BRILL'S
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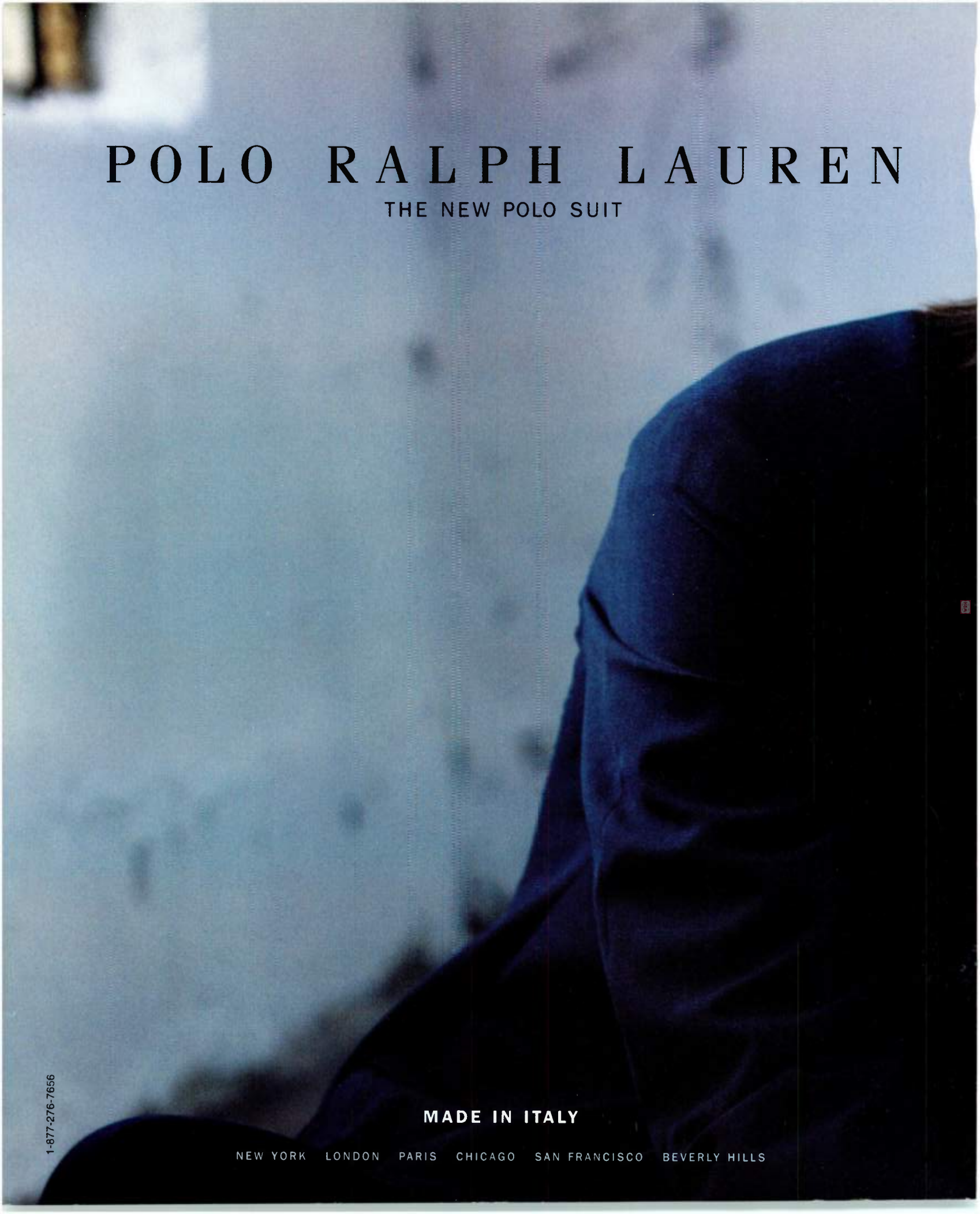
Actor Martin Sheen as 'President Bartlet'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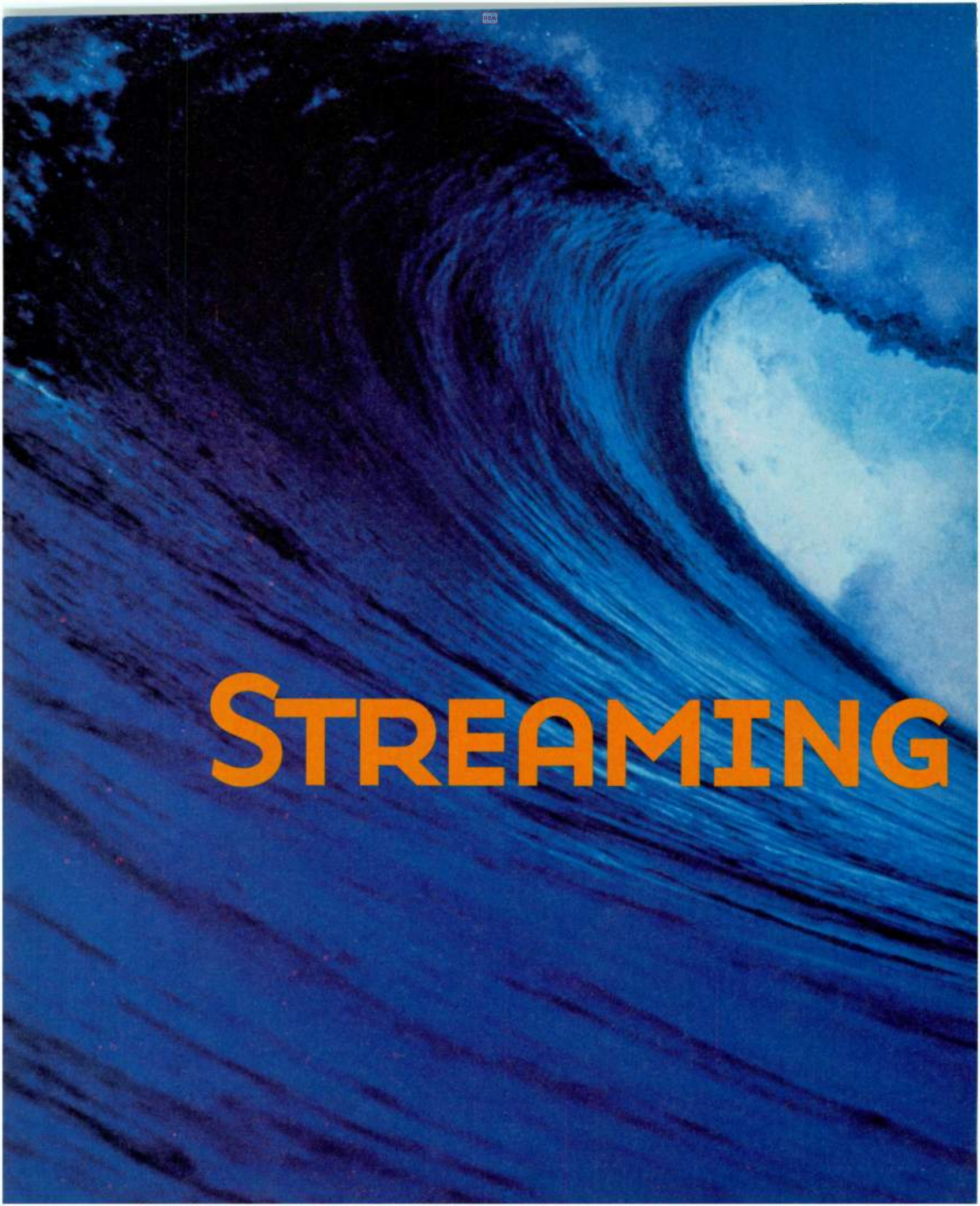
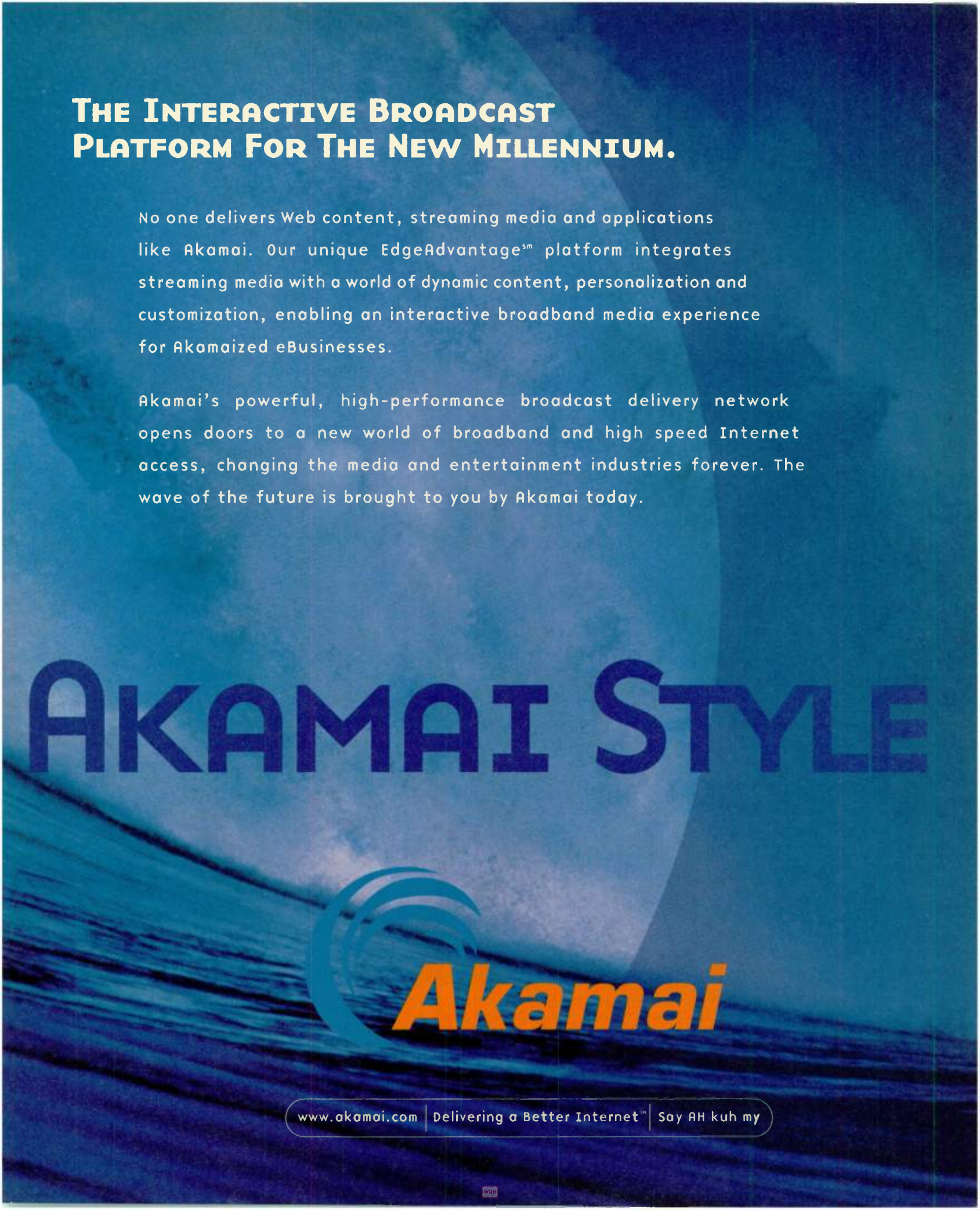

STREAMING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This is a story about the

And like most good stories, it begins with one arresting fact: In the year 2000, state-of-the-art eBook technology will become available on PCs, laptops and a variety of handheld devices. That's an installed base of 150 million Microsoft® Windows®-based PCs and laptops, for a start.

The driving force behind this reading revolution is Microsoft® Reader. And unlike any other eBook technology that has come before, it delivers a quality reading experience that begins to rival paper. It gives publishers the power to deliver content immediately, across the web and via other digital media. And it will be available next Spring on the largest installed base of personal computers in the world.

Easy to carry and easy to create.

We're constantly faced with a barrage of information. Yet none of us has enough time to consume all the media available today. To stay informed, we all seek new ways to maximize the benefits of reading. With Microsoft Reader installed on your laptop or on your handheld device, you can take eBooks and other electronic reading with you – hundreds or thousands of titles – ready to read at work, on the road, at home, or while commuting.

Creating eBooks scales from large publishing houses, to small presses, to self-published authors. The text you already have is all that you need. A simple conversion process changes your text into an eBook, ready for reading, distribution and sale.

It all begins here.

The idea behind Microsoft Reader can be summed up in one word: Clarity.

Let's be honest, the computer screen has never been comfortable for reading — especially for books and other long works. Compared to paper, the type is jagged, margins vary, the display is blurry. That's why people tend to print any document longer than a few pages. Poor on-screen reading is the main reason you may have believed that successful eBooks are still many years away.

But Microsoft Reader changes all that. Designed specifically to address the shortcomings of today's computer reading experience, Microsoft Reader brings to the screen exactly what we all love about books: clean, crisp type, traditional layout and an uncluttered format. The result? The first paper-like reading experience on a PC. It turns nonbelievers into true believers. And that's only the beginning.

Paper or eBooks, the choice is yours.

Over the next few years, books, newspapers and magazines will continue to be available primarily as print. We anticipate that eBooks will become an important alternative, a new opportunity for quick, convenient reading. Over time, we expect that books and other content will be available in both print and in electronic formats, letting the customer choose which they will buy. And in the future, eBooks may come to be preferred, especially by younger generations. Who knows, you may soon be able to read this publication with Microsoft Reader.

How will Microsoft Reader revolutionize publishing? Time will tell.

No one can predict the future, but this timeline represents the best estimates of Microsoft researchers and developers familiar with the history of electronic publishing.

Microsoft Reader with ClearType

2000
Microsoft Reader with ClearType debuts.

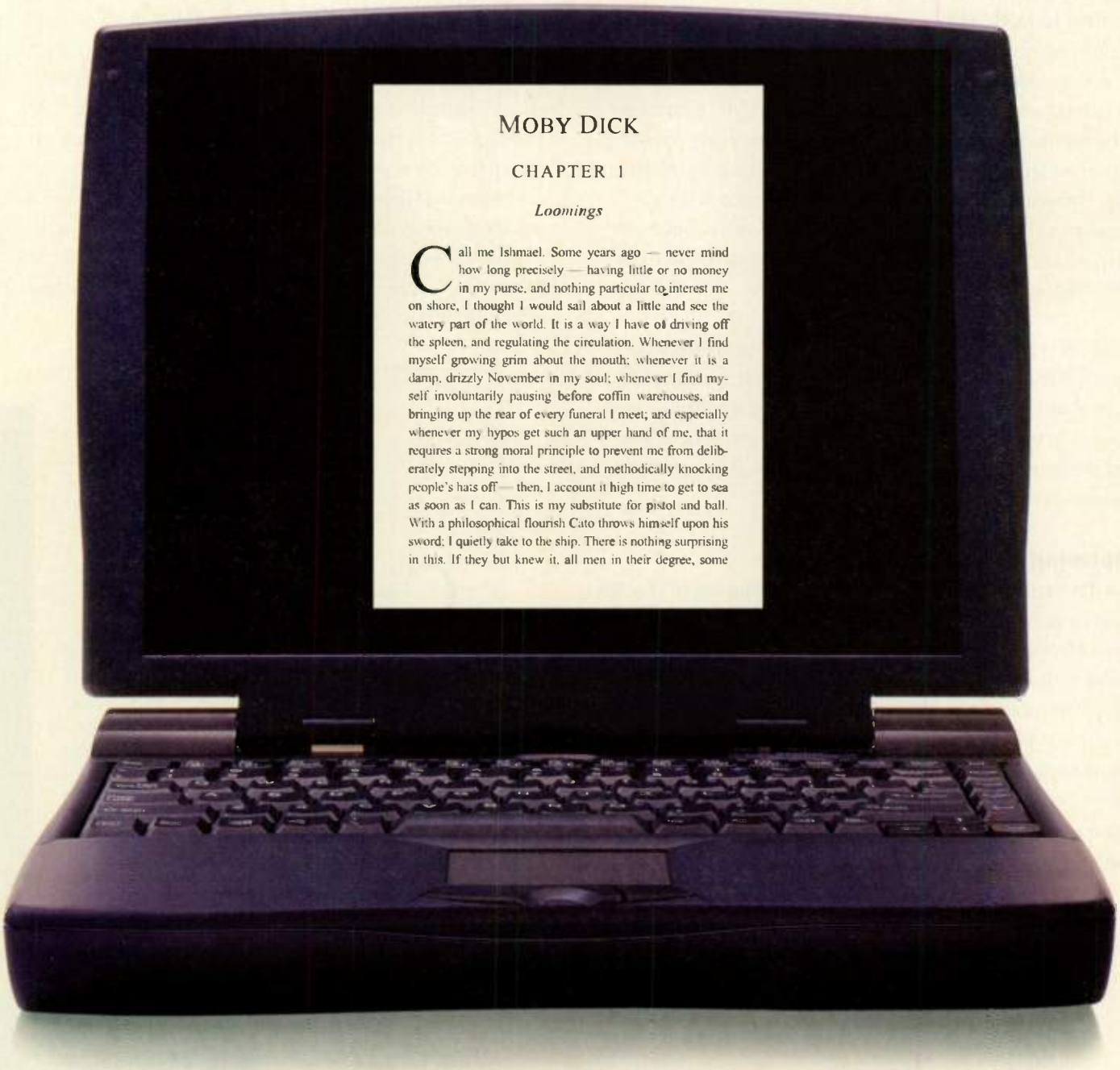
2001
Electronic textbooks appear and help reduce backpack load on students.

2002
PCs and eBook devices offer screens almost as sharp as paper: 200 dpi physical resolution is enhanced even further with ClearType.

2003
eBook devices weigh less than a pound, run eight hours and cost as little as $99.

future of reading.

Microsoft Reader with ClearType



2004

Tablet PCs arrive with eBook reading, handwriting input and powerful computer applications.

2005

The sales of eBook titles, eMagazines, and eNewspapers top $1 billion.

2006

eBook stands proliferate, offering book and periodical titles at traditional booksteres, newsstands, airports – even in mid-air.

2009

eBook titles begin to outsell paper in many categories. Title prices are lower, but sales are higher.

With Microsoft Reader, the

Microsoft Reader with ClearType: Seeing is believing.

At the heart of Microsoft Reader is ClearType,™ our revolutionary display technology that dramatically improves the resolution of Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screens. ClearType technology delivers a huge improvement in on-screen readability, creating distinct, sharp and clear characters. It provides a truly comfortable, "immersive" reading experience. How good is it? In a Microsoft study conducted in September, 96 percent of those surveyed preferred ClearType to conventional computer display technology in a side-by-side comparison.

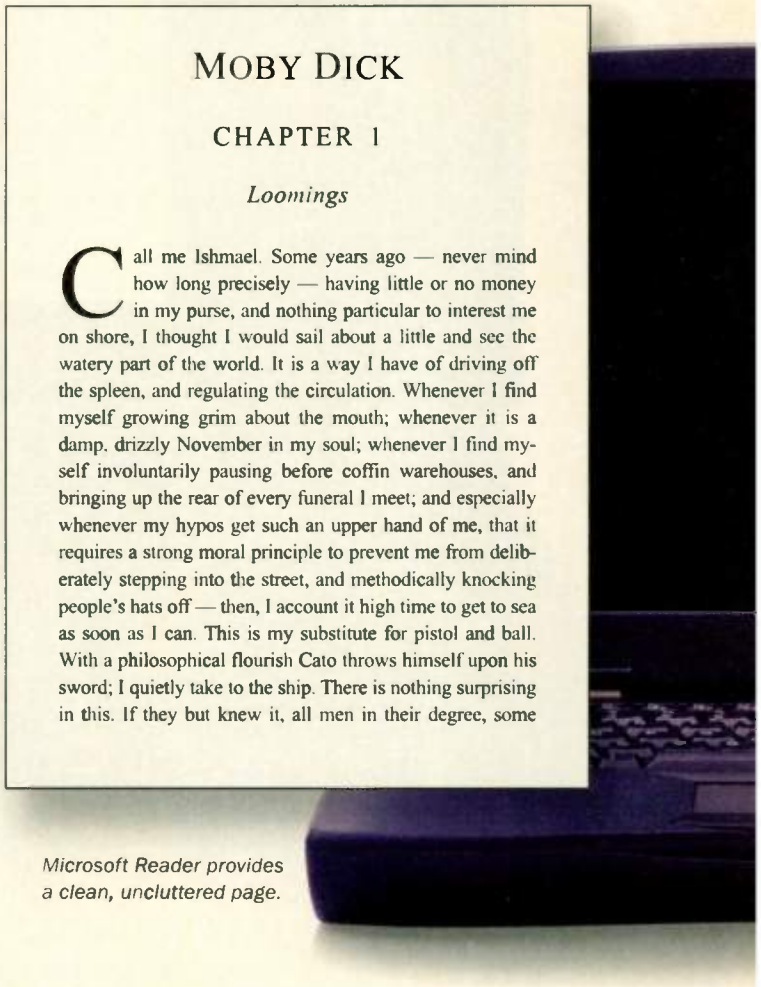
In addition to ClearType itself, Microsoft Reader delivers the finest qualities of traditional typography: ample margins, fully justified text, proper leading and kerning, and a book-like user experience that eliminates the distracting icons, buttons and bars that can clutter computer screens. With Microsoft Reader, eBooks will look as good as they read.

Improving upon perfection.

How did our effort to improve on-screen reading begin? For the past two years, Microsoft researchers have studied the influence of typography on the process of reading. We came to a simple conclusion: the book is a perfect reading machine. Evolved over centuries, the well-designed book frees the mind to focus not on letters and words, but on the story and meaning. A good book disappears in your hands. So when we set out to design the optimal reading software, we didn't dismiss the book. Instead, we embraced it as our blueprint. The result is Microsoft Reader.

Features that outperform paper.

Like paper, Microsoft Reader lets you highlight text. You can mark a place with a bookmark. Annotate at will. And, like print, you turn pages instead of scroll. While the paper book was our blueprint, we found useful ways to improve upon it. With Microsoft Reader, you can search for words and phrases. You can look up unfamiliar terms with the built-in dictionary. You can resize the type to create an instant large-print edition. And use the power of the computer to create a library that stores and manages a large collection of books and periodicals. Microsoft Reader also supports audio: you will be able to listen to spoken-word titles as well as read on screen.



Microsoft Reader provides a clean, uncluttered page.

2010

eBook devices weigh half a pound, run 24 hours, and hold as many as a million titles.

2012

Electronic and paper books compete vigorously. Pulp industry ads promote "Real Books from Real Trees for Real People."

2015

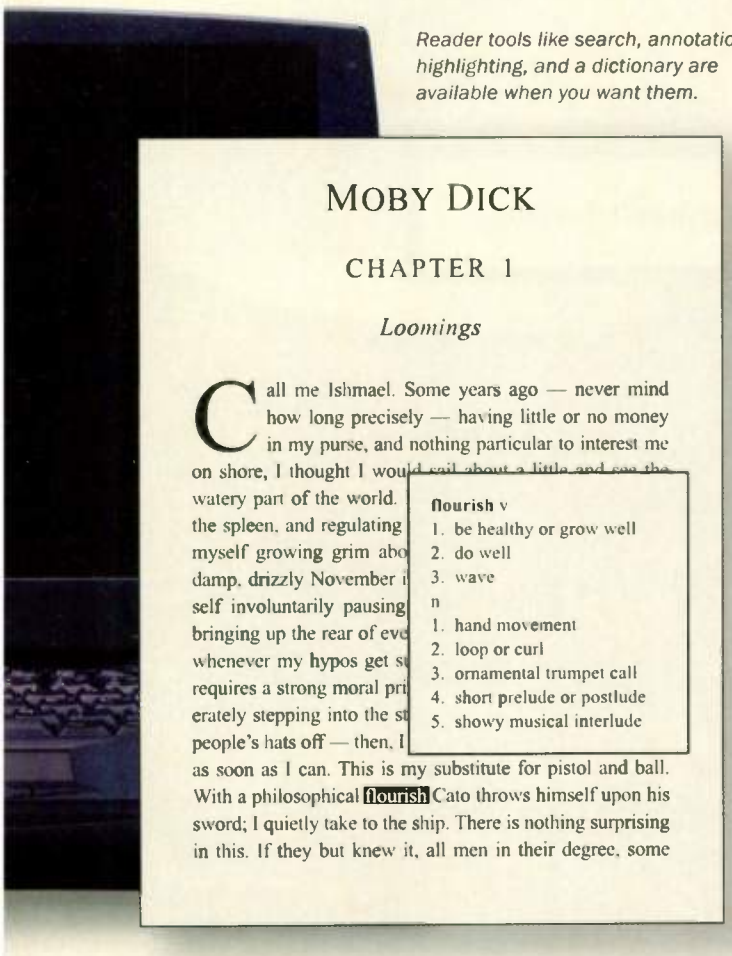
Former high-tech rivals unite to fund the conversion of the entire Library of Congress to eBooks.

future of reading is clear.

Protecting intellectual property.

Microsoft Reader includes a flexible copy protection system designed to protect the copyrights of authors and publishers. Our Bookplate technology is an unobtrusive method for keeping honest people honest. It electronically encodes the purchaser's name on the title page of their book or magazine to discourage unlawful distribution. We also offer a more sophisticated copy protection system that actively deters illegal copying. Microsoft Reader isn't burdened with copy protection overkill. Instead, it provides publishers and authors with a choice of security options appropriate to the level of protection required.

Reader tools like search, annotation, highlighting, and a dictionary are available when you want them.



Based on the Open eBook specification.

Microsoft supports the work of the Open eBook (OEB) organization, which provides publishers with a standard way to format their titles so that they can be read on all compliant eBook software and hardware. Titles that are formatted according to the OEB specification can easily be distributed to the Microsoft Reader. For publishers, that means an incredible benefit: format once and publish anywhere. From desktops to laptops to handhelds, and dedicated eBook devices as well. To learn more about the Open eBook initiative, visit the OEB web site at http://www.openebook.org.

Microsoft Reader is good news for booksellers too.

Although the Internet is an important new delivery vehicle for eBooks, readers still value the comfortable atmosphere of their favorite bookstore. In fact, the coming of the eBook creates new opportunities for booksellers. eBook titles for Microsoft Reader will be available to bookstores on CD-ROM, as well as via the web. We are also developing in-store facilities that can bring web distribution into the bookstore, enabling booksellers to transfer eBook titles directly onto their customer's reading devices. It's efficient. It's low overhead. And it's profitable.

Talk to us – we can help you get ready.

The story of the eBook is just beginning, and everyone can write their own chapter. Have questions? Need help? Talk to us. Visit our web site at www.microsoft.com/reader/. Or drop us a note at msreader@microsoft.com.

Microsoft Reader with ClearType

Microsoft
Where do you want to go today?

2018

Major newspapers publish their last paper editions and move solely to electronic distribution.

Book (buuk) n. 1. a printed written work, often stitched or glued at one edge and covered with cardboard panels and paper.

2019

Paper books remain popular as gifts, for collectors, for books of fine art and photography, and for those who prefer a print reading experience.

Book (buuk) n. 1. a substantial piece of writing commonly displayed on a computer or other personal viewing device.

2020

Ninety percent of all titles are now also sold in electronic as well as paper form. Webster alters its 1st definition of the word "book" to refer to eBook titles read on screen.

WRH

Up to the minute financial news. Stock quotes. Market research. 24 hours a day. So you'll know right away if you'll be rolling in cash, or wallowing in self pity. www.yahoo.com

Get that "I got out before the market crashed" feeling.

Yahoo! Finance

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PUBLIC TO PRESS: STIFLE IT

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.

SCOTT MENCHIN

It's not news that the public has a negative view of our nation's press. In fact, for some time now, surveys have indicated that journalists rank right down there with lawyers and used-car salesman when it comes to public esteem.

As journalists we are both troubled and puzzled by this phenomenon. What, exactly, from the public's standpoint, is the problem? What does the public want from the news media that it's not getting? What solutions to perceived journalistic abuses do citizens themselves have to offer? Or is it just that the public blames the messenger for the message the way some blame lawyers for their clients?

To get to the bottom of these and related questions, we turned to Frank Luntz, a veteran pollster and public-opinion expert. Working with Luntz, we devised a survey that was intended to probe, more thoroughly than had been done previously, the American public's views about the news they consume and the people who bring it to them. Luntz's report and analysis begin on page 74.

If nothing else, the poll results (and our follow-up interviews with the respondents) help explain why politicians love to run against the press. Although our poll shows that the public is evenly divided on the basic question of whether citizens view the press favorably or unfavorably, the overwhelming impression is of a public fed up.

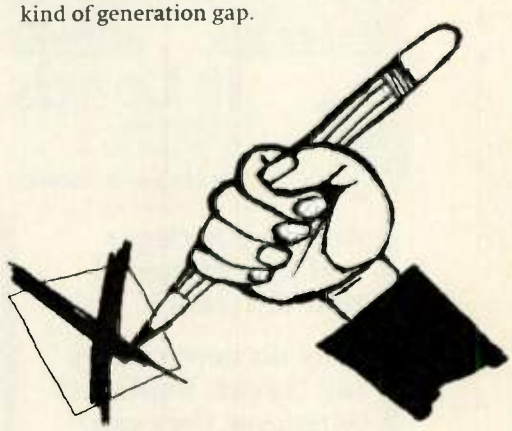
For instance, a large minority, transcending age, education, and party affiliation, favors curbs on the press (which would definitely be unconstitutional). An eye-opening 48 percent of all Americans would compel journalists to disclose their political leanings, and one fourth would bar them from participating in political activities of any kind.

The poll also uncovered what you might charitably describe as an inconsistency between what people say they want and what they actually consume. Okay, let's just call it hypocrisy. Only 22 percent say a TV station should continue to show a live hostage situation if the victim is held at gunpoint, for example, yet almost three times as many would keep watching to see the outcome.

"I don't think they should keep broadcasting it," says a retired Baptist minister from Texas. But he admits he would likely keep watching "out of curiosity, to see what happens and see how they handle it."

The poll also turned up some fascinating details about how differently people from various age groups, education levels, and parts of the country consume and perceive the news. Not too many years ago, we all watched the same network news shows and, for better or worse, shared a sense of what was important.

We've already seen how changes in the media marketplace, most notably the Internet, have splintered the audience. But one finding in particular shows how fragmented we've become as news consumers: Almost half of all 18-to-29-year-olds have gone online to get news, we found, but just 9 percent of senior citizens have gotten news online. That's a whole new kind of generation gap.



One issue our poll tried to explore is the extent to which people feel they get reliable information from fictional television dramas. In our cover story this month, Matthew Miller takes a close look at a new, popular television series that has challenged the conventional wisdom about our appetite for stories about the government.

Why would a magazine devoted to exploring the world of nonfiction feature a TV show on its cover? Because the program, *The West Wing*, does a remarkable job of presenting the people who run the government as rounded, nuanced, human characters—something the press often neglects to do, argues Miller, a syndicated columnist (and former White House staffer).

"Can a smart TV show renew interest in public life in ways that real politics brought to us by the real press corps can't?" Miller asks. For the answer, see his lively on-the-set report on page 88.

ERIC EFFRON

BRILL'S CONTENT

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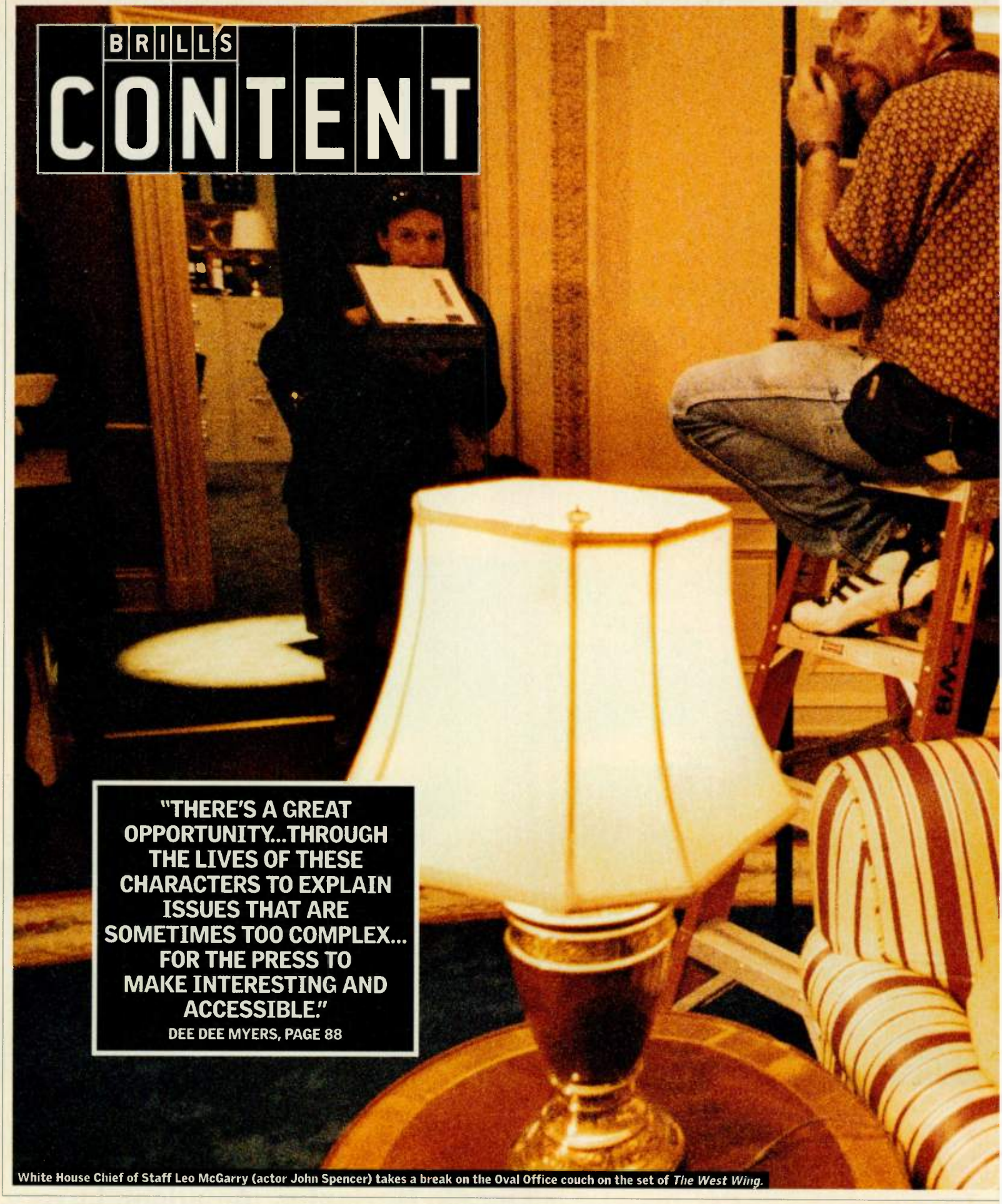
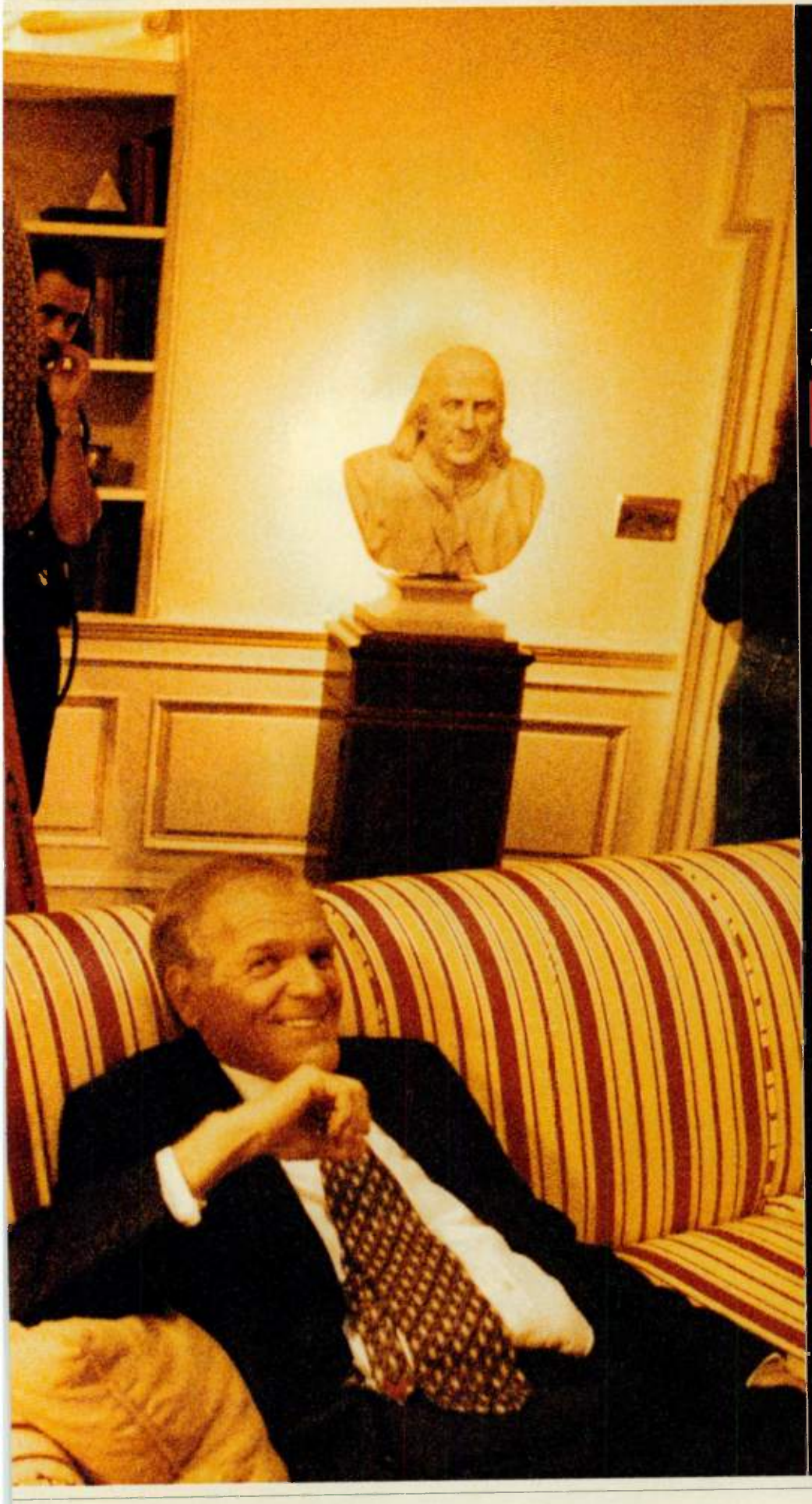


"THERE'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY...THROUGH THE LIVES OF THESE CHARACTERS TO EXPLAIN ISSUES THAT ARE SOMETIMES TOO COMPLEX... FOR THE PRESS TO MAKE INTERESTING AND ACCESSIBLE."

DEE DEE MYERS, PAGE 88

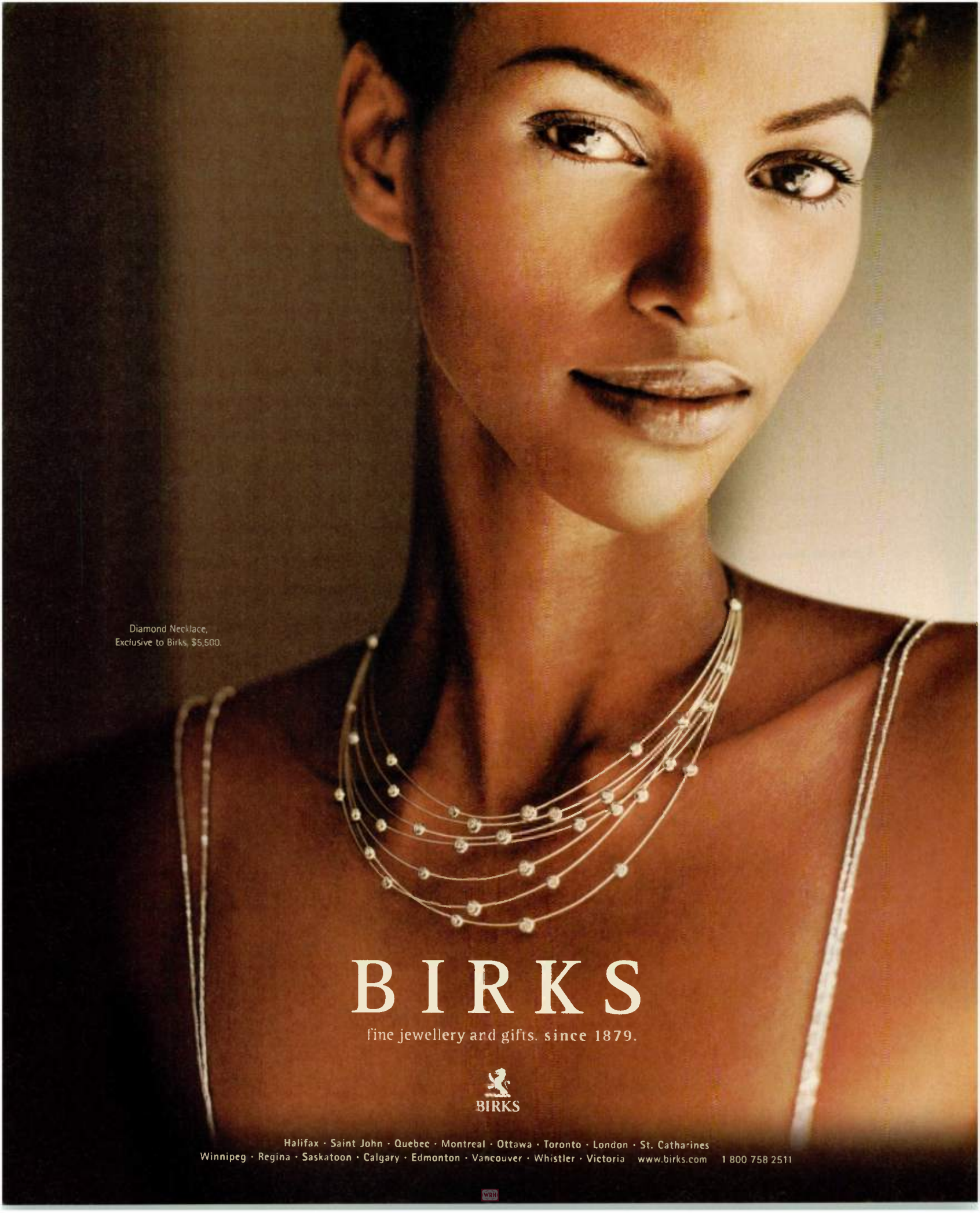
DOUGLAS ADESKO

White House Chief of Staff Leo McGarry (actor John Spencer) takes a break on the Oval Office couch on the set of *The West Wing*.



MARCH 2000
VOLUME 3
NUMBER TWO

COVER PHOTOGRAPH ALTERED TO INCLUDE PRESIDENTIAL SEAL.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Washington Post reporter David Segal let a source set the ground rules. Notebook, page 43

"IF YOU LOOK AT [TIME WARNER'S] SET OF ASSETS AND [AOL'S] SET OF ASSETS, IT'S ALMOST NO OVERLAP, BUT IT'S LIKE PIECES OF A PUZZLE."
BOB PITTMAN, INTERVIEW, PAGE 67

PETER MURPHY/CORBIS OUTLINE. ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT MENCHIN

UP FRONT

COLUMNS

DEPTS.

COMMENTARY THAT HITS

BELOW THE BELTWAY

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THE TROUBLE WITH BOOKS, NEGATIVE SYNERGY, VOICES UNHEARD, AND AN ABSENCE OF FAITH

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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.

INDEFENSIBLE

*It was almost amusing to read *The New York Times*'s pitiful defense of its story about [former federal Department of Energy computer scientist] Wen Ho Lee, especially the part where [investigations editor Stephen Engelberg] maintains once again what they now know is false ["The *Times* Fights Back," Letters, February]. Lee did not fail the polygraph test. He was only told by the FBI that he had.

I bet the *Times* wishes it could take that paragraph out.

MARTIN BLACKWELL, GLENDALE, CA

HARD TO READ

*Since the first issue, *Brill's Content* has been on an uneven but general decline into being mostly a collection of trivia. That has been pretty sad, but there has been occasionally a basis for hoping that it would get better. But now, with your "different" look, you have made the magazine nearly impossible to read [February]. I just cannot believe that someone was actually paid for making the mess.

GEORGE JOSEPH, PORTLAND, OR

BUYER BEWARE

After reading "The Trouble With Books" [February], I must say that if we hold gunmakers responsible for shootings, a bar responsible for a drinker, and tobacco companies responsible for tobacco users' illnesses, then all media companies—papers, magazines, books, TV—should be held responsible for their products.

PAUL LIPPS, ARROYO GRANDE, CA

THE FACTS ARE OUT THERE

*You have done a lot to call the different media to accountability. However, I wish [assistant editor] Jane Manners had dug a little deeper for the facts on *Hitler's Pope* ["Are Books Accurate?" February]. Ms. Manners is honest enough to call her spot-check of the facts "an admittedly limited investigation." However, the facts are out there and can readily be accessed.

PHILLIP BLOOM, SEATTLE, WA

NOT THAT SMALL

*Those of us who live in real mountain hamlets were surprised to read that Boulder [Colorado] was one of them ["JonBenét, Inc.," February]. According to the 1998 Census Bureau estimate, Boulder had 90,543 residents, which should elevate it from "hamlet" to "college town" or perhaps "Denver suburb." How much credibility can an article have that gets that wrong in the first paragraph?

ED QUILLEN, SALIDA, CO

EXPLAINING TO DO

*Ted Rose highlighted key facts in Senator John McCain's past relationship with Charles Keating and with the media ["John McCain's Bad Press," On The Trail, February]. Apparently, the senator has a lot more to explain than his temper.

BILL SEARLE, SCOTTSDALE, AZ

NOT REVEALING

*Personality portraits occasionally qualify as journalism, but phony "personality" pictures such as the ones you printed in the February issue ["Let's Get Surreal," How They Got That Shot] reveal far more about the ego behind the camera than anything about the egos in front of it.

Instead of learning something about a personality and devising a way to share it photographically with the rest of us, you profile a photographer who wants to "up the ante" by cooking up situations using backdrops and props that have little or nothing to do with the subject being photographed.

GARY HAYNES, PHILADELPHIA, PA

COINED

It's not every day one is given a chance to create a new word in a language as rich as modern English, and the Disney-Miramax-

LETTERS

Kaczynski fiasco ["A *Talk* Article's Negative Synergy," The Notebook, December/January 2000] begs for one: **Ant • er • gy** –(ant'er jÂ) n. [fr. Gk anti-, opposite + ergon, work]: conflicted action resulting in less than the sum of parts.

DANIEL KNAUF, GLENDALE, CA

SOMETHING MISSING

After reading the "Is This What's Ahead?" piece in the December/January 2000 issue, I was sorely disappointed at the absence of viewpoints from black people. Although there is no plethora of black media executives of tremendous stature, I can count at least five. Black Entertainment Television, as weak as it is, was not even mentioned in [your] "Road Map" of media enterprises. Nevertheless, there are plenty of average citizens who happen to be black. After all, their viewpoint is important to record given the amount of money and time black people spend on movies, music, watching TV, videogames, and consumer electronics.

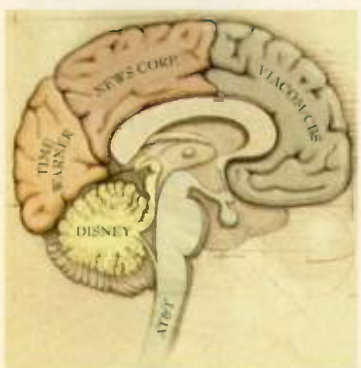
Why do omissions like this occur, and how can they be stopped? I would have welcomed a good tidbit of market research on the media mind share of a black American for once.

JAY GILSTRAP, NEW YORK, NY

Editor's note: For more on this subject, see Report From The Ombudsman, page 32.

NO CAUSE TO CELEBRATE

The soft thinking that lies at the heart of much of what is in *Brill's Content* is on display in your "exposé" of "Big Media" in the December/January 2000 issue.




KSEE news reporter Michael Golden

Let's not even mention that *The Nation* did such an issue, complete with synergy map, several years ago. [Your] discussion of the shameless cross-marketing of *The Rugrats Movie* concludes that it was an example of "synergy working well and harmlessly; a good time was had by all." Why was this "harmless"? Because the Rugrats are cute? Are they cuter than Tom Brokaw or Lou Dobbs? Why is NBC pilloried and Paramount-Nickelodeon forgiven—nay, even celebrated?

ALLEN LEVY, ORANGE, CA

SO WHAT?

Give me a break! Has *Brill's Content* resorted to attacking op-ed writers?

Your December/January 2000 Notebook questions the ethics of famous Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan, who penned a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed on the GOP involvement in the Clinton impeachment ["Working Both Sides Of The Street"]. Noonan may have had an existing relationship with some of those involved in that sad chapter of our nation's history, but so what if she or the paper didn't include specifics?

What *Brill's Content* really ought to have reported in the same space is how some current journalists who are ex-employees of Democrat politicos "report" the news—George Stephanopoulos, Bill Moyers, and Chris Matthews, just to name a few.

ANDY SZUL JR., ALEXANDRIA, VA

TO THE OLD SCHOOL

The story in the December/January 2000 issue titled "Deep Into Crime" reminded me of the style of Edward R. Murrow. The first in-depth news program, CBS's *See It Now*, dealt with issues in much the same way KSEE reporter Michael Golden seems to. Both Golden and Murrow make sure to thoroughly cover both sides of the issue, leaving the audience to decide the outcome of the piece.

How long will it take news organizations to realize they must reorganize their practices if they want to survive in tomorrow's media world?

FRANK SHULTZ, SYRACUSE, NY

A RARE DISPLAY

Thank you for the refreshing points of view you brought to the issue of Sandra Rowe's response to an article written in *Brill's Content* about media ethics [Report From The Ombudsman, December/January 2000]. It is rare that the public bears witness to a frank and honest disagreement between two members of the same media outlet.

JEFF SOROKA, LOS ANGELES, CA

GET RELIGION

Great minds can hold apparently opposing propositions simultaneously. Jeff Cohen seems to have at least a good mind, so he ought to acknowledge the possibility that the mainstream news media are hostile to orthodox Christianity, and give disproportionate exposure to certain Christian positions and people ["Beyond Belief," Face-Off, December/January 2000]. Far from being mutually exclusive, these two aspects of news coverage are in fact symbiotic, and I believe Mr. Cohen is disingenuous in pretending to be unaware of that.

Particularly disingenuous are the possible reasons Mr. Cohen gives for the alleged free ride given to Christian conservatives by reporters: guilt over their secular backgrounds and fear of being accused of Christian-bashing. These two reasons are reducible to one. The "dearth of investigative inquiry" is due to the relative dearth of active Christians in the national media.

