

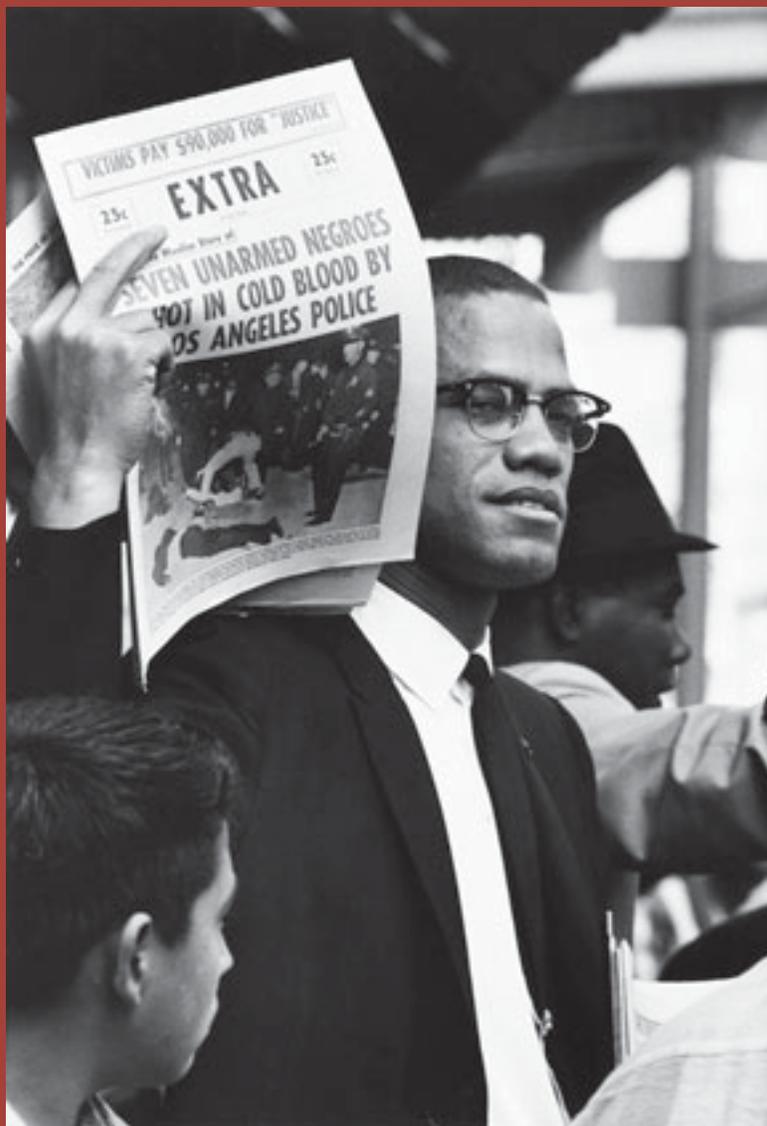
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THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Journalism and Black America: Then and Now



Journalist's Trade: Weblogs and Journalism

Editorial Disasters: Newsrooms and Normal Accident Theory

“... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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Nieman Reports Revisits the Coverage of Black America

Journalists explore connections between the racial climate in newsrooms and news organizations' coverage of race.

By Bob Giles

This issue of Nieman Reports takes a searching look at reporting on black America and at the racial climate and conversations in U.S. newsrooms. These are topics the magazine has visited before and will likely explore again, since the racial situation both inside and outside the newsroom continues to be a source of tension and unfulfilled aspirations.

Pieces published in the years just following the magazine's creation in 1947 reported on the American South and the civil rights movement, describing the dangers and difficulties that reporters and photographers faced in chronicling that struggle. Simeon Booker's account in 1956 of the Emmett Till trial in rural Mississippi told of the uncommon collaboration between 12 black journalists and a few white reporters in investigating the disappearance of witnesses to Till's murder. Simeon, a reporter for *Jet* magazine, and the other black newsmen found allies among white reporters in spite of the local sheriff's order that there was to be no mixing between white and black journalists.

Most reporters covering racial news in the Deep South for mainstream newspapers were white. John Herbers, a chief of United Press International's Jackson, Mississippi bureau, wrote for Nieman Reports in 1962 about the reality of being despised by the white community and a stranger to the ways of life lived by rural blacks. The framework in which the reporter must function, he said, included harassment by the local newspaper and radio stations "for reporting some behind-the-scenes developments that did not fit the official version of what happened."

Many years passed before the focus of racial coverage was broadened to address concerns about the inadequacy that resulted when news staffs had few journalists of color and directing editors who were typically white and male. By 1978, U.S. newspapers began to face up to the reality that their workforce did not reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the communities they served. Journalists of color represented about four percent of the news staff while the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in the nation's population was at least three times as large. That year the American Society of Newspapers Editors (ASNE) decided to use its influence to encourage papers to aggressively recruit journalists of color, hoping that newsroom population would reach parity with the national population by 2000.

Robert C. Maynard, an influential leading voice in this effort, wrote in this magazine in 1979 about the consequences of news organizations whose managerial ranks were "purer white than Ivory Snow." Describing the "unseen

environment" of nonwhite America, Maynard wrote, "If anything accounts for the problems of misportrayal, the answer must begin with those statistics" documenting a dominantly white news workforce.

Newspapers have made modest gains since then, but the newsroom population today of slightly more than 12 percent journalists of color badly lags behind the dynamic growth of a nation that is becoming more and more diverse. Committed editors and newspapers—spurred on by newspaper foundations and news industry organizations like ASNE and minority news organizations—have recruited vigorously and can show gains in hiring journalists of color.

Once on the job, however, many journalists of color don't see promising career prospects and, over time, four of every five leave the newspaper business. It is no secret why retention is the problem. The newspaper industry, by comparison to other industries, invests only modestly in leadership and management training. When spending is tight, training and education, typically, are the first to be cut. By shortchanging their investment in training and education, newspapers are undercutting the value of brainpower and the opportunity to build a culture of lifelong learning that can help sustain a stable, diverse workforce.

In explaining why they turn away from newspaper jobs, journalists of color mention lack of training and opportunity, absence of effective leaders and role models, and uncertainty about the newspaper's commitment to diversity. Constructive training and educational programs would help journalists of color rise to positions of responsibility in which they could serve as mentors to a new generation of minority journalists. Such a nurturing cycle would inevitably influence greater retention of minorities in newspaper jobs, as well as demonstrate to young journalists of color that newsrooms are a welcoming place for them.

The impact of editors of color on story assignments and judgments about news play would help build credibility and trust among the diverse communities our newspapers are seeking to serve better.

Training, education and commitment to opportunity is the surest course for creating leaders and role models who can show the way to new generations of journalists of color and strengthen the effectiveness of newspapers in an increasingly diverse world. If newspapers fail to make good on their intentions, they will become less credible and more marginal as institutions in their communities. ■

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Journalism and Black America: Then and Now

Black and white journalists, at times working as colleagues, at other times separately, have produced the first draft of our nation's difficult history of race relations. In this issue of *Nieman Reports*, journalists examine reporting at the intersection of black and white America and look at the racial conditions, climate and conversations in newsrooms.

Our series of stories begins with journalists' remembrances of covering the emergence of the civil rights movement and subsequent calls for "Black Power." **Jack Nelson**, who covered the civil rights struggle from 1965 to 1970 as the Los Angeles Times's Atlanta bureau chief, observes that "... many journalists, no matter what else they might have covered, look back on that period as the highlight of their careers—a time when the press had a profound impact on the most dramatic and important domestic revolution of the 20th century." **Jack Bass**, the coauthor with Jack Nelson of "The Orangeburg Massacre," reminds us of the national news media's reluctance to report on the February 1968 shooting deaths by state police of three students at Orangeburg's almost all-black South Carolina State College. "In the aftermath of major urban riots, the national media's interest in civil rights faded, and what happened on the campus of Orangeburg, where the victims were black, was out of tune with the times and not considered 'news,'" writes Bass.

The Maynard Institute History Project preserves the unique contributions of African-American journalists, including the journals of Earl Caldwell, a former New York Times reporter and Daily News columnist. In writing about Caldwell's experiences, **Dori J. Maynard**, the institute's president, notes that reporting on the Black Power revolution was "the only time that mainstream media put an important story entirely in the hands of black reporters." **Larry Muhammad**, a reporter with The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky, writes about the 176-year-old black press, its past and present and its impact on ethnic progress. Today, he writes, "... black papers must attract younger readers."

When documentary directors and producers **Whitney Dow** and **Marco Williams** went to Jasper, Texas to tell the story of the brutal dragging death of James Byrd, Jr., they divided their reporting by race. Whitney, who is white, relied on a white crew to interview white residents of Jasper. Marco, who is black, worked with a black crew to hear from black citizens. Dow and Williams edited their stories together to make "Two Towns of Jasper," and here discuss their technique and the challenges they confronted. **Jack E. White**, who wrote the "Dividing Line" column for *Time*, explains why he writes about race no longer. "The debate has gotten so fractious I can't hear myself think." White urges coverage of critical issues such as the "yawning academic achievement gap between African Americans and every other ethnic group in the nation." That challenge is being met by **Tim Simmons**, a reporter for The (Raleigh) News & Observer, whose minority education beat provides the platform to examine such issues in-depth in projects such as "Worlds Apart: The Racial Achievement Gap" and "The New Segregation." As Simmons writes, coverage such as this might never have happened if the paper "didn't have a reporter specifically assigned to a minority education issues beat."

The Jayson Blair situation at The New York Times awakened interest in issues revolving around the work environment of minority journalists. **Neil Henry**, a journalism professor at the University of California at Berkeley, heard from many former students who are black and working in

newsrooms. Henry writes, "... because Blair was young and black and the product of a training program aimed at increasing the racial diversity of the news staff, the scandal and its national news coverage became freighted with an added dimension of race, provoking pain and fury that was especially keen to blacks and other minorities in the industry." **Errin Haines**, entering her second year of the Tribune Company's two-year Minority Editorial Training Program, reflects on her experiences and on possible impacts of Blair's actions. "... for anyone to conclude—or even speculate—that the Blair incident was proof positive that young or minority journalists rise too far, too fast, made me nervous for my colleagues and myself."

Bryan Monroe, assistant vice president for news at Knight Ridder and a vice president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), explores why racial diversity in newsrooms matters and how a few news organizations are meeting diversity goals while so many others are not. Monroe writes, "... It will take 10 times this activity level to even come close to hitting the parity goals for staffing and coverage that our industry has pledged." **William McGowan**, author of "Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism," tells how his arguments were received by members of the journalism community. "Traveling through the intersection of journalism and our nation's racial tensions requires a hard head, if not a helmet," he writes. **Dori J. Maynard** describes finding "a conversation fraught with frustration and mistrust" when she visited newsrooms to talk about diversity, training and the conversations around diversity. Recent NABJ president **Condace L. Pressley**, program director at WSB radio in Atlanta, Georgia, connects the failure to reach diversity goals with how uncomfortable journalists are in speaking about race. NABJ can help, she says, to "create the safe place so desperately needed by journalists to have necessary, difficult and rare conversations about race in the newsroom—and have them across race." **Craig Franklin**, a news producer at KRON, explains how the TV station's "About Race" project and race committee—appointed to examine KRON's coverage of race as well as racial attitudes inside the newsroom—"began to slowly change our company's culture, exposing hidden fault lines and reducing tensions."

Gannett measures its newspapers' commitment to staffing diversity and the "appropriate use of minority experts in reporting stories." **Tom Witosky**, sports project writer for The Des Moines Register, asks whether the policies "amount to cynical political correctness" or if they "uphold journalism's primary responsibility to mirror accurately individual and community accomplishment and failure." **Jan Schaffer**, executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, reviews findings from a report on race reporting, "Delving into the Divide: A Study of Race Reporting in Forty-Five U.S. Newsrooms," that shows why such stories are difficult to cover and provides reporters useful tools for doing so. From a small East Texas town, The Marshall News Messenger editor **Phil Latham** describes how both Bill Moyers and his newspaper explored the roots of his community's racism. In his paper's series, "12 Questions On Race," Latham posed the same questions to six white and six black ministers and published their responses. For a time after the series was published, a Racial Reconciliation Committee was convened in the community "to try to improve the racial climate." ■

Reporting on the Civil Rights Movement

‘... the issue seemed so cut and dry and the injustices so stark that reporters struggled to remain objective....’

By Jack Nelson

In the spring of 1965, as the Los Angeles Times’s recently named Atlanta correspondent, I arrived in Selma, Alabama to find Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. standing on the courthouse steps, demanding voting rights for blacks. Meanwhile, Sheriff Jim Clark, backed by a mounted force of deputies armed with clubs and cattle prods, was yelling, “Get those niggers off the courthouse steps.”

The story went far beyond that confrontation, of course, and I was new on the civil rights beat. But thanks to help from a superb reporter, The New York Times’s John Herbers, I was able to find my way around a confusing and sometimes dangerous situation. It quickly became clear that reporters on the scene felt so deeply about the importance of this movement that at times they even exchanged information with competing publications. In more than 50 years of reporting, I covered no other continuing story where reporters of rival newspapers routinely shared information.

It was a story where the issue seemed so cut and dry and the injustices so stark that reporters struggled to remain objective, though many found it difficult not to become emotionally involved. Seeing hard-eyed state troopers (always described as hard-eyed—and they were) in Selma slamming their clubs against the skulls of blacks who were demonstrating for the right to vote left reporters feeling there weren’t two sides to this story. And there seemed to be only one side to Jim Crow justice when the only black you could find at a county courthouse would be a defendant or one pushing a broom.

As civil rights leader John Lewis, whose skull was fractured at Selma, wrote in his memoir, “Walking With



Civil rights leaders Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., left, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, center, and Rev. Ralph Abernathy held a news conference in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 8, 1963. They suspended racial demonstrations, and King said a settlement was near. *Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

the Wind,” reporters became “very sympathetic to the movement. ... You couldn’t be human and not be affected deeply by these kinds of experiences, in these kind of settings.”

I was reminded of my Selma experience while reading the two-volume “Reporting Civil Rights,” published by The Library of America on the 40th anniversary of the March on Washington. The books—an anthology of covering civil rights from 1941-1973, mostly by journalists but some by authors and civil rights figures—present a compelling history and are a great reference source. As the articles make clear, much of the coverage was exclusive and therefore highly competitive. But when there were massive demon-

strations or dangerous situations, reporters willingly briefed each other.

Learning About Reporters’ Coverage

The problems of covering civil rights were especially daunting in the Deep South in the 1950’s and 1960’s. In those years, the white establishment dug in its heels, and the Ku Klux Klan, the white citizens councils, and other racists lashed out at the media, as well as the civil rights movement, in a last-ditch effort to preserve segregation. As Herbers wrote in an April 1962 *Nieman Reports* article reprinted in the anthology, “fear of being mauled by racists” was just one of many problems report-

ers faced in Mississippi and other Deep South states where white supremacists ruled with an iron hand.

It was not surprising that Herbers's article appeared in *Nieman Reports* rather than the daily press, because in those days journalists generally considered the media's role in covering just about any story to be irrelevant. Even though the media was a major player in the unfolding drama, the public supposedly wasn't interested in problems encountered by reporters.

Nevertheless, many journalists, no matter what else they might have covered, look back on that period as the highlight of their careers—a time when the press had a profound impact on the most dramatic and important domestic revolution of the 20th century. News coverage of the civil rights movement helped galvanize public opinion and prod the government to enact and enforce laws to protect the rights of minorities and demolish the old system of segregation and white supremacy.

The anthology includes so many articles by New York Times reporters that the paper might appear to be over-represented. But the Times was far out front in covering the story, not only focusing on it long before other news organizations, but also devoting more resources and top news space to it and thereby helping make it part of the government's agenda. Claude Sitton, the legendary Southern correspondent of the 1960's, wrote six of the articles in the anthology, including dramatic accounts of the disappearance of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, whose bullet-riddled bodies were discovered under an earthen dam; the Birmingham church bombing that killed four little girls, and the assassination of Medgar Evers, a Mississippi NAACP leader.

Other New York Times reporters whose articles the anthology reprinted include Tom Wicker, Anthony Lewis, David Halberstam, Hedrick Smith, Peter Kihss, Earl Caldwell [See story on page 11 for more on Caldwell's reporting], E.W. Kenworthy, Nan Robertson, and Roy Reed. Reed, once described to me as the newspaper's best writer by Abe Rosenthal, then the Times's execu-

tive editor, wrote a vivid account of "Bloody Sunday" (March 7, 1965) when Sheriff Clark's forces attacked a John Lewis-led voting rights march with clubs, whips and cattle prods, injuring Lewis and 16 others. "The mounted possemen spurred their horses and rode at a run into the retreating mass," he wrote. "The Negroes cried out as they crowded together for protection, and the whites on the sideline whooped and cheered."

In those days most newspapers left the coverage of civil rights to the wire services, which mostly offered bland reports. The *Washington Post* didn't even open an Atlanta bureau until 1970. Major southern newspapers were no different. The *Atlanta Constitution*, where I was an investigative reporter before joining the *Los Angeles Times*, didn't even staff Selma. In fact, the publisher, Ralph McGill, and the editor, Eugene Patterson, both columnists at the *Constitution*, used to debrief me on developments in Selma when I'd return to the *Times Atlanta* bureau.

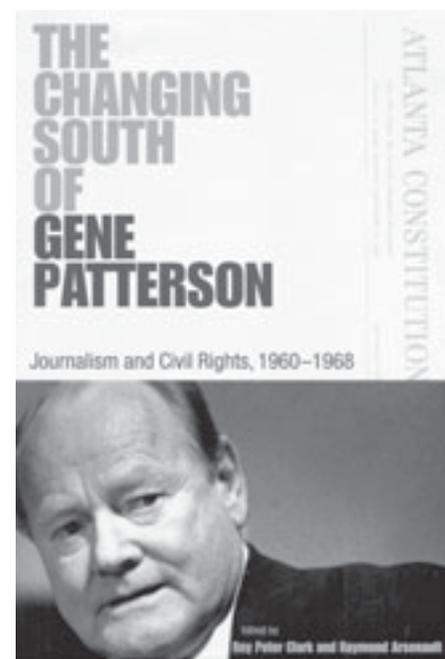
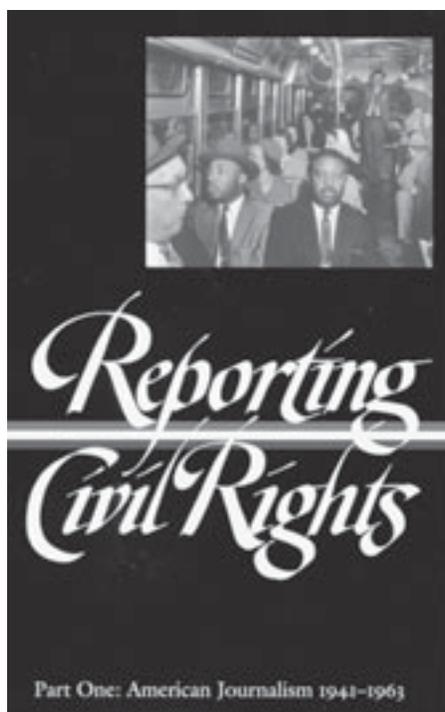
Both McGill and Patterson had wanted to go to Selma, but Jack Tarver, chief executive officer of both the *Constitution* and *The Atlanta Journal*, nixed the idea. Similarly, *Constitution* editors decided against assigning me to

civil rights for fear it would compromise my relations with law enforcement sources and hinder my reporting on corruption in Georgia. Newspaper executives in the South generally thought the less attention given the civil rights movement the better.

However, both McGill and Patterson were liberals who railed against racial injustices in their columns and both won Pulitzer Prizes. McGill won his Pulitzer for writing about hatemongers who bombed an Atlanta synagogue; Patterson was awarded one for his columns decrying violence and injustices, including the Birmingham church bombing.

Happily, the University Press of Florida has published "The Changing South of Gene Patterson: Journalism and Civil Rights, 1960-1968," a collection of columns written by one of the most gifted writers of our time. In columns carried by the *Constitution* during that time, he wrote with passion and lucidity about racial injustices and the damage segregation was inflicting on the South.

One column, a poignant account of the church bombing and the collective guilt of southern whites, began: "A Negro mother wept in the street Sunday morning in front of a Baptist Church



First drafts of civil rights history.

in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her. Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe....” The column ended: “With a weeping Negro mother, we stand in the bitter smoke and hold a shoe. If our South is ever what we wish it to be, we will plant a flower of nobler resolve for the South now upon these four small graves that we dug.”

We often hear newspaper reporting described as the first draft of history.

“Covering Civil Rights” and “The Changing South of Gene Patterson” are superb examples and rich reading for anyone interested not only in history, but also in excellent journalism that helped to tell the stories of race in America in the mid-20th century. ■

Jack Nelson, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, became a reporter at the Biloxi Daily Herald in 1947 after graduating from high school, where his nickname was “Scoop.” He was a

reporter for 13 years at The Atlanta Constitution where he won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing conditions at a state mental institution. After serving as Atlanta bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times from 1965 to 1970, he joined the Times’s Washington bureau where he served 31 years, 21 years as Washington bureau chief. He retired at the end of 2001.

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Documenting the Orangeburg Massacre

Campus killings of black students received little news coverage in 1968, but a book about them keeps their memory alive.

By Jack Bass

At 10:33 p.m. on the night of February 8, 1968, eight to 10 seconds of police gunfire left three young black men dying and 27 wounded on the campus of South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. Exactly 33 years later, Governor Jim Hodges addressed an overflow crowd there in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Auditorium and referred directly to the “Orangeburg Massacre”—an identifying term for the event that itself had been controversial among South Carolinians. Governor Hodges called what happened “a great tragedy for our state” and expressed “deep regret.”

His audience that day included eight men in their fifties—including a clergyman, a college professor, and a retired Army lieutenant colonel—who had been shot that fateful night. Some of them still had lead in their bodies from gunshot wounds. For the first time, survivors were honored at this annual memorial service for the three students who died, Samuel Hammond, Delano Middleton, and Henry Smith. Their deaths, which happened more than two years before gunfire by national guardsmen in Ohio killed four students at Kent State University, marked the first such tragedy on any American

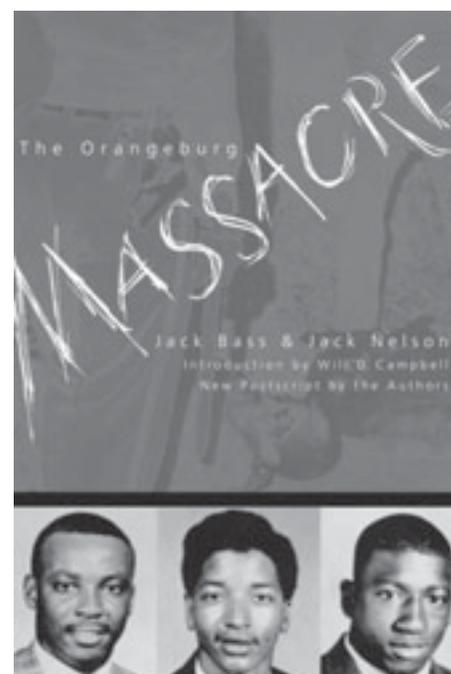
college campus.

Unlike Kent State, the students killed at Orangeburg were black, and the shooting occurred at night, leaving no compelling TV images. What happened barely penetrated the nation’s consciousness.

In an oral history project done during that 33rd anniversary, the eight attending survivors told their stories. Robert Lee Davis, a 260-pound football player when he was shot, was one of them. He drove from the small county seat town an hour away, where he worked with emotionally disturbed children. He told his interviewer, “One thing I can say is that I’m glad you all are letting us do the talking, the ones that were actually involved, instead of outsiders that weren’t there, to tell you exactly what happened.”

The Orangeburg Shootings

The shootings occurred two nights after an effort by students at the then almost all-black college to bowl at the city’s only bowling alley. The owner refused. Tensions rose and violence erupted. When it ended, nine students and one city policeman received hospital treatment for injuries. Other stu-



dents were treated at the college infirmary. College faculty and administrators at the scene witnessed at least two instances in which a female student was held by one officer and clubbed by another.

After two days of escalating tension, a fire truck was called to douse a bonfire lit by students on a street in front of



Tyrone Caldwell, a student at South Carolina State College, shook his finger at law officers after arrests were made when black students were barred from an all-white, private bowling alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina, February 6, 1968. Windows were smashed, cars overturned, and police hospitalized before the crowd dispersed. *Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

the campus. State troopers—all of them white, with little training in crowd control—moved to protect the firemen. As more than 100 students retreated inside the campus, a tossed banister rail struck one trooper in the face. He fell to the ground bleeding. Five minutes later, almost 70 law enforcement officers lined the edge of the campus. They were armed with carbines, pistols and riot guns—short-barreled shotguns that by dictionary definition are used “to disperse rioters rather than to inflict serious injury or death.” But theirs were loaded with lethal buckshot, which hunters use to kill deer. Each shell contained nine to 12 pellets the size of a .32 caliber pistol slug.

As students began returning to the front to watch their bonfire go out, a patrolman suddenly squeezed several rounds from his carbine into the air—apparently intended as warning shots. As other officers began firing, students fled in panic or dived for cover, many getting shot in their backs and sides and even the soles of their feet.

