shooting the president: "Aren't there any conspiracy theorists who believe something reasonable? Like, for instance, that poor Lee had a remote, hypnotic, intracerebral control device implanted in his brain? Why, certainly there are!" Belzer's message: Question authority, but do it with a smirk.

—Ed Shanahan

Crossing The "Dividing Line"



COURTESY OF *TIME*

Time's Jack E. White

FEW SUBJECTS IN AMERICA ARE AS SENSITIVE AS RACE, AND FEW WRITERS ARE AS REFRESHINGLY BLUNT ABOUT IT as *Time* national correspondent Jack E. White. In his column, "Dividing Line," White tackles such hot-button topics as New York City's Abner Louima police brutality case and shows how they illustrate larger societal issues, in this case the silent tolerance of whites for racial profiling by the city's cops. But White is no predictable firebrand: He questioned Jesse Jackson's diplomatic visit to Slobodan Milosevic ("I think [Jackson] needs the rush that only bargaining with evil can provide") and mocked the politically correct brouhaha over a new TV sitcom set during the Civil War: "Having now gone way beyond the call of journalistic duty by suffering through tapes of two episodes...I think both sides are missing the point. It's a lousy show...." White does more than provoke thought; he regularly offers suggestions for bridging the racial divide that he calls "a quarrel among cousins."

—Matthew Reed Baker

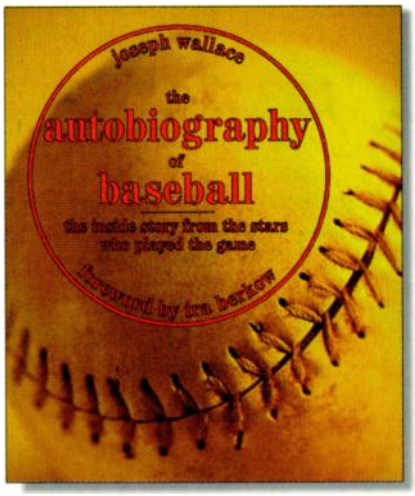
Navel Gazing With The Stars

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT JULIA ROBERTS'S FAVORITE BRA OR ABOUT BRAD PITT'S "fuzzy brown slip-ons," turn to *Vanity Fair*'s cover stories. But for a slightly deeper glimpse into the soul of modern celebrity, head straight to the magazine's back page for its "Proust Questionnaire." A regular feature in the magazine since 1993, this Q&A poses a series of life's weightier questions to celebrities. In the June issue, for instance, *Vanity Fair* asked fiction writer Jackie Collins for her motto. "Girls can do anything!" she replied. And which historical figure does Collins most identify with? "Frank Sinatra. He did it his way." Granted, few responses are likely to be included in the canon of twentieth-century Western philosophy. But they're fun. —*Michael Freedman*

NO PUN(DIT) INTENDED

WITH CAMPAIGN SEASON IN FULL SWING, POLITICS1 (www.politics1.com) is an important stop for political junkies, journalists, and anyone who wants to get informed before election day. Run almost single-handedly by Florida trial lawyer and citizen journalist Ron Gunzburger, Politics1 provides a dizzying array of news, candidate biographies, and web links related to the nation's hot issues and political contests. The site covers the 2000 presidential campaign, as well as House and Senate races in every state. Also, unlike many political reporters, Gunzburger does not ignore third- party candidates. One bonus is Gunzburger's free newsletter, which mixes his own reporting with news summaries from sources across the country. It's nonpartisan (Gunzburger, who says he is "a libertarian with a small 'l'" has worked as an aide or consultant to Democratic, Republican, and independent politicians) and often funny. He's even notched a few big scoops, including being the first to report that an aide to presidential candidate George W. Bush had registered the Internet domain names www.BushRidge.net, www.BushWhitman.com, www.BushEngler.com, and www.BushPataki.net. The May 12 report sparked a flurry of speculation that the Republican candidate was contemplating governors Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania, Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey, John Engler of Michigan, and George Pataki of New York as a potential running mate. —*Robert Schmidt*

Home Plate Histories



THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA'S national pastime lives in Joseph Wallace's *The Autobiography of Baseball: The Inside Story from the Stars Who Played the Game* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., October 1998). Wallace takes us through the hearts and minds of players, revealing their emotions, inspirations, and dreams. More than a collection of batting averages and career highlights, *The Autobiography of Baseball* presents long-forgotten and never-before-published interviews, vivid photographs, and humorous anecdotes. In a 1927 *New York Times* interview, Pittsburgh Pirate Paul Waner credits his use of a corncob for batting practice in achieving a lifetime .333 average. "There is nothing in the world that will take a freakish spin, a sudden hop, a wide, sweeping curve, like a corncob," Waner revealed. As *New York Times* sports columnist Ira Berkow notes in the foreword, "We are also treated to a history of a nation's myth as embodied in baseball—and the inevitable reality, which is sometimes happy, sometimes painful." From catchers and pitchers to first basemen and outfielders, Wallace presents an enlightening glimpse into the personalities that define baseball's history. —*Bridget Samburg*

1998 AWARD for "BEST WEB SITE" New York City Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists

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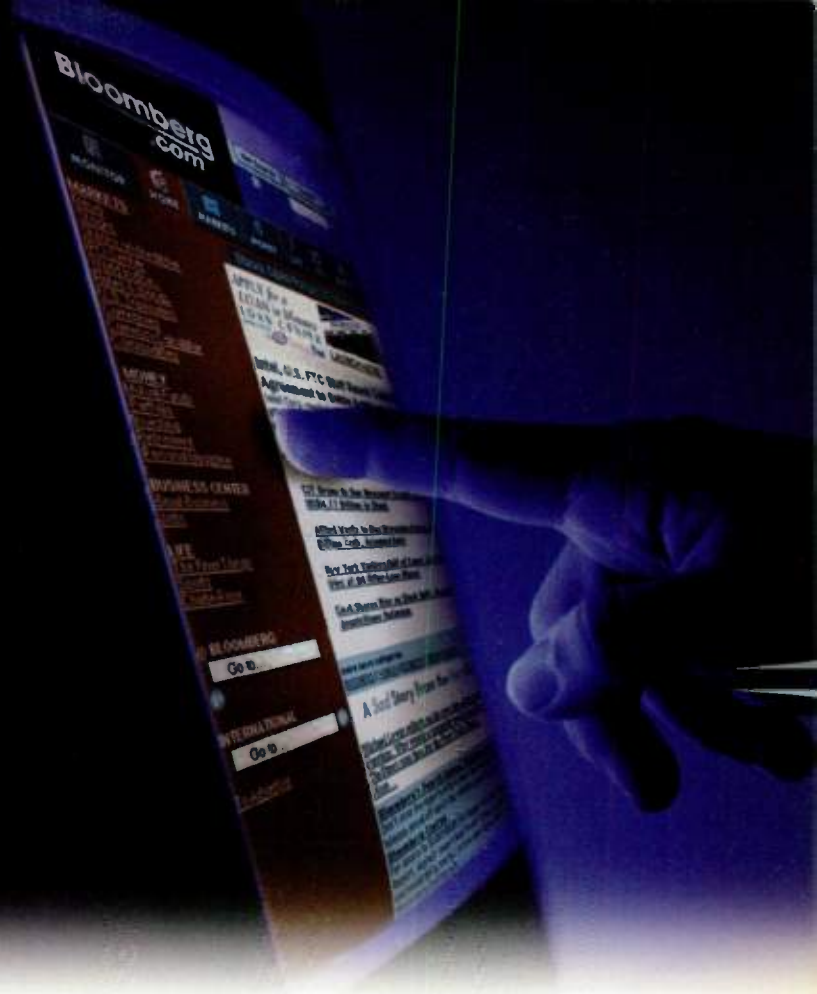

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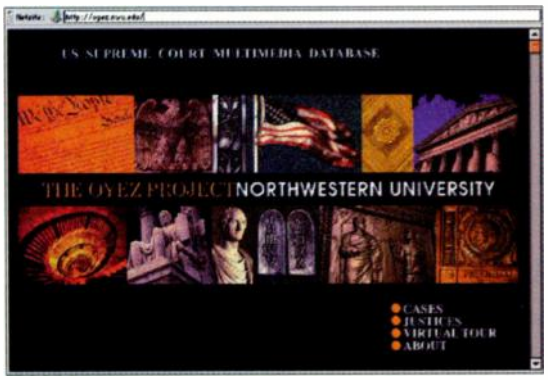
If It Pleases The Court



THE OYEZ PROJECT AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY (oyez.nwu.edu) is a unique resource for Supreme Court information. The multimedia database contains audio recordings of oral arguments from more than 600 cases dating back to the 1950s, including 1973's *Roe* v. *Wade* and 1964's landmark First Amendment libel suit, *New York Times* v. *Sullivan*. There's a catalog of Supreme Court opinion abstracts and biographical sketches of all the Court's justices starting from 1789. The site also offers visitors a virtual tour (with a 360-degree perspective) of the Supreme Court building and grounds.

—Erich Wasserman

Dateline Europe

FOR NEWS FROM PARIS TO ATHENS, TURN TO WWW.EURONEWS.NET. THE site is maintained by EuroNews, the pan-European television network set up in 1993 by a consortium of the continent's public broadcasters. Like the network, the website carries up-to-date reports on politics, business, and culture in five languages, including English. There are daily features, highlights of television programs, and a page of information devoted to Europe's infant currency, the euro. A weather section of colorful maps includes forecasts for all of Europe and beyond, as well as a running ticker of temperatures in cities from Edinburgh to Ankara.

A links page takes you to the companion sites for a number of EuroNews's member broadcasters, including Italy's RAI television and Britain's ITN.

—Dimitra Kessenides

For Scores And More

SPORTSPAGES.COM (WWW.SPORTSPAGES.COM) LABELS ITSELF "ONE-STOP WEB BROWSING for the Sports Journalist," but any fan with Internet access will find it worth a look. Compiled by Rich Johnson, a freelance radio news anchor, this site provides links to 159 U.S. newspapers, arranged by region (most of them based in and around big-league and major college towns), and to 30 news organizations from Canada and the United Kingdom (of interest, for instance, to tennis fans who want to read Wimbledon coverage in *The Times* of London). For a $3 fee, readers can check out a special page composed of Johnson and his crew's picks of the day's top stories, grouped by subject. And, for the sports enthusiast who wants more than roundups and box scores, those subjects include "Police Blotter," a recurring all-points bulletin on athlete-related crime stories. *—Ed Shanahan*

GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

POLITICAL JUNKIES WHO CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF OUR CAPITAL'S NEWS ON CNN CAN TURN TO ALLPOLITICS.COM (cnn.com/allpolitics). Updated throughout the day, the site offers sound-bite coverage of the inner workings of the federal government, along with commentary on current issues, and ongoing state and federal election reports. Also available: links to relevant articles in *Time* and *Congressional Quarterly*, and a RealPlayer component that allows visitors to listen to various political speeches and CNN news footage. A quick laugh can be had by perusing the work of political cartoonists Bill Mitchell and Mike Luckovich, among others. And, in the true spirit of democracy, moderated web chats put surfers in touch with major political figures such as Vice-President Al Gore, while providing a forum for debate.

—Justin Zaremby

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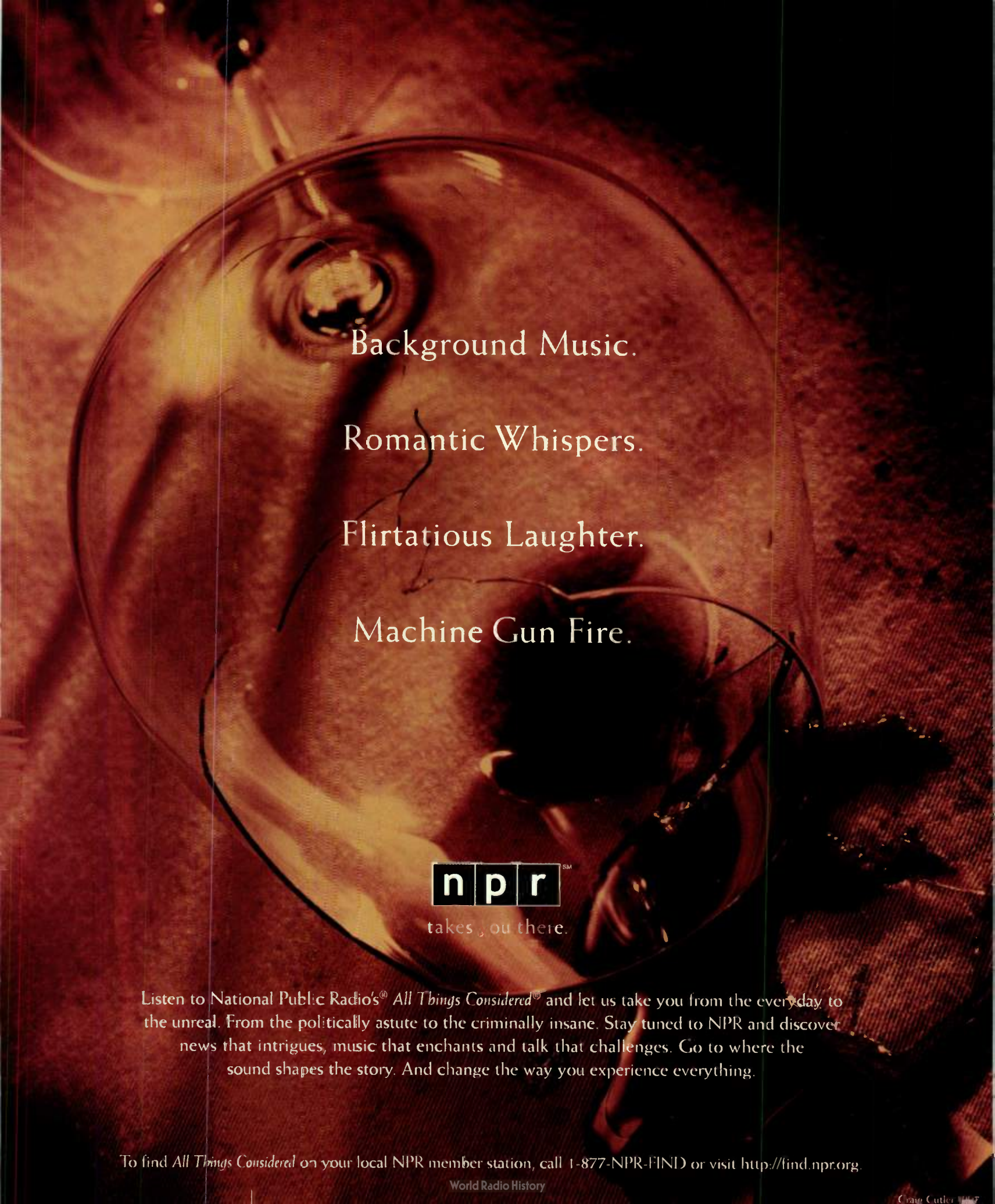

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Craig Cutler

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How Woodward Goes Wayward

In his latest best-seller, Bob Woodward doesn't let pesky facts or contradictory evidence get in the way of the story.

BOB WOODWARD KNEW IT WAS A STRETCH. But he remembered the insistent words of Alice Mayhew, the semimanic genius editor at Simon & Schuster who had been his mentor for this book and for his eight other best-sellers, beginning 25 years ago with his and Carl Bernstein's *All the President's Men.*

"Keep the narrative going," Mayhew constantly reminded him. "It's not enough to have a lot of facts. You have to tell a story. You need to develop the characters, construct scenes, build drama. That's the difference between a book that a few insiders read and a really big book that everyone wants to read."

Woodward badly wanted everyone to read this book. He had a theme that he believed in deeply and wanted to put in front of as many people as possible.

The presidency, Woodward believed, had been shadowed by a scandal mentality in the quarter century since Watergate because each of the five White House successors to Richard Nixon never learned the overarching lesson of Watergate: If you don't level with the people and the press immediately about any wrongdoing, scandal and investigation will define your tenure.

Woodward already knew that the last lines of his book would be about how these scandals and investigations had so defined and crippled President Clinton that he had, as Woodward would put it, "lost his way." But first, Woodward had to get people to read to that last, crowning paragraph. And that meant heaping on big servings of Mayhew's drama.

So as Woodward pored over his notes, he decided he would piece together what he knew about one crucial aspect of his book, add some garnish, and combine those factlets into a really dramatic vignette that would be emblematic of the reads-like-a-novel nature of the entire book. Once again, Woodward would make serious journalism a great read.

It was a fabulous scene, one Woodward already could see quoted in those inevitable news stories the day the book was released. Now, he was ready to type it out—even if he wasn't quite sure of its truth.

What Woodward knew, or thought he knew, was that Robert Bennett, President Clinton's lawyer in the Paula Jones case, had told some friends and reporters (off the record) that Clinton had told Bennett that he'd long since sworn off chasing women.

What Woodward also knew from several White House reporters was that Bennett and the president had, on occasion, been seen strolling the White House grounds talking quietly, each with a cigar in hand.

What he typed—and what has now ended up appearing in his new best-seller, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate*—was the following combination of those two almost-facts, with a lot more added, wrapped up, and packaged as follows:

One day, Clinton and Bennett went for a stroll on the White House grounds. Both had cigars. Bennett lit his. Clinton did not.... Rumors persisted in Washington connecting Clinton sexually with various women. For all Bennett knew, they were total garbage.

Perhaps it was the intimacy of the walk, the perfectly tended White House grounds or the male party and communion suggested by the cigars, even though the president's was unlit.

"If you're caught [f---ing] around in the White House," Bennett said, "I'm not good enough to help you."

"This is a prison," Clinton responded. "I purposefully have no drapes on the windows." As for women, "I'm retired," the president of the United States declared, repeating himself emphatically. "I'm retired."

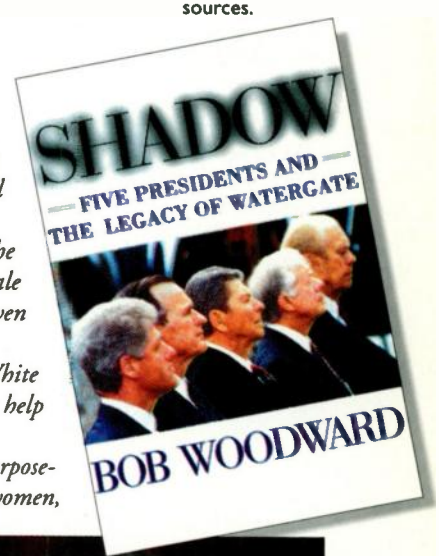
"Sure, this is a stretch," Woodward thought, "but it probably happened like that. And it could be one of the great scenes in the book."

* * *

How do I know all this? Like Woodward, I do and I don't.

I think I know that Alice Mayhew has told Woodward that stuff about constructing a drama because when she was my editor

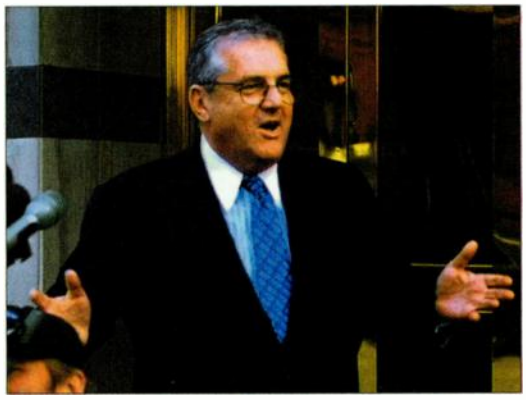
In his new book, Bob Woodward (below) requires readers to put a lot of trust in him and his self-proclaimed "exhaustive" evaluation of anonymous sources.



AP (WOODWARD)

on a book I wrote 21 years ago, she repeated the same mantra incessantly. I remember talking to Woodward about Mayhew's emphasis on drama over drinks at a book party several years ago, and Woodward's telling me that he always thinks of it when he's writing. (Disclosure: Mayhew remains a close friend.) But I didn't take notes, and in preparing this article I didn't ask Woodward about whether he was thinking of Mayhew's drama speech when he wrote this passage, despite the fact that he readily made himself available for a long interview and a series of follow-up conversations. (Why risk gumming up a good scene with his denial?)

I think I know how Woodward knew about Bennett's telling people that the president had told him he'd sworn off womanizing, but I didn't ask Woodward.



Clinton lawyer Robert Bennett says he never had a conversation Woodward recounts in the book.

I assume, but don't know, that Woodward knew about the one or two cigar walks Bennett took with President Clinton because lots of people in the White House press corps knew about them, according to Bennett.

But I'm depending on Bennett's denial to me that he ever had the conversation Woodward recounts during one of those cigar strolls. Moreover, I think it's possible, even probable, that Woodward decided to assume some or a lot without checking with those involved once he got a plausible piece of the story from one source, however potentially biased, because I've now talked to 12 people who could have been sources for specific scenes in this book but claim either that they weren't asked, or that they were asked but gave Woodward conflicting information that did not make it into the book. The problem is that most of them also made me promise not to reveal their names; they're happy to criticize Woodward's use of anonymous sources as long as they can remain anonymous themselves.

This makes my account like Woodward's book. You have to believe me about my sources; you have to trust my assessment of the sources' reliability; and you have to trust that my instinct for filling in the information gaps isn't overwhelmed by my desire to give you some of Mayhew's drama, let alone that my quest for drama hasn't led me to ignore facts that don't fit.

The difference is that I've just told you what I know, why I think I know it, and what I don't know. Woodward mostly doesn't do that, and, depending on what the truth really is behind this book, at best it undermines the credibility of an exhaustive piece of reportage and at worst it perpetrates a fraud.

Bennett adamantly denies that that conversation as recounted in the book, with all the specific quotation marks around it, ever took place. He also swears that he never would have talked to Woodward or any reporter about any conversation he had with the president or any client.

Woodward won't talk at all about any sources he had or didn't have, including whether he conducted any interviews with Bennett, other than to refer me to his source notes in the back of the book—which as a general matter doesn't help much: Two hundred and seventy-four of these source notes for the Clinton-related material cite only a "knowledgeable" source or sources, and 16 cite only a named source or sources. In the case of the Bennett stroll with President Clinton, the note cites the "author's interviews with knowledgeable source."

So, who's telling the truth? You decide. My real point is that I'm letting you decide. Woodward doesn't.

Another possibility is that Woodward promised Bennett he would not quote the cigar-stroll conversation and broke the promise. That's a claim now being made by two other lawyers—Sydney Hoffmann, who represented Monica Lewinsky, and Jane Sherburne, former special counsel to the president, who advised the president and Hillary Clinton on scandal matters. Both also assert that the material Woodward used from them is inaccurate.

Among other complaints, Hoffmann maintains that a paragraph in which Woodward says that Hoffmann "concluded it was highly possible that Lewinsky had a form of Clara Bow syndrome, named after the famous silent film actress who couldn't say no," is pure fiction. Woodward, while conceding that he spelled Hoffmann's last name incorrectly and might have gotten a few other facts wrong, says that the passages involving Hoffmann are basically accurate and violated no promises to keep whatever Hoffmann or others might have told him confidential. However, because he never quotes Hoffmann by name, but rather, as with Bennett, leaves her hanging out there as a likely source by describing her thoughts and by attaching quote marks to conversations she supposedly had with her client, Woodward is again unaccountable for any promised ground rules. Indeed, he won't acknowledge that he even interviewed Hoffmann, let alone say if he took notes.

Sherburne has now testified in a deposition in an unrelated case that a dramatic dialogue between Sherburne and Hillary Clinton in Woodward's book is "made up." Woodward says that he tape-recorded his conversations with Sherburne because their interviews were on the record but for background, meaning that he could use the information but not attribute it to her by name. He then was able to confirm the information from others, he claims, which allowed him to use the quotes from Sherburne without her being the named or only source for them. But we have to believe that Woodward actually found those other sources.

As for the accuracy of the quotes, Woodward first told me that in the wake of Sherburne's deposition accusing him of concocting the quotes, he had asked Sherburne for permission to release the tapes, but that she had refused that request. That seemed to settle the matter. But then, Sherburne, after many requests, finally agreed to comment about the dispute. She claimed that Woodward had withdrawn the offer to release the tapes after she and her lawyer had taken him up on the offer but had asked first to hear the

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portions of the tapes that would back up what he recounts in the book. Only when asked later about that did Woodward acknowledge that he had, indeed, withdrawn the offer, explaining only that "now that the lawyers are involved, we are figuring out the soundest way to proceed based on what's fair to Sherburne and to my careful reporting." In other words, a writer trying to make a probably-too-simple, Woodward-like narrative out of all of this could write that when Sherburne called Woodward's bluff, he folded.

Nonetheless, Woodward maintains that all of Sherburne's descriptions of conversations that he quotes in the book involving Sherburne can be found on those tapes. But when pushed, he qualifies that by saying, without elaboration, that some of her quotes may only be in his handwritten notes.

Jane Sherburne, a former White House lawyer, testified in an unrelated case that dialogue in the book between Sherburne and Hillary Clinton is "made up."

Even assuming Sherburne did betray Hillary Clinton's confidences, had Woodward been truly conscientious, he could have ignored what we can assume but can't know was the first lady's initial, general refusal to be interviewed for the book and faxed her specific questions based on what he was going to report about what Sherburne said to him.

Had he done that, however, his drama might have been ruined by her answer, which might have been a denial coupled with an argument that Sherburne is a biased source. Or the drama might have been ruined by Sherburne's having the opportunity well before publication to disavow the quotes once she (and Mrs. Clinton) found out they were going to be published.

To which Woodward replies that he can't reply. That's because other than revealing in the source notes that he interviewed Presidents Carter and Ford and not Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton, he won't address the question of whether he interviewed anyone else who is not mentioned by name in the source notes, including the first lady.

In fact, even if other sources are open and accessible to Woodward, it's not clear that he wanted to complicate his dramatic narrative by taking advantage of them. For example, Woodward presents various accounts of independent counsel Kenneth Starr's prosecutorial decisions that seem to draw one-sidedly from the view of one or two disgruntled Starr aides. If Woodward had written this for *The Washington Post* (where he is the assistant managing editor of investigative news) and not for Alice Mayhew, he'd have been instructed, I hope, to go back to Starr for comment, and we readers would have learned either that Starr declined to comment or, if he did comment, what he said. Woodward will only say, when asked about these Starr passages, that "I exercised all of my reportorial efforts to get everyone's point of view." But I'll bet Starr or other members of his staff would have, or did, comment, since it seems clear in other parts of the book that they cooperated with Woodward.

"Once Bob was able to get someone to fill in his narrative," says someone involved as a player in this book who claims not to have been interviewed but who knows Woodward well, "he didn't kick the tires of that source by worrying about what other sources might say about the same thing. Once he gets one account that works, that's it."

In fact, one of the aspects of this book that should give trusting readers the most pause is that on the occasions when Woodward realized that the public record already included a conflicting account, he *did* include the accounts in his source notes in the back of the book. Could the difference be that he felt compelled to note the conflicts in the public record because if he didn't, others would?

Thus, we read at one point that Nancy Reagan would not allow her husband to hold a press conference because her astrologer had advised against it. The source note for this passage tell us that Donald Regan—President Reagan's onetime chief of staff, who was embittered at the first lady because she was instrumental in his firing—recorded this account in his memoir. But the same note also tells us that Mrs. Reagan's memoir provides a different reason for not wanting the press conference.

At least this contradiction can be found in the notes, but wouldn't the fair way to handle this material have been to qualify the narrative in the book with her denial?

No, says Woodward, "I have made a judgment...and I would argue that [my] business is to try to sort it out and present the best evidence, and if there is a glaring contradiction, try to resolve it, [and] if you can't, try to explain it....What I'm trying to do is present the best narrative possible to the readers, and this includes all of that process....If you were doing the history as historians do, you would try to resolve it."

I guess it makes me a party pooper to suggest that some mention of the conflicting accounts should have been in the narrative itself. We can all see how that would complicate things. But at least it can be found in the notes. The bigger problem is that there is nothing in the notes pertaining to events for which conflicting accounts are *not* on public record.

This book is not the Woodward of Woodward and Bernstein—the two hero-reporters who in their newspaper articles told us, even when using anonymous sources, why they thought they knew what they did about Watergate and even told us what they didn't know. This is more like the novelization, or even the Hollywoodization, of Woodstein—the triumph of a Hollywood story line over ambiguity.

Woodward agrees that in trying to resolve conflicting accounts, "I try to present the best possible narrative I can....Is it perfect? I have yet to write a perfect book." But, he adds, "I've gone through a process myself which is as rigorous and as fair-minded as I can make it....It's careful, fair, exhaustive, but not perfect."

It is impossible to know, however, just how exhaustive it is because Woodward won't tell us whom he has interviewed or directly rebut those involved who claim not to have been his sources and assert that his narrative is based

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Descriptions of Kenneth Starr's prosecutorial decisions seem to be drawn from disgruntled aides.

on the one-sided accounts of those who were. But let's take a final example, where I can know definitively whom he talked to—or at least whom he didn't talk to.

On page 416, there appears an account of a meeting that Starr conducted with his staff just after this magazine's article on Starr and the press appeared on June 15, 1998:

Starr was in serious distress.

"Steve Brill's been a friend of mine for 20 years," he began mournfully. "I advised him when he started his first magazine, The American Lawyer.*" Brill had come to see him two months ago. "I thought he was coming to seek my advice on this endeavor, his new media magazine. He started firing 6-E* [the federal rule prohibiting grand jury leaks] *questions at me. I feel terrible. I'm sorry." He had been used to launch Brill's new magazine, and he had given* [Clinton defense lawyer David] *Kendall ammunition in their court fight about leaks. Starr said Brill had totally confused what he had said. He attempted to explain what he had meant, that he had been talking in general.*

Charles Bakaly [Starr's then-public relations aide], *who had attended most of the Starr-Brill interview, could see that Starr was contrite and embarrassed. During the interview, Starr had given one of his classic free-association lectures for 90 minutes on Rule 6-E.*

Woodward's source note for this passage cites "interviews with two knowledgeable sources." Yet Woodward is a friend with whom I have talked probably a dozen times in the last year, and he never asked *me* about any of this. If he had, I'd have told him that I never met Starr until four years after I started that first magazine. So Starr would have been misleading his staff if he said he had assumed our interview was a second instance of my seeking "advice" from him on a new venture. I'd have added that when I called Starr to set up our Lewinsky case interview, I clearly told him my purpose.

In Woodward's own voice in this passage, we're told, as fact, that Bakaly "attended most of the Starr-Brill interview." Why not ask me? I was there for the whole interview. I'd have said Bakaly was there for maybe 10 minutes out of 90, which would have cast doubt on what is apparently Starr and/or Bakaly's account of the session. Similarly, in Woodward's own voice we're told, again as fact, that Starr simply gave me "one of his classic free-association lectures" about the law of leaks. I'd have gladly shown Woodward my notes that demonstrate that much of the interview consisted of Starr talking about specific instances of his and his deputies talking to the press.

Asked about all this, Woodward readily concedes that he made a mistake in not interviewing me. But it's only one mistake, he points out.

That's true, and this is hardly a significant part of Woodward's book. But what's also true is that this is really the only such omission we can know about for sure, because Woodward won't tell us whom he interviewed and it's not fair to him to assume that those who claim they didn't talk to him are all telling the truth.

The issue, then, isn't what the truth is behind this trivial passage, nor is it whether Woodward should have believed nonanonymous-me over whoever his anonymous "knowledgeable sources" were. The point is that Woodward didn't ask, which gives credence to the claims of others who say he also didn't bother to ask them about flat statements of narrative fact that involve them in the book.

I have always thought the criticism of Woodward by other reporters was sour grapes. In 1983, in writing a retrospective about him and his partner Carl Bernstein for *Esquire*, I checked a lot that was by then checkable about their two Watergate books, *All the President's Men* and *The Final Days*, and found that their best stuff was right on the money. I still believe that to be true. So, it has always seemed to me an acceptable stretch for Woodward to ask readers to trust his omniscient narrative.

Do I still believe that when it comes to *Shadow*? Or did Woodward weave this together the way I've described it in the opening paragraphs with that cigar-walk conversation?

The answer is impossible to construct along one of Woodward and Mayhew's simple plot lines. I think Woodward is a conscientious guy who really does do exhaustive research, and I could find no one to come forward and contest a major substantive aspect of his basic reporting in *Shadow*. But the method he uses renders his reporting utterly unaccountable when it comes to all of those dramatic narrative details that make his books best-sellers.

These are important details. They tarnish or polish people's reputations and offer indelible lessons, even parables, for history. There's a lot of evidence that he pushed the urge to provide those details to the point where he not only stretched to make the narrative more dramatic, not only kept things uncomplicated by never reporting a conversation or event that in its remembrance has even the slightest ambiguity, but also seemed unwilling to complicate things by comparing the varying accounts before deciding which one to go with.

Calling his books history rather than journalism does not mean Woodward can avoid undermining his credibility when he hides the ball in the name of telling a better story. The first goal of both is to inform.

Force me to turn this all into a Woodward-esque, simple plotline, and I'll say that it's depressing and a sign of our times that one of the best journalists of our time, egged on by one of the best nonfiction book editors of our time, has chosen, with great commercial success, to entertain his readers at the expense of giving them the full story. ■

Editor's note: Intern Justin Zaremby contributed to the research for this story.

COMMENTARY THAT HITS

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the notebook

A Travel Tale's Crash Landing

IT WAS EXACTLY THE kind of "new and unusual" story that *Chicago Tribune* travel editor Randy Curwen says he's "always on the lookout for": a 700-word piece titled "Choppy Skies: A White-Knuckle Flight on Air Zimbabwe."

The June 6 article focused on freelance writer Gaby Plattner's ordeal flying between two of Zimbabwe's airports. The story's most bizarre aspect: the decision by the Air Zimbabwe pilot (flying solo) to put the plane on autopilot once it reached cruising altitude, leave the cockpit to use the bathroom, and prop the cockpit door open with a rubber band. But the rubber band snapped, according to Plattner's account, shutting and automatically locking the door. At that point, Plattner wrote, the pilot used an ax (conveniently stored aboard the plane) to break down the door and re-enter the cockpit.

The incredible anecdote sounded familiar to at least one *Tribune* reader, who called travel editor Curwen the day after it was published to tell him that a similar story could be found in a book that debunks so-called urban legends.

So Curwen sent freelancer Plattner an e-mail demanding that she produce the date of the flight and other details about her trip. What he got back was an e-mail apology in which she admitted that, save the part about her taking a flight in the African nation, what she had presented as a personal experience hadn't actually happened to her. "I thought it would heighten the dramatic effect," Plattner wrote to Curwen, according to the *Chicago Reader*, which first reported the fabrication.

Chagrined, the *Tribune*'s Curwen is dubious now about how Plattner came by the story. "I feel stupid now that we didn't ask her more questions," he says, adding that he had two phone conversations with Plattner during the editing process. "Every time I talked to her, she had new details....The only thing I never thought to ask her was, 'Are you lying to me?'"

Upon learning of the deception, the *Tribune* published a correction. But it hardly acknowledged the magnitude of the actual error: "The Travel section of June 6 printed a first-person account of a supposed incident in which a pilot was locked out of the cockpit. In fact, the freelance writer now says that she passed along a story she had heard as something she had experienced."

For her part, Plattner insists she didn't crib the story from the book, but heard it from a man seated next to her on the plane in Zimbabwe. She says she is now "skeptical that he experienced anything like it." Plattner admits she "screwed up," but claims this was her first newspaper-writing experience and that she had no idea it was inappropriate to pass off a stranger's tall tale as a true, first-person account.

Air Zimbabwe Corporation representatives, meanwhile, were furious about the article. In a June 24 letter to the *Tribune*, David Mwenga, the company's public relations director, labeled the article "untrue, unprofessional, and damaging to our airline....I cannot for one moment believe that a paper with a reputation such as the *Chicago Tribune*'s would accept such sick lies as a pilot breaking down the door to the cockpit with an axe."

Calling it "inexcusable journalism," he added, "[w]e do not keep axes on our aircraft." —*Ed Shanahan*

In Short

WHAT'S BETTER: *SALON*'S COFFEE OR STARBUCKS'S MAGAZINE?

Yes, the inexorable logic of brand extension now offers you the opportunity to purchase **Salon** magazine's "shade-grown whole bean coffee." (Rich taste, apparently, isn't the only selling point: The online magazine claims its java also "helps save trees for millions of birds.") You can sip it while you enjoy **Joe**, the new magazine marketed by the Starbucks coffee empire. If the theory is *What activity goes along with reading?* then it shouldn't be too long before we see a periodical published by a purveyor of toilet paper.

PUTTING ITS BEST FACE FORWARD

The pressure's always on at glossies to deliver more bang for the advertisers' bucks. **Cosmopolitan** has found a new way to do that, filling seven giant windows at its highly visible mid-Manhattan headquarters with posters for Neutrogena cosmetics. Next step: Neutrogena tattoos for the entire *Cosmo* staff.

OUR MODELS ARE GOOD-LOOKING

Under the heading "News To Use," **Glamour's** July issue presents an article on how cosmetics companies pick their spokeswomen. The one-page story is filled with quotes from the companies, all of which advertise in *Glamour*. They offer such surprising observations as the fact that Neutrogena's spokeswoman was picked because she has "perfect skin" and that the spokesmodel for "Almay's Skin Stays Clean Foundation" has a "very clean... type of beauty." This, of course, will help *Glamour* readers distinguish these spokeswomen from the mottled, grimy hags who flack for other cosmetics manufacturers.

DANNY HELLMAN (ILLUSTRATION)

True To His Words?

ONLY THE MOST VIGILANT *NEW YORK TIMES* READER WOULD have raised an eyebrow at the paper's June 26 headline, "Clinton Underestimated Serbs, He Acknowledges." The words topped an article about the president's press conference the prior day and began in the same vein: "President Clinton acknowledged today for the first time that he had underestimated Serbia's ability to withstand the NATO bombing campaign. In a lengthy news conference this afternoon, Mr. Clinton said he had believed that President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia would submit to allied demands after 'a couple of days' of bombing and halt the Serbian assault on Kosovo....Until today, the President and his top advisers did not concede that they were wrong in their initial expectation that Mr. Milosevic would capitulate after a few days of limited air strikes."

But if you jumped five pages to the *Times*'s transcript of the press conference, a surprise awaited: President Clinton actually said something different. "In Kosovo," a reporter asked, "what surprised you or went a way that you didn't expect?..." The president responded: "I had two models in my mind on what would happen with the bombing campaign. I thought it would either be over within a couple of days, because Mr. Milosevic would see we were united; or if he decided to sustain the damage to his country, that it would take quite a long while for the damage to actually reach the point where it was unsustainable. It took only a little longer than I thought it would once we got into the second model."


THE PRESIDENT

Clinton Underestimated Serbs, He Acknowledges

By JOHN M. BRODER

WASHINGTON, June 25 — President Clinton acknowledged today for the first time that he had underestimated Serbia's ability to withstand the NATO bombing campaign.

In a lengthy news conference this afternoon, Mr. Clinton said he had believed that President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia would submit to allied demands after "a couple of days" of bombing and halt the Serbian assault on Kosovo.

NATO and the Administration were initially criticized for that miscalculation of Serbian stamina, and then for failing to have a strategy for a prolonged air war, a campaign that ultimately lasted 78 days.

Until today, the President and top advisers did not concede they were wrong in their expectation that Mr. Milosevic would capitulate after a few days of air strikes.

Mr. Clinton said, realize, once Mr. the first days conflict we until the Yugoslav paign

PRESSING A DOMESTIC AGEND

At his news conference, Pre Clinton outlined his domesti for the coming months. Pu Excerpts, page A11.

that would make it w

He was asked about Kosovo d news conferen ate when consid bia, ag

The New York Times

The only other major paper to raise the issue, *The Boston Globe*, contradicted the *Times* account, noting that "Clinton also denied he had been caught off guard by the willingness of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to endure 78 days of NATO bombing."

Times reporter John Broder maintains that his article was accurate and notes that prior articles had reported that the administration was nonplussed at Milosevic's staying power. The president acknowledged his own surprise during an off-the-record dinner with other reporters in mid-June, Broder asserts. When Clinton then gave a similar answer at the press conference, Broder adds, it made the off-the-record comment "fair game." But doesn't the transcript appear nonetheless to contradict his account of the President's statement? Says Broder: "We'll just have to disagree on that." —*Nicholas Varchaver*

PUNDIT SCORECARD: A NEW LEADER

THE QUEEN IS DEAD. Long live the queen. Our four-time returning champion, Margaret Carlson, has been dethroned—at least, temporarily—by Eleanor Clift, as we update our scorecard to verify predictions the TV soothsayers made between August 1, 1998, and June 1, 1999. (Many relating to the Kosovo conflict are now verifiable.) Among the other pundits, Tony Blankley's pace cooled and both Mark Shields and Chippy the chimp surged into the top half.

Because a reader asked about it in a letter published in this issue, we'll make a confession: The comparison between Chippy and the human pundits is not an exact, one-for-one statistical matchup (Chippy has been making predictions only since late spring). But then, the comparison between pundits and other humans is not a fair one, either.

Eleanor Clift, MG (66 of 105)	.629	Bill Kristol, TW (49 for 85)	.576
Tony Blankley, MG (43 of 69)	.623	Michael Barone, MG (30 of 53)	.566
Mark Shields, CG (17 of 28)	.607	Sam Donaldson, TW (19 for 34)	.559
Margaret Carlson, CG (26 of 43)	.605	Cokie Roberts, TW (16 for 29)	.552
Robert Novak, CG (42 of 70)	.600	Kate O'Beirne, CG (18 of 34)	.529
Patrick Buchanan, MG (37 of 62)	.597	John McLaughlin, MG (41 of 83)	.494
Al Hunt, CG (40 of 68)	.588	Morton Kondracke, BB (37 of 89)	.416
Chippy, (unaffiliated) (17 of 29)	.586	George Will, TW (14 of 35)	.400
George Stephanopoulos, TW (49 for 84)	.583	Fred Barnes, BB (36 of 102)	.353

"BB": *The Beltway Boys*; "CG": *The Capital Gang*; "MG": *The McLaughlin Group*; "TW": *This Week With Sam Donaldson & Cokie Roberts*

Clift: Takes the lead

Carlson: Dethroned

Chippy: A strong showing

COURTESY OF *NEWSWEEK* (CLIFT); COURTESY OF CNN (CARLSON)

Boston Newspapers Split On Race Case

ON THE DAY AFTER THIS year's Boston Marathon, a white Boston police officer left a noose dangling above his boss's motorcycle. The officer confessed immediately, claiming it was a joke. His boss, Valimore Williams, a black lieutenant, didn't think it was so funny, and filed preliminary papers for a $1.2 million discrimination suit against the city, alleging that the noose was the latest in a series of racially motivated acts directed against him.

In a city with historically poor race relations, there was little doubt at Boston's two daily newspapers that the story was newsworthy. But the papers took starkly contrasting approaches. Depending on whether you read the spunky tabloid *Boston Herald* or the more staid *Boston Globe*, your view of this conflict and the state of race relations within the Boston Police Department would be dramatically different.

In the *Herald*, the noose symbolized a racial divide. "'[H]ateful,'" cried a page-one headline that quoted Williams. "Why don't they go burn a cross on his lawn?" read another officer's quote. And an anonymous *Herald* source charged that "a hangman's noose directed at a black man is on its face a racist act."

The *Globe*, meanwhile, offered more subdued headlines, such as "[Police commissioner] Evans stresses 'zero tolerance' for racism in police force." A *Globe* editorial struck a cautious tone: "Initial impressions...are often ungrounded....So far, there is no evidence to think the worst."

The differing perspectives presented a classic example of the stereotypical divide between a scrappy tabloid and a stodgy "paper of record." *Herald* editorials railed against police racism, portraying the noose incident as symptomatic of a larger problem. Joe Sciacca, a *Herald* deputy managing editor, said the paper aggressively covered the incident because there were real questions about whether the department was taking it seriously. "It was clearly a racially motivated incident," he says.

The *Globe*, however, soberly allowed that the noose could have been a prank—albeit a stupid one—while also covering the potential racial implications. For instance, the *Globe* prominently reported that black officers corroborated the prank claim–a fact barely mentioned in the *Herald*.

And when a police investigation concluded that the noose incident was not racially motivated, the coverage again diverged. Both papers reported the news, but the *Herald* then dismissed the investigation altogether the following day, quoting an "'outraged'" Henry Owens III, Williams's attorney, who said, "'They never did a fair and impartial investigation.'"

The *Herald*'s inflammatory language was overkill, argues Leonard Alkins, the president of the Boston chapter of the NAACP: "[I]t's a sensitive issue and there are victims all around." But civil rights attorney and Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree Jr. says he doesn't think the *Herald* creates racial issues: "I do think they are not afraid to confront them when they are just below the surface."

More important, the *Herald* got a key fact wrong. In two stories, the *Herald* mistakenly reported that the noose incident came two months after the city paid a black police officer $700,000 "after a severe beating by white officers." In fact, two of the three men held liable in a separate suit for their involvement in that assault were black—a critical distinction in an article about race.

A high-profile black officer also accused a *Herald* reporter of fabricating an inflammatory front-page quote about the noose incident, issuing a press release in which he denied saying "Jim Crow Jr. is still alive and kicking at the Boston Police Department."

The disputed quote prompted Police Commissioner Paul Evans to complain to *Herald* publisher Patrick Purcell. But the *Herald* stood by the story. "He made the remark and then buckled and denied it out of fear," says reporter Maggie Mulvihill, who willingly made her notes, which included the quote, available. "It just shows how deeply ingrained the racism is there."

—Michael Freedman

Live From Littleton: The Media Gets Taken In

THE YOUNG MAN SOUNDED PANIC STRICKEN: "I SAW TWO gunmen. [They had] weapons, black masks, black trench coats and...I thank the Lord that I got to hide where I did and they did not see me and blow me away." The terrified voice of Bob Sapin, broadcast live during the Littleton school shootings, made for gut-wrenching TV. It also made for just the latest hoax [see "Hugging The Spotlight," July/August] perpetrated on the media during a big breaking story.

Like many, Sapin, a 25-year-old unemployed snowboarder, was glued to his TV at his home in Park City, Utah, as events unfolded on the morning of April 20. (Disclosure: This reporter and Sapin share mutual acquaintances.) "I just wanted to see how easy it would be to wag the dog in a situation like that," he says. So Sapin called KUSA-TV, the NBC affiliate in Denver, and said, "I'm at the school!" He says a newsroom staffer asked his name—Sapin answered truthfully—and whether he was in any danger. Sapin replied that he wasn't sure, he claims, at which point KUSA began broadcasting the call live. "I told them I was out behind the school hiding in the bushes," he says. "I made myself sound real nervous."

Sapin went on to provide a gripping account. He fed KUSA details he picked up watching MSNBC and fabricated "realistic" touches, such as mentioning the name of a fictional math teacher. Sapin did betray clues that he was actually a TV viewer. He volunteered that the Columbine shooting was the seventh such incident of school violence in recent years, the type of helpful statistic not typically available to people hiding in the bushes during a shooting rampage.

Nonetheless, Sapin's was apparently a convincing performance. Patti Dennis, KUSA's news director, acknowledges that her station was hornswoggled. (Authorities at Columbine's school district confirm that nobody by Sapin's name attended the school.) Dennis says that during the first 30 minutes of KUSA's coverage, "[i]t was overwhelming." Dennis says her staff used "mostly gut instinct" in choosing which of the numerous unsolicited phone calls to air from people claiming to be Columbine students.

KUSA was hardly alone in being taken in. CNN later broadcast portions of Sapin's interview. And *The New York Times*, The Associated Press, *Boston Herald*, *Houston Chronicle*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*, among others, all made use of the interview. One of the reporters who quoted Sapin, the *Times*'s James Brooke, says "there seemed to be detail that sounded pretty convincing." He adds that he tried unsuccessfully to locate Sapin through directory assistance. (The *Times*, along with KUSA and the AP, have since run corrections.)

For his part, Sapin seems proud of what he dubs "the farce heard around the world." He does concede some regrets, though. "I felt bad later," he says, "when I knew that kids had died." Asked what he would have done if, for example, the police had sent officers to the wrong location based on his fictional eyewitness account, Sapin responds, "That would be pretty irresponsible police work to expect the news media to do their work for them." —*John Cook*

John Cook is a freelance writer living in New York.

QUIZ: Can you match the "social issue" with the talk show?

FIVE DAYS A WEEK, the burning issues of our time get kicked around (sometimes literally) on talk TV. But where do these shows find their guests? Sometimes, the answer is just a phone call away. On July 8, we dialed three such shows to find out what they were looking for. See if you can match the show to the topic. (We've included two topics for each show.)