PAUL MURRAY, POCATELLO, ID

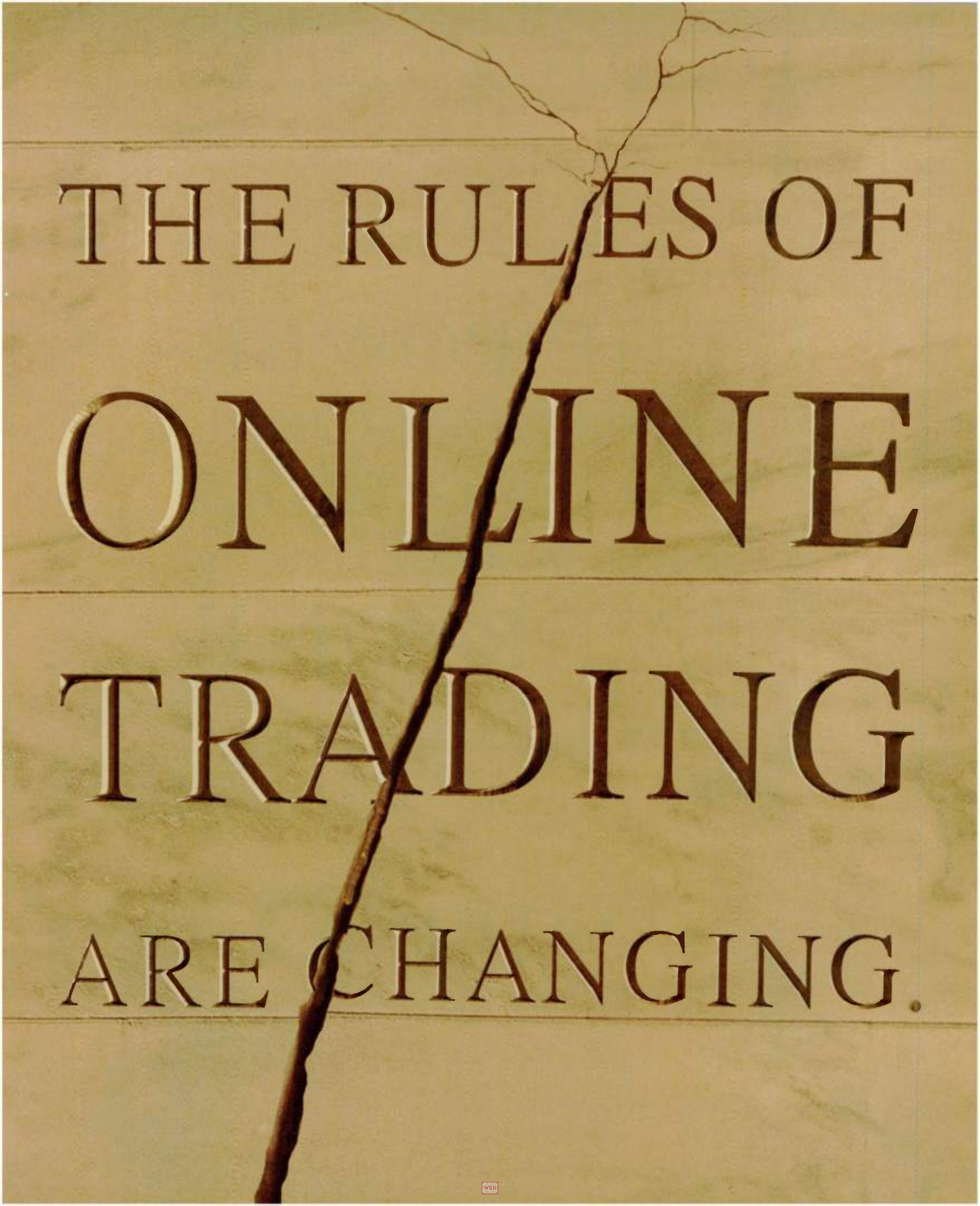
CORRECTION

In February's Notebook section, senior associate editor Ed Shanahan reported that Dow Jones & Company had in October sent letters to the publishers of child-oriented newspapers named the *Small Street Journal* in Maine and Mississippi demanding that the papers change their names because they closely resemble that of the company's flagship publication, *The Wall Street Journal*.

The story ["Warning: *The Wall Street Journal* Doesn't Kid Around"] failed to mention that in November, Dow Jones sent another letter to the publishers of Maine's *Small Street Journal*, in which the company said it wouldn't object to the paper's publication if the publishers dropped the trademark to that name, which they hold in the state of Maine. As of mid-January, the two parties were still negotiating a settlement.

We regret the error.

TOP: JAN SONNENMAIR/AURORA. BOTTOM: ILLUSTRATION BY BONNIE HOFKIN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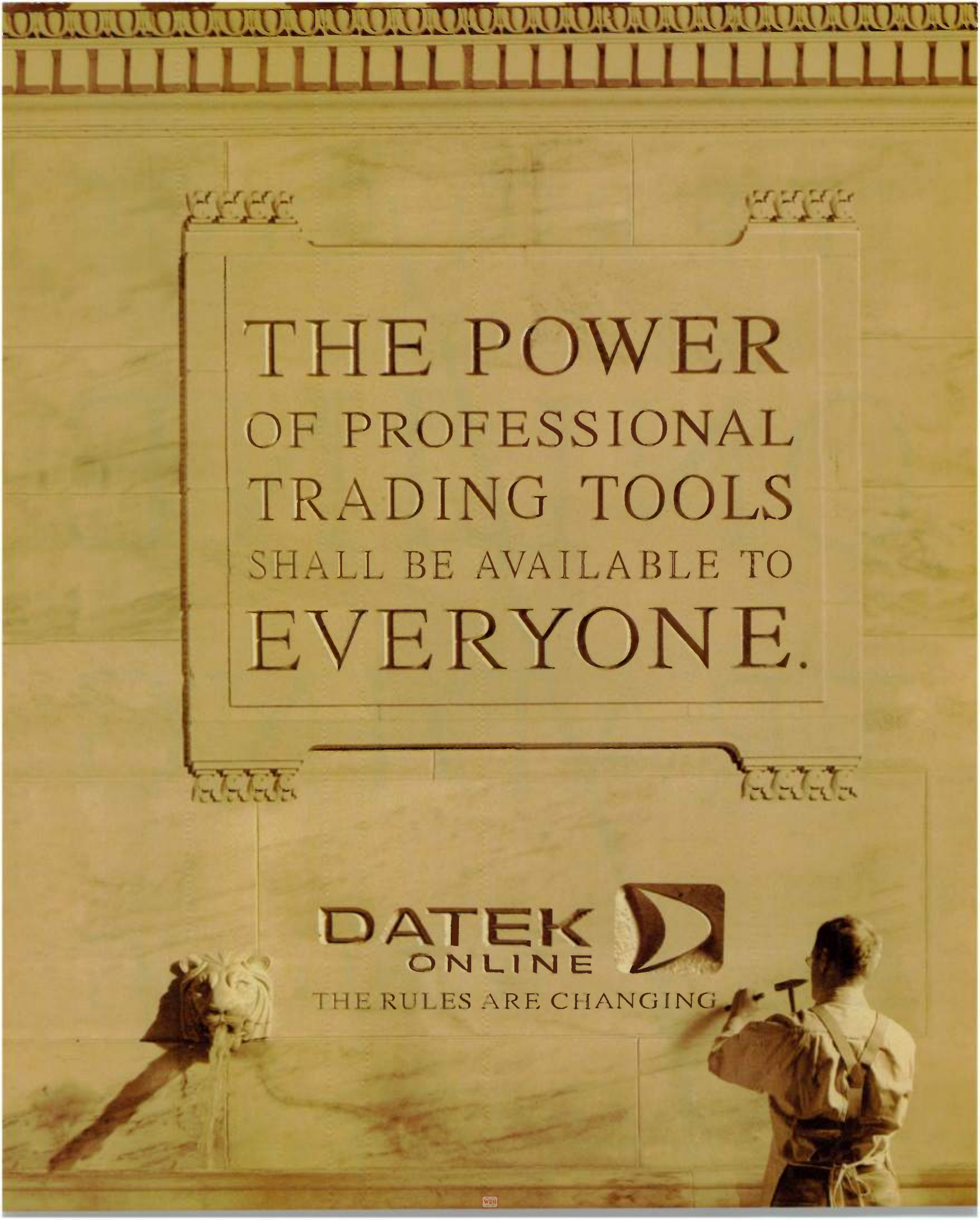
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Photograph by Andy Clark/Reuters/Archive

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

"My job was to get out in the streets and get dirty," says Andy Clark, a Reuters photographer assigned to cover the demonstrations outside the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in December 1999. Clark, 47, got more than dirty—he was tear-gassed and pepper-sprayed as well.

Thousands of demonstrators descended upon Seattle to protest the WTO talks, arguing that the organization undermines labor and environmental concerns and panders to business interests. Once in Seattle, Clark began scoping out confrontations between police and protesters. Shortly after he staked out a corner, Clark says, police warned the crowd three times to clear the streets: "Within about five minutes police fired the first tear-gas canister, which was immediately thrown back."

Then the mayhem began. Along with the tear gas, police set off noise-only grenades as a scare tactic and released pepper spray, says Clark, chief photographer at Reuters's Toronto bureau. The picture shown here, which ran on the front page of the December 1 *New York Times* and in other papers, captures the gas as it starts to rise. Although Clark stood to the side of the crowd, he was inhaling gas. "I also got quite a whiff of pepper spray," he recalls. "It makes your lungs feel like [you're breathing] fire." But Clark, who was using Canon's digital EOS D2000, says, "It wasn't affecting my shooting abilities, so I tried to hold my ground." Minutes later he started to cough. "I turned at that point and sprinted 20 feet away."

Having seen the rowdy demonstrators on television, Clark's D.C. editor called him and said, "Get the hell out of there." Clark was gassed and peppered five times that day, but he took a break only to retreat to a nearby hotel, where he filed his digital pictures using a modem and a pay phone.

BRIDGET SAMBURG


POLICE

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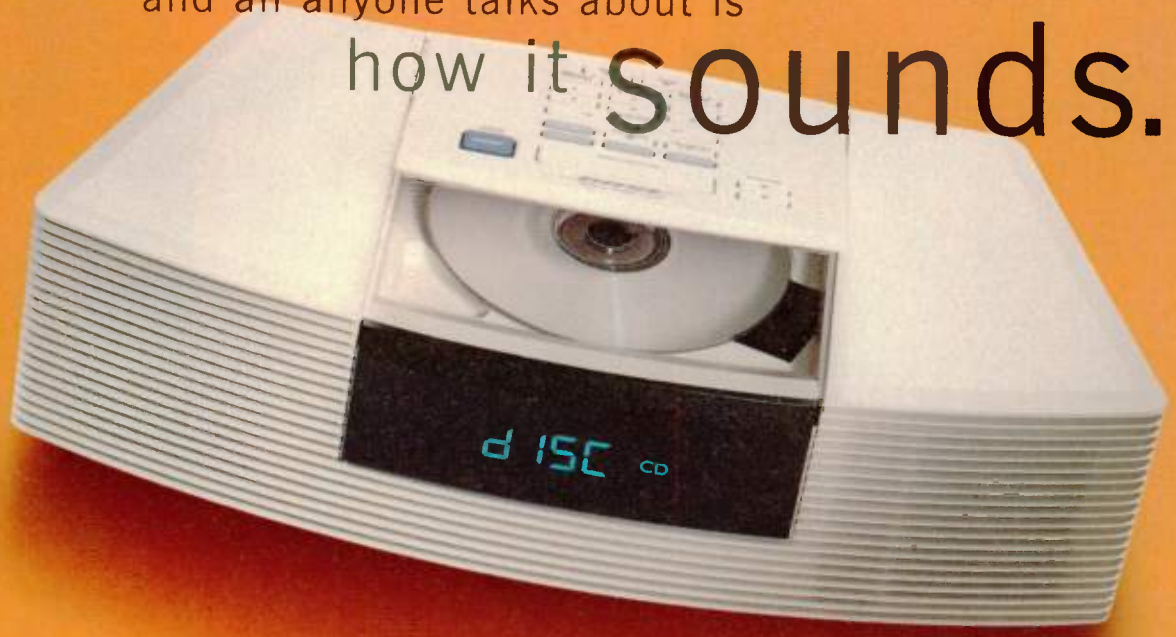

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truth or fiction: pick one

Fictional *West Wing* bests many reporters in depicting a nuanced Washington. Too often the opposite happens: Content billed as "true" is anything but. BY STEVEN BRILL

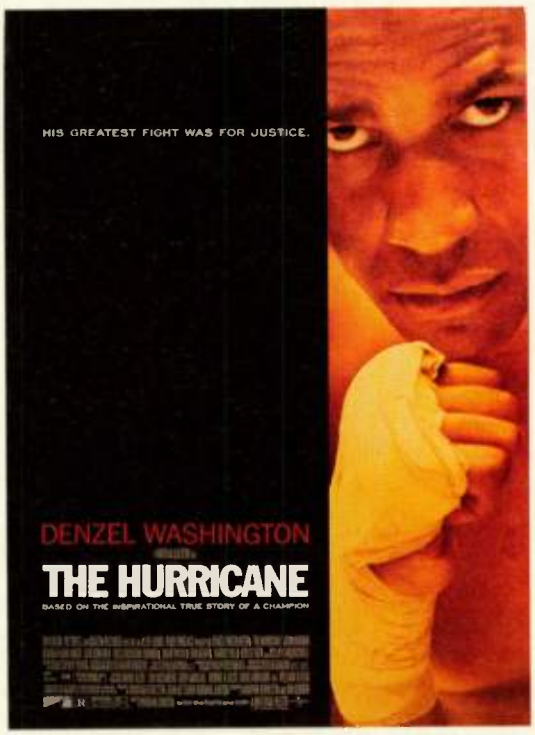
This issue's cover story spotlights a TV show that uses the backdrop of the White House and American politics as props for fiction. Our point is that the fictional *West Wing* conveys more truth about the humanness of those who run our government and sometimes even the complexities of the issues they face than most of the reports we get from Sam Donaldson and other TV marionettes who stand in front of the White House each night talking about who won and who lost that day.

I hope Oliver Stone doesn't take this story the wrong way. We're not celebrating Hollywood's hijacking of *real* names and *real* events in the name of telling some "larger truth," as Stone did with *JFK* or Michael Mann did with *The Insider*. Or the way the makers of *The Hurricane* recently did. Or the way every cheap TV movie that calls itself a "docu-drama"—such as this season's takes on Thomas Jefferson and JonBenét—does so shamelessly.

Sure, it's just Hollywood. But every time I see Oliver Stone I resent the fact that because of him a lot of kids think Clay Shaw is the man behind John Kennedy's assassination. Sure, *The Insider* is a good story, and, yes, tobacco companies are amoral and CBS should have run its tobacco whistle-blower story sooner. But it does matter that Mike Wallace isn't really a cowardly buffoon, that Lowell Bergman (as depicted by Al Pacino) wasn't a perfect hero, that *The Wall Street Journal* didn't get its tobacco scoop handed to it by Bergman, and that Brown & Williamson Tobacco didn't really threaten to kill the whistle-blower. It matters because the truth matters and because real people and real ideas get hurt when Hollywood tampers with real events and does plastic surgery on real people to tell a "better" story, which usually means a story in which there are only good guys and bad guys and little in between.

The Hurricane is the latest movie that says in its promotions that its is a "true story." Boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter—who really was wrongly convicted of murder—is depicted in the movie as an angel, when in fact he had a prior record of three robbery convictions and was arrested on the night in question with a shotgun in his car. His lawyers are depicted as lazy and incompetent. In fact, it was a team of lawyers, working for free for more than a decade, and not a group from a Canadian commune, that did most of the work that got Carter freed (with the help of a reporter for *The New York Times* who publicized their new evidence). The real, not-completely-black-and-white facts were apparently not enough for Hollywood.

When Hollywood producers are asked about these discrepancies, they always retreat to the safe ground of saying that they don't claim to be telling the truth, that it's "only a movie," and that, as Mann put it in rationalizing *The Insider* to *The New York Times*, "in the realm of drama, you change everything." If that's true, then why use real names? Let's not mistake what these producers and the large corporations that finance them are doing: They're trying to have it both ways. At the same time that they're evading responsibility, they're out there in their ads and in their self-important talk show interviews promoting the movie by saying that theirs is the real or even "larger" truth. They're not using the magical creative talents that make great fiction. They're using real names and real events to sell tickets; after all, a wholly fictional story about a cigarette company or a boxer can't be promoted the way the "real story" using real names can. And in the process, they're chipping away at reputations and at the truth, something that movie reviewers ought not to ignore (and which many of those who recently reviewed *The Hurricane* didn't). What's great about *The West Wing* and, indeed, about Oliver Stone's new movie about professional football, *Any Given Sunday*, is that neither hijacks the reputations of real people or the real facts of real events. They have to stand on their own merits as true fiction trying to make a larger point. There is a difference. ■



True story? ***The Hurricane*** **changed many key facts.**

NORMAN

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STUFF WE LIKE

BOOKS

AUDIO VISUALS

Do you consider the psychedelic design of the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album more iconic than Monet's paintings of haystacks? If so, check out *100 Best Album Covers: The Stories Behind the Sleeves* (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 1999), by Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell, cofounders of Hipgnosis, the company that designed *The Dark Side of the Moon* for Pink Floyd and *Houses of the Holy* for Led Zeppelin. They detail how these, *Sgt. Pepper's*, and other notable covers were produced, revealing design techniques and sharing colorful anecdotes about photo sessions. The covers are featured handsomely, and Thorgerson and Powell highlight each design element with captions.

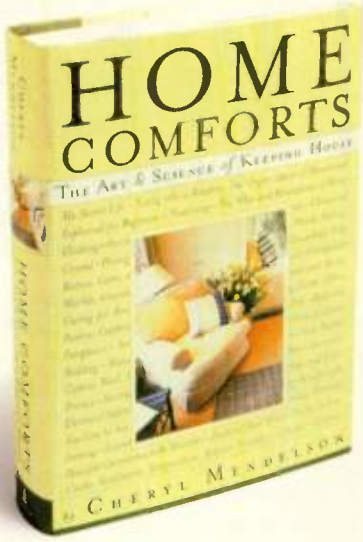
The book also provides insightful explanations for the inspiration behind many of the 100 covers. For example, The Rolling Stones Mick Jagger tells how Andy Warhol conceived the infamous zipper on the band's *Sticky Fingers* album. We also learn that the cover of punk band The Clash's *London Calling* was produced as an homage to Elvis Presley's first LP.

Equally intriguing are the technical details that explain well-known illusions: the melting face on Peter Gabriel's third album, for example, or the burning man on Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* (as the book notes, a stuntman was set afire for the shot).

Thorgerson and Powell provide a compelling look at this medium and prove that it's often more than just marketing: It's art.

MATTHEW REED BAKER

GREAT HOUSEKEEPING

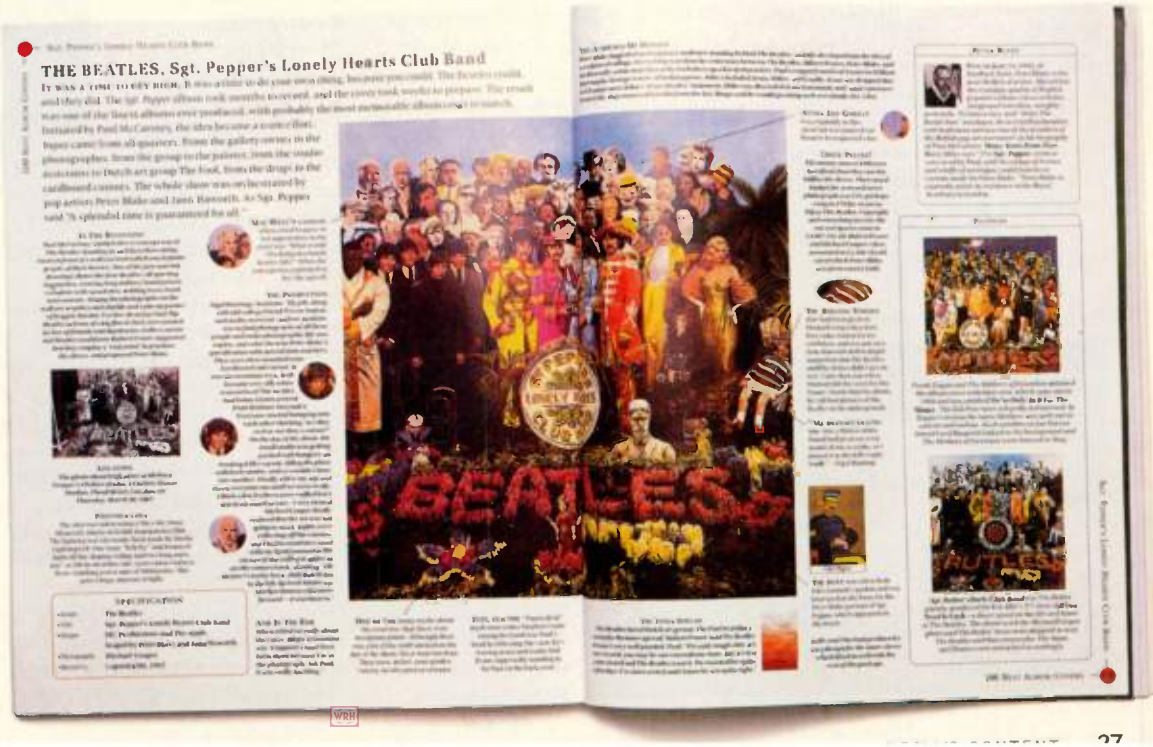


Although it's a reference work, *Home Comforts: The Art & Science of Keeping House* (Scribner, 1999) packs the punch of a major novel. The resonance stems from author Cheryl Mendelson's philosophy that a clean home is better than a dirty one. An obvious point to some, but often overlooked and ignored by overstressed workers in an age that has wandered far from godliness. And an age in which domestic concerns are hidden—Mendelson, a lawyer, describes housekeeping as "my secret life."

No Martha Stewart, Mendelson is concerned with housekeeping as a means of creating a safe, nurturing atmosphere, not cleanliness for cleanliness's sake. Still, she has produced an encyclopedic book, as sweeping in its scope as in its subject matter (the index lists seven subtopics under "dusting"). If you want to know how to clean ceramic tile, or get rid of dust mites, or the current state of computer privacy laws, it's all here.

But that information, which has caused some wags to nickname this book the "Joy of Cleaning," is superseded by the strength of Mendelson's argument for domesticity. She says that she wrote the book not as a backlash but to introduce the idea of a balanced home as an antidote to overwork. "This sense of being at home is important to everyone's well-being," Mendelson writes. "If you do not get enough of it, your happiness, resilience, energy, humor, and courage will decrease."

ALISON ROGERS



NORMAN

STUFF WE LIKE

A parting shot from *Off the Menu: The Last Days of Chasen's*

HOME VIDEO

LA MUSICA CUBANA

Amid last year's waves of Latin pop hype, one island of integrity rose above the surface: *Buena Vista Social Club*, director Wim Wenders's documentary on Cuban musicians, now available on videocassette (Artisan, 1999). It chronicles the story behind 1997's eponymous hit album: American guitarist Ry Cooder traveled to Havana, where he brought together a faded supergroup of veteran musicians who once played in the city's social clubs and recorded their music. That album went on to win a Grammy Award and sell more than 1 million copies, and the film has become one of the most popular documentaries of the past five years, grossing $6.95 million through the start of this year.

The movie has won numerous accolades as well, such as the best-documentary award from both the New York and Los Angeles film critics' associations. Wenders seamlessly combines joyous musical performances—from the Cuban studio to Carnegie Hall—with shots of old Havana's beautiful decay. Interviews with the musicians show how hard and yet how wonderful a long life in music can be. Their stories will inspire anyone to live *la vida Buena*. MATTHEW REED BAKER

On tour with *Buena Vista Social Club*

DEEP DISH

Okay, okay—so the video jacket misspells Rod Steiger's last name. We gladly forgive any documentary that offers uncensored footage of the actor—dark glasses, gold chain, napkin tucked into shirt—devouring a mound of spareribs. *Off the Menu: The Last Days of Chasen's* (New Video, 1999), a delirious paean to America's appetite for celebrity, charts the last week of the legendary Los Angeles restaurant, which closed forever on April Fool's Day 1995. Since 1936, it had fed: the pope, Jimmy Stewart's bachelor party, four former presidents simultaneously, Alfred Hitchcock every Thursday, Madonna whenever she wanted, and the Bogeys and Bacalls and Barbras of the world, many of whom gossip and reminisce on camera. In its last years, the restaurant lost patrons to hipper, trendier spots, such as Spago and Mortons—and the film mischievously tracks the media's final feeding frenzy. Paparazzi plant themselves outside. Has-beens bubble up from the tar pits, clambering for the last few reservations. Sylvester Stallone is turned away at the door. Gary Coleman somehow gets in, and hawks Chasen's signature chili. Ed McMahon holds court at, surprise, the bar. The bartender, having mixed his infamous "Flame of Love" cocktail for McMahon, says, "When you're sick, nobody calls you. But when you die, everybody comes to the funeral." BOB ICKES

NEWSPAPERS

HOOP DREAMS

Beyond reporting scores and statistics, *New York Times* NBA columnist Mike Wise creates tales of flawed and tragic heroes. His cast of characters, from Toronto Raptor Charles Oakley to Golden State Warrior John Starks, is both sympathetic and maddening.

Wise is not afraid to take anyone to task. He recently went after the New York Knicks' management for having failed to acknowledge Starks's eight-season tenure with that organization. In his first game in New York as a Warrior, Starks returned to the Garden this past fall without even a hint of fanfare. So Wise took it upon himself to chronicle Starks's rise in and contribution to the sport: how he went from bagging groceries in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to nailing a left-handed dunk over Michael Jordan and winning the hearts of die-hard Knicks fans. Wise included a heartbreaking anecdote about Starks's crying in the shower after blowing a crucial 1994 playoff game between the Knicks and the Houston Rockets.

Wise's stories remind us that the magic of basketball lies in ordinary people's rising above their limitations and achieving greatness. NICOLLE YARON

A PENNY FOR HIS THOUGHTS

Over the years, you have lost countless nickels, dimes, and quarters in pay phones. Now you pound the "return" button and loads of quarters pour out. What should you do? You might want to start by consulting Randy Cohen, resident "Ethicist" columnist in *The New York Times Magazine*. Each week, Cohen (soon to be syndicated) fields questions of the sort any of us might confront in everyday life: Should you tell a would-be employer you're pregnant? What should you do if you suspect your elderly mother should no longer be allowed to drive?

Cohen's approach is a novel one in this era of "depends on what the meaning of 'is' is." He actually grapples with right versus wrong and seeks to apply the universal to the particular—although he sometimes does so with a slyness that no doubt irritates purists. Here's his advice on the pay-phone question, for instance: Assuming you were never refunded the money you lost, Cohen figures, "keeping the money offers a kind of rough justice." He acknowledges flaws in this approach—you can't be sure you're taking money from the same company you lost it to—but the plan, he says, need not be perfect, only reasonable. "In such small matters," Cohen reasons, "you must strive to be honorable, not obsessive-compulsive." You may not always agree with this ethicist's ethics—in fact, he has been harshly criticized in conservative circles—but the problems he confronts and the solutions he offers are almost always thought-provoking. And how can that be wrong? ERIC EFFRON

LEFT GERAINT LEWIS/ARTISAN; RIGHT NORMAN

WSJ's GRADE-A Y2K

Special year-end sections of newspapers are often advertiser-driven affairs full of boring rehashes or trite predictions. But *The Wall Street Journal*'s Millennium Issue—dated Saturday, January 1—was a tour de force assessment not only of the new economies but of subjects ranging from e-commerce to religion to Internet democracy.

My favorite was the essay entitled "So Long, Supply and Demand," by senior special writer Thomas Petzinger Jr., who also served as the overall editor of the edition.

It's a brilliant, lucid summary of new and old economic theory that everyone should read (and that, despite its topic, everyone *can* read, because Petzinger has organized it so well and writes so well).

Daily newspapers are usually fish wrap by the next day, but you can order reprints or get the online version at www.wsj.com/millennium.

STEVEN BRILL

INTERNET

NEXT BEST THING TO BEING THERE

www.iht.com

Billed as "The World's Daily Newspaper," the *International Herald Tribune* has long been the paper of choice for English-speaking travelers and Americans eager to catch up on global news. But you don't have to travel abroad to enjoy this publication—an online version is available at www.iht.com.

Like the print edition, this uncluttered, sparely designed site (it's generally free of banner ads) relies on the combined forces of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to publish breaking international news as well as selections from each paper's trove of feature articles. The *Tribune*'s own correspondents span the globe and file reports from Prague to Kuala Lumpur. Their work is archived on iht.com for up to a year, whereas the paper's front-page stories and most other features are archived for six days.

Fans of such *Tribune* writers as restaurant critic Patricia Wells, fashion editor Suzy Menkes, and travel columnist Roger Collis will enjoy their frequent contributions. Beyond this, iht.com offers global financial data: Go to "International Funds" for listings of mutual and offshore funds from around the world, and "Global Stock Markets" for major indexes from 45 countries. Other features include a currency converter, holiday listings, and weather updates. KAJA PERINA

WORD SLEUTHS AT WORK

www.randomhouse.com/wotd

Spam. Akimbo. You the man. **Esoteric words and phrases like these are the garage-sale tchotchkes of the English language: We'll pick them up and use them if they catch our eye, but we haven't got a clue where they came from.**

The Mavens' Word of the Day, **a fabulous feature on the website of publisher Random House, Inc., unlocks the language's mysteries of origin with a light touch—and in engrossing detail. Whiz-kid lexicographer Jesse Sheidlower launched the feature in 1996 and presided over it until last October. The Mavens, five women who are editors in Random House's reference publishing division, have carried on the tradition seamlessly.**

The feature's alphabetical archive includes etymological explanations for more than 900 words and phrases, and the daily selections range from current slang to Olde English holdovers. Best of all, the Mavens take requests: Most of the updates are inspired by e-mailed readers' queries, and the editors sometimes send answers privately to people whose questions don't get posted. Browse this curious word world at www.randomhouse.com/wotd. MATTHEW HEIMER

REALITY VS. RUMOR

www.snopes.com

Curious about the e-mail you just received promising a $50 J. Crew gift certificate if you forward the same message to ten friends? Then check out Urban Legends Reference Pages (www.snopes.com), a legend-deconstructing website run by the husband-and-wife team of David and Barbara Mikkelson. The Mikkelsons maintain the site as a hobby and claim to do nearly all of the research themselves.

Explanations of funny and peculiar tales, such as the one that contends that the first toilet shown on American television appeared on the series *Leave It to Beaver*, are often extensive and interesting: "In 1957 television was still pretending that bathrooms didn't exist....CBS refused to approve the episode, and several rounds of wrangling ensued before a compromise was reached: the show could include shots of the toilet tank, but not of the toilet itself or the bathroom."

The Mikkelsons happily accept tips, information, and comments from their readers. They also offer e-mail updates and a message board. Perhaps the most valuable feature on their site is the information on some of the more serious hoaxes that have flooded e-mail boxes lately. "The hidden danger of legends is that they work to instill fears in people," says Barbara Mikkelson. Myths about women's health issues are a big concern, she adds, such as the claim that tampon makers put asbestos in their products. According to snopes.com, they don't. AMY DITULLIO

NORMAN

STUFF WE LIKE

RADIO

COMPANY TOWN

In a town where the press is notoriously bound up with the entertainment industry, Charles Fleming's *Deadline Hollywood* stands out as an independent voice. A book author and veteran of *Variety* and *Newsweek*, Fleming, 44, started his weekly report on Los Angeles public radio station KCRW last fall. (His *Deadline Hollywood* reports are archived on www.kcrw.org.) Fleming has provided midweek rush-hour listeners with shrewd, four-minute spots on what typically goes unreported about the entertainment business.

Amid all the upbeat news accounts of 1999's unprecedented $7.5 billion in box office receipts, for example, Fleming offered a contrarian analysis: "The 8 percent box office revenue increase from 1998 to 1999 is due to nothing more than the inflation in the cost of buying a movie theater ticket." And although a record number of 1999 films surpassed the $100 million mark, Fleming noted that many won't make money after the studios account for production and marketing costs, which in 1998 averaged $78 million per movie.

"We're a company town, and bad news for Hollywood is bad news for a lot of people, including people in the media who have a vested interest in delivering good news," says Fleming. "My job is to call people's attention to the story that they're not getting." D.M. OSBORNE

TELEVISION

TOURS BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Have you ever wondered what it's like to live on a nuclear submarine or what really goes on inside CIA headquarters? Then check out *On the Inside*, a nightly documentary series from the Discovery Channel. As its title suggests, the series sends cameras behind the closed doors of top-secret organizations (such as the CIA), government institutions (say, the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia), and other places never seen by the public (or on television) to uncover their secrets and explain how they work. Each episode is devoted to a single topic, providing an in-depth look at how events like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade come together or how the Los Angeles Police Department SWAT team does its job. The series is both fascinating and educational, but what's most intriguing is the range of subjects covered, from pop culture to scientific discoveries. KENDRA AMMANN

The Discovery Channel offers a look inside Philadelphia's U.S. Mint.

MAGAZINES

LET'S GET DIGITAL

With stories about computer software and cybersex toys, ecology and e-commerce, *Shift* magazine reflects today's Digital Age, in which culture and lifestyle intertwine with technology. A Canadian import, this monthly publication debuted in the U.S. in October, bringing an edgy, youthful voice to the glut of American technology magazines. The premise: that technology is changing our lives, both creatively and culturally. As both trend spotter and investigative reporter, *Shift* purports to examine all that is new media, and it does so in simple language free of technobabble. Recent issues have covered a range of subjects, including a vintage computer festival in Santa Clara, California; a form of virtual therapy for Vietnam veterans being used at Atlanta's Veterans Affairs Medical Center; and the footwear preferences of six Net surfers.

STEPHANIE BLEYER

THE WILD BLUE YONDER

Looking for adventure? Look no further than *Blue* magazine. Thumbing through the articles—on everything from trekking in the Himalayas to urban bridge climbing—is a thrill in itself.

Adventure lifestyle is the magazine's platform, but *Blue* also explores world politics, economics, culture, and such personal issues as how to cope with unfamiliar surroundings.

Every issue provides an eclectic mix of stories. The recent "Snow Issue" featured "What Would Jesus Do If He Were In Peru?" (a writer's chronicle of snowboarding down the Andes), as well as an article about the sex secrets of the Amazon jungle. It also included the "Globetrotter Dogma: 25 Rules of the Road." As if to prod the spectator to take an adventure, rule 1 reads, "Take a media sabbatical. If you haven't circled the globe yet, maybe there's an umbilical cord attached to your TV convincing you that the world is an unfriendly place. IT'S NOT."

STEPHANIE BLEYER

STUFF YOU LIKE

DALE AND SHARON HAGEN, OF SARASOTA, FLORIDA, WROTE IN AND SHARED THE FOLLOWING WITH US:

***Funny Times*, a political humor periodical published in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, serves up witty, often biting satire and political comment from some of the very best wits and wags in the country. The monthly tabloid-format journal makes no effort to hide its liberal tilt—Jim Hightower, Molly Ivins, and Dave Barry are comfortable in its pages—but never preaches or succumbs to a heavy-handed "message." Many contemporary problems, from health care to war to electoral politics—get a light-handed going-over.**

The treasures of the 15-year old paper, however, are the cartoons on every page from the pens of many of today's finest political cartoonists. We have never read a copy without laughing out loud over at least one or two perceptive gems that said it all in a simple caption or picture. It's a must-read for anyone who doesn't take politics too seriously. (For subscription information, go to www.funnytimes.com.)

Is there stuff you like? If so, write in and share your favorite media sources. Send ideas to: Stuff You Like, *Brill's Content*, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10175. Or e-mail us at: stuffyoulike@brillscontent.com. Please include your address and contact numbers.

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REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

In journalism, gathering a diversity of opinion isn't simply a matter of hewing to politically correct dogma. It often helps increase the accuracy of reporting. BY BILL KOVACH

A QUESTION OF GENDER. An e-mail message from Judy Mann questions the dominance of male opinion in the cover article "Is This What's Ahead?" [December 1999/January 2000], which discussed media mergers and why they matter to the future of news.

The question was a natural one for Ms. Mann, a metropolitan columnist for *The Washington Post*. Those of you who have read her columns, which have appeared in the *Post* since 1978, know that Ms. Mann often presents the feminist viewpoint on the issues of the day. Those of you who aren't familiar with her column will get the point when I tell you her rural address, near Washington, is the "Gender Gap" farm.

"I could not help but notice," Ms. Mann wrote, "that the predictors quoted in the above cited article appeared to be all men. I don't know if Halsey Minor [one of the 19 quoted in the article] is male or female....But 15 of the 19 people whose opinions were solicited are men....Surely enough women have arrived to positions where they can speak eloquently on media mergers and what they hold for the future...."

Ms. Mann was commenting on a sidebar ["Big Media Experts"] to the feature article. As it happens, it was a sidebar filled with men-only opinion, for Halsey Minor turns out to be a man as well.

HOW TO REACH BILL KOVACH
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This situation will be familiar to anyone who has tried to conduct a survey or organize a conference that somewhat reflects our pluralist society. Only during the last 40 years have women and minorities had a fair shot at advancing into senior positions in the media and in most other institutions. It is true, as Ms. Mann says, that "enough women have arrived to positions where they can speak eloquently on media mergers." Still, the number of women at the top of the hierarchy is limited, and those who have achieved such positions are under enormous pressure to reflect the views of women or minorities on the subject under consideration.

For example, I attended a journalism roundtable not long ago at which Joan Konner, a former dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, was the lone woman. The panel's organizers told me they had worked their way, with limited success, through three levels of the hierarchy of New York's major news organizations trying for a more diverse panel. One other woman who had accepted the invitation had to cancel at the last moment because of work demands. It seems that the few women and minorities in senior positions receive so many public appearance and interview requests that they simply turn them all down in order to get their work done.

That, in part, seems to be what happened in this case. Both the writer of the article, Rifka Rosenwein, and the editor, Elizabeth Lesly Stevens, are women. They were sensitive to the question Ms. Mann raises. Ms. Lesly Stevens says she and Ms. Rosenwein had included women on their list of people to interview. But one was not reached, and the other declined to participate.

I say that this was *in part* what happened because when I asked if anyone had raised the question of the absence of women from the survey, whether any consideration or concern had been expressed, editor in chief Steven Brill said no one had raised the issue. But he added, "If they had I'd have told them it was not an issue, which it isn't, any more than it would have been if we had interviewed ten people for a story and all ten turned out to be women."

There's an argument to be made for that hands-off approach. Intervening to make sure a certain mix of people is called on to express an opinion is a subjective process and can be skewed by personal prejudice. It can also degenerate into an exercise in narrow political correctness.

But, for sound journalistic reasons, I think that in a case such as this a stronger argument can be made for intervention to find a more diverse opinion. One of the things that set journalism apart from other forms of communication is the effort to present news, information, and opinion comprehensively and in proportion. Without proportion and comprehensiveness a kind of exaggeration that can seriously distort a story is more likely to occur. If half of the population of the country happens to hold a different opinion on the question being considered, that opinion will be absent. The result is the kind of exaggeration that diminishes the accuracy of the report. We already know enough about differences in how men and women relate to the media to suggest that women's views on the impact of media mergers might be significantly different from those of men.

It would not have been that difficult to accomplish more proportion and balance of opinion from big-media experts. The article could have, for example, included the views of women such as Kathryn C. Montgomery, founder of the Center for Media Education, in Washington, D.C., which studies, among other things, the impact of media mergers on American society; or Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, also in Washington, D.C., which studies media, policy, and gender issues; or any number of other women actively engaged in the field.

Steven Brill also pointed out in his response to the question that another sidebar to the feature article ["Mind Control? (not yet)"] was much more balanced. That sidebar, which measured how people used the media, was precisely balanced by gender—five male and five female respondents. But it, too, could have been more inclusive.

I have dealt only with gender balance because that's the question Ms. Mann raised with me, but the same sound journalistic arguments would call for more minority opinion in both articles. The current population's ethnic and racial diversity [CONTINUED ON PAGE 115]

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.*

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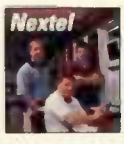

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NOTEBOOK

MOONLIGHTING

NEWSMAN AS PITCHMAN

Far from *60 Minutes*: Morley Safer for WJMK

The veteran journalist, his face one of the most recognizable in television news, steps forward, looks into the camera, and begins speaking. "Hello. I'm Morley Safer," he says. What Safer is introducing isn't a segment of *60 Minutes*, the CBS newsmagazine with which he's been associated for 30 years. It's something else entirely. "Welcome to *American Business Review*."

And welcome to an odd fusion of video news release, infomercial, and quasi-educational material that is one example of the gap-filling segments known in the television industry as interstitials.

The nominal topic of the four-minute segment Safer is introducing—made by WJMK, a Boca Raton, Florida, television production company—is highway safety. Given his reputation, Safer's remarks lend credence to what follows: footage of old cars, comments from highway-safety experts, and the latest whiplash-preventing technology from Volvo Cars of North America, which paid for the program's production.

How does Safer, who never mentions Volvo's name, get matched with this promotional material? WJMK typically approaches companies, offering to produce an array of products including interstitials, says Bill Hough, a WJMK senior producer. The interstitials are then sent to PBS stations, Hough says. The participation of a respected newsman like Safer is an added lure to potential WJMK customers. (Safer's WJMK predecessor: ABC's John Stossel, who says he ended his relationship with the company after deciding that its practices were questionable. For more on Stossel, see "Laissez-Faire TV," page 80.)

PBS stations don't have to use the programs, and, Hough says, WJMK doesn't guarantee that they'll air. That makes the deal a gamble, one Volvo was willing to take.

"The concept and the placement is what I was looking for," Volvo spokesman Dan Johnston says of WJMK's ability to place the interstitials on PBS stations, which generally don't air such promotional material. Johnston says he has no illusions about how viewers will see the WJMK segments: "I figured that a person who was going to view this would understand that it was coming from a certain viewpoint."

Steven Weisberg, programming director at WLRN, a Miami PBS station that regularly airs WJMK's interstitials, concedes that "quite frankly, it is a video news release that is positioned as an informational piece."

But Safer, who, Hough says, has been on WJMK's payroll for about six months, disagrees. He claims he is introducing a program "underwritten" by a company—something he correctly points out is common on PBS stations. Safer also says, "I haven't seen what I'm introducing," though he adds that he has seen other WJMK segments and "I haven't raised an eyebrow."

Asked how long he has worked with WJMK, Safer says, "That is none of your business." CBS News spokeswoman Kim Akhtar says the network is aware of Safer's "project for WJMK."

As to Safer's claim that he is introducing "underwritten" programming, Tom Epstein, PBS's vice-president of communications, says underwriting for public stations is strictly regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. "If someone is an underwriter," Epstein says, "they have to be disclosed as an underwriter at the beginning or the end of the program." WLRN's Weisberg says no such disclosures are made when he airs WJMK material. Doesn't this mislead WLRN's viewers? Says Weisberg: "That's why a lot of PBS stations won't run these things."

BRIDGET SAMBURG

TICKER

(Source: Roper Starch Worldwide, Inc.; Hearst Magazines survey: *The American Dream*, 1999)

75 Percentage of Americans who believe that the personal computer has improved the quality of life

58 Percentage of Americans who believe that the Internet has made life better

CLOCKING

ENCORE: THE CHARLIE ROSE TALK METER

After an 11-month hiatus, we plugged in our Charlie Rose Talk Meter to find out whether the perception that the PBS host talks more than his guests matches reality. We watched five January installments of Rose's show, comparing his gab quotient with his guests'. The results: Rose talked an average of only 24 percent of the time. Which isn't much of a surprise given that he was in the 21–23 percent range the last time we clocked him. It's nice to know there are still some things you can count on. KAJA PERINA

Charlie Rose's guests get in roughly three words for every one of his.

ON THE RECORD

"But it was too good to leave out."

TOM BROKAW, *NBC NIGHTLY NEWS* ANCHOR AND MANAGING EDITOR, ON WHY THE PROGRAM BROADCAST—AS PART OF A DECEMBER 20 REPORT ABOUT AIRLINE CARRY-ON BAG REGULATIONS—AN UNCONFIRMED ANECDOTE ABOUT PASSENGERS STUFFING A BAG CONTAINING THEIR DEAD MOTHER INTO AN OVERHEAD COMPARTMENT.

ROSE: GREGORY PACE/CORBIS SYGMA

BEHIND-THE-SCENES PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Shopping for TV dinners: Food Network's Derek Flynn checks out the produce in New York's Chinatown.

STOCKING THE CABLE KITCHEN

MEDIA LIVES

DEREK FLYNN
Food and beverage manager, Food Network

"Ostrich, rattlesnake, alligator, rack of wild boar...." Derek Flynn ticks off some of the items he needs for an upcoming episode of *Emeril Live*, the Food Network's signature program. Host Emeril Lagasse is headed to New York for a week's worth of tapings, and Flynn is looking at a 21-page shopping list.

As the network's food and beverage manager, Flynn is responsible for buying nearly all of the provisions for its cooking programs. Consider a partial shopping list from one week in January: Asian vermicelli, wood ear mushrooms, *kochujang* (a spicy Korean bean paste), salted pork, spaetzle, rack of venison, various tropical fruits, and several kinds of blue cheese. Says Flynn: "I have a few days, so I'm not worried."

Flynn, 42, has always loved food, and 20 years ago, he found a way to make a career out of it. Over time, he's been a maître d'hotel, a manager, and a bartender—but never a cook—in Chicago and in his native New York.

In 1993, Flynn took an entry-level job at the Food Network just as it was getting off the ground. He began by doing a little bit of everything—helping out in the kitchen, preparing the sets, sometimes ordering food and beverages.

Now a typical day has him reading through the pile of recipes for upcoming shows, placing phone orders to purveyors, and frequently checking in with the cooks in the network's kitchen: *Do you have what you need? Was that meat cut correctly? Are the herbs nice?*

Then there are buying jaunts to such places as Asia Market Corporation, on Mulberry Street in Manhattan's Chinatown. "What are the words for this in Chinese?" he asks the store manager about a head of Chinese broccoli one January morning. "*Gai lan*," she responds. "Yes," Flynn repeats, "g-a-i l-a-n."

As *Emeril Live* executive producer Karen Katz puts it: "If Derek didn't do his job, we would have no food to cook." And without food, where would the Food Network be? DIMITRA KESSENIDES

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REEL LIFE

HERE COME THE STORIES OF THE HURRICANE

Upon its release, Universal Pictures's *The Hurricane*, starring Denzel Washington as Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, drew criticism for its take on reality. Carter, a top-ranked middleweight prizefighter, was wrongly convicted, along with John Artis, of having committed a 1966 triple murder in a Paterson, New Jersey, bar. Among the movie's factual lapses: its treatment of the court case waged to overturn Carter's conviction and its portrait of his relationship with the Canadian commune members who helped win his freedom. Released about the same time as the movie was *Hurricane*, an authorized Carter biography written by former *Wall Street Journal* reporter James Hirsch. How does the book's version of the truth stack up against the movie's? Hirsch's extraordinarily detailed account makes it the winner by a knockout, though the movie does a decent job of capturing the close relationship between Carter and Lesra Martin, the black teen who is the Canadians' surrogate son. Also worth checking out: Bob Dylan's 25-year-old musical version. BRIDGET SAMBURG

	The Book	The Movie	The Song
ROUND 1 RUBIN CARTER	 Carter is passionate about boxing. At the same time, he drinks to excess and has a reputation as a womanizer. Carter spent four years in prison for assault and robbery and was a militant advocate of black power. He is no stranger to the Paterson police force.	Carter is depicted as a troublemaking youth but an upstanding adult citizen. His troubles with alcohol and his stint running guns for the African National Congress in South Africa are never mentioned.	"Rubin could take a man out with just one punch./ But he never did like to talk about it all that much./ 'It's my work,' he'd say, 'and I do it for pay,/ And when it's over, I'd just as soon go on my way.'"
ROUND 2 THE CANADIANS	The Canadians are portrayed as instrumental in helping Carter with his legal battles. But Hirsch covers in great detail Carter's romance with commune leader Lisa Peters and the boxer's father-son-style relationship with Lesra Martin. Hirsch reports at length on Carter and John Artis's lawyers: Myron Beldock, Leon Friedman, and Lewis Steel, who worked at no charge for nearly 20 years to help win Carter his freedom.	The lawyers have insignificant roles in the movie, and their arduous legal battle on Carter's behalf is minimized. Instead, it is the Canadians alone who are hailed as the heroes responsible for getting Carter out of jail. Lesra Martin is a central figure in the movie, the character who most inspires Carter to fight for his freedom. Carter's relationship with, marriage to, and eventual divorce from Peters are never mentioned.	Dylan's song does not refer to the Canadians, because they took up Carter's plight long after the song was recorded, nor does the songwriter mention the boxer's lawyers. 
ROUND 3 THE WITNESSES	Voluminous details are provided about how witnesses' testimonies varied significantly between Carter's first and second trials. Alfred Bello and Arthur Dexter Bradley, two white Paterson men who testified at the first trial of Carter and Artis, are later found to have offered their testimony in exchange for lenient sentences in connection with unrelated crimes. Bradley eventually recants.	Bello and Bradley play a minor role, although various witnesses are interviewed by Carter's Canadian supporters as they alone push to find out if the police tampered with evidence and testimony in their effort to convict Carter. Neither trial is depicted in the movie.	"Arthur Dexter Bradley said, 'I'm really not sure.'/ Cops said, 'A poor boy like you could use a break./ We got you for the motel job, and we're talking to your friend Bello./ You don't want to have to go back to jail, be a nice fellow.'"
ROUND 4 CARTER IN PRISON	Hirsch details the loss of Carter's right eye in an operation the fighter considers a deliberate attempt to disable his overwhelming strength. Also presented are Carter's ultimately successful battles with authorities over his unwillingness to adhere to prison rules, battles fought because of his insistence on his innocence. And Hirsch describes the countless hours Carter spent learning the law, drafting briefs, and helping form the arguments his lawyers used to free him.	 Carter is often seen reading, but his intensive study of the law is omitted. Frequent visits from his Canadian supporters are depicted. Carter is not seen struggling against prison rules, but it is clear that he has won special treatment.	"Now all the criminals in their coats and their ties/ Are free to drink martinis and watch the sun rise,/ While Rubin sits like Buddha in a ten-foot cell./ An innocent man in a living hell."
ROUND 5 HOW THE STORY ENDS	After 19 years in prison, Carter is freed by U.S. District Court judge H. Lee Sarokin, who overturns his conviction.	The final scene: a dramatic display of emotion as Carter addresses the bench in an attempt to convince the judge of his innocence. The judge ultimately frees Carter. The incident never occurred.	"But it won't be over till they clear his name/And give him back the time he's done./ Put in a prison cell, but one time he coulda been the champion of the world."

ILLUSTRATION: FRANK WEBSTER POSTER NORMAN

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In an age in which politics, journalism and show business have begun to merge, pundits have increasingly become performers, and performers posture and declaim - that's what they do. As long as political commentators, like sports-radio jocks, are hired on the basis of who has the loudest, most obnoxiously nasal voice, we'll be forced to endure their sermons. And as long as those commentators remain drawn from a stagnant, inbred pool, those sermons will be inane next page | www.salon.com/bc

Findings
By Jeff Pooley

FULL-COURT PRESS

Conventional wisdom holds that journalists who cover the criminal-justice system are inclined to dole out pretrial verdicts with reckless impunity. Those who believe this cite more than a half-dozen studies that conclude that pretrial publicity prejudices juries against defendants. However, Jon Bruschke of California State University, Fullerton, and William Loges of Baylor University challenge this research and point out that nearly all of these studies relied on mock-trial experiments. When Bruschke and Loges looked at real-world cases—134 federal first-degree-murder trials—they found that pretrial publicity didn't affect juries. The conviction rate for high-publicity trials—about 80 percent—was almost identical to the rate for defendants whose trials hadn't been covered at all by the press.

***Journal of Communication*, autumn 1999, page 104**

SCORE ONE FOR THE GIPPER?

Why did Americans think most of their countrymen adored President Ronald Reagan when, in fact, most didn't? According to the "persuasive press inference" hypothesis, we may have taken flattering news coverage of the Gipper to be a rough marker of his popularity. The idea: We tend to form impressions about what others think based on the way that news coverage is slanted, because we assume that the media we encounter have a broad and influential reach. To test this theory, Albert Gunther and Cindy Christen, both of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, gave different versions of two controversial news stories to more than 130 students. The pair found that the more a story was slanted in the direction of one position, the greater the students' estimated public support. This result occurred even if the story in question contained polling data that contradicted the story's slant.

***Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, summer 1999, page 277**

PREFABRICATED

NEW KIDS ON THE TUBE

The next pop group to emerge from Louis J. Pearlman's hit factory—which has already blessed the world with the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync—is sure to be huge. As early as last November, the group had songs written for it, record companies interested in making deals, and a 13-episode television series chronicling the group's inevitable rise to fame, set to debut on ABC in March.

Only one thing was missing: the group itself.

"Everything is upside down," said C.B. Harding, the series's director, during the audition process last fall. "We have the material, the production, the publicity—but no band."

The band exists now, with its five members chosen and undoubtedly some pretty spiffy dance moves worked out. Pearlman hopes to once again achieve pop success (presumably without the legal actions his previous creations launched against him) by locating the right mix of young talent, matching them with producers and writers, and grooming them in his Orlando studio complex, O-Town. (The similarity to Motown is intentional.) In the new show, ABC plans a sort of *The Monkees*–meets–*The Real World* that will follow the band's creation. It's probably the first time that a pop group's initial splash and its behind-the-scenes history arrive in the same package.

The TV series is a joint production of Trans Continental Media, Inc., which Pearlman created in 1991 to promote and manage the Backstreet Boys; ABC, which has scheduled the show for its teen-centric Friday-night lineup; MTV Networks; and Bunim-Murray Productions, the company behind MTV's *The Real World*.

With *The Real World*, Bunim-Murray Productions changed the landscape of "reality" television, bringing together seven strangers to live rent-free in a lavish home for a few months while cameras record virtually their every move. Last season—the show's eighth—*The Real World* earned its highest ratings ever, in part because of the ongoing saga of one cast member's battle with alcoholism.