Davis recalled in his oral history interview: “The sky lit up. Boom! Boom!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! And students were hollering, yelling and running. I went into a slope near the front end of the campus, and I kneeled down. I got up to run, and I took one step; that’s all I can remember. I got hit in the back.”

Later, Davis lay on the bloody floor of the campus infirmary, head to head with Hammond, a friend and quiet freshman halfback who also got shot in the back, and watched him die. Smith, a tall, slender ROTC student who had called his mother at two a.m. to tell her about the “shameful” beating of the female students by policemen, died after arriving at the hospital with five separate wounds. Middleton, a 200-pound high school football and basketball star whose mother worked as a maid at the college, died after asking her to recite the 23rd Psalm for him and then repeating it himself while lying on a hospital table with blood oozing from a chest wound over the heart.

Of 66 troopers on the scene, eight later told FBI agents they had fired their riot guns at the students after

hearing shots. Some fired more than once. A ninth patrolman said he fired his .38 caliber Colt service revolver six times as “a spontaneous reaction to the situation.” At least one city policeman—he later became police chief—fired a shotgun.

At a noon press conference the next day in Columbia, South Carolina, Governor Robert E. McNair called it “one of the saddest days in the history of South Carolina” and referred to “this unfortunate incident.” He expressed concern that the state’s “reputation for racial harmony had been blemished.” Contrary to all evidence, McNair also said the shooting occurred off campus. He placed blame on “black power advocates” and added other inaccurate embellishments.

Reporting on the Massacre and Its Aftermath

In federal court more than a year later, a jury took less than two hours to acquit nine troopers charged with imposing summary punishment without due process of law. The trial uncovered stark facts about this armed attack on a college campus, and this evidence helped immeasurably in research that a fellow Nieman, Jack Nelson, and I did in writing “The Orangeburg Massacre,” a book first published in 1970. The book has been accepted by historians as the definitive account of what happened that night and of actions that took place in its aftermath.

In the fall of 1970, two-and-a-half years after the shooting, a jury in Orangeburg convicted Cleveland L. Sellers, Jr. of “riot” because of limited activity at the bowling alley two nights before the shooting. Sellers, who had grown up 20 miles from Orangeburg, had returned from the Deep South combat zone of the civil rights struggle as national program director for the militant Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The presiding judge threw out charges of conspiracy to riot and incitement to riot, but the charge of riot stood. “Nobody here has ever put the defendant into the area of rioting on Wednesday or Thursday [the night of the shooting]

with the exception that he was wounded and that to my mind means very little,” the judge commented. Sellers, who is profiled in the book as “the scapegoat,” served seven months of a one-year sentence in state prison, with early release for good behavior.

In a November 1970 report on the Sellers trial in the *Southern Patriot*, Dave Nolan (now a historian for civil rights and other issues in St. Augustine, Florida) wrote that had the shooting happened “earlier, there might have been a public outcry. But this was 1968, not 1964, and in the intervening years civil rights demonstrations had come to be seen as ‘riots’—and most whites seemed to feel that it was justified to put them down as brutally as possible.” He suggested that the slaughter of the Vietnam War had so brutalized the public mind as to make three black lives “seem that much less important.”

The Associated Press initially misreported the shooting as “a heavy exchange of gunfire”—and didn’t correct it. In the aftermath of major urban riots, the national media’s interest in civil rights faded, and what happened on the campus at Orangeburg, where the victims were black, was out of tune with the times and not considered “news.” Few questioned Governor McNair’s misleading account.

In his report, Nolan concluded, “A new book, ‘The Orangeburg Massacre,’ ... will hopefully prick the public conscience.” Our book was widely and positively reviewed, and it also received extensive news coverage, especially its disclosures about shoddy FBI practices that included false statements by FBI agents on the scene to Justice Department superiors to cover up for the state troopers. F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover sent me a three-page letter—scalding in tone but erroneous and defensive in content. Together with my rebuttal letter to him, it generated another spate of news stories.

In many cities where the book had received rave reviews, however, it was unavailable in major bookstores. Although Hoover’s wrath scared away a syndicate that had committed to purchase rights for a series of newspaper articles, the distribution problem



Two black demonstrators killed in the Orangeburg Massacre lie on the ground at the edge of South Carolina State College in Orangeburg on February 8, 1968. Following three days of protests, which began when blacks were barred from entering a bowling alley by the proprietor, state police and national guardsmen confronted demonstrators. Three students were killed and 27 wounded. *Photo courtesy of The Associated Press.*

flowed from our editor (now deceased), who had been described to me by an author who had worked with him as “brilliant—and the most vindictive person I’ve ever met.” With us, he soon became contentious. Once, when I insisted to a sales clerk at a bookstore in Philadelphia that the book actually existed, he opened the current issue of “Books in Print,” showed me there was no entry for “The Orangeburg Massacre,” and said, “You must be mistaken. There is no such book.”

Working to Right the Wrongs

Journalism, of course, requires that reporters remain detached from events they cover. But since becoming an academic, I have been free to do what I can

to secure the Orangeburg Massacre’s place in history and to see that my native state addresses issues of truth and justice. Along the way, I have authored or coauthored six other books, including a text for a television history course on the American South since World War II—a project for which I served as director and executive editor. That project led indirectly to a 1984 reissue of “The Orangeburg Massacre” by Mercer University Press.

Subsequently, I became involved in the process that led a decade ago to the pardon of Sellers, who then received a faculty appointment at the University of South Carolina (USC). Despite a master’s degree from Harvard and PhD from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he had been unable to

get a college teaching job in South Carolina. He remains at USC, directing the African American Studies program and teaching classes that consistently are oversubscribed. In June he received the 2003 Distinguished Service Award from the mainstream Greater Columbia Community Relations Council.

When I returned to South Carolina in 1999 as professor of humanities and social sciences at the College of Charleston, I became involved in efforts that led to a state historical marker about the Orangeburg Massacre being placed on the South Carolina State campus. The 2001 oral history program developed from a student project in a "Depth Reporting" class I taught, and Governor Hodges made his speech after I dropped off a copy of "The Orangeburg Massacre" at his office. He later told me he was 11 when the shooting occurred and had never really understood what happened until he read the book.

Historian Bill Hine at South Carolina State has worked closely with me on many of these issues, as well as convening a panel on Orangeburg at last year's Southern Historical Associa-

tion annual meeting, the first such presentation at a major academic conference. It attracted an overflow crowd.

This year I produced a 35-minute video about the Orangeburg story based on the oral history interviews, which I showed to the 2003 class of Nieman Fellows. On that visit I also met with producers from Northern Lights Productions in Boston, who have begun working on a major documentary about the Orangeburg Massacre. As I write, a major religious denomination in the state is developing a plan to use the video as a mean of developing dialogue around the issue of race.

On this year's 35th anniversary, Governor Mark Sanford went a step beyond what Governor Hodges had said, issuing a statement: "I think it's appropriate to tell the African-American community in South Carolina that we don't just regret what happened in Orangeburg 35 years ago—we apologize for it." Two black state senators responded by introducing legislation calling for an official state investigation (there's never been one) and report of what happened. One of them told the

Los Angeles Times that you don't apologize for something unless you're guilty. Now there is interest in a film.

In the concluding sentence of a 2002 postscript to a new paperback edition of our book, Nelson and I wrote, "Whether the state eventually provides restitution as the final stage of reconciliation, as Florida did more than a half-century after the destruction of the all-black town of Rosewood, remains to be seen." ■

Jack Bass, a 1966 Nieman Fellow, as Columbia, South Carolina bureau chief for The Charlotte Observer covered the tragedy as it unfolded in 1968. He received the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Book Award grand prize for "Taming the Storm," a biography of Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. of Alabama. Bass spent 12 years as professor of journalism at the University of Mississippi, received a PhD at Emory University, and is now a professor of humanities and social sciences at the College of Charleston.

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The Work and Struggles of Black Reporters

Covering the Black Power revolution 'was the only time that mainstream media put an important story entirely in the hands of black reporters.'

By Dori J. Maynard

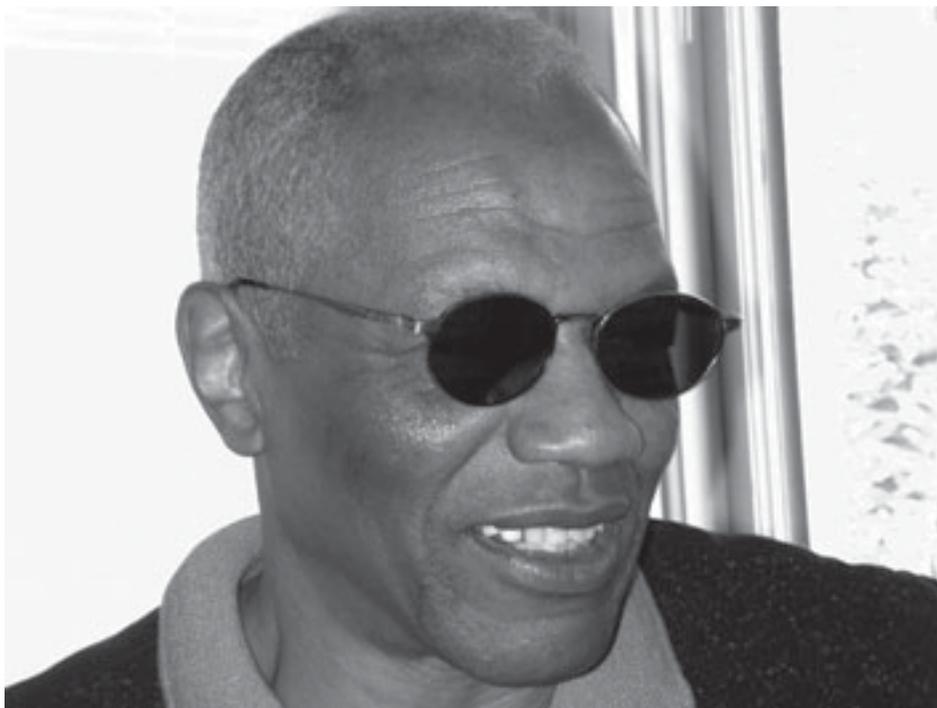
It was an era unlike any other. It came on the heels of the civil rights movement. First came the urban explosions of the mid-1960's known as "the riots" and then the calls of "Black Power" and the emergence of "the black consciousness movement." What took place became known as "the black revolution," and it was a revolution that changed the country and changed the way the media covered issues involving race in this country.

White journalists, many of whom

risked their lives and made their careers, covered the civil rights movement. But as civil rights morphed into Black Power, white journalists could not cover all aspects of the emerging story. Suddenly, white editors hired black journalists who had been repeatedly rejected from scores of newspapers.

The Maynard Institute History Project and its Robert C. Maynard Oral History Collection document and preserve the stories of those courageous

African-American journalists who broke into general circulation media during the turbulent 1960's and 1970's. The two-part project includes The Caldwell Journals. Written by former New York Times reporter and Daily News columnist Earl Caldwell, the serialized account of those stormy years captures the dramatic tale of the journalist behind the words, the journalist as player. The Robert C. Maynard Oral History Collection captures the voices of journalists telling their own stories. Those



Former New York Times reporter Earl Caldwell at the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. *Photo by Joaquim Siopack/Courtesy of the Maynard Institute.*

interviewed include Ed Bradley, of “60 Minutes,” Charlayne Hunter-Gault, of CNN, Institute cofounder Nancy Maynard, and Earl Caldwell. The Institute also plans to document the stories of journalists from other ethnic groups who broke general circulation barriers in the news media.

This collection explicitly documents—for the first time—the unique contributions of African-American journalists, and it stands as a rebuttal to those who claim that diversity is at the root of a decline in the quality of journalism. Hearing and reading what can be found in this archive makes it abundantly clear that it was white journalists who reported on the civil rights movement (except for those reporters from the black press), while it was mainly black reporters who covered this other era—Black Power, black consciousness, and the black revolution. In fact, this became the only time that mainstream media put an important story entirely in the hands of black reporters. That was a decision borne from necessity. With cries of “white reporter out,” black journalists were the only ones who were able to get the story.

Covering the Black Power Story

As Caldwell explains in his journals, the beginning of the change happened on the day Malcolm X was assassinated. “In Harlem on the Sunday that Malcolm X was killed, two reporters were right up front in the Audubon Ballroom, so close to the podium that when the shooting started, they had to dive to the floor for cover,” Caldwell wrote.

“Being there changed a lot for the two journalists. But how it happened that Stan Scott and Gene Simpson got into the ballroom at all that afternoon played a large part in ushering in a whole new era for black reporters. In the epilogue of ‘The Autobiography of Malcolm X,’ the author, Alex Haley, explained that on the day of his assassination Malcolm X specifically ordered that no press be allowed inside the ballroom. When Scott and Simpson arrived for Malcolm’s meeting they had their press credentials in clear view.

“At the door, they were greeted by one of Malcolm’s lieutenants. ‘No press allowed,’ he told them. Stunned, the two pondered the ‘no press’ edict until a suggestion was volunteered.

Malcolm’s aide pointed to their press credentials. ‘Put ‘em in your pocket,’ he said. They complied. Once they did that, they were told, ‘As black citizens, you can go on in.’

“Scott was covering that day for the UPI news service; Simpson was with WMCA radio. After the kind of exclusive they reported that day, there were significant rewards to be reaped. Scott was enticed to leave UPI and join WINS radio, then New York’s premier all-news station. Simpson was lured to television, first as a writer at the local CBS station in New York and then to WABC as an on-camera reporter.” (For the rest of the story go to www.maynardije.org and click on The Caldwell Journals.)

These are the important stories at the core of the project—stories of black reporters who were at the center of this revolution. Until now, black reporters who covered this era rarely had opportunities to tell their stories in books, in documentaries, and in magazine articles. As a result a large part of history remains untold.

Another story largely ignored in books that document the news media is the genesis of shield laws. As the Black Panthers rose in prominence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice began to demand that black reporters “spy” on the Black Panthers. They did this by demanding notes, tape recordings, and other information gathered by reporters. Caldwell, who was then with The New York Times in its San Francisco bureau, was a particular target. There was an effort to force him to appear before a federal grand jury investigating the Panthers.

In response, black reporters across the nation organized and led a legal fight against the government. Bay Area black journalists began publishing their own newspaper, “Ball and Chain Review,” to publicize this case and their actions. They convened the first national gathering of black reporters. And they obtained then Stanford University professor and noted Constitutional lawyer Anthony Amsterdam to argue their case. That battle reached the Supreme Court, where the government won.

However, the case created the rationale for state-enacted “shield laws,” which protect reporters’ notes from government seizure.

The lawsuit is well known. But the story behind it—the way black reporters organized to fight for their rights to be reporters who covered the black community and didn’t “spy” for the FBI—has largely been ignored. These

tapes and the History Project remind us of these journalists’ contributions to our craft. ■

Dori J. Maynard, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is president of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. Prior to being named president in January 2001, she directed the History Project. She also

heads the Fault Lines Project, a framework that helps journalists more accurately cover their communities, and is coauthor of “Letters to My Children,” a compilation of nationally syndicated columns by her late father, Robert C. Maynard, a 1966 Nieman Fellow.

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The Black Press: Past and Present

‘Once considered an outdated protest medium, the black press today is appreciated as crucial to ethnic progress.’

By Larry Muhammad

African-American newspaper publishers got a new and unlikely colleague in 1998—boxing promoter Don King. That’s right, the controversial sports impresario with the trademark Afro, outbidding all comers, paid \$760,000 for the Cleveland Call & Post, rescuing from bankruptcy an illustrious black weekly dating to 1902.

“The Lord is directing my path,” he told a convention of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), trade group of America’s black press. And he promised in a Call & Post editorial to “continue the legacy of founder Williams O. Walker. The light will continue to shine.”

Skeptics might see an embattled public figure burnishing his image after making millions in the fight game. But almost immediately the native Clevelander bought new equipment for the paper, replaced its phone system, and has used his deep pockets and high-powered contacts to increase advertising and circulation.

Naturally, Cleveland readers and the 200-some publishers in the NNPA welcomed King with open arms. But it wasn’t the only time that the financially strapped black press needed a knight to rescue a failing but important institution.

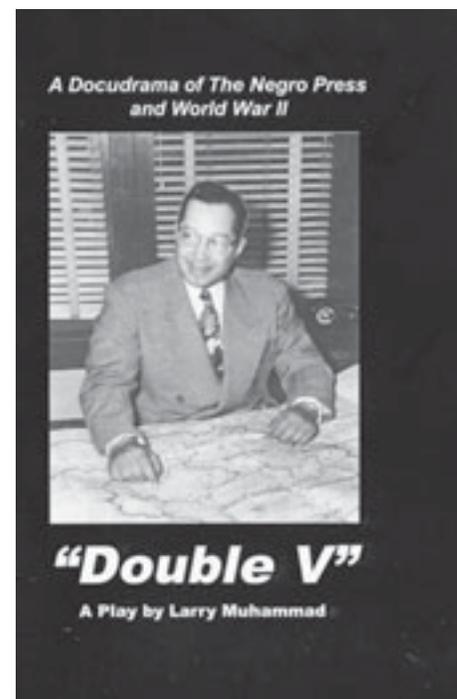
Take The Chicago Defender.

Founded in 1905 and one of the greatest newspapers ever published, the Defender jump-started the Great Migration in the early 1900’s, when millions heeded its call to leave the Klan terror and pseudo-slavery of the South behind for freedom and opportunity up North. In 1928 it helped elect Oscar DePriest the first black congressman after Reconstruction, pushed President Harry Truman to integrate the U.S. military in the 1940’s, and pioneered demands for racial equality that sparked the civil rights movement. It went daily in 1956 and acquired a regional chain circulating 522,000 papers. But its future was thrown into limbo in 1997 with the death of publisher John H.H. Sengstacke. Then, in late 2002, after five years of legal and financial wrangling, it was bought for \$10 million by Real Times, Inc., a Chicago-based multimedia company headed by Thomas Picou, a Sengstacke family member.

“Chicago Daily Defender remains in Black hands,” said a relieved black journalism review on its Web site, www.blackjournalism.com.

The Link to Ethnic Progress

Once considered an outdated protest medium, the black press today is appreciated as crucial to ethnic progress.



And a host of individuals and advocacy groups are coalescing to support it. The Defender deal, for instance, also reversed the uncertain fortunes of the 67-year-old Michigan Chronicle by attracting Detroit-based investors, including District Judge Greg Mathis, funeral director O’Neil Swanson, Detroit Black Chamber of Commerce chair Vivian Carpenter, and others.

Earlier this year, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People board chairman Julian Bond, the National Black Anti-Defamation League, and other groups, protested a Black History Month advertising campaign by Nissan that excluded black papers. The National Black Family Empowerment Agenda, a clearinghouse for ideas on racial progress that sponsors initiatives like “Renounce and Denounce the N-Word Resolution” and publishes its own paper, *The Challenger*, has a “buy black” program benefiting media. Visitors to its Web site (www.nbfea.com) can complete a resolution form pledging to “subscribe to at least one black newspaper, and call upon public and private entities to guarantee an equitable share of advertising revenue.”

And when Black Entertainment Television (BET) was sold to Viacom in 2001, which subsequently canceled BET’s main public affairs shows—the newsmagazine “BET Tonight with Ed Gordon” and “Lead Story,” which featured heavy-hitting political pundits Clarence Page, Cheryl Martin, DeWayne Wickham, George Curry, and Armstrong Williams—the NNPA made it an object lesson on the perils of nonblack ownership. “Even with its videos, the old BET provided more black-oriented public affairs programs than all of the other cable networks combined,” wrote NNPA national correspondent Artelia C. Covington.

NNPA leaders have publicly criticized the recent FCC vote relaxing ownership restrictions as a threat to alternative voices like the black press, at a time when affirmative action and a range of social issues are under assault. And they’ve capitalized on public relations opportunities, like last year’s race-based boycott of the Philadelphia Daily News over insensitive crime coverage. Six black newspapers promoted it, touting their own journalism bona fides in a related advertising campaign with the tagline, “More than 1.2 million readers every week get the truth about the black community from the Black Press.” Participating papers included not only smaller publications like the 60,000-circulation *Neighborhood Leader* and

Scoop, which distributes 105,000. There was also *The Black Suburban Journal* at 150,000, *Philadelphia Sun* and *Philadelphia New Observer*, both at 240,000, and the 420,000-circulation *Philadelphia Tribune*.

At the NNPA’s 63rd annual convention in June, there were some 400 publishers, editors, writers and photographers representing not only standard-bearers like the 70-year-old *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 98-year-old *Chicago Defender*, and 119-year-old *Philadelphia Tribune*, the nation’s oldest continuously published black newspaper. There were relative newcomers like the *Ft. Lauderdale Westside Gazette*, started in 1971, and the *Villager*, founded in 1973 in Austin, Texas.

There were old hands, like newly elected NNPA president Sonceria Mesiah-Jiles, publisher of the *Houston Defender*, but also new blood like George Curry, the *Chicago Tribune* veteran, chosen National Association of Black Journalist’s “2003 Journalist of the Year.” Curry is editor in chief of *BlackPressUSA.com*, the official NNPA News Service Web site and an online network of 15 black-owned papers, including the *New York Amsterdam News*, *The Jacksonville (Fla.) Advocate*, *The Toledo Journal*, *Philadelphia New Observer*, and *Milwaukee Courier*.

Curry covered the war on Iraq for NNPA News Service and *BlackPressUSA.com*, noting in his online journal, “Eight Days in Doha, Qatar,” that outgoing NNPA president John J. “Jake” Oliver, Jr., a black press veteran and publisher of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, schooled him on the gravity of a black media presence at the scene. Curry wrote: “What Jake saw at the outset and I didn’t was that my presence in the daily briefings would do wonders for the NNPA. In his mind, my being there allowed us to play on the world stage and let the world know that there is a strong, vibrant black press in the United States. ... Just as many African Americans, even those who oppose the war on Iraq, take pride in U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks when he steps up to the briefing room’s podium every day, there would be a certain segment of black America that

would also be proud to see a black journalist ask questions about Iraq.”

As a war correspondent, Curry continued a proud black press tradition. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Chicago Defender*, and other papers provided critical insights on both world wars from regular dispatches by correspondents on the ground. In the 1960’s, *Muhammad Speaks* had bureaus in Africa and at the United Nations.

The Black Press’s History

The U.S. black press is 176 years old this year. It began in 1827 when John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish started *Freedom’s Journal* in New York. By the Civil War, 40 black newspapers were being published. And, during the 1920’s and 30’s, when major papers virtually ignored black America, the glory days of the black press began.

Back then, major papers usually wouldn’t even run African-American obituaries. Black papers became the primary means of group expression and main community service outlet, reporting on job opportunities and retailers that didn’t discriminate, and covering charity events in uplifting society pages with big pictures of smiling, dignified black people enjoying each other’s company. Politics, sports, money and social issues were reported from the perspective of black readers. The careers of Lena Horne, Little Richard, Paul Robeson, and many other entertainment greats were promoted in their early stages before major media took notice, and editorial writers crusaded for open housing, quality schools, voting rights, fair employment, and equal accommodations—demands that later formed the civil rights agenda. There were bylined stories from America’s leading black activists and intellectuals—Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Langston Hughes in *The Chicago Defender* and W.E.B. DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad in the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Black publishers grew rich and powerful. Robert S. Abbott started the *Defender* with \$13.75 and became one of America’s first black millionaires. By

1929, the Defender circulation was 230,000 a week, but the Pittsburgh Courier was biggest, topping 300,000 with 15 editions across the country. In 1932, Courier publisher Robert L. Vann, Abbott and others steered black voters en masse to the Democratic Party, breaking traditional ties to the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln and helping to elect Franklin D. Roosevelt President. Gunnar Myrdal's landmark 1944 study, "An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy," said the strongest, most influential institution among blacks was its crusading press. It set the stage for—and helped engineer—monumental change from school desegregation in 1954 to the voting rights bill of 1957, the marches, sit-ins and civil rights legislation of 1964.

By the Black Power era, the formerly cutting-edge medium was considered powerless. The black press was considered, at best, a farm team for major dailies, which recruited top black journalists to cover the civil rights movement and eventually attracted readers and advertisers once considered the black press's captive market. Conventional wisdom by the 1980's was that the black press, by doing such a bang-up job promoting racial equality, had made itself obsolete.

The Black Press Today

In reality, racism remains a major obstacle to black progress in America today. Forty years after the March on Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream is still unachieved—and the black press is still on the case. The NNPA, founded in 1940, has kept the professional house in order, promoting journalism excellence as an alternative media industry. Its NNPA News Service supplies government and foreign affairs coverage to member publications and distributes nationally the local stories they originate.

There is also the NNPA Foundation, a tax-exempt entity that awards scholarships, runs a student internship program, and bestows journalism prizes like the A. Phillip Randolph Messenger Award for Excellence. In partnership

with Howard University, it also operates the Black Press Institute that conducts market research and career development seminars and archives black newspapers. Two years ago, the NNPA created BlackPressUSA.com. The Web site is a project of the Black Press Institute and handled by XIGroup, a Web development firm co-owned by Joy Bramble, publisher of The Baltimore Times, an NNPA member publication. The project has increased the number of black papers online by helping to create or update individual sites and linking them to BlackPressUSA.com.