—*Ed Shanahan*

1 THE MONTEL WILLIAMS SHOW

2 JERRY Springer show

3 RICKI LAKE

A If you're calling to be a guest on "Let the DNA test PROVE if you're REALLY my relative," press 1.

B Do you need a paternity test because ANOTHER WOMAN is ruining your marriage by insisting YOUR HUSBAND is the father of her baby? Press 2.

C Do you or someone you know only DATE outside their RACE? Press 1.

D Have you DISOWNED your TEEN daughter and now you want her back? Press 3.

E Do you HATE the person your friend is dating? Would you like to CONFRONT them on our show? Press 3.

F If you're calling to be a guest on "Even though I'm GAY, I'd be a better PARENT," press 2.

Answers: 1. (b, d) 2. (c, e) 3. (a, f)

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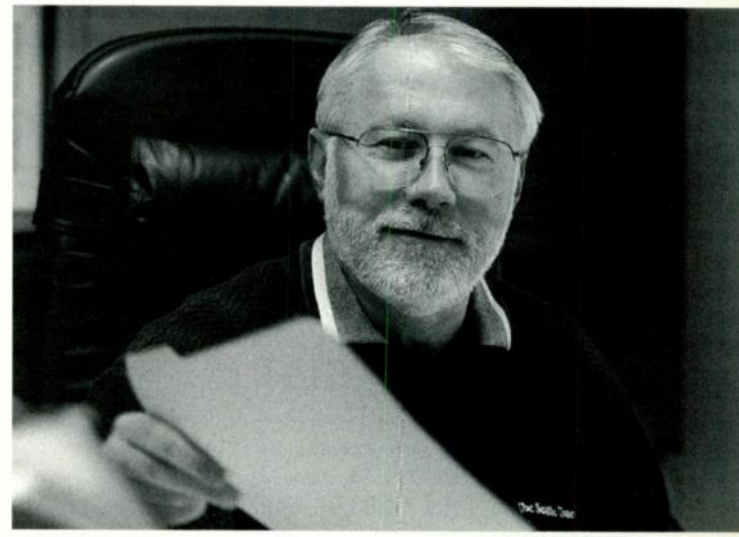
For years, we wrote about the right topics but in the wrong way – in ways that didn't connect to the daily lives of our readers. So we didn't give them the information that they needed, that they could use. Our definition of civic journalism is that it connects the reader and the community more directly to the journalistic process of formulating stories and asking questions.

We use different approaches. One is the "Front Porch Forum." We've asked people to have a conversation with their neighbors about issues such as growth and the future of the Puget Sound region – and then tell us what they said. We found that people in this community understand issues with a level of sophistication that's beyond what we might have guessed. They contribute.

Our staff is energized by this. At first, they were apprehensive. They asked good, honest questions, like: "Will we be setting aside our journalistic independence or journalistic oversight if we invite the community in?" The thing that is energizing is that when you bring readers into the conversation, there is this sense they really do care about the things journalists want them to care about and they value the opportunity to join the dialogue.

Journalists worry that paying attention to what readers want really means moving to the lowest common denominator, or making journalistic judgments by polling or marketing. When they realize that, in fact, readers value the role of the newspaper in their community, it never fails to be an uplifting experience.



Mike Fancher

VP and Executive Editor

The Seattle Times

The Pew Center for Civic Journalism is pleased to present this message, another 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.

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Jock Talk Isn't Cheap

MOST FANS PROBABLY DIDN'T BAT an eyelash when they saw Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Cris Carter appearing repeatedly on KSTP-TV of Minneapolis/St. Paul early this year. After all, the Vikings were then making what would be an abortive Super Bowl run and Carter, one of the team's veteran stars, was a natural choice as an interviewee. But what wasn't mentioned was that Carter was being paid for his efforts: KSTP had promised him $10,000–$30,000, according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, depending on how far the Vikings went in the playoffs. (KSTP news director Scott Libin confirms that Carter agreed to an exclusive paid arrangement for certain interviews, but declines to specify the amount. Carter did not return calls for comment.)

This kind of pay-for-players has become a common practice on local TV stations. Most often, those cashing checks are football players; their sport is still the most popular on TV. But basketball and baseball stars also get paid, usually when their teams reach the post-season.

Station executives say they shell out because it boosts ratings. "Why are we paying these millionaires?" asks one station manager. "Because we have to." But the evidence is equivocal: In Minneapolis, for example, KSTP's numbers did not spike during Cris Carter's January appearances.

In most U.S. newsrooms, paying for interviews is taboo—but the rule doesn't always apply when the subject is sports. "Journalistically, it's inconsistent as hell," admits Bruce Cunningham, sports director of Baltimore's WBFF, which has paid athletes for interviews.

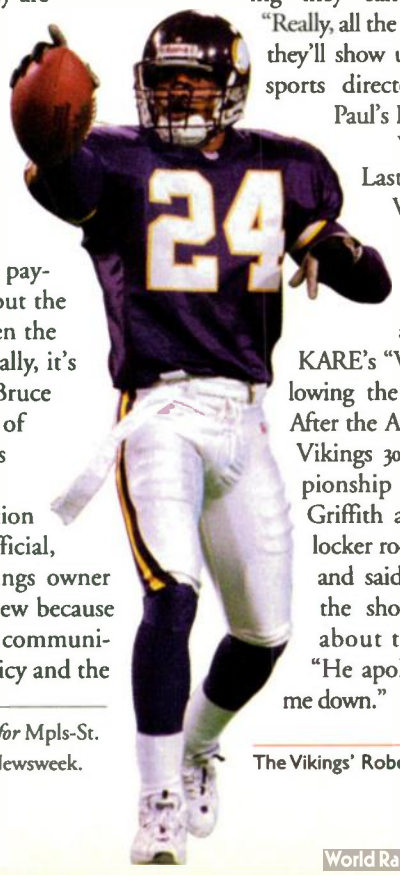
KTSP's Libin says his station would never pay an elected official, a businessman, or even Vikings owner Red McCombs for an interview because "they occupy positions in the community that could affect public policy and the public treasury."

"Obviously, [paying] is the last dying gasp of any journalistic responsibility," says Keith Olbermann, a senior correspondent for Fox Sports News, which does not pay interview subjects. "I think local sports news, with a few oases left around the country, is no more about journalistic responsibility than the *Jerry Springer Show* [is]....There are no journalistic standards in local TV sports—they sold out years ago." As with more than a dozen other media figures who criticized such payments in interviews for this story, however, Olbermann was unable to cite a specific example of a financial deal that caused a station to go easy on an athlete.

Viewers, meanwhile, are seldom given information to make their own judgments. Occasionally, audiences are told that a guest has received a gift certificate or a limo ride to the studio—usually because the station traded a promotional mention for the service. But none of the eight TV stations contacted for this story who pay athletes ever air a disclosure that money has changed hands.

Stations downplay the issue, asserting they can monitor themselves. "Really, all the money does is guarantee they'll show up," says Randy Shaver, sports director at Minneapolis/St. Paul's KARE-TV.

Well, most of the time. Last year, Shaver hired Vikings star safety Robert Griffith (who didn't return calls seeking comment) to appear exclusively on KARE's "Vikings Extra" show following the team's playoff games. After the Atlanta Falcons upset the Vikings 30-27 in the NFC championship game, Shaver says Griffith approached him in the locker room. "He came up to me and said he didn't want to do the show—he was too upset about the loss," says Shaver. "He apologized later for letting me down." —*David Brauer*



The Vikings' Robert Griffith

MORRY GASH/AP

David Brauer is a media columnist for Mpls-St. Paul Magazine *and contributes to* Newsweek.

Correction Facility

EVER WONDER why some magazines often run corrections while others rarely do? Is it that some magazines make frequent mistakes while others don't? Or is it simply that some are more willing to admit errors than others? What follows is a diverse list of monthlies and the number of corrections per issue each has averaged over the last three years. Editors or spokespeople at the magazines made virtually the same comments about their policies. Each said they were anxious to correct factual errors. Most cited their fact-checking staffs for preventing mistakes and noted that the majority of their corrections concern minor factual matters (especially in the case of *Wired*, which routinely corrects technical arcana). Practically all asserted that they publish few corrections because they make few errors.

In case you're wondering, our average (for the 12 issues we've published, including this one) was 3.45.

—Amy DiTullio

WIRED	3.17
VANITY FAIR	1.47
COSMOPOLITAN	.89
George	.69
HARPER'S	.36
Texas Monthly	.28
REDBOOK	.22
GLAMOUR	.17
Esquire	.11
GQ	.08

Reality, Edited

WHEN A NEW SERIES OF BOOKS THAT COMPILE THE DIARIES of real teenagers debuts this month from Scholastic Books and *Teen* magazine, teen readers will be left burning with questions: Will Teresa ever tell Kevin that she has a crush on him? How will Jake survive his dad's worsening illness? Is Katie super-involved in school activities as a way to block out her ex-boyfriend's abuse?

Because the series is billed as nonfiction and dubbed *Real Teens: Diary of a Junior Year*, there's one more question readers might ponder: How much of it is true?

"The diaries you are about to read are real," begins the first book. "Names, places, and other details have been changed to protect the teens involved. But what they have to say all really happened." For legal reasons, says Jean Feiwel, publisher and editor in chief at Scholastic Book Group, certain facts in the series had to be changed. For example, a four-year-old brother might become a two-year-old sister or a comment about hating a teacher might become a more general comment about hating a class. "It's cosmetic," says Feiwel of the changes.

But some of the tinkering may have been more than superficial. Laura Dower, a writer and editor who Feiwel says served as a "mother superior-den mother," pulled snippets from all the diary entries and gathered themes around events like a stolen kiss at a "sweet 16" party or Jake's grieving over his dad's sickness. The original entries weren't always as riveting as they could be, so Dower often went back to the writer and asked for more details. Then she would incorporate the gist of the conversation—in her words, but in the teen's voice, she insists—into an entry. She might also shift the dates of the entries around a bit to clarify that teens were talking about the same events.

With all these alterations, can the "real teens" series still be considered nonfiction? "Yes," insists Leslie Morgenstein, publishing director at 17th Street Productions, who helped produce the series. "If you were changing what happened, then it would be fiction." Feiwel says she never considered calling the series "based on reality" because nothing is "fabricated or untrue." Agrees Dower: "It's certainly true to their voices."

Feiwel does acknowledge that the featured teens, who won't see the books until they appear in stores, could possibly be surprised at what they find. "The extent to which we've disguised some of them might be jarring at first," she says. —*Kimberly Conniff*

A Pilgrim's Progress

The mother of a switched baby enters the media whirlwind. • BY KIMBERLY CONNIFF

THE REPORTER SEEMED TO MATERIALIZE OUT OF nowhere, running at Paula Johnson from a neighbor's backyard. Panicked that a photographer might be lurking nearby, Johnson pushed her three-year-old daughter behind her. "Leave me alone!" Johnson yelled. "Get the f--- off my property!" The reporter pressed her: "Come on, Paula, you just need to talk." When another reporter approached soon after, Johnson's friend screamed, "Get the hell out of here!"

"Can I quote you on that?" the second reporter shot back.

In one month last year, Paula Johnson's life turned upside down. On July 2, 1998, Johnson, then 30, learned that her daughter, Callie, had been switched at birth with another baby. Johnson's attorney had warned her that when the news broke, it was going to be big. But when Johnson thought of a news story traveling beyond the sleepy towns in the low, lush mountains near her Charlottesville, Virginia, home, she imagined it reaching cities 100 miles away. She did not expect it to become an international phenomenon.

Paula Johnson (left) and her lawyer, Cynthia Johnson, display a photo of one of the switched babies, Callie, at a press conference.

STEVE HELBER/AP

But in the year that followed, Johnson rocketed from obscurity to media renown, appearing on *20/20* and *Dateline NBC*, in *Time* and on the cover of *People*. Still, hers is not simply the story of a regular person victimized by the press. She may have been thrown into the media vortex for reasons beyond her control, but once there, she learned quickly that she could build a symbiotic relationship with the press, one that would serve her own interests as much as it served theirs. By the summer of 1999, however, her ultimate lesson was this: You may be able to temporarily tame the beast, but you can never outrun it.

Johnson learned that she wasn't Callie's mother in July 1998 because of a DNA test taken to resolve a child-support dispute with her boyfriend. The news quickly spread and Johnson, who dropped out of high school at age 17, was forced into a crash course in media education. At the time the baby-switching case came to light, Johnson was a devoted single mother of five (Callie, three sons, and an adopted daughter) who worked at a construction firm.

Despite her lack of media experience, she proved to be a quick study. Two nights after the story broke nationally, for example, she was on the phone with Justin Blum, a reporter for *The Washington Post*. Officials at the University of Virginia medical center, where the mix-up occurred, had refused to reveal if they knew who her biological daughter was. At a press conference that day, Blum told Johnson, UVA's spokesman had questioned her credibility, insisting there was no way hospital procedures could have caused the mix-up. "He's a f---ing liar!" Johnson blurted out, immediately regretting her intemperate language. "Call me back later," she pleaded, scrambling for a way to take the comment back. Later, Johnson offered Blum something in exchange for his silence: the tidbit that her baby had weighed two and a half pounds less when Johnson took her back to the hospital the day after being released, a difference Johnson thought should have caught the hospital's attention.

During this phone bartering session, a call from *USA Today* reporter Dennis Cauchon came in on the other line. He revealed that he had discovered the identity of Johnson's biological daughter. In the excitement, Johnson's attorney spilled the news to Blum. Within an hour, Blum was the one doing the pleading, according to Johnson's camp. *Give me the name,* he reportedly said, *and I'll make sure Johnson appears favorably in tomorrow's paper.* The attorney's husband, who had taken the call, refused. (Blum referred questions to *Washington Post* Virginia editor Scott Vance, who denies Blum made "an offer...to portray them in any light, favorable or otherwise.")

The next day, *USA Today* became the first paper to publish the name of Johnson's biological child: Rebecca Grace Chittum, whose parents had been killed in a car accident only one month before. The *Post* carried a story about the hospital's press conference—complete with the item about the baby's weight. There was no mention of Johnson's indelicate comment.

In just one chaotic evening, Johnson had begun to learn that the press could put pressure on the hospital, and that a little savvy could compensate for her own blunders. She had also seen, she says, that even reputable reporters will sometimes do anything to get a story. "I learned," she says, "that you have to be as devious and underhanded as they are."

Johnson, who is alternately brash and outspoken or poised and temperate, gradually learned how to run her own show, granting interviews to *Time*, *People*, and a series of newspapers. Because both her daughter's father (now separated from Johnson) and the two families raising Rebecca were reluctant to talk to the press, Johnson effectively became a spokeswoman for the tragedy, appearing with Barbara Walters on *20/20* and jetting to New York to be interviewed

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Progress *continued*

by Katie Couric on *NBC Today* and *Dateline*, and Maury Povich on *Maury*. These appearances did much to cultivate the image of Johnson as both a victim and a caring mother committed to keeping the girls in the only homes they knew. "I think we can all do it," Johnson told Walters. "We can all raise them together." When the families rearing Rebecca were in a custody dispute in November, Johnson stayed out of the tussle—and ended up looking like a stateswoman above the petty bickering. "I thought everything we were supposed to be doing was in the best interests of the kids," she lamented in *People*.

Johnson (right) appearing on *Maury* with Mistie Fritz (center), the victim of a snafu in which she was given the wrong baby for burial.

JOHNSON ALSO BECAME AWARE of the press's ability to turn public opinion against the hospital. She made sure the circumstances of her baby's birth—the fact that Johnson was not fitted with identity bracelets in her baby's presence, and that no red flags went up when the child "lost" two and a half pounds—were well publicized. When Johnson got wind of past mishaps at the hospital, she took it upon herself to promote the stories. In September a woman told her that her own ID bracelets slipped off when she was in the maternity ward. So Johnson called *Washington Post* reporter Michael Shear and passed on the scoop. She even accompanied him to the interview. (*Post* editor Vance declined to comment, citing a policy "not to talk about our sources or where we get our information.") With criminal and health department investigations, and reporters unearthing plenty of embarrassing stories on their own, the hospital had to hire a public relations firm to salvage its reputation.

When coverage didn't go her way, Johnson sometimes lost her cool. Early on, Adam Goldman, a reporter with the Charlottesville-area *Daily Progress*, wrote that Johnson's ex-boyfriend had twice been charged with assault and battery after Johnson accused him of beating her, and that she had been granted an order of protection. The stories (which were picked up by the national press) also revealed that Johnson herself had been arrested and fined $185 in 1994 for threatening a woman. "It was nobody's business, but [Goldman] made it public knowledge," Johnson says. "I was livid....I probably would've choked him to death if I had seen him." As retribution, she cut off his access.

Goldman's aggressive pursuit eventually wore Johnson down. She began calling him with story tips and using the nickname she had given him—*cockroach*—in almost affectionate terms. After her unexpected triumph in December as one of *Glamour* magazine's ten "women of the year" for "not letting a baby-switching nightmare tear her family apart," Johnson playfully autographed her picture: "To Adam Goldman....from the only woman that will always be in and out of your life."

By February the attention brought results: The state of Virginia (which controls the hospital) offered about $2 million to each of the girls, to be paid out over the next 30 years. The families raising Rebecca immediately accepted the offer, but Johnson balked. She not only refused the settlement, but also claimed that the other families had no right to approve it, especially when $250,000 (later reduced to $125,000) of it would go directly into the pockets of the adults. Outside a hearing on April 5, Johnson's high-profile new lawyer (who worked on the Kimberly Mays baby-switch case) dropped another bombshell: Johnson would seek custody of Rebecca, her biological daughter. "I want to be an active part of her life," Johnson explained later, "and they're preventing me from doing that."

Suddenly the woman hailed for keeping the girls' lives out of the courtroom seemed to be priming for a vicious legal battle. Stories started to portray her as out for cash—"Money not enough," noted part of a headline in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. *Newsweek*'s brief update quoted a grandmother from the faction opposing Johnson: "'She's doing something she told the world she'd never do.'"

The two toddlers had continued living with the families that had been raising them. But the idea of one big happy family had been a fiction for some time; the two sides hadn't visited each other for months. Now, as the battle emerged into the open, local news stations featured shell-shocked family members complaining that they missed their granddaughter, and many publications reported a nasty exchange outside the settlement hearing, during which Johnson refused to accept an Easter basket for Callie from a grandparent in the other family camp. (Johnson says the woman was "in her face" and she was just trying to avoid a confrontation.)

JOHNSON'S IMAGE WAS FURTHER BRUISED WHEN SHE LAID out her settlement demands: $2 million to be paid immediately. When the state refused, she countered with a sweeping $31 million suit, charging negligence, violation of civil rights, and fraud. *The Washington Post* showed its skepticism in a May 25 article, citing experts who predicted that "Johnson will have a tough time" getting around the cap on medical malpractice damages. A month later, she filed a suit against the manufacturer of the hospital ID bracelets. At this point, it would be well-nigh impossible to make Johnson's motives look noble, no matter how sympathetic the reporting.

Johnson continues to lament the attention lavished on her case, and insists, "I don't read the papers now." But until she filed her suits, she still called her favorite reporters periodically to chat. And she broke her self-imposed ban on TV interviews by appearing on *Inside Edition* in the spring.

In late April, Johnson generated a small flurry of coverage when she met with Kimberly Mays Weeks, the most famous switched-at-birth child (now 20). The two are talking about writing a book together—a project that Johnson speculates could lead to a million-dollar film deal. Why a book? After a year floating in and out of the spotlight, Johnson says that the only way she can tell the story she wants to tell is if she writes it herself. ■

Defending A Thug

Aundrey Burno in HBO's *Thug Life*

IF YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW WHY LAWYERS TELL THEIR clients not to talk to reporters, consider Aundrey Burno. A 20-year-old violent criminal and the central character in a recent HBO documentary titled *Thug Life In D.C.*, Burno boasted about his crimes on camera and added, "I'm the definition of a thug."

In June (one month after the documentary aired), after Burno was convicted of murder, a prosecutor used his on-screen comments to argue that Burno should be given the maximum sentence. "Mr. Burno announces that he will kill again if released," a prosecution memo argued. "He states that the high point of his life was when he first got his hands on a gun."

But Burno found a pair of unlikely allies: producers Marc Levin and Daphne Pinkerson, who had spent some three years chronicling his life. They wrote the judge, urging that their film "not be taken out of context." (In fact, the documentary painted a complex and poignant portrait of just how young, black men such as Burno end up in the criminal justice system.) The producers wrote that "the culture of prison life and the streets drives these teenagers to make various claims just to appear tough." But, they noted, they had seen "a more introspective and eloquent young man with great potential."

Pinkerson says she felt compelled to write to make sure the judge understood that Burno was more than a tough-talking inmate. Both the letter and the documentary sought, she says, "to put [Burno] and so many young black men in Washington, D.C., into context."

But the judge didn't buy that argument. Noting he had never seen a defendant less likely to be rehabilitated, he sentenced Burno to 45 years to life. *—Robert Schmidt*

HBO

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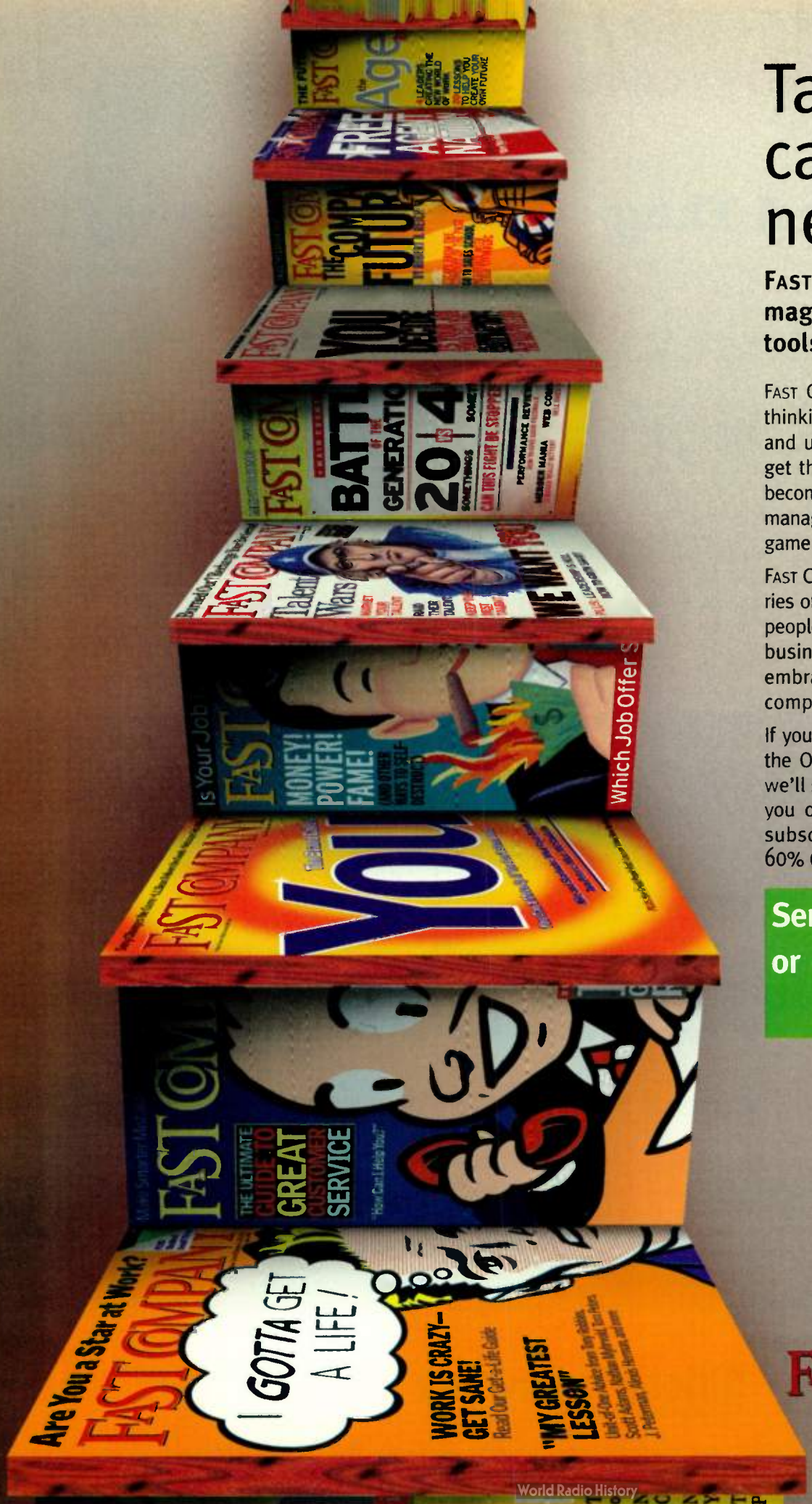

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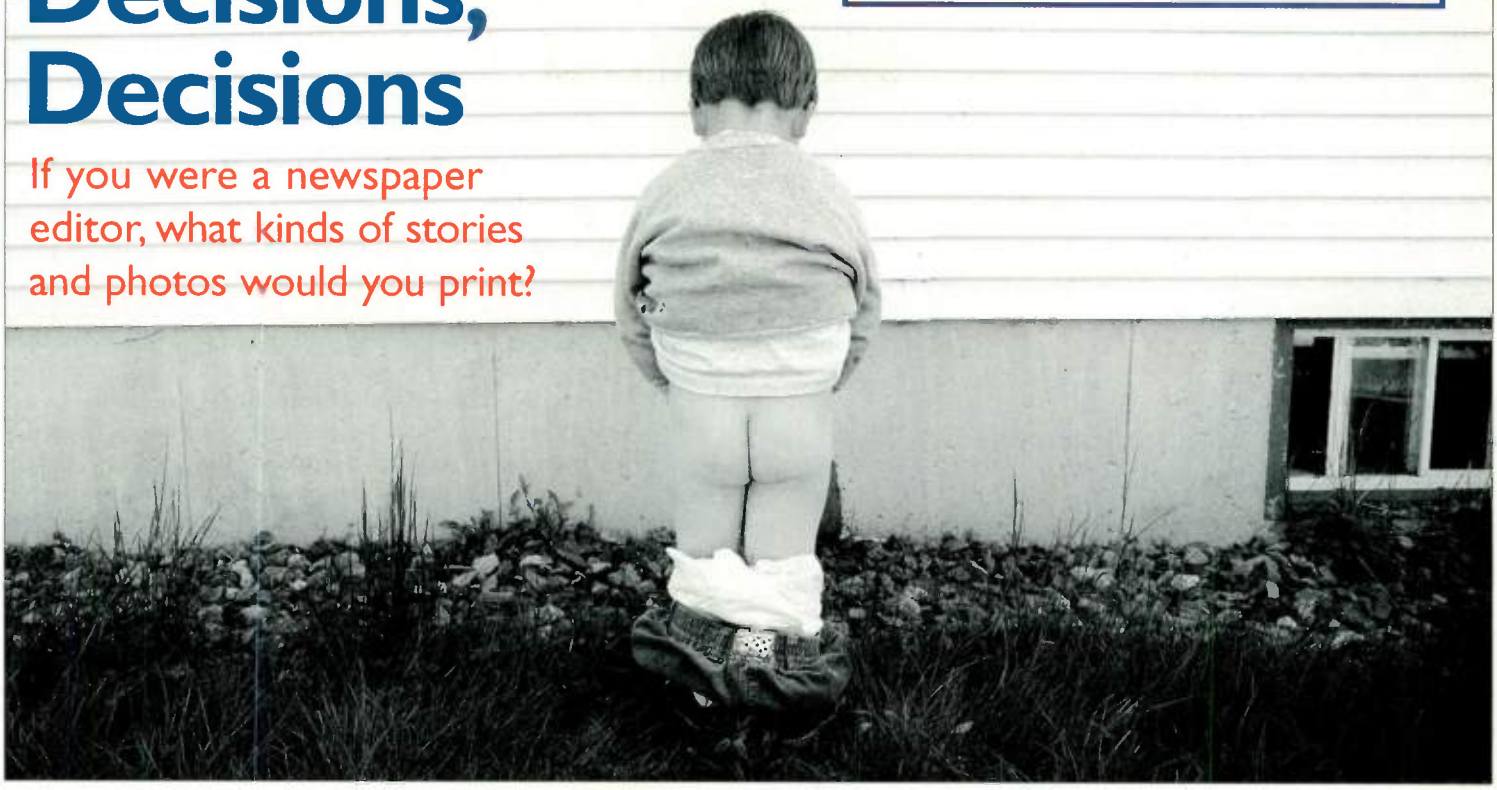
Decisions, Decisions

If you were a newspaper editor, what kinds of stories and photos would you print?



ANDREA BRUCE/THE CONCORD MONITOR

Photojournalist Andrea Bruce captured everyday life in Concord, New Hampshire, with this photo of a bare-bottomed three-year-old boy.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE ASKED ME OVER dinner recently what a newspaper editor's job is like. Rather than think this question over before answering it, I quickly launched into a blow-by-blow account of my last couple of days on the job.

I should have said that the job is to create and maintain high journalistic standards, hire the most talented people you can find, and allow them to make day-to-day decisions on the basis of those standards. One of the great things about editing a small daily is the chance to take part in the wide variety of choices that determine what reaches the reader's breakfast table. I have recorded a half dozen recent ones my staff and I have made, and here's your chance to make those decisions yourself.

1. Two weeks after the Columbine High School shootings, a 17-year-old girl is arrested at your local high school after it is learned that she has compiled a list of 36 students and at times has referred to it as a hit list. The charges: disorderly conduct and lying to police officers. The police have given you a press release detailing the charges and naming the girl. Where do you play the story? Do you name the girl?

2. The deadly Oklahoma tornadoes will be the lead story on the front page. The Associated Press has sent you dozens of pictures of this disaster, and your first decision is which picture will lead the next day's paper. Your choices boil down to two: a shot of the near-total devastation of a neighborhood and a shot of the tornado in the distance, with green fields and trees in the foreground. Which do you choose, and why?

3. The governor wants to replace the state insurance commissioner. The commissioner is resisting and appears to have the support of a majority of the Executive Council, which has power over gubernatorial nominations. The governor's office leaks to your reporter a long, scathing memo from the commissioner's deputy criticizing her boss as a do-nothing. The memo cites the commissioner's "unwillingness to engage the industry and business community on any of the important and evolving insurance issues of the day."

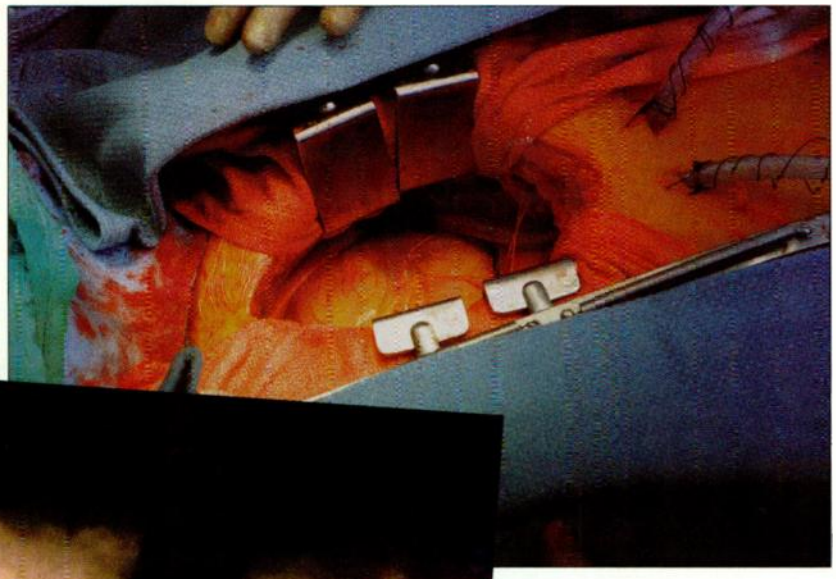
The afternoon your reporter is reporting her story, the commissioner changes his mind and says he is resigning. The governor issues a statement thanking him for his service and saying he "handled this difficult job with grace and dignity." The governor's office and the deputy commissioner ask your reporter to disregard the memo criticizing the commissioner's job performance. What do you do?

4. Andrea Bruce, a young photojournalist on your staff, shoots a regular feature called "This Life" for the Monday local section. The feature, a photograph accompanied by a brief story, chronicles everyday life in your area. One week, Bruce brings back a photograph of a three-year-old boy urinating on a wall. The photograph is taken from behind. The boy's pants are around his ankles, and his bottom is bare. The accompanying text explains that his parents are potty-training him. Do you run the picture?

5. A local mother believes the state has unfairly removed her ten-year-old child from her home. She offers to share the complete case file with your reporter so that he can write a full account of what happened. State statutes forbid the release of such information or its publication. What do you do?

6. Your local hospital recently opened a cardiac-care unit. Your photo editor arranges for a reporter and photographer to follow a patient through open-heart surgery. The photographer's shoot includes a picture of the patient's heart as seen

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



Editors deliberated over whether photos taken during an open-heart surgery were too graphic for publication (top). When tornadoes hit Oklahoma, editors were drawn to a dramatic photo of a tornado spinning in the sky (bottom).

through the opening the surgeon has cut in her chest. Do you run this picture as part of your Sunday morning package?

Here are our decisions:

1. When we first heard about the teenage girl's hit list, our inclination was to strip the story across the top of page one even though it was a busy news day. When we learned more of the details, we decided to move the story to the bottom of page one under a small headline.

The main factors in this decision were that the girl was not charged with a felony and that the police said she had no plan and no means to kill anyone. There were other factors. The girl regularly wore a black trench coat, and shortly after the Colorado shootings, one of our reporters had interviewed her for a story. His strong impression from the interview was that she was a threat to no one. Other students told us the same thing. We based our decision to give the story lesser play on our judgment about the seriousness of the threat.

Whether to name the girl was a harder decision. We believed the police wanted her name in the paper as a deterrent to other teenagers. But in making news judgments, we resist ulterior motives. This was an odd bit of role reversal: Usually we want the name, and the authorities are reluctant to give it to us; this time the authorities had given us the name, but we were reluctant to use it. In the end, we fell back on an old standard: The girl was an adult in the eyes of the law, and she had been charged. We named her.

2. The three editors gathered around the AP photo machine chose the picture of the tornado itself instead of the shot of the destroyed neighborhood. We reasoned that people had seen such devastation after other natural disasters. But the story was the tornado, and the photograph of that was powerful and ominous. It was a choice between cause and effect, and we chose cause. To double-check this decision, we called two other editors over and, without telling them of our decision, showed them the two pictures. When the tornado photo appeared on the screen, they both oooh-ed. The oooh factor is not to be discounted in making close calls on newspaper photos.

3. We ran with the memo about the state insurance commissioner. The officials' motive for leaking it to our reporter had evaporated, but our job was to tell what had happened, and the memo was an important part of the story. Without it, our story would have recounted only the official fiction, with the governor praising the outgoing commissioner and our readers left clueless as to why the governor wanted him out.

4. The picture of the little boy was in keeping with the purpose of "This Life": to make readers pause to appreciate the ordinary life around them. To us, it seemed just as innocent as the Coppertone billboards of the bare-bottomed little girl at the beach. If we ran it, we knew the vast majority of our readers would take it in this spirit.

The boy's parents were present when Andrea Bruce took the picture, but we needed to be certain they did not object to its publication. They didn't, and we decided that only the boy's first name should be used in the accompanying text.

We went with the picture and received three or four angry phone calls and two letters from readers. "[S]tandards of decency and good taste have vanished from the printed media....Pornography is still pornography even with childhood innocence used for exploitation," one man wrote.

5. As for the confidential case file, the first consideration was whether the mother's case would make a good story. Did our reporter believe the woman's complaint that the child had been unfairly taken away from her had some legitimacy, and did he believe reporting on it would shed light on the difficulties faced by both the state and families in child custody cases? The answer to both questions was yes.

Next, we had to be certain the mother understood that releasing the information violated the state statute. She did. But she was desperate to get her child back, and she saw laying out the case in public as a means of pressuring the state.

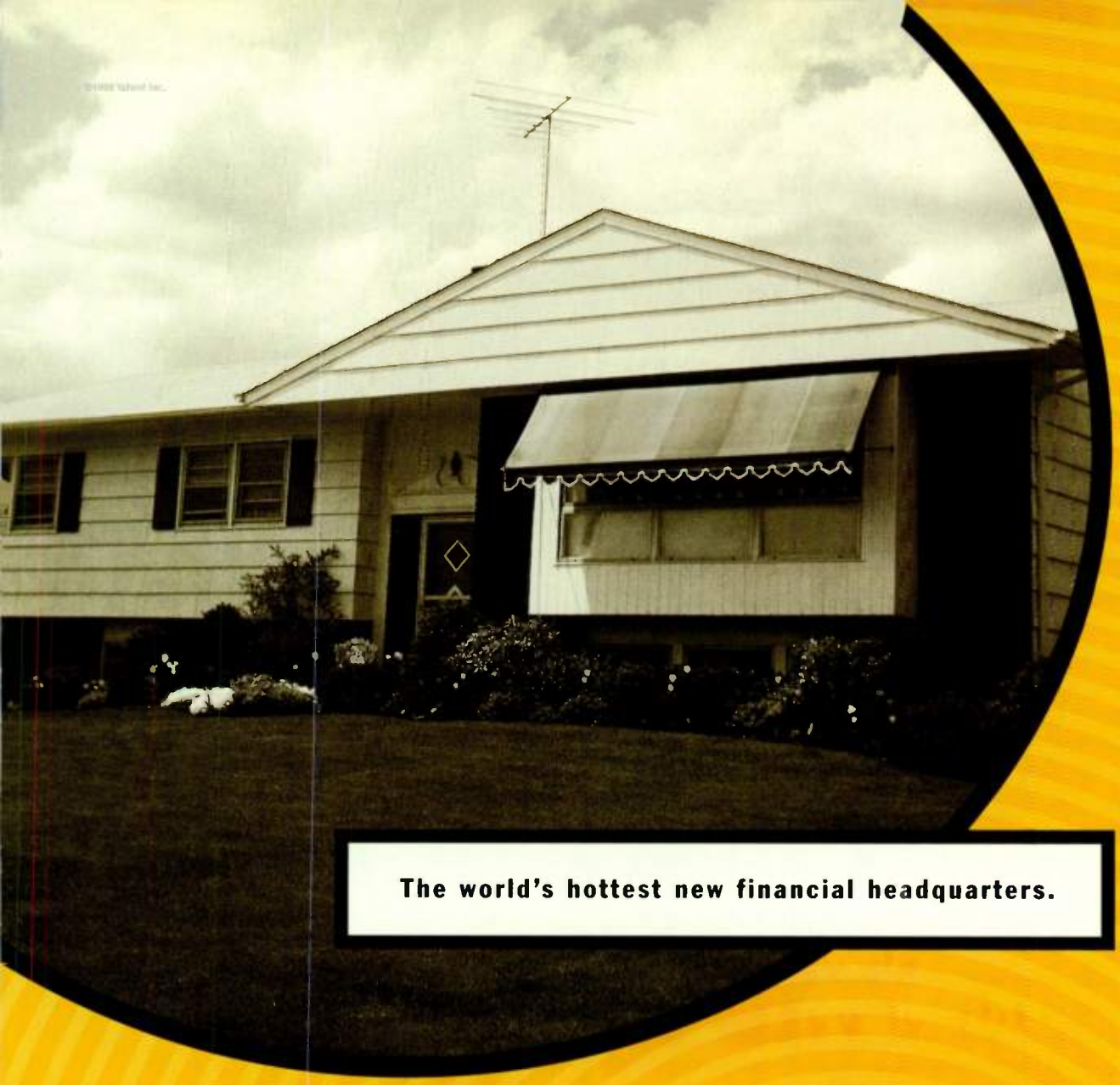
The paper was also undertaking a legal risk. We believe the state statute prohibiting publication of material from juvenile cases is unconstitutional, and yet because of the cost in money and time, we are never eager to litigate. But we decided the story was worth the risk.

Our bias is always toward publication, and child-custody cases result from one of the most extreme powers the state can exercise. Because of the strictures on reporting about them, they are also among the least understood. Our reporter, Steve Varnum, told the story in detail, and we played it across the top of page one in a Sunday edition.

6. An important rule of daily photojournalism—at least at the *Concord Monitor*—is: no gratuitous gore. Readers who gag over their breakfast because of a picture in the newspaper are not happy customers.

Nevertheless, the decision to use the open-heart surgery photo was an easy one. This was, after all, a story about heart surgery. Most of the discussion focused on how to play the picture. We opted for large play as the centerpiece of the photo spread inside the paper. And we took one other measure: In a front-page promo for the story on the day before it ran, we warned readers that some of the photos might be disturbing to some people. I received no negative feedback from readers. ■

ROBIN SHOTOLA/*THE CONCORD MONITOR* (HEART); PAUL HELLSTERN/*DAILY OKLAHOMAN*/SABA (TORNADO)



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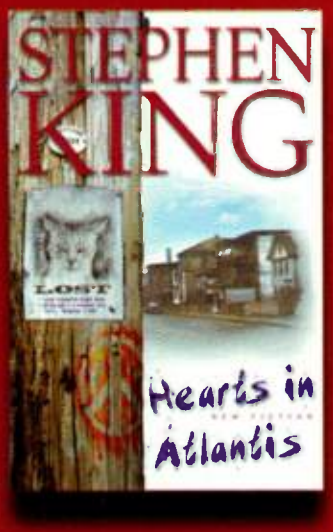

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Tenured Chairs Fly

Scholars duke it out, er, engage in counter-hegemonic discourse, over the meaning and impact of Jerry Springer. Plus, do negative political ads work?

Editor's note: *Scholarship about the media often can be dry and inaccessible, which is too bad, because academic insights can teach us much about the impact of what we read, watch, and hear. In this new regular column, Jeff Pooley will monitor—and translate—academic output, with an eye on why it matters to media consumers.*

ACADEMICS TEND NOT TO TOSS CHAIRS at each other. But if they did, daytime TV talk shows would be just the stimulus. Jerry Springer, Ricki Lake, and their ilk are, at least, the source of a real scholarly showdown. It's not that any academics who study popular culture find "Christmas with the Klan" or "Get Bigger Breasts Or Else" edifying television. (This is a genre, after all, for which *ambush* is a term of art.) Instead, they differ on whether the shows are out-and-out trash, or else a rare soapbox for those on society's margins.

Detractors—who span the political spectrum—complain that the procession of pathology recasts deviance as normal, taking the edge off moral judgment. Defenders applaud the shows' bias for the outrageous, which, they claim, enables the shunned to break their public silence.

Even with academic cheerleaders, these are not halcyon days for talk shows, many of which have suffered double-digit ratings declines since last year. Jerry Springer took a beating in the post-Littleton media orgy, which forced the self-professed "godfather of the decline of Western civilization" to swear off his show's trademark hair-pulling brawls for the second time.

Springer's move came just two and a half weeks after a Michigan jury slapped $25 million in damages on *Jenny Jones* distributor Warner Bros. and producer Telepictures Productions for negligence in the 1995 murder of a gay guest by another man after both had appeared on a "secret admirer" episode. Cultural critic Neal Gabler's comments at the time of the killing carried talk-show bashing to its logical extreme: "Naturally, the producers made professions of regret, but one suspects what they really regretted was the murderer's indecency of not having pulled out his rifle and committed the crime before their cameras."

Distaste for daytime talk starts with the premise that TV can't help but affect the way we see the world. The estimated 550,000 teenagers who tune in daily to the *Jerry Springer Show* see this country through the lens of Christian strippers and mothers who sleep with their daughter's boyfriends. As the shows race to the bottom-dweller, critics contend that they wear down our sensitivity to suffering. Sociologist Vicki Abt, coauthor of *Coming After Oprah: Cultural Fallout in the Age of the TV Talk Show*, has likened the process to drug addicts developing a tolerance.

There is nothing novel about this worry. Cicero, the Roman philosopher, warned in around 80 B.C., "If we are forced, at every hour, to watch or listen to horrible events, this constant stream of ghastly impressions will deprive even the most delicate among us of all respect for humanity."

It is notoriously tough to pinpoint the effect over time that particular media have on their consumers' attitudes. A recent study from the Annenberg School for Communication found that teens who watch talk shows wildly overestimate the extent of social problems. Everyday viewers, for instance, guessed that 55 percent of teen girls become pregnant before age 18, compared to nonviewers' 30 percent guess and the actual 4 percent rate. But the research did not show a link to teens' moral judgments.

In a 1994 study, researchers from the University of Alabama repeatedly exposed teenagers to TV shows featuring out-of-wedlock sex. The teens most heavily exposed

ED FOTHERINGHAM

rated the sex acts presented in the shows as much more acceptable morally than those who watched less. These results confirm the fears of respondents to a 1995 *Newsweek* poll in which nearly two thirds of the respondents said that talk shows reduce the shame connected to deviant behavior.

Scholars point out that young couch potatoes aren't Springer's only victims. Talk shows, of course, parade the outlandish—and sometimes encourage fists to fly—to entertain viewers. To detractors, that's a cheap exchange: Guests trade privacy for their 15 minutes, a hotel room, and a limo; all viewers get is a lousy laugh. Writes Abt: "People come into view, talk, cry, disappear, and in between we watch the commercials for consumer products that promise to improve our lives"—hardly a triumph of the have-nots.

For defenders of the genre, the trade-off, however tainted, is worth it. Sure, guests are exploited for profit, but they get something important out of it: a chance to speak out in a relatively tolerant setting. "Over time, the talk shows have managed to do for their audiences what no one else has: to make homosexuality, and even transsexualism and bisexuality, basically dull...," writes Yale sociologist Joshua Gamson, the author of *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. "From the perspective of those resisting a political and cultural system that labels them deviant, this is a good thing: the edges of normality push ever outward."

Jane Shattuc, who teaches media at Emerson College, agrees. In her 1997 book *The Talking Cure: TV Talk Shows and Women*, she concedes that the shows exploit, but argues that, "at their best, they offer, at last, an active, even aggressive, in-your-face identity to people who have been represented either as victims or perverts by the dominant culture."

In 1994, researchers from the University of Georgia who interviewed former *Donahue* guests about their reasons for appearing on the show found that they were by and large politically motivated, "striving to demonstrate their normalcy...to cast off labels of deviancy."

Of course, subversion on these terms plays right into hosts' grubby hands. Think of class-warrior Springer waving about his anti-establishment credentials: "We are showing a nonpower group," he told *Good Housekeeping* in 1998. "They're not powerful because of their education or their age, and they're not the people we're used to seeing on TV."

THERE'S A SUBTEXT TO THE STANDOFF BETWEEN talk-show boosters and their interlocutors, and it's the academic equivalent of the San Andreas Fault. In the end, both camps agree that these shows soften the contrast between terms such as normal and abnormal, or deviant and upright. For Gamson and other like-minded critics, that's the point. That's resistance. For Abt and her allies, shifting standards—enfeebled by the shows' challenges to moral judgment—pull the foundation out from under efforts to take any stance, political or otherwise.

When terms like "counter-hegemonic discourse" and "stigma management" get bandied about, we all wince. But there's a lot more at stake than the overnight Nielsens' latest favorite in the Oprah/Jerry horse race. Although Springer has said he thinks his show has no impact on society, he betrayed his outward assurance in a recent *Esquire* interview: "I just hope hell isn't that hot."

At least Springer will have a lot of company. With competition from the Oval Office, he surely owns no monopoly on lurid shock. As the *New Statesman*'s Suzanne Moore observed, "A culture ultimately gets the talk show it deserves."

THE MUDDITES

On the topic of screaming matches and brimstone, party primary campaigning is in full swing—which means it's open season again for internecine attack ads. Almost 50 years have passed since perennial presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson issued his high-minded aphorism, "He who slings mud generally loses ground." He was famously wrong—and now he's a footnote in a history textbook.

Faith in the efficacy of negative advertising ranks right up there with death and taxes. Voters may profess their hatred of the form, but they remember 30-second takedowns on Election Day.

That's the conventional wisdom. But recent studies have cast doubt on the reliability of Willie Horton's progeny. In a just-published paper, a group of journalism professors examined Oregon's 1996 Senate race and found that the state's Republicans were turned off by their own candidate's attack spots; his Democratic opponent had sworn off negative campaigning in the same race.

A recent case study of another race, in the *Journal of Advertising Research*, also documented what has been called a "boomerang effect" against the attacker after the opposition accused him of going negative. These results come on the heels of a 1997 meta-analysis of 40 studies, which confirmed that a hefty backlash strikes attack-ad sponsors.