With the ABC series, Bunim-Murray brings its *Real World* formula to the pop-music business. And though some may be turned off by the prefabricated quality of groups such as the Backstreet Boys, fans don't seem to care that these acts come straight out of Pearlman's finishing school. Says Pearlman: "So many fans have been asking us to see the behind-the-scenes look."

Pearlman—a cousin of singer Art Garfunkel's and the owner of the Chippendale's touring group of exotic male dancers—is himself an object of curiosity, as well as a frequent target for critics and his former protégés: Both the Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync have left Pearlman's Trans Continental Records and have sued him over financial disputes. Those suits have been settled out of court.

ABC hopes you'll watch Lou Pearlman fill in these blanks.

Pearlman will be prominently featured on the ABC program. "There's always a fascination with the idol-maker, the Svengali," says Ken Mok, an MTV executive vice-president. (ABC's *20/20 Downtown* found Pearlman fascinating enough to air a January 6 segment on him. The report, which briefly mentioned that Pearlman was developing a series for ABC, presented a balanced portrait of his successes and troubles.)

This Svengali's latest creation was launched with a nationwide talent search in November. At New York's Hard Rock Cafe, Pearlman, who could be Drew Carey's less fashionable uncle, presided over a procession of hundreds of fresh-faced, carefully coiffed young men, most between 18 and 25. The would-be pop stars warbled 'N Sync's "Tearing Up My Heart" and mangled the lyrics of "Silent Night."

Although he's one of the show's producers, Pearlman will not have the final say over what ABC airs. And who knows? Pearlman has created some less-than-stellar groups before—has anyone heard of CNote or Innosense?—and this new group may become one of them, no matter how the ABC show is received. "Maybe," Pearlman says, "they can't cut the mustard."

MICHAEL COLTON

TICKER

(Source: George Washington University, The Pew Charitable Trusts-Democracy Online Project)

74 Percentage of U.S. Internet users who believe that information available on the Internet about political candidates and campaigns is somewhat or very accurate

22 Percentage of U.S. Internet users who have gone online to find any type of political information

ANTHONY CUTAJAR/LFI

ON THE RECORD

"[T]hat's not shock radio. That's stupid execution of shock radio."

MICHAEL HARRISON, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF *TALKERS* TRADE MAGAZINE, CONCERNING REMARKS MADE ON AIR BY SCOTT SLOAN OF CLEAR CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS INC.'S WSPD SUGGESTING THAT THE REV. JESSE JACKSON SHOULD BE ASSASSINATED. QUOTED IN *THE* (TOLEDO) *BLADE*, DECEMBER 1, 1999.

POSTMORTEM

WELL, THAT'S ONE WAY TO GET THE SCOOP

In a December 14 profile of Connecticut attorney general Richard Blumenthal, *Washington Post* reporter David Segal praised Blumenthal's "media savvy," noting it was "a skill he might have honed decades ago as an intern at *The Washington Post*." What Segal didn't realize was that his profile was about to become a prime example of just how savvy Blumenthal can be—even with reporters who work at his old stomping ground.

Blumenthal put his media savviness to work on Segal while being interviewed for the profile, persuading the 35-year-old legal reporter to agree to a highly irregular deal that allowed the reporter to break big news and Blumenthal to get some uncritical coverage. The State of Connecticut was about to file suit against a large health maintenance organization, and Blumenthal told Segal he could report on the upcoming suit—but only if he did not seek comment from the HMO. Segal agreed. His profile, which ran on the front page of the *Post*'s Business section, trumpeted the suit in the headline and in the second paragraph. "Today, Blumenthal is set to become the first state attorney general to file suit against a health maintenance organization, suing Physicians Health Services, the third-largest health plan in the Northeast," wrote Segal. "The lawsuit will allege that the company has injured consumers and blocked their access to certain drugs based on cost rather than medical necessity."

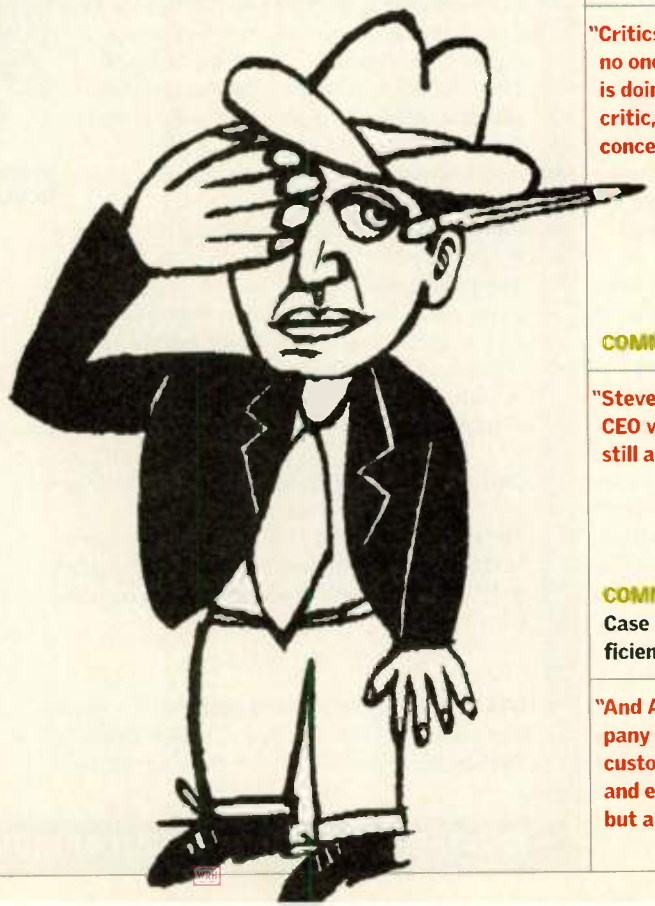
Segal's story was particularly upsetting to David Olson, senior vice-president of Foundation Health Systems, Inc., the parent company of Physicians Health Services, Inc. Olson, who stumbled across Segal's article via a news clipping service, picked up the phone and called Segal, looking for answers about why he hadn't received a call for comment. After all, reporters usually don't report allegations without checking with those targeted by the allegations.

Segal, Olson says, told him about the deal and defended himself by noting that the article quoted the head of an HMO lobbying group who'd said such suits are politically motivated.

That didn't satisfy Olson, who says *Post* readers saw only Blumenthal's version of the facts. "Let's call a spade a spade—the *Post* was a shill for Blumenthal," says Olson. "He should have paid [Segal] a fee for PR services."

Olson called the *Post*'s media reporter, Howard Kurtz. "I said, 'Howard, this is not the Paducah Times; this is *The Washington* bleeping *Post*," says Olson. "There are influential politicians reading the paper." Olson says he got a fair hearing from Kurtz, who ran a brief item about the flap in his December 27 column. Segal, who declined to comment when contacted by *Brill's Content*, told Kurtz that "I made a mistake for which I take full responsibility."

Segal's boss, Jill Dutt, the assistant managing editor for Business, declined to discuss how Segal's one-sided story got into the paper. Dutt did say at least three editors—a Business section assignment editor and two copy editors—read the story before it was published. Dutt told Kurtz that the *Post* should have done a follow-up story reflecting the HMO's views. As of mid-January, no such follow-up had been published. And Segal probably won't write one: He's moving to a new job as the paper's pop music critic. ROBERT SCHMIDT



SCOTT MENCHIN

MEET THE NEW BOSS

DID I REALLY SAY THAT?

When America Online and Time Warner's proposed merger was announced, we dug up some of what had been written in Time Inc. publications about AOL and the man set to become the merged company's chairman, Steve Case. Then we called those who'd written the stories to see what they had to say given who'll be signing their checks soon. LESLIE HEILBRUNN

"For standard bearers of the computer revolution, the techies who run America Online have a pretty shaky grasp of basic math."

David S. Jackson, "AOL Buys Some Time," *Time*, 2/10/97

COMMENT: "What idiot wrote that? No, seriously, at the time, there wasn't an analyst alive who thought that AOL wasn't going to be gobbled up by the Internet, and Steve Case defied all conventional wisdom because he kept succeeding. So I guess that teaches you not to rely on conventional wisdom."

"Critics compare AOL to Russia—no one has a clue what anyone else is doing. FYI: A high school music critic, Case scammed albums and concert tickets by telling record labels he wrote for Hawaii's leading teen newspaper."

Maggie Murphy, "EW Presents Power Mania 1999," *Entertainment Weekly*, 10/29/99

COMMENT: "Russia's looking up."

"Steve Case, you've got losses! AOL CEO watches stock tumble. But he's still a cybermogul, and you're not."

Belinda Luscombe, "Notebook: Winners & Losers," *Time*, 8/16/99

COMMENT: "I intend to put Steve Case as a loser again if he does sufficiently loserish things."

"And AOL's new bottom line is a company swollen with millions of new customers, rivers of new revenue and essentially unlimited potential but also a tricky new business

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 44]

NOTEBOOK

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43]

model that may prove difficult to take from the white board to the real world."
Michael Krantz, "AOL, You've Got Netscape," *Time*, 12/7/98

COMMENT: "Well, actually, I've been sucking up to AOL in print for years now, on the general assumption that one way or another they would wind up owning my ass. Steve! Dude! I'm, like, totally executive material. It's payback time."

"Foray into original programming (AOL Studios) seems misdirected; may never shake 'Web newbie' stigma."
Maggie Murphy, "*Entertainment Weekly*'s Ninth Annual Power 101," 10/30/98

COMMENT: "Well, we've solved those problems for him."

"Case, 39, has been famously (if inadvertently) self-destructive, infuriating AOL members by offering too little capacity and too many headaches."
Joshua Cooper Ramo, "How AOL Lost the Battles But Won the War," *Time*, 9/22/97

COMMENT: No comment.

"No, Case is basically a huckster. He started out marketing hair conditioner for Procter & Gamble and then tested exotic new combinations for Pizza Hut, only to find that people preferred plain tomato and cheese. Maybe that explains why AOL is the hold-the-toppings online service."
Marc Gunther, "The Internet Is Mr. Case's Neighborhood," *Fortune*, 3/30/98

COMMENT: "I'm totally comfortable with that, although personally I like my pizza with lots of vegetables on it."

"I don't care what you hear. The bottom line is this: Steve Case lured me into this place with a promise of fun and relaxation, all for a low monthly price. 'The first month is free!' he said, and God help me, I went, and now he's got me trapped in here, and I can't get out."
Stanley Bing (a pseudonym), "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Hit 'Enter,'" *Fortune*, 3/17/97

COMMENT: We were unable to reach Bing for comment.

DATEBOOK

MEET THE CARLSONS

As CNN anchor Bernard Shaw once said on *Inside Politics*: "Margaret Carlson, Tucker Carlson: You folks have me confused." We sometimes feel the same way, considering how frequently these two pop up on the media landscape.

So this month—as part of our ongoing effort to figure out who among the nation's pundits is the most ubiquitous—we've trained our sights on *Time*'s Carlson (Margaret) and *The Weekly Standard*'s Carlson (Tucker). Though not related by blood, the two are prominent members of the family of folks regularly tapped as experts by news outlets, particularly CNN.

In parentheses, we've given a concise description of what each discussed during numerous appearances in print, on television, and online. Asterisks denote those occasions when the pair surfaced on the same show.

Though Margaret says she was on vacation for the last 11 days of December (the month during which we tracked the pair), she rallied with the help of Time Warner synergy: Her report on using her computer to plan a holiday dinner party ran on two CNN networks and as a *Time* feature. Nevertheless, Tucker proved the more constant Carlson by a score of 20 to 13.

MATTHEW REED BAKER

DECEMBER

	TUCKER CARLSON	MARGARET CARLSON
WEEK 1	***Talk*** (Pat Buchanan's presidential candidacy and anti-Semitism; Warren Beatty's potential candidacy) **Slate: "The Breakfast Table"** (*The New York Times*'s group firings for offensive e-mail; George W. Bush as moderate candidate) **Slate: "The Breakfast Table"** (anti-media sentiment is wrong; potentially gay children's-book characters) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (predicting George W. Bush's role at his first presidential debate) **Slate: "The Breakfast Table"** (candidate weirdness in GOP debates)	***Vogue***: fan appreciation of HBO miniseries *The Sopranos* ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (George W. Bush's role at his first GOP debate) **CNN: *The Capital Gang*** (Bush's first debate; WTO meetings in Seattle)
WEEK 2	**CNN: *Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer*** (President Clinton and WTO; New Hampshire GOP race) **CNN: *Larry King Live*** (GOP debate in Arizona) **Slate** (Tucker tries an online "Candidate Selector" for undecided voters) **CNN: *Talkback Live*** (GOP debate in Arizona) **CNN Interactive: allpolitics.com** (GOP debate in Arizona) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (gun-industry lawsuits; GOP race) **CNN: *Crossfire*** (President Clinton's legacy)	***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (gun-industry lawsuits, the GOP race)
WEEK 3	**CNN: *Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer*** (the presidential and New York Senate races) ***The Washington Post*** (interviewed about being served a subpoena in Sidney Blumenthal's libel suit against Matt Drudge) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (Al Gore's health vs. Bradley's, Bush's choice of Christ as favorite philosopher, and the Bradley-McCain campaign-finance-reform alliance)	***Time*** (GOP governors support Bush) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (Al Gore's health vs. Bill Bradley's, Bush's choice of Christ as his favorite philosopher; the Bradley-McCain campaign-finance-reform alliance) **CNN: *The Capital Gang*** (GOP and Dem debates; failure of "don't ask, don't tell" policy)
WEEK 4	**CNN: *Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer*** (GOP-race polls and the Gore-Bradley *Meet the Press* debate) ***The Weekly Standard*** (Bush and gay Republicans) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and the N.Y.C. homeless, President Clinton's post–White House life)	**CNN: *CNN & Time*** (her effort to "plan and execute a high-profile Washington dinner party using only her computer") ***Time*** (Bush's smirk and attitude) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and the N.Y.C. homeless; President Clinton's post–White House life) **CNNfn: *In The Money*** (planning and executing a high-profile Washington dinner party using only a computer)
WEEK 5	**CNN: *Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer*** (McCain will be prez and other year-end predictions) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (Bradley and McCain's fund-raising success)	***Time*** (planning and executing a high-profile Washington dinner party using only a computer) ***CNN: *Inside Politics*** (Bradley and McCain's fund-raising success)


Tucker Carlson


Margaret Carlson

ALL PHOTOS KYLE CHRISTY FOR CNN

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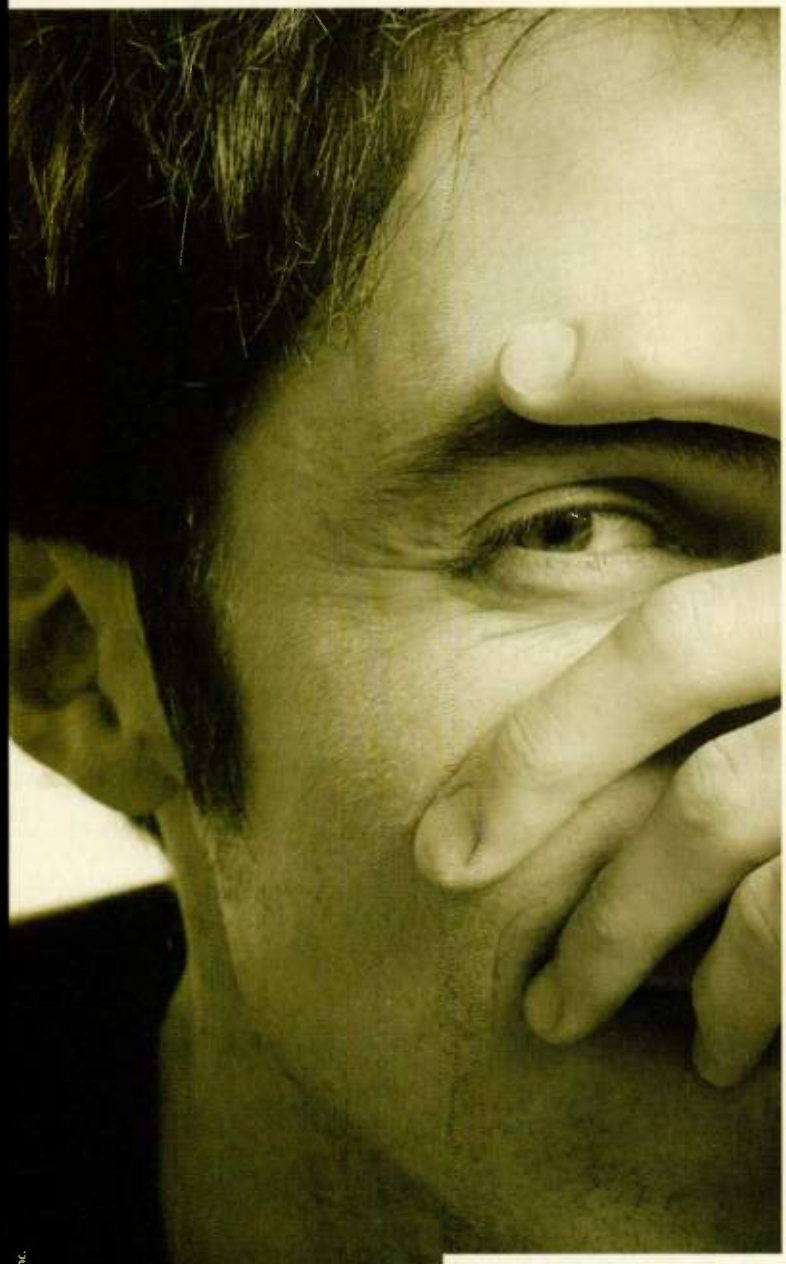

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vote early and often

Will vote.com transform the democratic process? Owner Dick Morris is using his media appearances to tout its sham poll results—and maybe make a lot of money. BY ERIC EFFRON

I voted for John McCain. In fact, I liked him so much, I voted for him twice.

Well, I suppose I should put the word *vote* inside quotation marks, because what I really did was log on to Dick Morris's astounding new website, vote.com, and register my opinion that McCain had won the Republican New Hampshire debate on January 6. It was only a semi-informed vote, I should admit, because I caught only a few minutes of the debate, what with the kids needing help with their homework and other household distractions. But I liked the way McCain handled those pesky questions about his actions on behalf of a big contributor, and I'm sort of rooting for him at this point. So I voted for him.

When I immediately tried to vote for him a second time, the website told me I could vote only once, although the message added that if I was a different user than the first voter, I could log on using a different user profile. That reminded me that I had another user profile for a different e-mail account, so I logged on using that name and voted a second time. I could have voted a few more times using my kids' e-mail accounts, but I don't like McCain *that* much.

Okay, maybe it's not news that these Internet polls are a joke. But in the case of vote.com, the joke may be on us, because it's part of an elaborate for-profit effort by Morris, a former Clinton adviser, to change the way our democracy works. And unlike most Internet polls, which are relatively harmless because they basically don't exist outside the hosting website, Morris cleverly uses his perches as a newspaper columnist and Fox News commentator to promote his new business venture and to tout its poll results as if they were significant. (So if you happened to hear Morris quoting the results of the vote on the January 6 GOP debate, you should subtract at least one vote from the McCain column.)

We've written in this space about ads that blur into news, about news that blurs into promotion, and about how the values of entertainment threaten to undermine the credibility of journalism. But Morris's vote.com represents a far different and perhaps more insidious blur: democracy blurring into commerce. If Morris pulls this off, he'll have a successful website and we'll have a damaged republic. If that sounds like I'm giving too much credit to Morris—the man who resigned in disgrace from the Clinton team in 1996 because of his embarrassing encounters with a prostitute—let's take a closer look at what Morris is attempting.

"When America was founded, some wanted a town meeting-style of direct democracy, but logistics prevented it," Morris writes. "Now that the Internet makes it quite possible, vote.com seeks to bring it about."

Your vote on vote.com is forwarded to your representatives, the White House, or other relevant authorities. If the practice catches on, Morris argues, millions of Americans will [CONTINUED ON PAGE 112]

BILL SUDICK

WRH

just one word

When Al Gore's comments to Concord High kids were twisted by the national media, the vice-president was humiliated. But teachers and students fought back. BY MIKE PRIDE

Every four years, New Hampshire's presidential primary gives me a front-row seat for the national media show. The coverage is deep, wide, and insightful, leaving voters no excuse for anything but an informed choice. But it isn't always pretty. Even what at first appears to be a small reporting error can reverberate through the airwaves, and setting such an error right is nearly impossible.

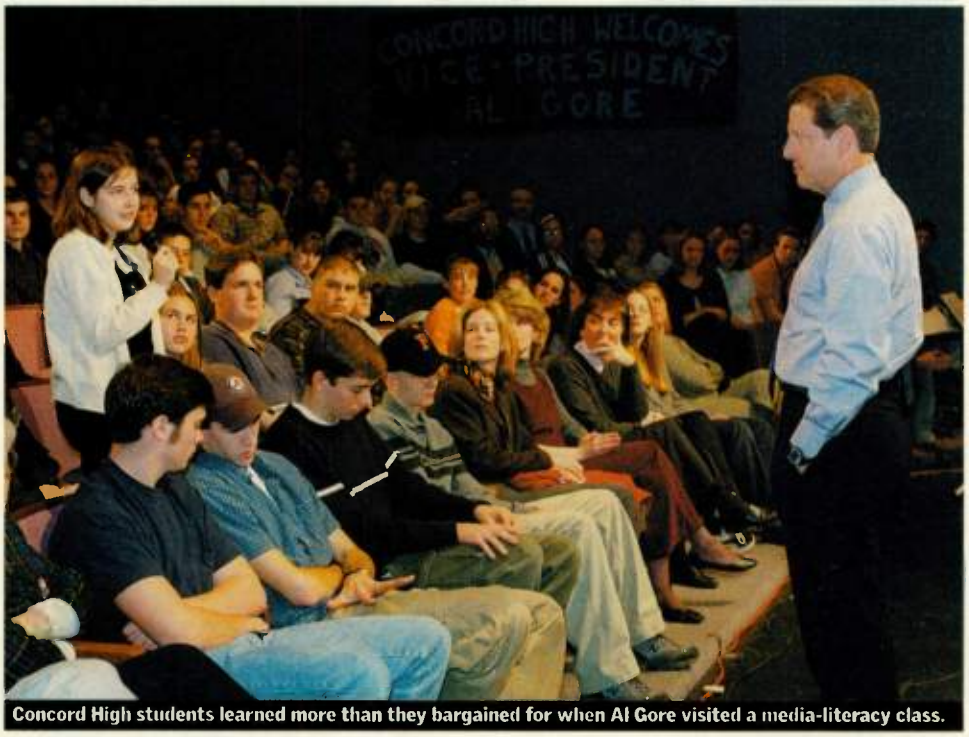
The coverage of Vice-President Al Gore's November 30 visit to our local high school was a case in point. Gore's topic was school violence, but he took students' questions on a range of other issues.

As the local paper, the *Concord Monitor* focused on the exchange between Gore and the students. However, the appearance at Concord High was only one of several stops for Gore in New Hampshire that day, and—quite properly—some national reporters played it down.

Ceci Connolly of *The Washington Post* found her theme in Gore's efforts to distance himself from Washington. Katharine Q. Seelye of *The New York Times* led her story with Gore's assertion that the Clinton administration—and, by extension, Gore himself—deserved credit for the booming economy. Connolly, who worked for the *Monitor* years ago, later explained that although she wasn't discounting the discussion with the Concord High School students, *Post* readers "get a pretty steady diet about Al Gore meeting with students....[T]ucked into the word 'newspaper' is the word 'new.'"

That is not to say that Seelye and Connolly found no news in Gore's visit to the high school. Seelye reported that Gore had told the students that "he was the one who had first drawn attention to the toxic contamination of Love Canal," the upstate New York neighborhood contaminated by chemical waste during the 1970s. "I was the one that started it all," she quoted Gore as having said. The same quote appeared deep in Connolly's story as well. She put Gore's statement in the context of "earlier attempts to embellish his role in major events." Similarly, Seelye invited a comparison between the Love Canal quote and Gore's claim that he had invented the Internet.

In fact, Gore never said "I was the one that started it all." But



Concord High students learned more than they bargained for when Al Gore visited a media-literacy class.

because television feeds off newspapers, once a statement like that appears in two such authoritative sources, it spreads like a virus. Luckily for Gore, someone followed its course and tried to stamp it out.

That someone was Joanne McGlynn, an English teacher at Concord High. I know McGlynn—she taught two of my children. She is creative, innovative, and energetic, and she constantly seeks to make her subject relevant. She and another teacher, Beth York, had invited all of the presidential candidates to the high school as a real-life lesson for their media-literacy classes. Gore was the third candidate to accept the invitation, and what a lesson his visit turned out to be.

Gore's statement about Love Canal came in his answer to Shane Fletcher, a student. Fletcher wanted Gore's ideas on involving students in politics. In the course of his response, Gore told this story—a good one that some of the students must have found inspiring:

"Twenty years ago, I got a letter from a high school student in west Tennessee about how the water her family was drinking from a well tasted funny. She wrote me how her grandfather had a mysterious ailment that paralyzed part of his body that she was convinced was

KEN WILLIAMS/CONCORD MONITOR

related to the water. Then her father also became mysteriously ill. People thought she was imagining things.

"We investigated, and what we found was that one mile from her home, a chemical company had dug a big trench, and they were dumping millions of gallons of hazardous chemical waste into the ground. It had seeped down into the water table and contaminated her family's well and the wells of other families in that rural area.

"I called for a congressional investigation and a hearing. I looked around the country for other sites like that. I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. Had the first hearing on that issue and [Toone], Tennessee—that was the one you didn't hear of—but that was the one that started it all.

"We passed a major national law to clean up hazardous dump sites, and we had new efforts to stop the practices that ended up poisoning water around the country. We've still got work to do, but we made a huge difference. And it all happened because one high school student got involved."

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS RIDICULED THE VICE-PRESIDENT'S "PINOCCHIO PROBLEM." CHRIS MATTHEWS CITED THE QUOTE AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF GORE'S "ZELIG CONDITION."

Gore's first mention of Love Canal was confusing. Although he did not say "I was the one that started it all," it is unclear what he meant by "that" was the one that started it all. He himself was unsure enough of what he had said to apologize the next day to anyone who got the misimpression that he was claiming he had discovered the pollution at Love Canal. But even if he overstated his case, the exaggeration falls within the normal bounds of claims made by politicians. Besides, the most likely readings of the ambiguity are not detrimental to him. He could have meant Love Canal "started it all" or the Tennessee site sparked the congressional hearings or the high school student's letter prompted him to act.

Television commentators in particular had no doubt about what Gore had said or what he'd meant. Within days of his appearance at the high school, McGlynn and her students videotaped and collected what became of Gore's statement once it entered what she called "the pundit pipeline." Here are some examples:

■ On *Hardball*, Chris Matthews cited the quote as another example of Gore's "Zelig condition." Here's a guy, he said, "who keeps saying, *I was the main character in* Love Story, *I invented the Internet, I invented Love Canal*....He's not happy being Al Gore. He wants to be these other guys." Matthews accused Gore of "stepping into an elaborate trap of his own construction" and raised the specter of Dan Quayle: "It's one thing to have misspelled *potato*...it's another to claim to have invented the potato."

■ On the same show, Ed Rollins said of Gore: "I think he has Edmund Morris [author of a fictionalized biography of Ronald Reagan] writing his speeches for him."

■ On C-SPAN, Republican National Committee chairman Jim Nicholson used the quote as more evidence of Gore's identity crisis. Nicholson said, "He can't seem to decide who he is, where he is, what the truth is."

■ On ABC's *This Week*, most of the regulars took shots at Gore. To snickers, George Stephanopoulos ridiculed the vice-president's "Pinocchio problem." Cokie Roberts said Gore had asserted that he "discovered" Love Canal even though the neighborhood had been evacuated before Gore's congressional hearings even began. With a smile, Bill Kristol quoted Gore directly and, of course, incorrectly: "'I found a little place up in New York called Love Canal. I was the one that started it all.'" George Will hinted at an unwritten three-strikes-and-you're-out rule on gaffes. "He's now out of margin on this," Will said. "People start to giggle, and you can survive anything in politics except giggling."

■ Three days after the Gore appearance at the high school, David Letterman's list was "Top Ten Other Achievements Claimed By Al Gore" ("No. 7. He invented the dog." "No. 1. Gave mankind fire").

■ In its December 13 edition, *U.S. News & World Report* ran the misquote—"I was the one that started it all"—in its "In Quotes" section.

■ In *Newsweek*'s issue of the same date, under the headline "Back on the Slippery Slope," reporter Bill Turque did not repeat the misquote but used the incident as another example of Gore's "penchant for embellishing the facts." Turque added: "What's mystifying is that in each instance, the straight story is just as laudable. He didn't uncover Love Canal, but he did help lead the fight against toxic waste dumping."

Actually, McGlynn's Concord High English students did more than simply chronicle the coverage of Gore's statement—they also attempted to right the wrong. The students stayed after school to write a press release, and McGlynn called Seelye. The *Post* ran a correction on December 7, six days after the error occurred; the *Times* printed one on December 10. *U.S. News* also corrected the misquote. Stories in the *Concord Monitor* and *The Boston Globe* and on a Boston television station exposed the error.

Holly Ramer of The Associated Press bureau in Concord wrote a story less sympathetic to McGlynn's students, saying they had "struck back" because they were "miffed" that Gore's visit "got no more than just a few quotes in newspaper stories." Gore was "slightly misquoted," Ramer wrote. She quoted Seelye as having said the error had been "blown out of proportion. It was one word."

Well, yes, just one word, but I don't buy that view. The real mistake the reporters made was to hear what they wanted to hear: one more episode in which Al Gore overstated his role in a major event. To their credit, they didn't lead their stories with it. And when confronted with their mistake by an activist reader, they corrected it.

But in an age in which this morning's newspaper account is tonight's talk-show ridicule, the premium on accuracy is higher than ever. As our local students learned, one word goes a long way—and fast—in the realm of all news, all the time. ■

Mike Pride is the editor of the Concord Monitor, *in Concord, New Hampshire. His column on editing a daily local paper appears regularly. You can write to him at mpride@cmonitor.com.*

the end of the affair

After a year without Monica, a scandal-less pundit discovers that breaking up is hard to do. BY CALVIN TRILLIN

This is the story of Scott, a political columnist who last February expressed great relief that the end of the Lewinsky scandal had left him free to deal with issues of substance, and then realized he couldn't think of any issues that he particularly cared to deal with.

Also, it became apparent to Scott almost immediately that he was going to miss being on television, a medium about which he had always expressed a certain amount of disdain. He was a columnist for a small-circulation magazine whose politics were sometimes described as neo-moderate or, when the description was being offered by the most severe critics of its ideology, as post-neo-moderate. The Lewinsky scandal had been the occasion of his first experience as an on-camera performer. For nearly a year, Scott had talked about the scandal regularly on cable news programs, and even once or twice on the Sunday-morning network shows. Although he spoke of appearing on television as a chore he was doing reluctantly, mainly to bring attention to his magazine, he prepared carefully for every program. He would spend hours selecting the right tie and the right sport coat; the look he was after was hard-nosed-but-essentially-suave reporter. He would prepare wry comebacks that were designed to sound spontaneous and to combine two or three radically disparate elements of the scandal, like oral sex and The Federalist Papers.

A few weeks after the Senate voted not to convict Bill Clinton, Scott's wife, Linda, found Scott in his study staring longingly at a chart he'd kept of which jacket and which tie and which wry comebacks he'd used on each program.

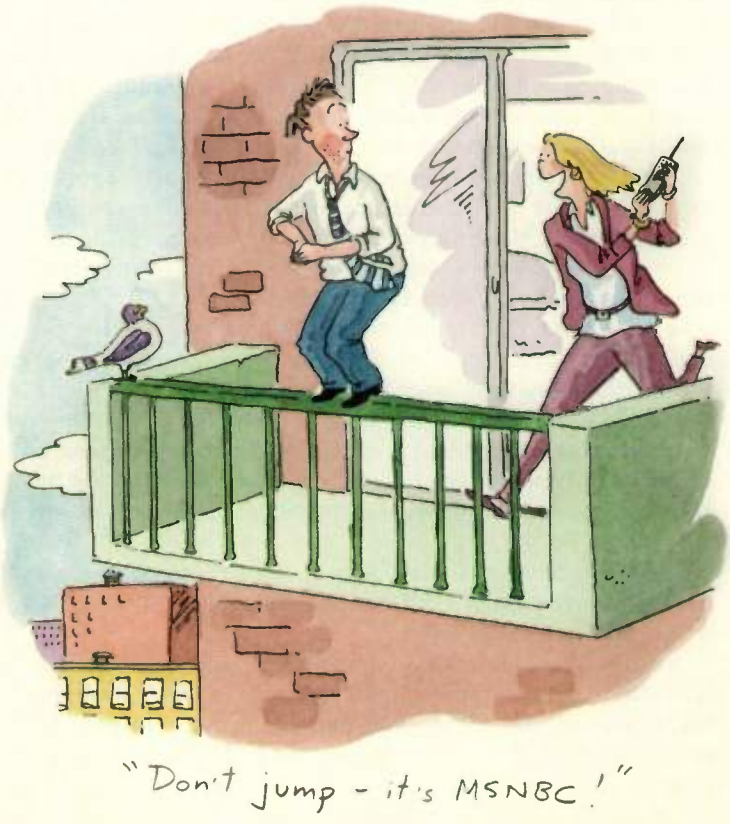
"I didn't want to repeat myself," Scott said, in a sad little voice. "No chance of that now."

"But just about every time you were on one of those programs you said how much you regretted having to devote your time to discussing sordid incidents of this kind on television instead of writing about issues that were of vital importance to the American people," Linda said. She reminded him of the time he'd said on CNN that he longed to be up to his elbows in the issue of Third World debt.

Scott stared at the chart for a while. Then he said, "You might say I wasn't coming clean with the American people."

During the months of the scandal, Linda had expressed some reservations about Scott's foray into television. She'd referred to MSNBC as Monica Smut NBC. She thought Scott was in danger of being subsumed into the fraternity of windy TV pontificators she'd heard somebody call the Sabbath Gasbags. Scott always grumbled about giving up an evening at home for a TV discussion on a subject he would refer to sardonically to his friends as "Monica Lewinsky and Gennifer Flowers as Objects of Desire: Compare and Contrast." But Linda thought he might be getting to accept as his due the attention brought by regular appearances on the tube. When they walked into a restaurant, he sometimes seemed to be waiting to be recognized. Now and then he was, maybe by a waiter who'd say something like "You know, you remind me of someone."

But when that recognition stopped suddenly, Linda grew concerned about Scott's state of mind. He thought he would probably be



DANNY SHANAHAN

called back to comment when it was reported that Judge Susan Webber Wright might cite President Clinton for civil contempt for his Paula Jones testimony or when there was talk of Janet Reno's naming a special counsel to investigate Kenneth Starr. But nobody seemed engaged by those developments. When Monica Lewinsky appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, Scott stared at the screen, stony faced. She was the wrongdoer, yet there she was, practically on prime time, while he, someone who had never had illicit sex with any public official, was all but banished. It occurred to him that this could be mentioned ironically, or maybe even wryly, in a television discussion as an example of how the rewards and punishments in our society are out of whack. Then he remembered that he was no longer asked to participate in television discussions.

As the months went on, Scott seemed increasingly dejected. Linda tried to be supportive. "When I read your piece on the Social Security trust fund, the earth moved," she'd whisper in his ear at breakfast, as she reached over to pour cereal for one of the children. But Scott knew that nobody was truly interested in the Social Security trust fund issue or the trade imbalance issue or any other issues he was writing about. At parties nobody approached him to ask about the inside story on those subjects, the way people had once approached him to ask whether he thought Paula Corbin Jones would ever find inner peace or whether he thought Linda Tripp was, when all was said and done, a sincere person.

In August, Scott seemed to brighten a bit with the flurry of speculation in the press that George W. Bush had used cocaine as a young man. Scott could imagine himself on an MSNBC panel, deploring the speculation while commenting on it with dazzling aperçus about the baby-boom generation and wondrously apt statistics on middle-class drug use and colorful quotations, such as John Mortimer's passage about how his father, a barrister who believed that strong drugs caused constipation, always said that Coleridge, an opium user, was "a stranger to the lavatory." But the speculation about Bush's youthful coke habit seemed to pass before any panels could be organized.

As autumn changed into winter, Scott found himself overcome with feelings of uselessness. He'd quit reading the papers. He no longer shaved, having decided that without television makeup he didn't look like himself anyway. He remembered having read somewhere that after World War II there was a fear that some GIs—relentlessly trained, hardened in combat—would be unable to adjust to civilian life and might even prove dangerous. Could it be that he was of no use in the civilian world?

And so it was that Linda arrived home from work one day in January to find Scott standing on the balcony of their apartment, 14 floors above the street, ready to jump.

"Don't!" she shouted. "You have to live—for me, for the children."

"Live to write about urban mass transit?" Scott said. "I don't think so." He shook his head sadly, and began edging farther out. Then the phone rang, and Linda snatched it up. "Scott!" she said, after listening for a moment. "Scott, it's MSNBC. They're planning a big retrospective discussion for the anniversary of the impeachment vote, and they want you to be part of it."

Scott paused. Then he said, "Really truly?"

"Really truly," Linda said. "They're hoping to get Henry Hyde and William Ginsburg and everybody."

Scott took a tentative step away from the edge.

"I think you should wear the brown tweed," Linda said. "The brown tweed makes you look wise."

"I think I wore the brown tweed last time on MSNBC," Scott said. He came in from the balcony and went to his study to check his chart. ■

Contributing editor Calvin Trillin is the author of Family Man, *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.

FACE-OFF

Are the media ignoring the underside of our booming economy? Or have they just stopped equating wealth with evil?

time for reality check

JEFF COHEN ARGUES

A good place to begin a discussion of media bias on economics is with the price of wine. In 1997, this is how the *New York Times* wine columnist discussed the issue: "The $100-a-bottle wine, once an example of vulgar excess, is now an everyday occurrence."

What's now an everyday occurrence is celebratory and ignorant elitism in national media. Indeed, it is the overriding bias in economics coverage—and leads to a conservative, pro-corporate slant on issues from trade to wages to Social Security.

For the record, an estimated 96 percent of California wines in 1998 retailed for $14 or less per bottle; 81 percent sold for under $7. Let's move from the price of wine to what a *Newsweek* cover last July called "The Whine of '99: Everyone's Getting Rich But Me!" It's a variant on *Money* magazine's less-whiny May cover: "Everyone's Getting Rich!"

Echoing *Newsweek*, CNN's June 30 *TalkBack Live* began this way: "Behind the mind-boggling wealth of Bill Gates, there are more billionaires and millionaires than ever before, and it might seem as if everyone you know is in on the action." *Newsweek*'s cover story focuses on the frustration of those who believe that everyone around them is getting rich. Only alert readers who can concentrate amid a deafening drumbeat would notice that when *Newsweek* says that "everyone's getting rich," it has in mind a tiny subset of Americans: "Almost half of all people who earn $50,000 or more say they know someone who's become rich." Reality check: *Newsweek* found that seven in ten people who were asked had family incomes below $50,000.

Like so much of the happy hype that masquerades as journalism about economics, the *Newsweek* piece skips breezily over reality: "The income gap remains a thorny problem, but wealth is being increasingly spread out as businesses give workers more of a stake. And as everybody starts to ponder his own dot.com business plan, that picks up the pace of innovation."

WESLEY BEDROSIAN

Reality check: Far from being "increasingly spread out," wealth in the United States is increasingly concentrated. According to New York University economics professor Edward Wolff, most American households have a lower net worth today than they did in 1983. The top 1 percent of U.S. households has more wealth than the bottom 95 percent combined, and more than 40 percent of total wealth—doubling the share it had in 1976.

Myths proliferate in mainstream media that tend to see the economy from the perch of corporate managers and investors and not from the perspective of the vast majority of Americans, whose income derives basically from wages or salary.

The elevated roost explains why daily newspapers have business pages but not labor or workplace pages. It explains why (along with corporate sponsorship and ownership) national television, including PBS, offers dozens of business and investor programs but not one regular show on labor or consumer rights. It explains why economics coverage is dominated by pro-corporate sources; a 40-month study of *Nightline* from 1985 to 1988 conducted by Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting found that for every union official discussing economics there were seven business representatives.

It explains the exalted status of ABC's John Stossel (see page 80)—a reporter who unabashedly advocates business deregulation on air and in speeches to Capitol Hill and industry lobby groups ("I'm delighted to pitch the miracle of markets and the evils of regulation every chance I get," Stossel told *USA Today* in a January 18, 1995, article). He had been a consumer reporter but was quoted as saying after a 1996 speech to The Federalist Society, "I got sick of it. I also now make so much money I just lost interest in saving a buck on a can of peas."

An elite perch explains how, during the Teamsters strike against United Parcel Service, columnists Steven and Cokie Roberts could warn against stronger unions by arguing that "a $20-an-hour job doesn't do any worker any good if the company loses business or closes down." Let's do the numbers: A $20-an-hour UPS driver earns in a year $40,000—roughly what Steve and Cokie were reportedly paid for lecturing in 1994 to a Chicago bank.

In the right wing's caricature, the Washington press corps is peopled by corporate-bashing, big-government liberals. This portrait is debunked by a survey of 141 journalists—primarily from the most influential outlets—conducted in 1998 for FAIR by Virginia Commonwealth University professor David Croteau. Comparing journalists' responses to public opinion as measured by mainstream polls, Croteau found journalists to be more conservative than the public on many key economic issues.

Journalists were [CONTINUED ON PAGE 54]

now it's okay to be rich

JONAH GOLDBERG ARGUES

If a giant asteroid made of the frozen Ebola virus were hurling toward the Earth, *The New York Times* would run a headline saying, "Armageddon Nigh; Fate Of Blacks, Women In Doubt." It's an old joke, but it gets to a larger point: Most crusading journalists don't have much use for economics except as a tool for their political agendas.

It seems only appropriate, now that we are clear of the nineties, for an end-of-the-century postmortem. In the eighties the media used the term *Reaganomics* the way the French use the word *America*—which is to say derisively. At first, during the recession of 1981-82, Reaganomics was synonymous with economic failure. In what must have seemed a great nod to fairness, *New York Times* White House correspondent Steven R. Weisman wrote in 1982, "No economist lays the entire blame for the current recession at the doorstep of Reaganomics....But judged on its own terms, Mr. Reagan's allegedly painless means to economic recovery has failed to deliver." By 1984 the economy was rebounding, but somehow, it was hard to figure out why. "[T]he current economic recovery is clearly making Americans feel better; what is less obvious is what brought about the upturn and who should get the credit," wrote *Times* correspondent Karen Arenson at the time.

When prosperity arrived, Reaganomics was redefined to mean everything cruel short of puppy-stomping. William Schneider, now CNN's senior political analyst, wrote in *The New Republic* in 1984: "Reaganomics is economic elitism. It is the view that hunger in America is merely anecdotal, that the homeless are homeless by choice, and that only the morally unworthy have been hurt by the Administration's policies."

WESLEY BEDROSIAN

In short, complex social ills were reported as if they were the logical and verifiable result of Republican economic policies, even though federal low-income aid actually increased under Reagan. "President Reagan's economic policies...were designed to make the rich richer and to punish the poor—and they have done exactly that," editorialized the *St. Petersburg Times*.

But what the media saw as evil in the eighties under Reagan suddenly became good or at least benign in the nineties under Clinton. Take income inequality. The fact is that in the nineties income inequality was easily as dramatic as it was in the eighties, perhaps even more so. But back then, the message about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer could not have gotten greater coverage if Elvis had come back from the dead to deliver it himself. I don't happen to think inequality is a grave problem. But the media certainly did, when it seemed to reflect poorly on Reagan. These days one hears very little about inequality, even though the usual left-wing groups Jeff likes still gnash their teeth about it.

Or take the superrich. Let's pick on *Newsweek*. In 1988 the magazine wrote that during the eighties, "the money culture ruled, and Ivan Boesky was some kind of hero." The Reagan years were "a time when avarice got respectable, poverty expanded and wealth became a kind of state religion." Fast-forward to July 1999. *Newsweek* ran a cover story on the beneficiaries of the Wall Street boom. Although it had a nice class-warfare title—"They're Rich (and You're Not)"—the authors reflected a more enlightened view of wealth. "In another, earlier era—the go-go 1980s—many Americans tended to make villains of such arrivistes. But the suddenly wealthy are no longer bogeymen....The rich, at long last, are very much like you or me: they're an idealized version of ourselves." Who does *Newsweek* think demonized the "arrivistes" in the first place?

Today, some nose-pierced skate rat working the mail room at hemp.com can become a zillionaire and replace Horatio Alger in the public eye. But when Michael Milken provided the funding for such fly-by-night operations as Federal Express and MCI Communications Corp., well, that was an age of selfishness, paper profits, and "junk" bonds.

Not all bad economic reporting is partisan. Rather, many journalists believe that they are simply in the bad-news business. Why, for example, are economic indicators phrased in the negative? Why say "unemployment jumped starkly from 4.2 to 4.9 percent" rather than "employment dropped from 95.8 to 95.1 percent"?

The same is true for reporting on poverty. "Now, the percentage of people living below the poverty line in America is at the lowest point of this decade. But that still means some 35 million Americans are in poverty," reported Charles Gibson on *ABC World News Tonight* in a typical declaration. The number 35 million is bandied about all the time. But what is meant by "poverty" is not always clear.

A 1998 Heritage [CONTINUED ON PAGE 55]

[COHEN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52] asked: Do "a few large corporations" have "too much power"? Somewhat split on the issue, 57 percent of the journalists answered yes; 43 percent answered no. By contrast, the public was one-sided on the question, with 77 percent (versus 18 percent) saying yes. If national journalists are business-bashers, soccer moms are communists.

Should Washington "guarantee medical care for all people who don't have health insurance"? Journalists were fairly divided (43 percent pro, 35 percent con), while the public supported a federal guarantee of health insurance 2 to 1—64 percent to 29 percent.

What about trade? Although the public was generally more negative than positive in assessing the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement, journalists were overwhelming fans of NAFTA (65 to 8 percent). On granting the president "fast track" authority to negotiate new trade deals, the public was as widely opposed (67 percent) as journalists were supportive (71 percent).

Raise taxes on the wealthy? That's hugely popular with the public; not so popular with the surveyed journalists—most of whom declared annual household incomes above $100,000, with almost a third declaring household incomes above $150,000. Reality check: The median household income in the U.S. is about $38,000.

Far from a leftist cabal, the Washington press corps reveals itself in the Croteau survey to be a conservative elite, out of step with average Americans. It seems that journalists prospering at prestige jobs in big corporations aren't overly worried about health coverage or the impact of overseas sweatshops on U.S. jobs and wages.

My point is not that well-paid journalists with right-of-center economic views can't cover the economy fairly. They can, but only if their coverage acknowledges that *economic events affect different people and groups differently*. And only if they commit to balancing sources and experts—especially on economic issues where their personal biases are in accord with the moneyed interests that own or sponsor the news. That takes courage. To cite two issues where balance is in short supply:

Trade. From NAFTA to the World Trade Organization, cheerleading often drowns out reporting on trade. Here's the lead of a front-page *New York Times* backgrounder on the treaty that gave birth to the WTO: "Free trade means growth. Free trade means growth. Free trade means growth. Just say it 50 more times and all doubts will melt away." The article—headlined in part, "How Free Trade Prompts Growth: A Primer"—wasn't satire; only sources lauding "free trade" were quoted.

Sourcing on this issue is no more balanced than the U.S. trade deficit. A FAIR study of reporting on NAFTA (April-July 1993) in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* found that of 201 quoted sources, NAFTA supporters outnumbered critics more than 3 to 1. Not one source represented a labor union; only six represented environmental groups.

TODAY IN THE MEDIA, TRIUMPHALISM HAS REPLACED DEBATE ABOUT "OUR BOOMING ECONOMY." REALITY CHECK: ONE IN FIVE KIDS STILL LIVES IN POVERTY.

Social Security. Like trade, a media mantra is repeated unchallenged—without big reforms, Social Security is going broke. *Say it 50 times and doubts melt away.* FAIR's 13-month study of nightly network news reporting on Social Security in 1998-99 found not a debate but a drumbeat: The system is going broke (not one dissenter) and can be fixed by turning it at least partly over to Wall Street (almost no dissenters).

Though rarely quoted in the mass media, some experts don't see a crisis. They note that the Social Security trustees' projection of a deficit in the year 2034 is based on a strikingly pessimistic average annual economic growth rate of 1.4 percent over the next 75 years. That's half the average 3 percent growth rate of the last 75 years, which includes the Great Depression.

Today in the media, triumphalism has replaced debate about "our booming economy." Reality check: 44 million Americans have no health insurance, and nearly one in five kids still lives in poverty. Because the minimum wage has fallen in value, 15 percent of workers receive a wage that would have been illegal in the late 1960s. For the typical worker, real hourly wages were lower in 1998 than in 1973. For these millions of Americans, a $100 bottle of wine is hardly an everyday occurrence. ◘

Jeff Cohen founded Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting. His latest book is Wizards of Media Oz: Behind the Curtain of Mainstream News.

JONAH GOLDBERG REPLIES

I'm confused. Jeff is outraged over the mantra "free trade means growth" but doesn't dispute it. He's rightly angry about pessimistic growth projections but seems oblivious to what creates growth. He decries decreasing wages but is silent on payroll taxes, which pay for the poverty and health measures he seems to endorse. He suggests that elite journalists lack "courage" for not spouting liberal economic theories, but I don't recall his saluting the courage of journalists defying conventional liberal canons.

Some questions: In every "Face-Off" to come may I quote all the surveys that show journalists as liberal? If *The New York Times* had a "Labor" section, what would it put on the front page? Didn't the idea that "right wing" equals "big business" go out with Thomas Nast cartoons? Besides Stossel, can Jeff name another free-market elite journalist, noted supply-siders Steven and Cokie Roberts aside? Yes, journalists are elitist; that's why we call them "limousine liberals." But Jeff's solution is to quote more union shills, which is like balancing Stephen Hawking with a flat-earther. And that brings me to Wolff's infamous Twentieth Century Fund study. Is it so hard to admit things are getting better? The Dow is ten times what it was in 1983, with more than twice the number of American households owning stock. Median family income went up 15 percent from 1981 to 1997; homeownership rates (the traditional route to prosperity) are at historic highs.

Also, the 1973 hourly-wages statistic is a liberal Medusa's head; it's used to petrify opponents. Reality check: Most honest economists say it's a bad number. It overstates inflation, and it ignores compensation (benefits, health insurance, etc.), which has increased handsomely since 1973. But, yes, Jeff's right about the wine thing. ◘

[GOLDBERG, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53] Foundation report by Robert Rector analyzed a variety of government studies that looked at the group of Americans defined by the Census Bureau as poor. Rector found that the typical impoverished American has a car, air conditioning, a stove, a VCR, a microwave, a stereo, and a color TV. He lives in a home with more space than the average resident of Paris. This may not be affluence, it may not even be as good as it should be, but it's not what most Americans think of when they hear the word *poverty*. What they do think of is starvation. However, the number of people going hungry in America is astonishingly small, according to surveys, while the number of poor people who are obese is dismayingly high.

WHAT THE MEDIA SAW AS EVIL IN THE EIGHTIES UNDER REAGAN SUDDENLY BECAME GOOD OR AT LEAST BENIGN IN THE NINETIES UNDER CLINTON.

The left used to complain that economics coverage was often just stock-ticker-reading. The complaint still has merit, especially when aimed at network news, which usually covers the markets like baseball scores. When these programs go "in depth," they usually do so in a "news you can use" style. Still, with nearly 50 percent of American households owning stocks, Wall Street coverage is getting ubiquitous—and better.

Another problem could be called "epistemological hubris," but my lips get tired when I read that. So let's just say that journalists rely on what can be measured without understanding the limited utility of such measurements. For example, we hear much about stagnating wages but not about the rise in compensation. Male-female comparisons showing huge disparities in pay fall apart when you account for seniority, education, and job category.

The worst high-profile economic reportage of the past decade was *The Philadelphia Inquirer*'s 1996 series "America: Who Stole The Dream?" Robert Samuelson called it "junk journalism" for good reason. In it, the authors abused statistics in ways that would make even Robert Reich cringe: "If $1 billion in exports creates 20,000 jobs, then $1 billion in imports eliminates a like number." This is like saying, "If you put an ice cube in your water it will make it cold, therefore if you remove it, it will make it hot."