The Web site features news and commentary exclusively by black journalists from black-owned publications, presenting itself as "a gateway" to America's black press with a combined readership of 15 million. It is a specialty medium, and its stories are unlikely to appear in other major newspapers. What follows is a sampling of headlines:

Bush's Tax Cuts Crippled the Poor

The Questions Sisters Ask About General Vincent Brooks

Harlem Guard Unit is Prepared for Iraq

Blacks Fear War With Iraq Would Drain Resources From Social Programs

Lawsuit Says DaimlerChrysler Treated Black Car Buyers Unfairly

Study: Blacks Live Closer to, Suffer More From Power Plants

In the wake of the Jayson Blair situation, George Curry's article, "Colorizing The New York Times Plagiarism Case," appeared on the Web site. It typifies the alternative perspective readers of the black press rely on. As Curry wrote, "When it was discovered that columnist Mike Barnicle of The Boston Globe and Stephen Glass of The New Republic had engaged in writing stories that contained more fiction than fact, no one indicted all white journalists for their misdeeds or blamed it on white privilege," Curry wrote. "To be blunt, they were simply

thieves. And so was Blair."

Ever scrappy and rambunctious, the black press doesn't hold much sacred. Even the highly regarded documentary, "The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords" got the once-over for historical omissions and faulty research in a 2000 Journal of MultiMedia History essay by Reginald Owens, former managing editor of The Informer and Texas Freeman. In an otherwise complimentary review, Owens wrote that the 1998 film minimized the black press's role in the Harlem Renaissance and Black Power movement; underplayed its importance in electoral politics; didn't mention Ebony and Jet, the Johnson Publishing Co. magazines that first attracted national ads by developing a black middle-class audience, and generally misrepresented black newspapers by prematurely ending its fascinating saga in 1975.

"Yes, there are fewer readers," Owens acknowledges. "Yes, black papers are no longer the main media for many African Americans. Yes, the number of black publications goes up and down depending on social and political circumstances. Nonetheless, the black press is no more dead than the white press. An analysis of the numbers—historical and current—simply does not support the idea."

Owens quotes circulation numbers from Gales Directory of National Publications and Broadcast Media, showing long-term growth that disputes perceptions of a black press in decline. Totaling about 150 papers with three million readers in 1965, shortly before the "Soldiers Without Swords" timeline ends, the black press actually included 230 papers in 1998 when the documentary aired, according to Gales, which listed in its 2001 edition 237 publications with 15 million readers.

Strengthening the Black Press

But the black press has a ways to go before reaching its full potential.

Overall, coverage must be improved. The Philadelphia Tribune swept the awards competition at this year's NNPA convention, taking the coveted

Russwurm Award for “Best Newspaper in America” and placing first in five categories—Best News Pictures, Community Service, Best Business Section, Best Church Page, and Best Entertainment Section. More black newspapers must perform at this high level of quality journalism.

Black papers must seek advertising more aggressively. There are few ads on the BlackPressUSA.com Web site, and when King first took over the Call & Post, some Cleveland advertisers said the newspaper’s ad reps had been slow to approach them. But to win big accounts, black papers need to stop relying on protests and moral suasion and instead bring an appealing readership demographic to the table. This means black papers must attract younger read-

ers. The average NNPA reader is 44 years old, 54 percent male and 60 percent college trained; it is not the free-spending 20-something reader that most advertisers want.

But most of all, black papers must continue the proud tradition of courageous journalism established at arguably its finest hour, during World War II. I wrote a play about it, “Double V: A Docudrama of the Negro Press and World War II,” which dramatically presents fearless black publishers putting out damn good papers despite newspaper shortages, unfair rationing, FBI harassment, and loss of advertisers. The “Double V” campaign—victory against Hitler abroad and victory against racism at home—not only set a standard for wartime news coverage but

also helped integrate the U.S. military in 1948.

NNPA president Messiah-Jiles said in a press statement: “What the black press offers is a historical record, which is a base for knowledge and a catalyst for change. It can empower us to act, and also challenge the powers that be to move in a positive direction.” ■

Larry Muhammad is a reporter for The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky. His play, “Double V: A Docudrama of the Negro Press and World War II,” was published in 2002 by Harmony House and is available directly from the author.

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A Racially Motivated Murder Leads to a Uniquely Reported Documentary

Whites interviewed whites. Blacks interviewed blacks. The stories came together.

Whitney Dow and Marco Williams directed and produced “Two Towns of Jasper,” a film broadcast this year as part of the P.O.V. series on the Public Broadcasting Service. In the article that follows, Dow and Williams create a dialogue of questions and answers to explain how and why they divided their reporting along racial lines to document a racial hate crime in the small Texas town of Jasper. In the opening section—as they speak of themselves in the third person—they describe how their project began.



Codirectors Whitney Dow (left) and Marco Williams (right) outside the Jasper, Texas county courthouse. Photo by Danny Bright.

How It Began

On June 7, 1998, perhaps the most vicious, racially motivated murder since the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till occurred in Jasper, Texas. In the early

hours of the morning, James Byrd, Jr., an African American, was beaten, then chained to the back of a pick-up truck and dragged for three miles until his

body disintegrated and his head was decapitated by a roadside culvert. Three white men from Jasper—John William King, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and Shawn Allen Berry—were arrested for kidnap and murder.

In the days following the murder, Whitney Dow called Marco Williams, his friend of over 20 years. As the two spoke about the murder, they both expressed dismay, shock and outrage at the crime. However, Marco (who is black) did not share Whitney’s (who is white) surprise that so brutal an act, one motivated by race, could occur in the last half of the last decade of the 20th century. Over the course of the next three months, race contin-

ued to serve as a catalyst in their discussions, and Whitney and Marco decided to create a documentary on the events in Jasper and the subsequent trials of

the three men accused of killing Byrd.

With the perception divide being a recurrent theme in their talks, they concluded that the best and, in fact, the only logical way to document the town where James Byrd was murdered, was by using segregated crews. Subsequently, Marco spent a year in Jasper with a black crew talking with and filming only black people, while Whitney spent that same year with white people and a white crew. The resulting film is “Two Towns of Jasper.”

To tap into their experiences and what they learned, Marco and Whitney pose and respond to questions they’ve been asked—and questions they asked themselves—about the difficulty and benefits of using this approach in the coverage of stories about race.

The Technique

Can a white reporter cover stories in black communities and arrive at “the truth” and vice versa?

Whitney Dow: Can journalists work effectively across race? Absolutely, but I now believe that blacks and whites will necessarily file fundamentally different stories when they cover racially charged events. During the research phase of this project, I spent some time in Jasper immediately following the murder of Byrd interviewing both white and black residents. At the time, I got what I thought were some valuable interviews with some of the black residents. Later, when we began filming the project in earnest and Marco spent time filming some of these same black residents, something startling was revealed: Many of the people I’d interviewed deliberately misled me about their identity, occupation, place of residence, etc. Although blacks were willing to talk to me about the murder and the problems that existed in their community, they were unwilling to reveal anything that might put themselves at risk. This called into question the value of the interviews I had done and revealed the baseline of distrust that colors almost all interaction across race.

At the same time, I cannot imagine I could have gained the same level of



Discussing the Shawn Allen Berry murder trial over breakfast at the Belle-Jim Hotel, Jasper, Texas. *Photo by Danny Bright.*

trust of the white community and, more specifically, of the family members of the accused killers, if I had an African American on my production team. The whites were so focused on their desire to present a positive image of race relations to the media that many times during the initial phase of a relationship with a documentary subject I felt as though I was being subjected to a P.R. blitz. It took time for the white residents to let down their guard and begin to speak honestly about their feelings. Having a black person there would have been a constant reminder to keep themselves in check.

Marco Williams: Why are we intimidated, if not outright afraid, of the idea of utilizing racially specific reporters to cover a racially specific type of story and to help uncover the “truth”? In most newsrooms, specialization of reporting is practiced daily: sports reporters cover sports, business report-

ers business, fashion reporters fashion. Such assignments are rarely questioned. But when a racially motivated murder occurs, some challenge the idea of reporting or documenting this story with “specialists” or, as others contend, it exacerbates the problem.

In covering a news event or telling a story, “truth” often seems determined by who is privileged to narrate the coverage, choose the angle, identify the protagonists, and determine the questions to be asked. These decisions are not random or in any way “natural” choices. Each reporter, each documentary filmmaker, each witness brings to the situation a set of biases and perceptions that arise out of who they are and what has been their personal, cultural and social history. If the “truth” of a story could be defined before reporting or documenting is done, then who defines the “truth” becomes critical to understanding the events and putting them into a larger context.

... I now believe that blacks and whites will necessarily file fundamentally different stories when they cover racially charged events.



Huff Creek Road, where James Byrd, Jr., was murdered. *Photo by Steven Miller.*

Perhaps, therefore, it is foolhardy to pursue the “truth.” Instead, our goal can be understanding. But there is a difference between explaining and sharing an experience. Sharing relies on having a common ground of experience and understanding, which is often not the case for black and white people in America. (Think O.J. Simpson verdict.) This is why Whitney and I determined that the best way to arrive at a truthful understanding of Jasper, and by extension America, was to use segregated film crews. This would give people the space to speak freely—out of their experience and understanding—and then allow us to bring these voices and viewpoints together to tell the events through black and white lenses.

In the case of race, where division often lurks, arriving at “truth” is more likely to happen when we embrace our differences through the embrace of our commonalities.

The Edit

Was it hard to knit our two perspectives into one film?

Whitney: The difficulty of weaving Marco’s and my footage into a single narrative was not that the white and black residents of Jasper saw things differently—it was that they saw and experienced entirely different things. Events important to the white community were often not even on the black community’s radar screen, and vice versa. An example of this was discussion of James Byrd’s character. For the whites, their understanding of the murder was inexorably tied to their perception of James Byrd, the man. Many whites felt that the fact that Byrd was unemployed and had many past run-ins with the law either mitigated the gravity of the crime or somehow implicated Byrd in his own death. They felt he should be “judged by the way he lived not the way he died” and were uncomfortable with any positive coverage he got in the media.

For blacks, how James Byrd lived his life was entirely irrelevant. He was killed because of his race and so, in effect, they were James Byrd. After putting together a scene in which whites discussed Byrd’s background, I expected Marco to have footage that would speak

to the same subject. In fact, he had no one discussing Byrd’s character because it was not an issue in the black community. This scenario was repeated again and again. What we discovered was that much of the time the scenes we created explicated specific periods of time, rather than specific events.

Marco: In the making of “Two Towns of Jasper,” Whitney and I effectively shot two different movies. In editing, we had to figure out how to make one. This demanded a relinquishing of absolute power and a movement toward shared power. In the framework of collaborative decision-making, is this possible? In the context of race, is this possible?

Who defines the context of a given scene or the order of the story is an assertion of power. No decision is simply an aesthetic choice. Who speaks first or last in a given sequence is of subtle if not overt significance. Struggles about this power played themselves out repeatedly in the editing room. The sequence about the school board’s decision to temporarily eliminate Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday as a school holiday provides a potent illumination of both the nature of the fabric of the town and of the impact that race had on the decision-making in the editing room. Just trying to arrive at an order that satisfied a sense of narrative, let alone a sense of theme and content, was problematic. Black and white residents saw the decision to remove the holiday very differently. So did Whitney and I.

Who should speak about this incident? What should this decision reveal about individual characters? About the town? We debated, too, whether the sequence or its placement detoured from the linear narrative of three murder trials. But where our debate lingered the longest was in deciding whose words (whose image) should end this section of the film.

Should it end with the radio reporter Mike Lout? He tells us that the holiday isn’t important to him because he never had to sit in the back of the bus; he tells us, with a nervous laugh, that whites won’t ever do that to black



Trent Smith (left), Director of Photography Steven Miller, and Whitney Dow (right) at Smith's home in Jasper. *Photo by Danny Bright.*

people again. Or should it end with the minister Ray Lewis? Ray tells us that “they” must have thought that “we” weren’t going to say or do anything, as we didn’t in the past; he also expresses some disconcertedness by the questioning of how the school board could consider doing this with all that had been going on.

Ending with Mike provides an articulation of the holiday’s lack of significance to whites, as well as an unambiguous feeling of guilt. Ending with Ray provides an illumination of the state of black power in the town, the ability or inability to say or to do something. And his words reveal the fissure between black and white. Is Martin



Marco Williams (left) and Director of Photography Jonathan Weaver with Rev. Ray Lewis (right) in Jasper. *Photo by Danny Bright.*

Luther King, Jr. day a black holiday or an American holiday? Either ending has validity, but in a film as tightly woven as “Two Towns of Jasper,” what is said last is likely to be what viewers remember.

The recognition that power is embedded in the storytelling played out repeatedly in the editing room. In a film that struggles to make vivid the differing perceptions of blacks and whites, what the audience retains is crucial.

Our Differences

Were there times when our two viewpoints were irreconcilable?

Whitney: Our goal of having white and black viewpoints represented in almost every sequence was a major challenge. But our attempt to include a visit to Jasper by the New Black Panther Party during the trial of John William King proved particularly difficult. It was impossible for us to cut a sequence in which neither the whites looked afraid—which they were not—nor the blacks looked weak—which also was not the case. The scene structure we settled on was dissatisfying to each of us, and this entire sequence was cut from the film when we reedited it for broadcast on PBS. This was an exception. Though we initially disagreed on how most scenes should be structured, we managed to find ways of melding our opposing viewpoints. This method of working yielded much more complex and compelling sequences than either of us could have constructed on our own.

Marco: To take on the challenge of questioning race relations, whether within or across the boundaries of race, is not without potential casualty. The scene with the New Black Panther Party offers a good illustration of what can happen when the perception and meaning of an event is not shared. In the festival and the theatrical version of our film, we included the New Black Panther Party. But we omitted them from the television version. Why? The simple answer is that the New Black



James Byrd, Jr.'s sister, Mary Verrett, after Shawn Berry's testimony. Jasper, Texas, 1999. Photo by Danny Bright.

Panther Party did not fit into the narrative. More complicated are the differing reasons we had for its removal. Whitney saw them as outsiders to the community and therefore not fitting into the framework of our film—the inclusion of residents of Jasper. I judged this scene expendable because although the New Black Panther Party's entrance into the film is clear, its eventual disappearance is not explained.

However, beneath concerns for the narrative justification there lurks a more profound difference of what the New Black Panther Party represents for Whitney and me and for white and black residents of Jasper. For Whitney (serving as proxy for whites), the New Black Panther Party was seen as a joke, not threatening, and no white resident took them seriously. For me, (a proxy for the blacks), its members represented “manhood,” power and the conflict of confrontation vs. reconciliation that blacks have wrestled with throughout our history in the United States. In the face of such broad differences, compromise or accommodation was required. When the debate could not be reconciled, the exigencies of narrative became the ultimate basis of our decision-making.

Lessons Learned

Whitney: It is easy to forget, as a liberal white journalist covering issues of race, that to many people I come in contact with in my reporting I represent a power structure that repeatedly has shown itself to be inherently untrustworthy and, at times, even dangerous to people of color. Although I am still extremely confident in my ability to penetrate communities of color, I now have a healthy skepticism about the quality of the material and information I come away with and am more diligent about checking sources. I also am far more aware of my biases, even as I attempt to be “objective” in my coverage, and I try to use this awareness as a tool to help me become a better storyteller.

Marco: Whitney and I experienced what few experience on the battleground of race in America: We asked questions about race on a daily basis for four-and-a-half years. What I learned in making “Two Towns of Jasper” was how crucial ownership of my reality is to changing the relationship between black and white. When differing viewpoints in a debate have equal footing, then and only then can fruitful under-

standing be achieved.

It should not disturb us to realize that those who don't share a history could have different interpretations and understanding of the same event. When James Byrd was murdered, the way in which white (or mainstream) and black newspapers reported the news was as different as black and white. This should not surprise us.

Future events will polarize Americans, and we should be able to accept and embrace that which polarizes us, rather than avoiding or ignoring what divides. Differences need to become part of our discourse. Who interprets an event, who gets to report on stories that shape our collective histories, who has the chance to define the “truth”—all of these decisions are important in shaping our understanding of events and how events are interpreted. Ultimately, how they are reported and recorded is crucial to giving us a basis to think about and perhaps understand how they could have occurred. ■

Marco Williams is an award-winning documentary and fiction film director. His films include “Two Towns of Jasper,” “In Search of our Fathers,” “From Harlem to Harvard,” and “Without a Pass.” His 1998 film “Making Peace: Rebuilding Our Communities” was part of a four-hour PBS series profiling people working to heal the conditions that create violence in their communities. Whitney Dow directed more than 200 commercial film and commercial projects before he was asked to direct two documentary shorts for the American AIDS Rides in 1997. In 1998, he created Feral Films to pursue documentary filmmaking full-time, and “Two Towns of Jasper” became his first feature documentary.

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Lacking a Worthy Story, a Columnist Retreats From Writing About Race

‘Race is a subject that needs lowered voices, or even some benign neglect.’

By Jack E. White

Ordinarily, abandoning a project that was supposed to be the capstone of one’s career and repaying a rather handsome advance to a publisher would be, at the very least, an occasion for regret. Yet I felt nothing but relief this spring when I decided to pull the plug on the book on black political leadership that I had been working on since I retired as a columnist for *Time* two years ago. After more than three decades of reporting and writing about race relations, I discovered that I had been rendered virtually speechless by a growing ambivalence about the only story I ever had really wanted to cover, the struggle of black Americans to liberate themselves from centuries of slavery and degradation. The debate has gotten so fractious I can’t hear myself think.

I hadn’t realized until I started the book how conflicted my view of racial issues such as affirmative action has become. When I joined *Time* in 1972, the racial issue was clear as a bell, the great civil rights victories of the 1960’s were still fresh in the nation’s collective memory despite the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., the still smoldering fires of the long hot summers, and the backlash-inspired hostility of the Nixon administration to what remained of the black freedom movement. And I didn’t have much trouble figuring out where I stood. Like many other young African Americans who became reporters then, I felt a sense of calling toward the civil rights movement, a faith rooted in the Kerner Commission’s finding that the press could and must play a crucial role in the struggle for racial equality by exposing the true depth and horror of the second-class status white America had imposed on its black citizens. I saw

myself, as one of a tiny handful of black journalists at *Time*, as a journalistic extension of the movement—loyal to its lofty goal of racial equality, but completely independent of the personalities who purported to lead it and thus able, even duty bound, to criticize them when necessary.

Discovering a Journalistic Mission

In this, I was following the example of the late Robert C. Maynard, who befriended me when I was a cub reporter at *The Washington Post* during the late 1960’s, and he was already one of the greatest black journalists of all time. Bob inspired me, and a generation of youthful black reporters who came under his spell, to believe that we were caught up in something much bigger than our individual careers, part of a continuum of journalistic freedom fighters that went back to Frederick Douglass, William Monroe Trotter, and Ida B. Wells. Heady stuff. My mission, as I came rather grandiosely to define it, was to pound away at the racial mindset of *Time*, which by the time I arrived had evolved from galling racial paternalism under Henry Luce to reflexive skepticism toward the movement’s increasingly militant leaders under Luce’s successors. I set out to create a journalistic space at *Time* in which a black journalist could write about black issues with unvarnished candor from a distinctly black point of view in a distinctly black voice that some whites and some blacks might find offensive.

It took 23 years, during which I worked my way up the ladder at *Time*, from junior writer to foreign and campaign correspondent to bureau chief

and, ultimately, senior editor of the *Nation* section, which covers national affairs. In 1995, I started my column, “Dividing Line,” and promptly began pissing off people, black and white, by playing no favorites. Those who praised me for castigating Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas as an Uncle Tom who had enslaved himself to the Republican right wing howled with anger when I refused to endorse the Million Man March because of the lunatic opportunism and anti-Semitism of its leader, Louis Farrakhan. My editors gave me plenty of leeway, offering suggestions on topics and how I should approach them, but never imposing the magazine’s point of view. The response from readers was extraordinary, especially blacks who had never expected to encounter an unmistakably black, unapologetically militant voice like mine in the pages of an establishmentarian white publication like *Time*.

The only trouble was the story. The monumental clash between oppression and freedom that unfolded during the 1960’s had devolved, by the time I began columnizing, into an ethnic power struggle marked by venality and intellectual fraud. The movement, or what was left of it, had become less and less concerned with uplifting the most oppressed of African Americans, those trapped in impoverished inner cities and isolated rural backwaters, and more and more focused on exploiting their sorry plight as a rhetorical lever to pry loose concessions for those who claimed to speak in their name. There were no heroes among those who claimed to be leaders. Organizations from the NAACP (since reformed) to the National Baptist Convention that had once formed the vanguard in the struggle for equality

had been turned into personal piggybanks by their leaders. Jesse Jackson fathered a child out of wedlock. Al Sharpton—well, what more need I say?

Distractions on the Racial Beat

But I'm less troubled by the personal corruption of black leadership than by its failure to address candidly the biggest challenge facing black America: the yawning academic achievement gap between African Americans and every other ethnic group in the nation. The tendency among so-called black leaders is to wish away the embarrassing fact that despite the enormous growth and unprecedented opportunities enjoyed by the African-American middle class, blacks' SAT scores are still, by far, the lowest of any ethnic group, or blame it on alleged racial bias. There is almost no acknowledgement, by liberal black leaders, that it's this substandard performance on standardized tests and grade point averages that makes dubious race-based admissions policies necessary at selective colleges and universities. Nor is there much recognition

that conservative critics of racial preferences have a point when they claim that black students, in too many cases, are being held to a lower standard for admission than their counterparts from other ethnic groups.

There is obviously a need for new approaches and bold experimentation to improve black academic performance, yet far more intellectual energy is being wasted on the futile crusade to win reparations for slavery. Black liberal leaders are virtually unanimous in their opposition to vouchers, often phrased in sanctimonious rhetoric about preserving the public school system from people like Jackson whose children attended elitist prep schools. They seem to be more concerned with preserving their links to teacher unions and patronage-minded local school administrations than they are with repairing what goes wrong in the classroom. Trouble is that their opponents are equally hypocritical. Their alleged compassion for downtrodden black youngsters masks their real agenda of diverting tax dollars from public schools to predominantly white private academies linked to the Christian right.

Meanwhile, the plight of ghetto school kids keeps getting worse.

Well, not to put too fine a point on it, this is not what I signed on for when I decided to become a journalist. And perhaps I made a mistake by becoming too personally invested in my specialty. I wanted to write about the quest for justice, not a sterile shouting match between the bankrupt remains of the civil rights movement and its equally unprincipled and grasping opponents. I'm so angry about the way the debate about race has degenerated that I can only write about it with disgust, not the dispassion that we need for a productive conversation about such a touchy subject. Race is a subject that needs lowered voices or even some benign neglect. So for now I'm keeping quiet. There's no reason to add to the din. ■

Jack White, a 1977 Nieman Fellow, wrote the "Dividing Line" column for Time until he retired in 2001. He currently serves as writer-in-residence at the School of Communications at Howard University.

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Reporting on the Minority Education Beat

At The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina, attention is focused on how race affects education.

By **Tim Simmons**

North Carolina's public schools are rapidly resegregating by race and class. Classroom achievement of students is suffering as a result. This story, "The New Segregation," was published in The News & Observer of Raleigh in early 2001, and this news was hardly a surprise to many people within the education community. But it did surprise many of our readers. It was also a story the paper might never have told if it didn't have a reporter specifically assigned to a minority education issues beat.

I was assigned to that beat almost four years ago after spending the previous eight years covering general education issues statewide for The News & Observer. I rarely find a colleague who shares this title at other newspapers. Yet the role of race is reshaping schools in ways unseen since the days of integration. From court decisions to academic achievement, from efforts to hold schools accountable to community decision-making, race matters in today's classrooms.

Our decision to break out a separate

beat grew from the publication of a three-day series I reported in 1999 that explored the depth and reasons for the state's racial achievement gap. Built upon a computer analysis of test grades, dozens of interviews, and countless hours watching silently from inside classrooms, the series was titled "Worlds Apart: The Racial Achievement Gap." Worlds apart was an apt description for the different ways in which many black students saw their schools compared with their white classmates.

The series also helped define the

debate about the differences in academic achievement between black and white students in North Carolina. It introduced the problem to our readers, made the topic a priority on the public agenda, and often served as a reference guide for countless state and local discussions. Readers ordered more than 5,000 reprints of the series; copies were sent to every school principal in the state.

Creating a New Education Beat

Once we'd published this series, there was only minimal discussion about whether we'd return to covering education as we had before. The News & Observer still uses a general education reporter to cover statewide education issues and separate reporters who cover local school districts. Readers would likely find it unacceptable if we relinquished those beats in a region that is home to Research Triangle Park, three major universities, and public schools that enroll more than 150,000 students.

Today, a beat that covers minority education issues spanning all grade

levels—from preschool to historically black colleges—is just a part of our education reporting stable. In addition to the traditional series that we publish over several days, this beat produces weekend stories and daily articles that our education reporters might otherwise never find the time to do. But more important, "Worlds Apart" established a template for how we continue to address sensitive issues of race, classroom achievement, and equity in public education.