At least part of that backlash is attributed to the "black-sheep effect"—members of a group (in this case a party) react most harshly to the misbehavior of one of their own. But don't expect war-room strategists to call off the dogs any time soon. Other research disputes these findings, especially if an ad is issue-based rather than a flat-out character assassination.

With airtime for TV campaign spots dwarfing news coverage in the run-up to elections—and with journalists themselves the only real competition in the blame for voter cynicism and empty ballot boxes—Jerry Springer's chair-tossing public sphere doesn't seem so freakish after all.

Abstract: It turns out that the kindergarten platitude "I'm-better-than-you" applies even to cigarette and liquor ads. For a recently published paper in the journal *Communication Research*, scholars asked almost 200 people to rate the impact of so-called sin advertisements. By large margins, these media savants judged themselves more resistant to Madison Avenue's wire-pulling than their fellow dupes—further proof of the long-observed "third-person effect" (i.e., our tendency to drape imagined armor around ourselves when appraising the media's slings and arrows). The more the study subjects' deemed others susceptible, the more likely they supported regulating such ads. ■

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GREETINGS FROM HOLLYWOOD:

Satan's L.A.-based whirling knife gauntlet of artistic castration.

By Cintra Wilson I entered the theater with my teeth clenched, expecting to see another thing I love infuriatingly drained into flavorless pulp by insecure Hollywood execu-thugs who need to stick their worthless, soul-killing two cents into everything and don't know when to shut up and let the artists do their work. But incredibly, it seems that for once they accidentally chopped together the right combination of

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In It For The Long Haul

When authors hit the road for purposes of book promotion, it takes a special kind of person to make sure they get from point A to point B in one piece.

WHENEVER I HEAR PEOPLE lament the passing of a beloved tradition, I find myself growing nostalgic for the days of the Golden Dartboard Award, which used to be given annually to the author who had behaved most despicably during a book-promotion tour. It was a private award—the ceremony untelevised and the results unannounced to the general public or, for that matter, to the recipient. (The normal courtesies of notification, it was felt, did not extend to informing someone that his picture had been turned into a dartboard.) Those eligible to vote were people who usually refer to themselves as media escorts and have always been referred to by me as author haulers. As a rule, the author haulers themselves were the people to whom the author had acted despicably, although rudeness to people like waiters, radio station production assistants, hotel registration clerks, and airline-ticket agents also counted. A single tantrum—even a single momentous act of selfishness or arrogance or cruelty—could not take the Golden Dartboard. It was reserved for sustained unpleasantness.

Author haulers tend to be forgiving of the occasional outburst, because they understand that the person in their charge is caught up in a process that might make anyone lose control of himself now and then. In the city he just arrived from, he may have endured a book-signing that, perhaps because the bookstore didn't think to advertise it or perhaps because no one was interested, attracted only two people—the two people, as it happened, he most wanted to avoid seeing while he was in that city. He may have just that morning spent half an hour in a television station greenroom being condescended to by someone who had sold 3 million copies of a book entitled "How to Take Out Your Appendix and Find the Real You."

An author on tour can get so punchy from the travel that he barely knows where he is. In fact, there used to be a radio interviewer in Detroit who, during the commercial break just before the interview began, liked to scan the front page of the local newspaper idly and then, suddenly placing his forearm over the newspaper's name, demand from the author sitting across from him, "Quick: what city are you in?" I got it right on the second guess—somehow, Milwaukee had leaped to mind—and was congratulated for doing better than most.

Under such circumstances, it's understandable if the author occasionally reveals signs of thoughtlessness or self-pity. Several years ago, for instance, a diet doctor on tour in Chicago accidentally slammed a car trunk on an author hauler, putting a serious gash in the hauler's head. As the injured party was being escorted into an ambulance for a trip to the emergency room, he heard the diet doctor say, "Does this mean

ROBERT DE MICHIELL

I'll have to take a cab to the airport?" The diet doctor didn't come close to winning the Golden Dartboard for that, although the wounded author hauler was given a special Purple Heart award.

One reason that an author on tour is often ready to blow his stack is that, no matter how many times he has been through the same exercise, he can't rid himself of the notion that the bookstore he visits after a full day of book-promotion ought to have his book in stock. He persists in making a connection between the promotion tour and sales, apparently unable to grasp the simple fact that they are separate industries. In the book-tour industry, the publicist succeeds by booking the author for a full day in whatever city he visits; on the other side of the equation, bookers of, say, radio-show interviews and bookstore readings succeed by filling slots. If the author on tour is busy all day with interviews and finishes with an evening bookstore reading, the people who work in both ends of the book-tour industry are happy. The sale of books is somebody else's department.

Author haulers began to emerge as a subset of the book-tour industry about 15 or 20 years ago. The founder of modern author hauling was apparently a woman in Cleveland named Emily Laisy, whose annual party for her fellow author haulers at what used to be called the A. B. A. (the annual gathering of the American Booksellers Association) eventually became the setting for the Golden Dartboard ceremony. An author hauler contracts with a publishing house to pick up the touring author at the airport and handle logistics until the poor fellow, vaguely wondering whether he might be in Milwaukee after all, is deposited back at the airport for his flight out. These days, a few cities have small author-hauling companies. In the early days of the industry, author haulers tended to be solo practitioners—often well-educated women who, for one reason or another, wanted to work only part time. Some of them turned out to be familiar with not only the shortest route to the radio station and the quirks of the leading drive-time interviewer but also with the novels of Albert Camus.

Even the less-erudite author haulers were never to be confused with drivers. An author hauler does not stand at the airport gate holding up a piece of cardboard that has the author's name printed on it in Magic Marker; she (or, increasingly, he) identifies herself by standing with the author's book casually under her arm, as if she has been—of all things—reading it. At least one author hauler I know keeps a huge basket of snacks and soft drinks in the middle of the backseat—partly as a service to the author and partly as an indication that the backseat is not where the author is expected to sit. Those sorts of precautions have not avoided instances of touring authors asking an author hauler to wash out their undies.

I'd be able to recognize a number of author haulers even if they weren't holding a book I had written. When it comes to book tours, I am what might be called a repeat offender. In those glorious days when the Golden Dartboard still existed, I would often get into the car of a familiar hauler and spend a few minutes catching up on how the kids were doing and whether the construction on the thruway from the airport might be completed in the next generation or two. Then I'd say something like, "So, is Martha Stewart going to win again this year?"

Martha Stewart won only once. Even Jeffrey Archer won only once. Although there was once talk of giving the late Lewis Grizzard a lifetime achievement award, nobody else actually won more than once. Depending on one's worldview, this fact might indicate that author haulers liked the idea of spreading the honor around or that, no matter how horrible the person you're dealing with has been, there is likely to be an even more horrible person still to come.

Although author haulers try to be discreet, it was only a matter of time before nosy and malicious people such as myself began spreading around the results of the Golden Dartboard voting. Three or four years ago, under pressure from publishers, the author haulers abandoned the annual ceremony. The last time I was on a book tour, I was reduced to asking, after I'd allowed a decent four or five minutes to elapse on the ride in from the airport, "Well, who do you think would have won it this year?" ■

Contributing editor Calvin Trillin is the author of Family Man, *just published in paperback 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.

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Diane "Got" Gore. But What Did We Get?

A journalism professor and former dean argues that Diane Sawyer's interview with Al Gore was ruined by a lack of respect, balance, and information.

DIANE SAWYER GOT "THE GET" WHEN she lined up Al Gore for his first network television news interview following the formal announcement of his candidacy for president on June 16, but the *20/20* audience got little or nothing from the the so-called news program. What we got was a world-class demonstration of what is wrong with television journalism these days, especially in the coverage of political leaders. And this time, Sawyer and her producers can't blame their cheap-shot rehash of old news on the usual suspects: deadlines and competition. There were years of time to plan for a thoughtful exploration of the candidate's political record and, if relevant, his personal life and conduct.

The following lead-in established the tone of disrespect and doubt that was the canvas on which the vice-president's television portrait was painted:

Sawyer, skeptically: "Are you really a country boy?"

Gore: "I grew up in two places. I grew up in Washington, D.C., and I grew up here [in Carthage, Tennessee, where the interview was conducted]. My summers were here. Christmas was here."

Sawyer taunts the candidate: "You mucked pigpens?"

Gore: "I cleaned out the pigpens...and raised cattle and planted and plowed and harvested and took in hay."

Sawyer, challenging the sincerity and the truth of his answer, sets him up: "I have a test for you. Ready for a pop quiz?...How many plants of tobacco can you have per acre?...What is brucellosis?...What are cattle prices roughly now?...When a fence separates two farms, how can you tell which farm owns the fence?"

What Sawyer was coyly but not-so-subtly suggesting was that the vice-president was, at best, a hypocrite and, probably, a liar, as if such a trivia test could prove he didn't have happy memories and a feeling of roots from days spent at the family farm in Tennessee. (In fact, Gore answered two of the questions correctly: Brucellosis is a livestock disease, and the farm inside the fence, where the poles are, owns the fence. "Not bad," Sawyer was forced to admit.)

Sawyer's questions told a story—her story—that Gore was raised with room service and privilege in a Washington, D.C., hotel as the son of a U.S. senator. Is it impossible to imagine that both Al Gores are true?

Sawyer followed up with questions about the next burning issue: how boring the vice-president is thought to be. She reported that recent "serious" polls say 56 percent of Americans find Gore boring.

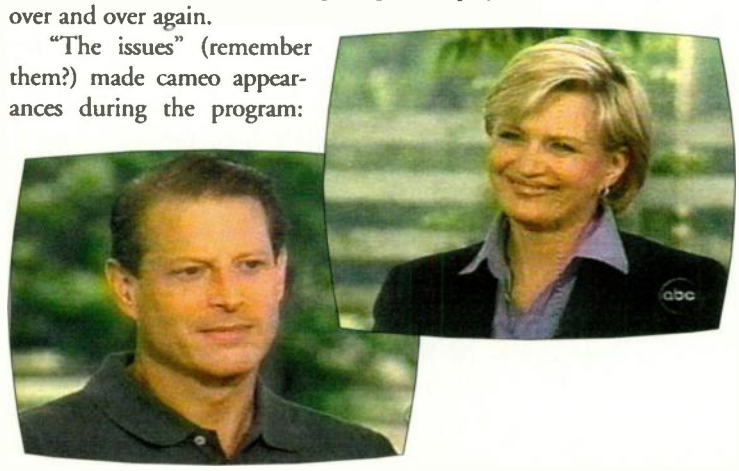
"Did you have a wild-man day?" she asked, as if one such Clinton day were worth a thousand votes. The program belabored the point by showing clips from the late-night talk shows with comedians poking fun at Gore's stilted style, as if what the country needs is a television entertainer for president. Jay Leno, perhaps, or, better yet, Diane Sawyer. "[D]o you think this is serious?" she followed up.

A normal person—say, one not running for president or not earning $7 million a year as a television correspondent—might likely answer: "You journalists are a bunch of intellectual thugs. Let's get to the point: leadership and vision."

Instead, Gore tiptoed through the poisoned tulips: "I think the press sometimes in the television age focuses a little bit more on style and a little bit less on substance than the American people would actually like. I am who I am."

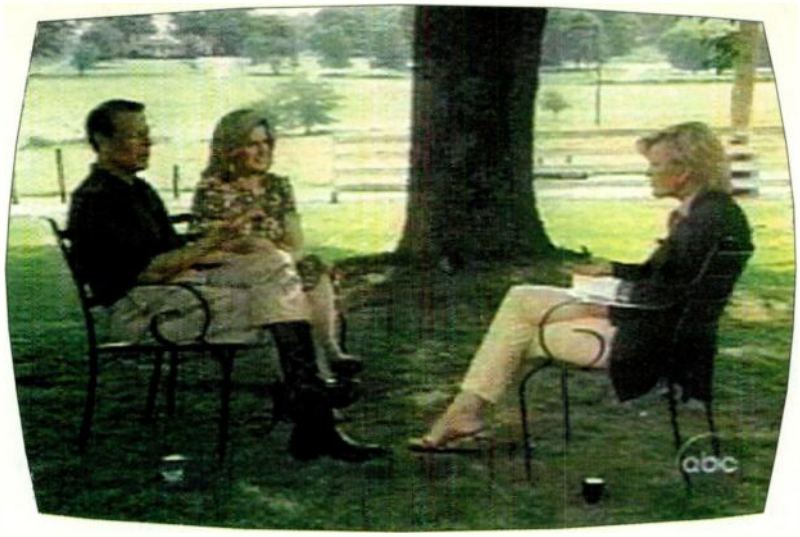
But, of course, he can't be just who he is. Better to be respectful to journalists at all times, even if they aren't to you, because they are the lens through which the public views you, and they can really hurt you. Better to be wooden than to risk a slip that becomes a tape clip to be played over and over and over again.

"The issues" (remember them?) made cameo appearances during the program:



During her interview with Al Gore on *20/20*, Diane Sawyer devoted more air-time to the Lewinsky scandal than to Gore's policy plans.

Joan Konner is a professor and former dean at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



Tipper Gore was brought into the interview for human relief, for pacing, and, yes, for picking the family pimples.

education, the environment, and Social Security; the defining party issues of gays in the military, abortion, and, of course, taxes and spending. They flashed, quicker than you can reach for the remote, like lunatic phantoms haunting the ancient tower of political reporting past—i.e., Roger Mudd with presidential candidate Teddy Kennedy.

Tipper Gore was brought into the conversation for human relief, for pacing, and, yes, for picking family pimples, namely Tipper's recently revealed bout of depression—or is it, as adversaries and ignorants would have it, possibly compromising emotional instability?

But the red meat of the matter was, of course, President Clinton's impeachment scandal, which the news media, in search of Lewinsky-era ratings, just will not leave alone, though the public has begged them to. The audience was teased to stay tuned by Sawyer asking: "An intern, in the White House, in the Oval Office. Did it outrage you?" Coming up, after a commercial break.

But not quite yet. Sawyer asked Gore, as a former journalist, to write the headline for the difference between himself and President Clinton. He responded: "New Era, New Leadership." Her script coming out of that comment was, again, skeptical: "He says he now wants revolutionary change, which begs the question—what was he doing for the past seven years?" A serious reporter looks that up for homework. Anyway, everyone knows the vice-president has been busy raising funds for the Democratic party, working on the country's technological future, breaking tie votes in the Senate, attending floods and state funerals, and not giving more than lip service to his defining issue—the environment—or the country's vital issues, such as campaign-finance reform and what's happening to public-interest protections in the Deregulation Age.

Gore explained, as if to an idiot child: "The role of vice-president is completely different from the role of president....[Y]ou're always trying to...help the country by helping the president." In other words, he's a team player, not an agenda setter. Get it?

Sawyer brought up the fund-raising scandal but only briefly, and then moved swiftly to what she described as "the scandal that drags like a stone at the center of his campaign." Who says so? The press, not the American public. The scarlet "I" of impeachment is on Clinton's chest, not Gore's, and now the public wants to know what's important to him and about him. But don't hold your breath. The program cut to the infamous clip of President Clinton wagging his finger and denying a sexual relationship with "that woman."

"You were standing there in the room when he waved his finger," Sawyer said in mock shock and an accusatory manner. Forget objectivity! Too boring. Sawyer also asked, "Yes or no: Did Bill Clinton compromise the dignity of the presidency with what he did with Monica Lewinsky?"

Gore answered: "Yes. But I think he recovered from it....What he did was inexcusable....I felt it was terribly wrong, obviously, but I do believe that with the good grace and good sense of the American people, we have been able to get through it." That was the news quote, if any, from the whole hour. One word. *Inexcusable.* End of subject, one would think, but no.

Sawyer: "I think there's an emotional mystery at the center of it about you, people feel." And then once more, "An intern in the White House, in the Oval Office. Did it outrage you?" Essentially, Gore repeated his carefully scripted answer. But the Clinton-Gore political transplant was *still* not over.

Another Clinton clip: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." Over and over, Sawyer belabored the question. Gore answered her: "Overwhelmingly, Republicans, Democrats, independents—they felt what he did was awful, but they felt that it was not something for which he should be removed from office."

I was crying "Uncle," and, I'd like to believe, so was the rest of the audience, but Sawyer continued, in hot pursuit of nothing: What did Tipper think? How did Hillary react? More airtime was given to regurgitating the Clinton scandal than to any other subject. Can Gore get this behind him? Can we, the people, get it behind us? Not if the Washington wags have anything to say about the subject—and even if they don't.

"The campaign," Gore said, "is about how we bring about revolutionary change to our schools, how we keep our prosperity going, how we make it easier for families to be strong and together. That's really what this is about. Not style—substance." It's a good thing he shoehorned that in. We might never have known from this program.

What the audience got was long on spin, attitude, and edge, the latest false gods and fads of journalism. With a stretch, there was a one-line news story—rather, one-word—picked up by too many papers and newscasts: Gore says Clinton's behavior was "inexcusable." Sawyer's interview was not well researched, not informative, not revealing, not helpful to the public that must decide who should become the next president of the United States.

President Clinton's inexcusable behavior in office cannot become an excuse for inexcusable behavior by journalists. His actions, and those of other public officials equally destructive of public trust in this sorry chapter, are not a pass for disrespect of our democratic process, in which responsible journalism plays an important part. ■

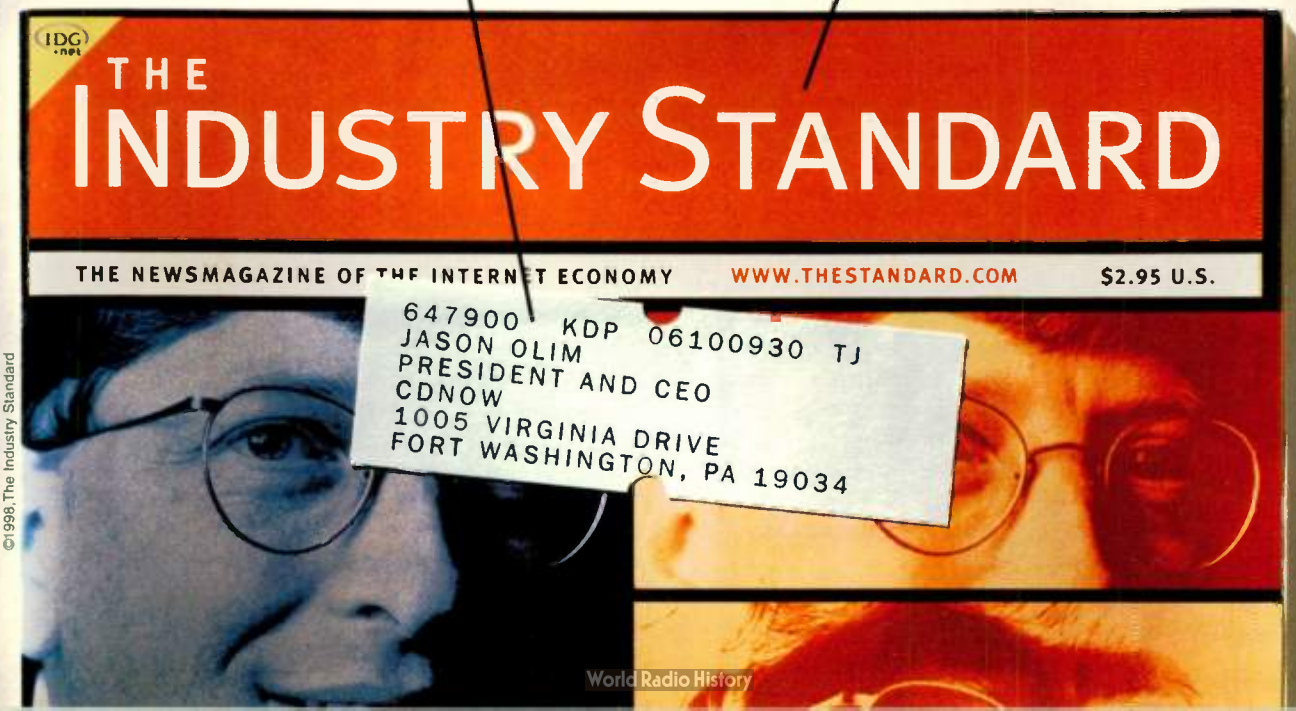
Editor's note: Diane Sawyer and ABC News chose not to respond to this article.

Learned of a company that customizes CDs for consumers.
— April 27th issue, pg. 39.

Bought a customized CD.
— May 11th

Bought the company.
— June 6th

What makes the Internet Economy click.™



Notes On The Net

Third Voice gives users a way to annotate any site on the Web. Before you dismiss this new dimension as online graffiti, consider its profound implications.

THE INTERNET HAS JUST SPROUTED another dimension. Third Voice, Inc., (www.thirdvoice.com) is offering a downloadable software tool that allows users to post public notes on any website. In other words, you can annotate the entire Web and share your thoughts with other Third Voice users (or exchange notes among private groups or just save them for yourself).

Third Voice software doesn't actually change the website you annotate. It first downloads the site from its regular source, then checks the Third Voice server for any notes you are authorized to see, then inserts small triangles where others have annotated the page. Clicking on the triangles opens the notes. It doesn't alter the original website, and only displays notes to other Third Voice users who have asked to see them.

Some will call Third Voice electronic graffiti. And, admittedly, the new writing space on Third Voice is starting out as a chaotic, populist medium. But this new commentary dimension to the Web will probably grow more orderly and valuable until it becomes, in effect, a meta-Web composed of expert marginalia. Whether Third Voice or some other system prevails in the marketplace (competitors already exist; will any of these tools become a standard part of Microsoft's Office suite?), the basic functionality—discussion groups overlaid on other sites—seems sure to last.

There will, of course, be lots of teeth gnashing about defacement, defamation, and the right to delete. A website cannot now disable Third Voice postings and, indeed, a user cannot even delete her own ill-considered posting. The most interesting legal hand-wringing will raise the question of whether a web-page author has what the French would call a "moral right" to control the appearance and protect the integrity of her artistic work. How you answer that question will turn on whether you think of the Internet as closer to television or to conversation.

U.S. law has always said *no* to the moral-rights claim in the print world. And it's a bit late to talk about control over appearance on the Net, given that users already can change the display of every website by resizing the frame or posting sticky notes on the screen or choosing different default header sizes. Remember the "framing" cases, which involved services that wrap a frame around another website? These new objections will fail for the same reason that those cases came up short—the original website stays unchanged, the only copying is done by the user, and any additions of text are made by mutual consent of the annotators and recipients. This seems likely to be found a "fair use" of the copy or a use effectively licensed to the end user. If it is a trademark infringement or a libel, that's only because of the content of the posting—and Third Voice goes out of its way to disclaim any control over that.

The more interesting (and nonlegal) question posed by Third Voice is whether—and how—this new channel for communication will become more valuable over time. Will we all sample the channel and then sign off in disgust when the notes become dominated by adolescent protest and random advertising? I think not—and the reason is that, in addition to the public and purely personal areas, Third Voice has provided for limited-admission private (perhaps one day available by subscription?) groups and for a category of notes from "experts."

Think about the possibilities that open up once you can read electronic marginalia on the Web written only by those you trust. A Federal Trade Commission expert could post warnings about false and deceptive offers. Commentators could attach their opinions to stories that appear on a popular news site. Those quoted or described in a story could post corrections! Lawyers advising a company on its e-commerce practices could create suggestions for improving the website, available only to those inside the company.

Groups could form an electronic campfire circle around websites in which they share an interest. Your buying club could exchange private comments on the items for sale on an auction site. Employees could post feedback directly on a company's intranet. You and your editor could use Third Voice to discuss editorial suggestions and fact-checking questions. Political candidates could debate issues by posting their statements and responses on each other's campaign sites. Two parties negotiating an agreement could use Third Voice to tie comments to particular alternative contractual language. Shareholders could annotate the electronic version of a company's annual report.

Many companies will think hardest about one particular possibility—that dissatisfied customers could publicly post

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credible complaints directly on websites used to attract new buyers. Because Third Voice provides for threaded discussions, it will allow the company to post public on-screen replies.

Uncontrolled annotations would raise serious policy questions. What happens when obscene or harmful postings appear on a website designed for children? Will it be possible to locate the identity of a poster—and would that be a good thing? If postings can contain links to other sites, and if one company posts a comparative statement on a competitor's site (with an invitation to visit the competing store), would that constitute fair competition or unfair leveraging of the popularity of the competitor's trademark? When will public notes expire and disappear—and who decides that? What specific privacy rules will protect the private-access groups?

If the Internet had a central authority, then we might get a clear answer to these questions. But the Net's very lack of a rigid, governing infrastructure led to this new functionality in the first place. An engineer, somewhere, acting without regard for the public-policy implications, can create a whole new cyber-landscape—and a whole new set of legal and policy issues to go with it.

The decentralized decision making that led to Third Voice might very well help us find answers to the public-policy questions raised by the software. Some users *will* post public graffiti, and many others will figure out how *not* to read it. Some will create new business models based on becoming trusted experts or leaders of a subscription-based private group. Some companies will keep this tool off their intranets. Some will figure out how to use it to increase employee feedback. We'll soon settle this new electronic frontier, just as we did the Web, and there will be an interesting, semi-orderly array of content roads and cities (and wastelands) in no time flat.

This won't happen because the engineer who opened up the new dimension planned it that way. Nor will it happen because Congress is smart enough to pass an Electronic Annotation Rights Act of 1999. It will happen because it is in the nature of our new electronic world to become more complex and more (but not too) orderly every day.

THE NEW SCIENCE OF COMPLEXITY SUGGESTS that nature seeks a "sweet spot" somewhere between randomness and order—and that it does so by moving from excess chaos or rigidity toward self-reinforcing interactions. The introduction of Third Voice notes to the Web may give us a chance to test directly this new scientific hypothesis. If multiparty marginalia become more valuable, it will be because the notes we see on others' sites surprise us sometimes and meet our established expectations most of the time.

There will be surprises. Someone may figure out how to make the life of a note, or its prominence on a list, depend on how many viewers click an "I agree" button—so that the public mind can be discerned from the evolutionary success of the best comments. Someone will get famous as the best web commentator, leveraging the eyeballs that others have worked hard to collect, but never even putting up a website or publication of her own. Some websites may develop a way (in software or legal code, it's just not clear) to prevent annotation of their own sites by others—but they then may have to decide not to deploy this defense because doing so would cause them to lose an audience or a way of adding value.

With Third Voice, users can insert notes on any web page. The notes appear as triangles just to the left of the highlighted word or phrase. Clicking on the triangle brings up the note.

Someone will figure out how to use these notes to inject a neutral viewpoint into an online quarrel. Someone will figure out how to use these notes to make new friends or rendezvous with old ones in real space. Movie studios (all of whose movies have websites) will tremble in anticipation as fan notes from the first showings pile in. Will the president answer postings on whitehouse.gov? Someone will do the equivalent of posting 95 theses on some version of an electronic church door.

We can't predict the future of the Third Voice dimension. But we do know that, in general, it's a good thing to have more tools and more space in which to work—more opportunities to communicate. Although those who think they "own" their websites will be horrified, Third Voice gives us a chance to build together a still more interesting online world. ■

Fast-Forward, Rewind

Two new video recorders promise to alter forever the way you watch television. But is now the right time to buy? • BY JOHN R. QUAIN

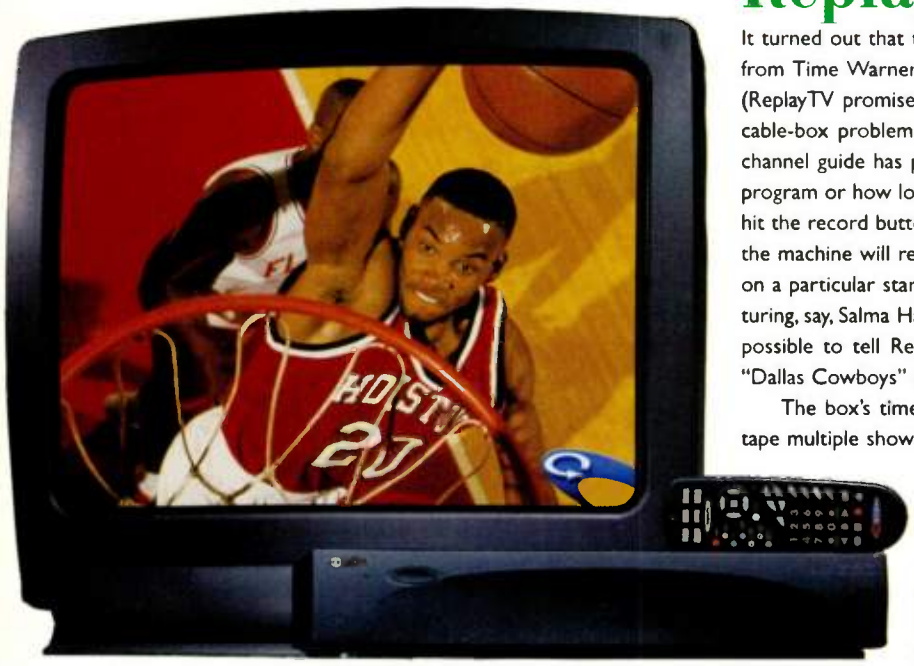
Editor's note: In this new column, Brill's Content *will regularly evaluate the latest products on the market that are designed to change the way we interact with media.*

THE TERM *CONVERGENCE* HAS BEEN BUZZING AROUND the computer business for years. For the technology-bound digerati, it has represented the Holy Grail of acceptance: access to the mass-market audience for television. Despite many attempts, including Internet-on-your-TV boxes, video phones, and "smart" cable converters, the marriage of computers and television has never been consummated—perhaps until now.

Called digital video recorders, or DVRs, the first two devices to use computing power to alter television dramatically are the $699 ReplayTV Personal Television Server and the $499 Philips Personal TV Receiver with TiVo Personal TV Service. By turning standard television signals into something anyone can stop and restart at any time, these black boxes can potentially transform the way we watch TV. You can rewind a live program, punch up your own instant replays, even stop a live show in its tracks. The last option enables you to pause a program, take out the garbage, walk the dog, get a snack—and then continue watching the show where you left off. If you time it right, you can even fast-forward through the commercials that were running while you did your chores, and catch up with the live show, seamlessly.

The ReplayTV and Philips TiVo boxes are essentially computers with fast hard-disk drives that continually record the incoming television signal in digital form. Each model includes software for changing settings and performing VCR-like recording functions, as well as a modem for updating the software and the on-screen program guides.

Touted as the ultimate in time-shifting couch-potato technology, these DVRs aren't bug-free yet. The ReplayTV and TiVo models I tested hook up to a television much as a VCR does. However, both must also be connected to a phone line to download software changes and program listings—a notable inconvenience in most living rooms and dens, where a phone jack often isn't readily at hand. And to change channels, both need to use an infrared doodad that you have to stick onto your cable converter box.



COURTESY OF REPLAY TV

ReplayTV

It turned out that the ReplayTV's infrared control was incompatible with my cable box from Time Warner Cable, so it limited my viewing options to a few cable stations. (ReplayTV promises to fix the problem by the time you read this.) But even with the cable-box problem, using the ReplayTV model was a channel surfer's dream. The free channel guide has program summaries and tells you how many minutes you are into a program or how long until one starts. If you see something you want to watch later, just hit the record button, and the box will store it for you. Hit the record button again and the machine will record the program every time that show comes on. If you're hooked on a particular star or director, you can also instruct the box to record everything featuring, say, Salma Hayek or directed by Stanley Kubrick. And a keyword feature makes it possible to tell ReplayTV to record every Dallas Cowboys game just by punching in "Dallas Cowboys" and letting the box search for game times and listings on its own.

The box's time-shifting effects are probably its most impressive features. You can't tape multiple shows at the same time, but you can watch a stored program while a live one is being recorded—something no VCR can do. And if you miss a crucial piece of dialogue in a live broadcast, you can rewind the show and watch it again without missing anything. I hit pause during a live Pete Sampras tennis match, changed laundry loads downstairs, and came back to pick up the action where I left off. And when I blinked and missed a line call, I just hit the instant replay button to make my own judgment (it was out!).

—And Take Control

Philips TiVo

The TiVo's stick-on infrared control worked without a hitch. Boasting many of the same DVR features as ReplayTV, the Philips TiVo box tries to distinguish itself by adding to its channel guide what amounts to an online magazine with programming suggestions. But don't expect *TV Guide* on your screen. The material is thin and rather obvious, which makes it all the more galling to have to pay a monthly fee of $9.95 for it. Because the box is pretty much useless without the channel guide, it means you're locked into the additional monthly fee, or you can pay a one-time lifetime subscription charge of $199 (for a service that no doubt will eventually become obsolete).

On the other hand, the Philips TiVo system does have a couple of features I missed on the ReplayTV system. TiVo lets you play "live" shows in slow motion (perfect for spotting continuity errors in B movies). It also offers a personalization feature: When you're watching a program you especially like, you can hit a "thumbs up" button to record your pleasure (or push a "thumbs down" button to register displeasure). Later, you can instruct the TiVo box to record your favorite shows or suggest programs similar to the ones you like.

COURTESY OF TIVO

Stay Tuned

These DVRs are not VCR killers. They are too expensive and have finite recording times. The TiVo unit I used records up to 14 hours of material, but only in a poor video-quality mode. With the best image-quality setting, you only get 4 hours of recording time, and if you want more, the 30-hour model (9 hours in best-recording mode) costs $999. The ReplayTV box has the same limitations, with a 28-hour model available for $1,499. Of course, if you want to keep programs you've captured using either box, you can have your VCR record them while you're playing them back on your DVR. Ultimately, if you spend a lot of time in front of the electronic hearth—and if money is no object—ReplayTV's model is the DVR to get. The rest of us may want to wait until the full potential of the technology is realized.

And what a potential. Electronics giants such as Panasonic Consumer Electronics Company are already planning to produce their own DVRs, while digital satellite-system companies such as EchoStar Communications Corporation and DirectTV, Inc., are planning receivers with DVR features. Major equity investments have been made in both companies by Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, and Netscape Communications cofounder Marc Andreessen has invested in Replay Networks, Inc. Even NBC has invested an undisclosed amount in TiVo, Inc. Why would NBC invest in a box that seems to make the standard ways of feeding viewers information and commercials obsolete? Maybe because TiVo plans to use the information about viewers' programming choices to allow broadcasters and cable stations to target their advertising at specific users. So in the future, while you're altering TV time, they may be altering your advertising time. Now, if only someone could invent something that would alter real time. ■

John R. Quain is a contributing editor to Fast Company *magazine and* PC Magazine. *He also appears regularly on* CBS News *and MSNBC.*

welcome to my hype-industrial complex, baby!

When it comes to a carefully strategized attack on our way of life, Dr. Evil could have learned something from the producers, marketers, corporate partners, and merchandisers who sold us *Austin Powers*.

By Michael Colton

MOST MOVIE STUDIOS DON'T HAVE GIANT lasers like Dr. Evil, the diabolical villain of *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*. So if you're New Line Cinema, the studio behind *Austin Powers*, how do you conquer the world?

You spend more money on your promotional campaign than on the production of your movie. You enlist a slew of corporate partners. You strategically time the release of the film, as well as the launch of advertising, merchandise, and corporate tie-ins. You create a *brand*, not unlike Martha Stewart or the Spice Girls.

The results are jaw-dropping: Opening to mixed reviews, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* earned a surprise $54.7 million in its first weekend in June, a record for a comedy, and will likely reap $200 million domestically. In every medium this summer, the dentally challenged agent was inescapable, but his film is just part of the phenomenon. Robert Thompson, a professor of film and television at Syracuse University, says films like *Austin Powers* emanate from a "sophisticated-hype-industrial complex."

"You used to have just a big hit movie, and all this cultural equity built up around it was wasted, pumped out into the ether," he says. "The most that the studio ever cashed in on was the box office. Now there's a sense that if you pour all this money into promoting a film, and let people get to know the characters, why not cash in on the satellite culture that spews out of that? The appearance in a movie is now just part of an incredibly complicated system to sell not just a movie but to sell character as lifestyle."

WHEN VISITED BY A REPORTER IN LATE JUNE, WIN FARRELL HAD not yet seen the *Austin Powers* sequel, much to the consternation of his catchphrase-spouting teenage daughters. But that didn't stop Farrell from explaining the film's success.

"It's shockwave marketing," he says, "a word-of-mouth generated by a confluence of marketing messages which all peaked at the same time. While Mike Myers is on the *Today* show, you see Virgin ads on billboards, Heineken displays in grocery stores, clips on the news, promotions on TV Land—you get a catalytic reaction of conversations: *Have you seen? Did you see?* There is enough input in terms of energy levels to catalyze conversations."

A former rocket scientist—he has Mars photos on the walls of his Manhattan office—Farrell now consults at PricewaterhouseCoopers, where his clients are mainly entertainment companies looking to create the next big thing. He is the author of a book, *How Hits Happen*, and is one of the few people who frequently use the phrases *memes and algorithms* and *Hootie & the Blowfish* in the same sentence.

Building on the complexity-theory research of the Santa Fe Institute—which uses quantum physics and existentialist philosophy to explain, among other things, how hurricanes form and why stock markets crash—Farrell and his team use artificial-life systems to predict how movies and CDs will perform. A system he creates may contain 200,000 "agents"—a sort of virtual focus group—each of whom represents a real person, programmed with as many as 100 different variables, from demographics (age, race, income) to "psychographics": One agent may seek out artists he perceives to be "rebellious"; another looks for music she can dance to.

There are further real-world analogies in the system: Certain agents are "leaders" who often buy music before their friends have heard of it, while others depend on their friends for advice. "Let's say you call me for a telephone poll—traditional market research—and ask what movie I most want to see," says Farrell. "I say *Austin Powers*. But then, when we go out together"—he points to four people in the room—"we see *Star Wars*." Farrell's models take this crucial social interaction into account: Each agent is friends with a certain number of other agents, and has varying levels of trust in his or her friends' opinions.

Once a client provides input for the model—proposed marketing strategies, promotion levels, release dates, audience-testing results—and Farrell's team adds in daily survey results about changing tastes, Farrell can see how a new product will play over a designated time period. He demonstrates with a model showing the release of the first Hootie album. He calls up a screen with a mix of red, orange, and yellow rectangles, each rectangle representing an agent and the degree of redness representing the agent's inclination to buy the album. Once the model is set into motion, the color levels move up and down; many agents turn blue, indicating they've bought the album. After a virtual year has past, most of the agents that didn't turn blue turn yellow, indicating they have lost all interest.

With these models, Farrell's clients can test various strategies for maximum effectiveness—when to release a second single, how much television advertising to buy. If the trendsetting agents have a lackluster response in the model, the client might increase advertising in magazines like *Entertainment Weekly*. If a film has been released and is underperforming in a certain geographical area, the client may try doubling the regional newspaper advertising in the model, and then do the same thing in the real world. Farrell says his predictions are accurate, often within 10 percent of final sales figures.

But Farrell admits that his models need work, which is why some of his clients use his services only as a supplement to the more traditional methods of firms like National Research Group. For instance, if a studio wants to test two different ad campaigns, Farrell's models are useless: His agents respond to the *quantity* of promotion, not the *quality*.

New Line did not employ Farrell's models, but it did rely on NRG and another market research firm, MarketCast, Inc. NRG—retained by all the major studios—uses testing and polling to provide the studios with information. A telephone poll might ask: *Are you aware of this upcoming film? If so, are you interested in seeing it?* Too many negative responses may encourage the studio to increase advertising for a specific market. NRG also runs focus groups for various cuts of the films and for the trailers. Their responses are used by a studio to change the film—shoot a happier ending, for instance—or to alter marketing strategies. Like toothpaste, much of what we end up seeing on the screen or in advertisements has been pretested.

Using the information from NRG and MarketCast, Bob Friedman, New Line's cochairman of worldwide theatrical marketing, and his team began working on the film while it was still in the script stage. Friedman's job was easier than it might have been because buzz already existed; after the 1997 debut of the first film, *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, Austin never really went away.

The first film was a modest success, earning $54 million domestically. But then the film took off on video, adding another $47 million to its domestic take. The character struck a chord among fans, who started hosting *Austin Powers* parties and attending midnight screenings.

Building on "complexity-theory research," Farrell and his team use artificial-life systems to predict how movies and CDs will perform in the real world. The goal is to sell us more.

"The fact that it didn't do that well the first time out and seeded itself into the public consciousness through video gives it a small-film feel," says Don Moriarty, partner and managing director of CMG Communications, the ad agency for Virgin Atlantic Airways, one of New Line's promotional partners. "The sequel managed to retain a bit of that underground cultish feel that the original release had, even though it's a big summer blockbuster."

Fans who felt that they were trendsetters, that *they* had discovered *Austin Powers*, were not turned off by a huge promotional campaign for the sequel that might have backfired for another film. However, though there was residual interest from the first film, the studio wanted to kick the sequel up to the next level. As Farrell might describe it, the potential audience for a film is like a photosensitive mixture of chemicals responding to light. When that mixture receives enough energy, the energy level reaches a point at which each sensitive molecule (i.e., Joe Consumer) becomes more likely to move to another state (i.e., a ticket buyer). One TV commercial might not do it, but a dozen images of Austin Powers in one day—and word-of-mouth among friends—might.

NEW LINE HAD LOCKED IN THE RELEASE DATE FOR *THE SPY Who Shagged Me* almost a year in advance. (And it would launch on that date, June 11, 1999, on 3,312 screens—a record until *Wild Wild West* debuted on 3,342 screens three weeks later.) Because June 11 came three weeks after the release of *Star Wars: Episode 1*, *Austin Powers* was positioned to debut when the moviegoing audience had, New Line hoped, tired of *Star Wars*. New Line used the competition to its advantage, launching a promotional campaign tied to

Star Wars. January's Super Bowl featured a clever ad—shot before *Austin Powers* had even begun production—that featured the tag line, "If you see only one movie this summer, see *Star Wars*; but if you see two movies, see *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me.*"

New Line spent $35 million-$40 million on its promotion and advertising budget (the film's production budget was $33 million). Because New Line is owned by Time Warner, it also benefited from corporate synergy, with merchandise in Warner Brothers stores and promotions on TBS, TNT, and in *Entertainment Weekly*, and tie-in products from Warner Records and Warner Books. Warner-owned HBO is currently producing an animated *Austin Powers* series.

But even with such a promotion budget and the help of Warner subsidiaries, true saturation of the market demanded something more. The promotion costs for *Austin Powers* would have soared higher—to $50 million-$60 million—were it not for the tie-ins and corporate partnerships:

Virgin Atlantic, a.k.a. Virgin Shaglantic, has spent $10 million on its Austin Powers campaign and estimates it has earned $20 worth of publicity for every $1 spent.

"The smashing all-new 2000 Mitsubishi Eclipse, which swings into Mitsubishi Motors' dealerships in July, will experience a little cross-mojonation as cats and kittens who visit Mr.ShowBiz.com...can build their own Eclipse spy-cars worthy of Britain's swinging Secret Agent, Austin Powers. Oh behave!"

"When you transfer a balance, the Austin Powers Titanium Visa card gives you a low, money-saving introductory 2.9% APR, followed by a low 10.99% interest rate—an offer that just may inspire you to say, 'Yeah, baby, yeah!'"

"Secret Agent Austin Powers' Hideous Mouth Illustrates American Academy of Periodontology Message: 'Don't Forget to Floss, Baby'"

As these press-release excerpts demonstrate, companies—much like fifth-graders—love to be affiliated with Austin Powers, and to repeat his lingo ad nauseam. "We knew that associating ourselves with Austin would certainly raise our coolness factor among key demographics," says Dave Thompson, senior manager of public relations at Philips Electronics North America, another of the film's promotional partners.

With tie-in promotions, *Austin Powers* became ubiquitous: on telephone booth ads; at theme parties in bars; in your e-mail, through Virgin's interactive *Austin Powers* cartoon; on the Web, where you can download an *Austin Powers* browser, bid $7,204 for Dr. Evil's suit on America Online, or shop for a novelty Swedish penis pump ($12.95). Austin was on TV and radio, in newspapers columns, even in the air, where Virgin Atlantic's "Austin Powered" contains images of the dandy chap on the sides of the plane and on headrests. On June 11, virginshaglantic.com reported 18 million hits during a 10-hour, 1,000 airline-ticket giveway, breaking records for an online event.

How did companies get so involved? Virgin Atlantic, which temporarily nicknamed itself Virgin Shaglantic, has spent $10 million on its *Austin Powers* campaign, and its popular, naughty ads ("There's only one virgin on this billboard, baby!") have been stolen from bus shelters. The company estimates it's earned $20 worth of publicity for every $1 spent, and Sarah Buxton, Virgin's marketing director, calls the reaction to the campaign "quite insane."

"Way back in the beginning, Mike Myers was looking for the right partners with the right commercial fit, in terms of really being fun and fitting part of the story," she says. "They approached us with a product-placement deal, and we saw it as an excellent thing to get behind."

According to advertising executive Moriarty, Virgin Atlantic didn't pay New Line for its product placement (Austin's pad is situated between a Virgin Mega store and a Philips store), and New Line did not pay Virgin for its promotional campaign, though the studio and Myers had approval over the tag lines. Dean Ayers, president of the Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association, a coalition of companies involved in product placement, estimates that only 10 percent of product-placement deals involve payment to a studio. However, Virgin and some of the other corporate partners paid New Line an undisclosed fee to use Myers's likenesses in their ads.

Virgin made its deal directly with New Line Cinema. Philips Electronics, on the other hand, worked through Norm Marshall & Associates, Inc., a product-placement agency it hired last year. Last October, representatives from Philips had a meeting in Los Angeles at the agency, with various studios presenting their upcoming films to solicit Philips's involvement. Top New Line executives talked about the *Austin Powers* script, their plans for the film, their estimates for its success. "We looked at several different vehicles, and *Austin Powers* was far and away the unanimous choice amongst the group of marketers from Philips and Norm Marshall," says Philips's Thompson. "Some of the other studios required payment for products in their films. We thought that was excessive."

In *Wayne's World*, Mike Myers mocked the very idea of product placements, denouncing such commercialization while prominently displaying corporate logos. The *Austin Powers* films are chock-full of products, but again, the commercialization is often mocked when it is employed. Much of the humor in the films comes from the character of Dr. Evil pronouncing the names of consumer goods: Hot Pockets, Eggo, Diet Coke. Or he riffs on pop culture (Will Smith, the Alan Parsons Project, *Jerry Maguire*). The entire film uses such cultural touchstones as punch lines: Jerry Springer, Willie Nelson, Moon Unit Zappa. Brand loyalty is built into the very nature of the *Austin Powers* humor.

Which is why, before the film was produced, Myers approached Starbucks Coffee Company with a script that prominently featured the company in one scene: as the new headquarters for Dr. Evil. "Naturally we were a little concerned being associated with Dr. Evil, but...we've never been a company afraid to laugh at ourselves," says Chris Gimbl, a Starbucks spokesman. Again, no payment was involved.

Another popular gag in the film comes when Fat Bastard, the obese, baby-eating henchman also played by Myers, sings an ad jingle from Chili's Grill & Bar. This joke wasn't in the

script, but resulted from Myers's on-set ad-libbing. "They sent us a letter and a tape of a test audience reacting positively to the line," says Louis Adams, a Chili's spokesman. "They said, 'Hey, Mike did this, and we'd like to leave it in.'" Because the jingle was a copyrighted song, New Line paid Chili's a fee, which went into the company's family assistance fund.

When it came to merchandising the film, New Line was once again in an enviable position. Because the first film was an unproven property, it launched with little merchandise attached to it, and the studio did not begin its major licensing initiative until June 1998, when the home video's success showed there was a hungry market for *Powers* paraphernalia. Merchandise was still selling in the spring of 1999, and companies continued to buy licenses.

Mike Judlowe, the vice-president of marketing for Mott's, Inc., saw the *Austin Powers* booth at the International Licensing Show in New York in June 1998, and says he "had as close to an epiphany as I ever had." Mott's had been trying to reach younger drinkers with cocktail mixers, and saw an *Austin Powers* connection as a way to "bring more fun" to the category, according to Judlowe. Shagadelic Shakers, on sale since the end of May, have been a huge success.

With so many young fans of *Austin Powers*, why market cocktail mixers? Granted, Shagadelic Shakers contain no alcohol (that's purchased separately), and feature recipes for "virgin," nonalcoholic drinks. "Certainly youth was a concern, but we felt comfortable that *Austin Powers* was really an adult property," says Judlowe.