The economy is huge, dynamic, unpredictable, and often vastly more complicated than the snapshot numbers that journalists rely on suggest. Worse, journalists often take a particular episode and assume that the plural of *anecdote* is *data*. Take the now-famous 1996 *New York Times* series on "The Downsizing of America." It began with the story of a single man, Steven Holthausen, who had a bout of really bad luck when he lost his $52,000 job and could find only a $12,000 job as a tour guide.

The *Times* declares that the "grimness" of Holthausen's tale is "no longer at all extraordinary" because "[m]ore than 43 million jobs have been erased in the United States since 1979." Okay, but they haven't resulted in 43 million Holthausens. Besides, that 43 million reflects less than a 3 percent annual turnover. It is a sign of an economy's health that new jobs are created and others lost.

But the biggest problem with economics coverage is that journalists tend to believe that politicians "run" the economy. When job growth is reported, the news is often credited to the White House, as if the president had a jobs home-brewing kit in the basement. No honest historian or economist would lay day-to-day poverty or jobless rates at the president's doorstep, yet journalists assume that all the solutions lie in Washington.

Obviously, much of this smells of liberalism, and some of it simply aids the big-government agenda without being crassly political. There is room for praise, however. Economics is the hardest of the social sciences, and it therefore lends itself to rational analysis and empirical debunking. And we have a wealth of excellent debunker-journalists—Robert Samuelson, Louis Uchitelle, Dan Seligman, James Glassman, Paul Krugman. Still, progress is slow and the asteroid bias continues. *The New York Times* recently banned the phrase "voodoo economics"—not because it discriminates against supply-siders but because it's unfair to voodoo practitioners. ■

Jonah Goldberg is the editor of National Review Online, *for which he writes a daily column called "The Goldberg File."*

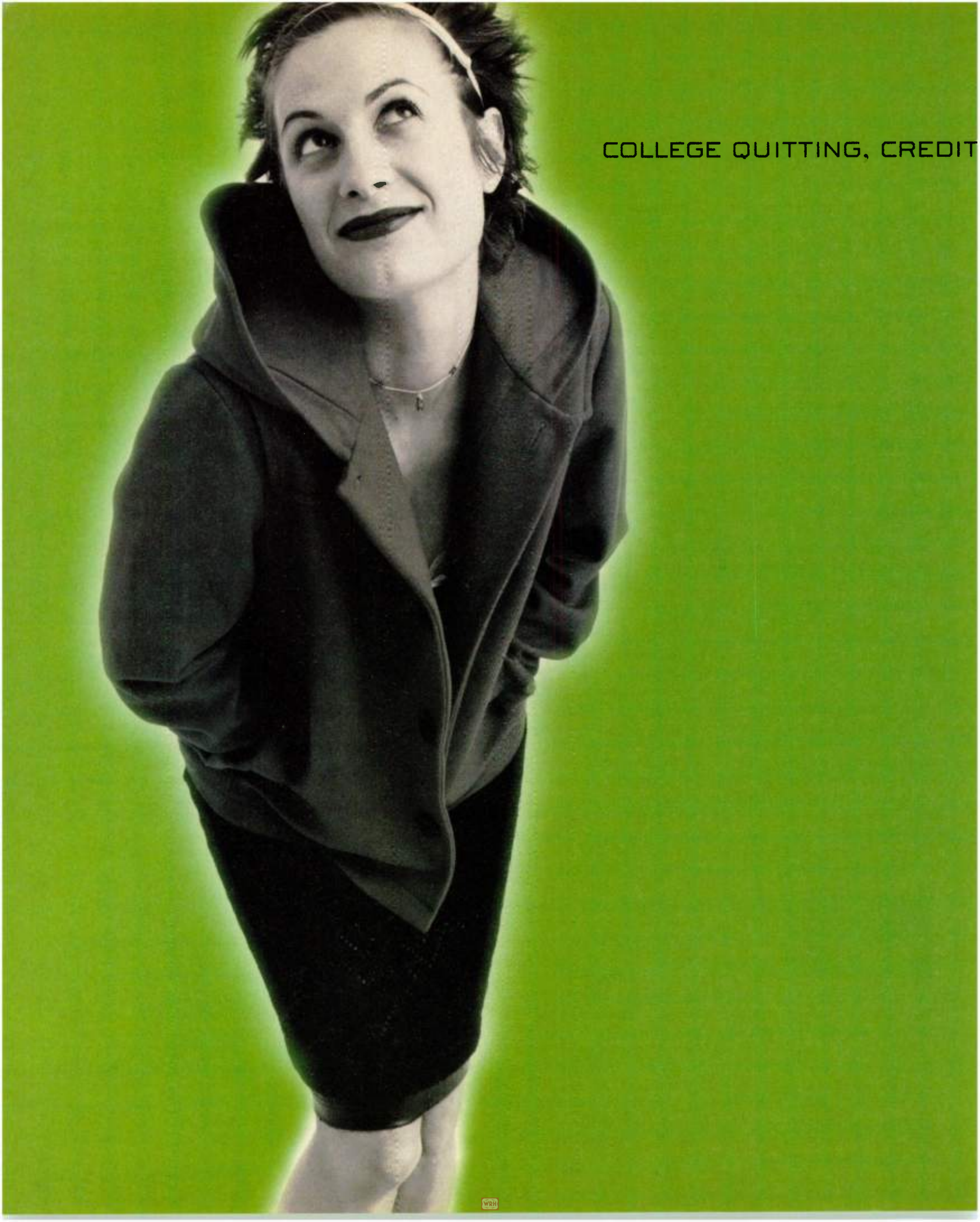
JEFF COHEN REPLIES

Here we go again—another meager rendition of how the media were unfair to Reagan and Reaganomics. This myth is debunked by Mark Hertsgaard's meticulous book, *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*. In selecting *New York Times* quotes, Jonah omitted top pundit James Reston, who hailed Reaganomics in 1981 as "[a] serious attempt...to spread the sacrifices equally across all segments of the society...."

Jonah echoes media elitism by citing media regular Robert Rector's dubious claims that the poor aren't so bad off, noting that their homes have "more space" than Parisians'—no mention that half of the U.S. poor live in suburbs or rural areas, according to Census data. Most poor households have a car—they also have one or more workers. Jonah and Rector are off-base on the public's view of poverty; again, polls indicate that most Americans would raise the poverty line.

Faulting journalists for reporting that unemployment rose to 5 percent rather than that employment dropped to 95 percent is silly—like griping about reporting on the roughly 8 million Americans with cancer rather than the 260 million who are cancer-free. But if he means that coverage should focus more on typical Americans, great. That would mean less focus on the well-to-do minority. Despite productivity gains, typical workers have had stagnating wages *and compensation*. As for the millions of downsized workers, most end up getting lower-paying jobs, says Princeton University economist Henry Farber. Every week, economist Dean Baker publishes a review of elite press bias for FAIR.

I do thank Jonah for making the following point: "These days one hears very little about inequality." ■


COLLEGE QUITTING, CREDIT

inside the bubble

If campaign coverage seems like a blur, it's because the reporters are all marching together in the same direction. Breaking out of the pack is almost impossible. BY MICHAEL COLTON

It's easy to be a campaign reporter: All you have to do is call up a campaign headquarters and ask to get on the bus. In exchange for coverage of their candidate, a campaign's staff will arrange to meet all your needs: sustenance, transportation, shelter. Staffers for John McCain have even driven journalists' cars from city to city while the reporters ate doughnuts on the bus with him.

Being a *distinctive* campaign reporter—that's a different matter. Little can be considered exclusive when there's a glut of other reporters following a candidate, herded around by campaign staff. Campaign reporting can be like summer camp, but it's also, says NBC producer Alexandra Pelosi, "like boot camp."

Direct access to the candidate differs from bus to bus. The exuberance of the McCain press bus has been documented by the journalists who've fallen under his spell, and it's true that Candidate McCain is much more open and available than any of the others. George W. Bush tends to dodge questions, and Bill Bradley doesn't give much opportunity for questions to be asked. Traveling with the Al Gore campaign, meanwhile, is like "being a prisoner," says Chris Casteel of *The Daily Oklahoman*. "We do things a little bit differently," says an imposing fellow named Jim, one of Gore's Secret Service agents, after giving a reporter's baggage to a Secret Service canine for sniffing.

The campaigns, understandably, are most deferential to the members of the press corps that are of the most use to them, so reporters from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are at the top of the hierarchy. In Iowa in January, some reporters were excited to receive a secret tip from a campaign aide that Bradley would be stopping by a local bar. The reporters had to stifle their jealousy when Bradley walked into the bar with James Dao of the *Times*. "They get what's called 'room service'—a lot of stuff hand-delivered to their rooms," says Jake Tapper of Salon.com. "As they should, since they're the most respectable and biggest publications."

"We see things quoted by Rick Berke in *The New York Times* that [Bush chief political strategist] Karl Rove wouldn't give us on the record," says Wendy Benjaminson, the political editor of the *Houston Chronicle*. Texas journalists used to receive preferential treatment from Governor Bush, but no longer. "Before he announced his candidacy, we had a special relationship with him," says Benjaminson. "Now they say, 'Get on line.'" In order to get a one-on-one interview last year, the *Chronicle*'s editor in chief sent a letter to Bush communications director Karen Hughes, reminding her that she had sent him a get-well card when he was recuperating from surgery. The letter worked.

The Texas reporters are quite popular with the other press following Bush. They know plenty of tales and rumors about Bush and other Texas politicos, and they suggest stories for the national press to investigate. Sometimes, Benjaminson says, a newspaper like the *Times* or *The Washington Post* will do a story on Bush's business dealings, and her paper will have to re-report it, even though it ran the story years ago. "It's a weird position for us," she says.

Foreign journalists are at the bottom of the hierarchy, since their readers and viewers don't even vote. Satoru Suzuki, the Washington bureau chief for TV Asahi America, a Japanese news organization, has been on the Bush trail for months. "He's interesting to the Japanese because people knew his father," he says. Suzuki did an exclusive interview with Bush in July—"We were lucky then," he says. Closer to primary season, the access dried up. Todd Harris, a spokesman for McCain, says he often sprinkles some foreigners on bus trips, because unlike many of the American reporters, they ask questions about foreign policy. The Australians, for instance, love to talk about East Timor.

In order to get an edge, news organizations employ different strate-

Members of the media horde vie for the attention of George W. Bush in Salem, New Hampshire.

JONATHAN ELDERFIELD/LIAISON AGENCY

gies for covering the campaigns. *The Washington Post* is fond of ganging up their reporters; at one Democratic debate in January, the newspaper had five reporters on hand to capture the moment. The most comprehensive organization, ABC News, assigned one young off-air reporter to each candidate. Every night, the reporters file notes to an ABC intranet; the information is used by every outlet of ABC News, including the Sunday pundit shows, ABC Radio, and ABCNEWS.com.

ABC is the only organization that has devoted full-time reporters to the "also-ran" candidates: Alan Keyes, Gary Bauer, and Orrin Hatch. After one debate in South Carolina, Hatch was trailed by his entire media contingent: ABC's Jennifer Jose. She followed Hatch around in her rental car during the primary season; unlike most of the campaign press, Jose had no difficulty getting access to her candidate.

Newsweek also has reporters spread out along the trail, but they're of little use to the candidates. That's because the reporters are gathering material for a *Newsweek* book on the quest for the presidency, not for the magazine itself. Their coverage won't see the light of day for another year. T. Trent Gegax, following the Bush campaign for the book, found that getting behind-the-scenes info can prove tough because of the glut of reporters on the bus trips. After a week on the trail, he headed out to Bush's headquarters in Austin, Texas, to escape the horde.

WITHOUT REALIZING IT, ERNESTINE BRADLEY SHAKES THE HAND OF A REPORTER. THEN BILL BRADLEY SHAKES THE HAND OF SOMEONE ON HIS OWN STAFF.

"IT'S SILLY," SAYS PETER MARKS, a former theater critic for *The New York Times* who is now covering the campaign. "We're all sitting in a big room watching TV."

Campaign reporters experience debates pretty much the same way the rest of the country does: on screen. They watch from a filing center—sometimes a cavernous college gym, sometimes a tiny studio—somewhere in the complex where the debate is going on. Some reporters choose to forgo the event completely and watch from the solace of their hotel rooms. Watching with the rest of the press, though, is like watching a movie in a theater instead of your home. It's entertaining to hear the collective snicker run through the press corps when Bush pronounces "obfuscate" as "obsfucate," for instance.

What's different about how the media experience debates is the atmosphere of spin. Before a debate begins, the reporters schmooze with their colleagues: Robert Novak and Mark Shields of CNN's *The Capital Gang*, looking increasingly like Waldorf and Statler, the cranky duo in the balcony of *The Muppet Show*, talk football; George Stephanopoulos signs autographs for local fans. Meanwhile, the campaign staffs are already spinning. For instance, before a January debate in Iowa, the Gore campaign distributed a packet called "Facts to Consider: A Debate Watching Guide...a sampler of key issues and likely Bradley attacks that may come up during tonight's debate."

During a debate, the volley of paper increases as a candidate's staff responds to any perceived misrepresentation or lapse on the part of the opponents. The most entertaining and informative spin tends to come from the Bradley camp. After the Gore staff issued a release, "New Jersey's Frank Lautenberg Endorses Gore," Bradley's camp provided a list of press excerpts proving that Lautenberg had in fact already endorsed Gore several times. When Gore mentions how education is his "top priority" during a debate, Bradley aides pass out a list of Gore quotes showing how he has already named other issues—the environment, campaign-finance reform—as his top priority.

After the debate, the pressroom becomes a buyer's market for reporters looking for spin. Reporters know they're being spun and that the spin is necessary to contextualize their coverage. Local officials and campaign managers present the campaign line and critique the opposition. Sometimes the campaigns bring out the big guns: Donna Shalala (for Gore), Cornel West (for Bradley). Reporters even engage in a little spinning of their own for the local TV reporters who need a political expert to demystify the debate for their viewers.

Outside the debates, "news" is a slippery concept, and observational color often fills in. Jake Tapper, who provides consistently irreverent campaign coverage in Salon.com, finds telling details in mundane campaign stops such as "retail events," those pseudo-happenings that litter the campaign trail.

One scene, from mid-December: Bill Bradley and his wife, Ernestine, are walking through The Pheasant Lane Mall in Nashua, New Hampshire, supposedly to buy luggage and watches. *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time* magazine, ABC News, *The New Republic*, and two reporters from *The Washington Post* all show up to capture this historic event for posterity. As one reporter says of these events, "you never know what [the candidate's] going to say."

The campaigning couple begins its handshaking at Burger King, surrounded by a tight huddle of media and staff. One cameraman hits Ernestine Bradley in the head, and another accidentally shoves a Macy's customer, who says, "He's not getting my vote." Ernestine trails her husband, reshaking hands and saying, "Are you going to vote? I hope so. I'm Ernestine. I'm his wife. I'm Bill's wife." At one point, Ernestine shakes the hand of *Newsday*'s Elaine Povich, not realizing she's a reporter. Then her husband shakes the hand of someone on his own staff.

When Ernestine lags, he becomes disoriented, needing someone by his side to get through this exercise. At one point he calls to her, but he doesn't use her name. "What did he say?" The journalists spring into action. "Is that a nickname?" "It sounded like 'Bushel.'" Salon's Tapper asks several Bradley aides about the name, but they all profess ignorance. "The Bradley campaign is covering up the nickname," he jokes.

Inside a Hallmark store, Tapper nails the scoop, perhaps Salon's biggest since it revealed Henry Hyde's infidelity. "'Wuschel,'" answers Bradley, when Tapper asks him about the nickname. Apparently, it's a variation of a nickname Ernestine had when she was a child. Later, back at the hotel, Tapper tells ABC's Jackie Judd about the nickname scoop. "You had the semen-stained dress," he says, referring to her reporting about Monica Lewinsky, "but I have 'Wuschel.'"

Tapper mentioned the Wuschel incident in his Salon.com article the next day. The Bradleys, for the record, didn't purchase anything. ■

the secret plagiarists

Should I feel flattered when filmmakers and fellow writers dip liberally into my work instead of doing their own? Not when they don't give credit. BY MARION MEADE

A phone call last summer from a fact checker at *Vanity Fair* threw me into a familiarly lousy mood. The magazine, he said, was planning to publish a Christopher Hitchens piece about Dorothy Parker, one of my biographical subjects, and he simply wished to confirm a couple of facts. Would I mind helping him out?

Alarm bells went off. Having seen my work shoplifted countless times, I was far from cordial. "Not so fast," I said. What did *Vanity Fair* imagine me to be—some sort of reference librarian?

But the fact checker could not have been sweeter. "Christopher Hitchens said to tell you how much he admires your book."

I cut straight to the point. "Does Hitchens's article mention the title of my book?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Does it mention my name?"

It did.

"Kindly?" I demanded, still overheated.

The young man was charming and reassuring. Ashamed of my rudeness, I began to thaw. Then I proceeded to rack my brain over his queries regarding material I had once known backward and forward during the seven years I spent writing *Dorothy Parker: What Fresh Hell Is This?* However, all that was in the past. Since then I had written two more biographies. Regrettably, my memory had clogged up. Not noticeably, but enough so that I now felt lucky to remember Parker's vital statistics.

When the article appeared in *Vanity Fair*'s October issue, I saw that I had been screwed again. It was true that Hitchens credited my biography, indeed spoke of it in a fairly complimentary way, as well he should have, because it looked as if he had used the book as his only source of information. As I read on, I found him casually passing off as his own research a quote from an interview I had conducted in the eighties, names of sources long dead, and a reference to a literary work I had exhumed from crispy yellowing periodicals in the stacks of Butler Library at Columbia University.

Now, there is no denying that, once published, information automatically falls into the public domain. Any fact that a biographer unearths is scarcely her exclusive possession, no matter how much she might like to think so. The very act of publication makes the material available to everyone.

But who, exactly, is everyone? Naturally, students writing term

Biographer Marion Meade says no rip-off is deemed too crazy.

ANNA CURTIS

Marion Meade's latest biography, The Unruly Life of Woody Allen, *is to be published in February by Scribner.*

papers are welcome to help themselves, and I don't mind historians' filling in the crevices, either. Ditto for unsung scholars who are careful to stay within the confines of fair use for their publications. For that matter, biographers could not compose their works without consulting other writers. All such uses are perfectly legitimate.

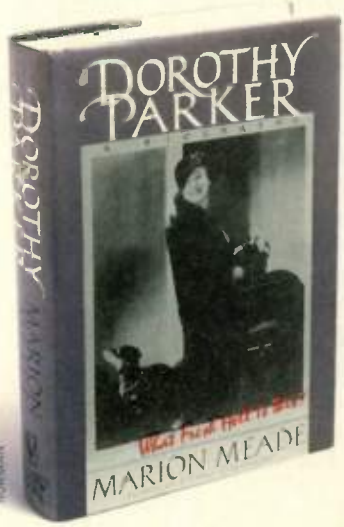
As for flagrant plagiarists who can't resist gobbling whole pages for their own projects, there's something sad and creepy about literary theft. I can be forgiving of those individuals.

Harder to forgive are the new secret plagiarists, the media and communications behemoths whose magazines and newspapers, cable networks and film companies routinely raid the work of biographers such as myself to satisfy their ceaseless need for product—at no cost. Magazines, for instance, apparently don't quibble over pieces submitted by writers too busy to do tedious research. Nor do they want their fact-checking departments to waste precious time actually checking facts. It seems that accepting articles plagiarized from biography has become increasingly popular. And afterward, heaping insult on top of injury, lazy fact checkers think nothing of ringing up the biographer to verify the stolen information. Occasionally, they have the audacity to ask for additional details not included in the book.

A WORK THAT TOOK YEARS TO RESEARCH AND WRITE IS DESTINED TO BE PILFERED, RAVAGED, OR DISMEMBERED, SOMETIMES ALL THREE.

Almost no rip-off tactic, I've learned, is considered too crazy. One morning, an anxious researcher from *Reader's Digest* caught me before I was entirely awake. The magazine had scheduled for publication in its UK edition a piece that mentioned one of Dorothy Parker's characters. The researcher told me the piece was definitely going to need work, and she said she had no idea how to fix a particularly "muddled" passage. "You wouldn't want to help me rewrite it, would you?" I wouldn't. (When the piece finally ran, there was no mention of the Parker character.)

The worst offenders are television documentary shows and feature film companies. As biographers know, there is mighty little likelihood these days of a book's being optioned. Instead, a work that took years to research and write is destined to be pilfered, ravaged, or dismembered, sometimes all three. Complaints are met with a standard lie: The program is based on "multiple sources," a lame excuse to avoid paying anyone. In the case of TV documentaries, biographers may sometimes be invited to participate, without pay, of course—the assumption quite likely being that we are suckers sure to lie down and roll over in excitement at the idea of appearing on camera. The truth is, that's how we usually behave, so desperate are we to draw attention to our work. (Unfortunately, the hope that the documentary will rake in extra sales for the book rarely pans out.)



Six years ago, Fine Line Features released *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh. I remember that while the movie was being made I received a purring phone call from someone at the production company who informed me that Leigh would be visiting New York for a few days and staying at The Algonquin Hotel while she researched her role as Dorothy Parker. Since I was really the expert on Mrs. Parker, the production woman said, would I mind dropping by the Gonk to fill Jennifer in? Tea was mentioned.

All right, I said. "But let me see the script first."

Silence. Clearly, the production woman wasn't expecting such a wacky request. Finally: Ah, that wasn't possible.

But why?

Well, Fine Line had no scripts to spare.

The bastards have something to hide, I thought to myself. Immediately I was on the phone to my literary agent, Lois Wallace, who called my Gersh Agency representative on the West Coast, and a couple of days later I had the script. Not only had Fine Line/Robert Altman/Alan Rudolph and their gang recycled my research, but they had in places shoveled my prose (my words, not Parker's!) verbatim into their dialogue and stage directions. What had made them think they could get away with it?

Photocopying comparable pages from the book and film script, I set out for the office of an entertainment lawyer. Confident I had a strong case, I plastered the incriminating documents across his desk and waited for sympathetic agreement. He blinked—not in surprise but in bewilderment. What was the problem?

Look there, I said, wagging a furious finger, the very same, 100 percent exact wording! Plagiarism, no question.

The guy was pretty cool about it. "Okay," he answered with a shrug. "But it's not in-your-face plagiarism."

I'm not counting on the secret plagiarists to mend their ways any time soon. However, it wouldn't kill the Condé Nasts and the Fine Lines to pay reasonable consultation fees. I would be happy to draw up a sliding scale. ◘

HITCHENS RESPONDS *Christopher Hitchens, of* Vanity Fair, *and Alan Rudolph, the director of* Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle, *were given copies of Marion Meade's piece and the opportunity to respond to it. Rudolph chose not to respond. Hitchens's response:*

Joke, right? You pester me with all this bulls--t and it turns out to be an ill-phrased article by someone who wants to moan about the nuisance of fact-checking? Tell her from me that she ought to be careful in her use of the word plagiarism and that if she made the insinuation in a serious magazine, or a magazine that anyone read, I would take it seriously in turn. As it is, do your worst—you seem to do it anyway.

F--- you, CH

truth in advertising?

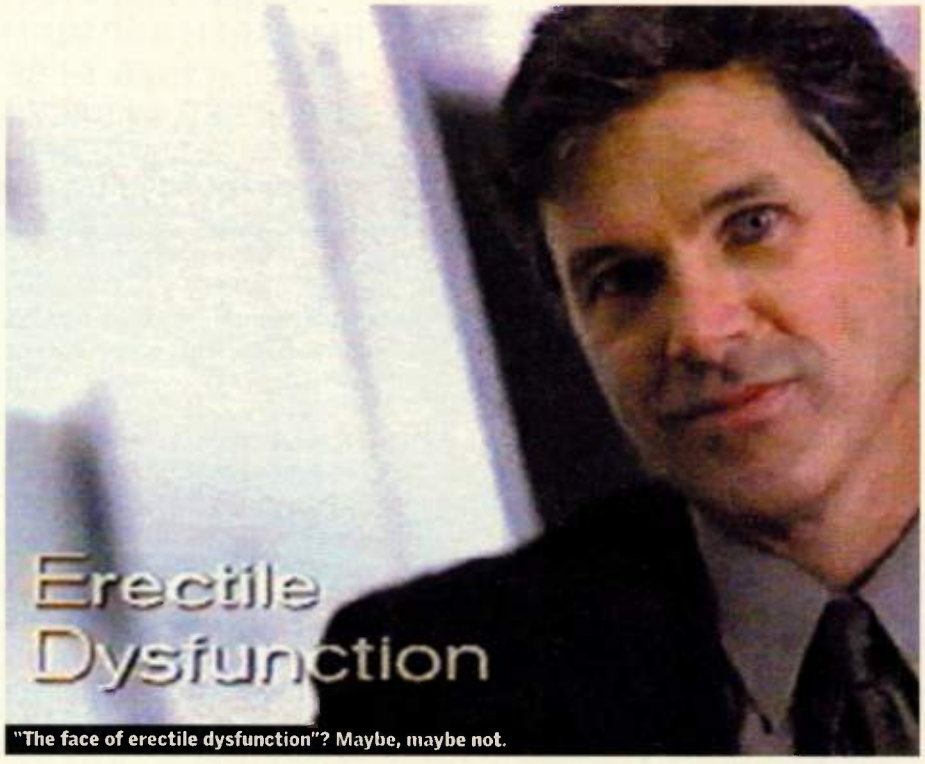
We've all suspected that advertisers routinely exaggerate, fabricate, and misrepresent. What we might not have realized is that many of these practices are legal. BY LESLIE SAVAN

Now that several generations have been raised on television, "truth in advertising" sounds like a knee-slapping oxymoron. Ads are, after all, just a part of the entertainment world, figments of desire; expecting ads to be truthful seems as out of place as wing tips on the beach.

Yet there are rules about telling lies in advertising. The fuzzy part is finding where the lies lie. Context is key, making some exaggerated ad claims permissible and others not, according to the Federal Trade Commission, which monitors deceptive advertising.

A celebrity who endorses a product, for example, and implies he uses it must actually use it, the FTC says. But it's okay for an unknown actor who is clearly playing a role to rave about a product he has never heard of before.

So when a voice-over in a TV commercial says, "This is the face of erectile dysfunction," as one ruggedly handsome actor after another appears on screen, those guys don't really have to have E.D. But Bob Dole did....Well, that would be true if the ad actually promoted a product. Dole's spot, however, did not mention Viagra, the No. 1 treatment for E.D., but only Pfizer Inc., Viagra's maker. There's often some question as to whether ads like this are public health messages or product ads.



"The face of erectile dysfunction"? Maybe, maybe not.

And, convoluted as this reasoning might seem, the E.D. ad is one of the easy calls. A grab bag of national ads have been busy recently demonstrating the many intricate layers of falsity in advertising—and the rules, warnings, and lawsuits that attempt to bring them to heel.

For starters, the revolution in computer graphics opens up opportunities for all sorts of fabrications. Lately, Dannon yogurt—healthy, innocent, white yogurt—has been making itself into the Forrest Gump of consumables, turning up where it's never been before in order to remake history in its image.

"You grow up eating Dannon," reads a recent print ad showing a statuesque athlete. "....And 6 feet, 3 inches later, you just happen to be Champion Volleyball Player Gabrielle Reece. Coincidence or Dannon?" A small inset photo of Gabby as a young girl shows her, according to the caption, "debat[ing] the merits of Strawberry vs. Blueberry," a cup of product by her side.

It's a real photo of the 6-year-old jock, all right, but Dannon digitated its product into the picture, as it did into a childhood photo of tennis player Pete Sampras for another ad in the same campaign. TV spots for both athletes show young actors hitting balls and eating Dannon, all in the home-movie look we're supposed to imbibe as maybe fake/maybe not.

"It's tongue-in-cheek," says Dannon spokeswoman Anna Moses. "That's not really young Pete and Gabby in the TV commercials. However, Pete and Gabby told us they really did grow up eating Dannon." Beyond that, neither Dannon nor its ad agency, Young & Rubicam Inc., would discuss the ads other than to send me a statement, approved by lawyers, that reads in part, "Both athletes reviewed the spots and agreed that everything depicted was, in fact, realistic."

That's the slippery deal these days: "Realistic" is a fluid concept. But

Leslie Savan, longtime advertising columnist for The Village Voice, *is the author of* The Sponsored Life: Ads, TV, and American Culture *(Temple University Press).*

such tactics aren't new. In a 1997 TV ad campaign, Dirt Devil vacuums were placed into some old Fred Astaire footage so that it looked as if the dead endorser's dancing partner were a vacuum cleaner. And the device of mock overstatement in the line "Coincidence or Dannon?" recalls the hipped-up hype used by Spike Lee in a 1988 Nike spot: The short guy keeps nudging Michael Jordan to reveal the secret of his greatness. Though Jordan denies it, Spike repeatedly insists, "Is it the shoes?...It has gotta be the shoes."

You might call ad claims of this ilk the Likable, Irrepressible Exaggeration, or LIE (something this acronym aspires to illustrate). In a swirl of nonstop entertainment, LIEs are essential to survival. Although a LIE seems merely to amuse, its below-the-radar mission is to serve as a litmus test: Are you cool with this? Or are you uptight, schoolmarmish, and in general not with the postmodern program?

HYPERBOLE CAN COMMUNICATE ALL SORTS OF INFORMATION —MUCH OF IT MAY NOT BE "OBJECTIVE," BUT IT CAN STILL BE HIGHLY PERSUASIVE.

Still, there are those who do try to sort out a few truths in a sea of anything-goes. About 150 deception cases were filed last year by the FTC, which monitors ads itself in addition to acting on leads from consumers, competitors, and media reports. The agency makes judgment calls with few baselines at its disposal.

"Overall, there aren't very many hard and fast rules that advertisers have to comply with," says Lee Peeler, FTC associate director for advertising practices. "That provides an advertiser with a lot of flexibility in formulating an ad, and it creates a lot of risks, because there are no bright-line standards they can take refuge behind."

But Peeler says there are three basic rules: 1) An ad cannot be deceptive—that is, mislead consumers to their detriment. 2) Objective claims must be supported with competent studies. And 3) Advertisers are responsible for the reasonable implications of their ads to consumers. "If an advertiser says, 'I didn't really mean to convey that,' well, that doesn't get them off the hook," says Peeler. "All of advertising law is based on what consumers take from the ad."

To make it a bit more confusing, something false may not be deceptive. For instance, "ads showing people picking orange oranges off a tree, when in fact many oranges are picked green, is not to anyone's detriment," Peeler says. But commercial speech about a product's cost or health benefits matters to people and can therefore be detrimental to them.

Although Peeler won't comment on Dannon's ads—or on any ad unless the FTC has completed an investigation—the FTC did find a 1993 Dannon TV spot for its frozen yogurt Pure Indulgence "misleading." As the camera lingered on a luscious shot of frozen yogurt, a voice-over said:

"Beware: The following graphic image may prompt feelings of guilt among viewers."

Then text appeared on-screen:

"Hey, it's okay. It's frozen yogurt.

"Proceed Without Caution."

The FTC charged that "directly or by implication," the ad misled people to believe that the yogurt is low in fat and calories. As part of its settlement with the FTC, Dannon promised not to do it again and paid $150,000 to the U.S. Treasury.

More recently, the FTC smoked out Winston cigarettes for having advertised that it had "no additives." That may be factual, says Peeler, but it's deceptive. "The ads left the implication that no additives made Winston safer than other cigarettes, and that's not true." A settlement required Winston to run prominently the disclaimer "No additives in our tobacco does NOT mean a safer cigarette."

Although many advertisers believe otherwise, running fine-print, superimposed disclaimers doesn't make a commercial kosher. "When I look back at deception cases," says Peeler, "I can't find any case when a video super has ever saved an advertiser from a finding of deception." In September, Peeler adds, Mazda Motor of America, Inc., paid $5.25 million for failing to make adequate consumer leasing disclosures. The disclosures appeared in small and unreadable print, offset by distracting images and sounds.

Other entities, such as state attorneys general, also watch ads for deceit, though they usually follow FTC guidelines. The National Advertising Division of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., takes on about 100 to 150 cases a year, mostly from companies complaining about a competitor's claims. Most companies comply with the NAD's rulings, but for those that do not, NAD may recommend a case to the FTC. Or one company may simply sue another.

Which is what happened in probably the sauciest truth-in-advertising case ever. Under its slogan "Better Ingredients. Better Pizza," Papa John's, the country's fourth largest pizza chain, had been running ads that implied that its pizza is better than industry leader Pizza Hut's. One TV ad said Hut's sauce was "remanufactured," while John's used "vine-ripened" tomatoes. Another said Papa made its dough with filtered water, while its competitor used "whatever comes out of the tap." Hut asked NAD to decide on the accuracy of the "remanufactured" ad in 1998, but NAD ruled for Papa. "Based on the evidence," says NAD director Andrea Levine, "we found Papa John's did have better ingredients."

Pizza Hut counterattacks Papa John's slogan

But in August 1998, in a relatively rare act of ad rage, Pizza Hut, Inc., sued Papa John's International, Inc., and then ran counterads. One ad claimed that Papa John's trucked in its dough, as the words "four to six days old" were superimposed over a truck barreling down the highway in slow-mo; black-and-white shots of the dough made it look ominous indeed.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 114]

selling news short

Click a button: Internet-based news digests offer immediacy and convenience, but are they junk food for the mind? The dangers of abbreviated news. BY ILAN GREENBERG

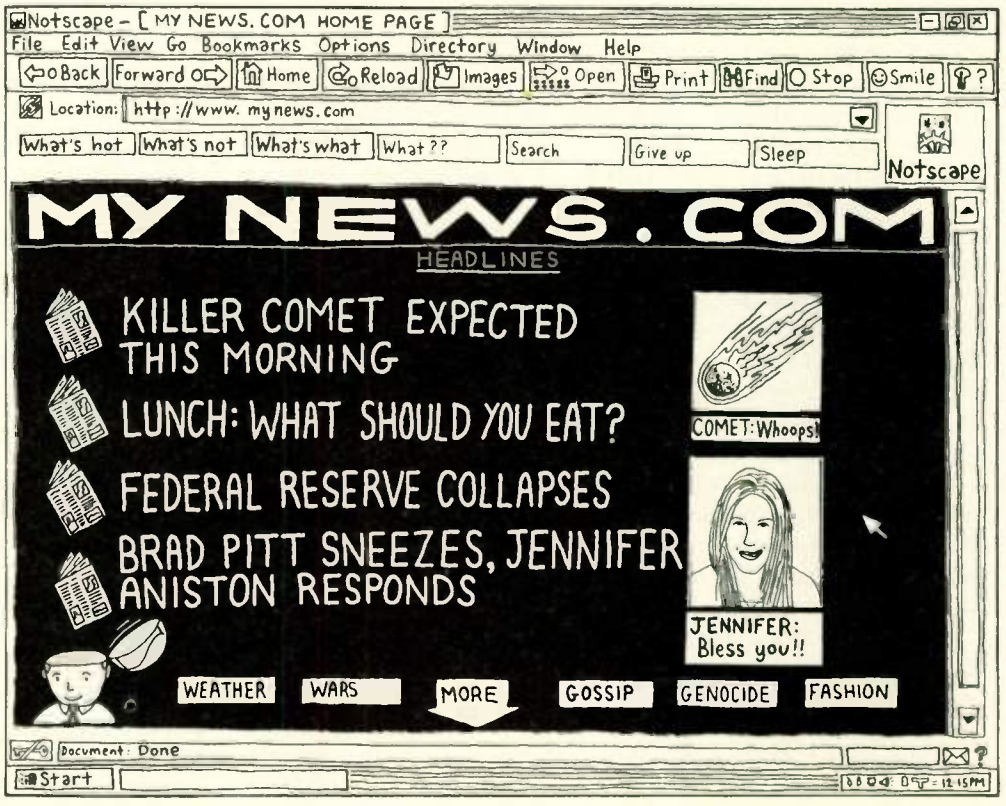
Want to know what the president's doing, but not all that much? There is no shortage of Internet-based services happy to adopt the burden of editing and summarizing the day's news, providing a sort of Cliffs Notes for your morning paper. To keep you informed, there are websites that summarize and sometimes critique a slice of the day's events, offering news about a particular industry or topic. There are services that provide headlines and summaries, such as NewsLinx (www.newslinx.com), which offers a compendium of the day's business and Internet-related articles, sorted by area of interest. Some of the news digests, such as The *Industry Standard*'s Media Grok, contain summaries of third party sources and are delivered straight to your e-mail in-box. Slate, the online magazine of politics and culture, sends out a daily e-mail to subscribers that boasts a summary of the top stories of five major daily newspapers: *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* (see "Ahead of the News," *Brill's Content*, September 1998).

Slate's daily feature Today's Papers does a terrific job of summarizing and critiquing the front pages of the nation's leading newspapers. The summaries are cogent and smartly written. Inconsistencies between the newspapers are always highlighted, and weak reporting is called out for rebuke. For example, in the spate of newspaper stories that ran in January about the U.S. and Cuba's negotiating the fate of a young Cuban boy, Today's Papers was quick to note how a phrase used by all of the papers, "a political tug of war," was substituted for hard analysis.

However, even Slate's excellent execution of its news summary service doesn't address the potential ramifications of reading news summaries instead of news. In fact, it brings certain issues to the fore.

There are times when news articles convey their meaning in the telling. Sometimes what's being communicated in an article is conveyed seamlessly, in all of the quotes, observations, and turns of phrase that come together to form the story. If readers turn instead to batches of headlines, or news summaries, to get their news, they're doing more than robbing themselves of a good read. It's perfectly possible to summarize the best journalism into one cogent point, but the force of its argument is lost; it's a little like reducing a Chekhov story to its moral.

It's tough to castigate busy readers looking for a shortcut to the day's news, especially when the news in question is information required for



PETER ARKLE

an ever-busier workplace. But the result of these digests and summaries is the same: the news, delivered on a gilded tray, chewed and neatly regurgitated for easy swallowing by the hurried or inattentive reader. The sheer ease with which news summaries can be received poses troubling questions. Will we substitute the skimming of quickie rewrites, albeit from a wide array of sources, for real reading about complicated issues and events? Will readers lose the sense of importance that an experienced editor, or a board of editors, has attached to the story by placing it on a newspaper's front page? Will news sources, when placed side by side in summaries, seem to have equal weight, so that prize-winners and tabloids are perceived to be alike?

A technological generation ago, news summaries were available for delivery by fax, but they were exclusive and expensive; the technology of e-mail can make the service free. It would be a shame if this change in delivery vehicle exacerbated the tendency to gloss over a well-reported story in the name of efficiency. It would be a calamity if scanning headlines became habit, normative, an everyday substitute for more careful reading.

IT'S PERFECTLY POSSIBLE TO SUMMARIZE THE BEST JOURNALISM INTO ONE COGENT POINT, BUT THE FORCE OF ITS ARGUMENT IS LOST; IT'S A LITTLE LIKE REDUCING A CHEKHOV STORY TO ITS MORAL.

One concern is the matter of news placement distortion. Newspapers put certain front-page stories above the fold not only to sell papers but also to assert a value judgment: These are the stories that the editors believe are most important. The news judgment can be debated, but it's not one that is made without thought. Placement serves as a guide to readers; where a story appears directs the reader how to interpret the news in the article, and how seriously to take it. The 18 dead bodies that resulted from a day's fighting in Indonesia play differently, and less importantly, on page A4 of *The New York Times* than they would have on page A1. News digests, which sometimes summarize an article without noting the context in which it was originally placed, can dilute or even obliterate decisions about placement. The digests are, in a way, de-editing the original story.

The collection of articles in a newspaper or the collection of segments in a television newscast are also a community. A good news source is a jumbled neighborhood, something of an embarrassment of riches offering connections among disparate readers. Pieces on politics, culture, crime, and science are piled together to create a broad framework, where the whole is greater than the parts. Most news summaries, however, are what people in the technology business call "narrowcasting": a selection of precisely selected news that caters to a single interest. The risk is one of ghettoization: If readers confine their news intake to stories addressing a smaller and smaller world, a narcissism ensues. What Time Inc. editor-at-large Daniel Okrent calls "the potential for serendipity" gets lost. The news becomes a mirror of a reader's world instead of a window out of it.

At their most worrisome, news summaries disrupt an ongoing relationship between a reader and his or her news source. A real conversation exists between newspapers, magazines, and websites and their readers; news summaries are a potential communication clot, making it difficult for writers and editors to feel the pulse of you the reader, their ultimate constituency.

In contrast to the output of the original news outlet, which is the product of many, if not hundreds, of writers, a news summary is at the mercy of its writer. Getting news from a single voice is not merely an aesthetic issue but a problem of a uniform point of view, of the constraints of a uniform tone. Nuances of argument and substance become potential casualties. Consider *The Economist*'s summary of its cover story about the ascension of Vladimir Putin to the presidency of Russia. The article, which ran in the January 8 issue of the magazine, indicated that "there are big reasons to doubt" Putin. The e-mail summary also conveyed that. However, a caveat analyzed in the magazine edition, which advised that Boris Yeltsin's resignation was nevertheless "long overdue," was not contained in the summary. It's often the case with a newspaper or magazine piece that important bits of news are scattered throughout, and a vital piece of information can easily reside near the bottom of a story, even after the jump. If the summary is taken for the total of the original article, news is lost. Information never gets digested, and the reader's resulting opinion is ill formed, although he may think he knows what he needs to know.

Similarly, can a summary do justice to an exhaustive article on any deep topic, such as the future of the world's oceans or the foreign policy positions of a presidential candidate? What is the point of a news operation's devoting major resources to a complicated story if the readers ultimately receive only its skeletal essence?

Insidiously, the explosion of news summaries could serve as its own rationale. Since big stories are expensive to produce, the popularity of summaries will likely encourage editors to provide copycat formats. Why not publish that synthesized nugget of hard information in the first place rather than devote resources to something that will be consumed only in its eventual, abbreviated form?

As if to capitalize on this point, newspapers and magazines themselves are jumping into the summary game, albeit limiting themselves to their own publications. The *Los Angeles Times* and *The Economist* send out occasional e-mail summaries of their own editions. (The goal is to encourage readers to jump to full-fledged Internet editions or even the original, paper-based product, but helpful summaries of articles are folded directly into the e-mail in case readers should choose to read only the e-mail.)

Of course, if sanity and a normal life are to be preserved, nobody can or should read every article in a large newspaper each day or watch three hours of CNN a night. But there has to be a happy place between information overload—technology's greatest gift to media—and a sole diet of Gimme the Gist. Unfortunately, the trend is hard to mistake. ◘

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a one-sided War

U.S. reporters have cast Russia as the clear villain in that country's war against Chechnya. The true story of the bloody conflict is much more complex. BY HOWARD WITT

Those nasty, brutish Russians are at it again in Chechnya, slaughtering innocent civilians and mercilessly bombing towns and villages into rubble, all the while brusquely dismissing Western humanitarian demands to end the carnage.

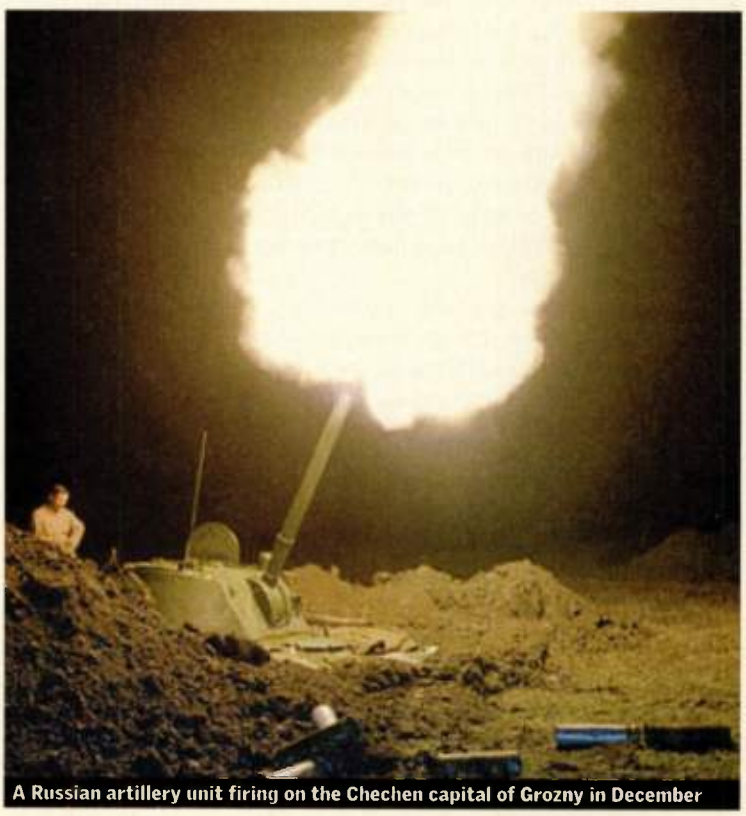
That's the story so far, anyway, as told by the American media, which are covering this winter's foreign war du jour with all the nuance and perspicacity of a Russian tank. In largely one-sided reporting in newspapers and on TV, the fighting in Chechnya is being portrayed as a case of outrageous bullying by the mighty Russians against a long-oppressed people who want nothing more than to be free.

But what about the other side of the story, the inconvenient details that might suggest that this war—the second conflict in Chechnya since the collapse of the Soviet Union—is considerably more complex than it appears and that Russia might be driven by something other than Slavic blood lust? What about the fact that Chechnya—a province of Russia, after all, in the strategically important Caucasus region—has been a thoroughly lawless place controlled by criminal bands for most of the past decade? What about the hundreds of cross-border kidnapping and terror raids staged by the same Chechen military leaders who are now supposedly "defending" their homeland from Russian attack? What about the Chechen invasion of a neighboring Russian province, Dagestan, in a bid to spark an Islamic militant uprising in the region—an invasion that was the actual trigger for the current Russian onslaught?

These details, unfortunately, have been relegated to the boilerplate "background" paragraphs buried deep in most news accounts, when they have been included at all. Far more typical have been newspaper stories highlighting Russia's artillery onslaughts; the military's bloody campaign to seize and hold Grozny, the Chechen capital; looting and other abuses committed by Russian troops; and the woeful plight of the Chechen refugees and civilians, who are bearing the horrible brunt of the war, as refugees and civilians always do. And suffice it to say that TV does firefights and muddy refugee settlements a lot better than it does nuance.

Reporters like to write about what they can see, and they can see the Russian excesses because the Russians have let them report from the their side of the front lines. They did not see much of the Chechen brutality leading up to the war because, quite understandably, they were afraid of being kidnapped if they ventured into the wild province.

Let me pause here for a moment to establish some bona fides, lest anyone think I am some kind of Russophilic apologist. I was based in Russia from 1992 to 1994 as a foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, and during my tenure I covered two bloody coup attempts in Moscow as well as assorted wars and skirmishes throughout the former Soviet Union. I was very nearly killed by the Russian military in several of its many guises: dodging Interior [CONTINUED ON PAGE 115]



A Russian artillery unit firing on the Chechen capital of Grozny in December

REUTERS NEWMEDIA INC./CORBIS

Howard Witt, editor of brillscontent.com, was a reporter, foreign correspondent, and editor at the Chicago Tribune *for 17 years, 3 of them in the former Soviet Union.*

INTERVIEW

making it work

What's behind the urge to converge? America Online Inc. president Robert Pittman talks to Steven Brill about his company's mega-merger with Time Warner Inc.

Bob Pittman is the man to watch at AOL Time Warner. A onetime protégé of Time Warner patriarch Steve Ross, Pittman left the company after Ross's death in 1992. By 1996, he had joined AOL, which was struggling to recover from a series of gaffes ranging from service outages to accounting headaches. As the current president of AOL and the designated co-chief operating officer of AOL Time Warner, Pittman is a rare hybrid, an executive with a wealth of experience in both old media and new media. *Brill's Content* editor in chief Steven Brill and Pittman talked just a few hours after the AOL-Time Warner merger was announced, on January 10, about what the deal means in the coming years for media consumers. The full transcript of their conversation appears on brillscontent.com.

BRILL: Take the AOL homepage as we now know it. How different will that look in five years?

PITTMAN: Well, you know, we think of it as a whole service. Our job is finding stuff our consumers want and getting it to them in an easy, reliable manner. If you look at what Time Warner has, they have all these brands that consumers are already connected to, products they use, products they like. I think one of the frustrations for Time Warner is that they want to get to this new [online] world. They want to connect to people through this, and we're sort of the missing piece of their puzzle. Likewise, I could also say that they are the missing piece of our puzzle too. [Though we're considering] a number of opportunities, I can't tell you what it's going to be in five years, because the Lord knows I can't see into the future. But I guarantee it's going to be simpler; it's going to be easier; it's going to be more robust.

BRILL: So they have the content and you have the network?

PITTMAN: I think that simplifies it too much, because also what's behind this is [that] there are so many areas of intersection. It's almost amazing. If you look at their set of assets and our set of assets, it's almost no overlap, but it's like pieces of a puzzle that fit together.

BRILL: I've heard you say often that AOL was like a television network in terms of its reach, its reach in prime time, et cetera. Is this the modern equivalent of someone like Time Warner merging with NBC or ABC?

PITTMAN: I think it's more than that, because I think we are many products. In addition to AOL, we have ICQ [instant messaging], which has a ton of reach around the world. And I think that all of these products have a place and have a market, and they marry well with plans

Pittman: The media future will be "simpler" and "more robust" for consumers.

Time Warner has. And part of it is the AOL service—like a network, carrying content. But other parts of it are really convenience devices for the consumer that allow the consumer to compress time. Instead of taking two weeks to figure out where you want to go on vacation, you can do it in an hour online.

BRILL: Let's look at news. [Time Warner has] two of the best names in news.

PITTMAN: Yes, they do.

BRILL: Would I be likely in a couple of years to see CNN.com or CNN as a staple offering on AOL?

PITTMAN: Probably not only on the AOL service. But if you've got a handheld device and you want to get the news you'll probably see AOL pushing CNN through it as a news source. Plus, certainly you'll probably see footage and carriage of CNN's version of it there as well.

BRILL: Will I be able to watch Larry King on demand on AOL?

PITTMAN: I'm not sure you want to watch Larry King [on your computer]. Online is not about story arcs and about kicking back and putting your feet up and having someone tell you a story. That's TV. I think, at the end of the day, [AOL via the personal computer] is not competitive with the TV set. [This merger will lead to] making TV convenient and responsive to the con- [CONTINUED ON PAGE 110]

PETER MURPHY/CORBIS OUTLINE

Kate's Bet

Vogue rising star Kate Betts fought hard to land the top job at Hearst's flagging _Harper's Bazaar_. But will Betts's strength—her taste more for actual reporting than for haute couture—clash with what readers want from a high-fashion bible? BY ABIGAIL POGREBIN

Katherine Betts has arrived. At New York's JFK airport last September, just days after starting as the new editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and just weeks after becoming a new mother, Betts is preparing to board a jet with baby Oliver and fly to Milan to cover the spring shows. But there's a snag: Betts didn't realize that even infants need a passport, and despite her entreaties, her baby isn't allowed on the plane. It was "a very vulnerable time" for Betts, says Bloomingdale's fashion director Kal Ruttenstein, who witnessed the scene. "The baby had to be sent home." Oliver and his father caught up with Mom a few days later, but that moment was an early trial for the 35-year-old Betts. She fought hard to land this job. She's an untested editor in chief, charged with reinvigorating a 133-year-old sacred text of high fashion that has seen both its circulation and its appeal to advertisers slip in recent years. New mom or not, Betts has little grace period to show she can rejuvenate *Bazaar*. For a woman as shrewd, driven, and self-controlled as Betts, there really was little choice but to get on that plane.

It's interesting to see that when Betts recounted this tale in her first editor's letter, in December, she glossed over the emotional details, and instead used Oliver's blank passport as a metaphor for *Bazaar* ("a passport for a new generation"). Any hint of anguish or unease was limited to the smooth line "Most of the way across the Atlantic, I wondered how millions of modern American women manage the difficult balance of motherhood and work."

People are watching Betts not just because she has been handed the keys to a Rolls-Royce with engine trouble: Though *Bazaar* is considered second in prestige to *Vogue*, it's actually third in circulation, behind *Vogue* and *Elle*, and fourth in ad pages, behind *W*. They're also watching because the personal angle fascinates: How did Betts manage to win her job just three days before producing a 10-pound-plus baby, and report to her corner office three months later without a trace of spit-up on her Michael Kors cardigan? Is it possible she'll redefine the fashionista as everywoman—with one foot in Dior, the other in diapers?

Betts also stands out because she's an American, not a Brit or an Anglophile like many of her peers and predecessors. In an arena where image is everything, Betts is ready-to-wear: all-American face, clean style, casual élan. "It's interesting to have an American at the helm of an American magazine again," says George D. Malkemus, president of Manolo Blahnik USA. "She has a wonderful Waspiness that we haven't had in a long time."