It is difficult to understate the importance of data analysis for reporting on this beat, much of it done by Susan Ebbs in the newspaper's news research department. Each year, the newspaper collects the test results of mandatory state reading and math exams as well as corresponding surveys taken by roughly 700,000 students. The records are basically student-level data stripped only of the students' names. They include student eligibility for subsidized lunches. Because of our ability to analyze this data, I often know as much about minority achievement as the school principal does when I show up for my first visit at a particular school.

"First" is an important word, for these larger stories that explore issues affecting minority children often require multiple visits to schools and classrooms. The data only provides the factual foundation of a story. It is the visits and interviews that bring the story to life.

When "Worlds Apart" was published, it was obvious that resegregation contributed to lagging minority achievement. But we did not want that fact to overshadow other important issues, especially those involving low expectations by teachers, administrators and sometimes even parents. Low expectations by adults, we found, were often at the heart of creating and maintaining the achievement gap. That meant returning to the topic of resegregation later—more than a year later as it turned out. It was a delay caused, in part, by the state's newfound interest in closing the achievement gap after "World's Apart" was published.

Data Defines the Story

While the data framed our stories about the low expectations for minority chil-



During lunch at Chapel Hill High School, students gathered in front of a mural promoting unity even as they chose to largely separate themselves by race at the cafeteria tables. *Photo courtesy of The News & Observer.*



As an African-American male, Isaac Hatcher was an exception to the rule in this Algebra II class. When Tim Simmons reported his story, white students were still three to four times more likely than black students to enroll in advanced sections or honor courses in the schools of the Raleigh-Durham area. *Photo courtesy of The News & Observer.*

dren, it also defined the storyline for my articles on resegregation. Rob Waters, who edited both series, often said he could not recall an issue in which numbers so clearly told the story.

Relying again on test score data, we coupled our analysis of trends in resegregation with other data. We looked at:

- Enrollment trends during the past 15 years
- Teacher turnover within schools
- A comparison of teacher experience levels based on the percentages of poor or minority students in each of the state's schools.

The numbers did tell the story. Minority students of similar family incomes posted lower test scores when they attended largely segregated schools. The ability I now had to show this information to principals and superintendents—black and white—as well as to share it immediately with teachers and parents took most of my interviews to a different level of conversation.

Irrefutable data did not necessarily make the interviews more comfortable. Some middle-class parents found the news unsettling; others, in largely white schools, quickly turned defensive. The students and teachers at one predominantly black high school, in particular, were quick to embrace the message but incensed to find the school used as an example. But in general, the combination of data analysis and shoe-leather reporting offered a view of the public schools that differed considerably from the schools that readers thought they knew.

“The New Segregation” showed, for example, how morale and discipline plummeted when a school that was two-thirds white becomes a school that is 96 percent black in the course of a single year. The series also offered the lament of teachers in Wayne County who want to know how a child who lives in a diverse school district can attend school for 13 years and never see a white classmate. And the stories showed that no matter how fondly African-American adults remember the schools of their childhood, today's seg-

regation produces a different school altogether.

Seeking Answers

Bolstered by the success of these reports, in 2002 *The News & Observer* took on yet another important issue, largely avoided in many discussions about minority achievement—the amount and effect of parental involvement in the schools. Eventually, the reporting I did on this appeared in a series entitled “The Parent Gap.”

This time the numbers did not offer an obvious storyline. Instead, they gave hints and insights that seemed to indicate a communication breakdown between many teachers and minority parents. The data also showed that regardless of income, African-American students were entering kindergarten less prepared than their white classmates, and during the first year of school the gap between them increased. Data showed, too, that African-American students in elementary and middle school watched more television and did less homework. Again, the differences were obvious across income levels.

But numbers could not tell us why. Again, that came from interviews and observations.

If talking with teachers and students about the role of race is difficult—and it is very, very difficult—those conversations seem relatively easy when I compare them with my job of asking parents why they seemingly refused to get involved in their child's education. Much of what I heard from them has been told before—parents without transportation; parents with two jobs; parents who are still basically children themselves. But these reasons certainly do not explain the circumstance of every minority parent or even a majority of them. And they don't convey their feelings.

In time, many of those parents stepped forward and talked about why they weren't very involved with their children's school. At times, they spoke individually; in other instances, they accepted invitations to be part of discussion groups. I went to their homes and met them in reading rooms of

public libraries. Oddly, some asked to meet in the schools they rarely visited. They looked at the data and listened to what others said, then many offered their assessment of what the schools look like from their perspective.

"It's a matter of trust," said a father of four from Wake County. "Why would a black parent trust the schools to do the right thing?" His view was shared by many other parents who were often skeptical about teachers' intentions even when their children succeeded academically. Without trust, advice about homework and television was suspect—maybe even trivial—from their point of view. Some teachers spoke with clearly understood the parents' frustrations; others couldn't relate at all to the feeling he'd expressed.

Many teachers wondered out loud what other choice a parent has but to trust the schools.

A story like this one covers a lot of ground when it has to bridge the distance between something as precise as data analysis and something as intangible as perceptions of trust. There is no one answer to give to this father's question, just as there is no one way to impress upon teachers—and readers—why he would ask it. But we report and tell this story so that all readers have a chance to hear his question and reflect on what it means for public education. It's an opportunity that exists largely because The News & Observer has created a beat found at few other newspapers—a beat focused on minority education issues. ■

Tim Simmons covers minority education issues for The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina.. His work has won several state and national awards, including the 1999 Fred M. Hechinger Grand Prize for Distinguished Education Reporting from the Education Writers Association for "Worlds Apart" and recognition by the Columbia University School of Journalism for exemplary coverage of race and ethnic issues for "The New Segregation." Those stories and others can be found at www.newsobserver.com/gap.

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Racial Reverberations in Newsrooms After Jayson Blair

'The coverage of the scandal showed once again that African Americans are still not allowed to be seen as individuals when they fail.'

By Neil Henry

The e-mail messages came from journalists around America, more than a few containing the line "you don't know me, but" All were commenting about racial reverberations in their newsrooms stemming from the scandal of Jayson Blair, the 27-year-old black reporter who resigned in disgrace from The New York Times in May after admitting to systematic plagiarism and fabrication during his three-year career.

An African-American copyeditor at a Midwestern daily wrote that she was humiliated to hear three white male colleagues openly criticize affirmative action policies for lowering "journalistic standards" across the country, policies under which the editor herself had been hired only a year earlier.

A second message came from a nationally recognized black reporter, who confided that the Blair scandal had reignited in her a long suppressed rage

and bitterness stemming from her early reporting career in the 1980's, when white editors—spurred by a similar scandal involving a disgraced black reporter, Janet Cooke, at The Washington Post—baldly questioned her veracity after she turned in a terrific piece of investigative work. The reporter was unsettled, she wrote, by how deeply the racial pain still cut more than 20 years later.

But among the most heartfelt messages came from a young African-American reporter in the early months of his career at a top newspaper on the East Coast. The reporter had graduated five years earlier from a leading school of journalism and excelled in two previous jobs at smaller newspapers before being hired by the big Eastern daily.

"Nothing in this business has angered me like this situation," he wrote. "From Blair's misdeeds, to the reaction of some of our editors, to these as-

saults on diversity—I'm just perpetually [furious] about my business and my newspaper, the one I learned to love while [in] school. I feel like we are in for some stormy months, if not years. Though I have not sensed any extra eyes on my work or had anyone question me, I am mentally preparing for it."

Understanding the Racial Fallout

It's big news when a journalist admits lying to the public. It's even bigger news when that journalist works for a newspaper as trusted and influential as The New York Times. But because Blair was young and black, and the product of a training program aimed at increasing the racial diversity of the news staff, the scandal and its national news coverage became freighted with an added dimension of race, provoking pain and

fury that was especially keen to blacks and other minorities in the industry.

Did the scandal represent—as some conservative white critics charged—the dangers and failures of such diversity programs, which many news organizations have adopted in the decades since 1968 when the Kerner Commission urged the press to hire more minorities and women to better serve the public interest? Were Blair's misdeeds overlooked for too long precisely because of his race, as the same critics maintained? What ramifications would the scandal present for race relations in America's newsrooms?

Such questions spurred me, a journalism educator, to write an essay amid the heat of the Blair scandal to my black former Berkeley students now working in the news media across the country. Even though these former students had nothing to do with the disgrace, I knew they would feel hurt and outraged by the critics and likely bewildered by a strange press focus on Blair's race that made it seem as if the young man's color had more to do with the reasons behind the scandal than his distinct problems of character.

I had several aims for the essay, which was also published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: to prepare young people emotionally for racial fallout in the workplace that might include increased scrutiny by white superiors because of their skin color; to remind them of the historical imperative for diversity programs in a field in which blacks were effectively excluded as recently as 35 years ago, and to reassure them at a time of anger, pain and emotional insecurity that they indeed had earned their right to practice their talent and skill with the best in the country.

I felt somewhat qualified to issue such advice because I, too, was a beneficiary of diversity efforts in their early days at *The Washington Post* in the 1970's. As a young man, I had welcomed the special chance to prove my mettle, not least because I considered such affirmative action a long overdue bridge to opportunity in mainstream journalism that had been denied black people for centuries. I also had been

present at the *Post* as a staff writer during the Janet Cooke scandal in 1981 (when the 26-year-old black reporter was fired after admitting she had fabricated a Pulitzer Prize-winning feature about an eight-year-old heroin addict) and was startled and hurt by the reaction of a few of my white editors and reporter peers. They had seemed emboldened in the scandal's aftermath to question not only the ability and trustworthiness of African-American reporters but also even our right to work there.

Still, all that was more than 20 years ago, and as I typed out the essay to my former students a part of me assumed that the climate in America's newsrooms had improved in the years since with greater diversity and integration.

What I wasn't prepared for was the volume of response I received from more than two dozen journalists and citizens of all color after the essay was published, many containing anecdotes written with raw emotion and reflecting the exact sort of apprehensions, fallout and racial typecasting I had feared. "Right after the [Blair] situation blew up," wrote a minority *New York Times* reporter whose identity, like the other letter writers, I am protecting, "I found myself having to defend to many of my white colleagues the right of the *Times* to hire reporters of color, as well as young reporters, and pointing out that such reporters were expected to perform to the same standards set for everyone."

Another minority reporter at the *Times* wrote that he, too, was startled and outraged by having to defend the diversity training program under which he was hired, while a third confided that the Blair episode had sparked awkward tensions even among some minority reporters. The rift seemed to be between those who argued that all minority reporters had a responsibility to lash back at the criticism of diversity, publicly and often, and those who felt it was more prudent to focus on work and to let the scandal blow over.

The reactions seemed similar across the country. "I am surging with rage about every single story that talks about race as being such a player [in the

scandal] and why diversity programs are at fault," wrote a journalist in northern California. "It sickens me." Added another writer from Tennessee, "The tragedy of this obviously talented, charming yet highly disturbed and self-destructive young man is being used by people in the industry who do not wish black journalists well to undermine [our] hard-won progress. This is an abomination. They've spun this and made it all about race, in the words of Frederick Douglass, 'to put thorns under feet already bleeding. ...'"

Diversity in Newsrooms

The *New York Times*, like many U.S. newspapers, has actively pursued a diversity hiring program aimed at improving the paper's credibility in local communities and its coverage of the world by making its newsroom more reflective of the American population. According to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), minority journalists today make up about 12.5 percent of the workforce in the nation's newsrooms—a marked increase from four percent in 1978. But the rate of increase has slowed drastically during the past decade, and some fear that the Blair scandal may hurt this limited progress even more.

ASNE has stood by its stated goal of making the nation's newsrooms more truly representative of American society. The industry's leading professional organization has urged 38 percent minority staffing of newspapers by the year 2025. From today's vantage, though, such goals seem as distant as ever. While blacks represent about 12 percent of the American population, for example, barely more than five percent of newspaper staffers are black. African Americans in upper newsroom management remain miniscule in number and tragically lost a key player in *New York Times*'s managing editor Gerald Boyd, who resigned in May along with executive editor Howell Raines after the Blair controversy.

If the scandal, its news coverage, and the racial reverberations in newsrooms were any guide, the progress made in the years since Kerner ap-

peared very delicate indeed.

"I live and work in southwest Georgia, in the heart of the Black Belt," wrote a white educator. "Our population is 60 percent black and 40 percent white. We would never have a Jayson Blair incident at our regional newspaper, because it consistently has no black journalists. Period. The few who are hired refuse to stay because of the backward culture of the news organization. It's a shame."

Pamela Newkirk, an associate professor of journalism and mass communications at New York University, who authored "Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media," a 2000 book examining the experiences of black pioneers in the mainstream press, believes the Blair scandal says more about the greater need for diversity programs in the culture of American journalism than it does about any inherent flaws in such programs as they exist.

Newkirk said she was "appalled" by editorial commentaries and news coverage of the scandal, especially "by the suggestion that somehow Blair's disgrace should reflect on all African-American, Asian-American, Latin American, and Native American reporters, or have an effect on diversity efforts." She said she received numerous calls from reporters seeking comment from her in the days after the Blair scandal broke, and nearly all of the questions focused on the merits of diversity efforts. "I'm still shocked by that story line," she

said.

But more significant to Newkirk was this: "The coverage of the scandal showed once again that African Americans are still not allowed to be seen as individuals when they fail," she said. "When they succeed, yes. When they win Pulitzers and earn Nieman awards, they are individuals, exceptions in our society. But when they fail, it's failure all around, failure for the race."

Such attitudes are particularly sad and shocking, Newkirk added, for young journalists, "who perhaps thought we had gone a lot farther in our industry and society."

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court, supported by briefs from numerous companies in private industry, including the news media, issued a significant ruling upholding the right of universities to factor race into admissions decisions with the aim of improving diversity and career chances for minorities. But with the decision the court also cautioned that such affirmative action programs will likely not be needed after 25 years or so. The justices believe that by then the nation effectively will have become "color blind" due to progress in bettering race relations and leveling access to schooling and jobs.

Whether that bright change will indeed come within the court's 25-year time frame, in colleges or in newsrooms for that matter, remains to be seen. But the timing of the decision

certainly seemed ironic in light of the controversy and attacks on diversity sparked by the Blair scandal. What appears certain for now is that such progress within the American press, at least, remains incipient and fragile, at best, with success ultimately dependent on the work of today's pioneers, who often have to be as strong of conviction inside the newsroom as they are fearless in their pursuit of the news outside of it.

"When something like this happens, it can shake your confidence," wrote the young African-American reporter quoted earlier about the Blair disgrace, who is working for an eastern daily on an exciting beat he dreamed of covering all his life. "I think it did mine for a few days. But no longer. I have been at this paper and in this business long enough to know that there are prima donnas and grinders and workers and liars and bitches and moaners of every stripe.

"Me?" he went on. "I'll put my name and talent up against anyone in the building." ■

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Contemplating the Relevancy of Age and Race

'My youth and race have been assets to my journalism during my budding career.'

By Errin Haines

There's nothing wrong with small newsrooms; I just knew I didn't want to work in one. So last year, when I was accepted into the Tribune Company's two-year Minority Editorial Training Program (METPRO), beginning at the Los Angeles Times, it was a dream come true. Not only was I skipping the small time, but also I was

going to be a reporter at one of the country's biggest daily newspapers.

Let me be clear: I was certainly not getting around paying my dues. The program, which recruits and trains young reporters of color and exposes us to some of the most talented people in journalism, is highly competitive, rigorous and firmly rooted in the ba-

sics: accuracy, solid reporting, news judgment, and strong writing. Eight classmates and I might have made it to the Los Angeles Times, but by no means had we "arrived;" in fact, I doubt entitlement was on any of our minds as we sat humbly beside Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters and editors during these past 10 months.

So when the correlation was made between former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair's age, race and his journalism, I was offended. For anyone to blame his numerous errors, fabrications and even quick ascent on the color of his skin or his rookie status was unfair and unwarranted. And for anyone to conclude—or even speculate—that the Blair incident was proof positive that young or minority journalists rise too far, too fast, made me nervous for my colleagues and myself.

Would veterans and others begin to wonder where rookies belong at big-time news organizations? How many people would accept the argument that diversity, whether of race or age, was being used as a substitute for talent? I hoped journalists wouldn't take as long to recognize the flimsy argument of diversity being the cause of this problem as Blair's bosses did to see through his flimsy and false reporting.

The numbers would certainly belie such an accusation. According to the 2002 Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates, conducted at the University of Georgia, the number of graduates with full-time jobs in journalism decreased for the second year in a row—down from 71 percent in 2001 to 65 percent last year, the lowest number in a decade. More importantly, the survey indicated that the gap between minority and nonminority graduates is widening: 61 percent of minority graduates had jobs after college, compared with 71 percent of nonminorities. Only a handful of these graduates are hired each year to work at newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post. Similarly, the American Society of Newspaper Editors reported this spring in its annual Newsroom Census that only a third of last year's newsroom internships went to minority candidates. This number has declined since 2001, and it shrinks even more if one considers placements at top-tier newspapers.

Two Journalists, Two Paths

Blair began his ascent as a 21-year-old minority intern at a top-tier newspa-

per. The journalistic juggernaut attended the University of Maryland, but left school his senior year for a job at The New York Times. There were many things he did right to land him in this position. He was a legend at his alma mater and college newspaper. He had been a star summer intern at The Boston Globe and The New York Times. Like many young reporters, he was a hungry, talented writer who knew how to schmooze his higher-ups. He had a big personality for a big newsroom. But unlike the majority of his peers, Blair used his charm to mask, not complement, his character and reporting flaws.

In my three internships and at the Los Angeles Times, I was frequently cited for both my upbeat personality and my ability as a reporter. While I have many years to become a curmudgeon, building a reliable reputation as a journalist my editors and colleagues can trust and depend on is something I cannot afford to delay. And both my hard work and pleasant disposition have paid off: My coworkers look to me as a reporter who can step up and deliver when big stories break and as someone who can contribute relevant ideas to the paper.

My youth and race have been assets to my journalism during my budding career. I've written several stories that required me to interact with children—no easy task, but I like to think it was made easier because I'm only a decade older and a lot more friendly than some reporters. It doesn't hurt that I'm familiar with the Powerpuff Girls and SpongeBob SquarePants, and donning a pair of Seven jeans when I have to go to a high school breaks the ice faster than small talk ever could. As one of my peers observed recently, "I might not have as much experience as other reporters here, but I'm eager to learn, and I don't mind doing assignments other people don't want to do. Plus I can tell an older journalist that Britney Spears isn't as hot as she used to be." She and I decided our younger years bring just as much to the table in terms of diversity as our race or gender and wondered whether she is the only person in the newsroom with a nose ring.

(Odds are she's unique in that way, too.)

Thankfully, at the Los Angeles Times there is generally a mutual appreciation among veterans and neophytes. Our main advocate in the newsroom has been Assistant Managing Editor Miriam Pawel. She is excited about METPRO and the opportunity to grow young talent. Not only is Pawel aware of one rookie journalist's slam poetry hobby, but she also appreciates this, values that reporter's youth and culture, and fully expects these experiences to manifest themselves in our newspaper's coverage on any given day. For the most part, the nine interns in this year's METPRO class were fortunate to find at the Los Angeles Times what I believe is a rarity at other big daily newspapers—a nurturing home at a paper that wants to run our stories as much as we want to tell them. Instead of finding ourselves in a cut-throat environment with a sink-or-swim mentality, reporters and editors are genuinely interested in our success and progress and helping us reach our journalistic goals.

I also receive support from scores of men and women colleagues of all ages at the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), where I serve as the chair of the organization's Young Journalists Task Force. In that role, I've discussed with dozens of my peers and mentors why the Jayson Blair affair is not a reflection on either young or black reporters. Currently, my contemporaries (NABJ members ages 18-34) are working to erase the stain on diversity caused by Blair and proving every day that young minority journalists are getting it right and will continue to do so. Meanwhile, other journalism organizations, such as the Asian American Journalists Association, UNITY: Journalists of Color, and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association were swift to publicly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with NABJ and young journalists to aggressively decry any attempts at a connection between Blair's actions and his minority status or youth.

No matter our age, I'd like to think similar motivations attracted us and keep us coming to the newsroom. Jour-

nalists share a sense of curiosity, a desire to accurately chronicle events around us, and a dedication to the public responsibility of our craft. Green journalism isn't necessarily yellow journalism. As young journalists, we don't connect ourselves to Jayson Blair or to others who perform their jobs as irresponsibly as he did any more than do our veteran colleagues. On closer examination, we have more in common with the veterans than with our misguided peer. Regardless of race, age or

the other differences that separate us, the Blair incident is a call to all of us, young and old, to come together in the name of what unites us—journalism, practiced with fairness and accuracy. ■

Errin Haines is a 25-year-old reporter who has worked at the Los Angeles Times for the past 10 months and is entering her second year of the Tribune Company's Minority Editorial Training Program (METPRO) at the Orlando Sentinel.

(In METPRO's first year, reporters are at the Los Angeles Times; the second year is spent at one of the Tribune Company's 11 daily newspapers.) She has interned at The Daily Press in Newport News, Virginia, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and The Associated Press. Haines chairs the Young Journalists Task Force of the National Association of Black Journalists.

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Newsroom Diversity: Truth vs. Fiction

Before and after the Times's debacle, American newspapers are still 'telling our readers an incomplete, inaccurate story.'

By Bryan Monroe

The New York Times scandal involving reporter Jayson Blair left many victims: The readers were lied to. The staff was humiliated. The two top editors were ousted. The paper's reputation was tarnished. Journalism itself was scarred.

But the entire debacle's most unfortunate victim may be the good name of diversity in American newsrooms. Or was it?

Early on in the drama, The Washington Post's Howard Kurtz made the now-laughable proclamation on CNN: "I wonder if a middle-aged hack would have gotten away with 50 mistakes and still be at that job?" (The answer, by the way, is yes.)

Then blowhard conservatives and frustrated newsroom left-behinds began to pile on, calling Blair the poster child for what's wrong with newsroom diversity, claiming that it has taken over the newsroom and lowered standards.

But just when Fox News was ready to go *live* (cue the *whoosh* sound effect), reality set in. People began to look at the facts, and journalists started to form clearer impressions about the value and impact of diversity in newsrooms. And the truth hurt.

The Reality Behind the Numbers

In an industry already struggling to meet its meager goals of reflecting the racial and ethnic makeup of their communities by 2025, efforts to recruit, hire and retain journalists of color have been plodding along, at best. Nearly nine of 10 newsroom professionals in America are white—and most of them white males. People of color make up just one-tenth of newsroom leaders. And the needle has barely moved in the past decade.

If diversity is taking over the newsroom, I guess most folks didn't get the memo. Three years past an initial industry target for local parity in newsroom staffing nationwide—editors had performed so pathetically they extended the deadline to 2025—the industry still misses the mark.

Meanwhile, the nation grows rapidly more diverse and complex, with people of color making up 31 percent of the U.S. population. And that figure will only rise, according to the census bureau. In states such as California and Texas, and cities like Miami and Phoenix, those so-called "minorities" are in fact the majority. Within a generation,

the rest of America will likely look like those communities. And unless things change dramatically, newsrooms will still be ill-equipped to cover this new America.

Why is this important? Too many newspapers still cannot fully cover the richness and complexity of their communities because their staffs come from a limited perspective. We are unable to regularly listen to those in the shadows and too often incapable of hearing voices different from our own. We, therefore, are telling our readers an incomplete, inaccurate story. And, in the process, we are practicing *bad* journalism.

Whether it is coverage of the local Muslim community leading up to the war, or getting inside a Vietnamese-American neighborhood in everyday stories, our newsrooms too often miss nuances in coverage or miss entire stories completely because we don't have staffs diverse enough to "get it." Or we miss fresh angles on the routine stories because the few staffers of color there are have been pigeonholed into doing stories on Cinco de Mayo or Black History Month. They don't get to cover the drama on the city council or developments in Tel Aviv.

Many newsrooms still look like a 1950's "Leave It to Beaver" image of America. Sure, some have progressed to a 1970's picture of black and white, allowing George Jefferson to coexist with Archie Bunker. But only a handful of U.S. papers, less than three percent, reflect the real America in 2003, "In Living Color."

It's time for serious action, but only a few editors have demonstrated the guts or ability to do what it takes.

Failing Grades at Big and Small Papers

According to a 2003 diversity survey, the overwhelming majority of American newspapers—some 97 percent of those that responded—are miles away from having staffing that reflects the racial richness of their local communities. For instance, The Miami Herald, in a market that is 65 percent minority, might have a staff of about 45 percent people of color—the highest percentage of any major paper in America. But the only slightly smaller Boston Herald, in a market that is almost 20 percent minority, reported only five percent of its staff as people of color.

And to make matters worse, 40 percent of all American papers still have no—*zero*—journalists of color working for them. That means that more than four million readers—more than the circulation of USA Today, The New York Times, and The Washington Post combined—do not read the work of people of color in their newspapers. Papers such as The (Everett, Wash.) Herald, circulation 50,506, and the Lancaster (Pa.) New Era, circulation 45,019, as well as companies like Liberty, Ogden and Community Newspaper Holdings top this hall of shame.

The audit, conducted annually by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), shows that nearly 500 papers failed to respond at all, including such big names as the New York Post and the Chicago Sun-Times. Of those that did respond, their newsrooms have 12.53 percent professionals of color (Asians, blacks, Latinos or Native Americans). That figure is well off ASNE's own interim 2003 target of

15.55 percent average nationwide and nowhere near the goal of parity with the rest of America by 2025. By that year, the national population is expected to be nearly 40 percent people of color.