Just what is the target demographic for *Austin Powers*? Kids love it, but New Line Cinema views its core demo as 18- to 24-year-olds, and the major corporations tied to the film—Heineken, Virgin Atlantic, Philips Electronics—produce products and services primarily for adults. Dave Thompson of Philips acknowledges that much of the *Austin Powers* audience may not buy home electronics, but says, "We start with the younger demographic so they grow up with the brand. We want to make them Philips users."

Ayers, of the Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association, says these companies' involvement is surprising. "I would expect that the corporate partners would be people who produce products aimed at the teenage audience," he says. "Either some of these companies didn't do their homework...or they just wanted to be involved in a movie at any cost and didn't care which."

Though the film contains plenty of kid-friendly bathroom humor, Powers is also unabashedly sexual. Few complained to Virgin Atlantic about its suggestive ads ("Five times a day? Yeah, baby!"), but in June a Georgia woman filed an obscenity complaint against Toys R Us, after her 11-year-old son picked up the Austin "Danger" Powers Ultra-"Cool" Action Figure, dressed in only red Union Jack underwear and gray socks and sporting bushy chest hair. The doll's voice chip asked him, "Do I make you horny, baby, do I?"

After the incident, McFarlane Toys said that this model was supposed to ship to specialty retailers, not mass-market stores like Toys R Us. The "innocent" version of the doll that should have been on sale at Toys R Us says, "Would you fancy a shag?"

He's everywhere: *Austin Powers* products, promotions, and paraphernalia conquered the culture this summer.

IN JUNE, *AUSTIN POWERS* HAD THE EXPECTED DELUGE OF PUBlicity. Mike Myers and costar Heather Graham graced magazine covers and talk shows; MTV re-aired a special tied to the first film—paid for by New Line—and produced a new *Powers* short for the MTV Movie Awards on June 10, the night before the sequel's release. By this point, shockwave marketing had already taken effect, and *Austin* was on the minds of millions of moviegoers. As in Farrell's computer model, the film's quality—debatable, judging by the critics—was almost a negligible factor for this group. Multiple images of Austin, coming from so many angles, can be quite persuasive. Enough, even, to make those orange rectangles turn blue. ■

TESTING Consumer Reports

When it comes to deciding which products and services to buy, there's no more trusted source of information than this 63-year-old magazine. But the self-proclaimed bastion of unbiased testing may not be as fair or conflict-free as it claims.

By Jennifer Greenstein • Photographs By Doug Levere

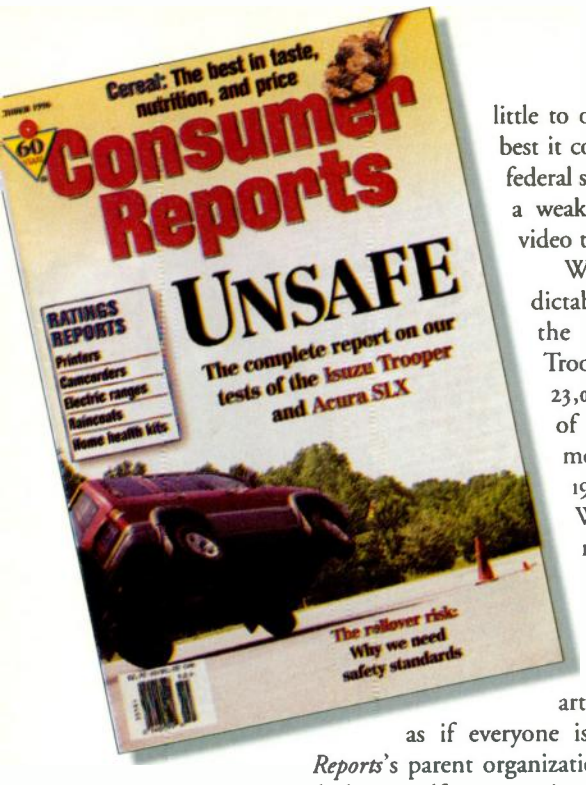
SIX EXECUTIVES FROM ISUZU MOTORS LIMITED WERE HUNCHED AROUND A CONFERENCE TABLE ON THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE company's U.S. headquarters in Whittier, California. It was 6:30 on a late August morning in 1996, and the Isuzu brass had been summoned by a cryptic call from *Consumer Reports* the previous afternoon. The caller had informed them that an Isuzu product would be discussed at a news conference that was less than 30 minutes away. No one at Isuzu had a clue about which of the company's vehicles was going to be in the spotlight or even what the subject of the magazine's press event would be. All they knew was that *Consumer Reports* was not about to laud them for their vehicular contributions to society.

"They don't hold a news conference to recommend a product," says Terry Maloney, Isuzu's vice-president for corporate relations and one of the attendees that day.

A few minutes after 6:30 a videotape arrived by messenger. The tape, the same one that would be shown at the press conference, depicted four different sport utility vehicles being put through their paces on a test track. On each run, the SUV made a sharp left turn to avoid a set of cones, followed by a sharp right to get back into the right lane. After the Chevrolet Tahoe, Nissan Pathfinder, and Toyota 4Runner successfully completed the lane change, it was the Isuzu Trooper's turn. The red SUV veered to the left, but as it tried to return to the right lane, the Trooper lurched sharply—and both right-side wheels rose more than two feet off the ground.

"We couldn't believe it," Maloney says. "We had never had any incidents, any claims. We'd never experienced a problem in the real world with Troopers."

Three thousand miles away, *Consumer Reports* employees handed out press kits and videotapes to the 40 journalists gathered at the magazine's Yonkers, New York, headquarters. The words of David Pittle, *Consumer Reports*'s technical director, were stern and unwavering: Consumers shouldn't buy the Isuzu Trooper, and owners of the vehicle should drive it only when necessary. Before the five-minute video had finished playing, Isuzu got its first phone call from a reporter. By day's end, it had received more than 100 calls from the media. That night, CBS and CNN carried the story; the next day, dozens of newspapers ran it, several on the front page. Isuzu, caught flat-footed, had



A scathing cover story sent sales of the Isuzu Trooper plummeting.

little to offer by way of a response. The best it could do: "The Trooper meets all federal safety standards and regulations," a weak counterpoint to the dramatic video that played on the news.

What happened next was predictable. In the 12 months following the report's release, sales of the Trooper dropped 43.5 percent, from 23,000 to 13,000. Such is the power of *Consumer Reports*, one of the most trusted names in America. A 1999 poll by research company Wirthlin Worldwide found the magazine was rated the most believable source of information about products and services, more reliable than a friend's recommendation or a news article. In an era in which it seems as if everyone is working an angle, *Consumer Reports*'s parent organization, Consumers Union, proudly declares itself a nonpartisan, nonprofit group with only one agenda: serving the interests of the buying public. *Consumer Reports*'s 4.9 million subscribers make it the eighth largest magazine in the U.S. by circulation—larger than *Time*, *People*, and *Sports Illustrated*. And nearly all of Consumers Union's $137 million in annual revenue comes from readers, because it won't accept ads for the magazine. "When you have advertising, the question is, 'How can we get the consumer we need'" to please advertisers, says Rhoda Karpatkin, who has served as Consumers Union's president for the last 25 years. At *Consumer Reports*, there's only the reader to cater to.

The magazine's reputation, its circulation, and its singular focus on extensive consumer testing give its pronouncements huge influence. (*Consumers Digest*, its closest competitor, has about a quarter of the circulation, invests much less in testing, and accepts advertising.) When *Consumer Reports* recommends a product, consumers go shopping; when it pans one, sales evaporate.

But *Consumer Reports*'s pristine reputation has been tarnished of late. Several companies and industry groups have challenged the magazine's testing methods and have alleged that the advertising-free institution may have an agenda it doesn't always disclose. Two car companies, Isuzu and Suzuki Motor Corporation, have even sued in recent years, charging that *Consumer Reports* manipulated its tests to get vehicles to tip. And Isuzu is furious that Consumers Union went so far as to petition the federal government to investigate the Trooper.

Consumers Union executives see the marriage of impartial testing and advocacy as a natural one. But the pairing has troubling implications. Consumers Union has accepted grant money from foundations with specific agendas—such as limiting the use of pesticides—and the magazine has then run stories supporting those foundations' goals. The assorted complaints raise a serious question about this bastion of rigorous, unbiased testing: Is *Consumer Reports* always as fair as it portrays itself to be?

YOU MAY NOT GIVE HAIR CONDITIONERS a lot of thought, but Peter Heinlein does. Heinlein, the senior project leader in *Consumer Reports*'s chemistry and textiles department, tested conditioners by purchasing about $50,000 worth of virgin Mediterranean hair ("not necessarily that it comes from Mediterranean virgins, but that it hasn't been dyed," he explains with a wry smile). Each bunch of hair was doused with a conditioner, rinsed, and combed out by hand. After that, each bunch was dipped in distilled water to tangle it, lodged in the vise of a machine that measures force, and had a comb swept through it, in order to calculate a numerical figure for the ease of combing. The dipping and combing was then repeated six times. The three-month process evaluated 71 brands; three earned the rating "best buy," the magazine's highest endorsement. *Consumer Reports*'s ever-efficient operation made sure the leftover hair didn't go to waste: It was mixed with lard and used to test the mettle of drain cleaners.

This is just one of the projects brewing behind the doors of the 50 testing labs at *Consumer Reports*'s headquarters. Pulling up a chair at a crowded table in the company cafeteria is a little like crashing a meeting of the high school science club. These eggheads of gadgetry—they have advanced degrees in subjects like cosmetic chemistry and engineering psychology—do the tedious work of seeing if things work as promised. The testers run vacuum cleaners over a potent mix of sand and talcum powder eight times in a 40-second period, then weigh the carpet and the vacuum to measure how much dirt has really been sucked up. They toss suitcases into a seven-foot wheel furnished with sharp metal edges to see how many tears and nicks puncture the bags after 25, 50, 100, even 300 turns in this luggage torture chamber. And they pull kitchen cabinets open and push them shut with a robot-like machine to see how long it takes for hinges to come loose.

Many of these *Consumer Reports* contraptions look goofy, but those who devise them couldn't be more serious about what they do. "I think that more than most organizations...there's a feeling here that there's an important mission," says Harv Ebel, who has devised tests for bicycle helmets, running shoes, and exercise machines. "I think people here are battlers who would fight hard for a cause."

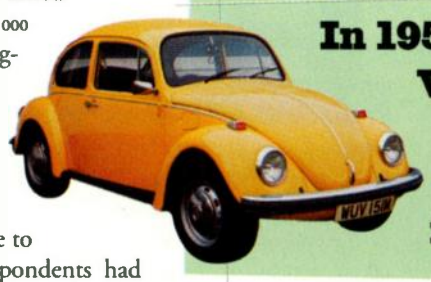
That cause began 63 years ago when the nonprofit Consumers Union was founded by a group of labor leaders, professors, and civil-liberties lawyers. Their goal, as outlined in the first issue of *Consumer Reports*, was "to provide consumers with information which will permit them to buy their food, their clothing, their household supplies and other products most intelligently." Executives proudly declare that the magazine's only loyalty is to the consumer. The magazine has no relationships with the manufacturers of the products it rates. It buys all the products it tests, including cars, at retail prices, anonymously. It forbids companies to tout a good review in an ad—it will sue them if they do—and won't even sell a company multiple copies of an issue that contains a plug.

Consumers appreciate the rigid neutrality. "They're more objective than any publication I've ever seen," says charter subscriber Milton Kaplan, who subscribes to about

50 magazines. "If I had to eliminate every magazine I get, this is one I would keep."

Millions of readers seem to agree. While most magazines rely heavily on advertising revenue—often selling subscriptions at deep discounts to attract readers—*Consumer Reports* charges an above-average $26 for 12 issues a year. That brought in close to $90 million in revenue in the fiscal year that ended May 31, 1998. And *Consumer Reports* readers are devoted. When the magazine announced it needed to improve its testing labs, 600,000 readers ponied up a total of $17 million in donations, about half the cost of buying and renovating a 180,000-square-foot building. Last year, the magazine collected $6.4 million in donations from individuals and $2.1 million more in grants.

In the last two decades, *Consumer Reports* has developed close to a dozen other products to expand the magazine's reach. Its website has 310,000 paying subscribers, making it the largest journalism subscription site on the Web, ahead of *The Wall Street Journal*'s site (see sidebar, page 76). There are newsletters about health and travel, a children's consumer magazine called *Zillions*, and a television division that produces segments on the magazine's reports to which 107 local TV stations in North America subscribe. Its $9.95 annual buying guide—published since 1937—sells 210,000 copies a year. The magazine's biggest-selling issue is its April car review: A survey this year by the Ford Motor Company found that close to a quarter of the respondents had consulted *Consumer Reports* before going car shopping. "I certainly wouldn't buy a new car without consulting them," says John Preston, an engineer with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the federal government's consumer watchdog agency.



In 1952 *Consumer Reports* gave the Volkswagen Beetle, then an unknown German import, a glowing review. By 1958, the car was the largest-selling import in the United States.

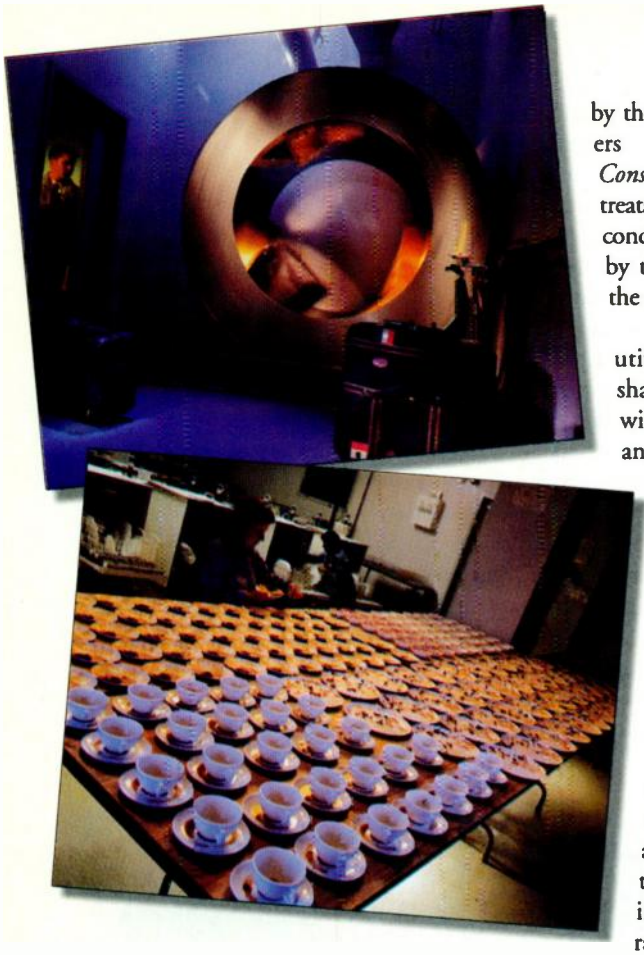
The magazine's reputation for sobriety and impartiality has given it enormous credibility among other media outlets. When *Consumer Reports* asserted in February that some fruits and vegetables had pesticide residues that were too high for children to consume, the report drew front-page stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*, and was featured on ABC News. "It was as if a government agency had issued this report," says Don Lipton, spokesman for the American Farm Bureau Federation, a farmers group that disagreed with the findings.

To a manufacturer, *Consumer Reports* can stand as judge and jury. It is known for taking uncompromising stands against products when it believes safety is at stake. Take, for example, its 1982 cover story on kerosene heaters, which declared the heaters hazardous and cautioned against buying them. "After the report came out, the health of the industry deteriorated and really never recovered," says Hal Smith, former president of the National Kerosene Heater Association.

Praise from *Consumer Reports*—particularly a "best buy" rating—can mean big business, however. "We know that whenever they publish something, if we happen to be the lucky one and get chosen as the top, we know it is going to be good sales for us," says Carolyn Verweyst, manager of marketing communications for Whirlpool Corporation's home appliances division. In 1952 *Consumer Reports* gave the Volkswagen Beetle, then an unknown German import, a glowing review. By 1958, the car was the largest-selling import in the United States. And a May 1992 story that rated the Saucony "Jazz" running shoe a "best buy" gave the manufacturer a significant boost. Annual sales at the shoe and apparel company, which had hovered below $60 million a year since 1988, soared to $81 million in 1992.

Consumer Reports's power to make or break a product understandably strikes fear in the hearts of manufacturers. Many companies are so apprehensive about its power that they will make only the blandest of comments about the magazine. Art Rogers, president of Saucony, North America, for instance, refuses to acknowledge that the magazine gave his shoe a boost, even though the company's annual report that year featured a newspaper headline that read, "Sales have 'gone nuts' since getting magazine's top rating." After all, a positive review today doesn't preclude a negative one in the future, and companies don't want to provoke the magazine's ire. Neither have companies been willing to lambaste the magazine's findings. "Companies are terrified to challenge *Consumer Reports* because they fear retaliation," says Eric Dezenhall, founder of a public relations firm that represents manufacturers. "They don't want to jeopardize their other product lines by picking a fight."

THAT TIDE IS BEGINNING TO TURN, as a handful of manufacturers and trade groups have begun to let their grumbling be heard. The loudest complaints have come from Isuzu and Suzuki. The crux of their suits, filed in 1997 and 1996, respectively, is that *Consumer Reports* violated the trait it has built its name on: impartiality. The Suzuki litigation includes a sworn statement from Ronald Denison, a former test-facility employee for the magazine, who alleges that on the day the Suzuki Samurai was being tested in 1988, he heard Irwin Landau, the magazine's editorial director at the time, tell an engineer, "If you can't find someone to roll this car, I will." Landau said in his deposition that he would never have said such a thing, except in jest. The magazine's executives deny they would pervert the magazine's test to sensationalize the results. And Denison was fired in 1989 for poor performance, although he says he has no ax to grind and is receiving no payment for his testimony. But regardless of how those suits are resolved—none of the other nine that have been brought over the years against the magazine succeeded—the complaints



Consumer Reports's luggage tester (above) simulates airline abuse. A technician dirties cups and saucers in preparation for dishwasher tests (below).

by the car companies and others bring to light how *Consumer Reports* sometimes treats manufacturers. And that conduct may not be marked by the fairness and openness the magazine touts.

Consumer Reports executives say that they will share their testing methods with any company. "We are an open book," says editorial director Jacqueline Leo, who joined the magazine in late 1997. "We'll go over our testing with any manufacturer that asks."

But some companies say they've found the process unsatisfactory. Echo Inc., which makes a leaf blower that *Consumer Reports* evaluated in April 1997, says the data it got were incomplete and inaccurate—a charge the magazine disputes. The magazine had made a damning charge against Echo: It accused the company of lying about how quiet its new leaf blower was. "*Consumer Reports* said sixty-nine [decibels] and Echo said sixty-five. You know what that does to one's credibility? It ruins it," says Robin Pendergrast, a public relations consultant for Echo. Weather conditions were supposed to be recorded as part of the test, which was designed by an outside group, but *Consumer Reports* staffers admit they failed to record them. "We didn't see that that had any relevance to the test results," says David Tallman, the program leader who conducted the test. In a letter to Echo, the magazine claimed it was "between 50 and 60 degrees, with very light wind" the day of the test, according to Tallman's recollection—but the National Weather Service says the temperature 15 miles away (the closest spot at which the service measures) ranged from 34 to 39 degrees. "It is possible to run this test under different conditions and therefore get different results," says Larry Will, Echo's vice-president of engineering. Cold weather makes the rubber on the machine stiff and prevents it from working properly, he says. Geoffrey Martin, testing director for the magazine's recreation and home-improvement department, disagrees. He says there is no proof that temperature plays a role. "It was a fair test," he says. "We wouldn't publish it if we didn't think it was."

California manufacturer Bell Sports fought back with its own media campaign after a *Consumer Reports* story asserted that some buckles on Bell bike helmets broke apart during testing. In a statement accompanying a video news release sent to television stations, the company said the magazine did not turn over complete test data, a charge Consumers Union president Karpatkin denies.

Bell executives insist that there is no problem with their helmets. "*Consumer Reports* claimed to have performed the test the same way as every testing laboratory," says Don L'Heureux, Bell Sports's vice-president of corporate affairs. "But they had results that were diametrically opposed...to everything that had been done by us and by independent testers for several years."

Consumer Reports often does more than tell consumers to avoid buying a product. As it did with Bell Sports's helmets, it frequently implores the government to investigate that product. Consumers Union's three advocacy offices in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas, urge government agencies to make policy changes on everything from mobile homes to pesticides. Last year the advocacy division had a $3.6 million budget and 43 employees. (The magazine division has 428 employees.) Karpatkin doesn't see a problem with the magazine evaluating some of the same products on which the advocacy offices take positions. "I see absolutely no conflict," she says. Product testing is "one category of the work we do," she says, and advocacy is an "additional part of our mission."

BUT THIS DUAL ROLE—IMPARTIAL scientific tester on the one hand, outspoken advocate on the other—isn't always fully revealed to readers. Consider the magazine's recent article about pesticides, which cautioned about the potential dangers posed to children eating produce. "With some fruits and vegetables," the story said, "kids who eat a single serving can exceed the safe daily limit of certain pesticides." At the end of the article, the magazine told readers that it had taken action to protect them: "Based on our analysis, Consumers Union has asked the EPA to restrict or ban specific pesticide uses" that it sees as endangering children.

But the story didn't mention that the analysis was conducted in part with funds from three foundations, all of which support the reduction of pesticide use. Those foundations gave Consumers Union a total of $370,000 in grants for pesticide research in the last two years. "They soft-pedal their political agenda," says Don Lipton of the American Farm Bureau Federation. "I'm not sure a civilian who doesn't follow these issues avidly could find out that there is a political agenda at work here."

Edward Groth, director of Consumers Union's technical policy and public service department, says the grants did not influence the findings. He says it's wrong to assume that "because a foundation has an agenda, that everybody they fund is enslaved by that agenda." That's a curious explanation from an organization that doesn't accept ads so that its pronouncements won't have even the appearance of impropriety.

Critics say the pesticide story was concocted to support the antipesticide position of Consumers Union. The language and tone of the article telegraph that your children are at risk, but the "proof" is weighed down by caveats such as "may affect," "Some are suspected," and "data suggest." The headline, over a picture of a young girl reaching for a peach, says the magazine's analysis found "many [pesticide levels] are too high." But the report's "toxicity index," created specifically for the Consumers Union study, is not

TRACEY KROLL/COURTESY OF *CONSUMER REPORTS* (2)

used by the government or anyone else to quantify pesticide risk. The story acknowledged that the pesticides on "virtually all tested produce" were found "within legal limits" by the government. Still, the magazine cautioned that a score of 100 or more on the toxicity index was "of concern"—a warning that was never defined more precisely. Groth says the story helped parents concerned about pesticides decide what to feed their kids. "A lot of parents say, 'I would rather play it safe, I would rather not expose my kid to pesticide residues if I can avoid it,' and we're trying to give people in that category advice," he says. "Now there are going to be others who say, 'I don't care about pesticides, I've got real risks to worry about.'"

The report has been strongly criticized by the Society of Toxicology, a group of scientists from academia, industry, and the government, which called the magazine's methodology "scientifically invalid" and its findings "not credible and unnecessarily alarmist." Groth agrees that the organization is "a professional society with no obvious ax to grind," but he says its position is "political" and its allegations are wrong.

Another recent warning from *Consumer Reports* sounded strikingly similar to the pesticide story: It told of a risk that was minuscule or unknown, and it played directly to protective parents. Last May's "Baby Alert," publicized on ABC's *20/20*, said that the chemical bisphenol-A, found in some plastic baby bottles, can leach into baby formula. "We calculate that a typical baby who drank formula sterilized by heating in the bottle would be exposed to a bisphenol-A dose of about 4 percent of an amount that has adversely affected test animals in studies" by a Missouri professor, the magazine said. What to do? *Consumer Reports* told parents to throw away bottles made with polycarbonate—the kind of plastic used in most baby bottles sold in the U.S., says a spokeswoman for the American Plastics Council.

This wasn't the first time *Consumer Reports* found danger lurking in plastic. In June 1998, it had warned about a chemical in plastic wraps that could also leach into food. In both stories, the conclusions were tentative. The baby bottle alert admitted that "[i]t isn't yet known what risk, if any, the chemicals that can leach from some of these items may represent to humans." As for the plastic wrap story: "It's impossible to say whether a tiny serving of plasticizers is risky." Based on those underpinnings, the magazine suggested readers throw away bottles and buy new plastic wrap. Karpatkin says the magazine's approach is "to say, 'Wait a minute, this is new, we don't know what the long-term consequences of this are, and therefore we should take precautions until we know more.'"

The plastics stories also shared another theme. Both warned that the chemicals seeping from the plastic could behave as "endocrine disrupters," which may interfere with the development of wildlife—and perhaps that of humans. Reducing the use of chemicals that may act as endocrine disrupters is a priority for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which gave Consumers Union an $85,000 grant last year.

COURTESY OF BELL SPORTS

ORDINARY READERS HAVE NOTICED THAT *Consumer Reports* appears to have an agenda when it comes to sport utility vehicles. "You can see this judgmental approach to the SUVs," says Steve Salavarria, a devoted reader who has subscribed for 11 years and keeps all his back issues. SUVs, with their low fuel efficiency, don't appeal to the magazine's asceticism, Salavarria observes. The magazine ran three stories in a year and a half that asked, "How safe are SUVs?" The answer? "[Not] as safe as many people believe." They guzzle gas, don't handle as well as cars, and pose a danger to other drivers, the magazine has written repeatedly. And *Consumer Reports* seems disdainful of their popularity: "If you're a North Dakota veterinarian who makes house calls, an avalanche spotter in the Rockies, or a retiree with wanderlust and a heavy trailer to tow, a sport-utility vehicle may be just the ticket," read the opening paragraph of a November 1997 story. "For most other drivers, an SUV may be overkill."

Isuzu alleges that when *Consumer Reports* declared its Trooper unsafe, the magazine's findings were trumped up as ammunition in its parent organization's battle with the federal government over regulation of SUVs. Consumers Union has been an unabashed critic of SUVs, petitioning the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to tighten standards for the vehicles. The NHTSA has largely rebuffed the magazine's efforts and criticized its methods. The agency had this to say in 1988 about *Consumer Reports*'s rollover test, the one the Isuzu Trooper and Suzuki Samurai failed: "There appears to have been sufficient latitude to allow a driver, either knowingly or unknowingly, to influence the testing without readily being detected by the available instrumentation....Using the same procedures, probably any light utility vehicle could be made to roll over under the right conditions and driver input." It concluded: "the test procedures do not have a scientific basis and cannot be linked to real-world crash avoidance needs, or actual crash data."

"*Consumer Reports* claimed to have performed the test the same way as every testing laboratory," says an executive at a bike-helmet manufacturer. "But they had results that were diametrically opposed...to everything that had been done by us and by independent testers for several years."

That's pretty much what Isuzu alleged in its 1997 suit. Isuzu executives say the magazine's test allowed the driver to purposely tip the vehicle, and they criticized the design of the test, which is supposed to determine whether a vehicle responds safely to "a sudden obstacle in the road—for example, a child or animal darting out into the vehicle's path." Isuzu contends that a driver would hit the brakes in that situation—

in the test, the driver must steer around the obstacle without braking. Isuzu is suing for defamation and product disparagement, claiming the tests were rigged to increase magazine sales and donations. *Consumer Reports* denies all the charges.

When the magazine dubbed the Trooper and the Samurai "not acceptable," it knew that the stories would almost surely destroy sales. But all *Consumer Reports* gave the companies was a few hours' warning of a press conference and copies of the video and story being distributed to the press. The companies knew nothing about how the tests were conducted, which left them unable to provide an informed response to the press and ensured one-sided coverage.

Consumer Reports brags that it opens its testing facilities to any company that is unhappy with its conclusions—but that invitation is only extended *after* test results are published. If the magazine told companies what its test results were before they appeared in the magazine, it might have saved itself from publishing a recent cover story filled with errors.

In February 1998, *Consumer Reports* declared that more than half the cat foods and a quarter of the dog foods it tested were significantly lacking in at least one key nutrient. The magazine gave 39 of the 97 cat and dog foods lower marks because of that deficiency, telling readers to buy other brands first. But *Consumer Reports* soon discovered—from a pet food company—that its meticulous testing process had generated flawed results.

The Iams Company learned that three of its products were being labeled deficient after a customer in Buffalo saw the news story on a local TV station. *Consumer Reports*'s television division had put out a report that named several products as nutrient deficient and showed a veterinarian describing how a cat that gets too little potassium would

Consumer Reports's Online Push

When Robert Seidman decided to buy a treadmill, he turned to the Web for guidance. After a quick surf to see what was available, he did something most people browsing the Web these days wouldn't dream of: He paid for information.

"I can spend three dollars now [on *Consumer Reports*'s website] and get a concise comparison of treadmills," Seidman remembers thinking at the time, "or I can spend two hours compiling that on my own from free stuff." Seidman, who works at Charles Schwab & Co., Inc., was able to find out—before having to pay—that *Consumer Reports* had indeed reviewed treadmills. He then ponied up $2.95 with a credit card, read the story, and a few days later purchased one of the exercise machines the magazine had recommended.

More people pay to log on to the *Consumer Reports* website than they do for any other information-based site.

Consumer Reports has been a quiet pioneer of the electronic age. It had a presence on Trintex, one of the earliest service providers, as far back as 1986. Less than two years after it launched its own subscription-based site (consumerreports.org), 310,000 people are paying between $19 and $24 a year, or $2.95 a month, to use it. (The $19 rate is for magazine subscribers.) *Consumer Reports* has the most paying subscribers for an information-based website, just ahead of *The Wall Street Journal Interactive*, which has 306,000. Other such sites that charge for their articles have far fewer subscribers. TheStreet.com has 51,000, Encyclopedia Britannica between 40,000 and 50,000.

The *Consumer Reports* website is a money earner for its parent organization, Consumers Union. And it hasn't hurt magazine sales; 15 percent of the online subscribers also get the print version.

Consumer Reports's powerful brand name is drawing online subscribers at a brisk clip even though they get pretty much the same content as print subscribers. There is almost no original content on the website, though there are message boards. Because half of those who go online are either researching a purchase or making one, people are willing to shell out cash to get access to *Consumer Reports* on the Web, says Bill Bass, who tracks e-commerce for Forrester Research, Inc.

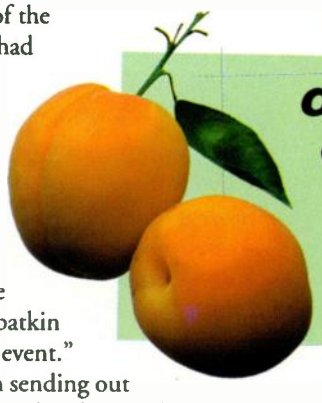
Yet many websites provide similar information about products—for free. You can read car reviews on autobytel.com or read about computers on Yahoo! Computers. But those sites don't have *Consumer Reports*'s breadth or, more important, its name recognition. "The minute you start talking about charging people for [information], you are into branded media—you don't see anybody at the top there that does not have a strong off-line brand," Bass says.

But a powerful brand name in the real world doesn't always mean success in the virtual world. Real-world strength can only translate into online success "if you're there first and you do it right," says Peter Clemente, vice-president of the Internet strategies group at Cyber Dialogue, another online research firm. The *Consumer Reports* site is easy to use, has lots of information (the contents of more than three years' worth of back issues are available), and it has few of the fancy graphics that can slow down the online experience. And reading *Consumer Reports* online is much more efficient than reading the print version because it's searchable: Type in "toaster," and you get all the stories about toasters printed during the last three years.

Consumer Reports's success is even more impressive in light of the fact that the company cannot take advantage of the two most available revenue streams on the web: e-commerce and advertising. Selling treadmills through the site or taking ads for them would violate the magazine's policy of shunning all ties to manufacturers. Rather than pose a handicap, that stance may actually help the site stand out. During a time in which search engines such as GoTo.com sell the top spots on their search results to advertisers, "[t]he whole issue of the relationship between the consumer and accurate, unpartisan advice is clearly coming to the forefront online," says Clemente. —*JG*

have trouble holding up its head. "Ouch!" Iams communications director Bryan Brown remembers thinking when he saw the tape. "America's most trusted consumer organization was saying some of our products were deficient." Iams sells more than $600 million in pet food a year.

"It was a devastating case for us," says Diane Hirakawa, Iams's senior vice-president for research and development. "I knew point blank that they were in error." Iams representatives asked to meet with *Consumer Reports* testers to review their methods. At the meeting, the magazine's people "were receptive but very, very confident," Hirakawa says. "Their attitude was, '[We're] willing to listen because that's what we do, but we know we're right.'" By the end of the day, however, the magazine had agreed to redo the tests. Seven days later, it issued a retraction and an apology. The sample sizes *Consumer Reports* had used for its tests were too small. None of Iams's products were nutrient deficient—in fact, only two of the 97 products originally tested had a deficiency.



Consumer Reports warned that children were at risk from eating pesticide-laden fruits, but neglected to mention the $370,000 its parent had taken from anti-pesticide groups.

"We were very embarrassed by the whole thing," Rhoda Karpatkin says. When the tests indicated problems with half the foods tested, "it should have raised a red flag," she concedes. Nevertheless, Karpatkin calls it "just an isolated bad event." The magazine was diligent in sending out corrections before its next issue hit the stands; it also asked television stations to broadcast corrections. Readers were alerted to the error on the letters page of the March and April issues, and a corrected version of the story ran in May. But the correction was never flagged on the cover, where the original story was trumpeted.

For a manufacturer, a mistake like that has lasting consequences. Iams's Hirakawa was recently at a friend's house when she noticed a competitor's pet food in the kitchen. "After I yelled at her, I asked why, and she said, 'My sister sent me that *Consumer Reports* article.' I straightened her out and sent her the correction, but how many of those people am I not seeing [with] that bag of pet food in their kitchen?"

Had the magazine told the manufacturers of its findings and given them a chance to respond, it would have spared itself an embarrassing error. But David Pittle, *Consumer Reports*'s technical director, sees no need to consult with companies about the magazine's findings. "When a movie reviewer goes to the movies and has an opinion about the movie, they don't call up the manufacturer and tell them," he says. But liking or disliking a movie is purely a matter of opinion. Telling consumers a vehicle is unsafe or a pet food is nutritionally deficient is quite a different matter.

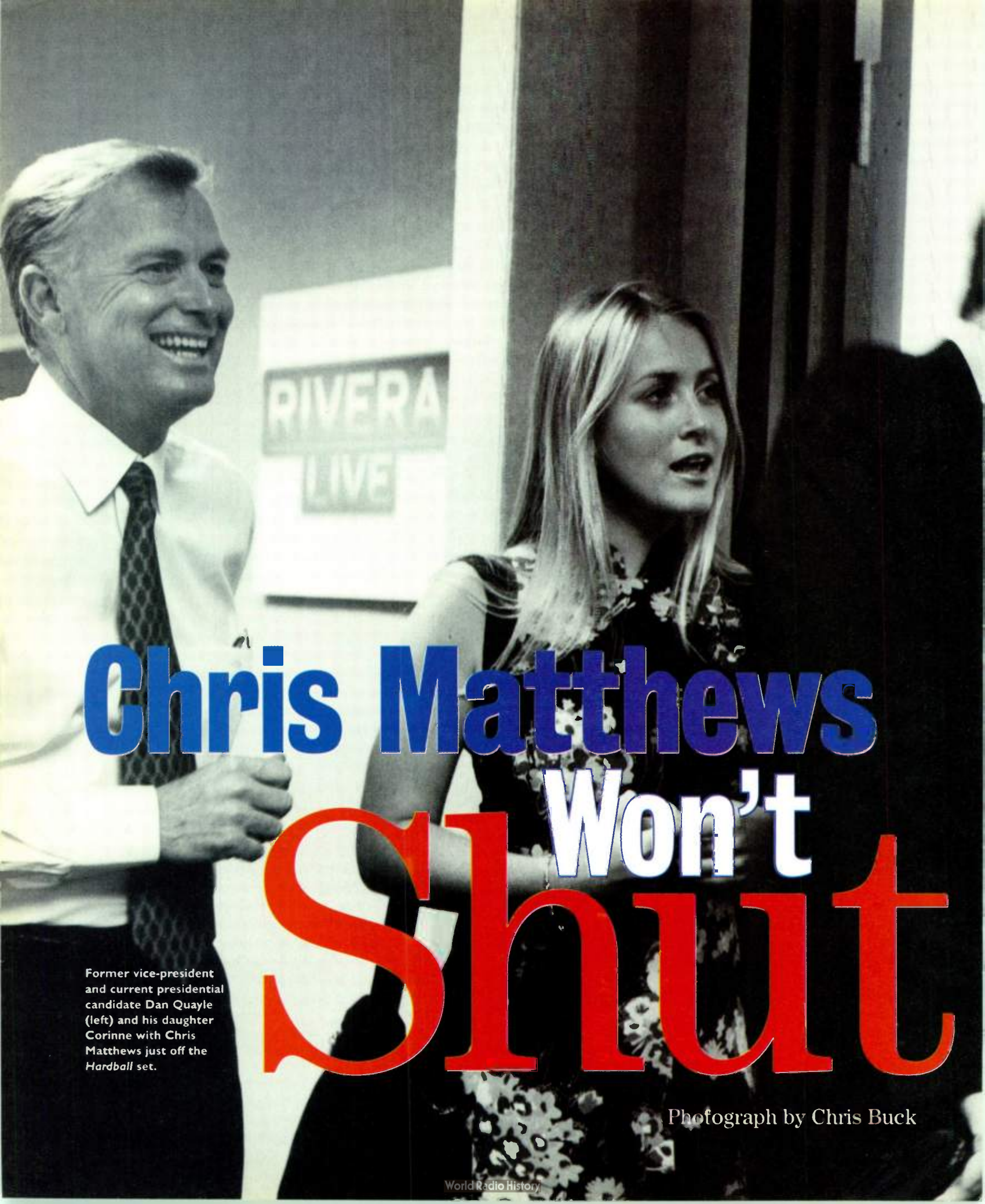
And on one occasion when *Consumer Reports* stretched its own rules against meeting with companies while testing their products, the resulting article had an element rarely found in the magazine: the other side's view. In the spring of 1989, technicians from the Ford Motor Company met for two and a half hours with six people from *Consumer Reports*—including the top editorial person, technical director Pittle, and the director of auto testing—as the magazine was preparing a report on the Ford Bronco II. Pittle says the meeting was initiated by Ford and was restricted to a discussion of recent government statistics that indicated the Bronco had a serious rollover problem. "I, as part of the decision process of agreeing to meet with them, put in a stipulation that said we cannot and will not talk about anything about our tests of the Bronco II, and they agreed to that," Pittle says.

Ford executives, however, apparently saw the meeting as a chance to plead their case before the *Consumer Reports* staffers judging the vehicle. A memo penned by a Ford employee recounted his take on the visit to the magazine's headquarters: "The trip was worthwhile; it may play a fairly significant part in moderating what might otherwise have been a totally disastrous story about to be published....Possibly the key achievement may be, although it may seem slight, that they will not just zero in on the Bronco II and single it out like *Consumer Reports* did with the Suzuki Samurai." That conjecture turned out to be right—the magazine gave the Bronco a "poor" rating, saying the vehicle tipped and handled sluggishly during its tests, but the rating was presented within a story about four SUVs. The memo concluded, "We think...that we have clouded their minds." Pittle calls the memo a "self-serving falsehood."

Somehow, Ford got enough of a sense of what the story would say to ready a detailed public relations strategy, as evidenced by internal documents introduced in an Indiana suit against Ford unrelated to *Consumer Reports*. Nearly two weeks before the story was released, Ford had prepared three strategies to rebut the magazine's charges: If it was "a moderate story," just do a press release; if it was "moderately bad," a press release and interviews; "if story is a disaster," Ford would hold a press conference and release its own videotape of the Bronco's performance. Pittle says no one revealed to Ford how the Bronco did in the testing, although the story was nearly finished by the time Ford visited the magazine's headquarters.

Ford's PR machine was ready when reporters began calling the day the story was released. The car company had enough specific ammunition to be able to make this retort, as quoted by The Associated Press: "In a comparable accident avoidance maneuver conducted for Ford, the Bronco II did not lift even one wheel off the ground," Ford said. But reporters didn't even need to call Ford for comment. The *Consumer Reports* article itself offered a full paragraph with the company's response to the government's rollover statistics.

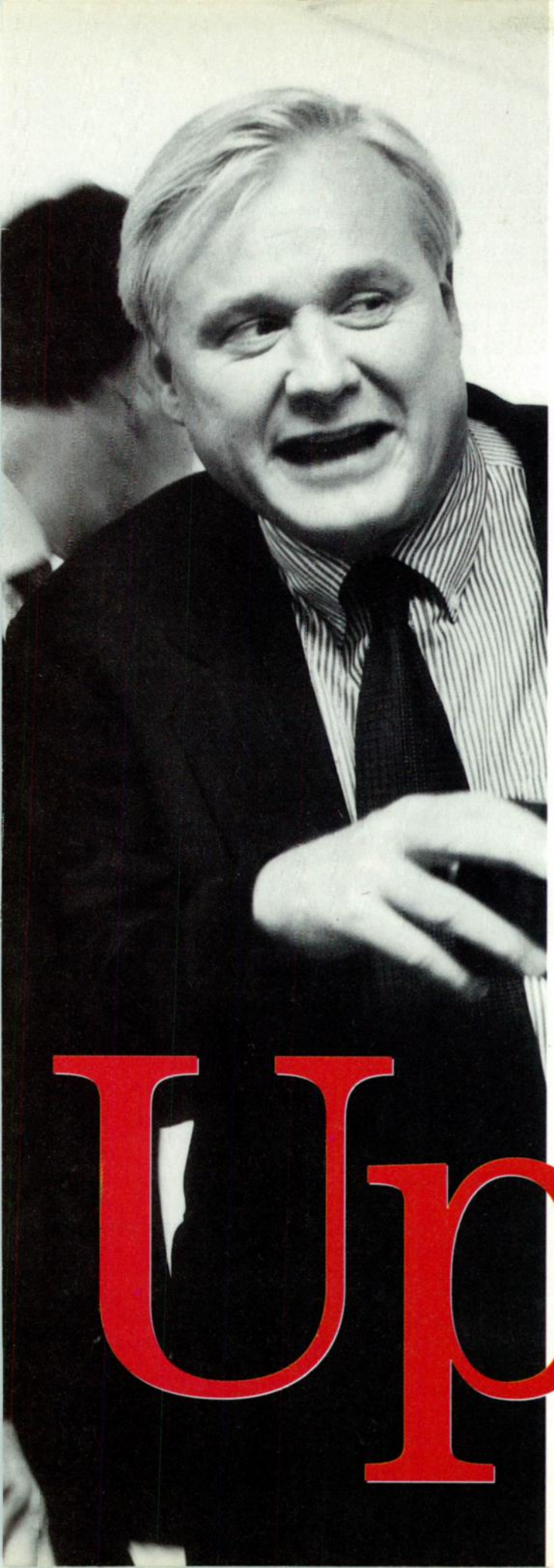
Isuzu wishes it had gotten a chance to sit across the table from the head of auto testing and tell him how safe its vehicle was, as Ford did. Says Isuzu's Terry Maloney: "We never had an opportunity to do that, and the damage was done."■



Chris Matthews Won't Shut

Former vice-president and current presidential candidate Dan Quayle (left) and his daughter Corinne with Chris Matthews just off the *Hardball* set.

Photograph by Chris Buck



Up

Chris Matthews talks with the force of a hurricane. He's loud, tireless, and passionately opinionated. Critics attack his show, *Hardball*, as an emblem of scream TV, in which argument often trumps journalism. Defenders say his on-air bluster conceals a considerable intellect.

by Gay Jervey

IT'S 4:15 ON A MUGGY, GRAY WASHINGTON AFTERNOON in late June—the kind of day that wraps the city in an edgy, lumbering fog. Things may be thick and enervated outside, but inside the studios of CNBC's *Hardball With Chris Matthews* the mood is anything but. The M&Ms are flying and so are the rat-a-tat questions and peripatetic political shorthand. Full-blooded thoughts and non sequiturs alike ricochet off the walls, as Matthews and senior producer Adam Levine prepare for the 5:30 P.M. taping of *Hardball*, which airs every weeknight at 8 and 11 P.M.

"The people in this town get crazy in the summer, and they get even crazier when it is hot, so they are going to be talking about *this*," Matthews had announced earlier that day as he galloped into the *Hardball* studios. He was referring to the bombshell du jour, an anonymously sourced *New Yorker* report—since denied by the White House—that President Bill Clinton was considering a 2002 run for the U.S. Senate in Arkansas. Now, as he stabs a finger though the air and pounds on a mound of photocopied news reports, Matthews shakes his head and instructs his team to get to the bottom of the latest presidential zigzag: *What is going on?*

At this particular second, though—and seconds are the recommended units of measure for Matthews time—Matthews is also concentrating on his upcoming interview with former vice-president and current presidential hopeful Dan Quayle, who is due to arrive any minute now. Matthews and Levine are trying to read between the lines of a speech on "family values" that Quayle gave earlier that day to The American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. They are also rehashing Quayle's last *Hardball* appearance, on June 9. At that time, Matthews grilled Quayle—who, God knows, is given to gaffes—on his opposition to the minimum wage, and dismissed him as a "wealthy kid" who could not begin to know what it's like to support a family on $6.15 an hour.

Members of the Carter White House in 1980 (above): (clockwise from middle) President Jimmy Carter, press secretary Jody Powell, speechwriters Matthews and Hendrik Hertzberg, and a military aide. (Right) Matthews and his wife, Kathleen, with his onetime boss, former House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill in 1992.

"I am sure that Quayle has done some research on this issue since we had him on," Matthews shrugs. "And I'm sure his people have warned him. Because that day I caught him on a particular vulnerability, which is his own lack of hard knocks.

"By the way," Matthews then offers, tossing a handful of M&Ms into his famously open mouth, "This is our secret weapon around here. This is where our energy comes from. M&Ms!"

Maybe so. No one would dispute the jolt of a sugar boost. But when it comes to Chris Matthews, there is far more than chocolate at work. Matthews—whose show is known for its raucous, roaring velocity—is invariably described as something between a Gatling gun and a whirling dervish. He resembles an off-duty Irish cop—slouching shirttails, penchant for high-octane caffeine, blunt asides and all. (For example, on the July 1 show, when his studio panel was discussing how both New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton seem oblivious to pleasure, Matthews shrugged, "Maybe that explains the quality of their marriages.")

Matthews seems all shoulders as he barrels through the halls of the *Hardball* offices, carrying himself with the gait and charge of a linebacker. When he hears that Quayle has arrived, Matthews rumbles into the makeup room, and immediately engages his guest in a conversation about today's news of a possible Bill Clinton Senate run, the supposedly blooming rift between the president and Vice-President Al Gore, and the sometimes complex relationship between presidents and their seconds-in-command.

Today, as always, Matthews speaks in a large voice that matches his size; off camera, it's clear that his clothes have long since lost their starch, which contributes to an aura of accessibility that can be pierced by Matthews's periodic petulance. This is a man who is rarely without something to say, on subjects ranging from the California primaries to his children's homework to his favorite movies (*The Wild Bunch*, *Rebecca*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*). After talking to Quayle, Matthews settles into his chair on the *Hardball* set and rambles to his camera crew about old dances (the Monkey and the Freddy), the movie *Notting Hill*, Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, and Matthews's belief that Hemingway was the master of subtext. In the meantime, Matthews is also taping a promotion for tomorrow's show, on which he will interview writer Joyce Maynard about her new book, as well as her decision to sell letters that novelist J.D. Salinger wrote to her. "Rob [executive producer Rob Yarin] loves this Joyce Maynard story," Matthews mumbles into his microphone, through which he can talk to the control room. "I don't know if I am going to love this story. Maybe. We'll see. But I think we need to say, the 'reclusive author J.D. Salinger,' to give context for those viewers outside *The New York Review of Books*.

"Anyway, about that Bill Clinton Senate thing," Matthews continues, talking to no one in particular—and everyone in general. "It looks like [White House spokesman] Joe Lockhart has knocked down that rumor. Who knows? But it is all distraction from Gore....But it sure is summertime in D.C. It is happening. It is here!"

Let's play *Hardball* !

GIVEN HIS UNABASHED YAKKETY-YAK, IT IS NOT surprising that Matthews is famous for long-winded questions that he often answers himself. And, man, can this guy interrupt—often reducing guests to staccato, barely monosyllabic answers. "I tell Chris that he never lets anyone answer his questions," sighs *Washington Post* columnist Mary McGrory, who has known Matthews for years and is fond of him. "I have literally seen [*Newsweek* chief political correspondent] Howard Fineman sitting with his mouth wide open, waiting to get a word in edgewise. And when Chris talks, his upper and lower lips don't meet. Tough-guy diction.