The Betts buzz has centered on the *Vogue*-versus-*Bazaar* drama: *Bazaar* owner Hearst's "stealing" of Betts from Condé Nast, and whether *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour sent a baby gift to her former protégée, who was Wintour's key deputy and *Vogue*'s fashion-news director.

But ask industry insiders—reporters, editors, creative directors, designers—to describe what distinguishes Betts, and they all tell you one thing first: She's smart. Not just savvy-smart but sagacious-smart, thoughtful-smart, skilled-smart. She makes fashion a business story, a sociological analysis, a psychological yarn. "I don't think she lives and breathes hemlines and colors," says Robin Givhan, who covers fashion for *The Washington Post* and was at Princeton with Betts. "She has a wider interest. She brings her generation's perspective on fashion to the magazine, which is that it comes from many places. An idea that flows from hip-hop musicians is just as legitimate as an idea that flows from a Paris design studio."

Indeed, Betts has demonstrated that "fashion reporter" need not be a contradiction in terms. "She does have this journalism background, and that sets her apart," notes Givhan. "A lot of magazines tend to be dominated by people with a really visual background or people who bring connections to the table more than journalistic skills."

Portraits by Jill Peters

That said, fashion journalism is a subset of journalism in which the usual rules don't apply. Most journalists don't accept gifts from the people they cover (Betts says this practice can make her "uncomfortable"), and most don't acknowledge, as Betts does, having to pay attention to fashion credits in the magazine to make sure big advertisers get some coverage.

THE REPORTER WORE BLAHNIKS

Talking to Betts in her minimalist (that's fashionspeak) office on the 37th floor, with its wooden slab of a desk, white orchids, and windowed walls overlooking midtown, one gets a convincing primer on why fashion is a legitimate journalistic beat—aside from the compelling fact that it's a multibillion-dollar industry. "Fashion is the first thing that always reflects what's going on in a broader cultural context," says Betts. "It's easy for people to say that fashion doesn't matter, but on a practical level, it obviously does matter. On a more personal level of self-expression, it tells you exactly where we are. It takes the cultural temperature immediately."

The February issue of *Bazaar*—the first that Betts oversaw from start to finish—does not have the freshest cover face (Gwyneth Paltrow, even as a brunette, is not exactly a discovery), but Paltrow's presence does offer the imprimatur of the hippest gal in Hollywood, and writer Rick Marin actually asks her some cheeky questions, such as "Do you consider yourself more Jewish or Waspy?"

that we're going to capture in the magazine....What's interesting about the new generation is that the fashion fantasy isn't the cliché of a couture ball gown anymore."

Betts says good fashion journalism isn't about the clothes but about good storytelling: "One of the mandates I had coming in here," she says, "was to have writers' voices that were strong and had a point of view and told a story." Patrick McCarthy, chairman and editorial director of *W* and *Women's Wear Daily*, where Betts was Paris bureau chief years ago, echoes the principle Betts says she learned at *WWD*, honed at *Vogue*, and brings to *Bazaar*: "Covering fashion is about covering people," McCarthy insists. "They are the most opulent, crazy, extraordinary—the movie industry has nothing on the fashion industry. The movie business is dull, dull, dull. Spend a night with Karl Lagerfeld or a dinner with Giorgio Armani, and these are very interesting people."

THE BEST OF *VOGUE*

But let's be honest about it: Great narratives aren't why most of us pick up a fashion magazine. It's an easy, lazy flip-through of glossy pictures, perfect for a plane ride or a visit to the hairdresser, full of women we'll never look like wearing clothes we'll never afford, in spreads that are hard to differentiate from the ads. We don't pick it up for the words. But take some time to read the copy Betts wrote or edited in *Vogue*, and it's clear how it differs from the toadying gush found in so much fashion coverage.

While nine months pregnant, and while carrying her full workload at *Vogue*, Betts produced an entire prototype of a new *Bazaar* for Hearst, as well as tables of contents for three issues.

Inside, Betts has paid more attention to guiding the reader. There's a simplified table of contents, clear page numbers for easier navigating, a service page on the best places that pamper—not just in New York and L.A. but across the country—and a new section on technology. The fashion coverage has more attitude: A spread on the trend toward luxury logos winks at the status-obsessed; Bret Easton Ellis eulogizes political correctness; and the Lauder sisters, heirs to the cosmetics dynasty, have opened their homes to show their contrasting tastes. There's a feature on six edgy young female photographers, and an on-the-road-with-Karenna Gore by a *New York Times* writer. "This is fashion for people with a brain and a life," notes Kristina Zimbalist, who wrote for Betts at *Vogue* and was hired by Betts at *Bazaar*.

Though it's not a revolutionary rethinking of what a woman's magazine can be, it is definitely a more interesting, more accessible read. Betts is not abandoning the staples—gorgeous models, beauty pointers, and celebrity profiles—but she seems to be trying to see them through a lens that's less gaga, less obvious. "There is a kind of sea change that's happening right now in photography and fashion," says Betts, "and it calls for a more irreverent, colorful, slightly over-the-top, sometimes ironic take on fashion and photography; that's definitely something

Betts's redesign debuted in the February issue.

Her designer profiles at *Vogue* were nuanced portraits of hypercreative, complex personalities. A feature on Tom Ford last March, for example, explored not just his resuscitation of Gucci but his childhood insecurity on the football field, his desire to have a child with his gay lover, and his latest career crossroads: "Can a minimalist start designing Vegas va-va-voom dresses?" wrote Betts. "Can a master of seduction dress Hester Prynne?"

In 1998, she wrote that Gucci's surveillance-style ads "incorporated two of the best no-no's: voyeurism and fetishism. By the time Marv Albert came along with his 'consensual biting,' sadomasochism seemed 'so last season.'" She also conceived a story about the new rich in Silicon Valley—the khaki-clad entrepreneurs working out of their garages. "Why get dressed for work at all when you're phoning it in on a T3 line?" Betts wrote. And she analyzed the mainstreaming of the avant-garde in a piece called "Rumblings in the Ranks," about how the more daring designers were being snapped up by the old-guard fashion houses.

Sometimes Betts herself was the story, trading places with designer Isaac Mizrahi and writing a day-in-the-life (Mizrahi declares Betts a "genius") or tagging along with her husband, writer Chip Brown, on a trek up Kilimanjaro. The piece was packaged

in *Vogue* as a fitness story, but it was a rare personal glimpse of the writer. Betts was the self-mocking diva ("The new wardrobe I was contemplating was a far cry from Prada"); the wife worrying over her incapacitated spouse ("It had never occurred to me that my husband would have trouble. I never thought he would be the one who would be left behind"); and the panicked woman: "When you're that diminished by fear there's no such thing as humiliation."

But on a recent rain-soaked afternoon, sitting in her office with an interviewer from *Brill's Content*, Betts is as polished and careful as people predicted she'd be—she's friendly but not familiar; she doesn't gab. Givhan says she's not a small-talker. Others describe her as "chilly," consciously reserved. "I can't imagine her being vulnerable," says one *Vogue* insider.

If there was ever a moment to be vulnerable, this would be it. She has just closed the February magazine—a top-to-bottom redesign by which she will be judged. It's obvious Hearst needs Betts to improve *Bazaar*'s circulation, which has been stalled at around 750,000 since 1994. Betts is also aware the press is salivating for a catfight now that she is competing against Wintour. (Wintour declined an interview request.) And, of course, there's that small burden of succeeding the late Liz Tilberis, who was widely admired for having returned *Bazaar* to elegance and for having battled cancer with poise until she lost the fight last April.

Betts "has a wonderful Waspiness that we haven't seen in a long time," notes one fashion insider.

Betts also knows she was not Hearst's first choice for the job. Hearst president Cathleen Black tried to lure Martha Nelson, who edits the latest publishing phenomenon, Time Inc.'s *InStyle* (now at 1.4 million circulation), and Bonnie Fuller, who edits Condé Nast's *Glamour*. Black also had discussions with London-based Tyler Brûlé, editor in chief of the ultrahip international design and lifestyle magazine *Wallpaper*. What that roster of dissimilar talents—a cheerful celebrity-stuff cataloger, a down-and-dirty sex-tipster, and a member of the avant-garde—reveals is that Hearst itself is confused about the right tonic for *Bazaar*. Black, of course, disagrees with this notion: It would have been "irresponsible" of her not to interview others with varying ideas, she says, without confirming any specific conversations.

What apparently dazzled Black most about Betts was her professed passion for the magazine and her work ethic. While nine months pregnant, and while carrying her full workload at *Vogue*, Betts produced an entire prototype of a new *Bazaar* for Black, as well as proposed tables of contents for three issues. "It's very easy to say to a potential editor, 'Tell me what you do or do not like about the current magazine,'" says Black. "It's another thing to say, 'Show me what you would do—not just in one issue but in two or three issues.' She created a template and dummy book that we thought was exactly right."

Despite the weight of all this, Betts shows no signs of the pressure. She doesn't have the sunken eyes or gray skin tone that too many late nights under fluorescent lights can do to a girl. She's dressed in an understated black Gucci sweater set, a Prada skirt, and suede Manolo Blahnik boots. Betts's style is now, inescapably, part of the story. Wintour and Tilberis became powerful symbols of their respective publications. Like them, Betts has a clothing allowance (estimated at more than $25,000 a year), and her personal style will be scrutinized as much as her magazine. But Betts prefers to remain somewhat inscrutable: "My style is actually not to describe myself," she says, "so you'd have to ask other people that."

Other people use similar words to characterize her look: *American, classic-chic, subtle*. "It's never over the top," says Pamela Perret, Betts's former assistant at *Vogue*. "If she's wearing a white shirt, it's the best-cut, most beautiful fabric." Barneys New York creative director Simon Doonan says, "She's always looked like a player. Remember what Oscar Wilde said: It's only superficial people that don't judge by appearances. Appearance is important."

Elle editor Elaina Richardson guesses Betts will have to develop a more public persona, and that means adopting a charity and becoming a regular, bold-faced name in the gossip columns, attending parties and store openings. Betts now has a direct line to gossip headquarters, "Page Six" of the *New York Post*; its editor, Richard Johnson, is married to Nadine Johnson, who is handling public relations for Betts's *Bazaar*. Richard Johnson says his column would cover Betts even if his wife weren't advising her, because the *Vogue*-versus-*Bazaar* war is too delicious to ignore. "This is the great rivalry," he says, "like Sotheby's and Christie's. Everyone's going to be watching."

"If she's going to take the Anna path," says one fashion veteran, "there have to be as many stories about her personally as there are about *Harper's Bazaar*—for example, *Kate Betts was seen at X bar drinking X with these people*. It's never been her personal style to have that kind of nightlife or anything." Betts won't have much of a choice, according to one industry insider. "She needs to be a figurehead in the Hearst envi-

ronment to keep the magazine. If she's seen to fail as a fronts person, she'll lose the job." Black offers a somewhat cryptic response to this notion: "I think the editor of a fashion magazine *is* a public persona, and Kate understands that, and I think she likes that role; but with it comes responsibility as well."

Betts's star power will also impact the market. What Wintour is photographed wearing translates to sales. Fashion editors can make a product a must-buy overnight. Take the Fendi baguette, a decorative small shoulder bag starting at $1,000. How did it become last year's phenomenon? Fashion followers explain that fashion editors were given free samples, which they wore to the fashion shows, where they were photographed, which then inspired society ladies, who were photographed wearing them, and on and on. Presto: a best-seller.

COMPULSIVE PERFECTIONIST?

Betts comes from a patrician family and artistic blood: Her father, Hobart Betts, is an architect; her mother, Glynne Robinson Betts, is a photographer. Betts was a serious student of ballet and French as a girl and caught the journalism bug early, editing her high school newspaper at Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut. Her Choate English teacher, Chip Lowery, remembers her above all as a "perfectionist" who "voluntarily rewrote papers, with an eye on making herself just a little bit better." When Betts is reminded of this, she laughs in a way that suggests her surprise at Lowery's memory and her recognition that she was actually that compulsive. "I was a little obsessed when I was that age," she admits. At Princeton, she reported for the paper, covering everything from the selective eating clubs to thundering bulldozers on campus.

After graduation, in 1986, Betts moved to Paris and worked as an assistant at the *International Herald Tribune* and then as a freelancer for *European Travel and Life*. An assignment on boar hunting got her noticed by *W* magazine. She joined the staff of *W* and *Women's Wear Daily* (*WWD*), and ended up running the Paris bureau.

WWD, a trade publication, values fashion prescience: knowing which young designer is going to be important, which trend is heating up, which rumored troubled company is actually close to filing for bankruptcy. *W* editor Patrick McCarthy, no longer a mentor but a competitor, says, "All she cares about is the story....Kate would feel it in the stomach if someone scooped her."

In 1991, *Vogue* lured Betts back home to New York to write about fashion. The following year, she launched "The View"—a fashion news report she eventually expanded from 3 pages to 25. Betts didn't just cover the Versaces of the industry. She tracked down aspiring designers in dicey sections of Paris and lofts in New York's Chinatown. Nicole Noselli, who, with a design school classmate, started a company called Bruce, says Betts put her label on the map. "She came and looked at our stuff," recalls Noselli, 28, who still works out of her home on Stanton Street in lower Manhattan. "Most people in her position don't do that."

But Betts is best known for having created, in 1995, the *Vogue* "Index," a section at the back of the magazine. At first glance, it's unclear why the industry considered it innovative—a busy hodgepodge of what's cool, how much it costs, and where to find it; tips on the hottest clubs, salons, hotels; where Ralph Lauren gets his leather gloves cleaned, etc. But it was groundbreaking and widely imitated because it made high fashion suddenly feel attainable, practical, even affordable.

Betts thinks it was more than just a hip shopping guide: "I think that the secret of the success of the 'Index' was the tone, not just the content," she says. "The tone was slightly irreverent, very accessible, very friendly, very 'this is between you and me on the Q.T.' kind of thing; we're telling you about where Tom Ford buys his underwear. It was sort of insider information without any pretentiousness. And I think that's what people responded to."

Betts wants to maintain that sauciness in her new *Bazaar*, to make the fashion conversation much more connected to the way people talk and play and juggle their lives. She plans a "dot.com" issue, a family issue, and an "extreme" issue (on not just extreme sports but "extreme everything"). She says *The New York Times* got it wrong when it reported in January that she's focusing more on celebrities, à la *InStyle*. "I don't know where they got that," she says. "Maybe because I once said there will be more 'lifestyle,' and someone misheard me." Betts says she does not think of the *Bazaar* reader in terms of chronological age: "I've never seen so many women age 25 wearing designer clothes and I've never seen so many women age 65 wearing the Gap," says Betts. "I want this magazine to have a young spirit. That doesn't necessarily mean it's only going to be about 35-year-olds."

"She needs to be a figurehead in the Hearst environment to keep the magazine. If she's seen to fail as a fronts person, she'll lose the job."

A good pitch, but it's too early in Betts's tenure to tell whether it's working. And one veteran editor says there could be a downside to Betts's plan. "Kate says she's going to make *Harper's Bazaar* a magazine for real women," says the editor. "I think there are two problems: One, that's not a very original statement; no magazine is not for real women. And the way she's defining it, she has a problem in terms of the core *Bazaar* readership—how much she's prepared to shake them and lose them. That [vision] is absolutely not what Liz Tilberis cared about. She cared about a visually driven, beautiful world of fashion-is-art."

Betts has been up-front about steering away from Tilberis's design-heavy concept, which she says was "brilliant" for its time but lacked color and energy. But she knows she can't scrap the blueprint entirely; she has to reinvent *Bazaar* without alienating loyalists. A circulation of 751,000 is nothing to sniff at, even if it doesn't approach *Vogue*'s 1.2 million.

It's unclear whether Hearst and Betts have a circulation strategy that aims to get *Bazaar* bigger numbers or stabilize its core readership—the married, wealthy woman, average age 39, who doesn't necessarily earn the money she spends. The risk in growing the audience is that it

NORMAN

Vogue's "Index" was Betts's brainchild.

can confuse *Bazaar*'s demographic. "In pushing to get either subscriptions or newsstand circulation," explains one editor, "you can bring in demographics that aren't good—that don't have the income and the education level to match your claim that you're a magazine for an affluent, sophisticated woman." So attracting larger numbers isn't good in and of itself? "They have to be the right numbers," says the editor. "It's why *Cosmopolitan* [with its younger readers] would never get Giorgio Armani's upscale Le Collezioni advertising. They don't have the demographics to support it. It isn't their client."

Black says Betts's *Bazaar* will have a more youthful voice, but it's not necessarily trolling for teenagers. "You don't want someone so young that they don't have the money to wear the lifestyle," says Black. "You want them to be the consumer."

If Betts has to worry about making *Bazaar* too young, at least three fashion reporters say she must also be careful not to make it too smart. "It's not *The Economist*," jokes one, who points out that *Mirabella* has become the paradigm of journalistic fashion copy: It's not great box office.

And the *Post*'s Givhan says *Bazaar* won't ever be as journalistic as Betts could make it, simply because these magazines are too entwined with their advertisers to be editorially independent. "Fashion magazines by their very nature are celebratory of the industry," says Givhan. "I don't think there's any magazine that pretends to be an objective reporter on the industry. They're tied to the industry by their advertising dollars, for access. It's a tricky, difficult task to say, 'I want to be a journalist at a fashion magazine,' because you're fighting two opposing creatures."

Betts schmoozes with (from top) Tommy Hilfiger, Diane von Furstenberg, Donna Karan.

Betts seemed to affirm this in a much-seized-upon quote in *The New York Times* last November. The *Times* wrote, "Will [*Bazaar*] go all the way in the name of journalism and include fashion criticism that advertisers might find unpleasant? 'We're not going to come out and say we don't like something,' Ms. Betts said."

Betts now says that was taken out of context. "The point I was making," she says, "was that the role of the fashion magazine is to guide the reader in the direction that you think they should be going in and to show them things that you think are important in fashion right now....I think that it's important that the reader feel positive about fashion and that the magazine is a celebration of fashion, not constantly criticizing it, because I don't think fashion is that serious."

But this isn't journalism the way most reporters practice it. Most editors wouldn't be careful to give advertisers their "due" in editorial content, and they wouldn't tell the reader that the makeup on the cover model was mostly Revlon when it was Kiehl's, because Revlon buys so many ad pages.

Betts rolls her eyes when pressed on this point: She thinks it's much ado about not much. She admits she has to pay attention to fashion credits to ensure that advertisers get their clothes featured, but not to the point where she'll feature a bad dress to coddle an advertiser. "I don't think that if you don't like something that it belongs in the magazine," says Betts.

Stephen Klein, an executive at the ad agency Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners, says fashion books make no pretense of dispassion. "These books aren't critical books. These magazines don't break. They make. They break by not featuring. It's oversight that these advertisers can't stand. You know those screaming phone calls happen when an advertiser spends tens of thousands on advertising and doesn't get featured."

"Everybody counts credits," says one fashion insider. "If a major advertiser doesn't get a cover credit all year, they'll call and say, 'You haven't supported us.'"

But designer Isaac Mizrahi says it can go the other way, too. "I didn't advertise a lot and [fashion magazines] used to use my clothes like mad," says Mizrahi, who shuttered his company in 1998. "Every once in a while they take care of their advertisers....They go and shoot an ugly dress and put some Gucci shoes with it to make it [tolerable]."

Elle editor Richardson concedes that there's an obligation to the advertiser, but most of the time, a particular item is showcased simply because the editors like it. "Like the Marc Jacobs shoes that everybody absolutely loved," says Richardson. "They maybe appeared 12 times in the same issue of a lot of magazines. That's a sign that the editors actually love it; it's not a sign that Marc Jacobs's advertising budget suddenly went through the roof."

Richardson agrees with Betts in not focusing on bad news. "At the level of *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue*, it isn't about fashion 'dos and don'ts'—it isn't *Glamour*, where you put a big *X* through something. Your job is to edit the best."

But all of the high-fashion bibles are grappling with the same malaise, as newsstand sales and market share slip across the category. "That tells you that there's a problem for fashion magazines," says one industry expert, "or that somehow the content isn't satisfying the same number of women it used to. So where have the women gone? They've mainly gone to *Marie Claire* [another Hearst title, launched in 1994, with 853,000 circulation] or the six-year-old *InStyle*, which are both more down-market, lifestyle-driven magazines." ("Down-market" means they cover more mass-market merchandisers, like the Gap and J. Crew.)

Betts knows the ground is shifting. Celebrities have trumped supermodels. The concept of fashion has expanded to include dishes, sheets, food, furniture, websites. The Internet is the next frontier of consumption. And women are busier than ever.

Betts is the perfect example. She's at the office from 9 to 8, works weekends, has to be in Europe four times a year and on the West Coast twice a year. She has a new son to raise and a husband she presumably wants to say hello to every once in a while. But as she stands in the *Bazaar* art department perusing the March layout, she chews a strand of hair and looks like there's no place she'd rather be. "I just love fashion," she says. "I don't think I'll ever be jaded about it." ■

PATRICK MCMULLAN (3)

Public to Press: Cool It

yes 49% **no 36%**

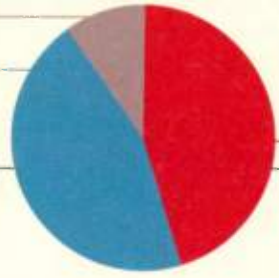
DOES THE PRESS GO TOO FAR IN PURSUING THE TRUTH?

America may have a uniquely free press, but a surprising number of Americans don't like the results. In a groundbreaking poll, the people weigh in on curbing the media, the outlets we most trust, and our conflicted feelings about sensationalism. The chief pollster explains.

By Frank Luntz

OVERALL, WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF THE NEWS MEDIA?

FAVORABLE	**45.5%**
very favorable	8.6%
somewhat favorable	36.9%
UNFAVORABLE	**44.6%**
somewhat unfavorable	29.1%
very unfavorable	15.4%
OTHER	**10%**
don't know/declined	10%

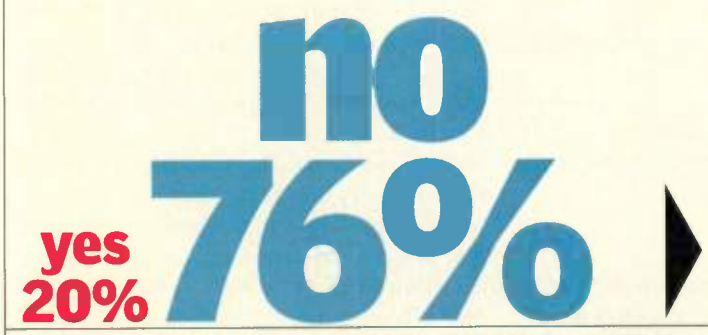


HOSTAGE AT GUNPOINT ON LIVE TV: SHOULD A STATION BROADCAST?

WOULD YOU WATCH?

SHOULD THE MEDIA HAVE USED EXTRA-POWERFUL LENSES TO PHOTOGRAPH JFK JR.'S GRIEVING FAMILY?

WOULD YOU HAVE WATCHED FOOTAGE OF THE BODIES INSIDE THE PLANE WRECKAGE?



SHOULD EXECUTIONS BE SHOWN LIVE ON TELEVISION?

WOULD YOU WATCH?

Do the media go too far in pursuing the truth? Nearly half of America says yes, according to a *Brill's Content* poll that sheds light on why so many Americans dislike and distrust the media.

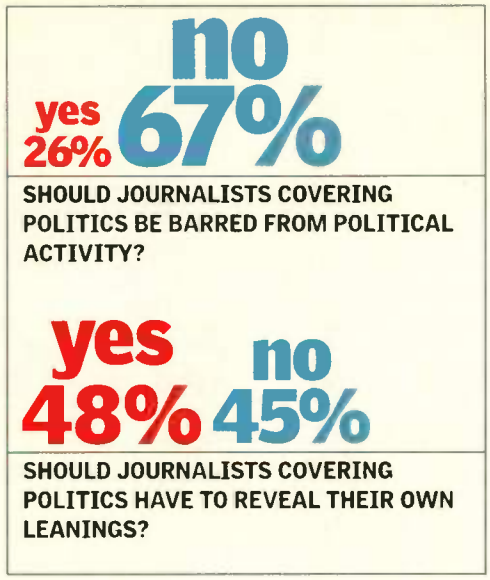
Although two decades of surveys have consistently shown the public's worsening evaluation of the Fourth Estate, we set out to do something different: learn what Americans want in news coverage—and what they expect from the individual journalist. In essence, we gave 822 randomly selected Americans a paintbrush and an empty canvas, and asked them to portray their media masterpiece.

And what did they paint? Handcuffs.

The degree to which citizens today would regulate journalists is eye-opening. The media have "so much power over politics and awareness," says Helen, a Connecticut respondent. (All respondents' last names have been withheld.) "They should be trained and licensed."

Although a minority of our respondents support press curbs, it's a big minority, transcending age and education. It also crosses partisan boundaries: 48 percent of all Americans would compel journalists to disclose their political leanings, and one fourth would bar them from participating in political activities of any kind.

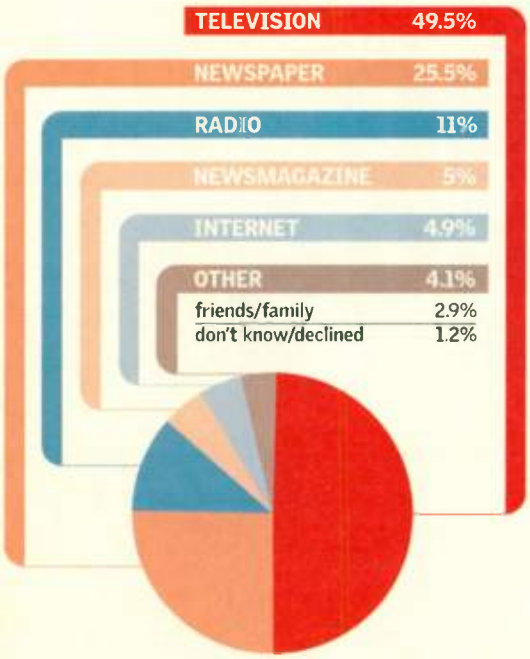
The public's desire to curb press freedom is just one finding from our poll, conducted by telephone, of adults 18 and older in the third week of December 1999 (with a +3.5 percent margin of error).



Other highlights:

- 74 percent believe that a TV station should cut away from a live hostage incident if a victim is held at gunpoint, but 59 percent would keep on watching if the station didn't cut away.
- 60 percent believe that the media make the overall national condition seem worse than it really is.
- 49 percent believe that the media go too far in pursuing the truth.
- 32 percent have gone online specifically to get news, including 45 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds.
- 28 percent would turn on CNN (or CNN Headline News) if they heard the president had been shot, double the figure for any other media outlet.
- NBC's Tom Brokaw is the most trusted television news personality.
- Younger adults are more than twice as likely as senior citizens to consider shows like *Larry King Live* and *Today* to be more news-oriented than entertainment-oriented.

FROM WHERE DO YOU GET MOST OF YOUR NEWS?



The Details

Our poll says the nation is evenly divided on the press: By a sliver—45.5 percent to 44.6 percent—most Americans regard the media favorably.

The evaluations divide interestingly along partisan lines. Only 35 percent of self described Republicans regard the media favorably, compared to 58 percent of Democrats.

But the sharpest and most important difference lies between those who favor unregulated news coverage and those who want outlets to use more discretion—or to be forced to. "If I see one more camera in some poor soul's face asking them how they feel...," says Mike, a Virginia supervisory engineer. "We all know how they feel....We don't have to stand there and see body parts."

Those who believe that the media should disclose more details rather than fewer are considerably more positive about the media than those who would restrict news coverage as well as their own news consumption.

Americans are also declaring a credibility gap: Fully 60 percent believe that the media make the American condition seem worse than it really is, compared to the 18 percent who believe that the media make conditions seem better and the mere 14 percent who believe that they get the overall picture right. Only 19 percent of the population believes that the press gets economic conditions about right, while 44 percent believes that the coverage is too positive and 27 percent too negative. "The latest Wall Street slide was covered more heavily than when Wall Street has a big jump," says Ohio respondent Gary. "They go on TV talking about the bad but not the good."

Our respondents also weighed in on boundaries, with nearly half (49 percent) saying the media go too far in pursuing the truth and 36 percent saying they don't go far enough.

Almost two thirds (63 percent) believe that the national news media provide too many specific details when reporting on news such as the John F. Kennedy Jr. plane crash, while 76 percent believe that the national press does not give enough information on news such as the federal budget or education. (We should have asked if they really would read or watch more on these subjects, but didn't.)

And our respondents named the most trusted national TV news personalities: NBC's Tom Brokaw is America's journalist of choice, with 16 percent of the vote. He wins among virtually every demographic, geographic, and behavioral subgroup but does particularly well among women 60 and older, people in the Midwest and the West, and Republicans. ABC's Peter Jennings comes in first only

Pollster Frank Luntz is president of Luntz Research Companies. Since 1992, he has conducted more than 400 surveys in 10 countries. This one was an exclusive collaboration with Brill's Content.

among postgrads, and CBS's Dan Rather wins among Independents. The three anchors' trust rankings mirror their current national ratings: Brokaw first, Jennings second, Rather third.

A New Party Line?

Political observers have long assumed that Republicans are more critical of the media than Democrats. Our results suggest otherwise.

Perhaps driven by the Clinton sex scandals, Democrats are actually more critical than Republicans when it comes to media limits. A majority of Democrats (56 percent) believe that the media go too far in pursuing the truth, while only 31 percent believe that they do not go far enough. Republicans are more mixed: 48 percent too far, 35 percent not far enough.

Even the generation gap affects the limits question. Only 28 percent of young adults believe that the media don't go far enough in pursuing the truth, while 63 percent believe they go too far. Older citizens are much more evenly divided.

In terms of ideology, three fourths (74 percent) of Republicans believe that most journalists are more liberal than they are, while only 7 percent believe that journalists share their ideology. "It would be interesting to see a byline saying that so-and-so is a Democrat or whatever," says Republican respondent Becky, an Oklahoma teacher. "We could take what they say with a grain of salt."

Perhaps more surprising, Democrats also perceive a liberal media tilt: 47 percent believe that most journalists are more liberal than they are, while 28 percent think most journalists are more conservative and only 16 percent believe that journalists share their ideology.

Age differences also affect these perceptions. Younger adults (18 to 29) are fairly evenly divided in their ideological identification with journalists—32 percent believe that most journalists are to their right, and 46 percent believe most journalists are to their left. Perceptions of liberal bias appear to grow steadily by age, with seniors much more likely to believe that most journalists are to their left (58 percent) than their right (11 percent).

New Take on Old Faithful

From the assassination of a president to the Beatles invasion to hurricanes and earthquakes, Americans used broadcast network television for three decades as their preferred (or only) immediate window to a crisis. That picture is becoming more complicated.

Although television remains the favored medium for breaking news, weather, and sports stories, the breakdown skews by category: A dominant 77 percent would turn to television for a presidential shooting, 68 percent for an approaching hurricane, 50 percent for a stock market crash, and 43 percent for a Mark McGwire trade to the New York Yankees. However, less than half of all television viewers would tune in to any of the three traditional TV networks given the increasing cable options.

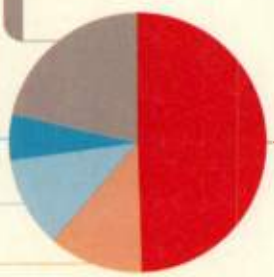
When it comes to breaking stories, radio and newspapers are virtually absent. Weather-related disasters would attract a significant number of radio listeners, but no other breaking stories would. A fair portion of the public would depend on newspapers to learn more about a major sports event, but that's about it for print.

IF YOU HEARD THE PRESIDENT HAD BEEN SHOT?

TELEVISION	**77.3%**
CNN/Headline News	28.3%
ABC	14.7%
NBC	11.2%
CBS	4.9%
FOX	3.9%
CNBC	3.6%
MSNBC	2%
other television	8.7%
RADIO	**8.7%**
all-news radio	5.1%
other radio	3.6%
INTERNET/WEB	**4.7%**
NEWSPAPER	**3.6%**
The New York Times	*
other newspapers	3.6%
OTHER RESPONSES	**5.6%**
don't know/declined	4.3%
friends/family	1.2%
other	*

IF YOU HEARD THE STOCK MARKET HAD DROPPED 1,000 POINTS?

TELEVISION	**49.9%**
CNN/Headline News	20.9%
ABC	7%
NBC	5.6%
CNBC	4.4%
MSNBC	2.3%
CBS	2.1%
FOX	1.7%
C-SPAN	*
other television	5.3%
NEWSPAPER	**12.2%**
The Wall Street Journal	3.4%
The New York Times	1.2%
other newspapers	7.6%
INTERNET/WEB	**11.4%**
RADIO	**5.8%**
all-news radio	4.1%
other radio	1.7%
OTHER RESPONSES	**20.7%**
don't know/declined	14%
friends/family	2.3%
other	4.4%



IF YOU HEARD THE NEW YORK YANKEES HAD SIGNED MARK MCGWIRE?

TELEVISION	**42.6%**
ESPN	18.7%
ABC	6.2%
CNN/Headline News	4.6%
NBC	3.8%
CNBC	1.8%
FOX	1.8%
CBS	1.2%
C-SPAN	*
MSNBC	*
other television	3.1%
NEWSPAPER	**17.9%**
The New York Times	1.6%
other newspapers	16.3%
INTERNET/WEB	**5.2%**
RADIO	**5.2%**
all-news radio	2.3%
other radio	2.9%
OTHER RESPONSES	**29.2%**
don't know/declined	21.9%
friends/family	2.2%
other	5.1%

* Mentioned by less than one percent.

And just as their overall broadcast entertainment ratings have dropped, broadcast-television network newscasts are losing to cable channels—especially those cable channels with name brands in particular news categories. Specialized cable channels "get the inside scoop," says Oklahoma schoolteacher Becky, "because that's what they focus on and report on all the time."

But current ratings tell only half of the story. We wanted Americans to say where they would turn in times of crisis—when speed, accuracy, and comprehensiveness are particularly important. Here again, cable TV has become the dominant medium, with CNN and CNN Headline News by far the favorite sources. CNN is a "little less biased," says Becky. "It's not so much an entertainment network but a news network. On...NBC, CBS, and ABC, the two get merged."

In fact, almost as many people say they would turn to CNN/Headline News in a presidential shooting (28 percent) as would turn to the three traditional broadcast networks combined (31 percent). CNN also tops our poll as to where people would turn should the stock market drop 1,000 points. If the crisis were an approaching hurricane, The Weather Channel is the overwhelming first choice (27 percent), with ABC a distant second (12 percent) and all-news radio third (10 percent).

And if Mark McGwire were ever traded to the Yankees, ESPN, at 19 percent, would be the source of choice, with no other outlet even close. The channels may change, but for big events, highly targeted and branded cable TV is now the primary source for Americans.

THE MOST TRUSTED TELEVISION JOURNALIST

1	Tom Brokaw	16%
2	"None of them"	14%
3	Peter Jennings	10%
4	Dan Rather	9%
5	Barbara Walters	3%
	Walter Cronkite	3%
7	Ted Koppel	2%

School Lines

Our poll also revealed the segregation of news consumption by education level. CNN draws the best-educated, leaving the less-taught to the traditional networks. Consider: Only 19 percent of respondents with no more than a high school diploma would pick CNN/Headline News after a presidential shooting, compared to 36 percent of college graduates and 46 percent of postgrads. A stock market crash would yield a similar split. Only 16 percent of high school grads and those less-educated would tune in to CNN if the stock market dropped 1,000 points, compared to 29 percent of college grads and 38 percent of postgrads. CNN is such an overwhelming choice for postgrads during a business crisis that it would surpass all other television, cable, all-news radio, and newspaper sources combined.

The New Media; the New News

Our poll confirms that the Internet is just beginning to break through as a major source for news. Nearly one third of the population (32 percent) has gone online specifically to get news, but that figure understates the current impact of the Internet as a news source. Online news consumption is more a factor of Internet use than anything else, and that is mostly a factor of age: As more pre-retirees and senior citizens become computer-literate, the Internet is sure to expand its news impact. "You can get real-time feedback" on the Internet, says a Virginia supervisory engineer respondent, who is 46.

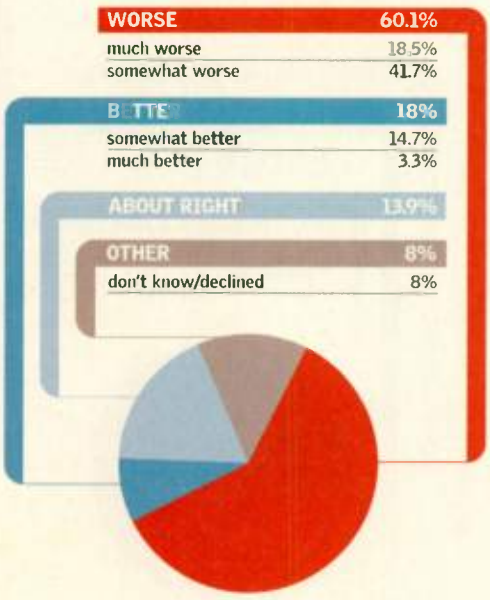
Demographics plays a major role in online news consumption. Almost half of all 18-to-29-year-olds (45 percent) have gone online to get news, as have 40 percent of the 30-to-49-year-olds. But just 9 percent of senior citizens and 27 percent of the 50-to-64-year-olds have gotten news online. An education gap exists as well: 46 percent of postgrads have gone online for news, compared to just 16 percent of those with a high school diploma or less. And more men sample online news than women do, 37 percent to 28 percent, respectively.

When Americans are asked to name their primary news sources, the Internet still trails television (50 percent) and newspapers (26 percent), although it is rapidly gaining on radio (11 percent) and is tied with newsmagazines (5 percent). Among men 18 to 39, 14 percent turn first to the Internet, in a tie with radio, and 23 percent consider it either a first or second source.

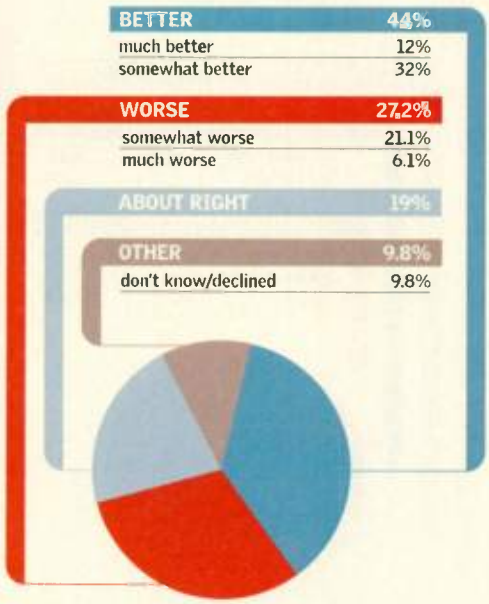
Our survey suggests the Internet has the greatest potential to dominate consumption of business news. Although only 4 percent would turn first to the Internet to learn more about an approaching hurricane, and 5 percent would pick the Internet for first news about a presidential shooting, fully 11 percent would go online to learn about a stock market crash. In fact, among Generation X'ers, the Internet is the first pick (24 percent) in times of a business crisis, with CNN/Headline News second, at 17 percent.

The decline of traditional media consump-

IN GENERAL, DOES THE PRESS MAKE CONDITIONS IN AMERICA SEEM BETTER OR WORSE THAN THEY REALLY ARE?



DOES THE PRESS MAKE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN AMERICA SEEM BETTER OR WORSE THAN THEY REALLY ARE?



tion has also made way for a new type of television show that blurs the line between news and entertainment. Consider shows such as *America's Most Wanted*: tabloidesque yet perceived by a fair number of viewers as news (38 percent). Issue-oriented interview programs like *Larry King Live* also score well within the news category, with 26 percent of our respondents perceiving it as a news show.

The *Today* show gets a 40 percent mostly-news rating; *Dateline NBC* rates a 66 percent.

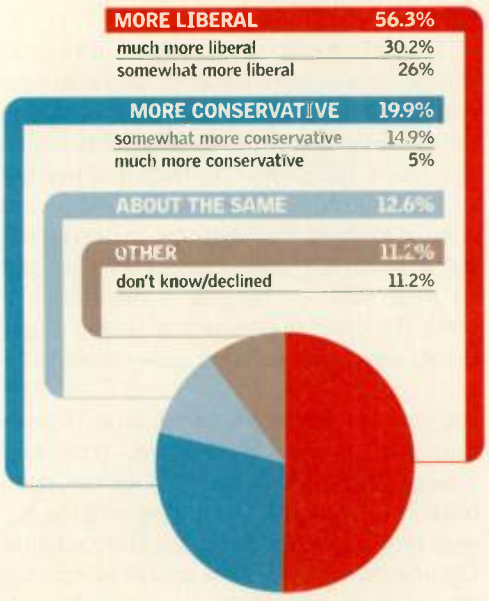
Curiously, even a fictional serial, *Law & Order*, has convinced 5 percent of viewers it's a news show. In a related question, when asked where they get most of their information about the field of law, the largest portion of respondents (28 percent) cited newspapers and magazines, but 5 percent also cited legal-culture TV dramas like *Ally McBeal*.

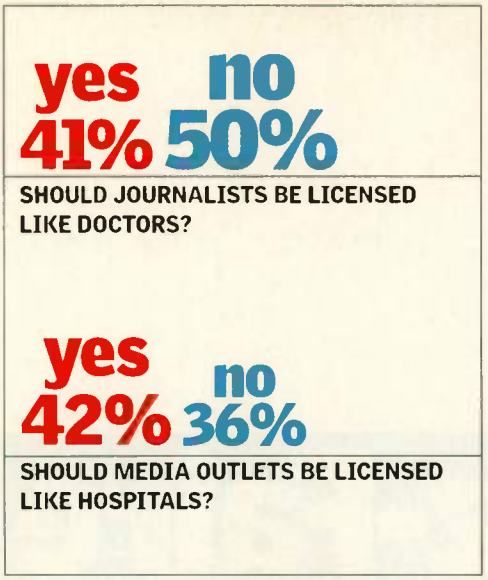
And consider this bonus figure: 13 percent of Americans say celebrity talk shows such as Jay Leno's and David Letterman's keep them up to date on current events.

Should They Show It? Would I Watch It?

Historically, Americans have told pollsters they want more substance than sensation in their news, and our poll suggests they're sticking to their claim. Nearly two thirds of the population (63 percent) believe that the media give too many specific details when reporting on news like John F. Kennedy Jr.'s plane crash,

DO YOU THINK MOST JOURNALISTS ARE MORE LIBERAL OR MORE CONSERVATIVE THAN YOU ARE?





while only 18 percent want still more. One respondent, a 65-year-old Maryland retiree, sums up the anti-sensationalist sentiment: "When [invasive coverage] comes on," he says, "I turn on the movies." Conversely, only 9 percent see an excess of detail in reports about the federal budget or education policy, while 76 percent want more.

Yet night after night, "news" about celebrities attracts viewer attention, while expanded reports about policy and politics on such shows as PBS's *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer* remain in the margins.

There were strong indications of that hypocrisy in our poll. Indeed, although Americans complain the press goes too far in the pursuit of truth, our survey strongly suggested many of us are still voyeurs at heart; we want to see it all—even in explicit detail. "It's like a car wreck," explains one poll respondent, a 43-year-old Oregon man. "You end up looking—it's human nature. But if it wasn't available to me, I'd be just as happy."

Though a paltry 11 percent of our respondents supported *Time* magazine's decision to print the images and transcripts from tapes made by the students who planned the Columbine High School massacre after the family was denied access to these same tapes, the issue sold well above average on the newsstand, according to *Time*.

"I think the families should have been exposed to them first," says a 63-year-old former school bus driver from Pennsylvania. "I didn't see the magazine, but I saw the pictures on TV....I watched [out of] curiosity."

To examine this apparent contradiction, we offered respondents real and near-real situations in which media faced boundary dilemmas. Although most advocate restraint in such situations, many admit they would tune in to such coverage anyway:

- Only 22 percent say a TV station should continue to show a live hostage situation if the victim is held at gunpoint, yet almost three times as many (59 percent) would keep watching to see the outcome. "I don't think they should keep broadcasting it," says Harold, a retired Baptist minister from Texas. But he admits he would likely keep watching "out of curiosity, to see what happens and see how they handle it."
- Just over one quarter of the population (27 percent) believes that if the press has irrefutable evidence that a previously unidentified woman had a sexual relationship with President Clinton it should print the woman's photograph. But more than a third (36 percent) would pick up the newspaper to see what she looked like. The numbers are slightly lower, but the ratio is the same if the photograph were of a liaison with Governor (and presidential candidate) George W. Bush.
- Only 10 percent of respondents believe that the Pennsylvania TV stations that recorded the suicide of the state treasurer in 1987 should have rebroadcast the videotape, yet more than double that number (24 percent) would have tuned in to watch it.
- Only 5 percent believe that the media were justified in using extra-powerful lenses after the JFK Jr. plane crash to photograph grieving family members inside the Kennedy compound gates, yet 15 percent say they would have actually tuned in if photographs of the bodies inside the plane wreckage had been shown.

These results confirm a long-standing assumption: What Americans say they want in news and how they will actually behave are entirely different. Extrapolating from several areas of our polling data, we've devised something we call a "voyeur index," the results of which are telling: Fully 39 percent of the American population believes that the media should not have covered any of these four scenarios, yet four out of five Americans (79 percent) would still have viewed at least one of them. (And what's more, the actual ratings recorded every day on television for similar programs suggest many more *would* have viewed them.) [CONTINUED ON PAGE 114]

Laissez-Faire TV

ABC's John Stossel is a man on a mission: to teach Americans about the evils of government regulation and the rewards of free enterprise. Does his journalism suffer for it? By Ted Rose

For a big-shot television news star, John Stossel has a lousy office. Sure, he gets to look down on Columbus Avenue from his room inside ABC News headquarters in New York, but that's about it. The eighth-floor office has no plush carpeting and none of the cushy furniture you'd expect a television news luminary to have, just a dirty old couch and a couple of stiff office chairs. Instead of a silver bowl cradling sweets, there is a plastic bag of jelly beans—a hole torn across the side—lying across his beat-up metal desk. His Emmys are carelessly crowded onto a tiny shelf far above eye level.

Illustration by Lara Tomlin

It's the real estate Stossel occupies on ABC's schedule that commands attention. He is a regular contributor to *20/20*, the ABC newsmagazine, and he's the only correspondent in the show's history to get his own weekly segment. But that's just part-time work. Stossel also produces four one-hour prime-time specials each year on any topics he chooses. To help produce those specials, Stossel has his own production unit, a staff of ten producers and assistants working full time to get his stories ready for airing. On average, 9 million viewers watched each time he took to the airwaves last year. What's more, his contract stipulates that each special be repeated.

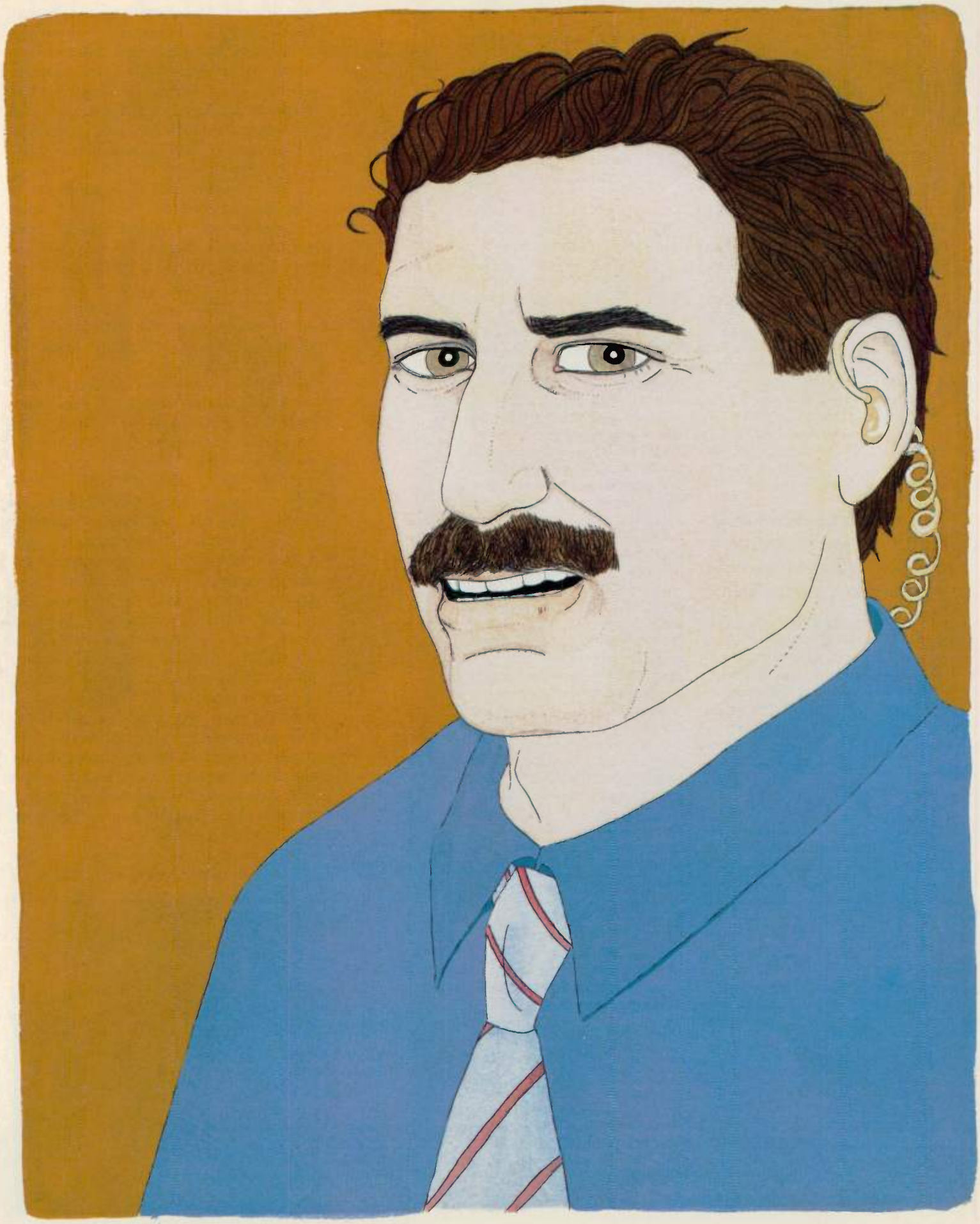
Stossel is well known for diving into complicated, esoteric debates and coming back with well-polished stories that deliver good ratings. He has used his platform to ponder why teenagers act the way they do, whether love can survive marriage, and the power of belief in our society.

But he is best known for his reports on the subject of government regulation. Once a consumer reporter who rallied against corporations, Stossel has become a friend of big business. He has suggested shrinking the Environmental Protection Agency and boarding up the Food and Drug Administration.

His anti-regulation advocacy has made him a hero in the libertarian ranks. "I think one John Stossel segment taking a skeptical look at government is worth a million dollars to the movement," says Stephen Moore, director of fiscal policy at The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. But this free-market slant has also made him one of the most controversial reporters on television. Stossel is enemy No. 1 to Jeff Cohen, who runs the liberal group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) and has been a *Brill's Content* columnist (see "Face-Off," page 54). "He's clearly one of the most openly and proudly biased reporters in the business," says Cohen.

Stossel's detractors denounce him as a sloppy, close-minded reporter; they credit his rise to the corporate dominance of today's media world. His supporters say that Stossel is a smart, thoughtful contrarian, a journalist who follows his nose for news and pushes viewers to think for themselves. "So which is it?" a Stossel television treatment might ask: "Is John Stossel a hero or a villain?" As is often the case, the answer is more complicated than television news makes it out to be.

IT'S JUST AFTER NOON on a Saturday in early December at the Washington, D.C., Renaissance Hotel. John Stossel is in the main ballroom, eating stuffed chicken with the bigwigs from the American Legislative Exchange Council, one of the largest groups of state legislators in the country. The group is officially nonpartisan, but that declaration doesn't



Stossel In Court

By Robert Schmidt

Stossel's reporting of a 1989 story on a dental disorder called TMJ—temporomandibular joint disorder—landed him in court as the named defendant in a libel suit. ABC and Stossel were sued by a Philadelphia dentist named Owen Rogal, who was the subject of a story entitled "The Biting Pain." Rogal lost the case. The trial judge accused him of perjury, but it was never substantiated. Still, Rogal was ordered to pay some $250,000, an amount that was later reduced. Nonetheless, the litigation offers a window into how Stossel does his job.