Looking at average hiring and attrition rates in American newsrooms, to meet the 2025 parity goal editors will need to make virtually *every* new hire during the next two decades a person of color, just to catch up.

And which editors have the will and the guts to do that?

A Few Success Stories

While radical action like this may be inconceivable for most editors, a quiet few have started taking dramatic steps and should serve as examples.

For instance, during the recent economic downturn, hiring has been scarce in most newsrooms. At The Washington Post, hiring has been limited as well, but editors were tired of seeing their diversity efforts stall until the economy rebounded. So according to Post deputy managing editor, Milton Coleman, the leadership focused its efforts especially on strong journalists of color.

The impact: At the Post through the end of 2002—and during the worst economy in recent history—nearly 50 percent of all new hires have been people of color.

On the other side of the country, journalists in Denver were tired of seeing the Latino community underrepresented or misrepresented in local papers. So editors at the Rocky Mountain News and the E.W. Scripps Company this spring teamed up with The National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) to be the test site for NAHJ's Parity Project. In this project, NAHJ pairs community members with newsroom leaders to match local staffing and reporting patterns with community impressions of coverage and look for ways to bring the two closer. Nationwide, the goal is to identify cities where Latinos are underrepresented in local newsrooms but make up a significant portion of the population and look at the impact that divergence

has on coverage.

The impact: At a recent roundtable in Denver, nearly every senior editor at the Rocky Mountain News heard firsthand from Latino community leaders about their impressions of how their paper covers—or doesn't cover—their community. One community member complained about the narrow coverage of Cinco de Mayo; he felt the paper focused too much on young Latinos cruising the streets. Another person said the paper was too dense, distant and impenetrable. After listening to this feedback, editors pledged to open up the newsroom, listen more to these and other communities, and increase efforts to diversify their staff and their coverage.

Meanwhile David Yarnold, now editor of the San Jose Mercury News, chairman of the diversity committee for ASNE, and recipient of the Ida B. Wells Award from the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), was tired of hearing reporters say that they couldn't find diverse sources for their stories and photos. So he, at that time executive editor, challenged reporters to quickly and measurably go out in the community, find new sources, take them out to lunch if needed, and look to expand their diverse contacts. And not only did he offer to pay for the lunches, he gave every reporter a full week off their beats to do nothing but expand their source lists.

The impact: More than 100 reporters have significantly expanded their lists and are now including women and people of color previously absent from the Mercury News. Yarnold said one reporter spent her week talking to dozens of new leads and came away with about 30 new people or groups to use as sources.

And national organizations are not being left out. The Freedom Forum, tired of hearing editors at smaller newspapers complain they can't find any young, talented journalists of color willing to work in small towns for little pay, has teamed up with ASNE and The Associated Press managing editors to help place young journalists at newspapers under 75,000 circulation.

The impact: Nearly 50 young jour-

nalists of color—including five provided by the NABJ—are now or will be working at small and medium-sized newsrooms around the country, supported by a \$20,000 salary supplement from the Freedom Forum.

While all these efforts are exciting and laudatory, it will take 10 times this activity level to even come close to hitting the parity goals for staffing and coverage that our industry has pledged.

But if editors continue our miserable level of progress, a new generation of leaders will, 22 years from now, still be talking about the problem, scratching their heads, and wondering what to do.

Diversity hasn't "taken over" American newsrooms, as some claim it has. Truth is, it is barely showing up. Editors should be tired of talking. It is time to act. ■

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'Coloring the News' Collides With Journalists

'... too many of those with heavy investments in the diversity crusade either read my arguments wrong or preferred not to review their investments.'

By William McGowan

“How did your colleagues respond to your book?”

In the scores of radio and television interviews I did during the publicity campaign for “Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism”—an examination of diversity programs and their often-corrupting impact on news coverage—this question was the one most frequently asked. And it's natural to see why. Diversity is one of the most controversial issues in the press today. No nerves are quite so sensitive and raw as those attached to the issues of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and discussion of them has long been surrounded by considerable discomfort and taboos.

Many news organizations demand a pronounced commitment to diversity as a requirement for career advancement. Failing to do so, or asking too many questions either about its animating premises or its execution in the newsroom, can “dramatically narrow” one's career options, as New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. phrased it. Indeed, stepping over the party line on this subject can result in ostracism, opprobrium and banishment to career Siberias.

My experiences with “Coloring the

News” confirmed that there are definitely sanctions for speaking out too candidly about this subject. Traveling through the intersection of journalism and our nation's racial tensions requires a hard head, if not a helmet. Though some reviewers gave the book's arguments and evidence fair treatment, there were many instances when the unacknowledged ideological leanings of a news organization or professional group made constructive dialogue much more difficult than it should be.

Many journalists were all too ready to read racial ill will into the book's critique of the diversity crusade or to dismiss it as a “right wing” screed and describe me as a conservative ideologue with an agenda. While some critics showed an almost religious attachment to the concept of diversity, frustrating rational discourse, others approached it with cool careerist calculation. They did their best to discredit it with blithe dismissals or unfounded charges about the book's “dubious scholarship.” (With some I sensed that the distancing they did from the book was to avoid coloring their own career prospects.)

I had been told to expect such treatment, and while it certainly did not outweigh the positive responses, some-

thing about the abusive tone and inaccuracies of these broadsides was disturbing. They seemed to say something profound about the way our journalistic culture debates—or stifles debate—about its coverage of one of our most vexing national issues. And they demonstrated the need to vilify those who step out of line and articulate a complex, dissenting view.

The Book's Message

In the book's first chapter I write that efforts to enhance “diversity” in newsrooms and in the news “product” are “worthy, historically necessary, and overdue.” I also note how this has led to turmoil in some news organizations and explore accusations of racial double standards in hiring, assignment and promotion policies, though I don't lay blame or validate any side in discussing such accusations.

The vast emphasis of the book, however—almost 200 of the book's 250 pages—is devoted to an examination of a more important issue: the impact that diversity efforts have had on news coverage, with particular attention focused on diversity-related issues of race, gay rights, affirmative action, and immigration. These issues reside at the

red-hot center of the nation's culture wars and had been the focus of many who claimed that the media had a left-wing bias.

The evidence I found and presented showed a disturbing level of ideological conformity in the press with coverage of these issues and favoritism toward various politically correct (PC) causes and protected PC constituencies. Although diversity purported to celebrate a multiplicity of viewpoints, certain unfashionable voices were overlooked or muted for a variety of reasons. Certain groups felt more empowered in the journalistic shouting match than others.

Why had well-intentioned diversity efforts run off the rails? I cited clumsy bureaucratic initiatives that encouraged "reporting by the numbers" and showed how this led to bias. I wrote about a climate that allowed activism and ethnic and racial cheerleading to eclipse neutral observation, as well as the ideal of objectivity, and about a kind of wishful thinking that caused too many journalists to see a world where "what ought to be true is substituted for truth itself," as Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen has phrased it.

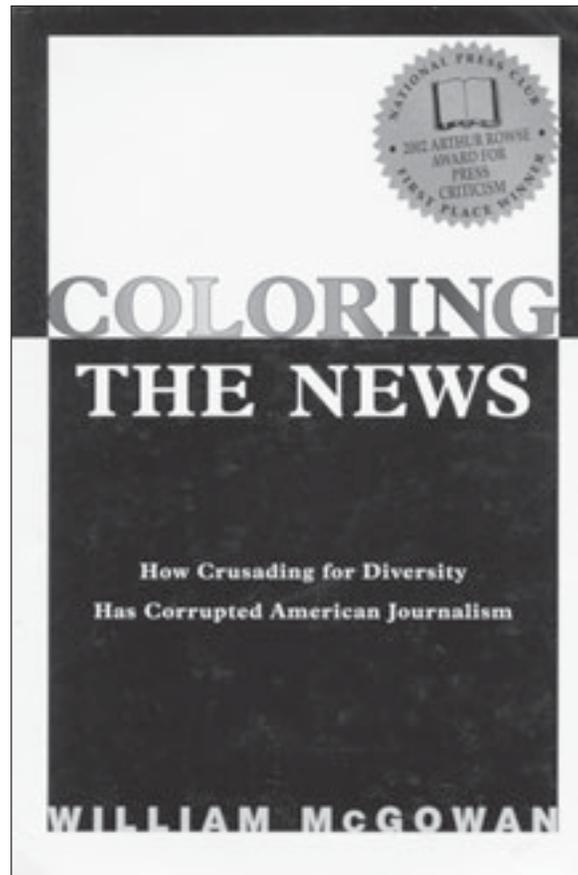
The book closes with an exploration of the consequences this kind of PC journalism has had on our political culture and on the media's health and credibility. I also argued that PC journalism hurt the credibility and financial health of mainstream news organizations and fed the growth of right-wing broadcasting backlash.

My goal in writing the book was not to condemn attempts to expand the ranks of minority journalists and enhance newsroom sensitivity to minority issues. I wanted to ask probing questions that few people in the profession seemed to be willing to ask, at least out loud, and, by doing so, spark a debate. If the book had an agenda, it was to reassert the values of intellectual rigor and honesty and to affirm a real diversity of opinion and experience—whether or not it was deemed "progressive."

I felt then and still do that we're at a demographic and cultural crossroads, when the need for honest and unbiased information is critical. Journalism needs to renew its appreciation for the ideal of fair and detached reporting—"armed neutrality in the face of doctrines," as one philosopher of the pragmatist school put it.

How the Reviewers Saw It

"Coloring the News" was commended in many reviews—some from surpris-



ing sources—for its careful research, its moderate tone, and for sparking an overdue debate. The review in *The Washington Post*, a newspaper that took a few hits in the book, noted that there were things that many reporters and editors would not want to hear, but said it essentially was a liberal-minded book written in the spirit of George Orwell. *Village Voice* and Editor & Publisher columnist Nat Hentoff put it in a league with the work of George Seldes, I.F. Stone, Murray Kempton, and Jimmy

Breslin and said if he were still teaching journalism "one book would be mandatory: 'Coloring the News.'"

Unfortunately, however, too many news organizations with heavy investments in the diversity crusade either read my arguments wrong or preferred not to review their investments. Several influential news organizations simply blacked the book out, even when legitimate news pegs existed and not reviewing it exposed institutional self-protection and a lack of integrity.

The *New York Times* refused to review my book and, in several exchanges with book editors at the Times, it became clear that my book was too critical of some of the diversity efforts at the newspaper—and their impact on news coverage—for a review to be assigned. The Times was not exactly covert about this. Asked on-the-record about the decision not to review my book by a media reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the Times's Book Review editor, Chip McGrath, confirmed the suspicion.

Not reviewing "Coloring the News" was, in my view, the journalistic equivalent to the "blue wall of silence" that the Times often decries. A newspaper's job is to get past such walls and hold public institutions accountable: My book was trying to hold the newspaper accountable. Not being willing to respond to this scrutiny seemed a negation of the paper's mission and a decision that ill served readers who depend on it.

This silent treatment from *The New York Times* put "Coloring the News" on a lengthening list of books (considered to be "right-wing"), including former broadcast journalist Bernard Goldberg's "Bias," which have not been reviewed by the Times Book Review, despite contributing to a vigorous debate among journalists (and in Goldberg's case, achieving the number one position on the Times's own bestseller list).

At National Public Radio (NPR), black talk show host Tavis Smiley essentially told me on the air that "black people

don't need a white journalist to tell them what's good for them." Juan Williams had prepared a package with Bernard Goldberg and me, but it did not reach the air for more than six weeks. The delay: Higher-ups at NPR's "Morning Edition" mandated a rather odd second segment to follow the next day with two pro-diversity figures who are not known for scholarship on the subject. This "balance" seemed to be happening to appease those at NPR who thought giving airtime to us would validate our arguments. This concern seems less apparent when the liberal perspective is voiced without a counterbalancing conservative one.

Sometimes the response to the book has had a vaguely comic or self-parodying quality. Some delegates at the Society of Professional Journalists 2002 convention tried to pass a resolution condemning the book, until cooler minds explained it might look a bit hypocritical for people in the First Amendment business to condemn an exercise in free speech.

As these experiences suggest, "Coloring the News" has become a hot potato—and I a bit of a pariah. Shortly after the book was published, I was invited to be a keynote speaker for a panel during the prestigious Media and the Law Seminar, an annual conclave sponsored by a consortium of Kansas City-based insurance companies, with support from The Kansas City Star. (A number of the law firms sponsoring the event do First Amendment work.) Fliers for the event with my picture were printed up, but then I was disinvited. According to one event organizer, a lawyer with a firm with ties to the Kansas City Star put the kibosh on the invitation, arguing that he was concerned that the newspaper, where diversity is a top priority, might pull their sponsorship. Another member of the organizing committee whose wife worked at the Star agreed. Curiously, the motto of the man's employer is "We insure free speech."

Fellow Journalists React

By far the sharpest and ugliest rebukes have come from minority journalists,

particularly officers and members of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Critics from the NABJ blatantly misrepresented the book's main points. They claimed that I was against the hiring of minority journalists and that I singled out journalists of color for newsroom political correctness and the miscoverage it had generated. Their reviews contained the worst kind of racial McCarthyism, as writers threw mud on my name and credentials.

Writing in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, columnist and local NABJ president Eugene Kane said "McGowan strikes me as one of the white journalists who long for the days of all-white newsrooms, all-white society pages, and no black faces in the newspaper unless they were charged with a crime." St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times media columnist Eric Deggans (another NABJ officer) wrote that I seemed to be consumed with anger and rage. "Anger that so many news organizations seem committed to hiring and promoting minorities. Rage that other sensibilities, besides those of the white male power structure, are now helping shape the nation's news agenda." The Maynard Institute's Dori Maynard had problems with the book's "scholarship" though she offered no specifics whatsoever. [See Dori Maynard's stories on pages 11 and 34.] On television, Les Payne of Newsday said that my politics were "from the gutter."

It was not surprising when the NABJ reacted strongly to the National Press Club's (NPC) decision to give "Coloring the News" its 2002 award for media criticism. Deggans wrote John Aubuchon, then the NPC president, that it was "amazing that the NPC would honor a book that so blatantly twists and bends the truth to attack such a simple obvious and honorable goal." (Yet a few months after this event, when I had agreed to debate NABJ about my book, the NABJ pulled out.) The Washington Post's Richard Prince said "Coloring the News" "is simply a continuation of the angry white male backlash we have been contending with since we landed on these shores." The National Association of Hispanic Jour-

nalists piled on, too, calling the book "insulting" and "poorly argued." That group went on to say that I had "a hostile attitude toward journalists of color." The NPC resisted the pressure to rescind their award, but its president and board of governors issued statements—without letting me know their content or timing—finding various faults with the book's core argument and its research, though once again specific charges were lacking and, in the end, the award was bestowed.

"Coloring the News" enjoyed sales far more robust than expected and did, I think, help to jumpstart a debate that had been stalled for too long. It also set the stage for my next book, "Gray Lady Down," which uses the Jayson Blair scandal as a window onto the decade's long slide of The New York Times under publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr.

But the overall experience has left me a bit ambivalent. While I gained a more clear-eyed view of today's corporate media realities, it was somewhat sad to lose the illusions I had harbored up until then. Call me naive or idealistic, but despite my own research and reporting on the subject, I still had a vague confidence that American journalism's maverick streak, which values iconoclasm and intellectual honesty, would help me overcome established notions about what public conversations can happen and which can't.

This I found was wishful thinking, a version of the world as it "ought to be," not as it really is. As a friend who works at The New York Times said in explaining his paper's blackout of "Coloring the News": "We're gutless careerists. What can I say? The treatment your book got dramatizes the power that liberals have to dominate the discourse and to shut down—or try to shut down—dissidents or those who have alternative points of view." ■

William McGowan is the author of "Coloring the News" and is currently under contract with Encounter Books to write a book about The New York Times and Jayson Blair.

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Why Journalists Can't Talk Across Race

'What we found is a conversation fraught with frustration and mistrust.'

By Dori J. Maynard

Nearly 30 years ago the news media set out to diversify its ranks. Since then it has more than tripled its number of journalists of color from the recorded low of 3.95 percent. It's progress, but progress that was far short of its goal to have the nation's newsrooms reflect the nation's diversity by the year 2000. According to the annual newsroom census by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), journalists of color make up 12.53 percent of the work force. People of color make up 31 percent of the overall population.

There is one often overlooked reason why the industry continues to struggle to retain journalists of color. It is because the news organizations that essentially serve as moderators of the nation's conversations have yet to learn how to talk about and across their own racial fault lines.

As part of the Maynard Institute's strategic planning process, we spent the first few months of this year conducting more than 70 interviews with 18 news organizations, most of them newspapers. Armed with a generous grant from the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, the institute was charged with examining three newsroom issues—diversity, training and the conversation around diversity.

What we found is a conversation fraught with frustration and mistrust. Many people of color are frustrated because they feel as though the industry is failing to live up to its promise. Much of that frustration is borne by the failure to meet the year 2000 goal and then the subsequent decision to push the goal back another 25 years seemingly without making the necessary changes to enable the goal to be better met in the future. Many executives are frustrated because they feel they receive no credit for the progress made. Many white men expressed frustration

because they are scared that if they say the wrong thing they will be branded a racist.

Years of compliance training, diversity training, and sensitivity training have taught participants what they *can* say, and this has essentially left people with a set of learned responses that don't take this conversation past predictable roadblocks. Little has been done to teach people how to say what they want to say in a way that can be heard and is effective. The result is that even in news organizations that have a diverse staff, the strengths of that diversity are often not reflected in either the content or the business practices. The reason: So many employees have been trained to say what they think they *should* say and not necessarily what they believe.

Greg Freeman, the late St. Louis (Mo.) Post-Dispatch columnist, said in "To Whom It May Concern," a book about retaining journalists of color assembled by ASNE: "From talking with colleagues from across the country, I feel that many journalists feel that they aren't listened to by management in terms of stories and angles. Angles that are perhaps different are often summarily dismissed because they don't always fit the mold of what some managers think stories should be."

Because of this, many journalists of color stop offering ideas that they know cut against the grain. Over time, a lot of them decide to leave journalism, according to a 2001 study done for ASNE. The study, brought together by Princeton University researcher Lawrence T. McGill, a meta-analysis of 13 studies looking at the retention of journalists of color between the years 1989 and 2000, cited the lack of professional opportunities and absence of opportunity for career advancement as two of the main reasons journalists of color make the decision to leave.

Trying to Talk Across Race

During one newsroom-wide conversation we had during the institute's assessment, there was debate about whether this lack of opportunity existed because white managers overlooked journalists of color or because journalists of color did not put their hands up. The discussion was a good illustration of the breakdown in communication across race that is apparent in many newsrooms.

It should not be surprising that journalists do not know how to talk across race. Little in most people's experience prepares them for these conversations. Most of us grew up (and now live) in mostly segregated communities, attended schools lacking in a diverse student body, and go to segregated houses of worship. Rarely are we in situations that give us the experience and knowledge about how to talk across race. In one community the lack of contact among the races was so apparent that, in an attempt to bring some diversity to his church, an African-American Louisiana Baptist bishop recently offered white people \$5 to attend a Sunday service and \$10 to attend a Thursday service. When asked why, Bishop Fred Caldwell told CNN, "So let's just cut to the chase. America needs to come together"

While the bishop's approach is unique, it is equally clear that in our news organizations we need to find ways to at least talk together, if not work well together, if we want to survive as an industry.

What makes this conversation more difficult is that we have yet to acknowledge and understand the role that race and gender play in shaping our perceptions of news and events around us. Just as journalists of color and their white peers experience industry opportunities very differently, they also

often view news events through very different lenses.

News coverage of Jayson Blair's situation at The New York Times offers an example. For many white journalists, race and diversity efforts were at the core of the story. In The Washington Post, syndicated columnist Richard Cohen wrote: "Not only was Blair not stopped, he was promoted to the national staff and ultimately given more responsibilities. Why? The answer appears to be precisely what the Times denies: favoritism based on race."

Many journalists of color saw the story differently, regarding what happened as a failure of management. "Over the years, the Times has rejected the notion that it needs an ombudsman and has insisted that its editors are capable of detecting errors, enforcing a code of ethics, and addressing issues of credibility raised by its readers. The Jayson Blair affair should be enough for the Times to rethink that conclusion," wrote (New York) Daily News columnist E.R. Shipp in an article she wrote for the "Outlook" section of The Washington Post.

The Siegal Committee report, a comprehensive examination of the events and practices that led to the departure

of the Times's top editors, Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd, makes it clear both race and management played a role. This is not because Blair was given a break due to his race, but because those who work in newsrooms often shy away from discussions involving race. Jonathan Landman, whose urgent memo noted the need to stop Blair from writing for the Times, said he did not aggressively block Blair's promotion to the full-time staff in part because the issue of race was involved.

"The racial dimension of this issue and Gerald's [Boyd] obvious strong feelings made it especially sensitive; in that sense it is fair to say that I backed off a bit more than I would have if race had not been a factor," Landman says in the Siegal report.

Landman's experience in shying away from such discussions involving race is common. The fear of saying the wrong thing, appearing racist, or just sounding stupid is so great that some of the white men who participated in our assessment observed that it interfered with the newsroom's ability to gather good stories and mentor and criticize across racial lines. People of color told of times they found good stories on their beats only to have their

news judgment questioned by a white editor. After a while, many said, they stopped going to their editors with such stories. At the same time, white editors have been heard to complain that despite having a diverse staff, all journalists think the same way.

To fulfill the industry's promise to diversify its newsrooms so journalists can accurately and fairly cover our increasingly complex communities, we need to find ways to talk across our nation's racial fault lines. To do so might require retraining ourselves in how to listen and how to speak honestly and respectfully to our colleagues. If we fail to learn how to do this, we stand a good chance of having these same stilted and unproductive conversations about how we once again missed the mark in the year 2025. ■

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Having Conversations Across Race in Newsrooms

We have not 'found a safe place or way to discuss racial issues with each other.'

By Condace L. Pressley

The meteoric rise of former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair and his swift and sudden fall into disgrace has given us in the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) much about which to think, write and talk. The "Blair Incident," as we have called it, also signals an NABJ call to action. Our organization has stated clearly and repeatedly that there is no excuse and perhaps no satisfactory explanation for Blair's abhorrent behavior. He was wrong and is being held accountable for his actions. The notion

that Blair will likely profit from his dishonesty should repulse all of us.

Those who ultimately managed Blair have also been held accountable for their actions. Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd resigned their positions as executive editor and managing editor at the Times. However, it appears that the managers with more daily contact with this reporter could have done more to prevent the tsunami of destruction done to the newspaper's credibility and to the morale of its employees. Blair needed coaches. Instead, he had

cheerleaders who failed to hold him accountable for the responsibility he assumed when he joined this prestigious news organization.

The New York Times will emerge stronger from this dark period in its 152-year history, as will our industry. For better or for worse, Blair's actions shone a white-hot light on the value of newsroom diversity initiatives. NABJ, like The New York Times and many other media companies, recognizes the value in having the diversity that is America reported on by those with

different voices and experiences. The content of our news coverage should reflect what is happening throughout the community.

Why Diversity Matters

Our challenge now lies in illustrating the benefits of diversity to the readers, listeners and viewers as well as to those opposed to “a hand up and not a hand out.” We accomplish this goal by how we compose our newsroom staff and the quality of our coverage that emerges from it. While few openly state opposition to newsroom diversity initiatives, clearly the industry is a long way from aligning its staffing with the demands for coverage of increasingly diverse communities.

Why is this disconnect still with us? I believe we are still not comfortable having conversations about race. Managers fear being labeled “racist” while journalists of color fear being labeled “not qualified enough.” These are issues we discuss among ourselves, but most of us haven’t found a safe place or way to discuss racial issues with one another. Another challenge our industry faces in trying to reach its goals

involves expectations and lifestyles. Many entry-level journalists of color come from the nation’s big cities and urban communities, and many of them want and expect to work in communities familiar to them. But the industry, especially newspapers, need entry-level journalists of color in our smaller cities and communities, places that might lack the cultural environments to which these entry-level journalists of color are accustomed.

This imbalance of expectation and need is something NABJ can help to address. As an organization, we already work to strengthen ties among African-American journalists and promote diversity in newsrooms. We honor excellence and outstanding achievement in the media industry and work to expand job opportunities and recruiting activities for established African-American journalists and students interested in journalism. And NABJ looks for ways to expand and balance the media’s coverage of the African-American community and experience.

Everyone—from NABJ and other organizations for journalists of color to the hiring managers in the industry—must urge entry-level journalists among

its members to entertain and to accept employment offers in the country’s smaller and medium markets where their skills are needed. There will be benefits for them, as well. Rookie journalists can learn, in a less-pressured environment, from the inevitable mistakes they will make and hone their skills across a range of assignments. There is something worth emulating in the way in which Major League Baseball relies on its system of farm teams. What better way is there to get the best prospects in the pipeline and ready them for the big time? There is also something to be said for understanding the value of “paying dues” and “earning stripes,” an understanding that some younger journalists don’t seem to have.