"What do I think of Chris's show? I think it is dreadful!"—McGrory pauses, a smile nudging through the telephone lines—"But I never, ever miss it. Not one." Does any one show stand out as particularly bad? "No," McGrory shrugs. "They are all bad. Horrible."

"When he goes off on something, he goes off. And you just let him go," says Fineman. "What are you going do? It is like an eighteen-wheeler. Nonstoppable."

COURTESY OF HENDRIK HERTZBERG (CARTER); F. LESLIE BARRON, COURTESY OF JILL EYNON (O'NEILL)

"He blows hard, but so do hurricanes."

FOR THE PAST 20 MONTHS OR SO, THAT EIGHTEEN-wheeler has been mowing down President Bill Clinton. Matthews, whose Democratic credentials include stints as a speechwriter for President Jimmy Carter and as a spokesman for former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill, has denounced the president as a "louse...who's disgraced his office." Matthews's vilification of the president has baffled—even alienated—some of his friends and made him controversial among some Democrats who considered Matthews one of their own, given his résumé. Some not only feel betrayed but also question his motives: Are his feelings driven by his heart, or by a desire to please the largely conservative audience that watches cable shows such as his? In the end, was the Lewinsky affair just too tempting and convenient a ticket to ride?

"I just don't believe that Chris would be so crass as to go on the air voicing strong opinions that he really did not believe," says former *Hardball* segment producer Clara Frenk, referring to speculation that Matthews's histrionics are motivated by ratings. "That just is not who he is. I think he is expressing what he really feels, but he has upset people who wonder why he has become so obsessively anti-Clinton.

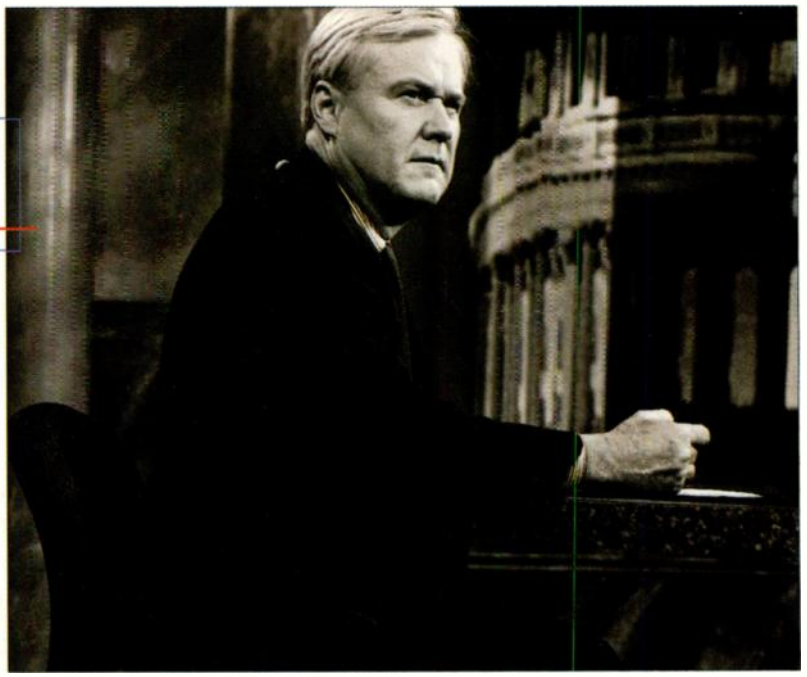
"When I started working with Chris in October of 1997, Monica was not an issue, and we were doing a variety of stuff. I loved working for Chris," continues Frenk, now a Democratic political and media consultant with The Potomac Advocates, a Washington, D.C., lobbying firm. "He is sort of a cultural sponge, and he is brilliant. Then the whole Clinton thing blew wide open, and he became this person whom I did not recognize anymore....He lost all ability to discipline or measure himself. It was just sad.

"I have talked to a number of conservative Republicans, and to them he is the Democrat who's had the road-to-Damascus experience," Frenk adds. "He has become their poster boy, as ironic as that may seem."

Matthews does not think that his views on President Clinton represent a seismic shift in philosophy, although he argues that the issue is complex. "Look, it's not easy to sort through all of these sentiments...," he says. "I have been tough on Clinton, and I know that has resonated with my audience. I have a tendency to be all gut sometimes, and I have indulged my gut with him.

"But upon reflection"—he pauses—"in my gut I am a conservative. In the end, though, I bring myself to liberal positions, like affirmative action or abortion rights, by thinking them through with logic and intellectual care. I think about things and say, 'Well, even though my gut is conservative, my intellect says no.' And I would like to believe that my heart breaks the tie."

If Matthews is persona non grata among some Democrats, *Hardball*'s no-holds-barred—and, at times, antagonistic—style has been criticized as emblematic of a larger trend in journalism—the notion that the culture of argument has overwhelmed the culture of reporting, and, in so doing, has blurred the lines between entertainment and news [see "TV's War Of Words," page 88]. In their book, *Warp Speed*, Bill Kovach, the curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard and *Brill's Content*'s ombudsman, and Tom Rosenstiel, the director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, describe Matthews as a card-carrying member of "a new class of chatterers who emerged in this scandal." Matthews, they write, belongs to a "group of loosely credentialed self-interested performers whose primary job is remaining on television."



CHRIS BUCK

Matthews is invariably described as something between a **Gatling gun** and a whirling **dervish.**

Matthews on the set of *Hardball*

Matthews's supporters contend that *Hardball* is not simply a pundit food fight. More often than not, they say, informed conversation works its way into the yelling, sputtering, and frustrated gasps. And, post-Lewinsky, some shows have actually been measured and calm. Whether they approve of *Hardball* or not, source after source suggests that Matthews's unalloyed love and knowledge of politics cement his credibility. "You could be six blocks away from him talking about politics, and his ears would shoot up like a horse," laughs Alan Simpson, the former U.S. senator from Wyoming who is now the director of Harvard's Institute of Politics and a regular *Hardball* guest. "He has a voice that comes across like a machine gun, but Chris is one of the few people that can run

Chris and Kathleen Matthews chat with National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Anthony Fauci at the 1997 wedding of fellow TV host John McLaughlin.

his mouth and his mind in gear at the same time and make some sense."

Matthews concedes that his mouth can take on a life of its own. But if his shows tend toward much ado, he swears that it is much ado about *something*. "All of the arguments and debate on *Hardball* are content driven," he says. "It's always a matter of politics or policy....And I think that there is an informality and lack of protocol to all of these shows. I am a *tummler*, you know, the Yiddish word for the guy that stirs things up. That's me. I stir things up. I want things to be lively. But I think that the arguments on our show always have the ballast of substance."

"The speed and decibel level of Chris's show forces one to listen," observes former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, a professor at Brandeis University and another *Hardball* regular. "Almost as a result, you are compelled to talk just to keep up. I don't think it is bad. It makes for good television. It does not allow, though, for a great deal of careful thought before one opens one's mouth. It is like diving into a fast-moving river. But I like going on because it is rapid-fire and interesting."

"[A] trait that I share with Chris is the fact that he does not have a lot of patience," says U.S. Senator John McCain, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. "Last week he was trying to get me to attack George W. [Bush]. I believe [Matthews] likes and respects me, but he is not afraid to bait me. When I am on a talk show, I make an effort to be measured and deliberate and when I am on with Chris, I find myself talking fast and really violating all of the principles that I adhere to on other shows. All of a sudden you find yourself getting hyper."

"People who see Chris as nothing more than a talking head, a philistine, are wrong," observes his old friend Hendrik Hertzberg, a *New Yorker* senior editor who worked with Matthews as a speechwriter for President Carter. Conceding that Matthews's combustion can overwhelm, Hertzberg laughs, "He is like someone from another culture where each person has less personal space. His level of 'in your face' is higher than most people consider the norm. I have gone on his show as a last minute fill-in. But I have never wanted to go on and argue about Clinton. There are a lot of people who say that 'I can be his friend, or his guest, but I can't be both.'

"I love him"—Hertzberg pauses—"wrong as he is about Clinton. He blows hard, but so do hurricanes. And with Chris, there is a lot of force and intellect behind the wind—a force of nature."

"I want to be a pundit!"

THE SON OF A COURT REPORTER, SAID FORCE WAS born in Philadelphia a week before Christmas in 1945, the second of five siblings. Matthews attended Catholic school and the College of the Holy Cross. His family and Irish Catholic roots define him and fuel much of his disgust with President Clinton. Matthews and his wife, Kathleen, an anchor for WJLA, the ABC affiliate in Washington, D.C., have three children, Michael, 17, Thomas, 13, and Caroline, 10.

The Matthewses regularly attend Mass at The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington, which is often referred to as the "pundit's church." Mark Shields passes the collection plate there. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett, Senator Edward Kennedy, and ABC *This Week* host Cokie Roberts also worship there. In addition, the Matthewses are active in Catholic Charities of Washington, as well as with an organization called SOAR!, or Support Our Aging Religious, which raises money for elderly priests and nuns.

One *Hardball* guest learned the hard way that it is not wise to insult Matthews's religious sensibilities. In September 1997, Matthews tossed political consultant and former Clinton aide Dick Morris off the set mid-show for a perceived slight to the Church. In the segment, Morris

VIVIAN RONAY/FOLIO

discussed former Massachusetts governor William Weld's bid to become the U.S. ambassador to Mexico. Weld, Morris said, was trying to showcase himself as a "poster boy for the moderate Republicans," which Morris deemed "a little like getting to lead a church after being crucified." At that, Matthews retorted, "I didn't like that last remark from Dick Morris one bit" and abruptly dismissed him from the show. As he closed that night's *Hardball*, Matthews explained, "There's certain things, by the way, to bring up a point I made earlier in the show rather loudly, there's certain things I'll let people say on this show and certain things I will not let them say. And one, I will not let them debunk anybody's race or religion, or make fun of anything like that on this program. Do it somewhere else."

After graduating from Holy Cross in 1967, Matthews studied economics at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and then joined the Peace Corps, serving in Swaziland. "Back then, Chris was very similar to what he is now," observes Fred O'Regan, the CEO of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, who served in the Peace Corps with Matthews. "We used to hitchhike around the bush in Africa, and Chris would always be wearing a necktie and arguing. We nicknamed him the William F. Buckley of Swaziland, because he always liked to...play devil's advocate."

When he returned from the Peace Corps, Matthews landed a spot as an aide to U.S. Senator Frank Moss, a Utah Democrat, and worked at night as a Capitol Hill cop. Matthews ran for Congress from Philadelphia in 1974 and lost. After that, he worked as an aide to U.S. Senator Edmund Muskie, the Maine Democrat. Then, in 1977, Matthews joined President Jimmy Carter's staff. "He was a mesmerizing talker, full of ideas and fun," recalls Hertzberg, who hired Matthews for the speechwriting job.

"When we left the Carter White House, we were all talking about what we wanted to do, and Chris just one day announced, 'I want to be a pundit!'" says Paul Costello, a New York public relations executive who had served as press secretary to first lady Rosalynn Carter. "At the time, I thought, *What the hell are you talking about, 'I want to be a pundit'?* But in hindsight, it was all very thought out."

Punditry would be a while in the making, however. In 1981, Matthews joined the staff of Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill as O'Neill's administrative assistant and chief spokesman. "The Republicans...went after Tip O'Neill in a big way," recalls Tony Coelho, at the time a congressman from California and the chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. "So we fought back, using Tip O'Neill as a spokesman. And in 1982, the Democrats were able to pick up 26 seats in the House and take political and philosophical control of the Congress....And Chris had a lot to do with that.

"For one thing, Chris started the whole thing of...having the Speaker make a statement...to the press every day," continues Coelho, now the general chairman of Vice-President Al Gore's presidential campaign. "And Chris would spin whatever it was that we were trying to do."

Karen Tumulty, a White House correspondent for *Time* magazine, covered Congress for the *Los Angeles Times* during the early to mid-1980s. "Chris did not have a light touch with spin," laughs Tumulty, a *Hardball* regular. "Quite to the contrary, he would very directly tell you what a story should say, and if you did not do it, you would hear about it. Believe me! I remember being in California, and Chris calling me and waking me up at, like, 6 A.M. Chris did not like something I had written, and he was on the other end of the line, hitting me with both barrels...." Today, Matthews describes his O'Neill days as "the best work that I ever did."

"People who see **Chris** as nothing more than a **talking head**, a philistine, are **wrong.**"

After O'Neill retired in 1987, Matthews worked briefly for a private company called the Government Research Corporation. He also started writing his first book, *Hardball: How Politics Is Played—Told By One Who Knows The Game*, which is now part of the curriculum of some political science courses and required reading for aspiring Capitol Hill staffers.

In 1987, Matthews traveled to San Francisco to attend a wedding. While there, he had lunch with an editor at the *San Francisco Examiner*. "[He] said, 'Do you want to have a column?'" Matthews recalls. "And I said, 'Are you kidding!? I have been waiting my whole life for somebody to say that to me! Of course I want a column!'" For several months, Matthews wrote for the paper on a freelance basis, and then in the end of 1987 signed on full time as the *Examiner*'s Washington bureau chief. In addition to stories for the paper, Matthews wrote a 1996 book, *Kennedy & Nixon: The Rivalry That Shaped Postwar America.*

TV Dream

MATTHEWS MAY HAVE BEEN THRILLED WITH HIS print job, but, in his heart, he had always wanted television. Around the time that he became the *Examiner*'s Washington bureau chief, Matthews started to make that dream come true. He approached Howard Stringer, then the president of CBS News, about appearing on air. Stringer in turn introduced him to David Corvo, then the executive producer of *CBS This Morning* and now NBC's vice-president for news. Corvo hired Matthews to do political commentary. In 1991, Matthews moved to ABC's *Good Morning America.*

Then, in 1994, Roger Ailes, now the chairman and CEO of Fox News, started NBC's new cable network,

(*continued on page 120*)

Confessions of a McLaughlin Group Escapee

The McLaughlin Group revolutionized the public-affairs TV show, ushering in today's ubiquitous shoutfests. In this excerpt from *Fat Man in a Middle Seat: Forty Years of Covering Politics*, Jack W. Germond recounts his career as a *McLaughlin* pundit and reveals why he finally said bye-bye.

by Jack W. Germond

WHEN JOHN MCLAUGHLIN CALLED ME EARLY IN 1981 AND invited me to take part in a pilot for a new panel show, I knew almost nothing about him. He was, I knew, a Jesuit priest from Rhode Island who had ended up writing speeches for President Richard M. Nixon and defending him until the last disclosure on Watergate. Since then he had been hanging around town for several years, doing talk radio and writing a Washington column for William F. Buckley's magazine, the *National Review*, which I read only occasionally. McLaughlin's first goal was to produce a program that would supposedly replicate the dinner party arguments in the nation's capital and be livelier than *Agronsky & Co.*, the long-running talk show on the local CBS outlet chaired by Martin Agronsky that had lost much of its bite with the death of Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News* five years earlier. The cast there was clearly more establishment oriented—Hugh Sidey of *Time* and the columnists James J. Kilpatrick, Carl Rowan, and George Will—and far better mannered.

Excerpted from Fat Man in a Middle Seat: Forty Years of Covering Politics, *by Jack W. Germond, to be published in November by Random House;* © *the author. Germond is a political columnist for the Baltimore* Sun. *He first appeared on* Meet the Press *in 1972, and has been a regular on the* Today *show, CNN, and* The McLaughlin Group.

When we went on the air, in May of 1981, the panel included, in addition to conservative columnist Robert Novak and me, the syndicated columnist Pat Buchanan and Morton Kondracke, then with *The New Republic* magazine. Kondracke was supposed to be the other liberal, arrayed with me against the full-mooners Novak and Buchanan. But as the Reagan administration went along and the country moved to the right, so did Kondracke—to the point that he wrote a piece for *The Wall Street Journal* in 1984 about why he might vote for Ronald Reagan and was tickled pink when Reagan called him. Some liberal.

In those early days, the show was fun to do and McLaughlin easy to live with off the air even if inclined to periods of ranting on camera. He would telephone each of us on Thursday, the day before taping, to give us his list of topics and to solicit our opinions on both those he had chosen and those he had left out. Sometimes he even would make a change if several of us argued, for example, that "You can't ignore such and such a development this week."

Unfortunately for the culture and the egos of the participants, the show was an immediate success. There never had been an ostensibly serious public-affairs program on which people repeatedly interrupted each other, shouted for attention, delivered ad hominem attacks on one another, and

derided the moderator. McLaughlin had guessed there was a market for such a program, and he was correct. The ratings rose rapidly on the five NBC-owned-and-operated channels on which the program aired, and, with the distribution help of WTTW in Chicago, more and more public broadcasting stations began to show *McLaughlin*, sometimes at the expense of the far more thoughtful *Washington Week in Review*.

The instant celebrity, limited though it was, was a heady experience. You could write your fingers off for 25 years, Novak and I agreed, and never get the kind of hearing you could get from shooting off your mouth on television for a half hour every week. The viewers obviously took the show more seriously than it deserved. I would get long, earnest letters—and even longer telephone calls—from people who felt their points of view were being ignored. There were also abusive calls and letters. In my case, the latter often focused on the size of my stomach. Such salutations as "Fatso" or (a particular favorite) "You Fat F---" were common. If the letters were signed—most of them were not—I would occasionally send one back, scrawling across the top my "thanks for pointing out the fat part—I had missed it." Most people, however, are nice and their praise is flattering, even if I feel a bit of a fraud when I hear it.

The politicians clearly took these talk shows seriously. We taped Friday afternoons, as did our rival program, *Inside Washington with Gordon Peterson*, which succeeded *Agronsky*. So Friday mornings the panelists could expect telephone calls from parties to some controversy in Congress making sure that we understood their position and obviously hoping we would adopt it on the air. An aide to the Senate minority leader at the time, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, called me almost every week to tell me the senator was available for an interview on the telephone that very moment. In fact, I had no particular reason to speak to Byrd, but it would have been unseemly not to take advantage of the "opportunity," so I would telephone, thank the senator for giving me a minute or two of his time, then listen to him describe the Democratic position on whatever issue was in the news. I also received frequent Friday calls from House members who had been assigned to attempt similar preconditioning of panelists. But most of them were candid enough to say something like this: "I'm supposed to give you a sales pitch on this thing, but I guess you already know where we stand, so, what the hell, have a good weekend." We both knew it was a game.

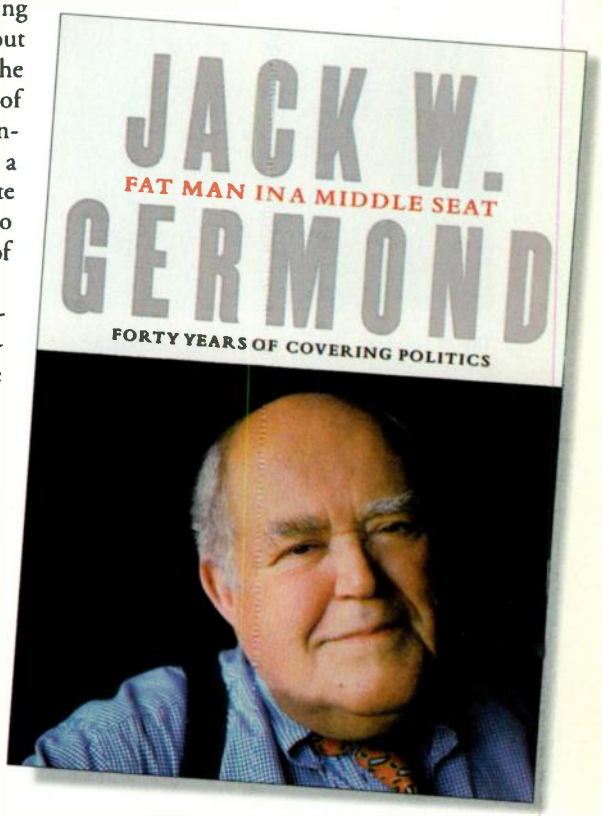
One of the special problems of the *McLaughlin* show was that so many people paid close attention to the predictions we delivered at the end of each program. Some of the panelists were so concerned about their "scores" they would telephone sources ahead of the taping trying to find something to predict with reasonable certainty it would come true. I would wing it, secure in the knowledge that if I couldn't think of anything on the air, I could manage by nodding sagely and saying, "Two more members of the Reagan cabinet will be gone by June 1"—a safe bet at any time in any administration. If McLaughlin demanded to know which two, I would simply look smug and tell him to buy my newspaper.

If you allowed a little fact to intrude on these predictions, there could be trouble. One day in 1986 I ran into Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland just outside the Russell Senate Office Building. We stood on the street corner chatting for five minutes or so, and I was struck by how dispirited he seemed to be about the chances of his moderate Republican views prevailing on any of the topics we discussed. So that Friday, stuck for a prediction, I guessed out loud that Mathias would retire rather than seek another term.

Early Monday morning his administrative assistant called me. "Do you know something we don't know?" she asked.

"Not at all," I replied. "If I knew something, I would have put it in my newspaper, the Baltimore *Sun*. I was just guessing."

When, three days later, Mathias suddenly announced he would not seek another term, I was given totally undeserved credit for having such good sources I knew about it before his staff. I accepted the plaudits with a proper show of modesty, muttering unconvincingly that it was "just a guess." Mathias sent me a note saying he decided to retire to spare me the embarrassment of being wrong.



Germond saves some of his memoir's harshest words for the ringleader of *The McLaughlin Group*, the bombastic McLaughlin.

If the viewers and politicians took the show too seriously, so did McLaughlin. He began to believe we were performing some educational function for the great unwashed. He wrote longer and longer introductions to issues, as if our viewers had been on the moon all week. And he became increasingly testy about the whole thing. He was always irked when I would be quoted saying that it was "just television" and that my "serious job" was writing a newspaper column five days a week for the *Sun*.

After the first year or two McLaughlin never bothered to consult us on the topics. Instead, some member of his staff would telephone us the night before the taping to tell us what the issues would be. And if we howled, we would be told that "Dr. McLaughlin," as they were required to identify him, thought the issues he had chosen were not getting enough attention. Sometimes he would indulge in what he called counterprogramming, meaning that he would consciously ignore the collective news judgments of everyone else during the week leading up to the taping and choose topics that had not appeared on a single front page or network news show.

As the program grew more successful, McLaughlin became even more difficult to abide. His ego, always greater than seemed justified by his charm or achievements, swelled to enormous proportions. He began to behave as if he could do the program with four clothing-store dummies, and he grew more and more autocratic. The tapings took forever. Frequently he would force us to cool our heels in the green room for an hour and a half or longer after the appointed time while he sat on the set, surrounded by frightened

The McLaughlin Group in a rare non-combative moment: Morton Kondracke, Eleanor Clift, John McLaughlin, Germond, and Fred Barnes.

young staff members, and revised and rehearsed his "reads"—meaning the introductory and transitional material that would appear on his TelePrompTer. In fact, none of this required the kind of time he was taking. He liked to show who was in charge, and he didn't have any serious work to do on a Friday afternoon anyway. If he found out that one of the panelists needed to catch a plane and was pressed for time, the reads would take even longer.

Moreover, McLaughlin would grow angry when any of us—usually me—complained about how long the process would take. He would never confront me, of course, but he would dispatch his principal producer, a young woman whom we all liked named Allyson Kennedy, to convey the message in the most indirect way.

One of the manifestations of McLaughlin's hauteur was his resentment of Novak's role on the show. "The Prince of Darkness," as he has been known for years, had strong conservative views and a combative style. He made everyone else seem to be appearing on the air in black and white while he was in Technicolor. He was the star, and McLaughlin was clearly irked. He began assigning one of his young staff people to count all the words each of us said during the half-hour show every week. To no one's surprise, these counts found that Novak most often said the most and that I most often said the least, findings that bothered neither of us. Nor did Novak take the hint as the counts continued to appear every week and McLaughlin continued to make oblique comments about them without, of course, confronting anyone. Novak was a voluble partisan, and it just wasn't his nature to worry about how many words he was uttering or, for that matter, what John McLaughlin thought about it.

The tension between them erupted on the set one Friday early in 1988. During a segment on the primary campaign, Novak accused McLaughlin of being opportunistic in trying to butter up someone in the Dukakis campaign he might need later on. It was an accusation we frequently made against McLaughlin and one that we knew was accurate. Usually he laughed them off. But this time, for reasons that never were made clear, was different. When we broke for a commercial, McLaughlin started screaming imprecations at Novak. His face was red, and the cords in his neck turned white. Novak tried to reply, but he was more startled than angry, and McLaughlin wouldn't listen. He grew more and more offensive, suggesting finally that if Novak didn't like the way he ran the show, he could take a hike.

I finally told McLaughlin to cool down, turned to Novak, and said, "If you want to walk out on this son of a bitch, I'll go with you." Novak shook his head, and by the time the commercial break ended a minute or so later, McLaughlin had regained control of himself. We finished the taping somewhat awkwardly.

But the next week, following the Iowa caucuses, McLaughlin used a substitute for Novak on the show. Leaving Novak off the panel after a major political event on which he had done a lot of reporting was clearly self-defeating, but McLaughlin was more interested in his control of the program than in its content. When it happened again shortly thereafter, Novak tried to arrange a meeting to deal with the issue directly, but McLaughlin sent word that he was too busy to see him. So Novak took matters into his own hands and set about producing a rival show. By fall it was accomplished: Novak left to produce and appear on *The Capital Gang* on CNN.

Novak was replaced by another friend of mine from our days together at *The Washington Star*, Fred Barnes. Fred was an accomplished reporter and one of many who, for reasons I never understood, simultaneously embraced religious fundamentalism and political conservatism as they approached middle age. He was also an articulate and forceful advocate on the panel. But Novak left a hole. *The McLaughlin Group* was never as much fun thereafter, either for me or, I suspect, for the audience.

My own break came several years later and without a dramatic confrontation on the set. McLaughlin had become increasingly autocratic and egocentric—and increasingly irritated at my bitching about the time being wasted taping the shows. The beginning of the end came at the 1996 Republican convention in San Diego, when, after taping our second show from the convention site, we all went to a luncheon with people described as General Electric executives who were, in fact, largely customers who bought a lot of G.E. appliances for their retail stores. During the lunch McLaughlin announced that the program was now going to be distributed internationally through some mechanism I never quite understood. Then, when he called on each of the panelists for a few words, I observed that now we could take credit for "dumbing down the whole world." It was said in good humor, and the appliance dealers laughed at what I think they saw as quintessential *McLaughlin Group* badinage. McLaughlin, however, was not amused, although he said nothing to me at the time.

A couple of weeks later I discovered that I was being replaced with a substitute for both the programs being taped at the Democratic convention in Chicago. I was mildly annoyed because it would cost me $1,200 in lost fees. Nor did it make sense. I had better sources at that convention than any of the other panelists and also was old enough to have covered the 1968 convention, to which this one inevitably was being compared. I did not learn until somewhat later, nonetheless, that I had been dropped as a pun-

CARL COX

ishment for my wisecrack about "dumbing down the world."

With Ally Kennedy long since departed and another producer in change, the whole system changed. Rather than the assumption being that the regular panelists would appear each week, we were told every Tuesday by a telephone call from some frightened staff member that "Dr. McLaughlin would like you to be on the show this week" or, alternatively, that "Dr. McLaughlin won't be needing you this week."

Now I had reached the point at which I couldn't simply roll with the punches. I found that I was getting angrier every Tuesday at having to wait for the moderator's blessing, angrier every Thursday when told the issues, and still angrier every Friday when we sat through the ordeal of waiting to do the taping. At this stage in my life I was rarely angry about anything, and I began to ask myself why I would allow something as trivial as a television program to set me off. So one week late in 1996, I sent McLaughlin a fax: "Effective immediately, I am ending all association with *The McLaughlin Group*. Good luck and bye-bye."

An hour later I sent a copy to John Carmody, the television writer for *The Washington Post*, to whom I explained I was quitting because I had grown tired of dealing with McLaughlin off the set. I made a point of saying I was not complaining about the content of the show; after 15 years it would be the ultimate hypocrisy to suddenly develop standards. My concern was that if I didn't take the initiative in describing the reasons for my departure, someone else would explain. The story would get around that I was a drag on the ratings or that I had an inoperable cancer or that I was involved in an unhealthy relationship with a sheep. Washington can be a tough town.

The reaction to my decision spoke volumes about how powerful television has become. No one could imagine anyone walking away from a regular spot on a television program. I looked at it another way—that the proof of how compelling such a slot can be was the fact I had stuck it out with McLaughlin for 15 years.

Most of it was money. I always told people I used the show to send my daughter Jessica to college and medical school, which was accurate, but only up to a point. The real reason was selfish. Appearing on television allowed me to enjoy the luxury of being a newspaper reporter without having to live on a newspaper reporter's salary. I could get an editor's pay without doing his work. I didn't want to be the pale guy sitting in the office, shuffling budgets and expense accounts and envying the reporters on the street covering the good stories.

The show itself paid only $600 a week, but my lecture fees rose to a respectable level for a shabby scribbler, topping out at $6,000 or $7,000 once in a while, although usually somewhat less. One year I earned close to $100,000; most years it was about half that much. I also had a modest salary and health insurance from the *Sun* and some income from syndication of a column Jules Witcover and I wrote every week for the newspaper and the *National Journal*, and from books and magazine articles. The critical thing was that I was not so dependent on any single employer that I could be easily jerked around. Having gone down with the *Star* in 1981, I didn't want to be on the beach in what was supposed to be my golden years.

There was, of course, a price to be paid for doing the lectures: endless dreary arguments about "buckraking" journalists selling their souls for honoraria. My partner, Witcover, and I followed a policy of not speaking for money to any group that we might cover, meaning essentially any political organization. But otherwise, I took the money. I didn't worry about conflicts of interest when I addressed the Grocery Manufacturers of America or the National Aggregates Association. And the fact was that no group who hired me for a speech ever tried to lean on me for a column.

I did have reservations about doing the *McLaughlin* show, however. I knew that my partner and such close friends as *Washington Post* columnist David Broder disapproved of my participation. And there is some validity in the old saw about lying down with dogs and getting fleas.

McLaughlin's ego, always greater than seemed justified by his charm or achievements, swelled to enormous proportions. He behaved as if he could do the program with four clothing-store dummies.

When I finally quit, I realized I probably could have done so much earlier without risking needed income. I soon became a regular on rival *Inside Washington*. Gordon Peterson, the moderator, is a nice man whose ego, if any, is well hidden. The show is taped on Fridays in no more than and usually less than 90 minutes, arrival to departure, with never a harsh word. The producer, Tina Gulland, and the panelists, Charles Krauthammer, Evan Thomas, and Nina Totenberg, are all civil to one another, both on and off the air.

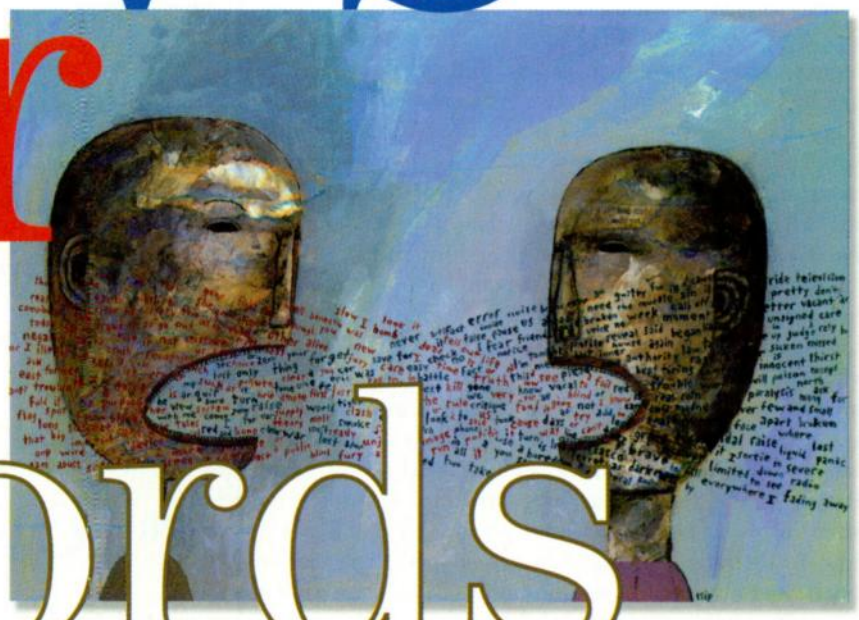
Would I have preferred never to have done *McLaughlin*? Sure. I realized how grotesque it could become some weeks. I knew I was risking whatever reputation I enjoyed for being a serious reporter. But I didn't have the luxury of doing only the things that were above criticism, unless of course I chose to spend my career making a marginal living or becoming an editor. I didn't enjoy the option of writing two columns a week for the *Times* or *Post* for $200,000 a year. I needed that occasional gig at the annual meeting of the Smokeless Tobacco Council or the Mortgage Bankers Association of America.

A better question would be one Tom Shales, television critic for the *The Washington Post*, once asked me at the end of a long interview about *The McLaughlin Group*: If you weren't on the show, would you watch it?

I wouldn't answer then but I can now. No. ■

Editor's note: John McLaughlin will have an opportunity to respond in our next issue.

TV's War Of Words



Scream TV reduces all discussions to oversimplified, black-and-white arguments between two polarized sides. Subtlety and nuance are scorned, because the goal isn't to understand an issue, but to win. It's yet another symptom of the Argument Culture. by Deborah Tannen

WHEN MY BOOK *THE ARGUMENT CULTURE* WAS PUBLISHED last year, I appeared on *Charles Grodin*. Returning home after the show, I found a message on my answering machine. "I tuned in at the time you told me," a friend's voice said, "but there were two men shouting over each other, and it set my teeth on edge. I switched it off."

I laughed at the irony. In introducing me, Grodin confessed that he had at times been guilty of the kind of interview I wrote about. He had an illustration for the viewers to see: himself and then-Senator Alan Simpson shouting at each other. This is what drove my friend from her screen—proving a point I made in the book and on the show.

Why are more news and public-affairs shows turning into shouting matches between left and right, liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican? For one thing, with round-the-clock news, the airwaves have to be filled, and these shows are easy and economical to assemble: Find a conservative and a liberal and you've got your show. Also, with the advent of cable has come increased competition, so producers need to make shows entertaining. But where do they get the idea that watching fights is fun? The answer is the argument culture.

The argument culture (as I explain in my book) is a pervasive war-like atmosphere that makes us approach public dialogue, and just about anything else we need to accomplish, as if it were a fight. It rests on the assumption that opposition is the best way to get anything done: The best way to discuss an idea is to set up a debate; the best way to settle a dispute is litigation that pits one party against the other; the best way to begin an essay is to attack someone; the best way to show you're really thinking is to criticize; and—as we see in the scream TV shows—the best way to cover news is to find spokespeople who express the most extreme views and present them as "both sides." Conflict and opposition are as necessary as cooperation and agreement, but the scale is off balance, with conflict and opposition overweighted.

By turning everything into a left-right fight, the argument

JORDIN ISIP

culture gives us trumped-up, showcase "debates" between two oversimplified sides, leaving no room for the real arguments. What's wrong with lively debate? Nothing, when *debate* is a synonym for open discussion. But in most televised debates, the goal is not to understand but to win. You can't explore nuances or complexities; that would weaken your position. And few issues fall neatly into just two sides. Most are a crystal of many sides—and some have just one. Perhaps most destructive, if the goal is a lively fight, the most polarized views are best, so the extremes get the most airtime and are allowed to define the issues. Viewers conclude that if the two sides are so far apart, the problem can't be solved, so why try?

If everything has to be squeezed into the procrustean bed of left and right, moderate views are drowned out. *Boston Globe* columnist Ellen Goodman (perceived as "the left") notes that if she's invited to appear on a show that she'd just as soon not do, all she needs to say is, "I can see both sides; it's complicated." Ann Coulter (a commentator on "the right") also finds that when she takes a position that doesn't fit producers' ideas of conservative, they don't want her.

The time crunch is a major factor in scream TV. A half-hour show (only 22 minutes of programming), is broken into three or four segments, each treating a different issue in progressively shorter chunks of time that are shared among four, five, even six, commentators. As if even these short segments aren't fast enough, each show presents instant pronouncements, such as *McLaughlin*'s end-of-show round-the-table predictions, the mid-show highlights on *Hardball With Chris Matthews*, or *The Capital Gang*'s viewer-submitted "Outrage of the Week." (It's telling that it's the *outrage* of the week: in this format, *provocative* typically means "provoking to anger.")

The battle imagery starts with the names: *Crossfire* (hinting war), *Hardball* (hinting super-competitive sports), *The Capital Gang* (a whiff of brash street fighters). The very structure of these shows is based on underlying metaphors of war and sports: Two sides duke it out; one wins, the other loses. But it's all a game: See the warring parties jocularly sparring at the end of the show, as the camera pulls away? Those who take part in these pseudo-debates know that there is a display aspect to it.

The shout-down shows distort public discussion of vital issues. Their pacing corrupts the information viewers get. Eleanor Clift (as I quoted her in *The Argument Culture*) explains, "The nature of these shows is you're forced to speak more provocatively to make a point in the short time you have before you get interrupted. People know there's an entertainment factor, but the danger is, it turns us all into stereotypes, because you don't have time to express the ifs, ands, or buts."

When I talk about the argument culture, I am often asked about Jerry Springer. Springer's show is also scream TV. Phil Donahue, who pioneered the format, used it to convey information provided by experts—with the audience interaction added. Oprah Winfrey saw the potential of the format to create a sense of connection among her guests, the studio audience, viewers, and herself by focusing less on the expert guests and more on the average people who come on to talk about their lives. Springer dispenses with experts entirely and exploits only one kind of drama: getting average people to come on his show to fight. But I worry less about Springer because no one is watching his show to form opinions about current events, as they are with news and information shows.

The argument culture also encompasses an ethic of aggression—praising those in power would be boring, rolling over. Those who take positions against the president, for example, don't just criticize—they sneer, ridicule, and heap scorn. By setting that tone, scream TV encourages viewers to approach others in an adversarial spirit, creating an atmosphere of animosity that spreads like a fever. As the Egyptian author Leila Ahmed wrote, describing the effect of the terms and tone in which Gamal Abdel Nasser habitually denounced his enemies, "once you make hatred and derision...normal and acceptable in one area, they become generalized to everything else."

But audiences love it, defenders of the genre say. Ratings, they claim, are the pudding-proof. But do the ratings really support this view? According to Nielsen, for June 1999 the percentage of households with TVs that tuned in to *Crossfire* and *Hardball* was 0.3 percent—a projected 305,000 households for *Crossfire* and 251,000 for *Hardball*. *The Capital Gang* (which airs on weekends) did similarly at 0.3 percent, with 347,000 viewers; *Equal Time* (also a daily show) did even worse, with 0.1 percent or 129,000 viewers.

Larry King Live is also a talking-heads cable show that airs weeknights, but one that gives viewers an extended conversation with one guest at a time. Though King is often ridiculed by his peers for asking only "softball" questions of his guests, far more viewers prefer his approach, giving him, according to Nielsen, 0.5 percent (or 538,000) of households. That's far larger than the audience of *Crossfire* and *Hardball*.

What *do* audiences like about these shows? Part of their appeal, I think, lies in their hosts. John McLaughlin's booming voice sounds like an old newsreel voice-over. Introducing a topic, he uses strategic pauses and sudden loudness to add drama: "The AMA," he tells viewers, "has voted to allow doctors [pause] TO UNIONIZE!!" American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade "was...CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE!!" (though he adds, *sotto voce*, "many believe"). McLaughlin's manner comes across as good-natured bluster.

Chris Matthews of *Hardball* does not shout or pronounce in dramatic highs and lows, stops and starts. He charms with his blond, boyish good looks and ready smile. The drama comes from the fast pace at which the words roll off his tongue, like a sportscaster rushing to keep up with the plays—in keeping with the metaphor of the show's name and his nightly call to arms: "Let's play hardball." [For more on Matthews, see "Chris Matthews Won't Shut Up," page 78.]

Why has talk on radio and TV become more a matter of *having* arguments than of *making* arguments? As I explain in *The Argument Culture*, part of the cause is the medium itself. Television (like radio) returns, in some ways, to the past. It was the advent of print that made Western society less disputatious, according to cultural linguist Walter Ong: In the absence of audiences before which to stage debates, attention gradually focused on the internal argumentation of published tracts rather than debaters' performance. The rise of contentiousness today is fueled in part by the return of oral argument on TV and radio, where once again the ability to dispute publicly is valued—and judged—as a performance. ■

Deborah Tannen is professor of linguistics at Georgetown University. Her books include You Just Don't Understand, Talking from 9 to 5, *and* The Argument Culture.

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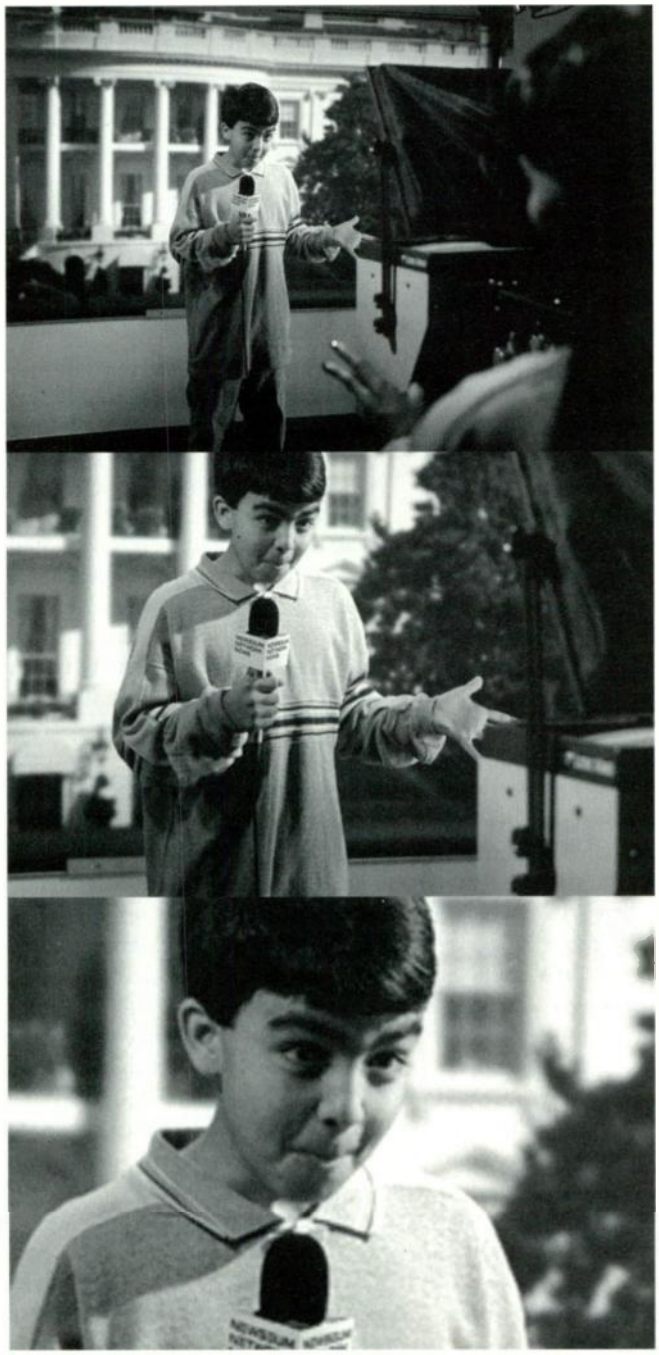

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BRILL'S CONTENT

TV PICKS

A MEDIA AGE AGO, CIRCA 1992, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN WAILED THE ROCK-SONG LAMENT that there were 57 channels and nothing on. Since then TV has supposedly become even more of a cultural wasteland. But our survey of the nonfiction television landscape—from *Nightline* to *Antiques Roadshow*, from established networks, such as CBS, to cable upstarts, like Animal Planet—proves that conventional wisdom decidedly wrong. In this special report, *Brill's Content* presents the quirky favorites of five TV-saturated critics, previews of the fall's new offerings, and an opinionated, hour-by-hour guide to the best of prime time.

Rosie Rules!!!

Fans of *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* adore the toy-collecting, Koosh ball-throwing host for one simple reason: She's just like us. **By Christine Champagne**

TIM BOWER

I'M A TV CRITIC, AND I watch television for a living. Being that I am a professional, I don't form close attachments to the people I view on the tube day in and day out. I'm not living in a fantasy world, imagining that I could become friends with *All My Children*'s Susan Lucci, *The View*'s Star Jones, or *Dawson's Creek*'s James Van Der Beek. But when I watch *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, I do think, *Rosie and I have so much in common: Our love of Madonna. Our obsession with* Party of Five. *Our interest in Happy Meal toys. We really could be friends.*

This means one of two things: Either I'm delusional and not the professional critic I claim to be, or Rosie is someone with whom I—and TV watchers like myself—truly bond. I'd like to think it's the latter.

Why do Rosie watchers like me feel such a strong bond with the daytime chat-show host? The answer is simple: Rosie is one of us—an ordinary person who can't resist chocolate, sometimes puts her foot in her mouth, and maybe doesn't look so great when she rolls out of bed in the morning. While Oprah Winfrey is constantly trying to get me to better myself, I know that Rosie accepts me just the way I am.

>>>>all times Eastern >>8-9 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>9-10 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

MONDAY

Antiques Roadshow (PBS)

Yes, the concept was ripped off from a British series of the same name. And, yes, it's embarrassing as an American to learn that there is a fairly liquid market in this country for a traveling pork salesman's old pig-shaped sample cases. But the three-year-old *Antiques Roadshow*, PBS's number one-rated series, is easily the best thing going Monday nights (sorry, *Ally McBeal*). It's got it all: Tragedy, as when a dupe learned that the Revolutionary War carven powder horn—perhaps the cornerstone of his retirement planning—was actually a worthless sham, dipped in tea to look old; and Joy, as when a retired schoolteacher was told by *Roadshow*'s star appraisers, twin brothers Leslie and Leigh Keno, that the eighteenth-century card table she bought at a garage sale for $25 was worth $250,000. When the table came up for auction at Sotheby's last year, it actually sold for $541,000. Now *that's* entertainment.

Two Fat Ladies & Hot Off the Grill with Bobby Flay (Food Network)

Cooking shows are an odd mix: part classroom, part entertainment. *Two Fat Ladies*, a British import that airs on the Food Network, puts the emphasis on entertainment. Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright (right), the ladies, are classic English eccentrics who travel the British countryside on a Triumph motorcycle and sidecar. Each show takes the ladies to a different location—a brewery one week, a Benedictine abbey another. Their recipes—ranging from Bubble and Squeak (pan-fried potatoes and onions) to Venison Pasty and an oddball dessert called Strawberry Breasts (that's what they look like)—are heavy on the lard and double cream. The real pleasure of *Two Fat Ladies* is not the recipes but the ladies, who dance about the kitchen sharing stories, scoring abominations like margarine, and celebrating the joy of food. Taking a completely different approach to the cooking show *Hot Off the Grill with Bobby Flay* (9:30-10:00) is all about the finer points of grilling. You won't laugh out loud, as you might with the *Ladies*, but you'll know everything you need to know about getting the best out of your barbecue.

I'm in no way threatened or intimidated by Rosie. How can I be? She's a big kid—and a goofball—at heart. She collects toys, shoots Koosh balls at her audience, and breaks into song whenever the mood strikes her—whether it's one of her favorite commercial jingles or a birthday song to Barry Manilow set to the tune of his hit "Copacabana."

Clearly, Rosie isn't afraid to make a fool of herself. She has no problem revealing her sentimental side either. My friend Michael still tears up when he recounts Rosie's chat with guest Betty Buckley. Those of you who watched *Eight Is Enough* will recall that she played Abby, Dick's second wife. Abby had the tough task of playing surrogate mom to a household of eight kids.

Well, Rosie, who was only ten when her own mom died of breast cancer, confessed to Buckley that she had watched the show wishing that her dad had married someone like Abby. Surely, some of you are rolling your eyes, but heartfelt confessions like that hit home with Rosie's fans, especially those who relate to TV as much as she does.

I love that Rosie happily admits that she is a TV addict. *Party of Five* is one of her biggest obsessions. Last season, Rosie flipped out when Ned started beating Julia. She chastised actor Scott Bairstow, the actor who played Ned, when he appeared on her show. You don't know how many *Party of Five* fans would have loved to have been able to let Ned have it (although I, of course, would not be among them, as I am a professional critic who can separate fiction from reality).