First, it's clear from Stossel's own testimony that he—like many other on-air correspondents—does little of his own reporting. Producers do most of the research for Stossel's stories; they give him news clips and notes of interviews to review. Stossel does some of the on-camera interviews and helps to write the script. Second, in this case Stossel did not completely, or even fairly, present the other side. Stossel (or perhaps his producer) decided who the villain was and didn't bother to let a few complicating facts get in the way.

The outtakes showed that the doctor was acting more responsibly than Stossel had led the viewers to believe.

Indeed, court records show that Rogal had been identified as a possible villain even before much of the reporting took place. A memo to Stossel and other ABC News executives from the story's freelance producer, Phyllis Ward, written on January 11, 1989, and titled "Initial Thoughts on TMJ Story," singled out Rogal as a "key marginal possibility." In other words, a bad guy. Rogal's crime? He had drawn attention to himself by filing suit against the American Dental Association in an effort to stop it from establishing guidelines for treating TMJ disorder, guidelines that might result in Rogal's treatments not being covered by insurance.

Stossel's March 24, 1989, story focused on Rogal, who had a lucrative practice treating patients with TMJ disorder, a condition of the jaw that can produce terrible headaches. The issue of TMJ disorder and how to treat it was causing much controversy in the dental world. Scientifically, nobody was really sure how to treat it. Even the symptoms and estimates of how many people suffered from TMJ disorder were in dispute. Some dentists contended that the disorder often went away by itself without treatment, while other dentists, such as Rogal, made a living by treating TMJ patients.

The machines that Rogal used to diagnose TMJ disorder were also controversial—some experts concluded that they had no diagnostic capabilities. These experts thought that such dentists as Rogal were using TMJ disorder to boost their business. Stossel, with cameras running, put himself in the dentist's chair to see what was up. Unbeknownst to Rogal, Stossel had already visited a dentist in New York who proclaimed him free of any TMJ disorder.

The trap was set, and, as Stossel reported on the air, Rogal quickly diagnosed Stossel with the condition and offered to set him up with an expensive treatment. Only then did Stossel reveal he had already been declared free of TMJ disorder.

The story that ran on *20/20* was very critical of Rogal. Stossel hammered the dentist, saying at one point, "It looks like you're looking to chase the money."

The trial itself bared some telling details about how the *20/20* piece had been put together. Stossel freely admitted on the stand that he had relied on the freelance producer and her assistants to do all the reporting for the piece. "I read everything they give me and look for problems, look for things that don't seem right and quiz them about it, and ask them to do more research," Stossel testified. "But I don't do the research myself, and that's how television newsmagazines work."

More embarrassing to Stossel were his own outtakes—footage from the interviews that never made it into the story. The outtakes clearly show that the first dentist who examined Stossel and found him to be healthy looked at him for only two and a half minutes. Rogal's exam, which featured a detailed medical history, lasted almost 20 minutes.

While being examined by Rogal, Stossel repeatedly complained of pain in his jaw and neck. At one point during the exam, Stossel offered: "[A]lso, when I go to the dentist and they say, 'Open wide,' it really hurts. It hurts more than the injection of the Novocain." But here's how Stossel portrayed his symptoms on the *20/20* broadcast: "For me, it's hardly a serious problem; my jaw clicks once a month. Occasionally I get a headache, but who doesn't? And on this day my neck hurt, probably because I'd played two hours of volleyball the night before."

And although Stossel portrayed Rogal as a dentist who was eager to diagnose TMJ disorder, the extra footage showed, in fact, that Rogal was acting more responsibly than *20/20* had led its viewers to believe. In one outtake, Rogal even told Stossel that he did not need to undergo treatment for the disorder unless the pain was interfering with his lifestyle.

In another excerpt that was not broadcast, Rogal told Stossel that he should see an orthopedic doctor, to make sure that stiffness in his neck (a symptom of TMJ disorder) was not the result of a different medical problem. At least twice Rogal suggested that Stossel seek a second opinion before undergoing treatment for TMJ disorder. In response, Stossel argued that it was clear Rogal wanted him to undergo the treatment and that the suggestion that he visit a specialist and get another medical opinion was pro forma. "Everybody says, 'Get a second opinion,' " Stossel said. "It's not news."

fool anybody. The crowd is overwhelmingly conservative-Republican, and The Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank, is hawking pamphlets outside the ballroom. Stossel used to collect Emmy awards regularly for his consumer reporting, but these days he's more likely to be honored, as he will be today, with a journalism award from a conservative political group.

The attention seems to make Stossel slightly uncomfortable. He's much more reserved and shy in person than his on-air persona might suggest. He has asked his presenter not to include the Emmys in his introduction, but the presenter does so anyway. On cue, Stossel rises to accept the trophy and a healthy round of applause, and to tell the group of legislators about his former life as a consumer reporter. "Every night, I would go on TV and talk about a company doing something bad to somebody," Stossel says. "I think I approached life the way most young reporters still do, which is that consumers are preyed upon by [businesses]."

Stossel didn't plan on becoming a reporter. He never expressed any interest in the trade during his childhood in suburban Chicago, nor during his undergraduate years at Princeton University. (He served on the college newspaper at Princeton, but as a business manager.) At the end of his senior year, in 1969, he had already received an acceptance from a graduate school in Chicago when he was wooed by a recruiter from King Broadcasting who was trolling the Princeton campus for young talent. The adage is that all you need to get on television is good looks and smooth talk, but Stossel didn't even have those. He had the looks—his puppy dog eyes and bushy mustache make him look like Tom Selleck—but his stuttering was so pronounced that it secured him a draft deferment from the Vietnam War.

He started as an off-camera researcher in Portland, Oregon, working for KGW, an

From "Greed": Stossel juxtaposes Mother Teresa and Michael Milken. "Who did more good for the world?" Stossel asks.

From "Are We Scaring Ourselves?": Stossel says that risks shorten your life by varying amounts.

NBC affiliate. "I found it dull compared to Princeton," says Stossel. "In Oregon, I kept offending people with my sarcastic sense of humor because people in the West would take me seriously." In Portland, he made his minor league debut. He stuttered sometimes on air, but learned to avoid it by recognizing words that would trip him up. (The word *dollar*, in particular, haunted the consumer reporter.)

After four years, he accepted an offer to work in New York City at WCBS, a prestigious station in the largest market in the country. In those days, local television news produced longer, more thoughtful pieces, and Stossel quickly established himself as a talented long-form storyteller. "He was clearly bright beyond his years," says Eric Ober, who hired Stossel in 1973 and went on to become president of CBS News.

When he was the in-house consumer reporter, Stossel says, his goal was one scam every day. He reported on bogus claims by aspirin companies, uncovered price-fixing by milk suppliers, and caught a group of census workers filling out the forms over coffee at McDonald's. Popular with viewers and in the newsroom, Stossel made the move to the big leagues when he was hired by ABC News, in 1981. For more than a decade, he continued his consumer crusade on a national scale.

THEN STOSSEL DECIDED HE would shift the focus of his reporting. Back in his ABC office, Stossel says that he experienced no epiphany, just a growing realization that he (and all the other reporters) had been asking the wrong questions. "It took me too many years of watching regulators work before I saw the law of unintended consequences," says Stossel. Journalists and politicians tend to focus on the benefits of government action, according to Stossel, without considering the negative impact of those regulations on the free market. "The big rip-offs were what the state was doing," he says, "spending 1.8 trillion dollars on programs that often didn't work." Stossel points to a set of bar graphs tacked above his bulletin board. It is a risk-assessment chart. When Stossel first explored the issue, he assigned an assistant to develop this chart; it took her a year and a half. Stossel gestures to show how the statistical risk of the dangers trumpeted by news organizations—airplane crashes, murders, toxic chemicals—pale in comparison to the risk of more mundane activities, such as driving and smoking.

Stossel decided he wanted to do a special on risk assessment, a decidedly unsexy topic—and one that did not generate much interest at ABC, he says. "There was no overt 'You can't do that.' It was just indifference," says Stossel. "[People would say] 'Yes, that's interesting,' and nobody ever did anything."

Then the free market stepped in. When Stossel's contract with ABC came up for renewal, he received overtures from both Fox News and CBS News. Stossel demanded that his next contract include a series of one-hour specials. ABC agreed. Few reporters were eager to work in the long form, and for ABC, the specials were an opportunity to promote new talent with Stossel positioned as the in-house contrarian, according to Alan Wurtzel, a senior vice president at ABC News at the time. "I just thought [his stories] were interesting," says Wurtzel. "That's all I cared about. Interesting programs that people would come to because I thought they were provocative and they could be well promoted."

Stossel's first special, "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" encapsulated the philosophy that has become his mantra, clarified his editorial style, and gave rise to the serious criticisms that dog him to this day. Stossel portrayed the Environmental Protection Agency as a byzantine bureaucracy that almost gleefully ignored the wishes of individuals. He lambasted journalists, including himself and ABC colleague Ted Koppel, for having unnecessarily exaggerated the risks of crime and toxic chemicals to most Americans.

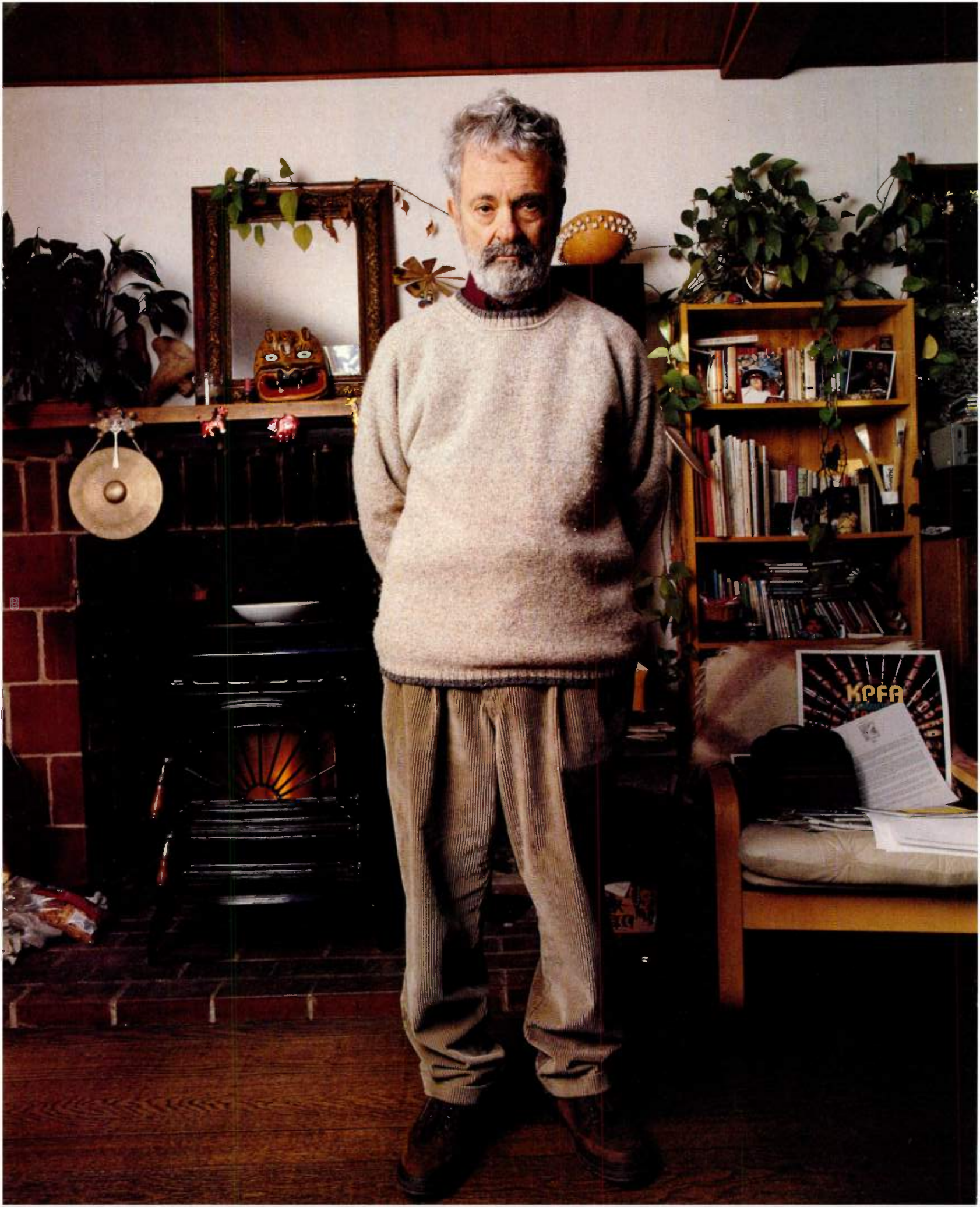
"We've talked about focusing on the wrong risks, the wrong regulations," said Stossel near the end of the hour. "But what if simply having so many regulations kills people?" That comment was incendiary enough to make ABC plaster a sign saying COMMENTARY just below Stossel's mouth. The program, which made a cogent case that regulations were the enemy of Americans, received strong ratings.

"THE MOST DISHONEST mass-media journalist I have ever encountered," says consumer crusader Ralph Nader, who was portrayed in "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" as the boogeyman of excessive fear. Nader was a fan during Stossel's consumer advocate days but now talks about him as if he'd been afflicted with a mysterious disease.

Every mistake raises the nagging question: Is he willing to manipulate his reporting to support his argument?

Nader's beef is that Stossel doesn't focus on the impact of regulations beyond their direct cost to corporations. Nader believes that many regulations produce collateral benefits that Stossel's narrow statistical analysis ignores. "His concept of cost is completely inside a corporate circle," he says. In "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" for instance, Nader backs a regulation that would mandate seat belts in school buses, a change that could cost as much as $1,800 per bus to implement. Stossel reports that a risk-assessment study concluded that the cost is not worth the relatively low risk to the children. "Ralph Nader says we can afford to worry about everything," Stossel says in his piece.

Nader argues that that statement distorts his point. If one includes collateral benefits that come out of regulations, such as getting children in the [CONTINUED ON PAGE 111]


KPFA

I Sold Out To Judith Regan

Berkeley professor Bob Blauner labored for five years on his literary tome about men mourning their mothers. Then Princess Diana died, and book-industry tsunami Judith Regan deceptively marketed Blauner's book as a tawdry look at the plight of Diana's sons. It was one of Regan's few publishing disasters. By Bob Blauner

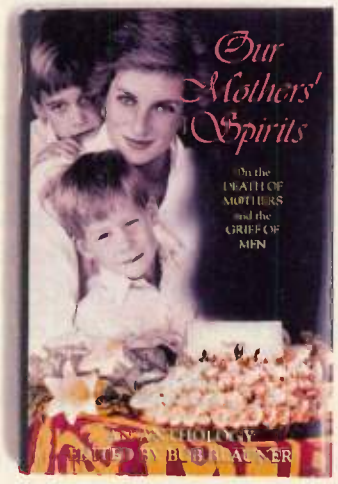
Most people don't believe me when I tell them that until I saw the headlines about Diana Spencer's death, in August 1997, I didn't know which country she was princess of. That my own fate would become tied to hers was even more unimaginable.

But thanks to Judith Regan, the publisher of ReganBooks, a HarperCollins imprint, that's what came to pass. *Our Mothers' Spirits*, a literary anthology I had edited that was subtitled "On the Death of Mothers and the Grief of Men," was scheduled for publication by ReganBooks in February 1998. By late August 1997, I had gotten all of the material together and sent off the manuscript to Dana Isaacson, my editor at ReganBooks. I was vacationing at Stinson Beach on the California coast, savoring the completion of five years' labor, when I heard from Isaacson that Judith Regan had decided to push up my pub date to November 1.

Why the rush? Regan's plan was to cash in on the Diana story, by making a tie-in between the stories in my book and the grief Diana's two young sons were experiencing. I was to write a new preface that would make this connection, and I was to submit it immediately. Somehow I accomplished this, despite the fact that while on vacation I had watched the U.S. Open tennis tournament on TV rather than the funeral in England or any of the Diana hoopla.

During my 30-plus years of teaching sociology at Berkeley, I had tried to maintain my integrity by consistently refusing to do anything that might be interpreted as selling out or vaguely commercial; I even thought writing textbooks for the mass market was beneath me. Even though the preface was an egregious act of commercialism, I felt okay doing it because I told myself I could honestly make connections between my expertise in male grief and the situation of the two bereaved princes.

But I knew that Regan would inevitably want to change the book's cover and that that would bring on a crisis for me. The original cover was a Renaissance painting of the Christ child suckling on the breast of the Madonna, whose burgundy gown was set off by an attractive background of orange, blue, black, and white. Since my book was about mothers dying and not sons, it wasn't really germane. But it was tasteful. And now I was expecting something garish.



The mock-up of the new cover arrived in early October, and it confirmed my worst fears. The front of the dust jacket was dominated by a photo of Diana and her two sons, the three of them towering over another shot of her coffin wrapped in royal drapery and covered with flowers. On top of the floral arrangement was a notecard inscribed to "Mummy." As if that weren't bad enough, the same photo of the royal threesome was on the spine, and on the back, the one of the coffin with its flowers and note. To top it off, the book's title on both cover and side was rendered in shocking pink.

It was a completely vulgar display and one that shamelessly exploited Diana and her sons. And it was also misleading. Looking at the cover, a reader would think that this was another of the many Diana books that were then being rushed into print. What hurt me the most was the kitschy, lowbrow message that was being sent, so at variance with the quality writing I had labored to assemble.

I immediately protested and predicted that the Diana cover, if it were used, would become the story of the book and that the stories of John Updike, John Cheever, Wallace Stegner, and the 40-odd other writers who had contributed to the anthology would be ignored. Two of the contributors to the anthology, Martin

Blauner (left) was horrified but powerless when he saw the cover (right) ReganBooks had chosen for his serious work.

Portrait by Douglas Adesko

NORMAN

THE REAL WHITE HOUSE

Can a smart TV show inspire interest in public life in ways that real politics—brought to us by the real press corps—can't? Absolutely. NBC's *The West Wing* presents a truer, more human picture of the people behind the issues than most of today's White House journalists. By Matthew Miller

Bill Clinton looks at the page and raises his pen. It's mid-January in the capital, and the State of the Union address is just days away. In the Oval Office, the president and his top aides pore over the latest draft. President Clinton is deeply engaged. This will be his last State of the Union, and maybe the most important. It has been a tortuous journey. The president, who once sought universal health care, soon found himself declaring that "the era of big government is over." Then came scandal and impeachment. But the president has survived and craves this chance to define his tenure. He knows the pundits ridicule him for how long he rambles on, daring to talk to the nation for a full hour unfiltered by the press. *Screw 'em*, he thinks. *The people love it.* The president scribbles in the margins, dictates new riffs for his speechwriters, and sends them back to work.

Three thousand miles away (and two months earlier), in a nondescript building on the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Aaron Sorkin, 38, creator, chief writer, and executive producer of the new NBC series *The West Wing*, takes a drag on a Merit and stares at his computer screen. The State of the Union address is days away. President Josiah Bartlet, a Democrat, plans to announce that "the era of big government is over." Toby Ziegler, his liberal communications director, wants the phrase killed; it's a betrayal of all that the party of FDR has championed for 50 years. The president has heard the beef before; even a retiring liberal Supreme Court justice called him a spineless sellout to his face. But Bartlet has something else on his mind. He collapsed in front of aides while rehearsing the speech, no longer able to conceal the illness he had masked during the campaign. One way or another, his health and his political philosophy—not to mention a looming war between India and Pakistan—must be cleared up by act 4. Sorkin stubs out his cigarette and starts typing.

Two White Houses. One real, one imagined. Bill Clinton gets a clean shot at an audience this big (about 40 million) only one night a year. Sorkin tells his White House story on his terms to 13 million people every Wednesday at 9. It's a prerogative the president can only envy.

Much like their real-world counterparts, NBC's White House staffers push legislation, bomb terrorists, and appoint judges. They count votes and twist arms. They cut deals, just like the pros.

But behind the fictional headlines are "real" people. The president (played by Martin Sheen) is insecure about deploying the military and afraid his daughter might be kidnapped. His chief of staff, a recovering alcoholic whose wife has left him because he's never home, fears he'll hurt the president when political foes leak word of his treatment for substance abuse. The deputy chief of staff frets that a big White House "win" on gun control feels like a loss because the bill is so timid that it's like "fighting the war on tobacco by banning certain-color matchbook covers." Another aide vomits after learning that the advice she gave the president in a hostage crisis has left an FBI negotiator dying. Everyone's mad at the vice-president. Nearly everyone needs a lawyer. And senior aide Sam Seaborn (Rob Lowe) is smitten with a high-priced call girl who's "working" her way through law school.

Not your average White House, perhaps—but then,

Hail to the chief: In NBC's *The West Wing*, actor Martin Sheen plays a heroic yet human leader of the free world (opposite).

On-set photographs by Dan Chavkin

Sorkin turns to Dee Dee Myers for reality checks. The president and vice-president need to get into a fight before a Cabinet meeting: What might trigger it? Or the president collapses during a State of the Union rehearsal: What would happen next?

how would we know? Yes, the Year of Monica put one seamy sliver of presidential life under a microscope, but that took subpoena power and a suspension of national sanity. Many reporters and media-watchers say that without the scent of scandal, the Washington press rarely tries to offer a rounded, human portrait of our leaders' character or motives. Sometimes this is out of respect for officials' privacy; more often, it's from lack of interest or access. The inside peeks we do get tend to come via betrayal, when a Dick Morris or a George Stephanopoulos cashes in and trashes the boss with a book that also offers insights into White House life. Now, however, Sorkin, along with fellow executive producers John Wells (of NBC's *ER*) and Thomas Schlamme (who, with Sorkin, also produces ABC's *Sports Night*), is wagering that the people and issues that collide backstage at the White House can be as gripping as the palace intrigues that inspired dramatists from Sophocles to Shakespeare.

So far, viewers seem to agree. Since its launch in September, *The West Wing* has ranked consistently among the 20 to 30 top-rated shows, drawing the educated, affluent audience advertisers prize. A poll of 54 critics conducted by *Electronic Media* magazine in November tapped *The West Wing* as the best show on television.

Yet *New York Times* chief TV critic Caryn James finds it "wildly uneven," shifting from nuanced situations to "scenes of Martin Sheen making the right moral decision with the music swelling in the background." Larry Hancock, NBC's vice-president of current prime-time series, says audience research shows that viewers find the complex plots and jargon-heavy political topics difficult to follow but worth the effort. "It's kind of a good, solid single," says producer Wells, whose *ER* has been one of television's few out-of-the-box home runs in recent years. "We can build on that over the next year."

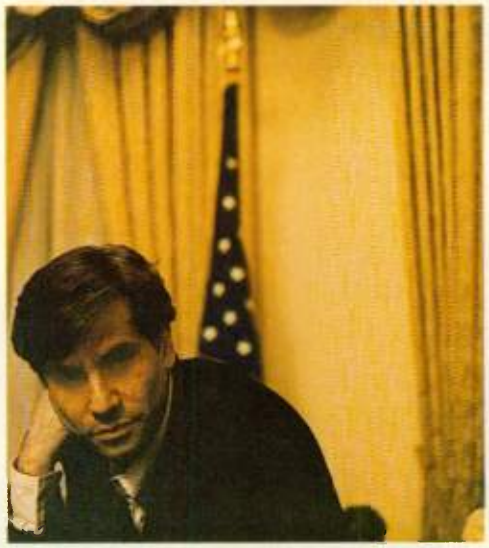
Washingtonians, meanwhile, are divided. Republicans chafe at what they see as Hollywood's liberal bias. "There's always an ideological hit there someplace," says James Pinkerton, a columnist and veteran of the Bush and Reagan White Houses. White House aides gripe that *The West Wing* doesn't look like the real thing: The halls are too big, the offices too comfy. The place feels overpopulated and overcaffeinated. "Who were all those good-looking people walking around with files under their arms?" White House press secretary Joe Lockhart quipped in the *Los Angeles Times* after the show's premiere. But his predecessor swears by it. "It's the only show on television that I actually watch," says Michael McCurry, calling it the first series in a long while that "has treated those who work in politics...as human beings." Matthew Cooper, deputy Washington bureau chief for *Time* and former White House correspondent for *U.S. News & World Report* and *The New Republic*, adds, "In that sense, it may be more truthful than [political] reporting."

Many of the capital's top columnists and reporters say they haven't tuned in (or have caught only the well-publicized pilot)—a group that includes James Bennett of *The New York Times*; David Broder, E.J. Dionne Jr., and John Harris of *The Washington Post*; Bill Kristol of *The Weekly Standard*; David Gergen of *U.S. News & World Report*; Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times*; and Chris Matthews of CNBC.

That's a shame, because these opinion-shapers are missing what a number of journalists, former White House aides, and media analysts say may be a promising antidote for today's widespread disenchantment with politics. Can a smart TV show renew interest in public life in ways that real politics brought to us by the real press corps can't? The show's producers insist they're not trying to do anything so grandiose. That doesn't mean they won't pull it off. And what's already certain is that although the show indeed has a liberal bias on issues, it presents a truer, more human picture of the people behind the headlines than most of today's Washington journalists.

Power break: Cast members lounge outside the Oval Office while the crew adjusts lights on the set.

It started, like so many things in Hollywood, over lunch. In 1997, Aaron Sorkin was a 36-year-old screenwriter with two hits under his belt. He'd written *A Few Good Men* for Broadway at 28, then adapted it for the big screen. *The American President* followed in 1995. Sorkin's agent, eager for him to try his hand at TV, thought he and John Wells should get acquainted.



Aaron Sorkin convinced skeptical NBC execs that a political show would work.

Wells, 43, was the driving force behind *ER*. In Hollywood's pecking order, a show runner like Wells outranked a screenwriter like Sorkin. As Sorkin sat down at Pinot Bistro, a French restaurant on Ventura Boulevard, he suddenly felt panicked. Wells was a busy man. *He wants to hear ideas*, Sorkin thought. Sorkin hadn't prepared any. But a friend had put a bug in Sorkin's ear a while back. You've got hundreds of unused ideas left over from *The American President*, he'd said. Couldn't that be the start of a TV series? Sorkin hadn't done anything but sleep on the notion. Now, so as not to embarrass himself or waste Wells's time, he tossed it out.

"Senior staffers in the White House," Sorkin said. That was the extent of the pitch. No plots for the first few episodes, customary in such meetings. No sketch of the characters and how they might evolve.

Instead, Sorkin told Wells how impressed and inspired he'd been while visiting the White House to research *The American President*. He'd spent time with George Stephanopoulos, press secretary Dee Dee Myers, and others. It seemed amazing that the people running the country were his age! He and Wells, both Democrats, agreed that respect for public service had been lost in recent years, replaced by the caricature that people who worked in politics were only after power. Sorkin described talented folks who worked out of cubicles for a fraction of what they could earn on Wall Street, all for the chance to make a difference. Their passion was palpable. The stakes couldn't be higher. And their workplace, the West Wing, was glamorous and dramatic.

Wells was intrigued. He also knew it would be a tough sell. Politics was held in such low esteem, network executives believed, that it was tough to create characters with whom viewers would want to spend time. Moreover, no matter how you came down on political issues, you risked turning off half your audience.

Wells and Sorkin pitched the idea to NBC. Without much enthusiasm, the network sent Sorkin off to write a pilot. He delivered the script that Christmas. The timing couldn't have been worse. A few weeks later Kenneth Starr's prosecutors confronted Monica Lewinsky at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Wells and Sorkin met with NBC executives to discuss the show's fate days after President Clinton wagged his finger and told the nation, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." If politics was poison before, it was radioactive now. NBC said no.

By this time, however, Wells had committed to the concept. After all, network types had once told him physicians were seen as so self-serving that heroic doctors like *ER*'s could never work. Wells's development deal with NBC gave him the right to shop the idea elsewhere if the network didn't bite. Several people were interested. After tussling right up to Wells's deadline, NBC grudgingly agreed to pick it up. But it was too late to shoot a pilot for the current season, so Sorkin went to work launching *Sports Night*, a half-hour comedy he'd pitched to ABC. Six months later Wells called NBC. "We're ready to make it," he said.

Make what? said the suits. *You're not really gonna make us make that, are you?*

But NBC's top management had been shuffled in the interim. Scott Sassa, a cable wunderkind from Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., was NBC's new West Coast president. "Sassa...was new enough to the network television business," says Wells, "that he hadn't been fully indoctrinated into the gospel of 'Washington, D.C., doesn't work.'" Sassa put *The West Wing* on the schedule. The delay was a blessing for Sorkin, since it freed him to focus exclusively on the first season of *Sports Night*. Now the screenwriter who once frittered away days in search of his muse when working on feature films would learn what it was like to have two TV scripts due each week.

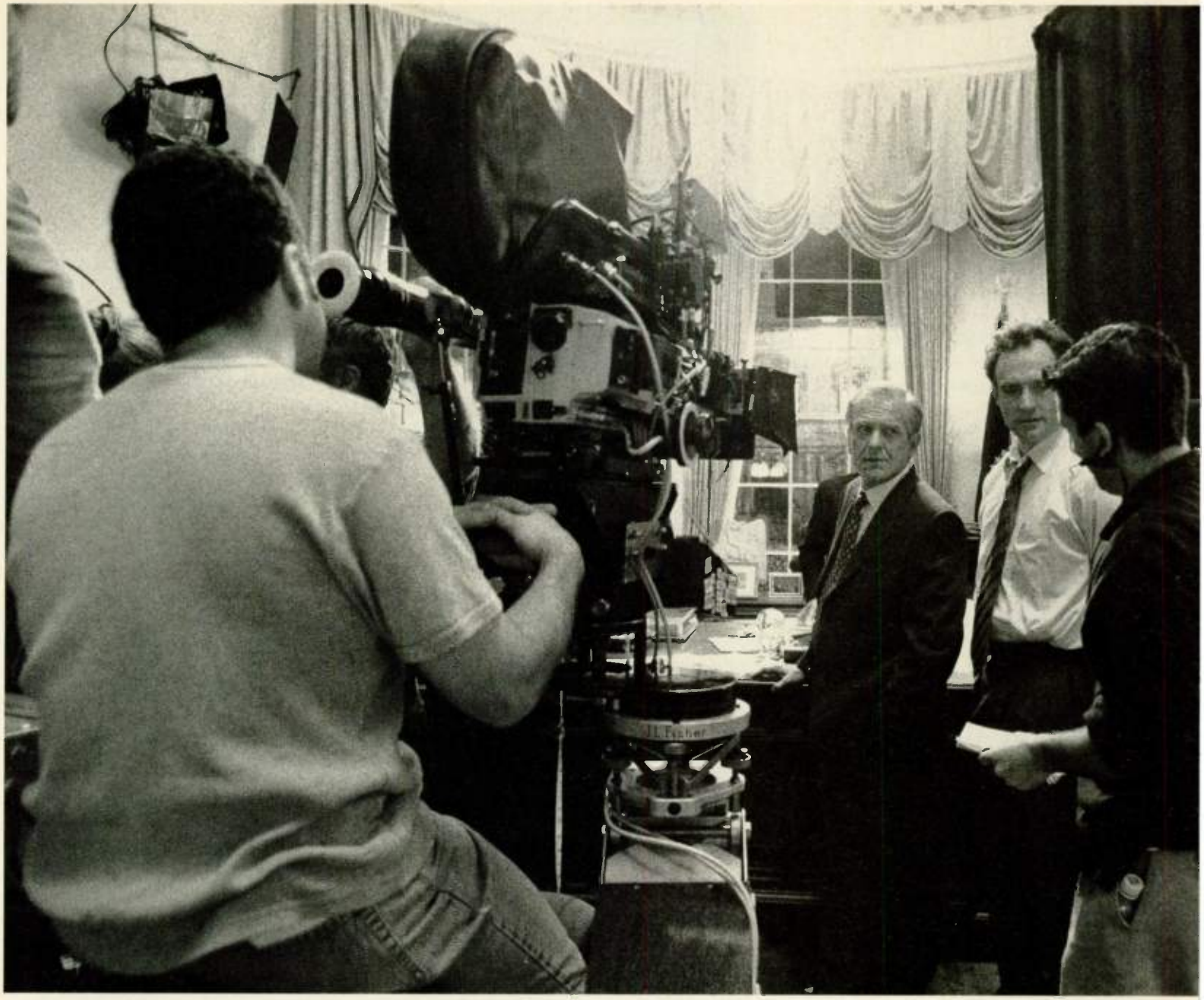
Sorkin enters the drab conference room in *The West Wing*'s writers' offices at Warner Bros. and looks around the table. The drill is the same most weeks. The previous week's 70-page script has been put to bed. The next one is due in eight days. Sorkin needs ideas. He's in his usual uniform: jeans, Converse sneakers, sweatshirt, tortoiseshell glasses. He's also sporting his casual-on-the-outside-but-churning-on-the-inside intensity. "What ideas do we have?" he asks. "What do we want to do?"

Sorkin's brain trust has assembled. There's Patrick Caddell, Jimmy Carter's pollster and strategist, now 49 and a little wild-eyed, fed up with real-world politics and passionate about *The West Wing*'s chance to do better than Washington. "This is better than going to a psychiatrist," he says. Near him sits Lawrence O'Donnell, 46, a onetime screenwriter who was Daniel Patrick Moynihan's right hand on the Senate Finance Committee before becoming a regular MSNBC pundit. Dee Dee Myers, 38, jumped at the consulting gig Sorkin offered because the characters felt like people she knew in politics. "They're human, they make mistakes, they make misjudgments," she says, "but they're there struggling day in and day out to try to get it right." Sorkin's politicos are all Democrats. He has a few playwrights on staff, too.

One-hour television dramas typically have a "bible," a detailed plan of where the story lines and major characters are headed through the season. Not *The West Wing*. "This show resides in the head of Aaron Sorkin," says O'Donnell. For example, Sorkin originally thought the president would be a minor, somewhat mysterious character and that the action would center on his staff. But the notion that you'd glimpse only the back of the president's head or watch him go around a corner felt hokey, Sorkin decided. (It helped when Martin Sheen loved shooting the pilot and wanted to raise his commitment from 4 episodes to all 22 in the first season.) Similarly, Sorkin decided that he wanted to make the First Lady, played by Stockard Channing, a doctor while he was writing the episode when the president falls ill, because it fit his plot needs and illuminated her character.

Most episodes feature three or four subplots that Sorkin stitches together into a fast-paced narrative. The staff's goal is to stay ahead of Sorkin, so when he comes up for air he has either a staff script to consider or ideas for episodes and the political research he'll need to write

DAN CHAVKIN



Despite the crush of cameras and crew, the Oval Office is remarkably realistic.

them. For some subplots, Sorkin can cook up the next installment of one of the show's running riffs: The press secretary, C.J. (Allison Janney), for example, has a flirtation going with a White House reporter; Sam Seaborn and the chief of staff's daughter look like a budding romance. But most stories are born in debates.

"If I can put two people in a room who disagree about something, anything, the time of day," Sorkin explains, "I can probably get a good scene out of it. The stronger the arguments on either side, the more compelling, the more interesting they are, the better."

"The Short List," a November episode on a Supreme Court nomination, shows how *The West Wing*'s brew of character, argument, and plot comes together in Sorkin's brain, filtered through the craft of drama, which he mastered as a fine arts undergrad at Syracuse University and has honed in years of storytelling. "I knew that I wanted the...story to start with 'Fantastic, everything's great, we got Mario Cuomo,'" Sorkin recalls. "And to end with 'It's a whole different guy.'

"In other words," Sorkin continues, "we're gonna have to discover a problem with our home-run candidate. I didn't want it to be scandalous at all. I didn't want it to be a nanny. I didn't want it to be sex like with Clarence Thomas. I didn't want this guy to have done anything wrong except that I was intrigued by [Robert] Bork and those who agree with Bork that the Constitution does not provide for a right of privacy, that the right simply doesn't exist. Not so much because of Bork's contention that *Roe* v. *Wade* was based on faulty legal thinking but more because I think privacy is huge."

Sorkin also knew he wanted the action to take place over just a couple of days. "The more you compress time, the more the heat goes up," he explains. "I was taught that you want to start your stories as close to the end as possible."

Sorkin continues, "I'll sit with Pat, Dee Dee, and Lawrence, and I'll say, 'Write me something about this; write me something about how that would work.'" O'Donnell supplied the résumé of the perfect candi-

"There's an unwritten code among political reporters that if you write anything that is even semi-flattering or...empathetic that you're somehow...not living up to the true calling of the journalist"—former Clinton spokesman Michael McCurry

date. Caddell researched the privacy arguments. Sorkin asked Myers for ideas on what might undo someone who seemed like the perfect candidate. She came back with the notion of an unsigned "note" (a long scholarly article) the candidate wrote as a young man on the *Harvard Law Review* that casts doubt on his commitment to privacy rights.

Sorkin had what he needed. "Once I have the dry argument," he says, "...I'll make it emotional or funny. I'll make it the difference between C-SPAN and watching television." In this case, the White House staff's discovery of the unsigned "note" sparks a crisis. How can the president appoint a justice who doesn't share his values? The climax is an Oval Office showdown on legal philosophy between the jurist, the president, and his top aides. Then President Bartlet goes with a second candidate, one he hadn't looked at seriously before. In this mix of passion, pressure, and serendipity, White House alumni say, Sorkin captures the feel of the run-up to a court appointment, shorn of a thousand undramatic details.

Sorkin (and the show's directors) turn to Myers for White House reality checks. The president and vice-president need to get into a fight before a Cabinet meeting: What might trigger it? The president collapses during a State of the Union rehearsal: What would happen next? (The press secretary's enduring instinct: Forget about the doctor; make sure no reporters are around.) Staff writer Paul Redford hands in a script on a state dinner. Sorkin wants to weave in subplots on a strike, a hostage, and a hurricane, all of which must be resolved by dessert.

Then there's laughter, which trumps everything. "Can I be funny for a half a page before I get into something else?" is often Sorkin's criterion in picking topics. Obscure news clips stir the pot. A small town in Alabama wants to scrap all laws except the Ten Commandments—how are they going to enforce the "covet thy neighbor's wife" part? A small item appears about an open ambassadorship to the Federated States of Micronesia. Maybe Sorkin's *West Wing* needs a man there, too—if anyone can find it. "Why not?" Sorkin asks. "We need an episode next week."

Some jokes, however, are still too hot to touch. For all of Sorkin's pronouncements that there won't be any "Monica" characters on the show, he has toyed with the idea of slipping in, out of nowhere and with zero fanfare, this scene:

A young female intern delivers some paperwork to the president and makes an adolescent sexual advance.

BARTLET: What did you say?

INTERN: I said—

BARTLET: Young lady, you're addressing the president of the United States, and you're doing it in the Oval Office. This isn't Fort Lauderdale, and you're not on spring break. Leave this room right now and don't ever come back.

"That's that," Sorkin says. "And we never discuss it again." So far he hasn't gone with it.

Other plots come straight from life. Sorkin had a drink with Stephanopoulos at the Four Seasons Hotel near Georgetown while researching *The American President*. The aide pulled what looked like a bus pass from his wallet. The card contained instructions as to where George would be evacuated to help the president run the nation in the event of nuclear war. On *The West Wing*, Josh Lyman, the deputy chief of staff, becomes unnerved by his card, and guilt-stricken when he learns his colleagues aren't slated to be saved. The real fun came off camera. "Dee Dee actually came to me and said, 'You know, they don't have these cards,'" Sorkin recalls. Turns out they did, but that *Myers* didn't.

Myers's involvement can prompt the show to relive, and rewrite, history. Take an episode featuring an India-Pakistan conflict that aired January 5. One subplot turns on how the president and his top men keep C.J., the press secretary, in the dark about troop movements.

"This is coming from my life," Myers says. Her worst moment in the White House came after the assassination attempt on former President Bush in 1993. Myers told reporters one Friday that the FBI was still looking into whether Saddam Hussein was involved; President Clinton would decide what to do once he reviewed the FBI's report. It turns out President Clinton already had the report and had decided to respond by bombing Baghdad the next day. Myers was out of the loop. She came into work Saturday and put "a lid" on, slang for assuring the press there would be no more news coming out of the White House. An hour later, with U.S. missiles flying, she found herself paging reporters who were on their way to a Baltimore Orioles game, her credibility in tatters.

In *The West Wing*, C.J., similarly in the dark, gives reporters a flip answer about there being no troop movements at the India-Pakistan border. As the press soon learns, C.J. doesn't know what she's talking about. "I wanted to make her more angry," Myers says. "I wanted there to be some resolution, in order to preserve the strength of her character, where she calls 'the boys' on the rug." Instead, Leo McGarry, the chief of staff (played by John Spencer of *L.A. Law*), brushes C.J. off by saying, "Just tell them you spoke without being informed." "I ran back," Myers recalls, "and said [to Sorkin], this is like saying, 'I'm an idiot; you can't trust me.'"

Sorkin concedes that he could have allowed Myers to live a little more through C.J. "I dropped the ball," he laments, sorry not to have done Myers's story justice. But what could he do? He had another script to finish. He had to move on.

"Here we go...settle please...background...*action*." It's a gorgeous California day on the Warner Bros. lot. Mountains rise beyond the end of the street that houses the two stages where *The West Wing* is filmed. Outside, amid a general milling-about, crew members grab doughnuts and coffee under a tent. There's a weird feeling of caste among the cast: Anonymous "extras" drift aimlessly while

The West Wing is filled with fun touches. Personally inscribed "power photos" with President Bartlet dot staffers' walls: "For Josh, my secret weapon," reads one. The bulletin board beside Sam Seaborn's desk sports a phone message from Dan Quayle: "Please call as soon as possible."

stars like Rob Lowe and Martin Sheen hunker down in their trailers between scenes. Their personal assistants—who, unlike real White House aides, almost always sign confidentiality agreements that make "kiss and tell" betrayals illegal—ferry messages and run errands.

Once Sorkin turns in a script, the monthlong production cycle begins. The director (there's a new one for each episode) usually gets the script seven days before filming, but sometimes it arrives as late as the day before it's set to shoot. Along with Sorkin and Thomas Schlamme, an Emmy-winning director who is Sorkin's partner on both *The West Wing* and *Sports Night*, the director and cast do an informal "table read" of the script. Held at night on the set over a takeout dinner, these family-style sessions amount to lovefests for Sorkin, as actors laugh and rejoice at the lines they've been given.

Filming takes eight days, which often run beyond midnight. Then there's two weeks of postproduction for editing, music, sound effects, and other technical magic. Once the director delivers the episode, Schlamme, Sorkin, and Wells do a final tweak to make sure that what Schlamme calls the show's visual and performance tones remain consistent.

On this sunny afternoon in November, director Kevin Sullivan (*How Stella Got Her Groove Back*) looks impatient on the porch outside the Oval Office. He's waiting to shoot a scene in which the president and his aides discuss the troops Pakistan has moved to its border. "It's a big day," he says to an assistant. "It's a ten-page day. I'd like it if we were shooting instead of standing around."

Television production, like house construction, turns out to be a carnival of unplanned delays. The sound team has trouble suspending a mike in the right place. Rob Lowe and Richard Schiff (who plays communications director Toby Ziegler) can't figure out how to race down the portico toward the Oval without Lowe's brushing into a potted plant. The whole thing involves more people than you'd think. Besides 8 main actors and about 20 extras (who are grateful for the steady work, since the office is supposed to feel the same each week), there are 70 crew members on the set. Counting the production staff, about 230 people are on the list for *West Wing* Christmas gifts.

For all of the White House's nitpicking that the set isn't perfect, in person the place is exciting. The "Oval Office" is a damned good Oval Office. And the others, even if roomier than *The West Wing*'s cramped warrens, are filled with fun touches that don't show on

CENSUS CONSENSUS: *THE WEST WING* COVERED IT BETTER

Like any other TV drama, *The West Wing* centers on the events and crises in the lives of its characters. But the world in which characters live always colors a series, and *The West Wing* takes advantage of that. The show often teaches viewers something about their government.

Take the November episode titled "Mr. Willis of Ohio." Amid the subplots about a character's troubled marriage and a run-in others have in a local bar, the show also took the time for a detailed explanation of the census. The hourlong episode had about 44 minutes of story, accounting for commercials. More than a third of the episode—15 minutes—was spent on the census plotline.

In the episode, a new congressman must cast his first vote—a vote that will help decide how the census is tabulated. In two scenes, totaling a minute and a half, Rob Lowe's character, a communications staffer named Sam Seaborn, gives a simple, what-everyone-should-know lesson on the census. Read how well it's handled in a scene in which C.J. Gregg, the press secretary played by Allison Janney, has admitted she doesn't understand the first thing about the topic:

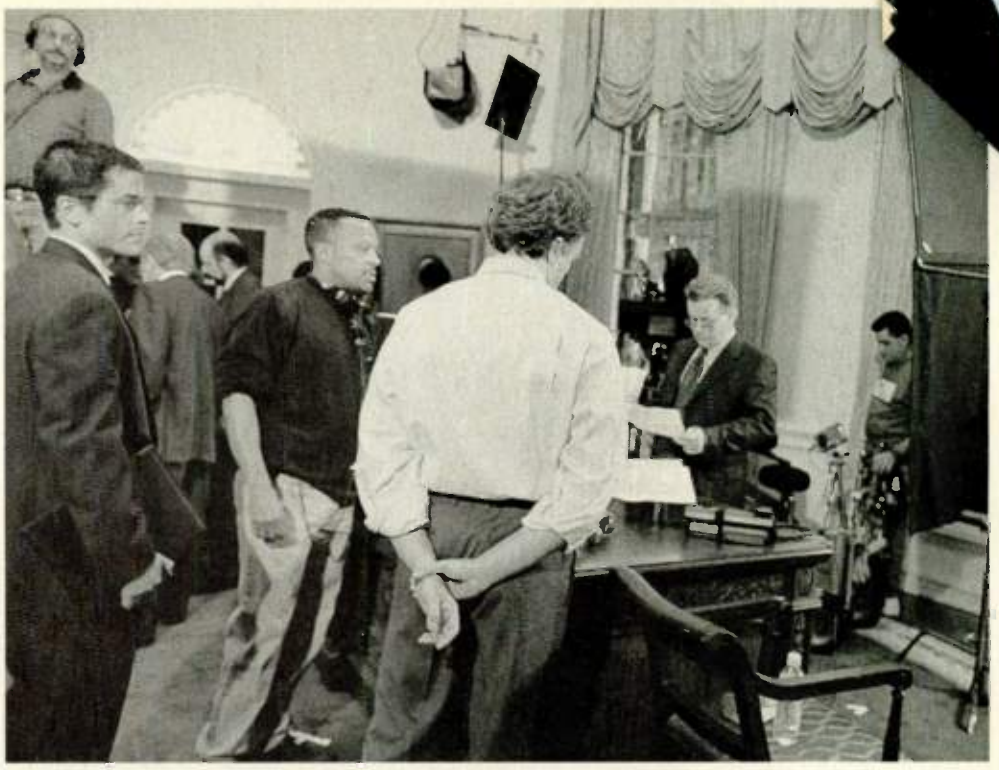
C.J.: Explain it to me.
SAM: The Constitution mandates that every ten years we count everybody.
C.J.: Why?
SAM: Because representation at the various levels of the government—federal, state, and municipal—is based on population. The only way to find out how many congressmen California gets is to count the people in California. Got it?
C.J.: Can I just say that if the briefing book had been written that clearly I would've easily understood.
SAM: We're not through yet.
C.J.: Okay.
SAM: The decennial census has always been done by a door-to-door head count. Some 950,000 professionals are hired. The process costs approximately 6.9 billion dollars. The process is also very inaccurate and tends to be significantly disadvantageous to inner-city populations, recent immigrant populations, and of course the homeless.
C.J.: You are a very good teacher, Sam. I want you to know that in this...
SAM: Your time of vulnerability?
C.J.: Yes. I appreciate it.
SAM: We're not done yet.
C.J.: Okay.

The tutorial is finished in a later scene:

SAM: Head counts have proven staggeringly inaccurate.
C.J.: Why?
SAM: How are you gonna count the homeless? There's a large and growing population of people who don't speak English. And there are plenty of people, particularly in the inner cities, who don't want to answer questions when you knock on their door. Plus it's always been hard. Sampling, statisticians have told us, is a much more effective way of getting a good census.
C.J.: And what's the legal argument?
SAM: The legal argument is, it's unconstitutional. The legal argument is, it's [against the] law.
C.J.: But if sampling's really against the law, why would Congress be trying to pass legislation saying sampling's against the law?
SAM: Ahhh, you see how good it feels to understand what you're talking about?

Such clear exposition—in only one minute, 30 seconds—would seem ideally suited for a report on the evening news. But *NBC Nightly News With Tom Brokaw*, the flagship newscast of *The West Wing*'s network, did not air any segments on the census controversy in 1998 or 1999. Only *NBC News at Sunrise* and NBC's *Today* show carried any news about the census—a story on each show the day the Supreme Court heard a case about the new counting method, and a story on *News at Sunrise* when the Court ruled against it.

Indeed, in all of 1998 and 1999, the weekday evening newscasts on all three networks—the places viewers should turn, one would think, for information on how their government works—did a total of 2.4 minutes on the census, according to Andrew Tyndall, who tracks those shows. In one episode, *The West Wing*—an entertainment show—covered it better. JESSE OXFELD



Lights, cameras, global action: Kevin Sullivan (second from left) directs a scene in which White House staffers discuss an Indian invasion of Pakistani territory in Kashmir earlier that day.

screen. Aping the cult of personality that every real White House falls prey to, Martin Sheen's face has been spliced into photos mounted everywhere. There's Sheen with Boris Yeltsin, Sheen perched between George Mitchell and Tom Foley, even Sheen delivering the State of the Union, with Newt Gingrich and Al Gore seated behind him. Personally inscribed "power photos" with Bartlet dot staffers' walls: "For Josh, my secret weapon," reads one. The chief of staff has a framed collection of campaign buttons. The bulletin board beside Sam Seaborn's desk sports a phone message from Dan Quayle: "Please call as soon as possible." On Sam's shelf is the compleat staffer's indispensable *Almanac of American Politics*—only Sam's is from 1980.

The cliché seems true: Acting is hard work. A scene taped earlier that will come to 10 seconds on TV took 15 takes and an hour to shoot. "Josh, I didn't expect you back so soon," asks Donna, Josh's secretary. "Did everything go okay?" "No, actually," Josh replies, "it didn't." Half the time they shoot again to perfect the performance; the rest because the picture or sound isn't quite right.

They're ready in the Oval Office. Sullivan steps out from behind the TV monitor where he directs the action, and he crisply leads Sheen, Lowe, Schiff, Spencer, and Bradley Whitford (Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Lyman) through a rehearsal. They work out some tricky business concerning who stands where and who looks at whom as the actors close in around the president's desk. Sullivan at one point actually strikes that classic director's pose: one eye closed, head cocked, looking between his outstretched hands to imagine the frame. Someone yells "Mark!" and a woman runs in to tape spots on the floor that the actors need to hit. Another sneaks Schiff some "sides"—tiny photocopies of the script—so he can check his lines. During a pause Sheen asks Spencer which episode is airing that night: It's a Wednesday, after all, and *The West Wing* is on. Between actors and crew there are 21 people in the room, making it feel like Clinton's chaotic real-world Oval back in his early days.

Finally they shoot. The news out of Pakistan is bad. The Security Council is meeting. The CIA has photos showing 20,000 troops near the northern border.

The president, Leo, Toby, Josh, and Sam plot strategy in the Oval Office. With a sudden knock, C.J. sticks her head in. The men turn suddenly and fall silent, as if she's intruding. She asks the question. Leo hesitates. Sure, he says, go ahead, put a "lid" on. (You can just hear Dee Dee Myers screaming.) The president's men eye each other, realizing what has just happened. C.J. exits. The tension breaks. "I'll brief her tomorrow," Leo tells the president. He shrugs.

"Cut!" Sullivan says. "Print it."