Discussing Race Among Journalists

NABJ can communicate this message to student members and entry-level journalists. However, it will be most effectively preached one journalist at a time by individual members who can share what they have learned from their experiences. Groups like NABJ can make other contributions as well. By using our Media Institute for journalism education as the vehicle and relying on NABJ member journalists in senior management positions as facilitators, NABJ can create the safe place so desperately needed by journalists to have necessary, difficult and rare conversations about race in the newsroom—and have them across race. Such discussions would benefit all of us and improve what we, as journalists, produce.

But there is work for the journalism industry to do as well. It must continue to support minority journalism organizations like NABJ by recruiting not only at our annual conventions but also year-round via programming like the NABJ Media Institute and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists’ Parity Project. [See more about this project on page 30.] While it might continue to be fashionable and cost effective to do more with less, when the economy finally rebounds the busi-

Minority journalists as a percentage of the professional work force of newspapers in eight circulation categories.

	1980	1983	1993	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Over 500,000	7.2	9.4	16.1	17.3	17.0	17.3	18.4	18.4	18.5	18.6
250,001 to 500,000	6.4	7.8	14.3	16.2	16.8	17.8	18.3	18.3	18.8	19.5
100,001 to 250,000	6.3	6.0	11.8	13.1	13.2	13.6	13.6	14.0	14.5	15.0
50,001 to 100,000	5.6	6.3	10.3	11.3	11.0	10.8	10.2	10.2	10.5	10.7
25,001 to 50,000	4.2	3.4	7.0	7.1	7.6	7.6	8.1	7.4	7.9	8.5
10,001 to 25,000	3.1	4.4	6.5	7.0	6.9	6.5	6.9	6.0	7.1	7.4
5,001 to 10,000	2.4	3.7	4.9	5.1	5.9	5.6	5.6	4.4	4.8	5.5
5,000 and Under	2.8	3.8	5.2	4.6	6.6	5.7	6.0	6.4	4.8	5.7

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ness side of journalism (with its ongoing emphasis on bottom line profit) must provide journalists with the necessary resources to achieve the goals of a diverse newsroom.

Every young journalist—not only those of color—needs supportive mentoring and solid training when they start working in the newsroom. Editors (and other journalists) also need support for and solid training in ways to manage diverse newsrooms successfully. There is no reason for black journalists, especially young ones, to be forced to wear the scarlet letter for the sins of one bad journalist who is black. Thousands of black journalists go to work each day committed to upholding the standards of an industry that the civil rights movement led us to integrate and in which we continue a struggle to advance.

In the Jayson Blair incident there

was sufficient blame to share. To attribute race as the cause of Blair's actions is unfair and wrong. In fact, in his memo to the staff of *The New York Times*, the newspaper's new executive editor, Bill Keller, observed that in a detailed report on the Blair incident journalists from outside the paper "answered the charge by some of our more partisan critics that the Blair case was a consequence of our determination to hire and promote a diverse staff."

"That charge, they make clear, is wrong," Keller wrote.

For us, as we move forward, the lesson is about taking risk. For entry-level journalists of color the risk comes in taking a job in a community where again you might be the first or the only one who looks like you in the newsroom and sacrificing social comfort in the short term, knowing a greater reward comes later. For the newsroom

managers who work with journalists of color, one risk is to figure out ways to get over the hurdle of having a young staffer confuse constructive criticism with racism. Only when we find ways to discuss these unnerving and discomforting issues will we advance our craft and our service to it.

I am willing to take that step. Are you? ■

Condace Pressley is the 14th president of the National Association of Black Journalists. Her term as president ended in August 2003. Pressley is the assistant program director of the nation's top rated news talk radio station, News/Talk 750 WSB in Atlanta, Georgia.

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Making Race a Part of Local TV News Coverage

A news producer describes KRON's reporting on race and the way this led to changes in how people work in the newsroom.

By Craig Franklin

Remember the Kerner Commission? It's surprising how few people do, even among those who report news about the issue of race relations that this 1968 report addressed.

In local TV news, we seem barely able to remember yesterday's assignment as we scramble to our next live shot. So it's laughable to imagine reporters stopping during their busy day to contemplate the race riots of the 1960's and how a group of presidential appointees—the Kerner Commission—reported back to the nation about its racial divide and blamed it, in part, on the mainstream white media's failure to report about "Negro" life and issues.

So it was scandalous (that it had taken so long) and extraordinary (that such an effort was about to be made by

our station when few newspapers and fewer TV stations were doing so) when management at KRON-TV in San Francisco decided in 1997 to begin a year-long project to report about race. Without such efforts being made by news organizations, North Carolina State University professor Robert Entman, who studies news and race, contends that blacks and other minorities are still being largely excluded or stereotyped, while the lives of whites are portrayed in a broader range—the good, the bad, and the usual.

KRON's "About Race" project set into motion an evolving growth in our newsroom that continues today. This project changed not only our approach to news coverage but also affected the lives of many on our staff. The initial goal of "About Race" was to reframe our reporting to deemphasize conflict,

sensationalism and finger-pointing and focus on information that would help viewers better understand and deal with race in their daily lives.

We began the project by asking two basic questions: What is race? Where does prejudice come from? Our stories then expanded to examine topics such as the roles race plays in religion, education and the workplace. Reporters also looked at interracial marriage and the lives of multiracial children. In time, we even produced a two-part series on how television news affects race relations.

Talking About Race

I was assigned to be the lead producer of "About Race," a decision that requires a brief explanation. In the early 1990's, minority staffers were trying to

introduce a “rainbow Rolodex” into the newsroom. I was one of several white staffers who quietly grumbled about “political correctness” as this idea was put forth. Without widespread support, and in a majority white workplace, the Rolodex project stalled.

Soon after, I was teamed with a black video editor to co-produce a documentary about the history of African Americans in baseball. I thought I was a well-intentioned, racially sophisticated and sensitive guy. So it shocked me when our increasing disagreements led to a blow-up: she accused me of being racist, and I called her incompetent. At this point a little counseling might have helped, but we really didn't know how to talk about race at our station. Management removed her from the baseball documentary, and I finished without her.

She and I didn't speak again until the “About Race” project started four years later and—before management realized its mistake—she was assigned as tape editor. At this point, the two people with probably the worst personal race relations in the building were going to be reunited for a lengthy, high-pressure project on race relations.

At her suggestion, we took a long, long walk and decided we didn't have to like each other, but we had to learn how to talk about our differences more honestly. The fact is, I had a lot to learn about the different realities race can create for people. When I was talking with a black man about that difference he said to me: “When *you* wake up in the morning you don't have to say to yourself, ‘I wonder, what's going to happen to me because I'm white?’ But somewhere inside my brain that question is always hanging.”

In working together on “About Race,” she and I ended up living the very subject we were reporting on. Through fighting, talking, listening, we eventually reshaped our pain and differences into an unlikely friendship that has grown through six more years of collaboration. Not a happy ending, exactly, more like a work in progress.

Early in the “About Race” project, news director Dan Rosenheim assigned a team of 15 staffers to examine KRON's

overall coverage of race as well as racial attitudes inside the newsroom. At the first meeting of our so-called “race committee,” a Filipino-American cameraman calmly stated that KRON was the most racially segregated place he'd ever worked.

Now at this point you might be picturing racism flowing through the halls of KRON like hot lava. Not so. KRON has always enjoyed the reputation of being a friendly workplace. So when he made his statement—and other non-whites nodded—the whites in the room reacted with stunned protests. The discussion could have quickly disintegrated but, instead, for the first time at our station, a diverse group of journalists began talking about race—haltingly, uncomfortably—but with the frank curiosity we typically bring to less threatening topics. As we took those wobbly baby steps, we should have had a trained facilitator to help us, but one wasn't there. Nonetheless, the race committee and the “About Race” project began to slowly change our company's culture, exposing hidden fault lines and reducing tensions.

Our news coverage changed, too. For example, the race committee's content audit showed that our news relied heavily on white experts. The committee recommended expanding our sources. Suddenly the previously poohpooled “rainbow Rolodex” became solid policy that all of us could support.

We documented this process as part of a two-part series titled “News and Race,” by devoting an extraordinary 24 minutes on the 6 p.m. news. The suggestion of examining ourselves in public generated even more newsroom conversation because our standard practice, as journalists, is to look at others, not at ourselves. Some staffers thought “News and Race” would be a self-serving whitewash, while management worried about exposing dirty laundry.

Ultimately the news director felt we were no better or worse than most companies and that showing our racial difficulties would spark broader public discussion. But it was not an easy decision. Rosenheim was clearly nervous

about the scripts, as were all of us who worked on these stories. Nevertheless, he kept a cautious distance, giving us support instead of interference.

A few days before we broadcast this series, Rosenheim showed it to the newsroom. After they'd viewed it, people voiced a broad range of opinions, which was another stunning example of change from the safe silence of years past. While concerns were expressed that we didn't dig deeply enough, the tone of the comments was generally positive, as I sensed communal pride in seeing us tackle such tough issues.

The Diversity Committee

By any standard, the “About Race” project was a success. Audience response was huge and overwhelmingly positive. We extended the project for a second year, producing a total of two dozen in-depth news pieces. More than 400 teachers wrote asking for copies. KRON won a Peabody Award, the Pew Center's James K. Batten award, three consecutive Unity Awards from the Radio-Television News Directors Association, and repeated recognition from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism's annual workshops on race and ethnicity.

This collective effort could not have happened without visionary management. But in 2000, KRON was sold and that management replaced. Some 20 staffers called a meeting with the new bosses and bluntly asked whether KRON would continue its commitment to racial issues. The answer was yes.

With that assurance, staffers formed their own grassroots “diversity committee.” Here's how it works. We meet at nine o'clock every Thursday morning to brainstorm story ideas. These gatherings supplement the regular news planning meetings. Anyone in the station is invited to come or submit ideas. About eight of us attend regularly. While the focus is still often about race, we also look at issues related to poverty, immigrants, gays, religion, women, seniors and people with disabilities. Besides “issue” stories, we also look for good features, or simply

ways to include a wider variety of folks in daily stories. Often we are able to provide background or context that news planners miss in their daily rush. After September 11, 2001, for example, we helped report in depth about Bay Area Afghan and Muslim communities.

All of this means more work for committee regulars, who still have other duties and deadlines. We make this extra effort because it feels right, but also because we love getting hold of a good story, and there are whole veins of untapped gold out there. Some “diversity” stories we’ve managed to get covered include a look at how playing basketball has connected the Japanese-American community for almost a century. And there were the ones about how school segregation in America was first challenged by a Chinese-American girl in San Francisco and how disabled people are trying to build “wheelchair ramps” on the Internet. We’ve also brought to the attention of viewers that Iraqi Americans have been broadcasting radio and television to Baghdad from the farmlands of California for three decades.

The diversity committee has its detractors—people who never attend but see us as marching in lockstep to a mandate of political correctness. A white producer calls us “The Politburo,” and another white, mid-level news manager was upset when we suggested a new, more cautious policy for identifying the race of crime suspects. “We’re supposed to be journalists,” he complained, “not social workers.” Occasionally, we have to dodge and weave to get stories on the air—actions that one person on the committee refers to as “drive-by diversity.” For example, one committee member is in a position to assign daily news crews. When she sees some rare downtime in the schedule, she can often dispatch a crew to a story that our committee has found. We also have a special projects unit that can bypass the daily news apparatus.

But when push comes to shove, we still need the backing of management. Thanks to news director, Stacy Owen, race and diversity remain on our newsroom’s agenda. In KRON’s annual reports to the Federal Communi-

cations Commission, the coverage category of “race, diversity and civil rights” has more than doubled since the committee started, from about 25 stories a year to more than 50.

Beyond those numbers, I believe that when news organizations make ongoing efforts to recognize, understand and reflect the variety of people and issues in their community, those who work for them become better journalists and possibly—to the horror of hard-bitten reporters everywhere—better human beings. ■

Craig Franklin is a news producer at KRON. The station’s continuing efforts to cover race and diversity have relied on several organizations, including the PEW Foundation’s Project for Civic Journalism, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism’s “Let’s Do It Better Workshops.”

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Mainstreaming and Diversity Are Gannett’s Core Values

But these programs ‘are not without controversy.’

By Tom Witosky

Jay Harris’s argument for minority mainstreaming and diversity in U.S. journalism is the same today as it was 20 years ago, when he was a national correspondent for the Gannett News Service and an African-American city councilman from a small Louisiana city that Harris can’t even remember presented it to him.

“He had been on the city council for years,” the former San Jose Mercury News publisher remembered recently. “But the only time the local paper asked him about anything, it was about a problem in the minority community or about the poor. They never asked him

for comment when there was a planning and zoning proposal or a city street paving problem. It’s like he didn’t exist when those questions came up.”

Harris heard those comments in 1984, at a time when he and John Quinn, then the top news executive in the Gannett Company, were beginning work on a policy to end what they considered to be a journalism myopia that was destined to alienate newspapers from their future readers. “Back then, I never understood why reporters and editors always seemed to limit the people they wrote about or talked to,” Harris said. “I don’t think it was

intentional in most cases, but rather it was something that no one had really thought about. It was the traditional way of doing things and that had to be changed.”

Twenty Years of Attention to Diversity

Since 1984, Gannett newspapers have been on a path of change to bring a diversity of culture and race into their newsrooms and their pages. Last year, Gannett’s 100 newspapers had nearly 1,000 minority journalists on their staffs amounting to 17.1 percent of the

company's newsroom workforce. That figure exceeded by nearly five percentage points the average percentage of minority journalists working at daily newspapers nationwide in 2002.

Gannett newspapers have also been evaluated annually during the last 20 years on how well they met the expectation that each newspaper include expert minority voices where appropriate and reflect the activities of each part of their communities. "Mainstreaming and diversity in our newsrooms and our news pages are essential to our newspapers maintaining credibility with our communities," said George Benge, the executive who oversees the company-wide program, named in typical Gannett fashion as the "All-American Review: Mainstreaming and Diversity." "We believe that the program will provide our newspapers with the credibility needed to remain strong over the long term in the communities we serve."

Executives at Gannett define "mainstreaming" as the appropriate use of minority experts in the reporting of stories. For example, when a sportswriter is working a story about how intercollegiate athletics are financed, then the reporter should include a minority expert on the topic. Gannett defines "diversity" as relating to stories about minorities and their communities. That means that to diversify the story on intercollegiate athletic finance, the reporter would use a predominantly black college or a conference like the Southwestern Conference to illustrate the impact of increased spending on athletic programs.

But the company's mainstreaming and diversity program are not without controversy. Given the Jayson Blair scandal at The New York Times, these reporting policies must be understood within the context of the company's intentions and the execution of those intentions. Simply put, does the goal of

having minorities well represented inside the newsroom and in news columns amount to cynical political correctness, or do these policies uphold journalism's primary responsibility to mirror accurately individual and community accomplishment and failure?

Gannett's Policies at Work

Shannon Owens recently became a sportswriter for The Des Moines Register. Owens, the great niece of Olympian sprinter Jesse Owens and the sister of Chris Owens, a forward for the NBA Memphis Grizzlies, is enthusiastic, knowledgeable, but relatively inexperienced in sports writing at age 23. She wrote for the student newspaper at the University of Texas, where she

Simply put, does the goal of having minorities well represented inside the newsroom and in news columns amount to cynical political correctness, or do these policies uphold journalism's primary responsibility to mirror accurately individual and community accomplishment and failure?

majored in journalism, and landed an internship at the Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer in 2002 through the prestigious sports journalism institute sponsored by the National Association of Black Journalists and The Associated Press Sports Editors organization. She is only the second minority journalist hired to write full-time for The Des Moines Register sports section in 30 years. Despite this, she is one of 18 full-time minority reporters and editors within the 160-member Register newsroom that amounts to 11 percent of the newsroom and just 1.1 percentage point below the minority population in the Des Moines metropolitan statistical area.

Owens's first Register assignment was to help cover a 13-state regional

soccer tournament held in Des Moines in June. Owens had never covered a soccer game before and felt completely out of her comfort zone. Like any rookie serious about learning her job, she spent hours watching soccer on morning and afternoons so hot that she complained of sunburn. "I didn't know I could [get sunburned]," she said with a laugh.

But Owens is dead serious about achieving her goal as a journalist. She wants to become a sports projects reporter and is already chomping to get a project underway. "I am curious about why minorities seem to concentrate themselves into one or two sports. Why they choose basketball and not soccer or something else," she said. Her idea is similar to a recent Green Bay Press-Gazette story that can be found on a Gannett editors' Web site that lists hundreds of stories reflecting diversity in communities served by Gannett newspapers. In Green Bay, the Gannett-owned newspaper wondered why so few minorities participated in athletics at Green Bay's five area high schools.

The paper's reporting explained why. Among the less obvious reasons was that many potential athletes—many of whom are recent Hispanic and Hmong immigrants—still have trouble with English and get confused when taking direction from coaches. Also, many of their parents—particularly those with daughters—oppose athletic participation because of their cultural beliefs.

"This story area has some potential," Owens said. "I just hope I can work it in with everything else I have to do."

Owens's addition to the Register staff is just one example of what Gannett contends is the benefit of the company's mainstreaming and diversity program. Qualified minority candidates are difficult to find, particularly minority female sportswriters, but they can be found and trained. The primary ben-

efit—when they become staff members—is the different perspective they bring to the newsroom in determining what is and isn't news. Questions about minority participation in Des Moines high school sports aren't something that occurs to many sportswriters who aren't from a minority background. For readers, there are benefits, too. Different parts of a community will identify with a newspaper when they believe the local newspaper understands their views and concerns.

Benge, who is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and was editor at two Gannett newspapers before becoming a corporate executive, points to recent U.S. population projections to emphasize the business rationale behind Gannett's policies. "Over the next 50 years, the percentage of minorities in the United States is expected to grow from 26 to 47 percent of the total population," said Benge. "That means millions of potential readers will be alive to witness and experience a monumental cultural transformation. We have to be ready for that."

Benge isn't strident about the company policy but also isn't afraid to confront tough issues. His message to Gannett staffers is a positive one, based on the belief that good journalism is about the successes and failures of all parts of a community—not just the dominant one. "There are a lot of good stories out there, but we need to find them. Sometimes that's easy and sometimes that's hard," he said.

Measuring Success

Gannett publications use two procedures to assure that mainstreaming and diversity become a part of the newsroom culture. Each newspaper must establish a list of minority experts for use by its reporters. These lists, often divided on the basis of subject, are to be used by reporters and editors to expand the pool of sources. Benge acknowledges that these lists produce varying levels of success. In some newsrooms, reporters turn to them constantly; in other newsrooms, they are

largely ignored.

Benge also recognizes the limits to which such lists can be developed and used. For example, there are plenty of minority experts in areas such as sports, where minority athletes are predominant, but in the front offices, many fewer can be found. Currently, major professional sports have only two minority owners—Robert Johnson, who owns the NBA team in Charlotte, North Carolina and Arturo Moreno, who recently became Major League Baseball's first Hispanic owner with the purchase of the Anaheim Angels. Still, these lists can be effective tools to help reporters and editors avoid relying on the same people who tend to be quoted again and again.

But sometimes by identifying "new" sources, they can quickly become over-used sources. In 1999, Brill's Content found The Greenville (S.C.) News, a Gannett newspaper, quoted the same Asian woman three times in 13 weeks in stories about a new area jogging path, the need to change area rugs to match the season, and an Elton John concert to be held in the community. "We don't want the same person quoted in every story because that serves no real purpose and acts to cheapen our effort," Benge said. "The source list, if updated and used properly, can provide excellent sources for comment and is good, ethical journalism."

A newspaper self-audit is done annually by a newsroom committee as part of the All-American competition. These audits—like the rest of the company-wide competition—can be effective tools in illuminating problems with stereotypes, as well as spotting missed opportunities to be more inclusive. "If a story is being written on the changing family, why not include an interview and picture of a minority family?" Benge said. "Subjects for features, businesses, sports as well as the daily news report can cut across all parts of a community, and we have to show our readers that we recognize that."

When Benge met with newsroom editors from several Ohio and Wisconsin newspapers that Gannett had acquired, one of his tasks was to inform

the news executives of the core corporate value to expand minority inclusion into their newsrooms and onto their daily pages. "Actually the meeting was going pretty well until I began going through some examples of what I considered to be inappropriate," he said.

Benge pulled out a high school football preview section from an Ohio paper. The cover headline, "Redskins on Warpath," led to a discussion about the use of mascots in Gannett newspapers. Gannett doesn't have a corporate policy on the mascot issue, so decisions are left to local editors. But in this case, the headline provided an avenue for a discussion about these broader corporate issues. "Our discussion got pretty frank and that was a good thing," Benge said. "I think I was able to point out pretty well just why that shouldn't have been the headline."

Gannett provides newspapers with direction based on the values it wants its newspapers to uphold. But Gannett also monitors how well each of its newspapers is adhering to its principles of mainstreaming and diversity and provides tools to help editors and reporters do this. "We believe in local autonomy on issues like that [the use of mascots]," Benge said. "Our company policy about mainstreaming and diversity is about how we want our company to operate. Local papers still have the ability to make decisions based on how they want to report the news."

■

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Reporting on Race: Building a New Definition of 'News'

A report on race reporting by civic journalists highlights some common approaches.

By Jan Schaffer

Journalists are pretty good at covering issues in black and white. They quickly anoint the victims and the perpetrators, grade schools as soon as test scores are tallied, and paint Enron or WorldCom in Darth Vader hues. But when it comes to covering issues related to race relations, it's less about covering the black and white and a lot more about exploring the gray.

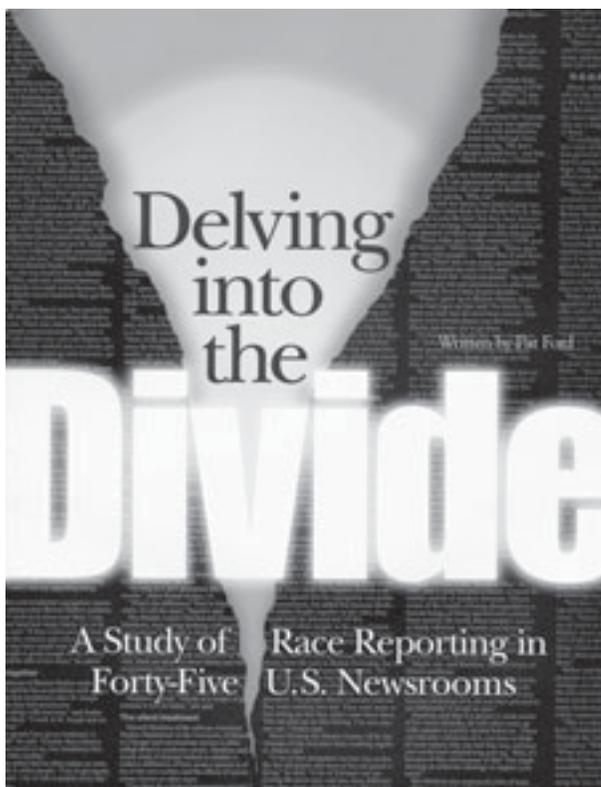
Covering race is seldom about reporting the noise, except when overt hate crimes or police misconduct motivate news coverage. More often, stories about race emanate from reporting on uncomfortable silences that exist in every community—the ones that make people squirm. Chronicling race relations in the 21st century is less about covering external conflict, a common and easy definition of “news,” and more about capturing the internal tensions—a trickier challenge for journalists.

Because internal racial tensions are less noticeable, covering them requires journalists to abandon some knee-jerk habits and reach for a different set of skills. They need to engage in deep listening by:

- Asking more open-ended questions.
- Listening for patterns, not anecdotes.
- Seeking out new voices.
- Framing the story after, not before, doing the interviews.
- Burrowing deeper on code or buzz words to unpack what people really mean when they use them.

Consider how deeper listening helped Mike Knepler at The Virginian-Pilot understand the role race was playing in the debate about a 1995 light-rail referendum. Hearing opponents talk about “bag ladies” and warn that riders

are “going to meet a lot of people they didn't meet before,” he heard a subtext that sounded almost like a coded appeal to those who fear blacks. Following these clues, he did more careful



reporting. And in his stories, he established that light-rail opponents were exploiting a fear of ferrying black Norfolk residents down to Virginia Beach resorts.

Covering race relations in the new millennium is much different than covering it during the civil rights decade of the 1960's. Then, journalists who were on the civil rights beat were seen as reporting to rectify wrongs and ensure equality. Right and wrong seemed pretty clear cut. Today, the terrain feels much softer, more confusing. “Solutions” that Baby Boomers might have embraced personally during the 1960's are now cast aside as failing to remedy

problems and even creating new ones. Busing to foster integrated schools? “No thanks,” many communities say, “Give us back our neighborhood schools.” Performance-based school accountability? Give us charter schools with some different markers for a “good education,” others insist. Higher education quotas to open up access? Justified, say some; illegal, counter others.

Difficulties in Reporting on Race

During the past decade, it's become increasingly clear to us at the Pew Center that there are two overarching storylines or master narratives—failing schools and race relations—that ripple through nearly every community in different ways. These storylines frequently emerged in many proposals we received for funding of civic journalism projects in award entries and in independent initiatives.