As evidenced by her behavior with Bairstow and her obsessions with celebrities like Tom Cruise and Barbra Streisand, Rosie remains as much of a fan as her viewers. It's her ability to keep in touch with that part of her personality that enables her to conduct some of the best celebrity interviews on television, particularly when she's talking to a TV star.

Because Rosie watches a lot of TV, she actually knows what is happening. That makes a huge difference. She asks the kinds of story-line questions TV viewers would ask.

Rosie's interviews are also enjoyable to watch because she is respectful of her guests (well, perhaps Tom Selleck would disagree) and excels at the art of fawning. We like to see our favorite celebrities treated with respect. Case in point: As one of only a small number of admitted Spice Girls fans over the age of 30, I was thrilled when Rosie treated ex-Spice Girl Geri Halliwell (once known as Ginger Spice) as if she were the queen of England.

On any other talk show, Halliwell would likely endure a ribbing. Rosie took Halliwell seriously.

Rosie takes everyone seriously, including her fans. It's important to her that they are involved in the show. The members of Rosie's studio audience are as much a part of the show as her guests are. Each show usually opens with a fan—or sometimes a group of fans—playing announcer and introducing the day's guests and Rosie.

One day, the announcer's job went to a pair of eleventh-grade girls from New Jersey who were so excited to meet Rosie that they screamed and shook as if they'd just gotten backstage at a Backstreet Boys concert.

The screeching was a bit much. Don't they get it? Rosie isn't some out-of-reach celebrity that you have to worship. Rosie is one of the few people on TV who is one of us. She's someone who might live next door or someone you might run into at the grocery store or perhaps even someone you might get together with every Tuesday night to watch *Party of Five*.

Not that I'm hinting around, of course. ■

Christine Champagne is chief critic for GIST TV (www.gist.com), a television listings and information website.

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> 10-11 pm >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> 11-12 am >>>>>>>>>>>

NewsStand (CNN)

Get past the hokey compulsion of the anchors to stand in front of any newsstand they can find in New York and Atlanta, and you'll discover that *NewsStand* actually gives synergy a good name. The *NewsStand* concept of adapting three of Time Warner's magazines (*Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Fortune*) for the company's all-news channel got off to an embarrassing start in 1998 when CNN retracted its report about the U.S. military's use of nerve gas against defectors during the Vietnam War. Preemptions, time changes, and skimpy corporate promotion plagued the show during its first year, and not surprisingly, poor ratings resulted. Then, in July, CNN overhauled the structure. *CNN & Time* got to keep a Sunday night time slot, but the weeknight shows are no longer devoted to a specific magazine. Former *CNN & Fortune* co-anchors Willow Bay and Stephen Frazier (left) join Judd Rose to oversee a mix of hard news and longer, magazine-branded segments. The more telegenic of the magazines' reporters and editors pop up as essayists, adding credibility and (sometimes) irreverence to the program.

Digital Jam (CNNfn) & Nightline (ABC)

Trying to make sense of the frenzy for Internet companies, not to mention all that talk about e-commerce, broadband pipes, and stock options? Tune into *Digital Jam*, CNNfn's nightly roundup of news about the high-tech economy. Anchored by Steve Young and Bruce Francis, and offering analysis from industry experts, the show's relatively sober approach is a welcome change from all the hype of much new-media coverage.

After 19 years on the air, *Nightline* (11:35) continues to offer perspective on events increasingly ignored or sensationalized by others. Anchor Ted Koppel and the show's correspondents, including Chris Bury and Michel McQueen, devote the first half of the show to engrossing reports on topics as diverse as Asian-American anxiety in the wake of allegations of Chinese nuclear espionage to a possible new vaccine for Alzheimer's disease. Koppel then follows up with probing interviews that often turn into highly charged debates. *Nightline* has consistently won journalistic kudos, including 41 Emmys. But rather than rely on its distinguished past, *Nightline* stays fresh and relevant at a time when so many news shows are content to regurgitate the spin of the day.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

PITY THE TV VIEWER OF TODAY, ALREADY BELEAGUERED by a wealth of programming options. The arrival of digital cable means even more channels over which to agonize. A few examples: Discovery Health began airing on August 2, a month after Fox launched The Health Network. Two new cable channels directed at women, Oxygen and a recently announced competitor from Time Warner and Condé Nast Publications Inc. (home to such magazines as *Vogue* and *Glamour*), are in the planning stages. And then there's Fanfare, the classical music channel that is to begin broadcasting in November, with Dick Cavett as the primary host.

But in this oversaturated media world, there are lots of intriguing new choices. If you crave more personality profiles, MSNBC this fall will have *Headliners & Legends With Matt Lauer*. Bob Costas will host *In Profile* for CNBC. And VH1's popular *Behind The Music* series (see Sunday, 8:00-10:00, page 103) gets its own spinoff. Tentatively called *Behind The Music II: Road to Fame*, the half-hour show is to chronicle newer bands, such as Sugar Ray and Barenaked Ladies, who've had a Top 10 hit or two, but no more. "They don't have enough story to fill an hour, and they definitely have plenty of career left," says Jeff Gaspin, VH1's executive vice-president of programming and production. (Time slots for all these shows have yet to be determined.)

Food Network's *Taste Test* (left) and Bravo's *Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends*.

We'll see a new syndicated talk show from Martin Short premiering September 13. The online financial site TheStreet.com moves its freewheeling columnists to Fox News Channel on Saturdays at 10 A.M. (repeated the next day at 1 P.M.). *BET Live from LA*, a late-night variety talk show, debuts from the black-oriented cable channel . Court TV has hired Fox News's Catherine Crier to host a midday legal news show. (Dates and times for the latter two have not been firmed up.) And starting October 1 at 8 P.M., Bravo begins showing *Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends*, with hour-long trips to the fringe of America to meet porn stars, right-wing survivalists, even infomercial producers. The U.S. has more of a fringe than any place else, claims Theroux. "America was founded as an experiment, as a kind of utopian experiment," he says. "They were consciously setting out to create a freer country. I think that people still come to America with a kind of Utopian intention. So these dreams can be pretty weird."

Americans also strive to create game shows, particularly around trivia. VH1's *Pop-Up Video* will spin off *Pop-Up Quiz* this fall at a to-be-determined time, while the Food Network launched *Taste Test* in July. On the latter entry, author and restaurant critic David Rosengarten plays Alex Trebek as contestants answer such questions as "Which vegetable is worn as a national emblem in Wales on St. David's Day?" (Answer: the leek.) A food-trivia show isn't quite the stretch it seems, argues Rosengarten. "There's always that kind of knowledge one-upmanship going on around the dinner table among foodies," he says. The same can be said for TV programmers.

—*Lorne Manly*

TUESDAY

8-9 pm

Nova (PBS)

The opening shot may seem as old as the show itself, but *Nova*, now in its 26th season, has not grown more faint over the years. Covering issues from time travel to El Niño, Einstein to airplanes, the weekly PBS program offers informative reports built on vivid footage and fascinating—although monotonal—narration. It's easy to dismiss a program like *Nova* as esoteric, but the show does not treat issues from a purely scientific perspective. Its pieces deal with the human element; emotions and reactions bring life to episodes. The "Surviving AIDS" episode, for example, dealt not only with the intricacies of medical treatments but also with the trials of living with the disease. And "To The Moon," a special about Apollo 11, rounded up not just the astronauts who touched down on the moon but the geologists who helped train them.

9-10 pm

60 Minutes II (CBS)

Same stopwatch, slightly different show. With returning correspondents Dan Rather, Charlie Rose, Vicki Mabrey, and Bob Simon (below), and new addition Scott Pelley serving as hosts instead of Mike Wallace and the regular crew, *60 Minutes II*'s no-nonsense presentation is a comfort for the viewer. Highlights from last season included Simon's searing report about how United Nations peacekeepers stood by during the massacres in Srebrenica, Bosnia. Remembering its roots, *60 Minutes II* presents a "classic" segment, recalling an original *60 Minutes* story succeeded by an update. For a lighter touch, commentator Jimmy Tingle presents "Uncommon Sense"—a humorous (and often sarcastic) glimpse at everything from politics to gambling. The strength of the show lies in its ability to follow the time-tested nature of its predeccesor. As the Insider's Guide from leading ad-buying firm Starcom Worldwide says: "Junior is doing just fine. The second edition of the original newsmagazine is holding its own and delivering high-quality stories to viewers. [*60 Minutes* executive producer and creator] Don Hewitt should be proud."

Keeping The Bulls Honest

CNBC's Ron Insana brooks no B.S. from guests or sources, making him a trader's best friend. **By James J. Cramer**

WHAT DO YOU do if you have a predilection to buy stocks, even when there are times that they shouldn't be bought? What do you do if you wear rose-colored glasses to read your quote machine and you know you are filtering out too much skepticism?

You watch Ron Insana.

Most of us are so used to drop-dead gorgeous guys and gals reading the news, usually haltingly and without understanding how to pronounce everything from Bezos to Humana, that it makes no sense that Insana has made it to the top of the business-journalism world. On TV! Heck, I think he's balder than I am, and you don't need a barber to know that's saying something.

But this guy is the real thing. Other anchors periodically put on fatigues or khakis and read the script from the field rather than in the studio. Insana discovers the script. He writes the script. He reports the script.

Insana makes and breaks news. He may be the only newsman in history to begin a bull market, as he did at 12:47 P.M. on October 8, 1998, when he broke the news that the Fed might have to intervene to lower rates again because of world chaos. He stopped a vicious downturn in its tracks with that news, informa-

(continued on page 96)

>>>>>>>>>>>>10-11 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>11-12 am>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Frontline (PBS)

Nearly 16 years after its debut on public television, *Frontline* continues to fulfill its mission as the only regularly scheduled long-form documentary news program that tackles the toughest public-affairs issues of the day. The proliferation of nonfiction and "reality-based" programming on network and cable television doesn't match *Frontline*'s depth. The show's aggressive reporting combines with compelling narrative to offer viewers well-crafted stories on such subjects as America's illegal gun trade. And the episodes live up to their provocative titles, such as "The Triumph of Evil," a spine-chilling account of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and how it could have been prevented. On September 28, *Frontline* (at a special time of 9 P.M.) will turn its cameras to the life of Pope John Paul II (right), while later in the season (date to be determined) the show will examine the links between sports and organized crime.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart & Win Ben Stein's Money (Comedy Central)

Since Craig Kilborn took his smarmy anchorman patter to CBS and left *The Daily Show* (11:00-11:30) to the more cerebral Jon Stewart (right), this nightly spoof of news shows has become a sharper, less annoying place to end the viewing day. Stewart's dry, sarcasm-dripping delivery meshes neatly with the show's signature skewering of the day's headlines and the media's foibles. "He's got a sweetness that lets him get away with stuff," says *New York Post* TV critic Michele Greppi. And while Stewart can't use the blow-dried Ken doll news-anchor look Kilborn did for comic effect, he *can* do silly and self-deprecating. "Jon's not uncomfortable with men in Speedos dancing behind him," says Madeleine Smithberg, the show's cocreator and executive producer.

Ben Stein, the nation's preeminent lawyer/Nixon speechwriter/professor/sitcom writer/actor/occasional *Brill's Content* contributor/Clear Eyes pitchman, has successfully added "game-show host" to his collection of personas. On *Win Ben Stein's Money* (11:30-12:00), the gimmick is that he's simultaneously a fiercely competitive contestant, fighting to preserve his paycheck. So when he forgets that a newborn horse is called a foal, that shocked-and-dismayed look on his face is genuine.

MILLENNIUM MADNESS

TELEVISION, ALREADY THE PLACE TO TURN for fast lessons in world history, will become even more so this fall. On October 10, CNN will begin presenting its own crash course with the first of ten episodes of *Millennium*. The project—labeled "a thousand years of history...in ten hours of television"—comes from the same team that put together CNN's award-winning *Cold War* series. "I see it as a glorified travel series, a magic carpet ride back through history," says co-executive producer Sir Jeremy Isaacs.

A scene from CNN's *Millennium* series

To be broadcast Sundays at 9 P.M., *Millennium* will focus on the changes that have affected our world over the last ten centuries. From the development of Islam and its growth in the eleventh century to the migrations and globalization that mark the twentieth century, producers have pinpointed specific moments and stories to tell this history. It was important, Isaacs explains, that the series' perspective not be "Euro- or Atlanto-centric." "Europe was a subordinate part of the world in the first five centuries of the millennium," he notes. "It was not dominating the world, but was overshadowed by Islam and by the achievements of the civilizations of China and India."

The rise of Western civilization is the subject of another ten-part series, this one tentatively titled *The Christian Millennium*, set to air on Bravo (Sundays in October, time to be determined).

Much of the programming heading our way comes from a number of print-television partnerships. Notable among these is a two-hour special produced by *The New York Times*, The History Channel, and Chicago's Towers Productions, Inc. The series, a tie-in with the six *New York Times Magazine* millennium issues being published this year, will offer whimsical takes on such subjects as money, sex, inventions, and exploration.

"We're taking broad themes and trying to tell exemplary stories with an unusual arc to them," says executive producer Jonathan Towers. The producers' choice for the sex scandal of the millennium? "[It's] Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn," Towers explains. "[Henry VIII's] appetite for dynasty and for lust...changed the course of history. He had to figure out a way to get divorced, and then had a habit of chopping off women's heads. England changed, the Catholic church changed. Here's a scandal that really meant something."

Sports Illustrated's 20th Century Sports Awards, a two-hour special on CBS, will air on December 2 at 9 P.M. On New Year's Day, Nickelodeon will broadcast a 24-hour documentary called *Nickellennium*, focusing on the hopes of the world's children for the next thousand years. And even Pope John Paul II is getting into the act. The Vatican is planning a televised special message to the world about faith, religion, and peace. —*Dimitra Kessenides*

Bulls

(continued from page 95)

tion that led to a subsequent 3,000-point rally.

How could he have such credibility? Because Insana is a realist. His 3-4 P.M. slot on CNBC has no B.S., no happy talk, and no bogus pushes of stocks.

You tout on his show, he lets you have it. You try to be less than rigorous about why the market is going to rally, and he catches you and pins you down. Fluently and effortlessly.

Insana's at his best when he spots problems no one else sees. For someone like me, a bull at heart, he reminds me that countries can default on obligations (he was early on the Russian debacle, which led to a huge decline in our stock market last year), and that interest rates and oil prices don't always go down. It is often news bulls don't want to hear, but that can't be denied. He keeps me from being too optimistic and makes me more skeptical, two traits every trader must have to be successful.

When Asia collapsed in 1997, I didn't know about the

WEDNESDAY

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>8-9 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>9-10 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

The World Today (CNN)

Looking for a straight-ahead, unvarnished newscast, not another network newsmagazine or cable news-channel free-for-all? CNN's recently revamped *The World Today* serves up what CNN does best: solid national and international reporting on breaking news from dozens of correspondents. Jim Moret and Joie Chen, anchoring from a spanking new blue set, deliver the news crisply and without affectation. With a full hour at their disposal, stories can stretch to several minutes each (rare these days), politicians can issue more than a six-second sound bite, and correspondents can actually provide context. And come September, the nightly newscast will add a third anchor to the mix, one who will lend the show what passes for star quality at CNN: former senior White House correspondent Wolf Blitzer.

Discover Magazine (The Discovery Channel)

Based on the popular science publication of the same name, *Discover Magazine* seeks out such intriguing topics as military surveillance and the possibilities of time travel, and explains how science and technology come into play. Although the title may suggest that the show engenders a sense of childlike wonder at how the world works, the subject matter is a bit more grim: Cannibalism, bloodsuckers, poison, ritual murder, and natural disasters were all recent show topics. But the best episodes go behind the scenes of professions that put lives at risk—and science to the test—every day. One show examined how well-trained security forces and high-tech vehicles protect (or fail to protect) world leaders; another explained how forensic scientists collect evidence from gruesome crime scenes (including one where the killer tried to burn a dead body). Some of *Discover*'s scenes are so well filmed—and the music so appropriately ominous—that you feel like you're watching a psychological thriller instead of a science program.

extent of the decline until Insana kept hammering it home. His relentless pursuit of that story, even after it became predictably downbeat—*because it was*—saved me a fortune, allowing me to boot a whole host of semiconductor stocks that turned out to be leveraged to Asia.

Of course, all good things have to come to an end. Insana's so good that he has moved to prime time to go head to head against the replacements for Lou Dobbs on CNN's *Moneyline News Hour*. He hit the ground running with interviews of former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and President Bill Clinton. Now everybody knows how good he is instead of just us daytime junkies. The secret will be out.

Bad for me as a trader. Good for everybody else. ■

James J. Cramer is manager of a hedge fund and cofounder of TheStreet.com. Under no circumstances does the information in this column represent a recommendation to buy or sell stocks. Cramer's writings provide insights into the dynamics of money management and are not a solicitation for transactions.

DAVID STRICK / OUTLINE

TODAY MEETS THE BRADY BUNCH

Later Today cohost Florence Henderson

IT'S THE GROOVIEST THING TO HAPPEN SINCE Marcia kissed Monkees heartthrob Davy Jones and Greg got to move into the attic. Florence Henderson, known as the icon of all TV moms for her role on the 1970s show *The Brady Bunch*, will be sampling grilled salmon salad, discussing the latest treatment for hernias, and bantering before commercial breaks as cohost of NBC's new morning show, *Later Today*.

And just as Jan Brady once confided to her TV mom that she admired her older sister, Marcia, but longed to develop her own identity, so *Later Today* will aspire to resemble NBC's lead-in, *Today*, while offering a few new twists on the ratings leader's winning formula.

Later Today, an hour-long show to be broadcast right after *Today* starting September 7 at 9 A.M., will depart from the traditional male-female anchor team to follow a new trend: the just-us-gals format pioneered on ABC's *The View*, on which the female hosts gab coffee-klatch style for much of the show. Henderson, 65, will play mother hen to NBC veteran Jodi Applegate, 35, the principal host, and Asha Blake, 37, most recently an anchor at KNBC in Los Angeles. While *Later Today* follows such talk shows as *The Roseanne Show* and *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* in anointing an actress as host, this won't be Henderson's first foray into morning television. In 1959, ten years before she began portraying the adoring wife, Carol Brady, Henderson served as a "*Today* girl," doing interviews, chatting with host Dave Garroway, and even singing on the show.

In substance and pace, *Later Today* will be patterned on the second hour of *Today*, with segments about parenting, health, finance, and entertainment geared to women, the primary audience for mid-morning television. And while *Today*'s hosts leave their comfy chairs periodically to interact with the fans assembled outside their first-floor studio, *Later Today* will have an in-studio audience for its hosts to mingle with.

Later Today is a natural move for NBC. Its rivals have spent millions of dollars copying the *Today* show format, so why shouldn't NBC produce a clone of its own and hold on to *Today*'s audience for another hour? Local station executives seem to agree. The show will be carried by stations that together reach 90 percent of the country's viewers. (*Later Today* replaces the lackluster talk show *Leeza* in most cities.) And who better than Mrs. Brady to try out that new exercise fad and chat amicably about Hollywood's latest hunk? After all, Greg and Marcia are all grown up. —*Jennifer Greenstein*

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>10-11 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>11-12 am>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Crime Stories (Court TV)

The cornerstone of Court TV's overhauled prime-time lineup, *Crime Stories* taps into the American fascination with, well, true-crime stories, while also attempting to understand what could possess people to commit such horrific acts. Although the framing introductions and closings by actor and comedian Richard Belzer (who can also be seen on *Homicide*, reruns of which air immediately before *Crime Stories*) blur the lines between news and entertainment, the hour-long segments are journalistically rigorous, not to mention fascinating. From the horrific story of former Delaware prosecutor Thomas Capano's murder and decapitation of Anne Marie Fahey to historical presentations of the Israeli capture and trial of Nazi SS officer Adolf Eichmann, *Crime Stories* informs without sensationalizing. Just make sure to switch channels before the *Snap Judgment* blabberings of radio personality Lionel come on at 11.

The Charlie Rose Show (PBS)

Charlie Rose's Rolodex is crammed with the names of the political and cultural elite. Yet the success of his hour-long, eponymously named talk show is not simply the caliber of his guests, but what Rose gets them to say. Rose breaks many of the classic interview rules—he's clearly gaga over some guests, he's an equal-opportunity interrupter, and he often shares little personal ditties. But it works. With his big, wood round table set against a black backdrop, Rose manages to put his guests (such as Bruce Springsteen, above) at ease and gets them to open up. So if you want to know how director Spike Lee and actors Mira Sorvino and John Leguizamo worked together to create *Summer of Sam*, or what former chief of staff Erskine Bowles did to keep the executive branch humming during the impeachment saga, Rose's show is the place to turn.

FANatical Obsessions

In capturing the pathos of our celebrity fixation, *FANatic* is both manipulative and addictive. **By Michael Colton**

WATCH ENOUGH MTV (or too much, in my case) and you categorize the programming into two camps. First are the star-driven videos, news, performances and profiles, the network's traditional bread and butter. On the other, more lurid side is MTV's "reality" programming, featuring the roommates on *Real World*, the Times Square hordes on *Total Request Live*, and the contestants on those "Wanna Be a VJ" searches. These are the people who actually watch all those star-driven videos. MTV has turned the cameras on its audience.

FANatic, an MTV show with inexplicable spelling that debuted last year and airs each Wednesday at 10:30 P.M., brings these two camps together, uniting the star and the star-worshiper. Like *The Truman Show*, it is a quintessentially late-nineties self-referential entertainment. It captures the pathos of our celebrity culture, the quasi-religion that we mere mortals create around celebrities. Think *Notting Hill* without the sex, if Hugh Grant had acne.

The show is manipulative and repetitive, but a guilty pleasure nonetheless. Each half-hour episode contains two segments that follow the exact same formula. First comes the "ambush": A camera crew and an MTV accomplice—the fanatic's friend or relative—surprise the fanatic with the news that the fanatic has been chosen to meet the Celebrity. Fanatic shrieks, threatens to faint. Then we see a snippet of the video clip the fanatic sent to MTV in order to be chosen, in which the fan cries something like, "*I am [Celebrity's] number one fan! [Celebrity] inspires me! I named my cat after [Celebrity] and when I'm depressed it's [Celebrity's] [acting/singing/beauty] that lifts me up.*"

THURSDAY

8-9 pm

Lonely Planet (Travel Channel)

If you're the type of traveler who prefers to hunt for crocodiles in Papua New Guinea or ride an ostrich through South Africa without leaving your La-Z-Boy, then the Travel Channel's *Lonely Planet* series is for you. The show, based on the popular Australian travel guides of the same name, features spunky hosts (including Megan McCormick, above) who think nothing of hopping a plane to Ethiopia or dog-sledding through Arctic Canada to engage in tribal stick fighting or in sampling seal blubber with the locals. *Lonely Planet* destinations are so off the beaten path that you're not likely to ever get there yourself. But watching the hosts trek around the world seven nights a week is a journey in itself.

9-10 pm

Investigative Reports (A&E)

When Bill Kurtis decides to dig in to a topic, he doesn't go halfway. After 30 years in the news business—and having worked for such venerable outlets as CBS News and PBS—the executive producer and anchor of A&E Network Television's *Investigative Reports* knows that good stories deserve more than the cursory treatment allowed by a 20-minute segment. He devotes a full hour to documentaries on subjects that range from killers whose violent behavior begins with cruelty to animals to the grueling boot-camp training facing female Marines. And when the topic warrants it, the stentorian-voiced Kurtis gives a story even more airtime: His *Guns in America* series lasted five nights, and explored everything from how and where guns are made to how children are learning to use them—as hunters, as drug dealers, or for self-defense. Kurtis can be tireless: In a documentary about mail-order brides, he featured both the story of a woman subjected to her husband's abuse, and that of a man whose bride and newfound lover are suspected of his murder.

Next comes the "journey": Fanatic travels from Kentucky to New York City to meet the R&B group Dru Hill; or from Seattle to Hong Kong to meet Jackie Chan; or from Melrose, Massachusetts, to Wilmington, North Carolina, to meet the cast of *Dawson's Creek*. MTV spares no expense, even sending one fanatic to the United Arab Emirates, where her idol, Wesley Snipes, was opening Planet Hollywood Dubai. MTV is so keen on illustrating the spontaneity of the whole enterprise that every other show seems to feature a fanatic, post-ambush, who is jumping into a limo without any shoes on or wearing just a towel and swimsuit. (The network doesn't explain that the fanatics are contacted in advance and told that as finalists, they should have a bag packed and be ready to go.)

Along the "journey," the fanatic speaks into the camera about how important the Celebrity is to the fanatic's life. *FANatic* is like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, except instead of serving the terminally ill, it serves the terminally obsessed. Sometimes the stories are heartfelt (how Ricky Martin's success has empowered the fanatic to pursue a Washington fellowship, for instance). But too often, the fanatic is unintentionally hilarious, or cringe inducing, as with the earnest guy—a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University, a playwright—who described how the derivative dance-pop of Carmen Electra helped inspire his writing and push him toward greatness. Yes, Carmen Electra, the B-level singer/actress (*Baywatch*) who's known mainly for her *Playboy* pictorials and her brief marriage to a supposedly drunken Dennis Rodman. She's also, apparently, a muse to the next Mamet.

In the second half of the episode, the fanatic meets the Celebrity, they hug and cry, and the fanatic conducts a standard, anticlimactic interview ("What's the new album like?" "Who are your influences?"). Undoubtedly the Celebrity enjoys the fanatic interview more than, say, another junket interview for E! Entertainment Television. But it's just that: an interview. While the fanatic is experiencing a life-changing moment, one that he or she will describe to grandchildren someday, the celebrity is often in the midst of a publicity tour or on a break from recording. The dynamic is imbalanced, and one can't help but feel sorry for the fanatic. When the Van Halen fanatic—voted "most likely to meet Van Halen" by his high school teacher—passionately described how the band's music made him want to live life to the fullest, Eddie Van Halen was fiddling aimlessly with his ax; Van Halen was only slightly more animated when the fan's mother said, "I want to be your guitar!"

Sure, the fanatics provoke some of the celebrities to reflect on their work. And some of the fanatics truly gain inspiration and self-empowerment, or at least some backstage passes. After meeting Ben Stiller, one fanatic left his job working the night shift making food labels at an Omaha factory and headed for comedic stardom in Los Angeles. I wish him the best of luck. Last I heard, he was working at Blockbuster. The Backstreet Boys fanatic ended up working for *FANatic*.

But more than appreciation for the fan's ambitions, I feel the cynicism evinced by Fred Durst, lead singer of the band Limp Bizkit. During his interview, Durst asked his fanatic: "We are the stupidest dumb-ass band in the world. Why would you like us?"

There's no real answer, because *FANatic* is an exploration of the vagaries of taste. It's ultimately voyeuristically entertaining because it makes you feel superior, like an episode of the *Jerry Springer Show*. You may sing along to Britney Spears at home, or read every book Stephen King produces, but at least you're not maniacally obsessed with Richard Simmons or Jennie Garth.

Except that we all worship at the altar of fame. It's part of why we go to movies and listen to music, and why we watch MTV. Even if we don't want to admit it. ■

Michael Colton is a senior writer for Brill's Content.

>>>>>>>>>>>10-11 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>11-12 am>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

48 Hours (CBS)

***48 Hours*, anchored by Dan Rather, has managed to survive in the shadow of its network cousin *60 Minutes* for more than a decade, evolving from CBS's critically lauded documentary *48 Hours on Crack Street* in 1986. Rather and award-winning correspondents, such as Harold Dow, Bill Lagattuta, and Erin Moriarty, skillfully exploit *48 Hours*'s signature style: the single-topic format that mostly lets a story tell itself. (In a disastrous 1996 move, the show temporarily abandoned this formula, but quickly realized its mistake.) Tackling such complex issues as criminal insanity, body-image obsession, and homelessness, the newsmagazine has avoided the celebrity fare that has become a staple of the genre. Now the third-longest-running prime-time newsmagazine on network television, *48 Hours* has won 18 Emmys.**

Fashion Emergency (style) & Silicon Spin (ZDTV)

Dying to turn heads at your ex-boyfriend's wedding? Wish you could make a grand entrance at your high school reunion? *Fashion Emergency* (right) can handle your dire predicament. Emme, one of the world's leading "plus-sized" models, personally escorts every fashion victim to the best makeup artists, hairstylists, and fashion designers around the country, who create polished yet practical looks for each guest of honor. Each "victim" is treated like a new best friend, so there are no Joan-and-Melissa Rivers-style catty comments to make you cringe.

ZDTV's *Silicon Spin* is the Washington talk show come to Silicon Valley. Host John C. Dvorak even looks a bit like *Hardball*'s Chris Matthews crossed with Morton Kondracke of *The Beltway Boys*. Given ZDTV's fledgling status–available in just 11 million homes–there are no production values to speak of. Four talking heads—journalists and the new-media executives they cover—join Dvorak around a U-shaped desk to pontificate and argue about everything from rocketing Internet stock valuations to whether you should take your cell phone on vacation. Dvorak, a contributing editor at *PC Magazine* and host of National Public Radio's *Real Computing*, believes that the key to a successful show is contrarianism. "There has to be somebody who has outrageous opinions, that are just off the wall–and is able to back it up a little."

Fox's Soccer Tease

Soccer fans are both loyal and passionate. Why won't any media conglomerate make us Soccer Weenies whole?

By Michael Hirschorn

THIS IS A RANT disguised as praise. Fox Sports Net's weekly English soccer roundup, *English Premier League Soccer*, is the best soccer show on television because, more or less, it's the only soccer show on television. Sure, you can watch the weekly pay-per-view broadcast live on weekend mornings. In most cases, though, the games are billed as thrilling "relegation" battles, which means you'll see the third-worst team in the league take on the fourth-worst team in the league to decide which one of them will get sent down to England's equivalent of the minors. ESPN2 has a chirpy half-hour weekly show that mainly attempts to pump up the disappointing Major League Soccer, the excitement of the ersatz highlights clashing uncomfortably with the acres of empty seats. CNNSI's *World Sport* will give you a few minutes of highlights amid the reports from the New Delhi tennis classic. RAI International broadcasts a live Sunday game in Italian and ESPN2 has a tape-delay Spanish game on Monday afternoons.

But for nearly complete weekly coverage of the fabulous quasi-surreal insanity that is English Premiership football, we have Fox. Host Lionel Bienvenu (working that current sports-announcer vogue for frat-boy-meets-homeboy yo-yo-ese) replays highlights and news clips, largely from England's Sky Sports, along with an only slightly condensed match of the week. Viewers last year were able to follow all of the league's juicy contretemps, far more entertaining than even those of the New York Knicks' front office. One favorite: working-class hero Robbie Fowler of Liverpool wagging his butt at college-educated Graeme Le Saux of Chelsea, a culmination of a season-long gay-bashing brouhaha (notwithstanding Fowler's married status) that was really a study in soccer's barely submerged class politics.

For all this pleasure, though, there is humiliation. We are made to pay for our inconvenient fandom. While the show is scheduled to air at 6:30 Sunday evening, it is often bumped for other supposedly more important sporting events. Sometimes the show comes on

FRIDAY

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>8-9 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>9-10 pm>>>>>>>>>>

Wall $treet Week With Louis Rukeyser & Washington Week In Review (PBS)

The "Money Honey" he is not, but Louis Rukeyser (left) and his long-running Wall Street roundup show consistently trounce their flashier competitors on CNBC and CNN in the battle for viewers. Now in its 30th season on public television, *Wall $treet Week With Louis Rukeyser* still starts off with a monologue from the oddly charming Rukeyser, who then questions a panel of business leaders, analysts, and a featured guest—a format that hasn't really changed since the Nixon administration. Though the graphics—and sometimes the jokes—are dated, the show's entertaining banter and clear analysis manages to make the dismal science seem less so.

Washington Week In Review remains the staid alter ego to *The McLaughlin Group*'s right-left screamfest—despite the recent turmoil of moderator Ken Bode's departure amid charges that the show's public-television management wanted to remake *Washington Week* in *McLaughlin*'s image. On the air in some form since 1967, the show's tested formula hasn't changed much over the years: A rotating group of journalists dissect the week's top stories with surprisingly sober analysis. In an age of MTV attention spans and sound-bite punditry, that's an accomplishment.

The News With Brian Williams (MSNBC)

Heir apparent to *NBC Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw, Brian Williams gets to flex his mellifluous announcer's muscles each night on the network's farm-team all-news cable channel, MSNBC. The program is often a surprisingly sober antidote to the frenzied cacophony of scandal news on which MSNBC has built its reputation. While the show has not turned out to be the "casual, contemporary *MacNeil/Lehrer*" that Jack Welch, chairman of MSNBC parent General Electric, described two years ago in *The Washington Post*, it is a model of good manners and journalistic restraint compared to John Gibson's *InterNight*, which airs on the same network.

Adding to the hour-long newscast's credibility is the regular appearance of reporters from *The New York Times*, who give viewers a sneak preview of stories they've written for the next day's newspaper.

at 1:00 A.M. Sunday, sometimes we have to wait until Monday afternoon, sometimes the sound randomly cuts off. And Bienvenu, who has other, swishier gigs on Fox Sports, clearly wants to be elsewhere. Witness his heavily sardonic references to "the beautiful game," the misplaced insertion of ESPN-style jocko exclamations into a sport that demands a subtler sort of vocal inflection.

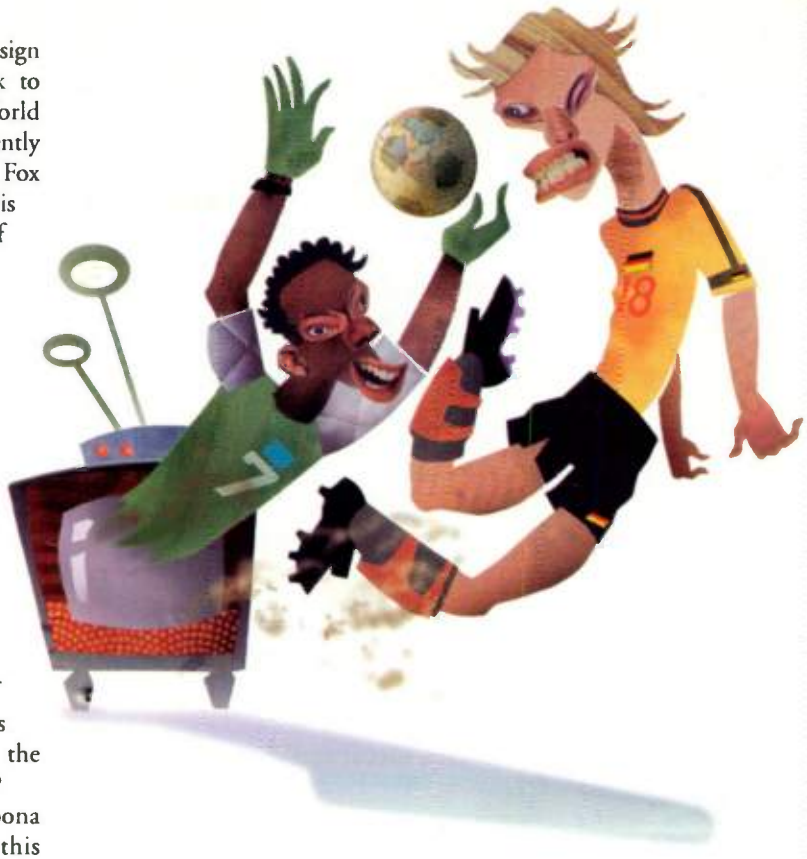
But I and my band of self-styled Soccer Weenies are grateful: We (Arsenal fans mostly, but who cares?) were able to experience Manchester United's historic "treble" this past season (league, national, and European championships) in more-or-less real time, an echo of a roar, but a roar nonetheless.

Some years ago, there was a brief, thrilling moment when Time Warner Cable ran weekends'—and evenings'—worth of Fox Sports World, a soccerphiliac dream of English and German and Scottish games back to back. Following the big Ted Turner-Rupert Murdoch clash, Fox Sports World mysteriously vanished from New York cable screens and now you have to sign up for the DISH Network to receive Fox Sports World Español. DIRECTV apparently can't be bothered. And Fox Sports World in English is available only in a fraction of the country.

This is clearly a sorry state of affairs. There is still little to watch above channel 50 on most cable systems. I am especially shocked by the vast wasteland of cable offerings outside New York: the infomercials, the New Age quasi-cults, the Australian sporting events from, say, 1996. Watching TV in Los Angeles can lead the best of us to thoughts of suicide. Is there no room here for the world's most popular game?

Women's soccer was a bona fide marketing smash this summer and while David (Mr. Posh Spice) Beckham is not quite as pretty as Mia Hamm, there must be sufficient room in this immigrant-rich nation for reasonable coverage of world soccer. The audience may not be huge, but it is passionate and loyal.

Will no major media conglomerate make us Soccer Weenies whole? Memo to Ted Turner: If you give us our soccer, we absolutely promise to subscribe to *In Style*. ■



DAVY LIU

Hirschorn, a former editor at New York *and* Esquire, *was most recently editor of* Spin.

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>10-11 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>11-12 am>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

Emergency Vets (Animal Planet) & Moneyweek (CNNfn)

Need to satisfy your craving for animal stories? Turn to *Emergency Vets*. One of the two most popular shows on Animal Planet—*Crocodile Hunter* is the other—*Emergency Vets* is part documentary, part soap opera. We get to know the vets at a Denver animal hospital as they deal with frantic "parents" worried sick about their ailing cats, dogs, and even snakes. It's all part of Animal Planet's mandate to capture the bond between people and their pets. Conventional nature documentaries, complete with their omniscient narrators, do not dominate this channel's lineup. "There are cheetahs in the Serengeti who get more screen time than Brad Pitt," says Clark Bunting, Animal Planet's senior vice-president and general manager. If after getting your fill of heart-warming animal rescues you find you desire something more of a dog-eat-dog nature, tune into *Moneyweek* (CNNfn) for a recap of the week's biggest business news.

Sports Challenge (ESPN Classic)

Imagine asking one of today's most significant sports stars to share the stage with five other athletes of the same caliber as they all match wits answering trivia questions. And, by the way, the compensation would be minimal. The Boston Red Sox have as much chance of winning the World Series as that game show does of ever airing. But fewer than 30 years ago, the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Jackie Robinson, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar would sit around the red-carpeted set of *Sports Challenge* and try their hands at sports trivia questions served up by host Dick Enberg. Superstars like Ted Williams, Joe Namath, and O.J. Simpson would drop by to serve as the show's mystery guest. And all of them would be decked out in the most hideous styles and fashions the 1970s could offer, from Afros to tan leisure suits. "It's almost as if no one wore a blue blazer," says Vince Doria, executive producer of ESPN Classic, which shows two episodes each weeknight. "Everything is pink and broad lapels and bell-bottom madras pants." But the athletes knew their stuff, and it was much more entertaining than watching a trivia geek like yourself answering the questions. The show has become a viewer favorite. Vows Doria: "We'll keep it on till people beg us to stop."

Laughing On The Late Shift

Conan O'Brien, his slow start long behind him, hosts the most reliably entertaining hour on late-night TV. And he's got a great theme song too.

By Aaron Barnhart

YOU WOULD THINK that by now, the geniuses who dream up concepts for cable TV—in recent months they've given us two new health channels, two new home-repair networks, and something called The Puppy Channel—would give us something we really wanted, like a Late Night Channel. Think about it: What TV memories are more warmly recalled by viewers than the bedtime shows they curled up with night after night? There was Carson, of course, and Letterman—not the weary-looking Dave we see going through the motions in his Broadway shrine, but the ironist with the kick-ass band who remade the genre over at NBC. Throw in Arsenio, Tom Snyder, and the occasional Jack Paar special and you've got the feel-good channel of the decade.

The average cable viewer has four or five dozen late-night choices these days, everything from *SportsCenter* to the West Coast repeat of *Wild Discovery*. But only a handful are really worthy of the label. Just a select few can transport us back to that time when we eagerly tuned in to hear the reassuring opening bars of our favorite theme song.

And it's no surprise that the best of the lot, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, happens to have a great theme song. As performed by Max Weinberg, the drummer for Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band who leads the show's pulsing seven-piece band, the theme song is a likable, high-energy, idiosyncratic ditty, perfectly suited to O'Brien's post-Letterman sensibility. Sadly, NBC wrecked it three years ago. In an attempt to build a bridge between *Tonight Show* viewers and O'Brien, the network turned the opening song into a promo, playing show teases over it.

Still, the opening is about the only thing NBC executives in Burbank have been able to muck with. It took a while for them—and the rest of us—to realize that Conan O'Brien knows what he's doing and always has. That's why the show's executive producer, Lorne Michaels, let him create exactly the kind of show he wanted. At a time when 26 percent of what had been Letterman's audience was abandoning O'Brien, critics were pelting the new *Late Night* with eggs, and Burbank suits were faxing the 30-year-old

>>>>>SATURDAY>>>>8-10pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>10-12am>>>>>>>>>

THE WEEKEND

Biography (A&E) & Larry King Weekend (CNN)

In a culture increasingly obsessed with the private lives of public people, A&E's 12-year-old *Biography* (8:00-9:00) has become the cable network's signature show. The program, which seven nights a week probes the lives of poets, politicians, and stars of the silver (and small) screen, has inspired a magazine and a 24-hour cable spinoff. Recent episodes walked through lives as varied as "Son of Sam" killer David Berkowitz, country crooner Tanya Tucker, and reformed newsman Geraldo Rivera. Although a yen for stargazing is what drives most of these profiles, don't expect it to be pure sycophantic fluff. A recent piece on George C. Scott focused as much on the actor's mercurial temperament and extramarital escapades as it did on his illustrious career. And host Peter Graves always offers astute commentary in a soothing baritone that makes the narration as fascinating as the images of the celebrities themselves. At 9, turn to *Larry King Weekend*. King may not be the most fearsome of interrogators, but the suspenders-clad host does get great guests and sometimes breaks news. (See Ross Perot's numerous appearances.) More Rosie than Cokie, King serves as a proxy for the viewer, and no one else has yet come close to combining talk radio and the TV talk show as well as he has.

Tim Russert (CNBC) & American Perspectives (C-SPAN)

The human equivalent of a pitching machine, firing one hardball question after another, Tim Russert's nice-guy qualities and thoughtfulness are showcased on CNBC's weekend show, simply called *Tim Russert*. A great interviewer, Russert usually devotes the full program to one guest, and it's an hour well spent. The guests, a mélange of politicos and journalists, such as Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura, Watergate scribe Bob Woodward, and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, reveal more than they would on the crowded Sunday morning talk shows, including Russert's own ratings leader, *Meet the Press*. At 11, C-SPAN's *American Perspectives* provides unedited speeches, debates, even commencement addresses from an eclectic list of country-wide events. Where else could you get Tom and Ray Magliozzi (of *Car Talk* fame) and U.S. poet laureate Robert Pinsky on the same show?

ROBERT DE MICHIELL

writer-turning-performer night and day, Michaels's faith in his charge redeems all those wretched seasons of *Saturday Night Live*, another Michaels production.

Today you can't find a more reliably entertaining hour on late-night TV. O'Brien's monologue is still a work in progress, but at least it's short; frankly, Dave and Jay would be well served telling just four jokes a night.

Nearly all the comedy routines, for which O'Brien and his staff are justly celebrated, debuted in his first few months on the air, such as "Actual Items" (in which all the news is made up) and the deathless parody of futurism that is still called "In the Year 2000" ("Women will give birth in their eighties thanks to an amazing new drug that makes labor last for over 60 years!").

The secret of *Late Night*'s comedy is playing against type. It was O'Brien's innocent charm that got him the job over better-known and edgier comics, and it's that quality that makes him a perfect foil for such characters as Pimpbot 5000, a *Lost in Space* relic that says in a synthesized voice, "Mess-with-any-of-my-hos-and-I'll-cut-you." And when it's time for another set of bogus public-service announcements, count on the soft-spoken Weinberg to get the most outrageous lines. ("Remember, hookers are people too," he said earnestly in one, "so say 'Thank you' when you're done.")

The mischievous Andy Richter, cast as O'Brien's sidekick just days before the show went on the air, has rewritten the job description. He lays patiently in wait during guest segments, waiting to interrupt with brilliantly timed comments.

Over the years O'Brien has transformed his tentative, too-clever-by-half interview style into masterful repartee. He can riff off of seemingly any comment, and make anyone seem smarter and funnier than they really are. And while Leno and Letterman battle to see which can book the cuter child prodigy or the dumbest animal trick, O'Brien uses his spare guest segments to bring on authors and musical acts (Green Day and Jewel had their network TV debuts on the show).

So now, the obvious question: Where to from here? O'Brien has no pathological hidden agenda, as Letterman did before he leaped to CBS. "When I was fifteen or sixteen years old, the things that really excited me were *SCTV*, *Monty Python*, Woody Allen—funny, unusual comedy," O'Brien told me last year. "I love it when people come up to me now and they're talking about something that happened on the show and they can't stop laughing. I'm addicted to that. That's my ambition realized."

Well, isn't that a happy coincidence. Our ambition is to hear Max Weinberg playing on *Late Night* at 12:35 A.M. for years to come. ■

Aaron Barnhart covers television for The Kansas City Star, *writes a column for* Electronic Media, *posts daily to the TV Barn website (www.tvbarn.com), and for five years wrote a weekly Internet 'zine on late-night TV.*

>>>>SUNDAY>>>>8-10 pm>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>10-12 am>>>>>>>>>>

Inside The Actors Studio (Bravo) & Behind The Music (VH1)

Access to New York City's premier acting workshop has become easier since Bravo began showing *Inside The Actors Studio* (8–9) five years ago. It was there that Marlon Brando and Robert De Niro honed their skills and explored Method acting. Developed by host James Lipton, the program gets actors, directors, and writers to discuss everything from their movie roles to the travails of penning compelling screenplays. In the process, the audience picks up tidbits not usually found in that five-minute segment on *Entertainment Tonight*.

Since its debut in August 1997, VH1's *Behind The Music* (9–10) has become one of the most addictive shows on TV. Although close to 70 episodes have aired—Shania Twain, Cher, and TLC (below) being the three most watched—there are essentially just two variations on the theme. Rock Star or Band surmounts incredible obstacles—poverty/disapproving parents/out-of-touch music executives—to hit it big. Or Rock Star or Band experiences wild success, is brought low by drugs/booze/jail/manipulative music executives, only to rise, phoenix-like, back onto the Billboard charts.

Rock & Roll Jeopardy! (VH1) & SportsCenter (ESPN)

Finally, thanks to VH1's *Rock & Roll Jeopardy!* (10:00 and 10:30), people can earn money for knowing that Heather Locklear is married to Bon Jovi's lead guitarist Richie Sambora, and that one-hit wonder Spandau Ballet shares part of its name with a German prison. In this welcome spinoff, the venerable game show narrows its focus for rock-music geeks. It surely won't be long until there's a different *Jeopardy!* for E! or perhaps even for the Game Show Network, where each category will be about other game shows.

The crowded cable landscape is lousy with sports-highlight shows that feature anchors endlessly drumming their "amusing" catchphrases on your cranium. But those staffing the desk on the granddaddy of them all, ESPN's *SportsCenter*, avoid the grating extremes of say, Fox Sports Net's Van Earl Wright. "I think the best kind of humor on these shows is understated, if it works," says Vince Doria, ESPN's news director until being promoted to run ESPN Classic. And ESPN's top team of Dan Patrick and Kenny Mayne pulls it off better than any other tandem.

Contributors: Amy Bernstein, Michael Colton, Kimberly Conniff, Leslie Heilbrunn, Dimitra Kessenides, Elizabeth Lesly Stevens, Lorne Manly, Laura Mazer, Jeff Pooley, and Justin Zaremby

For *This* They Get A Pulitzer?

The *Daily News*'s Apollo Theatre crusade featured shoddy reporting and half-baked conclusions.

BY ROBERT SCHMIDT

THE NEW YORK *DAILY News* lately has been in need of some good news of its own. Firings and defections have roiled its newsroom. Circulation is lower than it was when real estate developer Mort Zuckerman acquired the paper in 1993. Its uninhibited crosstown rival, the *New York Post*, has proven more successful at winning the tabloid buzz war.

But in April 1999, the *Daily News* got some very good news indeed: its series of editorials that investigated and exposed financial shenanigans and mismanagement at Harlem's legendary Apollo Theatre won a Pulitzer Prize.