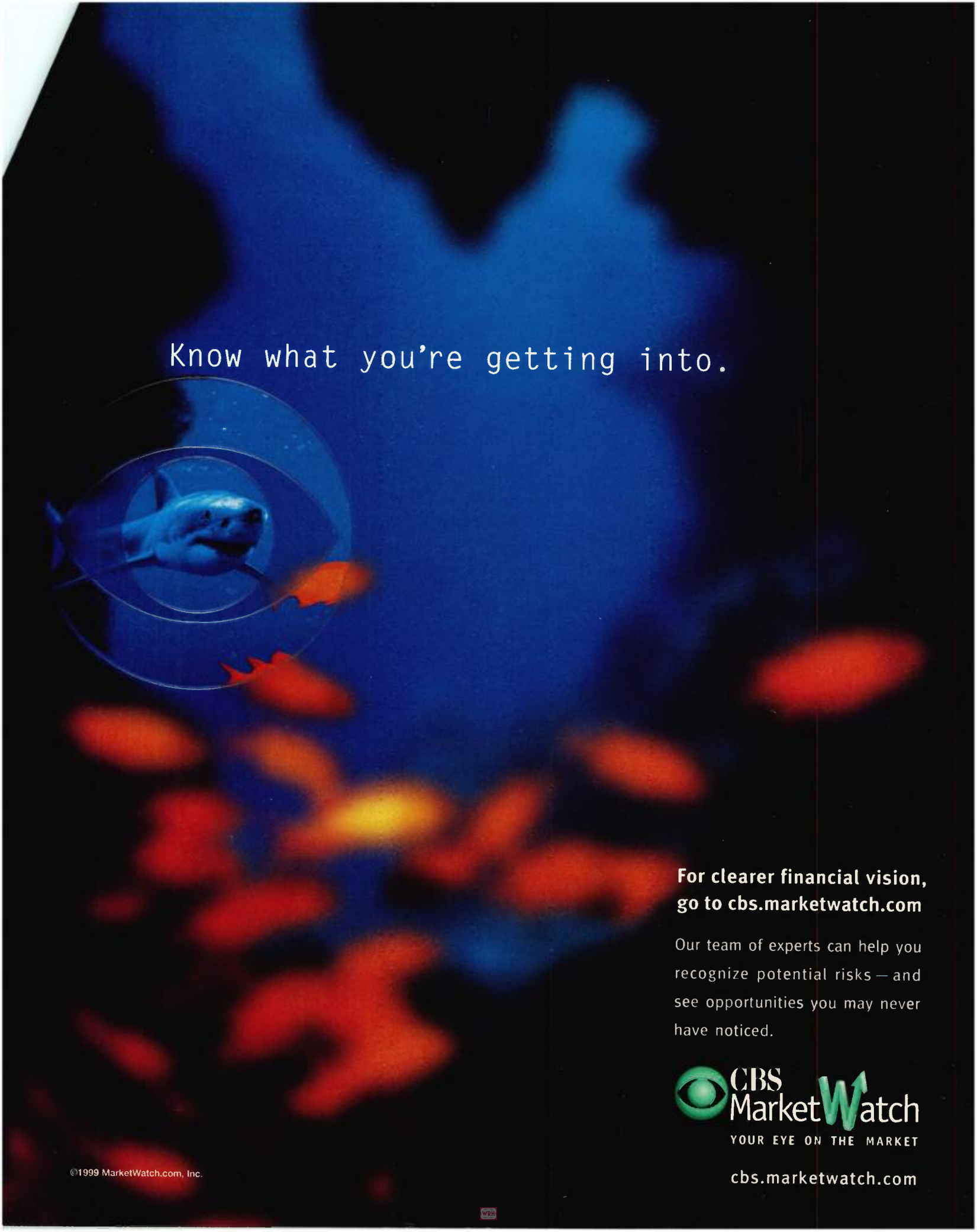
"This show is not here for me or for any of us to teach you something," says Sorkin, sipping coffee in his office. "It's not meant to be good for you. We're not asking anyone to eat their vegetables." The chief reason, Sorkin insists, is that "I'm not qualified to teach you anything." His college degree was in musical theater, he says, laughing. He watches *Inside Politics* because of a crush on Judy Woodruff. He likes news for its drama. He's not politically sophisticated.

Though it's hard to believe, given his obvious gifts, Sorkin sees himself as the dumber son and brother of brainy lawyers. In Scarsdale, the affluent New York suburb where he was raised, Sorkin says, he was surrounded by kids who were much smarter and overachieving than he was. He was the drama club "goofball." "What I developed over the years was simply an ear for the sound of intelligence," he says. In retrospect, Sorkin adds, the show should be staying away from things like the India-Pakistan conflict, which was "scary" because he "was in way over my depth." *The West Wing* shouldn't be taking viewers to the brink of nuclear war, he reasons, "or our seams start to show."

Still, "there's a great opportunity...through the lives of these characters," says Myers, "to explain issues that are sometimes too complex or too obscure-feeling for the press to make interesting and accessible."

The most striking example may have been an episode Sorkin built largely around the census—the government's official measurement of the U.S. population every ten years. To be sure, the count has a serious effect on how many representatives and federal grants a state receives. Still, it's the kind of issue that can put even dedicated policy wonks to sleep. To make his story work, Sorkin had to explain the stakes of a partisan debate over how the count is actually conducted. He did this through several scenes of stylish banter between Sam and C.J., who is clueless on the subject (see sidebar on page 94).

These scenes work, says Schlamme, precisely because they're not about teaching. "You're involved with the fact that Sam is the smarter one and C.J. has to be the student at this moment, so you're enjoying that, first and foremost," Schlamme explains. "From a directing point of view...[t]he essence of the scene is not about teaching us about the census; it's about how are these two [CONTINUED ON PAGE 113]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THE MONEY PRESS

CALLING ALL INVESTORS

Internet entrepreneur Mark Coker is on a mission to open companies' conference calls to the press and the public, giving small investors a place at the table. By Matthew Heimer

Last spring, International Business Machines Corp., one of the world's information-technology titans, didn't think individual investors were sophisticated enough to sit at the table when the company discussed its finances with Wall Street big shots. Mark Coker, founder of one of the world's smallest Internet start-ups, disagreed. It took eight months for IBM to make a 180-degree turn on the issue, and Coker did a great deal of the spinning.

On January 19, IBM was set to open its quarterly analysts' conference call to individual stock owners (and would-be owners), who would be able for the first time to listen to a discussion between IBM executives and analysts regarding Big Blue's financial health. IBM has joined a wave of companies that have agreed to this new openness in the past year: As of June 1999, 55 percent of the 2,700 publicly held companies represented by the National Investor Relations Institute (NIRI) had opened their calls to the public, up from 29 percent a year earlier.

To Coker, each "open call" means another victory for the people he's trying to serve—the roughly 8 million Americans who trade stocks online. In an environment of Internet-driven trading, where a stock's price can fluctuate wildly in minutes, the investor who can get the same information at the same time as the Wall Street players is, in theory, the ultimate winner.

Journalists at many of the country's leading financial-media outlets have supported Coker's open-call movement. But that movement is part of a larger trend that is significantly changing the role of the money press. Because investors can acquire the information they need more quickly and directly than ever before, financial journalists are finding that instead of being the messengers who bear the data, they are now the interpreters who make sense of it—for those investors who aren't too cocky to listen.

Fifteen years ago, the quarterly conference call didn't exist, and as recently as a year ago, estimates Coker, fewer than 5 percent of the nation's individual investors knew what they were. The calls are telephone- or Internet-linked meetings that coincide with the release of quarterly earning reports, during which company executives explain those reports and field questions from analysts and institutional investors. Today, about 83 percent of publicly owned companies hold such calls, according to NIRI.

LENNY GONZALES

"I'm on a crusade," says Mark Coker. "I really believe this is a revolution."

NIRI president Louis Thompson says the conference call became popular as part of an effort to provide equal access to data among big investment institutions, and to make sure that they all got important information at the same time. But many companies closed their calls to the press and the public, creating an information gap between the big institutions and the growing ranks of individual investors.

Companies can't disclose material information during the calls that they don't intend to release publicly—such "selective disclosure" violates laws against insider trading. But an investor listening to a conference can often gain insights into a company's prospects by noting which facts get emphasized or how data are framed in discussion. The focus at a call "can be [on] things as specific as revenue projections for specific units of a business. It can be detail about strategy, or simply nuance—management

changes, cultural shifts," says Mark Veverka, West Coast editor for *Barron's*. The analysts at the calls, adds Veverka, "can focus on things that [the media and the public] wouldn't see as newsworthy unless they were brought to our attention."

Many members of the business media are able to listen in on "closed" calls, through their contacts in the analyst world. But it still irks them to be shut out of calls—especially when information sprung at the calls leads big institutions to trade in ways that move markets. "The analysts run out of the meeting to the phone and start selling," says *Fortune* columnist Andy Serwer. "The journalist runs to the desk and starts writing up copy; it's going to take an hour [to reach the public], but it's better than nothing."

Companies often close their calls because they fear what Thompson describes as "the impact of misinterpretation"—individual investors trading stock based on a misunderstanding of data. Such mistakes might be perpetuated by financial media rushing to meet deadlines. Veverka sympathizes with that concern. "All marketplaces are imperfect, and it's not the case that investors will make the correct decisions just because they have immediate access to data," he says. Still, he adds, all investors—large and small—have a right to get the information at the same time.

That's where Coker comes in. "I'm on a crusade," he says. "I really believe this is a revolution." That sounds incongruous coming from someone as mild-mannered as the 34-year-old Coker. Leaning over a bowl of granola at a self-consciously rustic restaurant in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, Coker looks more like Dana Carvey than like Lenin. But he's quietly intense as he talks about the evolution of his obsession.

Both investing and computer technology loom large in Coker's background. He first played the stock market in high school, and his first job out of college was marketing director for his father's e-mail-software start-up. After that venture folded, Coker went to work for a Silicon Valley public relations firm, and in 1993 he founded Dovetail Public Relations, which handles media relations for high-tech companies out of its headquarters in Los Gatos, California, Coker's hometown.

Coker had never heard of investor conference calls until 1994, when executives at one of his clients, the antivirus-software maker McAfee Associates Inc., asked him to listen in and judge whether the company brass were presenting themselves smoothly. "I was amazed at the level of discourse, and at all of the stunning information that was being disclosed that I didn't know," recalls Coker. "It's information you can't find in a press release, and you're not going to find it" in public documents.

Coker began listening in on the calls for companies in which he held stock. That wasn't usually a problem: Most of his holdings were in computer-related companies, whose populist corporate cultures made them predisposed to open their calls. But in January of 1998, Coker approached Legato Systems, Inc., a network-software company—"I owned 3,000 shares," notes Coker—only to be rebuffed, with the firm explaining that it made its calls available only to analysts and institutional investors.

Coker soon found out that Legato's policy was the rule, not the exception. That revelation inspired an idea that was part entrepreneurship, part ideological campaign. He devoted a corner of Dovetail's offices to hosting BestCalls.com, a new venture that would tell investors where to find the conference calls that were open to them and pressure companies with closed calls to change their ways. Coker has funded the venture with his own money, putting up about $100,000 so far—most of which he earned by selling his stock in Legato.

TO COKER, EACH OPEN CALL MEANS ANOTHER VICTORY FOR THE PEOPLE HE'S TRYING TO SERVE—THE ROUGHLY 8 MILLION AMERICANS WHO TRADE STOCKS ONLINE.

Users of BestCalls (who join for free) can check a directory of publicly traded companies to find out when their calls take place. They can sign up to be notified by e-mail when specific companies are due to have a conference call. When a user inquires about a company that doesn't let the public attend its calls, BestCalls encourages a little activism: The site provides contact information and suggests that the user call and urge the company to open up.

BestCalls earns money primarily by licensing its conference-call scheduling data to finance-oriented websites like JagNotes.com and The Online Investor. The site hosts advertisements, but Coker says income from the ads has been negligible. BestCalls isn't profitable—it loses between $2,000 and $4,000 a month, according to Coker. "I really don't care" if the site ever makes money, he adds cheerfully.

When BestCalls launched, Coker suspected that he had a sympathetic audience in business journalists, since so many of them were also shut out of calls. He stressed that notion in personalized e-mails targeted to about a thousand of them. "The e-mail pitches were not 'Hey, cover BestCalls,'" said Coker. "They were about 'Hey, this is a service you can use to cover the companies on your beat.'" Journalists seemed to agree. By July, says Coker, 200 had registered on the site; that total was up to 450 in January. Coker says the site has just under 50,000 registered users overall.

When it came to lobbying IBM, Coker had more than just a professional interest. His father worked for Big Blue during Mark's childhood and helped develop the magnetic strips now used on the backs of credit cards. As for disclosure, IBM was not a closed door when Coker came knocking. The company has allowed financial journalists to listen in on its conference calls since 1993. It posts detailed breakdowns of its financial reports on its website and features a "Guide to Understanding Financials," which helps novice investors interpret the morass of data. "I never doubted that IBM was committed to fair disclosure," says Coker. "I just didn't agree with their definition of 'fair.'"

That's because IBM wouldn't open its conference calls to individual investors, as Coker learned when he called the company last March. In a conversation that Coker describes as "slightly combative," IBM director of investor relations Hervey Parke offered the argument that IBM would prefer having information be interpreted and filtered for investors by the analyst community. To Coker, that approach sounded like a veiled insult: "He was essentially telling me that [individual] investors were...smart enough to buy the stock, but not smart enough to understand the business."

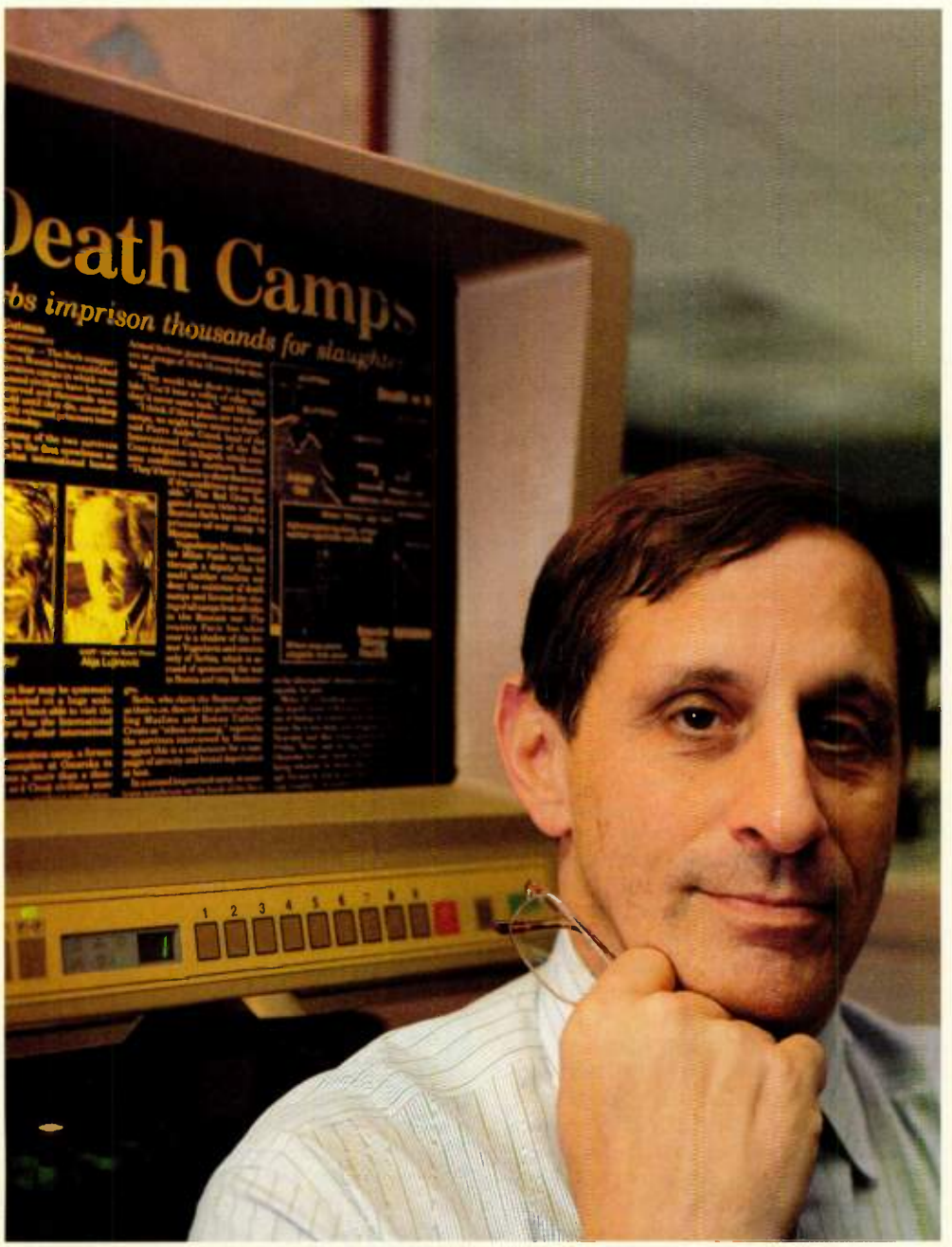
When journalists called and asked, "Who's not open? Give me names," Coker would use his conversation with IBM as an example of his experience and refer the reporters to Parke. Coker recalls that after IBM was cited as a "closed call" company in *Wired* and on CNN's *Moneyline*, he thought, "IBM's got to open up now, because this is going to be so embarrassing to them." Coker got the result he wanted: By late November, IBM had decided to open up the January call, via an Internet simulcast.

Did media or public pressure force IBM to open up? John Bukovinsky, an IBM spokesman, asserts that until recently, communications technology couldn't link thousands of investors to a conference call, and he denies that there has been any "investor groundswell." Still, he acknowledges that the public climate has changed in the last year in favor of greater openness—in part because financial media outlets are now "championing this issue."

Of course, equal access to conference calls doesn't make all investors equally powerful. Analysts and institutional investors are still able to get insights through professional contacts the day trader lacks—and financial journalists benefit from similar connections. But the trend toward open calls is a milestone in the democratization of the financial world, and it's one for which Coker's tiny website can take some credit. "In two years," says *Fortune*'s Serwer, "there'll be some major magazine story [titled] 'The 10 Horrible Companies That Still Don't Open Their Calls.'" If that scenario comes true, Coker's campaign may become obsolete, and that's just the way he wants it. ■

WITNESS TO THE PERSECUTION

After covering the conflict in Bosnia, veteran war correspondent Roy Gutman set out to educate journalists and the public about what constitutes a war crime. The result is a veritable encyclopedia of genocide. By Bridget Samburg



ANNA CURTIS

Roy Gutman continues covering foreign affairs, believing he can "make a real difference."

It was late June 1992, and Roy Gutman stood watching as a train 18 cars long rolled in to the town of Palić, in northern Serbia. Hundreds of people were crammed into the cars, some of them leaning out windows, gasping for fresh air.

"I saw people getting off the trains—mothers with babies, fathers looking haggard," says Gutman, a foreign affairs correspondent for *Newsday*. "I thought something enormous was going on." Unable to get information from Serb officials, Gutman managed to interview some of the refugees disembarking from the train. He discovered that they were Muslims from Kozluk, a village in eastern Bosnia, who had been deported from their homes by the Serbs. What Gutman was witnessing in the former Yugoslavia was an early wave of ethnic cleansing, which was soon to become notorious worldwide.

Gutman, who had been covering conflicts in Europe and Latin America for nearly 20 years, knew that what he saw that day in Palić was morally reprehensible, but he was not sure if it rose to the level of a war crime and whether the perpetrators could ever be held accountable.

Returning to his office in Bonn, Germany, Gutman called *Newsday* headquarters, in Melville, New York, to request a copy of the Geneva Conventions, the 1949 doctrine that established the international rules governing the conduct of war. After receiving the 50-page fax, Gutman says, "I couldn't make hide nor hair" of the law.

Gutman went on to earn a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for his coverage of the conflict in Bosnia, but his interest in the rules of war never ended. Understanding these laws, Gutman believed, would enable journalists to write more accurately about what they witnessed and to provide the public with a broader historical context in which to view current conflicts.

Not easily deterred—a colleague, George Rodrigue, then of *The Dallas Morning News*, recalls his careering down roads on his way to Slovenia, ignoring a tank's gun pointed directly at him—Gutman devoted more than three years to researching the rules of war, enlisting the aid of other journalists and experts in the field. His efforts culminated last July in the publication of *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*—an A to Z guide of 141 entries ranging from journalists' essays on covering conflicts to lawyers' explanations of the crimes involved.

"I think it's fair to say that as war correspondents we are as well informed as any bunch of people who are nonlawyers, and we didn't know anything," says David Rieff, coeditor of the book and a freelance journalist who has written for *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*, among other publications. He credits Gutman with being the driving force behind *Crimes of War*. "One of Roy's qualities is his idealism and indignation and hardheadedness," says Rieff. "He was the first of us to realize acutely the need for this book."

Reviewing *Crimes of War* for the *International Herald Tribune*, William Pfaff wrote, "Possibly the most depressing book of our time....It is, however, a reference work that has no counterpart, and it belongs in the library of anyone con-

cerned with war, international relations or humanitarian affairs."

Gutman, an intense man of 55, now speaks with authority when discussing the rules of war. Over breakfast recently, he cut his French toast as precisely as he discusses international conflicts. He speaks quickly and quietly, and his demeanor is more like that of a busy professor than of a daring war correspondent. But a foreign correspondent is what he was meant to be, he says. Beginning with his first foray into journalism, as a suburban reporter in his home state of Connecticut for the now-defunct *Hartford Times*, Gutman was attracted to the intrigue and adventure associated with foreign reporting, as well as the opportunity it might afford him to "make a real difference." As to the risks, Gutman says simply, "Telling a horrible story that nauseates you is something we have to do as a job."

Gutman worked as a foreign correspondent for Reuters for 11 years before joining *Newsday* in 1982 in its Washington bureau. In 1989, he moved to Europe and in 1994 returned to Washington, where he is still based, along with his wife and daughter.

"TELLING A HORRIBLE STORY THAT NAUSEATES YOU IS SOMETHING WE HAVE TO DO AS A JOB."

The veteran war correspondent wants *Crimes of War* to encourage reporters to learn the rules of engagement and better understand what they are reporting. "Too many journalists go to officials to find out what is happening," he scoffs. Gutman emphasizes the importance of being able to separate a war crime from a legitimate act of war. Before he could differentiate between the two, "I had a hunch that I had missed some significant stories before Bosnia that would have given me some clues about Bosnia," he says. Gutman recalls having witnessed the destruction of a hospital in Croatia in 1992 and writing about it as a human interest feature on the medical staff's working under adverse conditions. He did not focus on the fact that the bombing of a civilian hospital constitutes a crime of war. "I got the wrong lead," he says with regret.

But some of his other stories proved more effective. His 1993 reports from the Bosnian town of Foca about female rape camps were used as a road map by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to help indict those responsible for the camps.

From essays titled "Apartheid" and "Hostages" to "Sexual Violence" and "Willful Killing," *Crimes of War* offers a compelling and sometimes horrific account of the war crimes committed around the world in the last 50 years. Each chapter is divided into passages focusing on "The Crime," "The Law," and "Key Terms." More than 100 graphic black-and-white images accompany the text. "This is not a book for utopians," warns Rieff.

But it was a labor of love for its contributors. Legal consultant Steven Ratner says he was awakened one night while on a ski vacation in Taos, New Mexico. "It was Christiane Amanpour [chief international correspondent for CNN], half the world away," recalls Ratner, a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin. "She wanted to make sure she understood the law" as it relates to paramilitaries, the topic Amanpour was writing about for the book.

"One of the paradoxical things in the book is how many things aren't crimes," says Rieff. Sydney Schanberg, a former *New York Times* correspondent who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on Cambodia, writes in *Crimes of War* about one such gray area:

"Some scholars say that technically what happened in Cambodia cannot be called a genocide because for the most part, it was Khmers killing other Khmers," he writes. "And this may help explain why, over the years, the law has proved so poor a guide to the reality of human slaughter. For, whether you call the mass killing in Cambodia a genocide or simply a crime against humanity, it was the same by either name. It was a visitation of evil."

While working on *Crimes of War*, Gutman also established The Crimes of War Project, a nonprofit organization that aims to raise awareness among journalists and governments about the rules of war. (The organization is funded in part by financier George Soros, who is an investor in this magazine.)

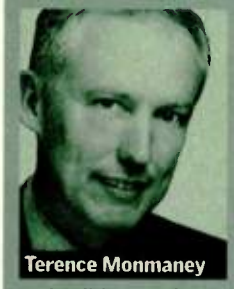
Gutman does not give up. On September 16, after most reporters left Kosovo and the rubble behind, Gutman was still there, reporting on the $70 million United States Army complex, complete with two chapels and a gymnasium, that houses two thirds of the American troops in the former Yugoslavia. Gutman criticized the government for having placed the compound and troops in the territory least in need of military reinforcement. And he is relentless in questioning the effectiveness of these peacekeeping missions.

Gutman also didn't forget the men, women, and children from Kozluk he watched arrive at the Palić refugee camp nearly eight years ago. With his hard-won mastery of the rules of war, he was finally able to put into print, in *Crimes of War*, what he had struggled then to understand: "Individuals or mass deportations are war crimes and crimes against humanity as defined by the Nuremberg Tribunals following World War II, and war crimes under the 1949 Geneva Conventions," writes Gutman. "If there is enormous loss of life, deportation may constitute genocide, namely the intent to kill or injure." ◘

FINDING DRUG TIES AT A MEDICAL MAG

BY KATHERINE ROSMAN

Call it a lesson in enterprise journalism. In late September, while sitting at his desk in the newsroom of the *Los Angeles Times*, medical writer Terence Monmaney flipped through an edition of the influential *New England Journal of Medicine*. He happened upon a drug-review article that found the drugs Rogaine and Propecia to be effective treatments for hair loss. After reading the story, Monmaney stared at the byline—Dr. Vera Price. The name sounded familiar to the reporter, a 16-year veteran of the science and medicine beat. So he did a bit of research and, confirming his suspicions, discovered that the author had financial ties to the drugs' manufacturers.



Terence Monmaney

Monmaney filed a September 28 page-one story that questioned the enforcement of the renowned medical journal's conflict-of-interest policy, which "prohibits editorialists and authors of review articles from having any financial connection with a company that benefits from a drug or device discussed in the editorial or review article," according to the journal's website. That the *NEJM* remain free of hidden (or even obvious) conflicts is critical because it is considered the preeminent source of trustworthy research and data for the medical community.

Even after his story was published, Monmaney, a former writer for *Newsweek* and contributor to *The New Yorker*, continued his investigation. "It struck me that there was something more than one person doing an end run around the journal's policy," says Monmaney, who decided to check the financial ties of authors to drug companies in 35 similar drug review articles that had run in the *NEJM* since 1996.

For three weeks, Monmaney combed through company websites and government documents; the legwork paid off in another page-one article on October 21, 1999. Of the total of 36 drug review pieces, "*The Times* has identified eight articles by researchers with undisclosed financial links to drug companies that market treatments evaluated in the articles," Monmaney wrote.

Dr. Marcia Angell, editor in chief of the *NEJM*, says that Monmaney's findings are accurate. Though a strict policy has been in place since 1990 to safeguard against financial conflicts of interest, Angell says, the proliferation of studies funded by pharmaceutical companies has complicated the policy's enforcement. Monmaney's research, she concedes, proved that some authors' financial interests were not being addressed by editors and were thus undisclosed to readers. "We have now brought our practices into conformity with our policy," says Angell. Monmaney's investigation, she adds, "is what stimulated that." ◘

LOS ANGELES TIMES

dept.

SOURCES

FACING THE INEVITABLE

As April 15 nears, the sources below will help you muddle through your taxes—and the thicket of tax information available. By Matthew Reed Baker

To paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, nothing is certain except death and taxes—and confusion about taxes. To figure out where you should look for help, we spoke to a variety of tax experts, including authors, academics, analysts, and federally licensed tax practitioners. Their obvious advice: Seek professional help if you can afford it, especially if you have a complicated situation. But for simpler or more general questions, they suggested specific sources and flagged concerns about turning to the media for information about taxes.

Most important, know that the only absolute is the tax code itself, which is inscrutable to the layperson. Everything else, including the Internal Revenue Service's materials for the public, is designed to be a readable translation of the code and is therefore never exact. "If [a tax tip] sounds too good to be true, double-check it," says David Mellem, the research manager for the National Association of Tax Practitioners. "If it's in two places, the odds of it being accurate are much better."

WEBSITES

"In terms of tax forms, the Internet has been a revolution for us," says the president of Financial Resource Management, Inc., C. Dale Boushley, a certified financial planner in Glendale, Arizona. Boushley used to spend hundreds of dollars to receive forms from all 50 states. Now amateurs need only find the right link and download for free. But type "tax advice" into your favorite search engine, and odds are you'll be faced with thousands of links. When surfing the Web for tax sources, be aware that many commercial sites (H&R Block, for example) offer similar features, like frequent tax tips or a question area, and though the free advice may help, it may also be incomplete.

"It might give useful information, but it's not going to answer all of your questions," says Mark Luscombe, principal analyst for tax-information publishers CCH Incorporated. "It's going to be spotty, with the thought that if you like what you see for free, you might think...the stuff you might have to pay for is good too." Also, be wary of any website that sounds like it's produced by a tax-protester organization or hypes an overly aggressive strategy for saving on taxes.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
www.irs.gov
This is the Nile Delta of tax sources, a bona fide cradle of tax information. Indeed, the IRS's website has nearly everything you'd ever want to know about taxes, including a cover page that counts down the days until April 15. Here you can find a staggering array of forms, statistics, publications, calendars, tables, treaties, and tax-saving tips for personal income filings. Another section offers similar features for business owners. Federal tax forms, as well as the agency's own tax-preparation guidebook, can be downloaded from the site.

TAX AND ACCOUNTING SITES DIRECTORY
www.taxsites.com
For a wide array of tax-related links, try this website, which is maintained by University of Northern Iowa accounting professor Dennis Schmidt. Its biggest plus is that it lets you access not only federal tax forms and publications but also those from every state tax agency. This site also has extensive links to tax-professional organizations, accounting-software information, and business and personal-finance news sources.

CNNFN
www.cnnfn.com/markets/personalfinance/taxes
CBS MARKETWATCH
cbs.marketwatch.com (click "Tax Guide" under "News Sections")
Both of these sites offer a variety of tax information from their own writers and from news wires. Also, some of CNNfn's content comes from *Fortune* and *Money*, which are published by its parent company, Time Warner Inc. This information is written for a broad audience and may be too general for your individual needs.

BOOKS

The staple books for this field are the tax-preparation guides, which were deemed generally accurate by our experts. That's basically because they are spinoffs of the IRS's own book, says Kenneth Morris, chairman and CEO of Lightbulb Press, Inc., who consulted with the IRS in the early eighties to develop the 1040EZ form, which streamlined income tax returns. For free, you can download the IRS book, *Your Federal Income Tax for Individuals* (IRS Publication 17), from the agency's website. Though this tome reads like an operations manual, it's valuable at least as a way to double-check information from other sources.

Other publications may counsel you to "beat the IRS," but once again, our experts suggest extreme caution in purchasing such literature, especially if the writers appear to have an anti-tax bias. As the NATP's Mellem puts it: "They make money; you go to jail."

J.K. LASSER'S YOUR INCOME TAX
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., $15.95
One of our experts' favorite tax preparation guidebooks, this massive volume (814 pages) contains all the features for the tax novice: tax tables, a glossary of terms, examples that read like elementary math problems, actual federal tax forms (with perforated edges for quick removal), and an extensive, easy-to-use index. "It just seems to be clear; it has good examples in it; it talks about some of the little esoteric things that some people who do their own returns might want to be aware of," says Frank Degen, public information chair for the National Association of Enrolled Agents.

TAXES FOR DUMMIES
By Eric Tyson and David J. Silverman
IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., $14.99
Also combining solid information with ease of use, this book includes forms,


PRINTED DAILY AND IT'S FREE!
DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY — Presenting The Fastest, Easiest — INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE — Tax Publication On The Planet
AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO RECYCLE!
THE DIGITAL DAILY
FASTER THAN A SPEEDING 1040-EZ . . . JAN 10, 2000 (96 DAYS UNTIL APRIL 15TH).
[Text Only Version]
IN TODAY'S ISSUE
1999 Tax Products CD-ROM
IRS Hiring Hundreds Now!
EXTRA! EXTRA!
Travel Agent Is Up In The Air About E-File
I Can Do This!
CAPE FEAR, NC Willie Dewitt operates a unique travel agency. *Just Do It! Travel Services* arranges special tours to help clients overcome their fears and anxieties. "Afraid of height? We'll put you in a hot air balloon!" quipped Willie.
Willie has done just about everything at least once, except file his Form 941, *Employer Quarterly Federal Tax Return*, electronically.

The IRS's website is a great stop for tax forms and information.

tables, and a big index. And like the other *Dummies* books, its simple and lively language, clearly distinguished sidebars, and signature warning signs (represented in this volume by a little cartoon bomb) almost make the tax process seem fun. The section on audits and coping with your IRS troubles is reliable—Silverman is the author of the out-of-print *Battling the IRS*, a book our experts praised for its unbiased advice on taxpayer rights.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR TAXES
By Scott R. Schmedel, Kenneth M. Morris, and Alan M. Siegel
Lightbulb Press, Inc., $14.95
Published in 1994, this slim volume is slightly out of date, but it's best for its explanation of how the tax system works. The colorful diagrams and clear prose detail the history of the IRS, how returns are processed, definitions of different taxes, hints on what triggers an audit, and more. When you're deep in the mire of scrawled forms and tattered receipts, this book will give you a bird's-eye view of how and why this whole process works.

OTHER

As for advice in other media, such as magazines, newspaper columns, and newsletters, they all provide basically the same information. "How many times can you cover—and after four magazines cover— 'How to get the most out of your 401(k)'? What the heck [else] is there?" says *Taxes for Dummies* author Silverman. "The information is reliable, if not new."

Though none was singled out by the independent experts we consulted, personal finance magazines were still generally praised for using good sources. CCH's Luscombe is regularly interviewed by journalists, and he points out that a writer's tax experience can vary greatly, whether it's a tax specialist for a business trade publication, a personal-finance freelancer who has built up a good reputation over the years, or a green staff writer still figuring out the subject. Hence you should remain aware that a writer may inadvertently distort tax information when turning it into regular English. Since the quoted sources are usually good, NATP's Mellem says, "call the source. Call the magazine, get the phone number, and call the source directly."

TOM HERMAN, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
Tom Herman's "Tax Report" column appears on *The Wall Street Journal*'s front page every Wednesday, and Herman regularly appears on NBC's *Early Today* and CNBC's *Today's Business*. In all venues, he offers tax advice, updates on tax regulations, and reports on how the tax system works. "[Herman's] a good writer who does a very good job of... summarizing new developments in two or three sentences," says Luscombe.

THE KIPLINGER TAX LETTER
If you're looking for a tax newsletter, you're likely a more sophisticated taxpayer. In that case, this biweekly publication is recommended for its current information on the status of pending tax legislation and how it could or could not affect you. (A year's subscription of 26 issues costs $59 and is available at www.kiplinger.com, under the "subscribe here" section.) The text is somewhat free of professional jargon; its density is due largely to the fact that its advice and news is compressed into concise, scannable hits of information. "It's enough to plant a seed in your mind to try to talk to your accountant about it," Luscombe says, though his words could apply to any of these sources. ■

SHOOTING STARS

Annie Leibovitz will stop at nothing to capture celebrities on film in imaginative and revealing ways. That may be what makes her one of the most revered—and feared—photographers today. By Julie Scelfo

Carl Lewis strapped on red stiletto heels. William Hurt stripped down to his underpants. Jodie Foster wore low-cut lingerie. And Demi Moore got naked—twice.

Not just any photographer could talk these personalities into revealing themselves so intimately. But Annie Leibovitz is not just any photographer. "I always jump at the chance [to be photographed by Leibovitz]," says Foster. "Having your picture taken is really a painful experience, and it isn't with her."

Leibovitz is one of the most prolific pop photographers of the 20th century, and her photos have been called "the ultimate validation of celebrity" by *Time* magazine. "People want to be photographed by Annie Leibovitz because it's a statement...it means they've arrived," says Darien Davis, a former assistant to Leibovitz and a professional photographer.

But despite her attraction to celebrity, Leibovitz takes pains to avoid being one herself. She refused to be interviewed for this story—through her studio manager, her agent, and her publicist at Random House, which issued her newest book, *Women*, in October. Her refusal was no surprise—throughout her career, Leibovitz hasn't granted many in-depth interviews. Still, her photos have made her a household name, and have transformed magazine imagery into iconography that has, to many, defined the last few decades of pop culture. "People know my pictures better than they know me," Leibovitz told *The Washington Post* during one of her rare interviews, and she likes it that way. Even the press coverage surrounding *Women* and a White House reception revealed little information about her personal life or work techniques.

Still, it's clear that her skill as a media creator lies not only in what she sees through the camera. It's in how she creates images in her mind and then transfers them onto film, compelling her subjects and staff to cooperate before they can see the results. To do so, she's demanding and often harsh with those around her. But she's also insecure, dynamic, forceful, and focused, proving that her portraits are the products of much more than what can simply be seen in the pages of a magazine.

Leibovitz, 50, has been taking photos professionally for 30 years, since she sold her first picture, to *Rolling Stone*, in 1970. A former painting student at the San Francisco Art Institute, she took an interest in photography and switched majors. One day she stumbled upon an antiwar rally and photographed beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg smoking marijuana. She took the photos to *Rolling Stone*'s San Francisco offices to see if the magazine wanted to buy them.

Rolling Stone did buy them, and it made Leibovitz a staff photographer, too. And as *Rolling Stone* developed into one of the primary chroniclers of the seventies, so did she. Leibovitz became its chief photographer in 1973 at the age of 23 and provided insider snapshots that weren't available anywhere else. Her images also captured the rising dominance of fame and celebrity, a theme that continued in her photos through the nineties.

Leibovitz soon began shooting photos that were increasingly prearranged, posing celebrities in artistic and contrived positions, utilizing props and elaborate sets. Those images revealed

ABOVE NORMAN

Leibovitz is often as famous as the stars she photographs, despite her efforts to stay out of the spotlight.

DANA LIXENBERG/CORBIS OUTLINE

something distinctly personal about her subjects. One of her most well-known images from the *Rolling Stone* era was her 1980 photo of a nude John Lennon curled up next to Yoko Ono. The photo became famous for the vulnerability it conveyed and because it was taken only hours before Lennon was killed.

In 1983, she was ready for a change and decided to move to *Vanity Fair*. The timing was fortuitous: Tina Brown arrived the next year to revamp the magazine into an insider's guide to celebrity worship and high-rent popular culture. Leibovitz's photographs became an essential component of the magazine's character, and during the past 17 years, she has churned out hundreds upon hundreds of photos for its covers and features. In addition to defining the *Vanity Fair* look, the style of the photos became a benchmark of celebrity portraiture.

BEFORE THE SHOOT BEGINS

Today, Leibovitz, who lives in New York City, works on contract with Condé Nast Publications but also has other clients and periodically does work that interests her personally. She has three full-time photography assistants plus a studio manager and a full-time archivist, who keeps track of an entire library of her film. She also relies on various freelance producers, who bear the formidable responsibility of producing her elaborate, often expensive shoots.

As soon as Leibovitz Studios accepts an assignment, the pressure is on to develop a concept for the photo. Although the client sometimes has a suggestion, it falls to Leibovitz and her staff to devise an idea of how and where to photograph the subject. For inspiration, Leibovitz has amassed a large library filled with books by other photographers, which she regularly consults. "She usually takes me aside and shows me images...that she wants [the photos] to get the feel of," says the young *Star Wars* heroine Natalie Portman. For the May 1999 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Leibovitz showed Portman photos taken in the 1800s by British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron that Portman thought were "very womanly, very natural." The *Vanity Fair* photo spread of Portman, in which the girl posed against a tree in a romantic forest scene, had the same delicate, feminine look.

Leibovitz also asks the client to send her a folder full of personal and professional information. "She reads everything and tries to get into the psyche of the person," explains Kim Meehan, a stylist under contract with *Vanity Fair* who works with Leibovitz.

As soon as a visual concept is decided, other professionals are brought in to the project, including a producer, who is responsible for coordinating all logistics involved in the shoot and hiring scouts to find the best site. There's also a stylist, who will oversee the subject's wardrobe and hair and makeup, and local photography assistants, who augment the regular staff and assist with equipment on the day of the shoot. With generous clients like *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*, Leibovitz has the resources to implement shoots on a scale larger than is typical of other photographers.

Then the studio manager schedules a time that works for both the subject and Leibovitz. Leibovitz works nonstop, and her calendar can be as full as those of the famous people she photographs. "Her schedule was as difficult as the First Lady's," explains former productions coordinator Forest Hoeckel, referring to a 1997 *Vogue* shoot of Hillary and Chelsea Clinton on a trip to Africa. "We actually had to reschedule shoots with people like Princess Di."

When Leibovitz decides on an idea or ideas—to suspend performance artist Laurie Anderson over Coney Island, for example, or to photograph Whoopi Goldberg in a bathtub of milk—the producers have to track down and coordinate all of the elements, no matter how unconventional. "We would joke and call it Pink Elephant Productions, meaning whatever is necessary—even a pink elephant—we would have to not stop until we found it," says Hoeckel, who produced for Leibovitz for two and a half years.

For the Anderson photo, which ran in the April 10, 1995, issue of *The New Yorker*, Leibovitz wanted to suspend her on a tightrope across the boardwalk at Coney Island. Hoeckel had to fly in a rigger—a specialist who secures harness and scaffolding equipment—from the Midwest. Leibovitz also wanted to shoot Anderson in operational aquarium tanks—with the sea turtles still in them, of course—which meant that the producer had to secure special permission for this, too. "We do whatever is needed to pull it off," says Hoeckel, noting that that's why Leibovitz can be very expensive—shoots can cost as much as $100,000 a day for the entourage of people and equipment. "It was really crazy," says Anderson. "First of all, it was really cold....I got lowered into a 12-feet-deep, kind of big, vat of water....I had weights around my ankles....I didn't breathe—I was being weighted down and then pulled back up....And then the sea turtles started peeing...bright, green phosphorescent pee. And I realized, *Oh, my God, I'm drinking this.*"

THE SHOOT

Once the people, place, and materials are coordinated, Leibovitz's team of three photo assistants arrives early at the location to begin setting up the shoot. Preparing the many lights and cameras can take anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of days. For the annual Hollywood issue of *Vanity Fair*, it can take as long as three days to set up for one day of shooting. Sometimes, the preparation is significantly shorter, as it was when Leibovitz photographed Harvey Keitel on the street near his home. She had hoped to take some photos inside, but he balked when he saw the equipment and staff Leibovitz wanted to bring in with her.

As the sets are built, the assistants experiment with various lighting arrangements, each time taking the professional equivalent of Polaroids, on which they write extensive notes. Typically, assistants or others on the set stand in for the Polaroids to shorten the shoot for the celebrity, a common practice among professional photographers.

Once Leibovitz arrives, she circulates among the sets (often there is more than one) and her assistants, the dressing rooms and stylists, to make sure each detail is exactly as she has envisioned it. "Annie understands that a lot of the time, the idea you have in your head is only in your head," explains photographer Darien Davis. "She came in and started going through my dirty clothes hamper," says Joy Hawks, a professional rodeo rider photographed at her home by Leibovitz for *Women*. "She pulled out the dirtiest clothes she could find and said, 'These are what you should wear.'"

One reason subjects are often eager to sit for Leibovitz is that she insists that every effort be made to make them as comfortable as possible. "She's definitely more interested in conveying the person you are rather than the image the magazine wants to portray of you," says Natalie Portman, who posed for Leibovitz's photo on the cover of the May 1999 *Vanity Fair*. "I was so, so pleased because I really felt like [the photographs] looked like me."

Natalie Portman says Leibovitz wanted a natural, feminine look for her portrait in the May 1999 issue of *Vanity Fair*.

NORMAN

Leibovitz also tries to make the shoot as convenient as possible for her subjects. "I told her I had a 7 o'clock flight and only had time to go and swim at the gym before that," says Laurie Anderson, referring to a shoot before the one at Coney Island. Leibovitz's solution? Rent the gym. "[S]he was set up in the middle of the swimming pool on a ladder....There was Annie, with her camera, fearlessly jumping around with all these wires....You can't say no to someone who does stuff like that. You just can't. It's too over the top."

As Leibovitz takes pictures, she talks to her subjects, while her assistants stand by ready to unload and reload the cameras, logging each roll of film as they go. She has been known to continue for hours, the shutter clicking through countless rolls. As she works, she directs her staff to make any desired adjustments but is sensitive to the subjects' comfort. "There's one photo that required me to lay on the couch with my arm out," says Portman. "Every few minutes she'd ask me if I'm okay, if I wanted a break. She never forgets that you're a person."

For many of her shoots, Leibovitz's staff learns about the subject's food preferences and hires a caterer to prepare items the celebrity likes. Often the subject's favorite CD is playing when she or he arrives, or if someone requests a special musical selection, an intern is dispatched to find it. When Leibovitz photographed the cast of *Primary Colors*, they wanted to listen to a Ben Harper CD, and an intern was sent running.

To get what she wants on film, Leibovitz can be demanding and insistent with her staff, yet charming and kind to her subjects. In fact, she has been described as vulnerable and even needy at times, causing subjects not to want to disappoint her. "She's just one of those people you want to put your arms around her and tell her she's going to be okay," says Foster. "She's a self-doubter." Of course, the fact that she's a bigger celebrity than some of the people she photographs also elicits cooperation, as does her persistence, which eventually wears people down.

Many of her associates say she is unwilling to accept anything less than her ultimate vision and that this relentlessness makes her difficult to work with. She is also known to blast her assistants with cruel and cutting remarks. "It's one of the most amazing experiences of my entire life and some of the most painful," says one former assistant. "I thought I was going to have a heart attack at 23." Leibovitz commands a tornado of activity, as her assistants and staff rush to meet her every demand. "It's very intense, and Annie is a very intense woman. She's strict when it comes to work," says Lori Goldstein, a longtime stylist. When asked if Leibovitz can be harsh, Goldstein says only, "What's that saying? You take [it] out on the people you love."

Other professionals seemed to fear retaliation in the industry for speaking frankly about Leibovitz, and four former assistants refused to be interviewed for this article. Some said they would cooperate "if it was okay with Annie"—it wasn't. After initially expressing interest, Harvey Keitel declined to be interviewed after his publicist called Leibovitz's studio and found that she had not granted an interview herself. In October 1999, Leibovitz told *The Washington Post*, "I'm working on balance....I try not to run the people working for me into the ground." Still, her staff says her work habits push them to their limits.

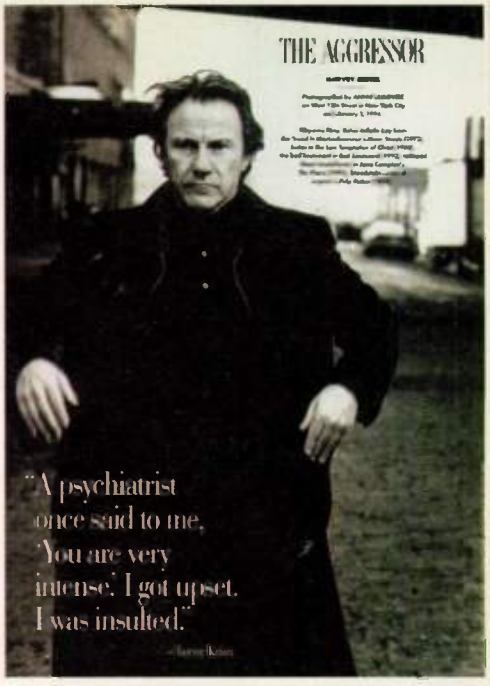
Sometimes Leibovitz's schedule is so grueling that the staff is stuck together for days, traveling together, waiting together, sharing their meals. For her book on the 1996 Olympic athletes, they visited as many as ten cities in one month. "You're like a family," says Goldstein, as did four other of Leibovitz's former staffers. Their closeness also comes from enduring unusual and arduous activities to prepare for a shoot, like the time they, along with Leibovitz, underwent scuba training to photograph the Olympic athletes underwater. The entire photo staff went through anti-gravity training to be able to shoot in the plane that was used in the film *Apollo 13*. The plane, nicknamed the "vomit comet," caused Leibovitz and an assistant to get sick.

Despite her difficult work demeanor and on-the-job hazards, there are many reasons people work for Leibovitz, including exposure to one of the most highly paid photographers in the world. "It's like the ultimate boot camp," says Hoeckel, noting that the volume, caliber, and logistics of Leibovitz's work are unlike any other photographer's. "We all say we graduated from the school of Annie Leibovitz," adds Goldstein.

SHE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS NEEDY AT TIMES, CAUSING SUBJECTS NOT TO WANT TO DISAPPOINT HER. "SHE'S A SELF-DOUBTER," SAYS JODIE FOSTER.

Working with her can also be a launching pad for aspiring photographers; former assistants George Lange, Martin Schoeller, and Andrew Eccles have themselves become successful magazine photographers. "I learned more in two years with her than I did in ten years of working in photography," says Richard Ballard, a professional photographer and also a former Leibovitz assistant.

Being generous is not something Leibovitz is known widely for, but many who are close to her insist she is. In the past she has given out signed prints of her work to staff as Christmas presents, which typically cost $2,000. She can be equally thoughtful with her subjects. When shooting Jodie Foster for her *Women* book, Leibovitz shot extra photos of Foster's son, then 14 months old. "I can't get them through the developer," Foster



Harvey Keitel posed on a New York City street after refusing to let Leibovitz's crew inside his home.

explains, citing the tendency for the photos to be stolen or displayed in stores. "She took a whole bunch of photos and mailed them to me....[And w]hen we did mother-daughter shots for *Vanity Fair*, she always sends a copy to my mother. I don't know if you know a lot of photographers," Foster continues, "but they're kind of like a lead guitarist. Not the type to send pictures to your mother."

Until recently, Leibovitz has rarely been on the other side of the camera. Exceptions include a story called "On the Road With Annie Leibovitz," which appeared in *American Photographer* in 1984, and a documentary that ran on Bravo. Then, last October, when *Women* was released, there was a small flurry of press coverage, and Leibovitz's picture graced *The Washington Post* Arts section, *The New York Times*, and other papers. Still, those articles and an interview with Katie Couric on *Today* couldn't crack the guarded Leibovitz, who would talk only about her pictures and did not address her personal life at all.

There are those in the industry who wonder whether Leibovitz's best days have passed. "Some people may have a novel in them, and Annie may have had ten, but maybe they're all written," muses George Lange, who worked with Leibovitz in the mid-eighties and has taken photos that have appeared in *Newsweek* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Lange later reconsiders, adding, "But maybe there's 15."