Usually the failing schools story is also a race relations story because the schools that are performing the worst have large minority student populations. Or these schools have high minority dropout rates. Or they receive fewer resources and have less skilled faculty than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. Moreover, reporters see year after year the patterns of performance gaps in the test scores of black and white students and struggle to write stories that address the problem rather than affix the blame. [See page 22 for coverage of the achievement gap.]

Yet racial tensions in the community or racial issues in schools often don't become news stories until some visible, noisy conflict emerges. Perhaps the governor slashes funding for el-

ementary and secondary public schools and community protests surface. Or a political candidate lambastes poor test scores and finger-pointing ensues. Or the police unfairly target minority motorists.

Readers, listeners and viewers, however, don't usually experience race as conflict. For them, race plays itself out as a shifting array of epiphanies and observations, difficult encounters, and tough choices. The pattern of these experiences over time rather than a particular incident that happened recently often provides the narrative thread for people's conversations and stories about race relations. So, when journalists report about race through a lens of intense conflict, the stories don't resonate with people's experiences.

From a journalist's perspective, however, eliciting and portraying such long-term patterns are tough. Often news organizations don't have the appetite or patience for stories that can be filled with ambivalence and be kind of messy to write or tell. White journalists, not surprisingly, risk framing the stories they report through a white lens, while minority journalists often struggle to pitch ideas arising out of their experiences and perspective to less-than-eager editors. Good sourcing can also be an ongoing problem, especially when language issues become part of the equation. Sometimes reporters work from Rolodexes that are packed with "quote commandos"—people whom reporters elevate to community spokespersons even when they aren't particularly validated or even respected within their own community.

Reporters' Tools for Covering Race

In the more than 800 civic journalism efforts the Pew Center has collected since 1993, we began to detect some new patterns in the coverage of racial tensions. Having identified them, we reported further and assembled what we learned in a 108-page booklet called "Delving into the Divide: A Study of Race Reporting in Forty-Five U.S. Newsrooms." Part how-to and part case study, the booklet serves as a road map for

news organizations that are trying to find ways to report on issues involving race, such as increased immigration to or diversity within their communities.

The initiatives we cited employed a lot of classic civic journalism tools. They created venues for interactions that became listening posts for reporters. These helped journalists to identify leaders and understand the language people used to talk about their experiences. Of course, we also see in these efforts widespread use of "civic mapping," one of civic journalism's contributions to race relations reporting.

Civic mapping gives journalists a structure for going out in the community and finding new kinds of sources, so-called "catalysts" and "connectors." The catalysts are the "go-to" people who attend to neighborhood business; local people tend to know who they are. Connectors are the civic bumblebees who pollinate a lot of community groups, from sports to scouts. Both are in short supply in journalists' Rolodexes. Civic mapping also helps reporters identify "third places." These are the spots where people informally gather and trade information. Most politicians know where third places are; fewer journalists do.

"Delving into the Divide" spotlights, too, many conventional tools for reporting on race, while featuring some that are unconventional. What follows are some that have been well replicated:

- **Giving news space to different perceptions.** Journalists tend to want to validate a right or wrong. But truth is in the eyes of the beholder. Those journalists who report "truth" as a plural word, not a singular word, tend to hear more from community members, who feel they have some access.
- **Polling, but only if it is done right.** Respondents in race polls tend to give politically correct answers. Drafting the questions is the most important step in good polling. Perceptions always differ, even when aspirations are the same. Questions should be able to probe for both.

- **Walking the streets and talking to people—before a story is framed.** This works well because people open up if they think you don't have a predetermined point of view.
- **Creating venues for people to talk.** These venues include focus groups, task forces, and video-conferencing. By doing this, reporters have heard poignant stories and built bridges to new sources.
- **Debunking myths and addressing them straight on.** This approach has produced its share of "aha" moments for reporters and readers.
- **Fessing up.** Some news organizations, such as The Jackson (Tenn.) Sun, have published a mea culpa, acknowledging that their past coverage was either biased or excluded big pieces of history.
- **Inviting action.** Letting people get involved and take ownership of the problem pays big dividends.

The goal in reporting about race relations is to bring a long-term perspective and a broad, encompassing approach to reporting these stories. I like to say that it's the 5,000-foot view, not the 50-foot one, which results in the best news coverage. To strive to inform people not only about what happened yesterday but, more importantly, about how things are progressing over time, seems an approach that every journalist could benefit by pursuing. ■

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Asking Questions So a Community Thinks About Race

The Marshall News Messenger played a central role in creating a new dialogue.

By Phil Latham

The cover of the Pew Center's report, "Delving into the Divide: A Study of Race Reporting in Forty-Five U.S. Newsrooms," shows an ever-widening, craggy gorge. One imagines treacherous and slippery pathways, almost impossible to navigate, coming out of it. Equally difficult to imagine is one bridge being built to connect the two sides: It would seem puny and insufficient. But could two or three bridges possibly provide the space needed for people to pass freely from one side to another? It isn't likely.

But there is another way: If this gorge is transformed into a plain, the walking gets easier for everyone. And filling up this gorge doesn't require the intense engineering of bridge-building or negotiation. It just requires shoveling. Lots of shoveling. Count me among those journalists who tries to shovel as much as he can.

Exploring Racism in Marshall, Texas

When I arrived in the East Texas town of Marshall (population 25,000) in 1998 to become editor of *The Marshall News Messenger* (circulation 8,000), no issue was as clear to me as the deplorable state of race relations in this community. Marshall's problems with racism are infamous. They were first made so by James Farmer, one of the cofounders of the Congress for Racial Equality, who lived here and went to school at Wiley College, a local historically black college. Then, in the early 1980's, Bill Moyers explored our town's racial troubles in "Marshall, Texas/Marshall, Texas," a frank, tough look at racism. The piece was part of Moyers's "Walk Through the 20th Century" series, which won an Emmy.

"Marshall, Texas/Marshall, Texas" depicts two Marshalls, one white and

happy, the other black and angry. Moyers's work was important and highly courageous, and it is worth noting that he remains a beloved figure here in the black and white communities. Presenting the truth did not make him an outcast. But showing the truth also did not inspire most of our residents to do much about those problems, either. After Moyers won the Emmy, a black woman, well known in Marshall, was denied access into a local tour of homes. This occurred in the 1990's, not some distant time ago. The local country club still has no black members. While the by-laws don't prohibit it, the rule is chiseled in stone.

These facts rightfully shame many in Marshall, and some have even stepped forward to do something. But the racial problems remain worse here than in any community in which I have lived. We came to Marshall from another small East Texas city only 100 miles to the south, but when we settled here, we felt the change in racial climate immediately. We'd only been here three months when my 13-year-old daughter asked, "Dad, why is there so much racism here?" Good question. I only wished I could have answered it.

I couldn't, but as editor of the newspaper, I believed it was a question that needed to be asked and answers sought. And there were other questions that for too long had gone unasked, such as "What can we do about it?" These questions and others formed the basis for a series our newspaper undertook called, "12 Questions on Race."

Asking Questions About Race

Before this series was published, I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could best communicate with readers. I was a native Texan, but I was also new to their community. They weren't going

to accept me pontificating on matters of race. If anyone would speak on this topic, it would have to be someone readers knew and trusted. East Texas is in the Bible Belt, which might be a term of derision outside the belt, but a source of pride inside it. So I thought we'd come up with 12 questions about race and pose them to 12 ministers, six white and six black, covering as many Christian denominations as possible. I would not interview the ministers, but we'd print whatever they wrote on the topic of the week.

I spent a great deal of time working on the questions that were, for the most part, not about religion at all. Many people in East Texas seek regular guidance from their ministers on a range of secular topics, so this was just an extension of that practice. Getting white ministers to be involved was easy. I had only one turn me down. It was an entirely different story with African Americans, and this puzzled me until one of them suggested that being a part of the series would be like painting a large target on his back for everyone—police, bankers, insurance agents, employers—to see. White ministers at least did not think they had anything to worry about. A few may have been surprised.

Six black ministers agreed to participate, but on the day before the series was to begin—a Saturday—I still had not gotten a response from any of them. Finally, I went to a minister's home and knocked on his door until someone answered. I told him I needed his answer to the question—"Using a scale of 1-100, how would you rate Marshall's racial climate?"—right then. He took my notebook and, sitting in his pajamas at his kitchen table, scribbled out 60 or 70 words that I could use. He never missed another deadline.

Many of the ministers, white and

black, gave Marshall failing grades for its racial climate. Ed Robb, Sr., a white, conservative Methodist evangelist who once took Billy Graham to task on the “NBC Nightly News” for being too liberal, gave the most enlightening answers throughout the 12 months that the series was published in 1999. And, once the series was done, it was Robb who reached out to African Americans to form a Racial Reconciliation Committee to try to improve the racial climate. Before Robb’s health began to fail and the loss of another key member, this committee played an extremely important role in helping the community to resolve a racial dispute.

I am heartened by the impact our newspaper’s coverage had in the formation of this committee. It’s the exact effect you want as a journalist—to inspire others to take action. Of course, many journalists disagree with civic journalism—with the role journalists play in trying to influence the civic life of their communities—but I would be embarrassed to have not had the Messenger reach out in this way. If I felt such a distancing from the concerns of a community was required of reporters and editors, I would rather drive a truck.

After the 12 Questions Were Asked

The day after the first installment, a wealthy local businessman called to say he’d pulled a small amount of advertising from the newspaper, something that didn’t concern me. What did concern me were his barely veiled threats against Robb and the other white ministers who were taking part. When I called Robb to warn him, he brushed it off. “That doesn’t bother me,” he said. He was true to his word.

Complaints lessened after the first two or three installments, but they did not stop. Some charged that the newspaper was guilty of “stirring things up.” And few transgressions in Marshall—and throughout the South—are quite as serious as that.

This newspaper and its staff did not stop its coverage of racial issues with “12 Questions on Race.” It published a complicated investigative piece showing the huge disparity in the high number of blacks and fewer number of whites who are arrested and jailed for certain minor offenses. Regularly, for the past two years, a local African-American columnist has commented on matters of local interest.

Though I’d only been in Marshall a short while when we did our series, I wasn’t new to Cox Newspapers. In one story about our “12 Questions” series, I was singled out for going ahead with this controversial project even though I was new on the job. The fact is that I’d known everyone to whom I report at Cox Newspapers for many years. I know their hearts on such racial issues, so I never worried for a moment about their support. Indeed, Cox Newspapers supported us fully as we faced a variety of threats to our advertising and readership along the way.

It pains me that the Racial Reconciliation Committee is gone, but the fact that it existed at all—and had at least one resounding success—tells me we can encourage the community to rejuvenate it and make it better. We simply have to get our backs behind our shows and get to work. ■

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Twelve Questions On Race

1. If you were asked to grade race relations in Marshall, what grade, from 1 to 100, would you give? How might we improve our score?
2. For the most part, predominantly white churches sat out of the civil rights movement. Black churches were much more heavily involved. What part do churches now play in the ongoing work for racial equality?
3. What is your favorite Bible verse, story or message concerning racism and/or how to overcome it?
4. What should you do if you see a person of your race engaged in racist behavior, such as making fun of another race?
5. This group is made up of six white and six black ministers. If each of you could talk frankly with a member of the other race about dealing with racism, without fear of offending, what would you say?
6. As ministers you deal with enriching the souls of your church members. Should you and your congregation be concerned with the economic welfare of those denied earthly riches because of racism?
7. How can churches and their members fight racist hate groups without sinking to the same level? Should we ignore these groups or confront them?
8. What three things—if you could pick only three—could happen in Marshall to improve the racial climate here?
9. Marshall has a rich, proud history. How do we maintain that pride and accurately depict that history although racial subjugation is a part of it? How do different races in Marshall celebrate each other’s histories?
10. Different races of people encounter each other all day long in public schools and on many jobs. At the end of the day they, for the most part, resign themselves to social polarization. What are churches doing, or what should they be doing, to reduce the social polarization? Or does it matter at all?
11. Children learn to segregate themselves; they are not born knowing segregation. In Marshall, where do they pick this up? If it’s primarily in the home, where else do they see it? What can churches do to combat this learning process?
12. Some say racism has not lessened, it has just become more covert. What are the racist subtleties you see in your race and in another? How do you combat subtleties without becoming a whiner or nitpicker? How much should a person be comfortable with? ■ —P.L.

Words & Reflections

Accidents happen in newsrooms, and some even can be expected to happen, according to **William F. Woo**, a former editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch who teaches journalism at Stanford University. Woo connects ideas emerging from Charles Perrow and other scholars of normal accident theory with editorial disasters in newsrooms. Woo begins by asking whether “there is something about news organizations—how they are managed, structured and equipped with technologies—that might offer us an explanation?” In his comprehensive analysis, Woo walks readers through some accidents—both in and out of newsrooms, with particular attention paid to what happened with Jayson Blair at The New York Times—to explore how well various institutions and industries might be able to prevent them. “When we don’t see that newsroom values . . . can be thought of as operating systems, then we risk finding that our newsrooms have become so complicated that the interaction of everything in them becomes too difficult to track,” Woo writes. “The result: We will not apprehend the next disaster until it is upon us.” In an accompanying box, Woo associates what the Times’s Siegal committee found with what the theories he’s written about tell us, and he observes that “if even a quarter of all the recommendations are put in place, the paper’s complexity will grow and with it the chance not only for things to go wrong but for the problems to spread in unpredictable ways.”

In an essay entitled “While the Watchdogs Slept,” **Gilbert Cranberg**, the former editor of The Des Moines Register’s editorial pages, wonders why the press hasn’t done a better job of investigating the Bush administration’s stated reasons why the United States went to war in Iraq. “Why did it take some four months from the disclosures by [Mohammed] ElBaradei and [Seymour] Hersh for press and politicians to find their voice and ask tough questions . . .?”

Alex S. Jones, director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, reflects on the life, times and journalism of Scotty Reston, who was Washington bureau chief for The New York Times during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Jones’s thoughts about the ways in which Reston reported on events of his time compared with how reporters in Washington now work were spurred by publication of John F. Stacks’s book, “Scotty: James R. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism.” Jones observes that, “Scotty Reston emblemized a moral journalism that could be tough or gentle depending on the situation, and he and his peers felt comfortable making those choices based on their sense of what was best for the nation.”

From the apartheid policies of South Africa to the civil unrest that plagued countries in Southern Africa, John Ryan writes about three decades of experience working as a white newspaper reporter covering these stories. **Wilson Wanene**, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist living in Boston, reviews Ryan’s book, noting the value of “One Man’s Africa” to journalists. “. . . one gets to see that even under a racially divisive system, there were newspapers and reporters calling things as they were.” Yet there were many stories white journalists couldn’t tell, and Wanene tells us how newspapers “relied on novice black journalists it recruited who in turn performed beyond expectations. Sadly though, they could not be given bylines as this would have endangered them.” ■

Journalism's 'Normal Accidents'

By exploring theories about how organizations fail, a journalist understands better what is happening in newsrooms and why.

By William F. Woo

As The New York Times went through its hell last spring, I marveled, as others must have, at the sequence of destructive events consuming it. Who could have imagined that a very junior reporter could have conned the paper so outrageously and for so long? Or that his eventual firing would lead to the departure of a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, chaos in the newsroom, resignations of the two top editors, and the mortification of the publisher who, only days before, had declared his faith in his executive editor?

Actually it happens—not every day, but frequently enough. Many news organizations have gone through searing difficulties for which there were ample warning signs that were ignored or misinterpreted.

Like the Times, other news organizations, in times of stress, have had to deal with unforeseen and seemingly unrelated events that made a satisfactory resolution impossible. Though details of these cases differ, they can be analyzed for what they had in common before the first obvious sign of trouble, for how the organizations responded to the problems, and for the ways in which the troubles spread out of control.

I came to this line of analysis a few years ago after reading a gripping account by William Langewiesche in *The Atlantic* about the crash of an airliner into the Florida Everglades. ValuJet 592 caught fire after oxygen canisters in the cargo hold exploded. The real cause of the crash may have been more complicated. Langewiesche suggested that the crash was the result of an intricate and unpredictable set of events involving a new type of airline spawned by deregulation, the contractors that served ValuJet, and the government agencies

that were supposed to oversee it. The crash, he concluded, was what organizational theorists call “a normal accident.”

Paradoxical as it may sound, accidents in some organizations can be considered normal. Such organizations have complicated and highly interactive components. Their operating systems are tightly coupled, providing little room for recovery.

News organizations do not involve risky technologies in the way nuclear power plants, petrochemical factories, or even airliners do. Death and destruction do not occur when media organizations crash, though the loss of public confidence in the press can be widespread and damaging to society. Not all of the features of normal accident theory apply to journalism, but enough do that the theory can be a way of looking at what has been happening in America's news organizations.

In terms of its mission and its protection under the First Amendment, journalism is a unique industry. But in some ways, as we shall see, it shares organizational similarities with other industries, some prone to normal accidents. If journalists cannot recognize this, they won't be able to understand why certain things go wrong again and again. And they will be handicapped not just in their ability to prevent disasters, but also in their capacity to effectively

serve the First Amendment.

What Jayson Blair did at the Times was no accident. It was deliberate. That is true with disasters at other news organizations. They are not “accidents,” as we commonly understand the word, but the results of transgressions such as plagiarism, poor judgment, or many of the other things that journalists do that they shouldn't.

But what came to light after Blair was uncovered, and what happened after he committed his deception, will be familiar to anyone who has looked at normal accident theory. The same can be said of problems at other news organizations. Normal accident theory will not explain everything, but it explains a good deal.

Back in 1993, Doug Underwood, a former Gannett journalist, wrote a book called “When MBAs Rule the Newsroom.” “On virtually every front,” he declared, “the newspaper industry's approach has been to get its members to adapt the corporate ‘management’ and ‘marketing’ solutions to handling their difficulties.” In the years following, the emphasis on management throughout the news industry has been unprecedented, and yet the landscape is littered with disasters.

News organizations large and small have been brought low by plagiarism, by theft of information or the sale of it, by stories that proved to be fiction

Not all of the features of normal accident theory apply to journalism, but enough do that the theory can be a way of looking at what has been happening in America's news organizations.

instead of fact, by spectacular breaches of the firewall between news and business, by postings of sensational but false information on the Web, by embarrassing failures to get right such big stories as the CNN/Time Tailwind account of how nerve gas supposedly was used by the United States in Indochina, and the San Jose Mercury News's "Dark Alliance" series, which accused the CIA of introducing crack cocaine into inner cities.

Is there a connecting thread among them? Is there something about news organizations—how they are managed, structured and equipped with new technologies—that might offer us an explanation?

When the Theory Applies to Newsrooms

As a formal inquiry, normal accident theory began in 1984 with a Yale sociologist named Charles Perrow and his book "Normal Accidents: Living With High-Risk Technologies." Many characteristics of normal accidents, as he defined them, are common to problems news organizations experience. Perrow, however, was not the first scholar to examine accidents in a new way. A better place to start is with the late British sociologist Barry A. Turner, who made a close study of 84 accidents in the United Kingdom. In "Man-Made Disasters," published in 1979, Turner noted two phenomena that are found in many journalistic train wrecks.

Turner observed that man-made disasters don't happen out of the blue. Typically, they have an incubation period, a time when unnoticed sets of problems begin accumulating. These

periods certainly occur in journalism. Take the case of Patricia Smith, The Boston Globe columnist who invented people and events and had to resign in 1999. Her record was full of warning signs about fabrications, some dating more than a dozen years to her work at the Chicago Sun-Times. Editors let them slide.

Second, Turner saw that relevant detail often is buried within a mass of irrelevant information. People don't go around with their eyes closed but, as Turner notes, "A way of seeing is always also a way of not seeing." In one instance, Turner found that memos that might have prevented a deadly rail accident went unread because they were regarded as "flotsam" in the system.

That Jayson Blair's expense accounts contained contradictory information is a significant clue that he never went to places where he supposedly did his reporting. Expenses that he turned in for a meal in Washington, for example, had with them a receipt from a restaurant in Brooklyn. Yet frequently problems with expense accounts go unnoticed, sometimes for months. And Blair's expense accounts were reviewed not by editors familiar with his assignment but by an administrative assistant.

In another example, during the planning period before the Los Angeles Times devoted its Sunday magazine to the Staples Center in October 1998 under a profit-sharing agreement, editors attended meetings where clues to the deal could easily have been recognized. At one, as recounted by the paper's media critic, David Shaw, a 23-page document detailing the arrange-

ment, including "revenue opportunities," was available. Twenty-three pages of business text can be flotsam to busy journalists.

Though Turner's work went largely unnoticed in America, Perrow's book was quickly recognized for its significance. Normal accidents, he wrote, occur in organizations characterized by interactive complexity and tight coupling within their systems. In these situations, he wrote "multiple and unexpected interactions of failures are inevitable."

Not every nuclear power plant will have a serious accident. But given the nature of such installations, somewhere, sometime, accidents are inevitable. Not every paper will find its reporters have made stories up or plagiarized or sold information to tabloids. But the way newsrooms are organized and managed means some disasters are also inevitable there.

News organizations today are characterized by interactive complexity. The growing dependence on convergence of technologies (print, online, broadcast) requires it. Yet even beyond technologies, news organizations have become complicated places through the developments of newsrooms without walls, the introduction of team reporting systems, and the dispersal of authority that once rested with middle management. Decentralized authority can bring perspectives and reporting power from smaller units into a large journalistic project. But the coordination requirements are higher and, as each unit works its piece of the whole, the likelihood of unnoticed problems increases.

In the 1998 CNN/Time Tailwind story alleging that the United States used nerve gas in Laos, the association between the magazine and the network represented a new interactive complexity in journalism. Time lent its name to the project but was involved very little in its preparation. CNN was ill-equipped to handle an investigation of this magnitude. Time's fact-checking system was suspended after its editors were convinced by a CNN summary that the project was sufficiently researched. CNN never consulted its own

Yet even beyond technologies, news organizations have become complicated places through the developments of newsrooms without walls, the introduction of team reporting systems, and the dispersal of authority that once rested with middle management.

military experts. According to the Columbia Journalism Review's story about this situation, the head of CNN/USA read the 156-page briefing book on the program only after it had been broadcast.

Missed Warnings and Other Newsroom Issues

In his time at The New York Times, Jayson Blair passed through at least four separate units: the internship program, the metropolitan desk, the sports department, and the national desk. They were interactive, linked with central newsroom authorities, but there were plenty of cracks into which warning signs could fall—such as a memo declaring that Blair must be stopped from writing for the Times.

With hindsight, we find it hard to believe such warnings are ignored. Yet normal accident theory teaches us that warnings often receive little attention. As Langewiesche notes: Murphy's Law is wrong. Perrow has shown that what can go wrong almost always does go right. Otherwise, who would ever get into a car, much less ride on an airplane?

Nowhere is Perrow's point made more persuasively than in the work of Diane Vaughan, a Boston College sociologist. Her study of the 1986 shuttle disaster, "The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture and Deviance at NASA," should be read by every editor and publisher.

The shuttle exploded because of the failure of the Viton O-rings, which seal joints at the end of the solid rocket boosters. Before launch there were concerns whether the O-rings would hold in the cold weather that January in Florida. Despite the misgivings of engineers, the mission proceeded, and the seven astronauts were killed when the Challenger exploded. But Vaughan found that in the previous year, O-ring problems had been discovered in seven of the nine shuttle launches. Murphy's Law was wrong. What could go wrong with the O-rings hadn't. Vaughan coined a wonderful phrase, "the normalization of deviance," and these words can be applied to newsrooms

everywhere.

Put simply, normalization of deviance occurs when professional standards progressively decline, and the boundaries of acceptable practices are stretched. When what can go wrong goes right seven times or 70, we are tempted to try it again. But the next time, the shuttle might blow up or a billion dollar libel suit land in our laps.

New technologies have coupled newsrooms together more tightly than ever. Photos taken in the field are processed through digital editing systems, and they may get into the newspaper without editors seeing more than a fleeting image on a computer screen. An artful deception, such as the composite photo from Iraq that cost the Los Angeles Times photographer Brian Walski his job, is more likely to go unchallenged in the digital age than had he patched together images in the darkroom.

Under the pressure to get news on its Web site, editors can be rushed into posting unverified information that goes instantly to readers. If the material is false—as it was in the case of postings by The Dallas Morning News and The Wall Street Journal in the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal—embarrassing damage is done before an audience of millions.

The furor that followed the revelations about Blair reveals another kind of close coupling. Even as Times executives were trying to put the incident behind them, Internet postings, most particularly on Jim Romanesko's Web site, kept the issue alive, generating still more problems for the paper in the form of rumors and accusations. Suddenly the Times was confronted with challenges to its reporting by Judith Miller in Iraq. Messages from Times staffers about Executive Editor Howell Raines crackled with indignation about the way he managed. By extending and fanning the controversy, the Internet became an important element in the eventual resignations of Raines and Managing Editor Gerald Boyd.

In contrast to normal accident theory, another theory holds that training, redundancy of safety systems, and a strong organizational culture can dras-

tically reduce accidents. This is called high reliability theory and aircraft carrier operations and the handling of nuclear weapons are cited as evidence of its validity. Unfortunately, journalism is ill-suited to take advantage of it.