The paper's interest in the Apollo began in March 1998, when the editorial board toured the theater and found it in sorry shape. The former showcase for Billie Holiday and James Brown had become a shabby hall, dark five nights a week. "We were shaking our heads and saying something is not right here," says *Daily News* editorial writer Jonathan Capehart, who, with his colleague Michael Aronson, went on to pen 17 editorials between April 1998 and July 1999 attacking the management of the landmark.

The *Daily News* did shine a badly needed spotlight on the Apollo's board, which clearly had not been as diligent as it should have been in protecting the theater's interests. But as the *News* hammered away at the story, it ignored or mangled facts that would have made the tale far less spectacular—and less likely to be Pulitzer material. And when *Brill's Content* pressed the Pulitzer-award-winning editorialists on these points, the inquiries were met with equivocation, no comments, and even an attempt to downplay the scope and significance of the series.

Hard times: The Apollo suffered after a powerful Harlem congressman and an old pal struck a "sweetheart deal," the *Daily News* charged.

SUZANNE PLUNKETT/AP

The Apollo tale seemed tailor-made for a tabloid. The *Daily News*'s editorials charged that powerful Democratic New York Congressman Charles Rangel and "media mogul" Percy Sutton had struck a "sweetheart deal" that allowed the two old pals to treat the Apollo as "just a cash cow to be milked." The shocking bottom line for New York taxpayers, according to the *Daily News*: Sutton used the not-for-profit Apollo as a venue in which to tape his *It's Showtime at the Apollo* syndicated television series, but never bothered to pay the theater $4.4 million he owed under a complicated licensing agreement. The *Daily News* also alleged that Rangel, who heads the nonprofit board that runs the theater, had allowed his longtime friend and political ally (Sutton is a Harlem power broker and onetime Manhattan borough president) to get away with it.

The barrage of editorials targeting the two prominent Democrats spurred government authorities (all Republicans maneuvering in an election year) to act. The New York state attorney general filed suit against Apollo board members, and the New York state and city governments suspended funding for the Apollo foundation. For the *Daily News*, the result was newspaperdom's biggest prize—the Pulitzer, with the judges lauding the *News* for "its effective campaign to rescue Harlem's Apollo Theatre from the financial mismanagement that threatened the landmark's survival."

The problem is that the *Daily News*'s "effective campaign" is based on the allegation that Sutton owes the foundation $4.4 million. But, after *Brill's Content* spent considerable time delving into the arcana that surround the deal, it's clear that the *Daily News* seriously overstated the significance of what is, by any logical reading, an error made during the drafting of a voluminous contract.

Sutton's history with the Apollo goes back to 1980, when his company, Inner City Broadcasting Corp., bought

the then-ramshackle theater out of bankruptcy proceedings. By 1991, after millions had been spent restoring the theater to its former glory, the Apollo was still a money loser, and Sutton wanted out. In exchange for $12 million in loan forgiveness from the state and a commercial bank, he turned the Apollo over to the state, which then leased the theater to a not-for-profit foundation headed by Rangel.

Amid that transfer of ownership, Sutton arranged to continue to use the Apollo name and facilities to tape *It's Showtime at the Apollo.* As part of the five-year licensing agreement, signed in 1992, Sutton agreed to pay the Apollo foundation $2,000 for each day the show was taped or 25 percent of the show's net profits, whichever was greater. For four years Sutton paid the foundation the $2,000 per episode (close to $100,000 total) because the show was not profitable. In the fifth year of the contract, Sutton paid $195,000, or 25 percent of the net profits. As the Apollo foundation and Sutton began negotiating a renewal of the deal in 1997, the foundation's controller did something that nobody involved had apparently ever done. He actually read the dense, 30-page licensing agreement that was included in the 700 pages of ownership-transfer documents.

On page 13, the sharp-eyed controller noticed that "net profits," (typically defined as gross revenue minus expenses) were defined as gross revenue. If Sutton were liable for a portion of gross revenue rather than net profits, the controller told the Apollo board's finance committee in November 1997, Sutton owed $4.4 million. The majority of the foundation's board, however, was disinclined to hold Sutton to the erroneous definition of "net profits." Rangel and Sutton, the two signatories to the contract, maintained that the definition of net profits as gross revenue was a mistake made by the lawyers—unfamiliar with television-licensing agreements—who drafted the contract. Rangel and Sutton say it was never their intention to enter into a deal that entitled the Apollo to 25 percent of *Showtime*'s gross. (The foundation is currently suing its law firm, White & Case, for malpractice for its drafting of the contract. The law firm maintains that it did nothing wrong.)

But how did the *Daily News* explain this considerable complexity? On May 12, 1998, the paper editorialized that "Apollo Numbers Don't Lie," noting that "this is a story of impartial, cold numbers that show convincingly that the legendary state-owned theater has not been getting its fair share of revenues." The editorial noted that the agreement "clearly" required that Sutton pay 25 percent of his gross to the Apollo foundation. To interpret the contract, the *Daily News* editorial cited an expert: "The [contract's] language is dense, but the high-powered law firm of Paul, Weiss, whose analysis of the contract was requested by [the Apollo's executive director] said the language means the Apollo is entitled to about 25 cents of every dollar Sutton takes in, not just his profits."

But the Paul, Weiss lawyer whose opinion carried so much weight in the *Daily News* was a young associate admitted to the bar just a year earlier. Furthermore, the associate wrote a May 1998 memo to the foundation's executive director that was receptive to the notion that the definition of "net profits" in the contract was made in error. "To be fair, these two arguments [one being that an honest mistake was made] do have some merit..." the associate's memo says.

Nevertheless, *Daily News* editorial writer Capehart says that despite the Paul, Weiss associate's inexperience, the legal opinion came from someone at a high-powered law firm and that Capehart trusts the analysis.

As for Rangel and Sutton's argument that the license agreement simply contained an error as it defined "net profits," Capehart says he finds that hard to believe. Indeed, the entire editorial board, Capehart says, laughed "in hysterics" when an attorney for the Apollo foundation offered that explanation in an October 1998 meeting. In a subsequent editorial, the *News* mocked their explanation as an "imaginative" excuse. Capehart posits that Rangel, an attorney and the senior Democrat on the House committee that writes complicated tax legislation, and Sutton, also an attorney, certainly would have caught the two sentences that incorrectly defined "net profits." Says Capehart: "It seems to me that if you're negotiating a contract, these are folks who deal with contracts and things like this all the time, I think you would go and make sure that [it is right]."

And the 32-year-old Capehart isn't one to cut someone a break, even if those involved did indeed make an

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DAILY NEWS

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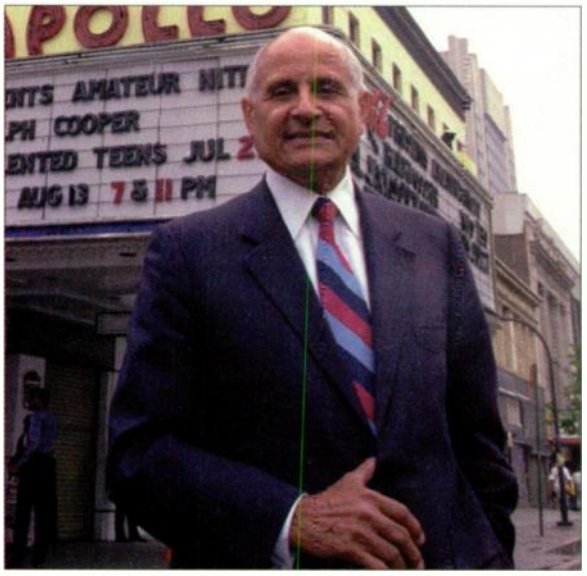
Apollo crew finally faces the music

IN FILING A LAWSUIT yesterday to oust the Apollo Theatre Foundation board of direc[illegible]torney General Dennis Vacco has taken the [illegible] lem landmark.



Too close? Congressman Charles Rangel (top) admits he should have paid more attention to the Apollo, but says that the *News* unfairly painted him and Percy Sutton (bottom) as thieves.

MARTY LEDERHANDLER/AP (RANGEL); DAVID CANTOR/AP (SUTTON)

JOURNALISM AWARDS

NEWS WINS PULITZER

JOURNALISM AWARDS

...from the Daily News' Pulitzer Prize-winning

EDITORIAL WRITERS Jonathan Capehart (L) and Michael Aronson congratulate each other in newsroom yesterday. They were cited for "pulling the plow" on the Apollo editorials that won top Pulitzer honors.

Eyes on the prize: The *News* celebrates its win.

honest mistake. Even if all this was caused by an inadvertent drafting error, Capehart says, the foundation should have capitalized on Sutton's mistake and claimed the money. After all, he reasons, any mistake was in the favor of the Apollo, which desperately needed any money it could get.

What's more, Capehart and his colleague Aronson omitted information that showed Sutton gave the Apollo far more compensation than the editorials claimed. All told, the *Daily News* ignored nearly $1 million in rent and other consideration Sutton says he has made to the Apollo foundation since 1992.

Capehart says he did not report on the bulk of Sutton's additional payments because Sutton refused to be interviewed. Sutton was asked to comment as the first editorial was being prepared in April 1998, but did not respond. Sutton says he was never again approached for comment, though the paper attacked him on its editorial page 16 more times over the next 15 months. *Daily News* editorial page editor Michael Goodwin disputes that Sutton was never again approached for comment, but declines to elaborate on such efforts. However, the license agreement, to which the *News* had access, clearly states that Sutton pays "market rate" additional rent (about $60,000 last year) for his use of the theater.

Further, the 77-year-old Sutton was hardly the "media mogul" that Aronson and Capehart described. Besides *Showtime*, his other media assets are seven radio stations and part of the cable system that serves the New York City borough of Queens. Most public companies don't operate at anywhere near a 25 percent profit margin, and it's hard to believe that Sutton would have agreed to a deal that handed the Apollo 25 percent of his gross. And according to Nielsen Media Research, Sutton's *Showtime at the Apollo* wasn't, as the *Daily News* asserted, more successful than *Baywatch* and "tied for third place among syndicated shows nationwide." Actually, *Showtime* ranks around 90th place in the Nielsen ratings for syndicated shows. Aronson, whom Capehart says did this reporting, did not respond to two calls and one letter requesting comment.

Overall, Capehart defends the editorials: "I stand by our contention that, if anything, the Apollo Theatre has been robbed of its potential. That's what [the series] was all about."

Really? Capehart is being a bit more modest here describing the accomplishments of his series than the *Daily News* was in its own pages the day after it won the Pulitzer: "The *News* won the prize for fact-packed editorials that exposed mismanagement at the Apollo—and took to task powerful politicians including Harlem Rep. Charles Rangel."

To the *News*'s credit, even Rangel admits that he did not give the theater enough attention and that somebody should have closely reviewed Sutton's contract. And the paper's campaign against the chummy Apollo deal drove up the price Sutton had to pay to renew his licensing agreement to $1.6 million for this year alone. But Rangel and Sutton complain they have been unfairly tarred by the *News*'s campaign. They say that the paper's facts were just plain wrong when they were painted as thieves who stole $4.4 million. Laments Rangel: "The truth of the matter is there is not $4 million [owed], there is no sweetheart contract, and they got a Pulitzer for it."

While the Pulitzer judges consider the comments of the subjects of stories as they deliberate, the Pulitzer organization doesn't alert story subjects when a story is up for the prize. Rangel and Sutton weren't aware that the *Daily News* editorials were under consideration for a Pulitzer, and therefore didn't lodge a timely complaint that could possibly have affected the outcome. Rangel complained to the president of Columbia University, which administers the Pulitzers, after the *Daily News* had already won the prize.

Meanwhile, the *Daily News*'s campaign to "save" the Apollo, which so impressed the Pulitzer board, may well have hurt the Apollo more than it has helped. Rangel and Sutton are busy trying to clear their names in impending court battles, and the theater remains in limbo—with its state and city money frozen, a nascent fund-raising campaign stalled, and a board of directors paralyzed by legal action. Rangel, who concedes he has not been the most hands-on chairman, refuses to step down from the position under a cloud. Sutton says that he won't pay any money to the theater unless an audit finds his company made an accounting mistake.

At this point, Sutton actually relishes the prospect of having to relive all this in court. The New York state attorney general's suit against the Apollo foundation is scheduled to go to trial this fall, and the Apollo foundation's malpractice suit against its law firm is awaiting a judge's ruling on the firm's motion to dismiss. "To me," Sutton says, "now is an opportunity to [tell my side] in court, instead of being a victim that everybody can shoot at." ■

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Six years after U.S. soldiers were terrorized in the bloody streets of Somalia, Mark Bowden tells their story.

DRAWING THE BATTLE LINES

BY MICHAEL FREEDMAN

BY THE TIME MARK BOWDEN BEGAN researching the Battle of Mogadishu—the 1993 conflict in Somalia that left 18 American soldiers dead and more than 70 wounded—it was a hazy memory in the minds of most Americans. The only lingering image of that overnight battle in a faraway land was of jeering Somalis dragging the corpse of an American soldier through the streets of Mogadishu.

But in the spring of 1996, Bowden, a 20-year veteran of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the author of two nonfiction books—1989's *Doctor Dealer* examined the rise and fall of a dentist convicted of trafficking cocaine, and 1994's *Bringing the Heat* chronicled the Philadelphia Eagles' 1992 season—was assigned to write a profile of President Bill Clinton. Bowden remembered reading newspaper stories about Somalia and the president's visits with surviving soldiers and their families. Intrigued, Bowden scheduled an interview with James Smith, a retired army captain from New Jersey who had lost a leg in Vietnam and then his eldest son, Jamie, in Somalia. Smith met with the president after his son's death and testified before Congress in 1994 about the action in Somalia, but two years later he still did not understand how his son, a member of the elite Army Rangers, could have bled to death on the streets of a war-torn nation on the western edge of the Indian Ocean.

Bowden wondered too. And after countless miles logged on trips to Somalia, U.S. military bases, and soldiers' homes, Bowden, now 48, wrote a 31-part series for the *Inquirer*, which served as something of a first draft for his best-selling book, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, a relentlessly detailed moment-by-moment account of the Battle of Mogadishu as seen through the eyes of the men who lived it.

The battle, which was expected to last about an hour, began the afternoon of October 3, 1993, when an elite group of American soldiers were dropped by helicopter into Mogadishu, with the intention of capturing two top lieutenants of a powerful Somali warlord. But when Somalis shot down two American helicopters, the soldiers were suddenly stranded, trapped overnight in hostile territory. Amid the dozens of subplots and character sketches braided through this story, Bowden introduces readers to heroes like Tim Wilkinson, an Air Force medic who "decided to ditch a tamer career as an electrical engineer for something to make his heart pump faster" and found it in the streets of Mogadishu as he "ran, plowing across the wide road, head down as the volume of fire suddenly surged" to tend to a fallen soldier.

Conscious of not turning *Black Hawk Down* into the sort of rah-rah military book in which battles are glamorous and the United States always wins, Bowden is unflinching in his description of war's bloody realities. He offers, for instance, Peter Squeglia, a 25-year-old company armorer from Newport, Rhode Island, who watched a buddy get shot in the head and get part of his finger blown off before taping "the mangled flesh" back on with a piece of duct tape. "I told Mark if you want to tell the story, you have to tell the good, the bad, and the ugly," the elder Smith says. "And I think he told a real good story of regular people who were thrown into a firefight and stood tall."

Bowden's reconstruction of the battle is made all the more remarkable by the fact that he began with virtually no sources and had little knowledge of the military or understanding of Somalia beyond what he had read in the newspaper. For the first month of research, Bowden admits, he didn't even know what he was going to do with the information he had compiled. "I just knew it was a great story," he says, "and, ideally, I thought I would be able to tell it in a compelling way. It took a while to convince myself that I could do it."

It took even longer to convince his editors. At the *Inquirer*, Pennsylvania's largest daily newspaper, editors didn't initially see the value in spending time and resources to write about a battle that had taken place three years earlier. But once the series got started, the response was overwhelming. So many people logged on to the *Inquirer*'s website to read each day's installment that the computer system actually crashed several times. "It just couldn't handle traffic of this magnitude," said David Zucchino, Bowden's editor. The newsprint version, which ran in the *Inquirer* as well as about a half-dozen other Knight Ridder papers throughout the country, was successful as well. "Because the action and the story was so strong," Zucchino says, "I knew it would carry over from one day to the next, and hopefully leave the reader begging for more."

Nonetheless, the series' success was hardly a guarantee that New York City publishing houses would want to turn it into a book. In fact, it was initially rejected by every major publisher in New York before being picked up by Atlantic Monthly Press, which published *Black Hawk Down* in March. Bowden is now working on a screenplay based on the book for Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

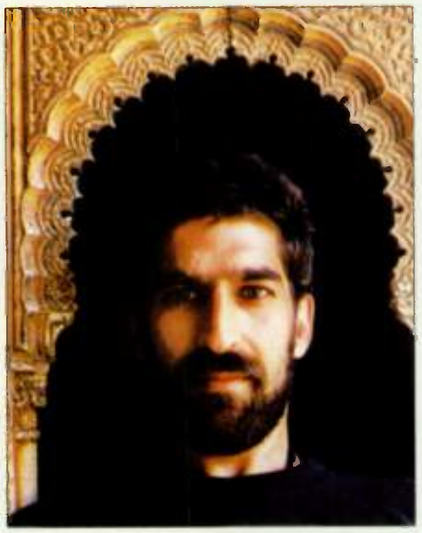
Part of the reason for the book's resonance—even so many years after the fact—is that Americans never realized the extent of the combat, says Bowden. "Even though the bare outline had been reported," he notes, "the full horror of that experience and power of that experience hadn't been communicated anywhere." Until now. ■

SUSAN BIDDLE/THE WASHINGTON POST

Mark Bowden knew little about the Battle of Mogadishu before he began writing the bestseller *Black Hawk Down*, a moment-by-moment account of one of the U.S. military's most violent firefights since Vietnam. Still, he knew it was a story he wanted to tell. "A story of battle is one of the most compelling stories that anyone will ever read," he says.

Burtman Does Hard Time

BY MATTHEW REED BAKER



Bob Burtman's forte is challenging powerful institutions and exposing their secrets.

ROY CRINER HAS AN IQ of about 70 and is serving a 99-year prison sentence for raping a 16-year-old girl, who in 1986 was raped and then stabbed to death with what may have been a screwdriver. But according to "Hard Time," a September 1998 feature by Bob Burtman of the weekly *Houston Press*, Criner could very well be an innocent man.

Four years after Criner was arrested, the prosecution still could not produce enough physical evidence to prove he killed the girl, so the murder charge was dropped, and Criner was convicted only of aggravated sexual assault. Burtman's interest in the case was piqued by the DNA test that Criner took 11 years after the rape—the test yielded a negative result, so a state district judge recommended Criner be given a new trial. But in May 1998, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals denied the recommendation, arguing that "overwhelming, direct evidence" fingered Criner.

Based on official records and more than two dozen interviews, Burtman determined that the quality of that evidence actually did *not* overwhelm significant reasonable doubts about Criner's guilt. No fingerprints or hairs linked the victim to Criner, and the witnesses' testimonies were inconsistent. Burtman also revealed that critical information that might have helped Criner was never released: a cigarette butt was found at the crime scene (Criner didn't smoke), and the dirty screwdriver found in Criner's truck had been tested and showed no traces of blood. Lead prosecutor David Walker admitted that the evidence against Criner was not "overwhelming," and the district attorney is now seeking DNA samples from other potential suspects.

In April, "Hard Time" earned Burtman the Press Club of Houston's award for investigative reporting. "I liked what the judges had to say, that there is no more important story that a journalist can do, which is that of an innocent man in prison [who] has been railroaded by the state," Burtman says. "To me, it really is one of the more important things that I have done." Walker credits Burtman with fair reporting and "a largely objective approach," despite starting from the premise of questioning Criner's conviction. "But maybe that's just the way the press is," Walker says, "and maybe that's the way it ought to be."

Burtman, 43, has made a career of questioning authoritative and revered institutions in the country's fourth-largest city. He has detailed the financial mismanagement of the NBA's Houston Rockets, and his exposure of corruption in the city's public works department led to reform efforts. Burtman has also written about how local residents are affected by big interests, whether it's the machinations behind a new publicly funded baseball stadium for the Houston Astros or the petrochemical industry's whitewashing of environmental crises. Describing his journalistic mission, he says he likes to quote satirical bluesman Reverend Billy C. Wirtz: "Sacred cows make the tastiest burgers." ■

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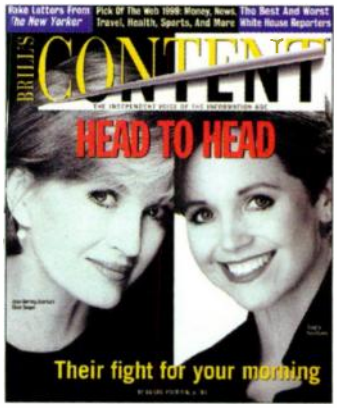

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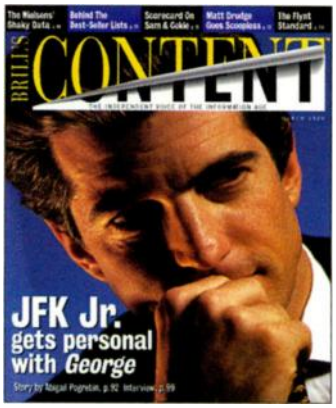

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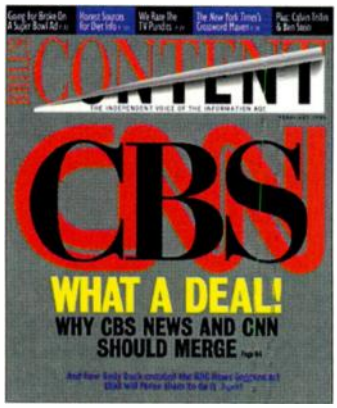

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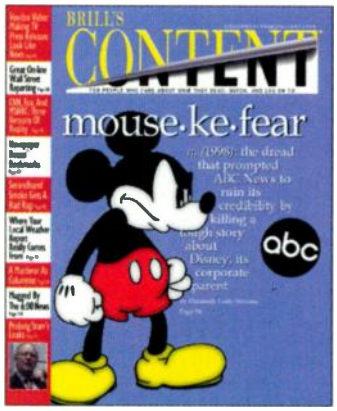

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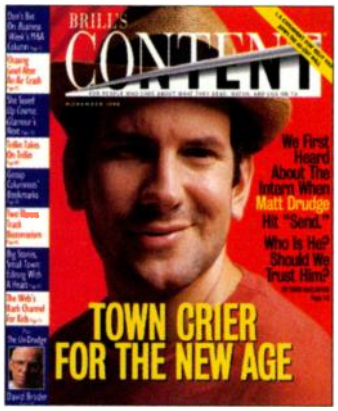

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Can Hillary Win Them Over?

To prevail in her likely U.S. Senate race, Hillary Clinton will have to tangle with the New York press. We identify her most daunting obstacles. • BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

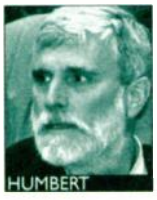
SOME DESCRIBE IT AS A bloodthirsty beast. Others say it has been defanged by politicians such as New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Either way, the New York press is a multiheaded animal that Hillary Clinton, who is considering a run for the U.S. Senate in the Empire State, will need to feed—or at least understand, because it will be filtering her message for voters and setting the tone for the national press.

We decided to help by identifying the ten most influential elements of the state's political Fourth Estate. We asked 53 reporters, editors, politicians, and political advisers familiar with these parts: Whom does Clinton have to worry about, court, or at least hope to sway? Who can make the difference?

Many cautioned that in this cyber age, in which anyone can break a scoop that snowballs, the establishment press will not necessarily have the greatest impact. But there is still a strong consensus as to whom in the New York media really matters when it comes to shaping the debate and influencing voters. We've ventured some tips as to how to handle them.

1. MARC HUMBERT

REPORTER, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS ALBANY BUREAU


HUMBERT

Perhaps the single most important New York reporter covering the campaign, Marc Humbert defies Big Apple stereotypes. In fact, he doesn't even work in the city. The dean of the Albany press corps, he has been happily ensconced in the statehouse for 19 years. His articles appear in up to 55 newspapers around the state—in places like Rochester, Binghamton, and Syracuse. "Humbert is very important," says Harold Ickes, Mrs. Clinton's campaign guru. "Everybody tells me he basically drives much of the upstate press coverage." That's critical for Clinton, who will need to turn the conservative tide in the upstate Republican strongholds if she is to win.

"Humbert generally views himself as a grizzled, know-it-all kind of guy," says one Democratic media adviser. "You've got to be careful with him, because he's pretty smart and he's one of these guys that some people coming into town could underestimate."

Above all, Humbert is viewed as evenhanded. Mario Cuomo says that when he was governor, he trusted Humbert more than any newspaper. "AP is the closest to fair that you can get," Cuomo says. "They don't have an agenda—they tell the story straight."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:
Offer Humbert better morsels than you do his colleagues, so he sees that you trust him to be responsible. The straight-shooting character of both Humbert and his news organization means they're more invested in being accurate than acrid.

2. *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

A. HOWELL RAINES

EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

The *Times*'s endorsement is a no-win situation for Clinton: if she gets the nod, it's a big ho-hum—just what everyone expects. But if Giuliani, the most likely Republican candidate, gets the endorsement, says Fredric Dicker, who covers politics for the *New York Post*, "it signals to me that she's probably going to lose. It would suggest that she had so abysmally failed in making her case that even the *Times* couldn't bring itself to endorse her."


RAINES

The final decision will be made by publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr., but steering *Times* opinion up till that point will be editorial page editor Howell Raines. "Nobody," says former *New York Post* editor Jerry Nachman, "has been as tough on the Clintons as Howell Raines....I think [the *Times* is] going to be in a dilemma because they hate Rudy, but they like the job he's done; and they're much more politically kindred to Hillary, but are horrified at what she and her husband have done."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:
Reporters joke that Clinton should go fly-fishing with Howell Raines. They're only partially kidding. Angling is Raines's favorite pastime, and in his book *Fly Fishing through the Midlife Crisis*, he describes seeing a different President George Bush when he fished with him. "He was such a genial and considerate host," Raines wrote, "that I found it hard to square that behavior with his lackadaisical performance and meanspirited policies." So get a rod and make an afternoon of it.

B. ADAM NAGOURNEY

POLITICAL REPORTER

This hustler with a Cheshire smile

AP (HUMBERT); JANE STANTON HITCHCOCK, COURTESY OF MORROW BOOKS (RAINES)


NAGOURNEY

is addicted to the campaign trail, and his observations can sting. "He sneaks things into his articles that end up making a big difference," says former presidential adviser George Stephanopoulos. Ruth Messinger got a taste of Nagourney's style when she ran for mayor of New York in 1997. In one story, for instance, Nagourney focused on her visit to a Bronx factory, a trip intended to dramatize the city's high unemployment rate under Giuliani. But the company president hosting the event thanked Giuliani for helping to keep his factory from relocating. Messinger "looked on wanly," Nagourney wrote. "For Ms. Messinger, it was the latest in a series of mishaps..."

"He comes across to me as wanting to be controversial," says Bill Lynch, who worked for David Dinkins when Dinkins was mayor of New York. "And that doesn't mean he's not thorough or fair in his reporting. But he looks for an edge." Agrees Nagourney: "I totally believe in pushing the envelope."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Read the book Nagourney just coauthored, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America*. It'll give you a primer on gay politics and an excuse to engage him on a subject he cares about.

C. GAIL COLLINS

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER/ POLITICAL COLUMNIST

If the *Times* isn't considered a laugh a minute, many single out Collins for finding the carnival in a campaign. Collins has distinguished herself in short, signed pieces on the editorial page, and has been given a regular column for the duration of campaign 2000.


COLLINS

She showed her touch recently in lampooning Vice-President Al Gore for "trying to make up in decibels what he lacks in spontaneity." Noted Collins, "This is our fault. We have been carping about how boring Al Gore is, and the poor man is all but howling at the moon in an effort to sound more compelling. We are being forced to watch him go through an enormous effort to look effortless....Voters are not going to elect a President who makes them feel like nervous parents at the second-grade class play."

Collins could hit on a quirk or characterization that people remember, says Joe Conason, a columnist for the weekly *New York Observer*. "She could make something stick if she says it the right way."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Collins cares about women's issues, a natural topic for you. But don't waste time inviting her to be your seatmate on the campaign bus. "I've never been into access myself in a big way," says Collins. "I think showing up for stuff and watching them when they're doing things is more important than whether they'll hang out with you."

3. FREDRIC DICKER

STATE EDITOR/COLUMNIST, *NEW YORK POST*

Even liberal consultants concede that Dicker can't be dismissed as a mouthpiece for notoriously conservative *Post* owner Rupert Murdoch. "Fred's a real reporter," says one who has advised the nascent Hillary Clinton camp. "Fred can also whack the Republicans to death too." But Dicker's conservative bent and sources make him "trouble" for the first lady, says a Democratic consultant. Former governor Cuomo is still licking his wounds. Dicker, says Cuomo, "*killed* me—*killed* me—and I think many times unfairly, and I said so. I like him."


DICKER

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Ask Dicker to dinner. He expects you to be icy and elitist, so a little warmth might disarm him. Dicker agrees that Clinton "should be seeking a lot of journalists out." Before you sit down, however, you might want to prepare an answer to one of the questions he has ready: "Mrs. Clinton, if upstate New York was a separate state, we'd be 49th in the nation in job growth. Why is that?"

4. DON IMUS

RADIO PERSONALITY, WFAN

Just mention the name Hillary, and Don Imus starts brandishing his cleaver at the first couple. "Don't they *get* this?" he asks. "We are *sick* of them! Even those of us who *voted* for them. We hate them; we want them to go away." Imus, who labels Mrs. Clinton "a horrid human being," reaches 10 million listeners nationwide. Therefore, no matter how much abuse he heaps on her, she has to figure out a way to deal with him.


IMUS

Out of the cocoon? Hillary Clinton on the campaign stump.

SANDY GEIS, NYT (NAGOURNEY); TONY CENICOLA (COLLINS); COURTESY NEW YORK POST (DICKER); GEORGE HOLZ/OUTLINE (IMUS); AP (CLINTON)

"Imus will be very important," says GOP consultant Jay Severin, because "you're talking about a political audience rich and important beyond most people's appreciation. Those are largely suburban, largely independent, highly educated people who vote."

"If I were a candidate," says Imus, "I would just ignore me....We're just going to make fun of them anyway."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Forget what Imus says—appear on his show. It's easy for him to pummel you if you're an abstraction, but if you're sitting in front of him, he'll either be disarmed that you had the gumption to show up, or else attack and perhaps earn you a bit of sympathy.

5. MARCIA KRAMER

CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT, WCBS-TV

Shark. Piranha. Sociopath. Just some of the tender words evoked when you ask about WCBS-TV's Marcia Kramer, who is both a tenacious reporter and the tough host of her own Sunday morning show. Hats get tipped to the elder statesman, Gabe Pressman, of WNBC, who set the standard for gritty local TV political reporting, but Kramer is more feared. "Marcia is the one that both campaigns have to be careful of," says Dominic Carter, who reports for New York 1 News, the all-news cable channel. "She will sit there and be professional and smile in your face, and the daggers will be coming so fast, you don't even realize what happened until it happens and then it's major news."


KRAMER

Kramer's shining moment came during the 1992 campaign, when she formulated a question that Bill Clinton couldn't duck regarding his marijuana use. It elicited the infamous response "I didn't inhale"—which will undoubtedly dog him forever.

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Despite your husband's stumble on Kramer's show, you should go on it. If you can parry her jabs, viewers will be impressed.

6. LONNIE ISABEL

NATIONAL EDITOR, *NEWSDAY*

You might not expect to find a liberal paper in a relatively conservative area. But that describes Long Island's *Newsday*. It has a long-standing reputation for strong reporting in the educated Nassau and Suffolk counties—a prime battleground for a Clinton-Giuliani contest. Ickes argues that *Newsday* should be high on a list of press that matters: "The suburban vote will be a very critical factor. So it's a very important piece."


ISABEL

No single person was identified by those we spoke to as instrumental, but Lonnie Isabel will be overseeing the paper's coverage, and is respected for his bedrock news values.

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Newsday's editorials so far have been leery of your carpetbagger status. They want to know that you "can become an advocate for New York's interests." So here are some of what *Newsday* considers Long Island's: Nassau County's government needs a financial bailout, the region needs a bridge to Connecticut to facilitate commerce, and traffic-choked Long Island still lacks a good bus system.

7. MORTIMER ZUCKERMAN

CHAIRMAN, COPUBLISHER, *DAILY NEWS*

This real-estate billionaire is a fixture on the New York social circuit, a regular on *The McLaughlin Group*, and even a cameo performer in the occasional major motion picture. And, oh yes, he publishes *U.S. News & World Report* and the New York *Daily News*, where he is responsible for the paper's editorial voice and endorsement.


ZUCKERMAN

"I don't know what Zuckerman's politics are going to be in 2000," says *Village Voice* senior editor Wayne Barrett, "because he's always been a Bill Clinton man and he's always been a Rudy Giuliani man, and he has business deals with both....He has a half-billion dollars worth of federal leases. He has two new sites in Times Square that he needs city support for."

That's "preposterous," responds Zuckerman. "My business interests don't affect my role in journalism." He points out that the *News* didn't endorse then-Mayor David Dinkins in 1993, even though Dinkins had the discretion to impose a deadline on a real-estate deal that could have forced Zuckerman to make a huge payment to the city.

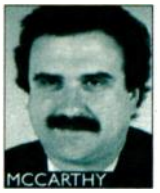
ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Air-kiss the *Post*, but embrace the *News*. No matter how pleasant you find dinner with Dicker, his boss will never be a fan. You have a much better shot at charming Zuckerman.

8. BOB McCARTHY

REPORTER, *THE BUFFALO NEWS*

"The guy out of Buffalo is pretty important for Democrats," says Ickes. That's how many people refer to McCarthy—"the guy out of Buffalo," probably because he's known more for his venue than for his byline. But as many as 350,000 people will be reading his campaign articles, dwarfing the audience for any other upstate publication. "They are *the* newspaper in western New York," says Democratic consultant Hank Sheinkopf, referring to the *Buffalo News*.


MCCARTHY

After 17 years at the paper, McCarthy has distinguished himself by being solid, savvy—and somewhat indistinguishable. "He's one of those guys that comes into New York City and no one knows he's here," says one media strategist. "Everybody thinks he's up in Buffalo, and he's actually chasing a story down here."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

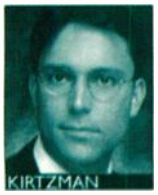
Take a page from Senator Charles Schumer's playbook; he made relaxed visits to McCarthy's newsroom before and during his campaign. "I don't care what you say," says McCarthy, "it never hurts to have people like you, or have people think you're a nice person, a regular Joe."

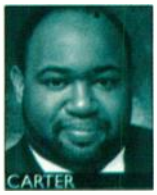
9. NY1

ANDREW KIRTZMAN
DOMINIC CARTER

SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTERS

The CNN of New York City is the all-news cable channel, NY1. Despite its small audience, its fans are the people who shape a race: the press, the pundits, the politicians. The bespectacled Andrew Kirtzman and the bearish Dominic Carter alternate as hosts of the nightly *Inside City Hall*, on which they round up the day's political news and interview the players.


KIRTZMAN


CARTER

Says the *Times*'s Nagourney: "I have a television on my desk now, which I did—God's honest—specifically because of NY1."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

Kirtzman and Carter are considered thorough and tough, but each has a vulnerability. Kirtzman is writing a book on Giuliani, and may feel he should give you more airtime so that there's no perception that he's focused on one candidate. (Obviously he's got a hotter book if the mayor triumphs.)

Carter's off-screen drama is his tense history with the mayor, who once accused him of "showing no decency" when Carter probed reports about the shakiness of the mayor's marriage. The good news is that your relationship with Carter has to be an improvement over the mayor's; the bad news is that Carter doesn't shy away from asking about dicey marriages.

10. WAYNE BARRETT

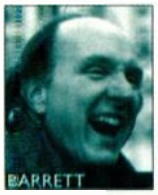
SENIOR EDITOR/REPORTER, *VILLAGE VOICE*

MICHAEL TOMASKY

COLUMNIST, *NEW YORK* MAGAZINE

We called this one a tie because these two are both described as trenchant, but opinion is split as to whose copy will affect the campaign. Barrett has been muckraking at the *Voice* for two decades. Tomasky covered politics there before inheriting the political column at *New York*.

Barrett is an undisguised liberal known for compulsive digging that can unearth damaging land mines. Most recently, he deflated then-U.S. Senator Alfonse D'Amato's main campaign attack against then-Congressman Charles Schumer—the fact that Schumer missed 110 votes in the House of Representatives because he was campaigning for the Senate. Barrett checked out D'Amato's attendance record when he was a Nassau County official 19 years ago and found it was even more derelict: D'Amato had missed 966 votes while running for the Senate.


BARRETT


TOMASKY

Tomasky is perceived as less partisan, although he did appear as master of ceremonies at an anti-impeachment rally last year. In one June column he posited that Elmira, New York, "has become the metaphor for everything Hillary Clinton doesn't know about New York" because, after cheerily volunteering that she'd been there, it turned out her family only drove through on a car trip 40 years ago.

One adviser to Clinton thinks Tomasky will be influential: "Tomasky is given great credence by the cognoscenti, the insiders." But some say his columns lack teeth. "He doesn't hurt anybody," says *Post* columnist Jack Newfield. "He doesn't punch hard."

ADVICE TO CLINTON:

If there's anything you're hiding, mail it to Barrett now and save yourself the suspense.

As far as Tomasky's concerned, he says he'd be happy to share a cup of joe—dutch treat. "The cup of coffee isn't going to buy you off or anything like that," says Tomasky, "but it lets you know that [the candidate is] aware that you're out there and that you have some kind of function in this circus."

OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE IMPORTANT media outlets missing from this list. The tabloid gossip columns will be a seeding ground for stories that take root, and *The New York Observer*—despite a rarefied Upper East Side audience that limits its reach—has formidable reporters in Andrea Bernstein and Tish Durkin, as well as a connected Clinton loyalist in columnist Conason. And the Gannett News Service's Albany bureau matters because it feeds papers throughout the state, including in Westchester County, another decisive suburban battleground. Also doing their part will be the ethnic papers, such as *The Jewish Week*, which broke the story D'Amato couldn't escape—the time he called Schumer a *putzhead*, a Yiddish slur. The Jewish press will also be paying a lot of attention to Clinton's position on Palestine since her controversial suggestion that it should have its own state. In fact, Clinton's biggest headlines on her first New York campaign swing in July came after *The Forward*, a Jewish weekly, revealed that Clinton had described Jerusalem as the "eternal" capital of Israel (a position at odds with her husband's). That, in turn, inspired headlines such as "HILLARY'S CHUTZPAH," in the *New York Post* (whose headline writers deserve their own mention as a threat to Clinton's candidacy).

Most important, Clinton has been shielded by intermediaries during her White House days. Sure, the press has been tough, but she hasn't had to spar with reporters on a daily basis. She has been able to cherry-pick her interviews. "Hillary's been dealing with softball throwers and puffball lobbers," argues ex–*New York Post* editor Nachman, "while Rudy's been dealing with people who stick pins in his likeness at night. So I give the big edge to Rudy here."

The New York media have always favored pols willing to enter the fray and trade shots with them (see sidebar, page 116). They're likely to chomp at the bit if Clinton tries to keep them restrained behind a rope line. Of course, no matter what she does, New York press outlets will still be jostling for scoops. But, says Nachman, "I think the single determining factor of whether she runs and how well she does will be the New York city and state press corps: Is she willing to take it on and will she survive it?" ■

J. BRADY, COURTESY NY1 (KIRTZMAN); COURTESY NY1 (CARTER); CATHERINE DODGE SMITH (BARRETT); PETE KUHNS (TOMASKY)

Let The Engagement Begin

BY BRIDGET SAMBURG

Primed for battle: Hillary Clinton takes on Arkansas gubernatorial challenger Tom McRae in 1990 after McRae called a press conference to criticize then-Governor Bill Clinton, who was out of town.

NEW YORK REPORTERS MAY have been shocked that Hillary Clinton's staffers roped them off like cattle during one of her first unofficial U.S. Senate campaign events, but the Arkansas press wasn't the least bit surprised. "She always had a desire to be isolated from rigorous inspection," recalls Max Brantley, editor of the weekly *Arkansas Times*.

But Brantley and 12 other Arkansas journalists say there is another side to Hillary Clinton, one that hasn't been visible during her years inside the protective cocoon of the White House: If she decides to remove that shield and engage journalists one on one—something the New York press would love to see—she is more than qualified to do so. Even during her Arkansas days, they say, Clinton resented press scrutiny. But on occasion, she shed her protective dome and demonstrated she could handle even the toughest media hounds.

Consider this example from May 1990. Then-Governor Bill Clinton was being challenged by Republican candidate Tom McRae, who regularly criticized the incumbent for spending too much time traveling out of state gearing up for what became a presidential run. Knowing that the governor was out of town, McRae called a press conference in the rotunda of the state Capitol to berate him. "Since the governor will not debate me," McRae began, "we are giving our own answers."

Before he was able to continue, Hillary Clinton appeared from out of nowhere. "Do you really want an answer, Tom?" she hectored McRae. "Do you really want a response from Bill when you know he is in Washington doing work for the state? That sounds a bit like a stunt to me." McRae was stunned, recall reporters who were present. She then quoted reports, released by a foundation McRae had once headed, that hailed her husband's work as governor.

McRae's dramatic press conference fizzled and he was forced to admit that the governor had made significant accomplishments for the state. "Do you think it was appropriate for you to come out here and heckle him?" *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* columnist John Brummett says he later asked Hillary Clinton. "I didn't give up my rights to free speech because I'm first lady," she snapped back. (Mrs. Clinton declined to comment for this article.)

Hillary Clinton's dance with the Arkansas media was a successful—but cautious—one. "It was clear long ago that she courted the press like it was a rattlesnake," says Brantley. And the biggest snake of them all was John Robert Starr, arguably the most influential columnist in Arkansas. Now writing for the *Democrat-Gazette*, Starr has been described as bumptious and arrogant. (Starr did not return multiple phone calls and a letter seeking comment.) "He's kind of like an Arkansas version of [*New York Times* columnist William] Safire," says fellow *Democrat-Gazette* columnist Gene Lyons. And, Lyons says, "they needed him if they wanted to get anything done. He was very influential with the swing vote—with the blue-collar, white-collar, middle-class voters."

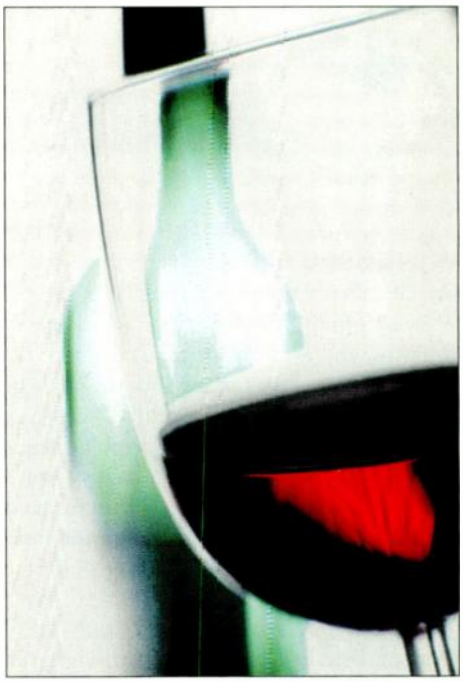
It was Hillary Clinton who was put in charge of courting Starr, appeasing him, and taking him to lunch every two weeks or so. "I'm sure she gritted her teeth every moment," Lyons laughs. "She did that for years." Starr, who Lyons says is "absurdly influenced by flattery," was not a fan of Bill Clinton but took to the governor's wife. "We spent an hour a day on the phone keeping our butts out of trouble with [Starr]," says one woman who worked closely with the Clintons. "We had to have him and that was that."

The flattery worked. "He became one of her biggest allies and supporters," says Lyons. Things quickly turned after Bill Clinton decided to run for president and his wife no longer had the hours to invest in Starr. After that, his columns began using terms such as "the Great Satan" and "loonie" when describing Mr. and Mrs. Clinton, respectively. "I hate to think this woman," he wrote last year, "for whom I once had great respect, can be that stupid."

Certainly, with the giant swarm of media covering Hillary Clinton's expected Senate run, New York reporters shouldn't expect to be wined and dined the way Starr was. But should she decide to offer the New York press the kind of aggressive engagement they crave, the evidence suggests she'll be able to spar with the toughest among them. ■

LARRY TRUSSELL

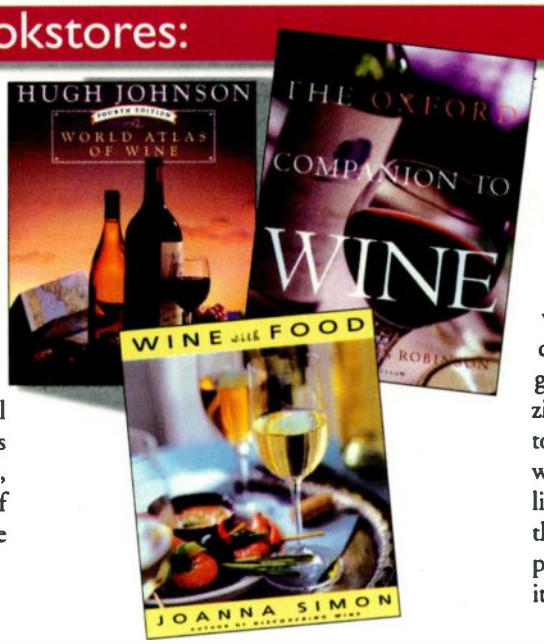
Through The Grapevine



Whether it's a chardonnay, cabernet, or Beaujolais that tempts your palate, here's where you'll find some of the best information about the pleasures of wine.

● BY DIMITRA KESSENIDES

in the bookstores:



THE OXFORD COMPANION TO WINE

edited by Jancis Robinson (Oxford University Press, $60) This A-Z guide covers all aspects of wine, from vine density to bottling. Jancis Robinson, a noted writer whose columns and stories have appeared in the *Financial Times* and *Decanter*, offers colorful photographs, maps of wine regions, diagrams that explain various wine-making processes, and much more. Robert Parker, publisher of *The Wine Advocate* newsletter, calls this "the most encyclopedic" book available.

WINE WITH FOOD

by Joanna Simon (Simon & Schuster, $25) Is white wine the only option when it comes to fish and chicken dishes? Not anymore, writes British wine expert Joanna Simon. In this 155-page volume, Simon presents more than 100 wine-and-food pairings, along with details about the flavors, aromas, and textures that help determine which wines complement which meals. There are chapters on how to serve certain wines and on "World Class Combinations," as well as an easy-to-use guide for when you need to make a snap decision.

THE WORLD ATLAS OF WINE

by Hugh Johnson (Simon & Schuster, $50) The most impressive feature in expert Hugh Johnson's book is the vast collection of colorful, detailed maps of the wine-producing regions of the world, from Bordeaux in France to the Peloponnese in Greece. Wine labels and regional histories accompany the maps, and an illustrated calendar that depicts a typical year in the life of a vintner is a lovely standout.

VINEYARD TALES: REFLECTIONS ON WINE

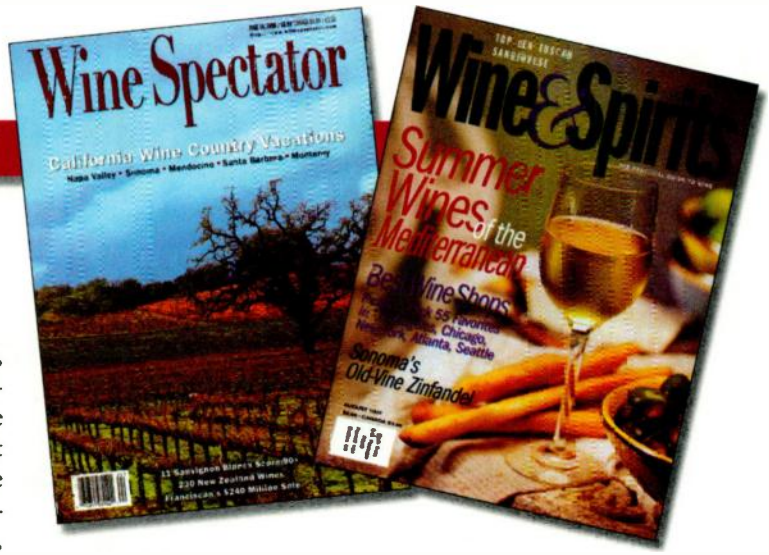
by Gerald Asher (Chronicle Books, $22.95) A collection of stories about vineyards and vintners based on Asher's travels to hundreds of wineries. Many of these lively, elegant tales first appeared in *Gourmet* magazine, for which Asher has served as wine editor for 24 years. "He's the guru of wine writers," says *Wine & Spirits* editor and publisher Joshua Greene of Asher. "[This book] is the best kind of wine writing. It's about the places and the people who are making it, and it gives you a view of wine that's very local."