Still, many of her past colleagues believe that her photography is incomparable. "I have a lot of respect for her because she really rises to the occasion over and over again," says Hoeckel. "[W]hen you work on that level, you're really forced to re-create yourself [because] the public is watching. Her pictures are under our noses all the time," adds Hoeckel. "There's really only one Annie Leibovitz, after all." ◘

THE DOCTOR IS ON THE AIR

Therapists dispense advice over the air, in print, and on the Internet. Are they qualified to dish it out? By Jesse Oxfeld

DR. JOYCE BROTHERS

Syndicated newspaper columnist, 1960–

B.S., human ecology, Cornell University, 1947; M.A., psychology, Columbia University, 1950; Ph.D., psychology, Columbia University, 1953

Selected work experience: Winner, *The $64,000 Question*, 1955; *The $64,000 Challenge*, 1956; host: *Dr. Joyce Brothers* and *Tell Me, Dr. Brothers*, WNBC-TV (New York City), 1958–66; *Mind Over Matter With Dr. Joyce Brothers*, NBC Radio Network, 1960–98; contributing editor: *Good Housekeeping*, 1964–present; *Reader's Digest*, 1979–present; *Parade*, 1982–present

How do you differ from other media therapists? *My credentials are excellent, I've gotten all sorts of awards, and I try very hard not to make mistakes.*
What's the most important general advice you can give? *Don't stay at a Ramada Inn.*
What do you think of Regis Philbin as a quiz show host? *I think he makes a splendid host. You get the feeling he's rooting really hard for the person.*

DR. JOY BROWNE

Host, *Dr. Joy Browne* syndicated TV program, 1999–present; *Dr. Joy Browne* syndicated radio program, 1993–

B.A., behavioral science, Rice University (Houston), 1966; M.A., psychology, Northeastern University (Boston), 1968; Ph.D., philosophy, Northeastern University, 1972

Host, radio programs: KGO-AM (San Francisco), 1984–86; KCBS-AM (San Francisco), 1986–88; WABC-AM (New York City) and ABC Radio Networks, 1988–93; WOR-AM (New York City), 1993–present

Difference between you and others: *I'm a licensed clinical psychologist, I've been on radio for a long time, and I have a sense of humor.*
Most important general advice: *Number one, see if you can stay in the present; the past is immutable. Number two, try not to blame but to problem-solve. The bottom line is, the behavior you have the most control over is your own. Number three, give up the temptation to take on the role of victim.*

DR. LAURA SCHLESSINGER

Host, *The Dr. Laura Schlessinger Program* syndicated radio show, 1994–

B.S., biological sciences, State University of New York (Stony Brook), 1968; Ph.D., physiology and cellular biophysics, Columbia University, 1974; postdoctoral certificate in marriage, family, and child counseling, University of Southern California, 1979

Adjunct professor, psychology, Pepperdine University (Malibu, California), 1982–88; host, *The Dr. Laura Schlessinger Program*, KFI-AM (Los Angeles), 1990–1994; columnist: The New York Times Syndicate, 1996–98; Universal Press Syndicate, 1998–present

Difference between you and others: *Generally, they promote themselves as radio therapy, whereas I think 'radio therapy' is an oxymoron. You can't do therapy on radio. My show is about moral health. The way I promote myself is, I say, 'I preach, I teach, and I nag people to do the right thing.'*
Some people seem to dislike you. Why? *I think that I'm very counterculture, in that I'm expressing ethical virtues and moral virtues and religious virtues. I would think that my message makes some folks pretty uncomfortable, and they have the ability to retaliate. But it doesn't change the rightness of what I'm saying or the acceptance from the audience.*

DR. DREW PINSKY

Cohost, *Loveline* syndicated radio program, 1995–present; MTV's *Loveline*, 1996–

B.A., biology, Amherst College, 1980; M.D., University of Southern California School of Medicine, 1984

Cohost, *Loveline*, KROQ-FM (Culver City, California), 1983–present; chief medical resident, Huntington Memorial Hospital (Pasadena, California), 1987–88; program clinical director, Chemical Dependency Services, Las Encinas Hospital (Pasadena), 1990–present; editor in chief, drDrew.com, 1999–present

Difference between you and others: *I'm not a therapist, and I'm not a counselor. I'm a general physician... [who's] interested in educating. I don't believe the media can treat anyone, but a lot can be learned by examining cases in a public forum.*
Aren't you just a younger, taller, male Dr. Ruth? *No. I deal with adolescent health issues; it just so happens that the kids are preoccupied with reproductive issues and mental health issues and substance issues.*

DR. JUDITH KURIANSKY

Columnist, *Newsday* (Melville, New York), 1993-present; *Penthouse*, 1995–

B.A., psychology, Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts), 1968; M.Ed., counseling education, Boston University, 1970; Ph.D., clinical psychology, New York University, 1980

Senior research scientist, New York State Psychiatric Institute, 1970–78; therapy coordinator, National Institute for the Psychotherapies, 1977–79; host, *Dr. Judith Kuriansky Program*, WABC-AM (New York City), 1981–88; adjunct therapist, Center for Marital and Family Therapy, 1986–present; host, *The Dr. Judy Program*, WOR-AM (New York City), 1985; adjunct professor, psychology, New York University, 1989–present; host, *Love Phones* syndicated radio show, 1992–99; columnist, www.blues inthebedroom.com, 1999–present

Difference between you and others: *My impeccable professional background and experience, mixed with being real and cool and funny. Which is, by the way, what other people say about me.*
Most important general advice: *Love yourself; trust yourself; go for your dreams.*

DR. RUTH WESTHEIMER

Syndicated newspaper columnist, 1986–

B.A. equivalent, Sorbonne (Paris), 1956; M.A., sociology, New School for Social Research (New York City), 1959; Ed.D., family and community education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1970

Adjunct professor, social sciences, New York University, 1986–present; host: *Sexually Speaking*, WYNY-FM (New York City), 1980–1984; *Good Sex With Dr. Ruth*, Lifetime Television, 1984–86; *Ask Dr. Ruth* syndicated television show, 1987; *The All New Dr. Ruth Show*, Lifetime, 1987–88; columnist, www.drruth.com, 1996–present

Why are you good at what you do? *I'm very well trained.... The combination of what I have, in terms of my accent, in terms of my being an older woman, and in terms of my being able to use humor and, at the same time, being old-fashioned and a square is what contributed to [my] success.*
Is it weird that Americans looking for sex advice turn to, basically, their grandmother? *I don't think that it's weird at all. To the contrary. I do believe that my private practice and my success has to do with maturity. I think that this is why people are willing to talk to somebody who's the age of their grandmother. It may be easier than to a peer.*

dept. TOOLS

CELL PHONES GO ONLINE

Whether you're stuck in traffic or lying on a beach, the phones and services below will get you onto the Internet—for a price. By John R. Quain

The NeoPoint 1000 is one option for accessing the Web with a cell phone.

NORMAN

An essential element of the Internet hype is the assertion that someday the Web will be everywhere: on your TV, on your watch, even in your car. Although much of this is still a broadband pipe dream, in the coming year phone companies will be pushing one aspect of the Internet-anywhere future: cell phones that can surf the Web.

Accessing news and information wirelessly on the Web from a beach cabana or ski lift is a tantalizing idea. You could check your mutual funds, buy a book, or look up NBA scores with nary a computer or cable in sight. So to see just how far I could get with this fantasy, I tested two of the latest Web-enabled wireless phones and experimented with a new Internet-based service that lets your PC communicate with your cell phone.

NEOPOINT 1000

The largest of the three phones I tested was the NeoPoint 1000 with Sprint PCS wireless data service. Although the shiny silver phone is larger than most and weighs 6.4 ounces, its 11-line liquid crystal display is better suited to Web surfing.

The NeoPoint 1000 costs $399. Its standard battery lasts for about 2.5 hours of talk time and about 40 hours in standby mode. As a cell phone, it worked without a hitch. Calls were clear, and it worked in several cities I visited, including Chicago and San Francisco.

The NeoPoint has a flip-down cover that conceals the dial pad, but you can access the Web without opening it using menu buttons located just below the screen. Web access is slow, at about 14.4 Kbps (kilobits per second), but because you can get only text from the Web—no graphics, animation, sound, or video—it turns out to be fast enough. The phone comes with a built-in Web browser, and you get an e-mail address automatically from Sprint PCS. Unfortunately, you cannot directly access your existing e-mail address unless you have a Yahoo! Mail account. And you cannot open and read e-mail attachments, such as Word documents.

When you get online you're presented with a list of websites and services. For news there are headlines from CNN and Reuters, but you get only one or two sentences on each story. Most of the material is truncated, but such information as stock prices and sports scores is ideally suited to cellular Web surfing. Amazon.com appears on the main menu. You can punch in addresses for other websites, but don't bother. To be viewed on the NeoPoint 1000, websites need to adhere to a specific page standard called HDML (handheld device markup language) and very few do. I could not visit most major newspaper sites, for example, or my own rather simple website. (NeoPoint says future software upgrades may solve this problem.)

When you're not on the Net, the NeoPoint, with its calendar and contact list, can double as an electronic organizer. It can store about 1,000 items and be synchronized with your PC's contact manager using a serial cable. The supplied NeoPoint SoftSync Plus software can pull appointments and addresses from popular Windows programs such as ACT!, Microsoft Outlook, and Lotus Organizer.

But you can't surf the Web and talk on the phone simultaneously. And there are separate charges for each service. Sprint PCS's voice service starts at $29.99 a month for 120 minutes of calls, plus 35 cents for each additional minute. Web access costs an additional $9.99 a month for 50 minutes, with each additional minute costing 30 cents.

There are also some coverage issues with Sprint PCS's digital-only service—which can be patchy outside major metropolitan areas. At the time of this writing, NeoPoint had struck an agreement with wireless carrier AirTouch Cellular that will significantly expand coverage in the U.S. and give users access to broadly available analog cellphone systems.

For now, the NeoPoint 1000 is one of the best options for wireless Net access. The phone's large and crisp display is particularly appealing for reading the stories of the day. But until Sprint PCS lowers its prices, you'd be better off buying a newspaper.

MOTOROLA V8160

Owning the smallest cell phone available continues to be a major status symbol. Now Motorola, Inc., has taken that desire to the next level by imbuing its diminutive V. Series phone with Internet browsing ability.

I tested a prototype of the Motorola V8160, a brushed silver model no bigger than a cigarette lighter and weighing less than 3 ounces. Priced from $499 to $699, depending on your service contract, it should be available by the end of March.

The V8160 is small enough to put in a front pant pocket and it has another advantage. As with other cellular phones, you can access the Web only on digital wireless systems, but the phone is also compatible with older, analog cellular services. So just about anywhere you go, you should be able to

make a phone call. On digital systems, it should last for about 2.5 hours of talk time and in standby for 125 hours. Analog calling is more taxing, with talk time limited to about 50 minutes and standby mode rated at about 13 hours.

For getting on the Net, the V8160 has one major drawback: its minuscule liquid crystal screen. It can show only three lines of text at a time from a website, but Motorola has made it as ergonomic as possible. Little on-screen icons tell you which buttons to push to get to a menu or to return to a message, and you flip through pages using buttons on the side of the phone.

For Web access, the Motorola model I tested used Bell Atlantic Mobile's Web Access service. A basic calling plan costs $29.99 a month for 200 minutes, plus $9.95 for Web access from the phone. However, additional voice and Web-surfing time beyond the 200 minutes are charged at the same rate (59 cents per minute in this case). Using the Bell Atlantic service, the Motorola's Web-surfing features were similar to those of the NeoPoint phone—except in one respect: The V8160's browser can go to any standard HTML pages, although it will strip out any graphics or photos.

As with the NeoPoint, when you log on, you get a list of site categories to visit. There's weather from AccuWeather.com, sports from ESPN.com, a Yellow Pages directory, and travel information from Biztravel.com. I tried getting door-to-door instructions online for a trip across town from MapQuest.com. My first attempt took about ten minutes to punch out the addresses, but it worked. The slowdown comes because you have to change the dial pad from typing letters and numbers to typing symbols and back.

Getting and sending e-mail also worked without a hitch. The phone's software lets you auto-forward, respond to, and CC messages. You can even add a standard signature message (such as "I'm trying to type from my phone"). The phone is chockablock with other features, such as a vibrating alert and a headset jack, but the Starfish TrueSync software for hooking it up to your computer wasn't finished in time for my tests.

In spite of its steep price, the V8160 will doubtless be one of the most popular gadgets this year. True, the screen is cramped, but you won't want to stay online for long anyway, considering how expensive the Web service is. On the other hand, if you can afford this phone, you can probably afford to surf as long as you want.

FUSIONONE

One hassle with cell phones is that to use their calendar and contact features effectively you have to figure out how to connect the phone to your computer and select the information you want to download. This can be a time-consuming process, and whenever you make a schedule change, you have to go through the whole process again. FusionOne thinks it has a better solution.

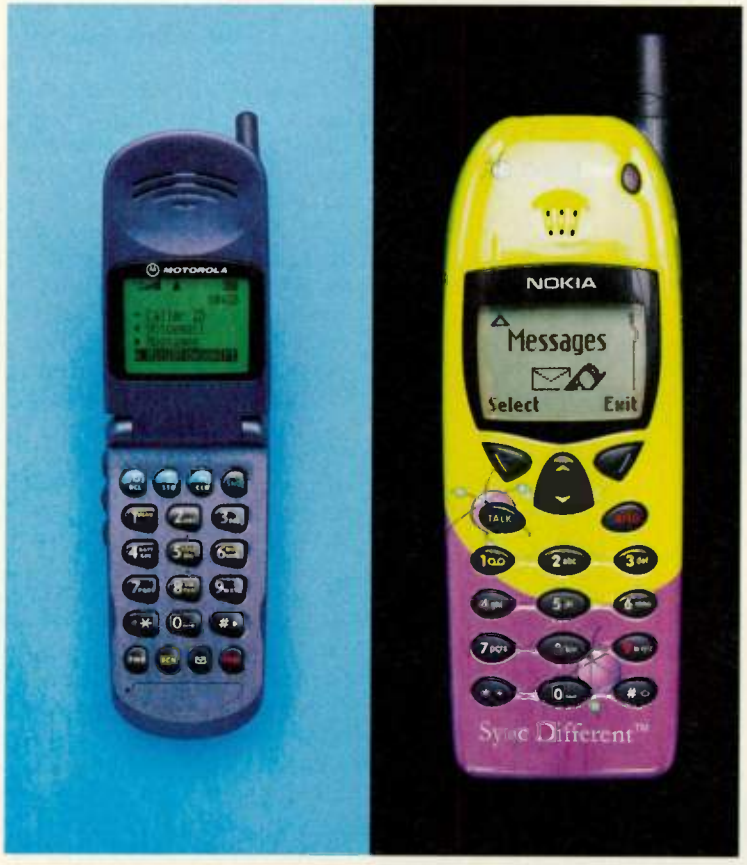
Instead of your copying files to a floppy disk to take home or having to plug your cell phone in to your computer for every appointment change, the company's software will automatically update the information on each device via the Internet. Called eDock, FusionOne is testing this service for a planned rollout this spring. I took a test drive of eDock (www.edock.com) using a Nokia 6190 cell phone with Omnipoint wireless service.

To start using the service, you must install FusionOne's software and upload the information you want to coordinate to the eDock site. You get 25 megabytes of free storage on eDock.com, but you have to endure ads. An as-yet-undetermined, monthly-fee-based service will also be available for those who want to eliminate the ads and get more storage.

Even on a slow, 28.8 Kbps modem, it took me only about 20 minutes to upload a few Word files and my entire Outlook calendar and contact database (with more than 4,100 entries) to eDock. Subsequent synchronizations take only a few seconds because FusionOne's software transfers only the information that has changed rather than the entire file.

Once you've created your password-protected account, you can view your stored calendar and contact list on the site from any computer that has Web access. Thus the FusionOne service also acts as an emergency backup system if your computer crashes or your cell phone dies.

After setting up my account, I selected a few phone numbers I wanted stored in my cell phone. (Cell phones have limited storage capacity, and the Nokia 6190 can hold only about 255 entries.) When I was finished selecting the dozens of numbers, I logged off the site.



Motorola's V8160 (left), set to hit the market soon, will also provide Web access. FusionOne's eDock service works with phones such as the Nokia 6190.

Almost immediately, the Nokia 6190 started chirping, alerting me that the numbers I had selected had arrived (Nokia refers to the files as "business cards"). With a few button pushes I was able to save the names and numbers to my phone's contact list. Unfortunately, you can't save several contacts at once; you must save each number individually, which means listening to a lot of beeps from the phone. Furthermore, you can't do this with just any cell phone.

FusionOne's system requires special features, so initially, the FusionOne service will be available only on compatible Nokia phones using the Omnipoint and Pacific Bell services. In addition, it works only with Windows computers using Microsoft Outlook, Netscape Communicator, and Internet Explorer. You can choose to synchronize any kind of computer file on the service; you just can't view it online. The company plans to support other software programs later and to make the service work with Palm Pilots and other devices that can connect to the Net.

With FusionOne, you still can't get contacts and appointments directly from the eDock site using a cell phone. For example, if you realize you need a number from your eDock contact list that isn't stored in the phone's memory, you can't use the cell phone to access the website to get the number. FusionOne also hopes to make this possible.

In the meantime, though, with the Ominpoint service you get an e-mail address for the phone that can also be used to directly send and receive messages of up to 160 characters from the Net or other Omnipoint phones. Monthly charges can add up quickly. Forty minutes of local calls costs $19.99, including ten e-mail messages and ten numeric pages. Additional e-mail messages are 15 cents each, and numeric pages cost 10 cents each. Also, like Sprint PCS's service, Omnipoint has some coverage limitations, such as being unavailable in Chicago.

FusionOne's eDock system cleverly leverages the power and connectivity of the Internet, but sending hundreds of updates to the phone can be costly. So until wireless-messaging prices come down, the Internet-everywhere dream will be beyond the reach of most of us. ■

Contributing editor John R. Quain also writes for Fast Company *magazine and* PC Magazine, *and he appears regularly on CBS News and MSNBC.*

NORMAN

PHONY FACTS AND HISTORIC HOAXES

Don't believe that signpost, tour guide, or national shrine until you've read *Lies Across America*: a travel guide that strips our country of its favorite fables. Also: Newly translated letters reveal intimate facts about Galileo's private life.

LIES ACROSS AMERICA:
What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong
James W. Loewen
The New Press

The Jefferson Memorial misquotes the preamble to—and conclusion of—the Declaration of Independence. The log cabin the National Park Service touts as Abraham Lincoln's "birthplace" was built 30 years after his death. The supposedly brutal winter George Washington and his troops endured at Valley Forge was unusually warm.

Go figure.

In *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, James W. Loewen inspects the thousands of markers, monuments, plaques, and preserved historical sites that dot our land—reserving his wrath for more than 100 outrageous inaccuracies and distortions. It's a refreshingly prickly take on travel writing, hoary Americana, and those hoopskirted guides with the phony accents and butter churns.

Loewen won the American Book Award in 1996 for *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, which exposed errors and distortions in high-school history texts. Here he takes to the road to find fault both with national shrines and desolate, middle-of-nowhere signposts. Loewen says many mistakes spring from pure cluelessness.

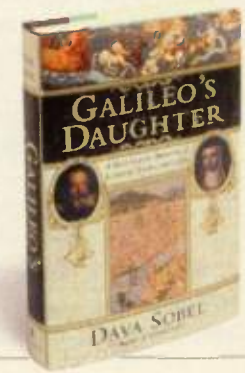
But too often, he adds, commemorators deliberately suppress or alter the truth—in the cause of political correctness or to bury unflattering facts. For instance, the governing board of the USS *Intrepid* memorial in New York City voted to excise any mention of the ship's Vietnam service.

"In short," Loewen writes, "the lies and omissions memorialized across the American countryside suggest times and ways that the United States went astray as a nation....That's why it may be more important to understand what the historical landscape gets wrong than what it gets right."

Part Charles Kuralt, part Terminator, Loewen escorts us to every state and the District of Columbia. In Almo, Idaho, we discover that a massacre of white pioneers by Indians commemorated on a roadside marker probably never occurred. We also visit Graysville, Indiana, where Loewen asks the manager of the state's historical marker program why more women aren't depicted. "The only woman I can think of," she replies, "was the subject of the first successful gallbladder operation." Actually, she had an ovary removed—but who's counting? BOB ICKES

GALILEO'S DAUGHTER:
A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love
Dava Sobel
Walker & Company

"I believe that good philosophers fly alone, like eagles, and not in flocks like starlings." These words by Galileo Galilei, published in 1623, describe the scientist's approach to his life's work. By moving scientific study out of theoretical musings and into precise mathematics, Galileo became a titan of history. But in his time, he inspired the wrath of many academic and religious detractors. We may thank him now for advancing the Copernican cosmology that placed the sun—not the Earth—at the center of the known universe, but Galileo was rewarded with a trial for heresy by the Holy Office of the Inquisition.

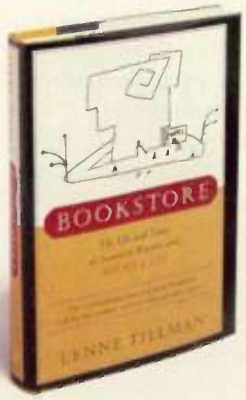


Galileo's Daughter tells the intimate story not only of how Galileo became "the father of modern physics" (as dubbed by Albert Einstein) but also how he gained strength from being a father. Dava Sobel weaves Galileo's personal and professional lives into a tapestry of 17th century Italy: papal intrigue, courts of nobility, and austere convents. She explores Galileo's devotion to his eldest daughter, the nun Suor Maria Celeste. As revealed in her letters, translated by Sobel, the two were quite close. She helped her father with family affairs and prepared medicines for him when he was ill. And once the 69-year-old Galileo was threatened with torture and imprisonment, she not only managed his Tuscan estate from within convent walls but provided spiritual solace.

A chronology that closes this handsome volume tells of NASA's *Galileo* spacecraft, which orbits the same moons of Jupiter he discovered—a fitting tribute to such a philosophical "eagle." But *Galileo's Daughter* shows that he did not fly alone, after all. MATTHEW REED BAKER

BOOKSTORE: The Life and Times of Jeannette Watson and Books & Co.
Lynne Tillman
Harcourt Brace & Company

In today's book world, where wide selection and discounted prices have made Barnes & Noble a ubiquitous sight, bemoaning the loss of the independent bookstore seems to be a futile exercise. Lynne Tillman, however, has managed to record what is most valuable about these endangered independents in *Bookstore: The Life and Times of Jeannette Watson and Books & Co.* Chronicling the rise and fall of Books & Co. bookstore, which was located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan from 1978 to 1997, Tillman weaves together stories from Watson, the bookstore's owner; its staff; and the regular readers and famous writers who consumed the store's eclectic mix of literature.



Books & Co.'s valued community, which participated in hundreds of readings, book signings, and parties over the years, was sustained by writers such as Fran Lebowitz, Paul Auster, and Brendan Gill, as well as Woody Allen—who stepped up as a last-hour warrior to try to save the store in 1997 and wrote the preface to the book. These and other writers share their memories in *Bookstore*.

But the unique atmosphere that Books & Co. was able to provide, from the knowledgeable and excited staff to the cozy couch on the second floor, is perhaps best recounted in the colorful interviews with Watson herself: "When Gary Snyder read...Allen Ginsberg introduced him. During the reading, little white things flew across the room....I looked around. Ginsberg was sitting next to me, using a Swiss Army knife to clip his nails. Very peculiar." AMY DITULLIO

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 67] sumer. What we'll do in the next 20 years is take [the PC], this other box for information and communications, and make it as convenient and responsive as television is. So I really think it's a companion box to the TV. It's not instead of the TV. I think the two do not intersect in terms of consumers. If you look at the decision tree of consumers, their first decision is "Am I on my computer or am I on my TV?" And then I think what CNN is looking for, what any big brand looks for, is ubiquity. Then no matter where you go, there it is.

BRILL: What about AOL on TV?

PITTMAN: We're not going to put that kind of product on TV, but rather we're going to use the power of interactivity with AOL TV to make TV more enjoyable. More of a service. With the 500 channels of TV, you can't surf to find what you want. By the time you find the show you want, it's over. So you need at the very least an interactive program guide to find it. Then, what other behavior do you do on TV? We'd love to share it with others. So I have my buddy list there. If I'm watching something on TV that's neat, I'll send an Instant Message to somebody else watching and say, "Hey, quick, turn over to channel 26. You're not going to believe this." You'll have this opportunity.

BRILL: You can do it on the same machine?

PITTMAN: You'll do it right on your TV set. And so what it really says is the PC remains sort of—think of it as the hub of the wheel with a lot of spokes coming off of it. I can access my AOL account and that information and pieces of it from lots of other places, whether it's the TV set or a handheld device or my cellular phone or whatever.

Q: WOULD AN AOL TIME WARNER MAKE A DEAL WITH MATT DRUDGE? A: THE GOSSIP AREA MIGHT.

BRILL: What about something like using AOL's subscribers to send them e-mail, asking, for example, "Do you subscribe to HBO?" "Yes, I do." "Well, use your program guide for tonight. Don't miss the premiere of *The Sopranos*."

PITTMAN: Well, we're pretty careful about sending unsolicited e-mail to people, but we certainly have the means of communicating with the consumer. But we are probably on the extreme of protecting consumer privacy. We're almost rabid about it.

BRILL: What about music? I heard [Time Warner CEO] Jerry Levin at the press conference say that this is a fast way for Time Warner to be in the music online business.

PITTMAN: Teenagers today are looking for music on the Internet. They have a hard time getting it in an easy-to-use form. AOL can immediately provide the platform, make it easy and simple to use. Time Warner's got all the music, and clearly there are a ton of hardware folks [who] would love to build a handheld device that plugs in to all this. The economics are wonderful for digital downloading and also wonderful for promotion over the Internet versus the other choices that we've got [like Viacom's MTV]. I think no one's quite worked out that model yet, to figure out exactly what works for the consumer. But, you know, that's a year or two [-long] process of trying various things until you shake out what works for the consumer.

BRILL: So the advantage, in that sense of the merger, is that you know you have a certain amount of music, and Time Warner, from its standpoint, knows it has a certain distribution channel?

PITTMAN: And both work with each other in shaping it. So it's something that's totally integrated as opposed to something that's at odds.

BRILL: Will you do this with other music companies?

PITTMAN: Absolutely. It's like HBO buys movies other than Warner Bros. [movies]. The good news is that you can be assured Time Warner will not be left out.

BRILL: If I'm MSNBC.com, I woke up this morning knowing that more people come to MSNBC.com than come to CNN.com. And I woke up this morning knowing that more people come to CNBC for financial news online than come to CNN*fn*. That would change or should change with this, won't it?

PITTMAN: I sure hope we can turbocharge the Time Warner properties. But the Internet, unlike cable TV, doesn't exclude anything. Even if we're putting CNN front and center, you can still type in "MSNBC" right there. So we don't shut people off. What we do is, we promote and advertise others to give them more presence.

BRILL: What about the news operations: CNN, *Time*, *Fortune*, et cetera? They'll be managed by an online service that's known for great marketing, but it is also known to be agnostic about content. It takes what it gets. And it lets people make their choices. AOL is not an editor. AOL does not take editorial responsibility.

PITTMAN: For the AOL service as a business unit that's true. I think when you look at AOL Time Warner, clearly Time Warner has a long corporate culture. I think Jerry Levin holds that public trust very dear to him. And I think AOL CEO Steve Case understands and appreciates that as well. I mean, Steve has not been just about business. He doesn't want to have just the most valuable company in the world. He wants to have the most respected company in the world. And I think all of us are smart enough to know that journalists, that news people, are a special breed and what you do is, you support them and you protect them but you don't try to do their job.

BRILL: Would an AOL Time Warner make a deal with Matt Drudge?

PITTMAN: I don't know. AOL Time Warner as a corporation is probably not going to do any deal with somebody like that. The question is, Are there online products [at the divisional level] that might make a deal with Matt Drudge? Perhaps. There are gossip areas on the AOL service...that might.

BRILL: What about X-rated stuff?

PITTMAN: We have not taken X-rated stuff. We don't take X-rated advertising.

BRILL: What about chat rooms?

PITTMAN: Well, chat rooms are a different matter. Those are communication devices set up by members. I don't know what goes on in private rooms; I don't know what goes on in Instant Messages; and I don't read your e-mail. So it's hard for us to do any of that other than to say we think that the consumer should have enormous power to control it. At AOL, we probably have by far the best parental controls of anybody in the online world. We can do something that you can't do with any other medium: The parent can decide what values they have and build the service around that. [Parents can control] who [their kids] can get e-mail from, who [they] can send it to, what areas [their kids] should have [access to]. I think that probably we all wrestle with where do you draw lines and what's appropriate and what's not. Online has an advantage over traditional media in terms of being able to let every consumer make the service a little different for them and their family.

BRILL: What's the reason someone shouldn't like this merger?

PITTMAN: I can't think of any. ■

Disclosure: Brill and Pittman were friends and colleagues at Time Warner in the early 1990s, when both worked on the creation of Court TV, in which Brill and Time Warner were partners. As a result of that partnership with Time Warner, Brill owns an interest in Time Warner stock that has been enhanced by the announcement of the merger with AOL.

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 83]
habit of buckling up, regulations are a bargain, Nader says. But in the special, Stossel offers only the simplistic reduction of Nader's point before moving to another topic. In Nader's mind, Stossel's distortion is no accident. "He's the great corporate exonerator," says Nader.

"JOHN IS APPROACHING [his stories] from a certain point of view that is different and fresh," explains Victor Neufeld, executive producer of *20/20* and Stossel's boss. But Stossel still works to present opposing opinions and deliver fair reports, according to Neufeld. "It's a very fine balancing act."

And a very public one. Most television reporters choose to conduct their reporting—and make their mistakes—behind the curtain of supposed objectivity. But Stossel's ideological position robs him of that comfortable cover. Such a nonconformist as Stossel invites scrutiny (from an organization like FAIR), and scrutiny inevitably uncovers errors. And every mistake raises the nagging question *Is he willing to manipulate his reporting to support his argument?*

Take his 1999 special "Greed," in which Stossel argues that profit-hungry capitalists end up enriching everybody in society, not just themselves. Stossel manages to pick a fight with Mother Teresa in this show. "Michael Milken made a billion and went to jail," says Stossel's announcer. "Mother Teresa died without a penny. Who did more for the world?" The statistical crux of the report is video footage of a rally on Wall Street, protesting the widening wage gap between American workers and bosses, and the fact that the compensation of bosses, including bonuses, has risen by 500 percent over the past 15 years. "Still, this doesn't mean the workers were hurt," Stossel reports. "Factory wages were up, too—up 70 percent."

The statistics are technically accurate but also terribly misleading. Neither number was adjusted for inflation—a must for an accurate representation of real wages. Furthermore, when the statistic involving factory wages is adjusted, it tells a different story: The average wage of factory workers rose by 3 percent—hardly a great gain. Stossel points out that he got the number from the liberal AFL-CIO and that he believes other statistics prove his point, but he admits that using unadjusted numbers was a mistake: "We shouldn't have done that."

THE TRUTH IS THAT Stossel's stories utilize a remarkably combustible mix: a sexy narrative made out of relatively unsexy material via a constricting medium. Toss in a number of producers, each with the potential to shape a story, and the results are not surprising. Last year, Stossel aired a special called "Is America # One?" His answer was yes, and the reason, he argued, was the United States's relative freedom from government intrusion. At one point Stossel compares Europe and America and argues that Europeans' social-minded labor policies—such as extensive vacation and generous parental leave—make the Continent lag economically behind the more laissez-faire United States. He continues:

STOSSEL: Many economists who once argued that we could learn from Europe, like James Galbraith, have now changed their minds.

GALBRAITH: There might be a moment for the Europeans to learn from us, rather than for us to be studying them.

The problem is that Galbraith, a liberal economist at the University of Texas (and son of Harvard professor emeritus John Kenneth Galbraith), says that one brief sound bite misrepresented his views; he was making a different, almost contradictory point about how Europeans could learn from America's redistributive programs, such as Social Security.

When asked about the Galbraith problem, Stossel sounds concerned but defends his work. "It was something that got put in late," he says. Still, Stossel, who says that he was given only selected clips of the interview, insists that the reporting was in context. Todd Seavey, the associate producer who conducted the interview, denies that the staff made any distortion. Stossel doesn't need to twist other peoples' positions to fit his own, explains Seavey. "For good or ill," Seavey says, "Stossel has proven he's perfectly happy to go on camera and say it himself."

THAT WILLINGNESS TO SPEAK his mind into the microphone—and his libertarian views—makes Stossel somewhat of an outcast in the straitlaced world of New York television news. There's no overt hostility from his colleagues, Stossel says, just some eye-rolling. "Almost no one here agrees with me about these things," he says. "People just aren't interested in it."

Judging by the ratings, some people are. Stossel gets the specials and the viewers because, as Adam Smith might remind us, he is skilled at shaping and delivering his ideas—and because his ideas are in demand.

As he transforms his agenda into prime-time television, Stossel may cut corners, as was revealed in 1992 when he was sued unsuccessfully—over a story involving a dentist who had allegedly performed unneccessary procedures (see "Stossel In Court," page 82). That such a smart and talented reporter can be fallible ought to warn the buyers of television news to beware. But that warning doesn't eliminate the value of Stossel's bringing a strong point of view to the airwaves.

Stossel's perspective is badly needed inside network television, according to Arnold Diaz, who followed in Stossel's professional footsteps by moving from WCBS to ABC, where he has Stossel's old job as *20/20*'s consumer reporter. "As journalists, we deal with government agencies so often—they generate news. It doesn't occur to a lot of us to question it, whether it's even necessary why they're doing it," he says, adding that he doesn't always agree with his friend's conclusions. "He reflects libertarian philosophers that have come before," says Diaz. "He's certainly a worthy messenger."

Stossel is always eager to share his views. In January 1995, he went to Washington to attend the first meeting of a newly formed bipartisan congressional caucus considering regulatory reform. Stossel didn't go to cover the event; he went as a featured speaker to proselytize for deregulation. "I would consider it wrong if I would write a bill or lobby for some specific bill," he was quoted in *USA Today* as having said at the time. "But I'm delighted to pitch the miracle of markets and the evils of regulation every chance I get."

Stossel, who likes to cast himself as a learned scholar who has a responsibility to tell as many people as possible what he has learned, talks a lot. By his count, he has spoken to 27 groups over the past two years. And he has collected more than $263,000 in speaking fees for his trouble.

ABC News policy says employees are allowed to speak to groups they cover or could potentially cover, but they can't accept money for it. Yet Stossel does. He says charging people is his way of thinning out invitations. In addition to conservative political organizations such as ALEC and The Federalist Society, Stossel has spoken to The Michigan Petroleum Association and to Chase Manhattan Bank. Stossel gives most of the money away to charities of his choosing, he says.

Despite ABC's stated policy on speaking fees, Stossel's bosses approve his speeches on a case-by-case basis. But they don't sign off on the charities. They might be interested to learn that one of Stossel's favorites is an obscure nonprofit called the Palmer R. Chitester Fund. One of the fund's initiatives, started last year, is called "Stossel in the Classroom," which takes Stossel's specials and repackages them in a teacher-friendly educational kit. Stossel doesn't receive any monetary compensation from the effort, just the knowledge that he's helping introduce his thoughts and ideas to America's young. ■

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47] be able instantly to register their opinions—on everything from tax-hike proposals to whether homosexuals should serve openly in the military—and authorities will ignore them at their own peril. Representative democracy as we know it would be replaced with this electronic (but easily manipulable) version of a town meeting. Only, as William Saletan wrote in Slate magazine, "Morris would run the meeting."

On vote.com, the issues are framed (by Morris and his staff) with often simplistic pro-and-con summaries that leave little room for nuance or middle ground. You are always just a click away from a Morris opinion column—often a rant against Hillary Clinton—and you are never out of view of a flashing banner ad selling Morris's new book, called—surprise—*vote.com*, which makes the argument that the Internet will soon replace television as the most powerful force shaping our democracy. And as my own double voting (and the fact that Alan Keyes was pronounced the winner of an earlier GOP debate) demonstrates, the results are easily corrupted, or certainly subject to the whims of whoever happens to be motivated to play the game. Another problem with any online poll is that it is limited to people who are online (and that means people who are more likely to be affluent and white).

WEB POLLS ARE A JOKE. BUT WITH VOTE.COM, THE JOKE MAY BE ON US, AS DICK MORRIS TRIES TO CHANGE THE WAY OUR DEMOCRACY WORKS.

But those are minor irritants to Morris, who did not return calls seeking his comment. His site is ad-supported, so if the people come, Morris may be figuring, the ad revenue (presumably from interest groups and others hoping to influence the vote) will follow. It's the privatization of democracy. In the meantime, it's a good platform from which to sell his book (which in turn promotes the website). And unlike the many online surveys that do little more than let the community being served look at itself in a mirror, vote.com's influence is magnified thanks to Morris's role as a political commentator on Fox News.

Morris's colleagues on Fox are always happy to talk about vote.com (which occasionally links from Fox's own website), and Morris, of course, is even happier to oblige. This exchange in December between Morris and Paula Zahn, host of the Fox show *The Edge*, provides a case study in cross (and crass) promotion.

ZAHN: All right, very quickly, in closing tonight, you've been talking a lot about the role the Internet may ultimately play in the way we all vote.

MORRIS: Right.

ZAHN: Now, this isn't going to happen in the general election in 2000, where we're going to be able....

MORRIS: No, but it's happening...right now. Vote.com, the website I'm working with, has launched an Internet presidential primary where you can log right on. If you don't live in New Hampshire and you don't live in Iowa—you can if you do, but wherever you live, you can vote. And you don't have to go freeze your butt off in New Hampshire to vote. You can do it in the privacy of your home.

ZAHN: And what are you going to do with these numbers once you have them?

MORRIS: We're going to quote them on your show.

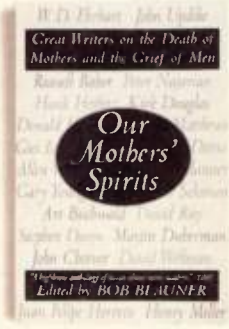
ZAHN: All right.

Hey, nobody said democracy was pretty. ■

I Sold Out To Judith Regan

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 87] decide whether the cover was a stumbling block to sales. *PW* quoted a buyer for Ingram, a major book distributor, who had said that customers might have already had that reaction. "It's not like it's flying off the shelves."

Indeed it wasn't. At least not in the way the Ingram buyer meant—into the arms of eager buyers. But it was, by January, flying off the shelves into cardboard cartons to be sent back to HarperCollins in New York. The debacle of the Diana cover had become clear, even to Judith Regan.



So, once again, plans were made to change the cover and reintroduce the book in April 1998, just in time for Mother's Day. I could hope again, though I also wondered whether the buying public would view a book on the death of mothers as an appropriate gift for that holiday.

But plans for the new cover fell through when HarperCollins sales representatives could not interest bookstores in reordering.

The hardcover had done so poorly that I was surprised that ReganBooks and Harper Perennial even published a softcover edition [pictured below], which they did, in March 1999. This time the cover was Diana-free. It was an attractive enough design that featured the names of the book's contributors. Not a single media outlet took note of it.

All told, as of the latest accounting statement sent to me by HarperCollins, net sales of *Our Mothers' Spirits* through December 1999 totaled just 2,961 copies. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Judith Regan declined our invitation to comment. Here are excerpts of a statement submitted by a HarperCollins public-relations staffer:

"You should take note of Mr. Blauner's acknowledgment [in his book] to Judith Regan. 'I am indebted to Judith Regan for seeing the potential of my subject matter.' Mr. Blauner's more recent comments...are truly surprising, given Mr. Blauner's stated gratitude for Ms. Regan [*sic*] efforts at the time of the publication of his book.

"...Mr. Blauner states that publishing houses handle the chore of obtaining permissions for authors. This may sometimes be the case where an author of an original work incidentally quotes copyrighted materials for which permissions are required. This is not the case with anthologies where it is customarily the editor's responsibility to locate appropriate material and obtain permission for its use. If Mr. Blauner had any issue with this, he should have raised it before he signed a contract...

"Comments about cover selection are irrelevant. As Mr. Blauner recognizes, under the terms of his contract, the publisher had the right to make the final decision about the cover for the book.

"As to Mr. Blauner's comments about Ms. Regan's show on Fox News, it is inaccurate that authors are infrequent guests. Ms. Regan advises me that most of her guests are authors and that very few of them are actresses or actors. In any event, Ms. Regan's selection of guests for her television talk show has no bearing whatsoever on the publication of books under the Regan imprint.

"The paperback edition remains in print and is at this time available for sale from HarperCollins. We are proud to have published the collection of writings on a sensitive subject compiled by Mr. Blauner."

THE REAL WHITE HOUSE

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 95] people going to end up being closer to one another by the end of this episode. So if you start from that, then you can lay on...any dialogue you want and it's fascinating."

Sorkin then made the census plot turn on whether the White House could persuade one of three congressmen to change his vote on a census-related amendment to a spending bill. The rider barred the use of a more accurate "sampling" methodology that would have raised the number of minorities but seemed not to be allowed by the actual language in the Constitution mandating a census. One of the swing legislators, a black man, switches his vote after Toby reminds him in a meeting—with a dramatic reading of the Constitution—that the nation's founding charter counted a slave as less than a full person. It all feels as if Sorkin were saying, "Give me the most boring issue you can think of and I'll make a gripping drama out of it."

Sorkin stitches into that same episode a sequence of three rapid-fire hallway chats that captures the essence of the debate over what to do with the budget surplus—return it to taxpayers or spend it on government programs—better than a hundred dull editorials could:

DONNA: What's wrong with me getting my money back?

JOSH: You won't spend it right.

DONNA: What do you mean?

JOSH: Let's say your cut of the surplus is $700. I want to take your money, combine it with everyone else's money, and use it to pay down the debt and further endow Social Security. What do you want to do with it?

DONNA: Buy a DVD player.

JOSH: See?

DONNA: But my $700 is helping employ the people who manufacture and sell DVD players, not to mention the people who manufacture and sell DVDs. It's the natural evolution of a market economy.

JOSH: The problem is that the DVD player you buy might be made in Japan.

DONNA: I'll buy an American one.

JOSH: We don't trust you.

DONNA: Why not?

JOSH: We're Democrats.

DONNA: I want my money back.

JOSH: Shouldn't have voted for us.

John Wells says he and Sorkin have been determined from the start not to talk down to the audience. "Conversation is actually written in such a way as to be true, complicated, and yet easy to understand," he says.

When it comes to its treatment of political issues, Sorkin and Wells insist *The West Wing* isn't a case of Hollywood lefties mounting a soapbox. It's a charge to which they're clearly sensitive, and with some reason. "He's a liberal who believes in liberals," says former Bush and Reagan domestic policy and political aide James Pinkerton of Sorkin, adding that the show's treatment of political issues invariably comes down to "Republicans bad, Democrats good." In one episode, *The West Wing* went so far as to caricature right-wing religious leaders as bigoted and slightly lunatic.

"Nothing goes into the show without a full pro and con," Wells counters. "Otherwise, it's just somebody preaching to the choir." The show has aired the conservative case against public television and hate-crime laws, for example. President Bartlet hawkishly favored massive retaliation against a much smaller terrorist strike. One issue on which Wells concedes the show hasn't been balanced is gun control. "I don't think any of us really believes in the other side of the argument very much," Wells says. The other side of the argument, of course, is the Second Amendment to the Constitution.

If Sorkin's politics are Democratic, they're not entirely predictable. A child of liberals, the 11-year-old Aaron got bopped over the head with his own McGovern placard when he showed up to tweak Nixon's motorcade as it swung through White Plains, New York. "There's a little part of me that has been trying to get back at that woman my entire life," he says. Yet Sorkin is also a big George Will fan. And he's planning to have Bartlet do a Malibu fund-raiser in a coming episode—not only as a way to dig into campaign finance but to go against liberal type and have fun with dilettante starlets and their "causes."

In the end, a Democratic administration rules *The West Wing*, and the show is definitively left-leaning. But some observers argue that it's not what Sorkin's politics *are* but what his attitude *isn't* that represents the most intriguing, and potentially influential, aspect of *The West Wing*'s success. Sorkin is not cynical. "Aaron starts from...an absolute love for these people [his characters]," says Schlamme.

"I'm not a journalist," Sorkin explains. "My obligation isn't to the truth...my obligation is to captivate you for however long I've asked for your attention." He's right, of course: There's plenty that's not factual in *The West Wing*. But Sorkin "captivates" viewers by making the human side of politics more real than life—or at least more real than the picture we get from the news. For Sorkin, this is simply how he goes about his business. But the culture clash this humanizing instinct represents can't be overstated. By the seemingly innocuous act of portraying politicians with empathy, *The West Wing* has injected into the culture a subversive competitor to the reigning values of political journalism.

"It conveys a truth about the White House that we don't get from other sources," says Jay Rosen, chairman of the journalism department at New York University. When Sam Donaldson and his colleagues stand in front of the White House and give us their report, Rosen argues, they're engaged in two acts of persuasion. On the one hand, they want to convince us that they're giving us the "inside story"; on the other, that they haven't been "taken in" and don't buy the self-image of the White House staff. "What gets lost in that conflict," Rosen says, "is the humanity of the participants."

"There's an unwritten code among political reporters," says former Clinton spokesman Michael McCurry, "that if you write anything that is even semi-flattering or... empathetic that you're somehow or other 'in the tank,' and you're not living up to the true calling of the journalist." In a recent essay in *The New York Times Magazine*, reporter and author Michael Lewis lamented this "dehumanizing prism" in language that reads like a prospectus for *The West Wing*. "There is precious little written or said that would explain to someone who is not a politician why a person would become one," Lewis wrote. "Or what if feels like to be one." "This," he argues, "is just a huge void."

This void is felt strongly by *The West Wing*'s stars, immersed in Sorkin's stories every day. The five actors who were interviewed for this piece said the process of doing the show had enlarged their empathy for public officials and the challenges they face. "You know, I'll read Maureen Dowd," grumbles Bradley Whitford, who plays Josh Lyman. He sounds angry. "The whole tone of it is deeply cynical, deeply, deeply cynical....I think that she's functioning as a performer."

"People go into this work [politics] because they have strong convictions," says Rosen. "The narrative from political journalism is that this melts instantly on contact with political reality. The truth is more complicated. It's interesting that it takes fiction to convey that fact." ◘

Matthew Miller is a syndicated columnist and senior fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Miller worked as an aide in the White House budget office from 1993 to 1995. When The West Wing *was picked up by NBC, he had an agent submit his name for a possible consulting role. He never got a meeting.*

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63] This fall, a jury in U.S. district court in Dallas found that the John's campaign, including its slogan, was false and misleading. It decided that two Hut ads were as well. In early January, the judge in the case ruled that only Papa must pay damages (of $467,619.75) and that Papa must yank its slogan—and never use a recognizable variation of it—from all its advertising, and from napkins, pizza boxes, store signs, and delivery trucks. Papa John's is appealing (and is suing Pizza Hut over another commercial).

What the two pizza chains have been arguing about is not just whether the various claims are greasy, but whether they are also puffy. *Puffery* is an actual term in advertising law. The FTC's Peeler defines it as "a claim that doesn't mean anything to consumers, and is therefore not actionable. If you say a sports car is 'the sexiest European,' as one ad did, that doesn't really convey any objective information to consumers, and they wouldn't expect substantiation. It's just hyperbole."

But hyperbole can communicate all sorts of information—much of it may not be "objective," but it can still be highly persuasive. One customer is now opposing an advertiser's puffery defense in an Ohio court. E*Trade had advertised its online brokerage as "reliable, convenient, fast and efficient" and its technology as "state of the art," saying trades could be "executed and electronically confirmed within seconds." But a client, Truc Hoang of Westlake, Ohio, says that service outages stopped her from completing trades and cost her $40,000. She filed a class action suit against E*Trade (as of late December, the class had not been certified). E*Trade filed for dismissal, citing other cases in which ad claims were considered "mere puffery."

But Hoang's lawyer, David Webster, says, "Puffery shares a lot of the same qualities that have been attributed to the test for obscenity: It's hard to define, but I know it when I see it, and this is not puffery. When a company says, 'We have state-of-the-art, superior technology,' etc., those are objective statements made to lure consumers in, and consumers have a right to rely on those statements in making their choices."

E*Trade spokesman Patrick Di Chiro says, "No technology is 100 percent perfect, but actually our technology is north of 99.7 percent reliable." So the ad claims are true, he says, but even if they can't be proved, they'd still be considered "puffery," based on legal precedent.

Of all the puffy guff, "state of the art" is my favorite. In a TV spot more than a year ago, the prowess of basketball player Teresa Weatherspoon was compared to the "state of the art" technology of Cablevision Systems Corporation, a New York regional cable operator. I get Cablevision, and the cable box's remote control doesn't let you change the volume or even turn on the TV. How can it possibly state that it's state of anything?

Some of the answer lies in the assumption that we consumers are a savvy lot. As Peeler says, "Most of the polls I've seen have found that consumers have a very healthy level of skepticism about ad claims." Well, sure, that's what we tell pollsters, but we keep on buying. Advertising washes over us in places that aren't susceptible to rational thinking or legal distinctions. When I see a product surrounded by high-production values, an attractive celebrity endorser, and a cool attitude, damn if a small part of me doesn't believe that I'm being picky in doubting my cable company's word. Just a little bit more, I start to trust corporate reality over my own.

Coincidence or advertising? ■

Assistant editors Kaja Perina and Julie Scelfo contributed research for this article.

Public to Press: Cool It

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 79] The results for two regions stand out. The Northeast—the media mecca of America—favors restraint, and yet its residents are the most likely to take a look anyhow. Those in the South, home of the Bible Belt, neither want news of this kind shown nor would watch it if it were shown, they say.

Demographically, the desire to see everything is one area where men and women sharply disagree. Men (particularly younger men) are much more likely to want to see it all and watch it all, while women (particularly older women) say they prefer more discretion and would behave accordingly. Less-educated Americans, though not necessarily approving of showing everything, are much more likely to tune in than the better-educated—a fair explanation for the popularity of programs like the *Jerry Springer Show*.

The Un-American Solution?

One of our objectives in this poll was to give Americans a chance to react to various "solutions" to enhance journalistic accountability. Though it's interesting that a meaningful number of respondents support regulating the media, the bigger surprise is that this view cuts across virtually every demographic, geographic, and behavioral subgroup:

- Almost half (48 percent) of all Americans believe that journalists covering politics or government should be required to let readers and viewers know their own political leanings.
- 41 percent believe that journalists should be licensed like doctors. "Just because they're reporters doesn't mean they can go anywhere and ask harmful questions," says 40-year-old Sally, a Maine housewife.
- 42 percent believe that media outlets should be licensed like hospitals.
- One out of four (26 percent) would bar political journalists from participating in political activities of any kind.

The key distinction between those who favor restrictions and those who oppose them is total news consumption. Supporters of these restrictions consume more news than any other segment of the population except seniors. Put another way, the more news you consume, the more likely you are to support restricting the news media.

And fully 72 percent of those who favor restrictions believe that the press goes too far in pursuing the truth, compared to just 43 percent among those who oppose restriction of any kind. Other factors, from partisanship to traditional demographics, have no impact on the desire for media regulation or restriction.

And So...

The public has spoken. Or has it? We are critical of the media in so many ways, and yet we continue to consume news. We complain there is not enough substance, and yet many of us consider shows like *America's Most Wanted* to be hard news. We would tell television news producers to limit what they broadcast, yet most of us admit we want to see more. We are a mass of contradictions, just like the news. ■

Interviews of poll respondents were conducted by assistant editor Leslie Falk.

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66] Ministry sharpshooters firing on a crowd, sweet talking my way past drunken army conscripts manning a remote outpost, and, most memorable of all, traversing a freshly laid Russian minefield with only a frightened teenage private to lead the way. So I'm not a big fan of Russians in uniform toting Kalashnikovs. Nor do I doubt the veracity of the American media accounts of Russian atrocities during this latest Chechen war. War is, as they say, hell.

Sometimes, however, war may be necessary. It's this very possibility that the U.S. media, in their zeal to identify a "bad guy" in the current Chechen conflict, have managed to obscure.

WHAT ABOUT THE INCONVENIENT DETAILS THAT MIGHT SUGGEST THAT THIS WAR IS CONSIDERABLY MORE COMPLEX THAN IT APPEARS?

Consider just two examples from the scores of news stories, editorials, and op-ed pieces that have appeared in major U.S. newspapers since the Russian military operation against Chechnya started, last September.

"Russia's generals are rebuilding their state on the mangled corpses of Chechnya's civilians," Jim Hoagland, *The Washington Post*'s esteemed observer of foreign affairs, wrote in a November 21, 1999, column, headlined "The Ugly New Russia." "Chechens must die for Russian notions of power and territorial control to live again. The bodies are just bricks in the Kremlin's bloody wall of revived nationalism."

Not much context there, to be sure.

Michael Gordon, a *New York Times* correspondent who has spent considerable time reporting from the Russian side of the front lines, provided more balance in a January 4, 2000, dispatch about a Russian businessman who had been kidnapped by an armed gang in Chechnya and freed, apparently by the Russian military. Gordon wrote at some length about the epidemic of kidnappings in Chechnya—"[m]ore than 800 people...in the last few years"—including a group of British communications workers who had been beheaded by their captors.

Except the headline on the piece—"Freed in Chechnya, a Kidnap Victim Serves Russia's Needs"—suggested the businessman's ordeal was principally a propaganda vehicle for Russia. And Gordon's story made the point explicitly.

"As international criticism of Russia's military tactics in Chechnya has increased, Russians have responded by citing the problem of kidnappings, and insisting [they are] doing battle against 'bandits' and 'terrorists.' Today Mr. Dolgalyov [the freed kidnapping victim] was Exhibit A in the Russian public relations campaign."

Is it necessary to sneer at Russia's desire to end the kidnapping plague in Chechnya? Even Chechen civilians are not sneering.

"People really did curse the Chechen fighters," says Rachel Denber, a Human Rights Watch deputy director just back from an investigative tour of the war-torn region, where she interviewed many Chechen refugees. (Human Rights Watch is funded in part by financier George Soros, an investor in this magazine.) "They're sick of it. They feel like they're stuck between a rock and a hard place."

Human Rights Watch, which has issued dozens of scathing reports documenting Russian abuses during the Chechen conflict, can scarcely be described as sympathetic to Moscow. Yet if it can discern shades of gray in this war, what's stopping the American press? ◘

REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32] was not reflected in either of the sidebars. A journalism that does not take into account the cultural differences in our society is simply misleading.

Steven Brill responds: I disagree with Bill in the sense that the real care that needs to be observed has to do with the expected diversity of perspectives, not simple gender. What I mean by that is that in asking about media mergers, we tried—hard—to find different perspectives, such as the owner of an independent bookstore versus the editor in chief of Time Inc. That mattered more than whether the ten people included more men or women. However, when we were asking consumers about what media they consumed, we sought different consumer perspectives—which rightly included a conscious realization that women often consume differently than men. In that regard, though, we definitely should have also included a more racially and ethnically diverse mix.

Bill Kovach replies: But gender and minority status often can provide a different perspective, maybe more so in connection with a job description. That's the whole point. ◘

KICKER

BY ED SHANAHAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY HOVLAND

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