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD COMPLETE WINE COURSE

by Kevin Zraly (Sterling Publishing, $24.95) Renowned wine-tasting instructor Kevin Zraly has been teaching classes at New York's Windows on the World restaurant for 23 years, and he's gathered up his expertise for this instructive, no-nonsense book. "He's got a wonderfully dry sense of humor," says wine writer and radio commentator Paul Pacult. "He takes on the basics of wine, right from ground zero."

LAURENCE DUTTON/TONY STONE IMAGES

in the magazines:



WINE SPECTATOR

(M. Shanken Communications, Inc., $3.95)

A lavish bimonthly magazine, *Wine Spectator* offers feature stories, columns, and even gossip about the wine world. "It's a lifestyle publication that really translates into the whole joie de vivre that the wine experience should mean to people," says Michael Yurch Jr., president of New York wine merchant Sherry-Lehmann, Inc. While every issue is filled with a variety of information about wines, it's the features—a recent comparison between European and American wine tasters, for example—that stand out, says wine expert Robert Parker.

DECANTER

(IPC Magazines Ltd., $6.75)

One of Britain's premier wine magazines (also available in the United States), *Decanter* is geared to a sophisticated audience. The primary emphasis is on European wines, says John Voros of New York wine merchant Morrell & Company. "It's very knowledgeable about esoteric, wonderful, and expensive wines," adds *Wine & Spirits* editor Greene.

WINE & SPIRITS

(Wine & Spirits, $3.95)

"*Wine & Spirits*...has a nice introductory feel to wine, and it's also able to talk to people who are seasoned veterans," says wine writer Paul Pacult. The magazine bills itself as the "practical guide to wine," and that's exactly what it is. With its straightforward approach, *Wine & Spirits* is a must for neophyte connoisseurs. The annual "Guide to Understanding Wine" is an issue devoted entirely to a single topic, such as how to organize a wine-tasting event. Special features give readers the chance to rate their local merchants.

on video:

JANCIS ROBINSON'S WINE COURSE

(Wellspring Media; $19.98 for individual videos and $99.98 for the entire series—available from www.wineenthusiast.com) Jancis Robinson lends her wine expertise to this five-part series, which includes an introduction to wines and specifics on a variety of wine types, from chardonnay to sauvignon blanc, from Riesling to merlot. In "Fizz & Grape Invaders," Robinson, the author of 12 wine books, examines how bubbles get into champagne and considers the safest way for cracking open a bottle of the bubbly. "[Robinson] really did a tremendous job with educating absolutely everyone with her series," says Pacult.

WINE 101

(Speer International/Ward Television; $89.95 for the series—available from www.wine-101.com or by calling 1-888-LRN-WINE) Actor David Hyde Pierce, best known from his role as Niles on NBC's *Frasier*, narrates this six-part series aimed at educating wine novices. The series tackles how to taste wine, where certain grapes come from, and the differences in grape varieties. The "Chianti and Port" segment includes a visit to Central Market in Florence, Italy, as well as an explanation of the grape-stomping ritual used in creating port wine.

EVE FOWLER (VIDEOTAPES)

on the web:

WINE SPECTATOR

www.winespectator.com

This companion site to the bimonthly magazine is updated daily with news items and feature stories. Devoted wine drinkers and collectors should check out winespectator.com's "Wine of the Day" recommendations and the stock prices for publicly held winemakers. There's also a database of wines (searchable by ratings and by retailers), an archive of magazine and Internet articles, and a glossary of basic wine terms.

THE WINE INSTITUTE

www.wineinstitute.org

Want to brush up on the latest news about interstate wine-shipment regulations? The Wine Institute, a trade association representing California vintners and wineries, carefully follows these and other legal and regulatory issues.

BERINGER VINEYARDS

www.beringer.com

This site, from one of Napa Valley's best-known and largest wineries, also offers an excellent, coherent section on how wines are classified and described. There is a page about wine aromas and flavors where you can learn what it means when wine is described as "oaky" and how a wine gets that way.

ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY

www.robertmondavi.com

"The food world is getting more and more closely associated with the wine world," says *Wine & Spirits*'s Joshua Greene. That's something the Mondavi site pays attention to. Sample some lemon-and-black-pepper-marinated grilled chicken legs with a glass of Pinot Grigio, the site suggests, or an artichoke frittata with some chardonnay. (Be warned: The recommended wines are all made by Mondavi, no surprise.)

VIRTUAL VINEYARDS

www.virtualvineyard.com

What's a horizontal wine tasting? Just ask the Cork Dork—a.k.a. sommelier and wine expert Peter Granoff—of Virtual Vineyards. Granoff answers this question and many more (browsers can post their own queries). This is primarily a retail site for buying wines and foods, but the Virtual Vineyards's various features offer a fun way to brush up on some wine trivia.

in the newsletters:

THE WINE ADVOCATE

(Available by subscription only—see www.wine-advocate.com; $50/year) Robert Parker first published this independent consumer's guide to wines in 1978. He's since gained a reputation as one of the most influential wine critics in the United States. Each bimonthly newsletter consists of hundreds of ratings and descriptions, all based on Parker's own palate. Morrell and Co.'s John Voros says, "It's a bible for most serious retailers, [who] have a very sophisticated clientele...and [it's] a great source for our clients also."

(*continued from page 83*)
America's Talking, and hired Matthews for a show called *In Depth*. When MSNBC took over America's Talking in 1996, Ailes moved Matthews to CNBC. "Chris talks like the guy who is on the barstool in Akron, Ohio, and that is part of his appeal," observes Ailes. "A lot of people ask long questions because they want face time, but Chris just *can't* shut up. The decibel level can disguise how talented he is"—Ailes chuckles—"If you have lunch with him, you have to put a fork in his hand just to get a word in edgewise!"

When he first joined CNBC, Matthews hosted a half-hour show called *Politics with Chris Matthews*, which in January 1997 was renamed *Hardball*. Later that year, the show was given a new look and feel, built around Matthews's personality. "At the time," Matthews says, "there was a definite decision to enlarge the show from what you would call politics—in the sense of elections, congressional action, who is up, who is down—to the more broader issue of what kind of country we want to live in....I think we vote all the time now, not just in November. People vote through what kinds of issues they focus on and become enraptured with." Or, it could be said, Matthews votes *for* them with the issues he chooses to cover on his show.

Marching to Jerusalem

FORMER *HARDBALL* PRODUCER MICHELE REMILLARD will never forget that fateful day in January 1998 when the world got wind of Monica. "The Pope was in Cuba, and Chris was in Miami when Lewinsky broke," recalls Remillard. "Chris called me at home at 7:30 in the morning, woke me up, and all but blasted me out of bed! He was so excited that I could barely understand him."

"Believe me, Chris was into that story from the get-go," sighs former *Hardball* producer Clara Frenk. "I remember, early on, a staff meeting in which Chris flat out said, 'Anybody who does not like the way that we are covering this story can get up and walk out of the door because we are going to put red crosses on our chest and march to Jerusalem on this one!'"

In March 1998, *Hardball* was expanded to an hour to cover the president's debacle, and a month later started rebroadcasting at 11:00 P.M. Rarely did a day go by without the Lewinsky matter lurching front and center. "I have always felt that there were three factors that made this such a big story," Matthews explains. "One was the presidency, the second was sex, and the third was suspense. For a long time, we did not know what exactly what was going to happen, so there was sort of this Hitchcock factor. But the presidency was the primary justification for that story.

"The president," Matthews muses, "has to know where he is. He is in the White House. He has to remember that. Let me get this straight. *I am in the White House.* I remember as a presidential speechwriter, it never went away, that sense that you were in this historic spot. You would smell the rhododendrons or the wonderful smell—that aura—when you walk over to the West Wing. Everything is historic, and you just feel this place. And the history that went on there, the magic..."

In addition to inflaming Matthews's patriotism, the scandal has served *Hardball* well. After its debut on January 15, 1997, *Hardball* drew an average of 252,000 households in its first year. During 1998, however, *Hardball* averaged a 0.85 total rating, reaching some 559,000 households per show. According to Nielsen Media Research, *Hardball* averaged 251,000 households in June.

Not surprisingly, Matthews's top-rated shows have all focused on the White House scandal. The number-one show aired on August 19, 1998, two days after the president confessed his affair to the nation, and reached 1,028,000 households. The show that ran the night before, on August 18, is a close second, having reached 1,023,000 households.

On August 17, the day the president admitted to the country that he had had an "inappropriate relationship" with Lewinsky, *Hardball* ran two shows, the regular taped episode, and a live show after the speech. On the first, Matthews ranted, "I'd like to suggest that in every household and every car pool and every barroom in America, and every party you've been to in the last seven months, there's been somebody who's spoken up for the president and said, 'I believe he didn't have this relationship.' All of those people are part of the recruited commission and put-in-the-field army of Clinton liars. He has made them all into liars....And tonight he better come on and apologize to those people...."

Before the second show, Matthews watched the president's speech with some of his guests. "I remember Chris responding much more instinctually than I did to the president's anger," recalls Major Garrett, a senior editor for *U.S. News & World Report*. "I was focused on what Clinton said, and Chris was more focused on how he said it, and how the audience would respond to his larger tone."

In addition to Garrett, panelists on the later live show included Michael Barone of *Reader's Digest* (who has since moved to *U.S. News*), jury consultant Jo-Ellan Dimitrius, former Democratic New York congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman, former Democratic Georgia congressman Ben Jones, former federal prosecutor Michael Murphy, and U.S. Representative Chaka Fattah, a Pennsylvania Democrat. Even for *Hardball*, the show was a free-for-all that featured sharp words from all sides—and a rather unhinged Matthews. Consider the following passages:

MATTHEWS: "...I have never said that the president had to answer all these questions tonight."

FATTAH: "...Chris...Chris...that's...Chris..."

MATTHEWS: "But I want to get you to—on one point."

FATTAH: "...Chris..."

MATTHEWS: "You've been on the show many times...."

FATTAH: "...Chris..."

MATTHEWS: "...Congressman, defending the president, saying he didn't do it because he told you he didn't do it. Don't you think he owes you an apology for being out—one of those people defending his lie for the last six months—the last several months?"

FATTAH: "He owes..."

MATTHEWS: "Don't you—doesn't he owe you an apology for this?"

And later:

MATTHEWS: "Chaka, let me—let me ask you a question about the—about the people in this country. You have defended the president against the charge that he denied he had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, believing he was telling the truth, apparently. The vice-president of the United States, a man who everybody believes a pretty noble fellow, even if you disagree with him—here's what he said tonight a short time ago, blah, blah, blah, blah, I am proud of him, not only because he is a friend, blah, blah, blah, but because he is a person who has had the courage to acknowledge mistakes."

The next day, *Washington Post* TV critic Tom Shales excoriated Matthews as "the screaming meanie of TV news—and last night's performance was no exception."

Eating Crow And A New Contract

MATTHEWS AND HIS PRODUCERS MAINTAIN THAT they are enjoying life after Monica and the freedom that it gives them to pursue other subjects. "We really try to mix the shows up...," explains *Hardball* executive producer Rob Yarin. "I try to read all of the e-mail that we receive. We did a show recently on George W. Bush's military record, and a lot of people thought we should look into Al Gore's record, too. So we are working on a show about that. And [in mid-July] we will also have the writer Elizabeth Drew on a new book that she has written, *The Corruption Of American Politics: What Went Wrong And Why.*"

One of Yarin's favorite recent shows appeared on June 1. "Over the weekend, there had been a news story in Maryland that revolved around a student protesting that there would be a traditional student-led prayer during the graduation ceremonies. And we used that as a stepping stone to talk about religion and schools."

"Cable created an opportunity for Chris to bring ideas and opinions to life and put them on TV," observes his wife, Kathleen. "In reality, Chris thinks that debating ideas on TV is the same as doing so on the floor of the Senate. He has never thought of himself as being an objective, take-no-sides reporter. He is a different kind of journalist....He wants to be at the center of the debate. He believes that he is fair, but would not think of himself as being objective. To the contrary, Chris wears his opinions on his sleeve."

Earlier this year, Matthews's blustery unpredictability landed him in trouble. In May, without checking the facts, Matthews identified Cody Shearer, a freelance journalist whose sister is married to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, as one of the people alleged to have threatened Kathleen Willey, who claimed that President Clinton had approached her sexually. "Kathleen Willey speaks for the first time in more than a year, for the next hour here on *Hardball*," Matthews announced when he began the show, as if he had a great scoop. Later, Matthews asked Willey, "[I]s there something in you that's been burning to get out about this whole matter, how you've been portrayed? You're breaking your silence. Do it right." Toward the end of the interview, Matthews said—referring to Willey's insistence that she had been threatened by so-called Friends of Bill—"Let's go back to the jogger, one of the most colorful and frightening aspects of this story. You were confronted as you were out walking." After a brief discussion, he blurted, "So it's Cody Shearer."

"I can't tell you," Willey replied.

As it turned out, Shearer provided documentation that he had been in California at the time of the incident. Matthews later apologized on the air, saying that "I now regret having...not spoken beforehand with [Cody Shearer] before I mentioned his name on the air. I should have never brought his name up till we had vetted it." For this article, Matthews declined to comment, other than to refer *Brill's Content* to his on-air statement. Likewise, NBC vice-president for news David Corvo declined to comment, and cited Matthews's apology.

Apparently, the gaffe has not hurt him with his bosses. At press time, Matthews and the network were close to signing a new five-year contract that would give Matthews a hefty raise as well as a presence on MSNBC, and perhaps even move *Hardball* to that channel.

IT'S A THIRD OF THE WAY THROUGH THE TAPING OF THE June 28 *Hardball*, and Matthews is about to start his interview with former vice-president Quayle. "I'm going to be nice to you, as always," Matthews grins. Quayle laughs knowingly, throwing his host a genial "Yeah, right" look. "No, really," Matthews retorts. "I am just going to let you sit out there and swim. I'll just say, 'Tell me about yourself!'" Later on, as the cameras roll, Matthews tries to put Quayle on the defensive about the notion that—cigars, thongs, impeachment, and all—President Clinton is commanding radiant economic numbers: "If you're president and you—rather, you were president and you had a 4 percent growth rate, unemployment rate about 3 ½ percent or something, hardly any inflation, wouldn't you be jumping up and down for glee and saying, 'Look how great we are?'"

QUAYLE: "I..."

MATTHEWS: "If you had the same numbers, wouldn't you be saying, 'Hurray for our side?'"

QUAYLE: "Absolutely, but I'm not there. And here's what I say. Here's what I say. We can do bet—"

MATTHEWS: "You're honest, at least."

After the taping is over, Matthews asks Quayle, "Seriously, when was the last time we had the economic indicators that this president has? When was the last time?"

"We had numbers like that in the second half of 1992," Quayle replies.

Matthews folds his arms, tosses his head back and unleashes a grin: "A lot of good that did you!"

Matthews has delivered yet another zinger. He's playing hardball. ■

Editorial intern Justin Zaremby contributed to this report.

Sex, Serial Killers, And Suicide

Say good-bye to simple stories of old-fashioned teenage angst—the new trend in teen fiction is not for the fainthearted. • BY KIMBERLY CONNIFF

"I got to admit, heroin's the best. I mean, THE BEST...with heroin, ahhh. You can just sit in a sewer all day and be soooo happy and feel soooo good...That's why it's dangerous. You have to be strong to feel that good, because after a while you have to open the door again and step out and...go to work or ring up your mum or whatever...Yeah...to do heroin you've got to have a life."
—from Smack, *by Melvin Burgess*

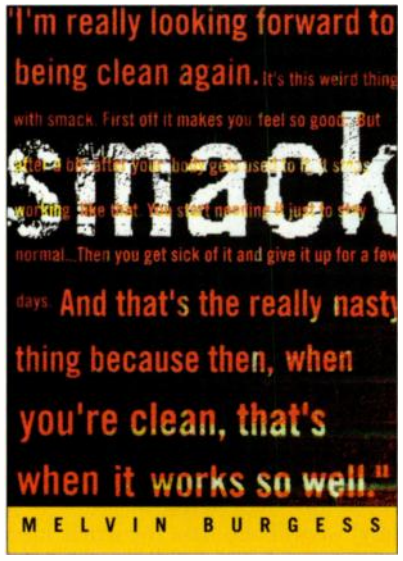
IT'S CERTAINLY NOT A SCENE out of *Sweet Valley High*. In *Smack*, which is written for teenage readers, Melvin Burgess chronicles the lives of two runaways, Tar and Gemma, and their evolving addiction to heroin, complete with subplots about domestic abuse, prostitution, and teenage pregnancy. This is today's new teen novel: gritty, immediate, and brazenly hard-core. The characters deal with any number of controversial issues, from incest and sexual abuse to suicide and murder. Suddenly, those dogeared pages in Judy Blume's *Forever...* don't seem so racy anymore.

In *Monster*, for example, a 16-year-old boy is on trial for murder after robbing a drugstore with some friends. In the boldly titled *The Fuck-Up*, one of MTV's new line from Pocket Books, a college dropout slinks around Manhattan's East Village, eventually landing a job at a gay-porn movie theater. (The title is artfully wrapped around the cover, so that only "UCK-UP" is displayed on the front.) And in *Tenderness*, celebrated author Robert Cormier renders the unlikely courtship of a teen serial killer (who murders his mother, stepfather, and three girls) and a 15-year-old runaway who has learned how to use sex as a weapon.

Teen readers are buying these brash books in droves: Although Amazon.com won't release exact sales figures, of the 13 fiction books that appeared on its list of the 20 best-selling teen books for the week of June 28, ten deal with violent or gritty issues. Meanwhile, hardcover sales are soaring way beyond industry standards. *Smack* sold 18,000 copies of its hardcover edition—which publishers agree is more than triple a highly successful figure for teen fiction. "Eighteen- to 20,000 in hardcover [sales] is...really rare," says Ginee Seo, vice-president and editorial director for the Harper Trophy line at HarperCollins.

One after another, these books are outselling publishers' expectations. *Tenderness*, for example, has sold 20,000 hardcover copies, while *Dancing on the Edge*, in which an emotionally disturbed girl becomes obsessed with finding the father who abandoned her after her mother's death, has sold more than 30,000 copies. The high sales "show that there is [a more] active and engaged readership for these books," explains Marc Aronson, a senior editor at Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

A smattering of recent articles, including pieces in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, have bemoaned this trend toward what the *Times* called "bleak books." But many experts in young-adult literature insist teens are dealing with issues like incest, drug abuse, and death every day and that these books show respect for kids grappling with such problems in their own lives. "There's a sense that teenagers are articulate, thinking beings that you don't necessarily have to shelter from



hard things that happen," says Christine Jenkins, who teaches children's and young adult literature classes at the University of Illinois.

Experts also say there's a lesson integral to the stories. "It doesn't beat you over the head, but it's there," says Sharyn November, a senior editor at Viking Children's Books and Puffin Books. In *Smack*, Tar and Gemma fall so far into a well of heroin abuse that even they realize they can't climb out without help—if they can climb out at all. "If adults think this is an advertisement [for heroin], they're crazy," says Cathi Dunn MacRae, editor of *Voices of Youth Advocates*, an industry trade magazine, "It tells you just how awful it really is."

YOUNG-ADULT LITERATURE HAS LONG been an elusive category. Officially defined as fiction aimed at 12- to 18-year-olds, books with rosy-cheeked teens on pastel covers have only captured the fancy of kids 14 and under

in recent decades. Meanwhile, older teens have plunged into adult fiction, devouring John Grisham, Stephen King, V.C. Andrews, and Tom Clancy.

The trend toward hard-core literature is partly a ploy to lure those older teens back to the young-adult category. As further proof of these books' prominence, a contingent of publishers have launched new imprints specifically to cater to readers looking for fiction that packs more of a punch. Avon Books has created the Avon Tempest line, Henry Holt is pioneering Edge, and Viacom-owned Pocket Books has jumped into the fray with its Pocket Pulse imprint. Pocket Books is also behind the new line of novels from Viacom-owned MTV, which are sold as adult titles but are being heavily marketed toward teens on MTV's channel and website.

Publishers aren't alone in their quest to promote their wares directly to teens. With the last of a second generation of baby boomers hitting adolescence, there's a surge in the teen population, and "the culture is being driven by that audience," says November of Viking and Puffin. "There's a string of movies just for teens, TV shows just for teens. Now there's a push within publishing: What can we do for those teenagers?" In a sign of teen books' emerging presence, the American Library Association will announce in January the winners of the first award created specifically for young-adult books. Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com both have teen destinations and best-seller lists on their websites. And at mega-bookstores like Barnes & Noble, owners are separating out teen sections and plopping them next to hot-selling science fiction and mystery novels.

TO SOME EXTENT, THE issues being explored in these new novels—no matter how shocking or controversial—are "old wine in new bottles," according to Michael Cart, an author and critic who was the president of the Young Adult Library Services Association from 1997 to 1998. In 1967, S.E. Hinton broke new ground with *The Outsiders*, the heartwrenching story of gang violence that was (and still is) an obsessive read for teens. In the 1970s, there was Cormier's desolate *The Chocolate War*, as well as the anonymously penned *Go Ask Alice*, the diary of a girl who experiments with sex, and drugs herself into oblivion. All three titles were still in the top 20 on Amazon.com's teen best-seller list this summer.

However, most of the authors writing about serious issues in the seventies and eighties shaped their novels around a single problem—teen pregnancy, suicide, alcoholism—and didn't bother much with character or plot development. "The problem was the tail that wagged the novel," says Cart. Today's teen novels deal with a more complex reality: In *Smack*, for example, Tar runs away from an abusive father, Gemma struggles with her emerging sexuality, and nearly everyone turns to prostitution to support his or her drug habit. "Now the problem is general dysfunction," says Deborah Stevenson, associate editor of the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. "It's less often 'Daddy drinks.' Now the whole family is dysfunctional."

These novels are aggressively pushing the boundaries of teen fiction, and some adults are asking just how far is too far. Among the most vocal critics is radio personality Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who has spearheaded a movement critical of the American Library Association's policy toward freedom of expression. Controversies over teen books have also sprouted up in school and public libraries across the country. Last spring, an incensed librarian who specializes in young adult literature wrote in to *Voices of Youth Advocates*, complaining that the magazine had recommended *Tenderness*, Cormier's teen-killer tale, for adolescent readers. "There is an ever increasing movement away from wholesome and constructive values and literary themes and toward abnormal, sick, and destructive subject matter in children's literature," the letter writer lamented.

Still, for the most part, those who deal with young-adult fiction—publishers, writers, reviewers, librarians, and the teens themselves—have embraced the trend. The numerous awards and honors these books are earning are a testament to their literary quality: *Smack* won the prestigious Carnegie Medal in England before being released in the U.S., three of the five finalists for the young people's version of the National Book Awards last year dealt with dark subjects, and *Monster* earned the coveted *Boston Globe*-Horn Book honor this year.

TEENS TELL THE REAL STORY OF WHY these books are so popular. They appreciate that adults have finally realized they're "smart enough to know what real life is like," says 17-year-old Adam Balutis, who reviews books for publishers and for the American Library Association. Especially in the world post-Littleton, there's a sense among teens that nothing is too shocking anymore. "It's almost a dare, like try and shock me if you can," Balutis says.

Last year, *Voices of Youth Advocates* published a column by teenager Julia Rosen that challenged the *New York Times*'s criticism of these books (she also wrote a letter to the *Times*). Rosen is convinced she and her peers are ready to handle what today's fiction has to offer. "Until we live in a world where no problems exist," Rosen wrote, "where adults always behave responsibly, and where there are always happy endings, adults must learn to accept that some of the books we read will describe the harsh realities of life." ■

(continued from page 18)

Gary Byrne's testimony was hearsay from another officer, John Muskett, who denied telling Byrne that he had seen the president and Lewinsky alone together. It's surprising to see Mr. Leubsdorf beat this still-dead horse.

DEVIL'S LITTLE HELPERS

*The July/August issue had two good stories about what I call "demonizing the devil."

One was the less-than-ethical sting operation by ABC's *PrimeTime Live* attempting to show how blacks are pulled over by police more frequently than whites ["Stinging The Cops," The Investigators]. The other was the exaggeration and lack of accuracy in the award-winning story about the agricultural giant Flo-Sun, Inc. ["*Time* On Big Sugar: A Not-So-Sweet Deal," The Notebook]. The excess stopping of black motorists based on racial profiling is a real problem, but thanks to ABC's actions it will now be harder to convince the public of that. The Flo-Sun owners are indeed guilty of corporate greed, but are now using that story in efforts to prove they have been unjustly maligned.

ARTHUR CANNON
Phippsburg, ME

SORELY DISAPPOINTED

It was with breathless anticipation that I picked up the July/August issue, emblazoned with a "[P]hotograph of a replica" (huh?) of the infamous Monica Lewinsky dress. Finally, I thought, a story in which Mr. Brill admits that there *was* a dress! He apologizes for his attacks on those who, he claimed, had falsely reported its existence! I was sorely disappointed to see it was yet another tirade that desperately needed an editor.

THERESA DEFINO
Silver Spring, MD

HE DOESN'T LIKE IT

[Staff writer] Jeff Pooley plugs the relentlessly PC *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting* in ["Stuff We Like," July/August]. I guess intoning the slogans of left-wing, flat-earth economics still counts as good journalism, even, for heaven's sake, this late in the twentieth century. What is it about "word" people and liberal/left causes, anyway? Up next, I suppose, are puff pieces on *The Angolite* and *Mother Jones*, and a defense of the journalism of Sidney Blumenthal. You can defend such liberal-chic nonsense on the grounds that it "contributes to the debate"—a criterion seldom applied, so far as I can tell, to right-wing nutcases.

MARK RICHARD
Worthington, OH

ON PRIVACY

*In response to Forrest Carr's complaint ["Letters," July/August] about privacy issues revealed in "Who Gets Paid What" [May]: Since when have the media ever cared about the privacy of anyone?

MATT URLACHER
Eugene, OR

BAD ANSWER

*I received the July/August edition of *Brill's Content* in my mailbox today, and immediately flipped to find the response as to why the figures of employees at *Brill's Content* were not included [in "Who Gets Paid What"]. I was not pleased with the reasoning.

[One explanation] was that you would appear "self-indulgent." Trust me, you seemed much more hypocritical not sharing than you would have appeared self-indulgent sharing.

JASON MILSTEIN
Deerfield, IL

ALL HE NEEDS

I'd pay $3.95 a month just to read [Calvin Trillin's] "The Wry Side."

DAVE FREEDMAN
Chicago, IL

LOSE THE CHIMP

*As I understand it, one of *Brill's Content*'s missions is to point out the worst examples of media hyperbole and wretched excess. Getting a trained chimpanzee to make political prognostications ["Pundit Challenge: Can They Beat Our Chimp?" The Notebook, July/August] is really no better than the tawdry, gimmick-laden nonsense found in the worst examples of tabloid media.

SCOTT P. HARVEY
Chicago, IL

APPLES AND BANANAS

*Mark Twain [quoting Benjamin Disraeli] said that there were three kinds of lies. That is, lies, damn lies, and statistics. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that Chippy the chimp is a liar in the third sense. When you use statistics like percentages, you have to be comparing the same thing and to the same degree. Neither was true with Chippy the chimp. There's no evidence that the pundits were asked the same questions as Chippy, and the pundits answered a lot more questions than Chippy. George Will may have only gotten seven predictions right, but for all we know he might have answered correctly all six of the questions put to Chippy and he'd have a 100 percent rating.

DAVID P. GRAF
Chicago, IL

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

*Is Steven Brill serious in suggesting that book reviewers read original source materials, etc., to verify the integrity of nonfiction books they are reviewing ["What Book Reviews Don't Review," Rewind, July/August]? The idea, however laudable, is utter fantasy. There is not a publisher in the country—much less a reviewer—with the resources to fully verify the accuracy of nonfiction books.

JOSEPH BARBATO
Contributing editor
Publishers Weekly
Alexandria, VA

CALL IT FEE SPEECH

*The article by Steven Brill ["What Book Reviews Don't Review," Rewind] was an excellent exposition of a problem, but I don't think it took the analogy it offered to its proper conclusion.

Books aren't free speech, they're fee speech. When you charge money for something, you're obliged to provide what you say you're going to provide. If you don't, there should be civil remedies, and if you know you're not doing it, there [should be] prosecutorial remedies.

ROB HARPER
Toronto, ONT

MEASURED VALUE

*In my experience, one size seldom fits all, and not all awards work the same way. The [George Foster] Peabody Awards are given to television and radio programs of the highest merit across news, entertainment, and public-service categories. Peabody also recognizes significant achievement by institutions and individuals. We measure the program itself, not the event. So your gimlet-eyed search for accuracy and fairness is not applicable to every one of the 1,300 Peabody contenders ["A Prize For What?" Rewind, July/August]. Peabody jurors are not required to audit yuks to honor comedy nor count inches of rainfall to reward flood coverage. We honor the enterprise of investigative reporting, breaking a story, informing or entertaining the public valuably.

I am certain each Peabody juror has a personal definition of truthfulness and accuracy, the story within context, that is calibrated against each entry as applicable. Submissions of news reportage are supported by accompanying documentation and validated by other media as a "third source." This material is frequently vetted by Peabody jurors during our deliberations. Very often other stations tip their hats and/or newspapers acknowledge the investigations and results of the journalists we honor. We measure the value of public service efforts by their documented accomplishments.

NEIL L. ARONSTAM
Chairman, Peabody Awards
National Advisory Board
New York, NY

HOMEWORK DONE

Your article "A Prize For What?" takes various journalism awards programs, including the George Foster Peabody Awards, to task for failing to check the "accuracy and fairness" of the underlying reporting in the winning entries. Unfortunately (and unfairly, as it would seem), your article failed to report the gist of our telephone conversation on this matter, and gave the mistaken impression that checks for fairness and accuracy in Peabody entries are not routinely undertaken. Lest your readers be misled, let me assure them that Peabody award nominations undergo thorough scrutiny during the selection process, first by faculty panels, then by subcommittees of the Peabody board in regional meetings. Members of the Peabody Board are sent preview copies of all finalists to review for fairness and accuracy. Finally, the merits of the final nominations are debated vigorously in a four-day plenary session at the University of Georgia. Among the 15 members of the Peabody Board are journalists, editors, senior media executives, academics, and critics, most (if not all) of whom have a lifetime of experience in assessing the fairness, accuracy, and impact of broadcast journalism.

Particularly with investigative pieces, board members are mindful of the need to evaluate the accuracy of the reporting. We routinely review original source documentation in these reports. Every year, we reject programs that lack sufficient verification for claims made, or which fail to allow the subjects of the reports an opportunity to respond. Simply put, if the journalism is shoddy, the program is eliminated. In 58 years, we have made more than 1,000 awards. Not one has been successfully challenged for its accuracy, nor has a Peabody award been rescinded or withdrawn.

The Peabody awards program shares with *Brill's Content* the goal of promoting accuracy, fairness, and integrity in the media. In that spirit, we wish to reassure your readers (and our nominees), that our evaluation procedure is more than "cursory," and that it would be difficult—if not impossible—to win a Peabody for false, inaccurate, or unfair reporting.

BARRY L. SHERMAN
Director
George Foster Peabody Awards
Athens, GA

SB responds: My article reported exactly what Mr. Sherman said—and still appears to be saying here between the lines: that no one proactively checks the accuracy of the stories submitted. Clearly, Mr. Sherman remembers saying—indeed, in this letter he does not deny saying it—that "we judge television programs, not the underlying story." Surely, he remembers his long explanation of how [Peabody jurors] rely on the "integrity of the submitting journalists."

LIT UP

Thanks for the story on Mike Wallace ["Real To Reel," July/August], a "journalist" who has brought misery to others and now faces the cruel glare. I suggest the movie be titled *Someone Lighted A Cigarette And CBS Coughed.*

JERRY L. LUQUIRE
Columbus, GA

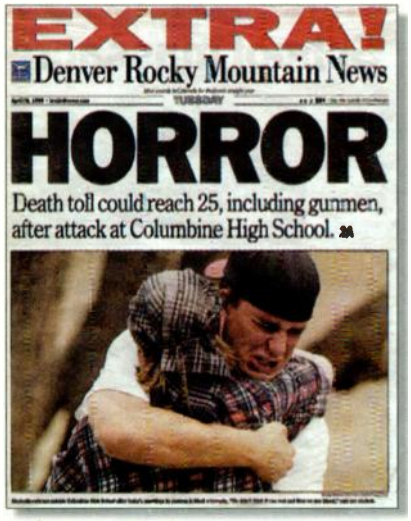
GROW UP

*One thing missing from Jon Katz's assessment of the media's reaction to Littleton ["Report From Hell High," The Browser, July/August] was how the media has fed into the victim culture that fuels the incredible amount of self-pity these "geeks" have. [I]f you choose to be different than the norm, you are going to be open to ridicule from the people who make up the norm.

ROBERT MATTHEU
Louisville, KY

BE CONSISTENT

*As a reporter who helped cover Columbine High School for *The Denver Post*, I agree that the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* was a tough competitor on the story. But I'm amazed that your flattering review of the *News*'s coverage glossed over—or failed to mention—


EXTRA!
Denver Rocky Mountain News
TUESDAY
HORROR
Death toll could reach 25, including gunmen, after attack at Columbine High School.

some major problems in the paper's work ["In Their Backyard," July/August].

For starters, the *News* fell for a hoax, leading its April 24 paper with a long story about a Web-posted suicide note [which the newspaper copyrighted], "apparently composed by [Eric] Harris," that warned of "more extensive death to come" on April 26. After the *News* published its story, police confirmed that the Internet note was a fraud posted on the Web after Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold already were dead. In two paragraphs near the end of [your] six-page spread, you do note that the *News* ran a funeral notice for a Columbine student who still is alive, and that the *News* mistakenly identified another student as a member of the Trenchcoat Mafia. Fair enough. But if *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* got suckered by an Internet hoax, called a live person dead, and erroneously labeled a teenager as a member of a controversial school clique, would you run the same puffy story?

MARK OBMASCIK
Denver, CO

A FIRESTARTER?

It's nice to be recognized, even as a Lord of Criticism ["The Cultural Elite," July/August], but not in the plebeian role of straw man. I am not the anti-Wynton. There is no "battle for intellectual supremacy" in the jazz world. To put the record straight, I've written about Wynton Marsalis maybe eight times, sometimes favorably—you could look it up (see "Rhythm-a-ning," 1985). Lorne Manly bases his argument on my pan of *Blood on the Fields* and an essay on jazz repertory at Lincoln Center, and I suppose he's entitled to reduce me to little more than a carbuncle on Mr. Marsalis's spine and vice versa.

I'm not sure, however, that he's entitled to some of his assumptions, and I wonder how they square with *Brill's Content*'s code of ethics. He writes, "Many critics, including Giddins, are white; some have hammered Jazz at Lincoln Center for neglecting white musicians' contributions." Heavens, what a deceptive semicolon! I've never made that argument and don't share it. (My complaints have centered on the exclusion of postmodernists, most of whom are black—you could look that up, too.) He cites a passage in [my book] *Visions of Jazz*, adding, "The unmentioned target of those lines is Marsalis..." Yet the passage is quite clearly directed at generations of jazz fans and critics who champion one style of jazz at the expense of all others. If I had wanted to target Mr. Marsalis, I would not have been shy about it.

Finally, Mr. Manly closes with an insidious statement: "While Giddins and Marsalis don't consider their disagreements a racial issue, the charges of racism and reverse racism can still be heard." Indeed? Where? Is your man saying that what I perceive to be Lincoln Center's musical conservatism is in reality antiwhite bias and that my musical liberalism is correspondingly antiblack? Mr. Manly isn't pouring gasoline on a fire; he is trying to get the damn fire started.

GARY GIDDINS
The *Village Voice*
New York, NY

WASTE OF TIME

*Gay Jervey's "profile" of Maureen Dowd ["In Search Of Maureen Dowd," June], which was apparently based on her asking 100 admirers of Dowd, "What is Maureen *really* like?" struck me as a waste of time. Your readers would have been better served if Ms. Jervey had forgotten about the *She's-mean-but-on-the-other-hand* interviews and had just critiqued a batch of Dowd's slashing, mean-spirited columns and had questioned whether or not Dowd really deserved a Pulitzer in the process.

BURLING LOWREY
Washington, DC

A FULL 360

*With the publication of your magazine's piece on Maureen Dowd, *Brill's Content* has come full circle. Your magazine started with Bill [President] Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. Dowd's Pulitzer is built on her talented but pointless megasnipes at the [Lewinsky matter's] whole sordid cast of characters.

CLINT BREWER
Nashville, TN

DELIGHTED

*I read your piece on Maureen Dowd with delight. It is perhaps the true mark of your article's professionalism that many presold Dowd fans will find much therein to bolster their mistaken admiration of this self-advertising, destructive Sphinx on the Potomac.

PHILLIP DANZIG
New York, NY

SHE'S THE BEST

*Maureen Dowd exemplifies the best in American journalism. Your article exemplifies some of the worst. With rare exception, Dowd's columns are entertaining and perceptive. With rare exception, her targets deserve her scrutiny. What the wounded egos of the political class you quote just don't get is that we, her readers, really want her style of robust criticism.

HOWARD SEREDA
Metuchen, NJ

A FAN OF LAMB

*It makes me so happy to read about Brian Lamb and C-SPAN ["Lamb's Rebel Plan," Honor Roll, June].

Up until about eight years ago I was able to get C-SPAN. Since the cable companies (mine is Cox Cable in Cleveland) started taking off programs from my initial basic-cable package and putting them on their deluxe package, [for] around $30 per month, I haven't been able to get C-SPAN.

BARBARA DESTEVENS
Lakewood, OH

Josh Greenfeld

MAKES HIM WONDER

*It is disconcerting to read [*New York Times Book Review* editor] Charles McGrath's response to Josh Greenfeld's story in *Brill's Content* ["Greenfeld's Complaint," Talk Back, June]. One wonders if McGrath decides in the future to venture out on his own and become a freelancer, will the *Times*'s treatment of Greenfeld seem equitable to McGrath?

PAUL A. GREENBERG
Staff writer
Times-Picayune
New Orleans, LA

STRUCK A NERVE

*Tim Russert's statement that the suggestion that he attempted to help his wife's (Maureen Orth) career by attempting to influence *Dateline NBC*'s editorial judgment regarding a broadcast of a story that would help promote Ms. Orth's book about Andrew Cunanan constitutes "the worst kind of sexism imaginable" is breathtaking in its hyperbole ["Irresistible Impulses," June]. According to Mr. Russert, the worst kind of sexism imaginable is for someone to suggest that a rich author would use her rich media husband to pull strings at his company in order to promote her book. Certainly, such sexism is far worse than women who receive less pay for equal work, women who get fired from a job because they're pregnant, women who get passed over for promotions because they're not perceived as aggressive, and women who are the victims of domestic violence. Nope, these brands of sexism are not nearly as bad as suggesting that Mr. Russert called in a favor for his wife. The outrageousness of Mr. Russert's statement is matched only by its egocentricity and defensiveness. Sounds like *Brill's Content* struck a raw nerve.

MARCUS JIMISON
Raleigh, NC

WHAT'S NEWS

"What's new about this story?"

So begins [senior writer] Abigail Pogrebin's article "Irresistible Impulses," about *Dateline NBC*'s reporting on Maureen Orth's book about Andrew Cunanan and his killing spree. It's a question one might apply to her own piece.

What's new about the fact that journalists have opinions about what material belongs in a piece and doesn't? We at *Dateline* don't think it's news that we engage in an open exchange of opinions during our editorial process but that in the end the executive producer makes the call. It happens every day here and in many newsrooms across the country.

What's new about the fact that *The New York Times* reviewer thought the Cunanan saga was a little too oft told? He's entitled to his opinion, as is the reviewer in *The Denver Post*, who called it "one of the best true-crime books in years." Ms. Pogrebin revealed to the world that some people like books, some people don't.

And speaking of that review: We don't know whether there was debate about it, but in that review the *Times* found the revelation about Versace "fit to print," as did *Brill's Content*. We look forward to the piece in *Content* about its own debate, or lack thereof, about reporting the Versace information.

What's new about *Dateline* working with Maureen Orth on a story? We turned to her in 1997 and our hour on the killing spree won a National Headliner Award. She had the scoop on Cunanan, and no one suggested we interview her because of her private life. Is it so remarkable we would sit down with her again after she's reported the story for 18 months and has new details to share? Did the wire services and newspaper that reported on her book do so because of whom she is married to? Of course not. She's a top-notch reporter and an expert on the Cunanan story. And for the record, she was generous with her time, answered all of our questions, put us in touch with some of her sources, cooperated fully with our team, and demanded not one scintilla of special treatment.

And here's a headline from *Dateline*: The decision to report on the book, the decisions about how long the piece would be, had nothing to do with whom Maureen Orth happens to be married to or what other journalists decided to report or not report. The Cunanan piece we did was a solid story, interestingly told, and our audience agreed.

"What's new about this story?"

If it's news that at *Dateline* we stay with a story, turn to acknowledged experts, and, in telling the story, challenge our sources, our assumptions, and ourselves—we're glad *Content* broke the news.

ADAM GORFAIN
Senior producer
Dateline NBC

DUBIOUS

Given your magazine's normally high level of journalistic skepticism I was very surprised to see Steven Brill accepting at face value the position that "confrontational" journalism is "not the Asian way" ["Cracks In The Great Wall," Rewind, June]. Even accepting the rather dubious premise that there is a monolithic thing we can call Asian values, are we to take it that Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, and (increasingly) Indonesia are somehow less than truly Asian because they enjoy broad freedoms of speech and press?

J.E. MARKLEY
Fengyuan, Taiwan

PATRIK GIARDINO/SHOOTING STAR

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[TICKER]

346 Number of news articles archived on LEXIS-NEXIS to mention *Bill Clinton* on June 11, 1999, the day after the president, in a nationally televised address, called NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia "a victory"

296 Number of news articles archived on LEXIS-NEXIS to mention *Austin Powers* on June 11, 1999, the day *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* opened in theaters across the U.S.[1]

0 Number of *Mademoiselle*'s twelve 1995 issues with celebrities on the cover

8 Number of *Mademoiselle*'s twelve 1998 issues with celebrities on the cover[2]

40 Percentage of men who change channels "every time" or "several times" during a TV commercial break

28 Percentage of women who change channels "every time" or "several times" during a TV commercial break[3]

5 Percentage increase in violence on prime-time network TV shows from November 1996 to November 1998 (measured during the first two weeks of the November "sweeps")

30 Percentage increase in foul language on prime-time network TV shows from November 1996 to November 1998 (measured during the same period)

42 Percentage increase in sexual content on prime-time network TV shows from November 1996 to November 1998 (measured during the same period)[4]

3 Average number of hours per day that children ages 12–17 watch TV

3 Average number of hours per day that children ages 2–11 watch TV[5]

67 Percentage of U.S. subscribers to Internet service providers who say they would select a computer with Internet access over a telephone or a TV if stranded on a desert island and forced to choose between the three

23 Percentage of those people who would select a telephone

9 Percentage of those people who would select a TV[6]

38.5 million Projected number of children and teens who will use the Internet in the year 2002

$1.3 billion Projected amount spent by children and teens to buy goods online in the year 2002[7]

78 Percentage of parents in computer-equipped households who are "strongly" or "somewhat" concerned that their children might reveal personal information over the Internet

78 Percentage of parents in computer-equipped households who are "strongly" or "somewhat" concerned that their children might view sexually explicit material over the Internet

32 Percentage of parents in computer-equipped households who use filtering software to shield their children from what they consider harmful Internet content[8]

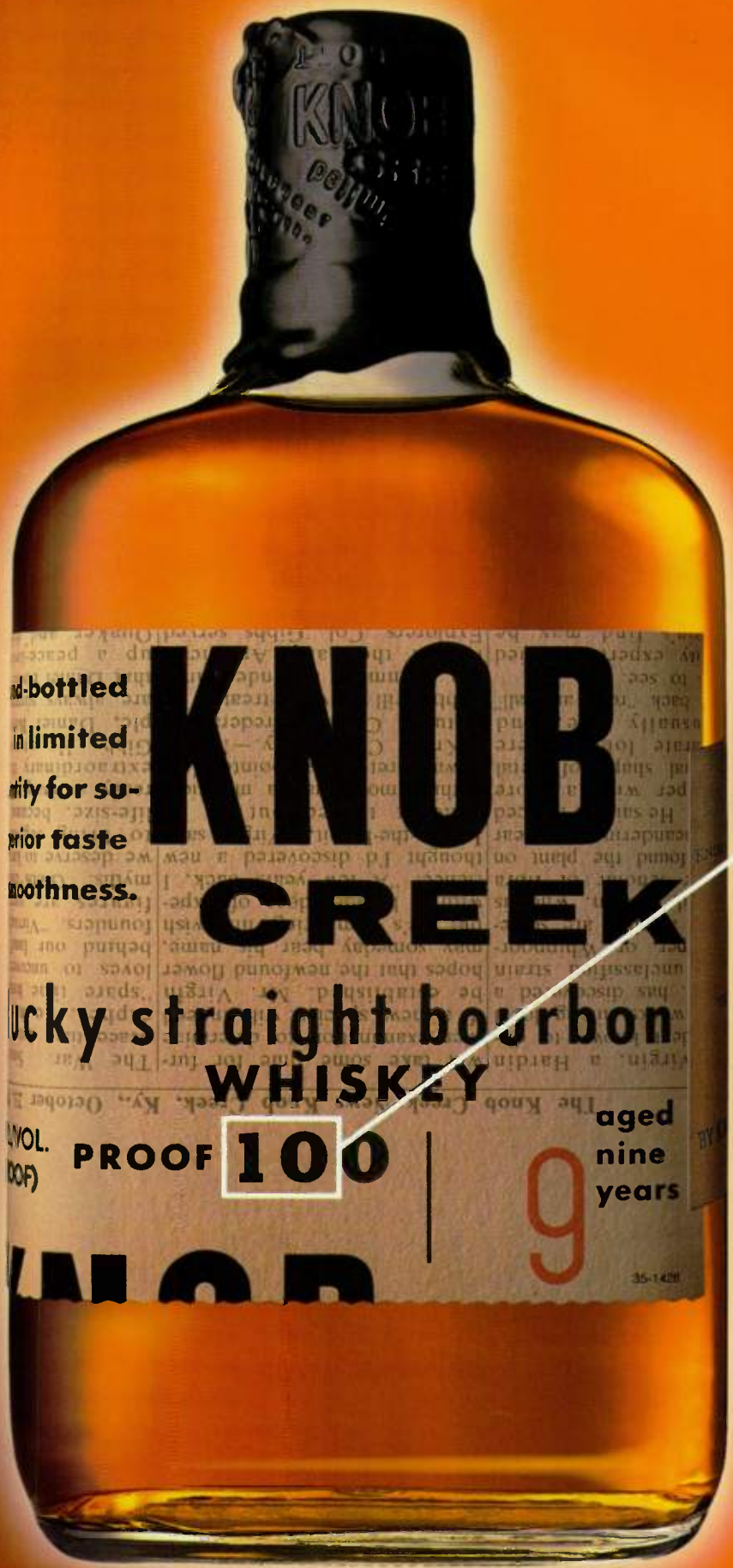
1.5 Percentage of Americans who say they obtain the books they read by buying them via the Internet

3.9 Percentage of Americans who say they obtain the books they read by buying them at garage or yard sales[9]

$8 Cost per hour of using the World Wide Web at The Cafe Asia Site Phnom Penh, the first Internet cafe to open in Cambodia

$12 Cost per hour of using the World Wide Web at Kinko's, Madison Avenue at 34th Street in New York City[10]

1) LEXIS-NEXIS search, July 6, 1999 2) *Mademoiselle* 3) *Los Angeles Times* television viewing poll, September 1997 4) Parents Television Council 5) Nielsen Media Research 6) America Online, Inc. and Roper Starch Worldwide cyber study, 1998 7) Jupiter Communications 8) The Annenberg Public Policy Center 9) Maritz AmeriPoll, February 1999 10) Reuters; Kinko's



(Only the Romanian judge gave it a 9.5)

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