Deviance Becomes Normal in Newsrooms

The findings of Scott D. Sagan, a Stanford political scientist, are relevant here. In his book, "The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons," Sagan writes that to achieve high reliability, organizations need to maintain "a strong organizational culture—in the form of intense socialization, strict discipline, and isolation from the problems of broader society" Few newsrooms can function under such requirements. Aircraft carrier deck crews can carry out crash exercises until every person knows exactly what to do. How many newspapers can or should conduct weekly all-hands plagiarism drills?

Sagan also describes what theorists call "garbage can" organizations. I would place news organizations among them. In the garbage can model, organizations frequently lack clear and consistent objectives. The publisher, the editor, and the assistant metro editor handling a sensitive story might have very different ideas about the paper's mission or even their own responsibilities. Garbage can organizations use "unclear technologies," whose processes are not adequately understood by all the members of the group. The online editor might know exactly what should go on the Web. Journalists doing the stories might not. In garbage can organizations, the decision-making process is fluid: "Participants come and go; some pay attention, while others do not; key meetings may be dominated by biased, uninformed, or even uninterested personnel." What journalist has not worked in a newsroom like that?

Garbage can organizations are also prime candidates for normal accidents. When failures occur, analyses tend to pinpoint culprits or faulty equipment and absolve the institution. Instead of

recognizing how organizations might have failed, such analyses often conclude with high-minded reaffirmations of institutional values. The bad apple has been identified, and all will be well again.

"The person who did this was Jayson Blair," said Arthur Sulzburger, Jr., publisher of The New York Times. "Let's not begin to demonize our executives" In fact, Sulzburger's troubles were just starting.

Safety measures themselves often contribute to normal accidents. As Sagan points out, the problems at Russia's Chernobyl nuclear power plant began with the testing of a new safety system. In the conflagration at the Times, as we shall see later, at least two significant safety measures failed to put out the fire, and both made matters worse.

Once, clerks passed out galley proofs

to copyeditors who read them carefully before or between editions. It was a ritual that was socially enforceable. Copyeditors who weren't going through their pile of proofs were obviously not doing their job. Today, in many newsrooms, proofs are gone—often for budget reasons. Editors try to catch the story in the computer system.

That's a small degradation of standards, and usually nothing goes wrong. But simple errors that copyeditors miss have significant consequences. As the 1999 Credibility Project of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) reported, "Small errors undermine public confidence in the press, and the public finds lots of them in the paper."

For a large degradation, take the case of the Los Angeles Times. After Mark Willes came to the paper in 1995 as its chief executive officer, he de-

clared that he would knock down the firewall between the news and the business sides with "a bazooka, if necessary." Despite his colorful language, the idea was hardly revolutionary. By then, the concept of "total newspaper management" was already in place in many organizations. But Willes went at it with a vengeance. In his report of that newspaper's Staples Center disaster, the Los Angeles Times media critic, David Shaw, suggested why it took so long for journalists to recognize that Staples presented a serious threat to the paper's credibility.

Shaw wrote that "the most important factor in the lag time between first word and big explosion may well have been a gradual, insidious change in the climate at the paper; so many in the newsroom had become so inured to intrusions by business-side considerations in the editorial process that they

The Siegal Committee Report

Examining suggested changes through the lens of normal accident theory.

In its report to the publisher of The New York Times, the Siegal Committee declared that the "practical result" of its recommendations "should be a guarantee that never again can a rogue journalist exploit our disconnectedness, or our failure to share warning signs." "Never again" are extravagant words for journalists. But let us assume the committee is correct and the problem of the rogue journalist has been solved. Have others been created? Normal accident theory provides an answer.

After the disastrous experience with Jayson Blair, the paper's management realized that its problems were broader and deeper than those posed by a troubled young man. The mandate of the Siegal Committee, which took its name from its chair, Assistant Managing Editor Allan M. Siegal, and included 21 other staff members and three outside journalists, was to recommend

improvements for "the newsroom's methods of communication, collaboration and supervision."

The Siegal Committee was not the only body at work on these issues. There was also a working group on training and performance management and a communications group divided into three subcommittees. All told, these panels produced, by my count, well over 100 recommendations. These included generic wish items such as brown bag lunches, obvious steps like having job applicants interviewed by departments where they are likely to work, the strengthening of general principles, such as making accuracy a "higher priority" and narrow, specific suggestions, such as the Duke Corporate Education program.

Some of the recommendations from the various committees overlap, but even so, they constitute a bulk that even the Times can scarcely digest. Bill

Keller, the executive editor, has wisely selected a few on which he can deliver, such as the appointment of an ombudsman and a masthead-level editor for upholding standards and another essentially for personnel matters.

Whether all of the recommendations would improve the Times is problematic. Much is made in the reports of the need to modify the culture of the Times. I would observe that a newspaper is a product of its culture, and if the culture at the Times is changed, the paper inevitably will also change and in ways that no one now can foresee.

Moreover, the Times is likely to find that a big obstacle to reform is simple inertia. The Siegal Committee noted that the Times relies too heavily on anonymous sources. That, by the way, is not a problem that requires a long lead-time for fixing. Try, beginning right now, declaring that nonconforming stories don't get in the paper.

were desensitized and demoralized.” Bit by bit, the deviant “intrusions” of business had become the norm.

The Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in 1998 provides excellent examples of a vast collective normalization of deviance. Once, it was understood that professional standards meant that stories must be sourced. If information had to be presented anonymously, there were rules, such as the requirement for two independent confirmations. The Committee of Concerned Journalists found that in the pivotal first six days of the story, which set the tone for the coverage to follow, only one statement in a 100 was based on two or more named sources, and 40 percent of all reporting based on anonymous sources used but a single source.

The most insidious normalization of deviance involves the decline in the vigilance of editors against errors. Ev-

ery editor will say that accuracy comes first. But note what ties together Jayson Blair, Patricia Smith, Mike Barnicle, Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, and Ruth Shalit, to mention just a few high profile miscreants who stole the words of other writers or faked their stories.

All were valued for their narrative skills, for their “storytelling” ability. None was recognized for reporting skills. As Barbara Crossette, the former New York Times’s bureau chief at the United Nations, wrote recently, “Bright writing now brings the most and quickest rewards inside news organizations.”

There need be no conflict between bright writing and solid reporting. But the pressures upon reporters to include “real people,” provide vivid detail, always show instead of tell, and the extravagant praise that is heaped upon inexperienced journalists for bringing these things to their stories can create

a dangerous situation. A few years ago, ASNE published a handbook of journalism values, asserting “When it comes to accuracy, the ‘right facts’ means ... coverage that ‘rings true’ to readers.” What “rings true” might not be true at all but merely conventional wisdom or stereotype.

In “News Values: Ideas for an Information Age,” Jack Fuller, president and CEO of Tribune Publishing Company, writes, “Reporters who do not meet the simple standard of accuracy should not be taken seriously” Editors at The New York Times would surely agree. Yet, despite the staggering number of corrections made to Blair’s stories, he was taken very seriously.

Jayson Blair and the Times

The Blair case exhibits how normal accident theory can apply to journal-

The Siegal report was released while I was out of the country. The first Times I read upon returning was published Saturday, August 9. A front page story on the mysterious trailers found in Iraq and suspected of being used for biological weapons contained at least a dozen anonymous statements. (The only person named, a spokesman for an intelligence agency, declined to comment.) Another Page One story on Liberia contained nearly as many. The notorious October 30, 2002 sniper story by Jayson Blair, given special notice by the Siegal Committee, contained five unidentified sources.

Business as usual? Rome wasn’t built in a day? Old habits die hard? Pick your cliché, but remember that identifying a problem and solving it are very different. In any event, my main purpose here is not to analyze the Siegal report and the others but to look at their recommendations in light of normal accident theory.

What Normal Accident Theory Suggests

The first thing to note is that organiza-

tions at risk of normal accidents are characterized by interactive complexity. Every newspaper is a complicated organism, and the Times would seem more complicated than most. If even a quarter of all the recommendations are put in place, the paper’s complexity will grow and with it the chance not only for things to go wrong but for the problems to spread in unpredictable ways.

Imagine a family car that has just put its occupants through a terrifying experience. First the brakes failed, then the steering locked up, and mysteriously the accelerator jammed. But instead of taking care of these three items, the family decides to have the entire car overhauled. The new, improved car not only has different brakes, steering and accelerator hookup, but it also has a new and untested fuel system, transmission, airbags, windshield wipers, headlights, suspension, the works—everything assembled not with factory components but with parts designed by committees of mechanics of varying qualifications and experience. Would you feel safer in it?

Secondly, normal accident theory

teaches that disasters often begin with safety mechanisms. The catastrophe at Chernobyl started when engineers disconnected automatic shutdown devices to test the backup power system. Astronauts demanded safety devices for their Mercury spacecraft, and an escape hatch was added. But it was the accidental blowing of the hatch that set off a complicated system accident that led to the loss of the second Mercury capsule. As Scott D. Sagan notes, normal accident theory asserts that redundancy, added to systems for reliability and safety, “tends to add to the complexity and opaqueness of the system, thereby increasing the probability of hidden interactions”

Many of the committees’ recommendations make good sense. As a result of them, the Times may become an even better paper and a happier place to work. But complexity has been added often, I suspect, without consideration of the system as a whole. As a result, one may wonder whether the possibility of hidden interactions with unhappy consequences has now become a probability. ■ — WFW

ism. Earlier I noted how interactive complexity and close coupling, characteristics of organizations that experience normal accidents, were present at the Times. I also have acknowledged that normal accident theory does not cover every aspect of the case.

Blair, a 22-year-old African American, joined the Times as an intern in 1998 and the following year became a full-time reporter. He had no college degree, and in the journalism school at the University of Maryland and later as an intern at The Boston Globe, Blair had been a controversial figure. Editors at the Times found him bright, personable and seemingly candid. The paper apparently assumed that he had finished college. The check on his background appears to have been perfunctory, the warning signals dismissed. The problem was incubating.

The internship program at the Times, where Blair began, was intended to bring minority journalists into the newsroom, and there is speculation that Blair was later allowed to get away with shoddy practices because of his race. The Times denies it. In fact, for this analysis, his race is not very significant.

What is important to observe is that diversity has moved beyond being a value to which news organizations commit themselves. It has become an operating system. In some news organizations, diversity is quantified and incorporated into managers' compensations, and it has become a key element of news stories, without which news articles might be judged incomplete. As an operating system, there-

fore, diversity becomes one more piece of interactive complexity.

As Blair progressed, he produced stories that were not only highly praised but also contained many mistakes requiring corrections. By early 2002, his performance was raising concerns by some within the paper. Jonathan Landman, the metropolitan editor, sent the warning saying that this error-prone reporter had to be stopped from writing for the paper.

Confronted with his shortcomings, Blair took a short leave. When he returned, the Times had a "tough love" regimen for him. Editors noted that his work became more accurate. The Times believed that a safety measure had succeeded. It hadn't. Instead, the editors' restored confidence gave Blair more opportunities to betray the paper. Blair was assigned to the sports desk and then, for unclear reasons, sent to Washington to work as one of the reporters on the breaking sniper story. There he produced several scoops. Complaints that these were false were noted but not acted upon.

When the San Antonio Express-News late in April complained that Blair stole its story about a Texas woman whose son was missing in Iraq, his string finally ran out. Rousing itself at last, the Times confronted the young reporter and began investigating his work. Not only had he plagiarized, he had been inventing sources and facts and had gone to elaborate lengths pretending to report from cities he had never visited.

Jayson Blair was fired, and shortly thereafter the newspaper published a

lengthy report on what he did. An extraordinary meeting followed at which Sulzburger, Raines and Boyd addressed the Times's staff. The idea was to have an open exchange, to hear an explanation of why Blair's work was tolerated, and for Raines to acknowledge his grating management style.

But the meeting did not put out the fire. Subsequent Internet exchanges revealed the depth of the divisions on the staff. Another safety fix had failed. Indeed, it only made things worse by encouraging and legitimizing angry criticism of management.

Two weeks after Blair left the Times, the publicity about the news operations at the paper and its bogus stories claimed another journalist. This time it was Rick Bragg, the paper's Pulitzer Prize-winning stylist who had relied on the reporting of a personal stringer for stories he detailed so colorfully and on which only his byline appeared. Bragg, too, had risen on the wings of his storytelling ability. And again, it was a complaint from outside the paper that brought a journalist down. Other staffers in the newsroom were outraged anew, this time by the implication that here, at journalism's gold standard, bylines and datelines meant nothing. The fire Jayson Blair had lit, that had smoldered for years, was now burning out of control.

Sulzburger had said the paper's executives should not be demonized and that he would not accept Raines's resignation were it offered. What changed his mind is hard to tell. Perhaps it was a meeting with the Washington bureau that convinced him the two top editors had to go. The resentment against the autocratic Raines was too deep, too intense, to be repaired. Boyd, the managing editor, was better liked, but he was Raines's handpicked deputy and moreover he, too, was tainted by the Blair affair. That he also resigned was not a surprise.

Two major efforts to contain the fire had failed. It had burned in ways that no one could have predicted and had scorched people far from its origin. Now it threatened to consume the entire organization. Sulzburger took the

Organizations prone to normal accidents have complicated interactivity among their operating units or systems. So do news organizations. Such organizations are closely coupled, as increasingly are news organizations, with their dependence on new technologies that are not thoroughly familiar to all who use them.

most drastic step available to him, short of his own resignation. In forestry, it is called a backfire, a blaze lit to stop the progress of an even greater fire.

On June 5, 2003, just a little more than a month after the San Antonio paper had blown the whistle on Jayson Blair, Raines and Boyd resigned. As the two top news executives said farewell to the newsroom, Sulzburger announced that Raines would be replaced on an interim basis by Joseph Lelyveld, who had retired as executive editor in 2001. The paper, Sulzburger said sadly, had seen both good times and bad.

“We will learn from them, and we will grow from them,” he said. “And we will return to doing journalism at this newspaper because that’s what we’re here for.”

Lessons to Be Learned

Sulzburger’s remarks were meant to bring closure to the episode. Whether they will is doubtful. An investigative committee directed by a Times editor, Allan M. Siegal, and charged with sorting through the troubles to determine what went wrong in the newsroom and why, has produced its report as have two other working groups. Their findings indicate that the Times has a great deal of work ahead to undo damage not only caused by the Blair affair but also by accumulated practice. Moreover, though the problem of the “rogue journalist,” as the Siegal committee refers to Blair, might have been solved, normal accident theory suggests that other difficulties have been created. [See accompanying box on page 50 for more on the Siegal Committee report and other findings.]

By examining the case of Jayson Blair and the Times and by looking more briefly at other disasters in the press, I have sought to bring the analysis of normal accident theory to journalism. Organizations prone to normal accidents have complicated interactivity among their operating units or systems. So do news organizations. Such organizations are closely coupled, as increasingly are news organizations, with their dependence on new tech-

nologies that are not thoroughly familiar to all who use them.

I have sought to show that as with organizations where normal accidents happen, news organizations experience the normalization of deviance. Often the beginnings of problems are masked by incubation periods, and relevant detail can be buried in a mass of irrelevant information. I have tried also to describe news organizations as what theorists call garbage can organizations, whose processes and technologies are often not clearly understood. And I have made the point, as do normal accident theorists, that safety measures often do more harm than good.

Does all this mean that news organizations are doomed to catastrophes, such as the Jayson Blair episode? Was there nothing the Times could have done to prevent this? Is there nothing it can now do to repair the damage? Nothing other news organizations can do to prevent something like this from happening to them?

The answer is an emphatic no.

Normal accidents arise out of the ways we construct and manage our news organizations. If we continue to tolerate the degradation of standards—by allowing, for example, the discipline of verification to yield to the allure of vivid detail and to the speed of treating every aspect of a story as breaking news—then the normalization of deviance will continue in newsrooms. Accuracy, the keystone of what we do, will be further devalued.

If we invest in media convergence without understanding the interactions of technology and the people who must make it work, we court dangers that lie in close coupling of systems. When we don’t see that newsroom values—such as narrative storytelling, diversity and decentralization of decision-making—can be thought of as operating systems, then we risk finding that our newsrooms have become so complicated that the interaction of everything in them becomes too difficult to track. The result: We will not apprehend the next disaster until it is upon us.

So let us end where Charles Perrow, the originator of normal accident theory, found his own conclusion:

“These systems are human constructions, whether designed by engineers and corporate presidents or the result of unplanned, unwitting, crevice, slowly evolving human attempts to cope. Either way they are very resistant to change. ... But they are human constructions, and humans can deconstruct them or reconstruct them.

“The catastrophes send us warning signals.”

Think of Jayson Blair and The New York Times as a warning signal for journalism. ■

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Normal accidents arise out of the ways we construct and manage our news organizations. If we continue to tolerate the degradation of standards—by allowing, for example, the discipline of verification to yield to the allure of vivid detail and to the speed of treating every aspect of a story as breaking news—then the normalization of deviance will continue in newsrooms.

WATCHDOG

While the Watchdogs Slept

Five months went by before many in the press questioned the administration's evidence for going to war.

By Gilbert Cranberg

The press and what passes for the political opposition spent much of July giving the White House a hard time about a spurious 16-word sentence in George Bush's State of the Union message. July? Bush delivered the message on January 28. What happened during all of February, March, April, May and June?

Well, there was a war and Jessica Lynch to cover. The likelihood that the President had used bogus information to sell the war he was eager to launch seemed to be judged by press and politicians as not all that consequential despite ample early warning that the administration had a truth-in-advertising problem.

After all, Bush had charged in that January speech that Iraq "recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," but the claim was debunked within weeks by Mohammed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and head of the U.N.'s nuclear inspection team in Iraq. "Based on thorough analysis," he told the United Nations Security Council on March 7, "the IAEA has concluded ... that these documents—which formed the basis for the reports of recent uranium transactions between Iraq and Niger—are in fact not authentic. We have therefore concluded that these specific allegations are unfounded."

Seymour Hersh followed up on this news in a *New Yorker* article that appeared at the end of March. He reported that the crudely forged uranium documents were initially circulated by British intelligence, but that they were given to U.N. weapons inspectors by the U.S. government. Hersh added that ElBaradei's disclosure of the forgery "has not been disputed by any government or intelli-

gence official in Washington or London."

Journalists Drop the Story

Then, shamefully, the story died. It lost its pulse despite a top U.N. expert's declaration, on the record, that doctored evidence figured in the U.S. case against Iraq notwithstanding both a credible report that the United States may well have trafficked in the fakery and the inescapable implication that the President had broadcast phony claims in his State of the Union address.

Phony claims were made not just about uranium. In the sentence immediately following the reference to uranium, Bush said, "Our intelligence sources tell us that [Saddam Hussein] has attempted to purchase high strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production." A few days later, Colin Powell, speaking at the United Nations, dealt at length with the aluminum tubes, tying them to an Iraqi uranium enrichment program. On March 7, however, after months of studying procurement patterns, looking into the possibility of an Iraqi enrichment program, inspecting Iraqi documents and interviewing Iraqi personnel, ElBaradei also threw cold water on this scare talk. He declared there was no evidence "that Iraq intended to use these 81mm tubes for any project other than the reverse engineering of rockets."

So by spring of this year both of the administration's efforts to connect Iraq to the deadliest of weapons of mass destruction were pretty much in tatters. Nevertheless, there was no hue and cry about what looked like administration deception. That didn't happen until months later, when former

U.S. ambassador to Gabon Joseph Wilson described in a July 6th *New York Times* op-ed a mission he undertook for the Central Intelligence Agency in February 2002 to check out a reported uranium deal between Niger and Iraq.

Wilson wrote, "It did not take long to conclude that it was highly doubtful that any such transaction had ever taken place." He added, "Based on my experience with the administration in the months leading up to the war, I have little choice but to conclude that some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat."

Wilson's article triggered a flood of criticism of the Bush administration, but ElBaradei already had shown that the administration's case for war was flimsy and, worse, that phony documents were part of the picture. Wilson added only marginally to what was known.

So why did it take some four months from the disclosures by ElBaradei and Hersh for press and politicians to find their voice and ask tough questions, at least about the uranium portion of Bush's State of the Union message?

Context may not be everything, but it can explain a lot. While the war against Iraq had begun officially on March 19, the war drums beat well before then as troops were deployed and polls registered strong support for action against Iraq. Given the prevailing climate, including the verbal attacks being made on France and others for being soft on Saddam, it was convenient and simple to brush aside "old news" questions. Once the war was underway, and the news was dominated by the dash for Baghdad and scenes of victory, there was even less appetite to question the evidence for war.

By the time Wilson's piece appeared, the dominant news from Iraq was of a mounting toll of American casualties, and the word "quagmire" began to be used. Suddenly, the press and politicians had not only a peg on which to hang questions that should have been

raised months earlier, but also a more congenial climate to raise them in.

All in all, this leaves us with the uninspiring picture of watchdogs who were asleep on the job when they should have been barking. ■

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Reflecting on a Different Era in Political Journalism

Scotty Reston 'and his peers felt comfortable making those choices based on their sense of what was best for the nation.'

Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism

John F. Stacks

Little, Brown and Company. 373 Pages. \$29.95.

By Alex S. Jones

One particular moment in John F. Stacks's biography of Scotty Reston vividly demonstrates the distance American journalism has traveled since Scotty's heyday in the 1950's and 1960's. The book's title is "Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism," and its essential argument is that we would all be far better off if the news—particularly political news—was covered the way Scotty did it when he was running the Washington bureau of The New York Times.

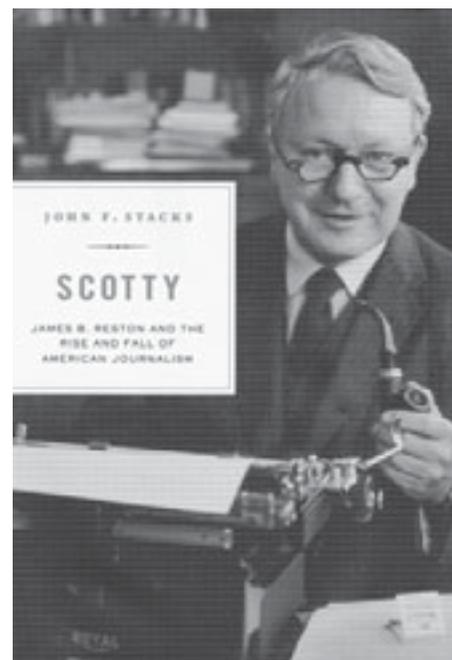
It is an argument that has some merit. But then one comes to the moment on page 227 in which Stacks describes the immediate aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Eileen Shanahan, one of Scotty's stalwarts in the bureau, recounts how late in the evening of the assassination, Scotty assembled the bureau to talk about what to do next. Lyndon B. Johnson was now President, and the bureau discussed his limitations on foreign policy and the likelihood that he would make mistakes. Shanahan recalled that almost every dip and turn of LBJ's roller coaster of an administration was foretold that night, which testifies to the shrewdness and acumen of the journalists present. But at one point, Scotty said to the group, "I am not encourag-

ing enterprise on the Bobby Baker story." The bureau had been in pursuit of the corruption story that would eventually send Baker, one of LBJ's close friends, to jail. "We all knew what he meant," Shanahan told Stacks. "He didn't have to say the country is in a state of trauma. It would not be the patriotic thing to undermine this new President who is coming into office in these horrible circumstances."

It is difficult to imagine such a journalistic protective mantle being cast over any President since LBJ, especially by The New York Times. The gentle handling of George W. Bush by many in the media seems to be prompted more by fear of being labeled unpatriotic than from Scotty's Olympian judgment that truth should sometimes come second to mercy.

Reston's Moral Journalism

Stacks's interesting and provocative book presents Reston as unquestionably Olympian, but with the strong patriotism of a grateful Scottish immigrant and the moral code of a strict Calvinist. The same Scotty Reston who declined to pursue Bobby Baker had a month earlier fiercely resisted JFK's push to have David Halberstam removed from Vietnam because of his



"pessimistic" coverage. It is the same Scotty Reston who a few years later thundered that if the Times would not publish the Pentagon Papers, which was then in doubt, he would do so as owner of The Vineyard Gazette, his weekly newspaper in Martha's Vineyard.

And it is the same Scotty Reston who, at the end of his life, defended his judgment that the Times should not have published the article announcing that there was soon to be an invasion of the Bay of Pigs. As it was, the article was greatly softened at Scotty's urging and the role of the CIA removed, but Scotty's view was that nothing should have been published at all.

Reston emblemized a moral journalism that could be tough or gentle

depending on the situation, and he and his peers felt comfortable making those choices based on their sense of what was best for the nation. Political figures had no choice but to treat the most powerful newspaper columnists and journalists with respectful attention, not to say fawning solicitousness. And in return, they were treated with a kind of journalistic noblesse oblige that kept personal failings and the sausage-making aspects of government out of the paper.

His style of journalism was succeeded by the adversarial, aggressive and intrusive reporting that has dominated the American press—at least until September 11. It is ironic that Reston was a key instrument in advancing that evolution, a change that he largely despised. Journalistically, he was a product of World War II, when there was a clear good side and a clear bad side, and the U.S. government was unquestionably with the angels. His style of political reporting never lost that faith.

The turning point in his career came when he caught the attention—and affection—of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the Times's publisher in the 1940's and '50's, and his wife, Iphigene, the daughter of Adolph Ochs. To the Sulzbergers, Scotty embodied the best in journalism and in American character, and his

talent and resourcefulness made him the paper's star. Though Scotty was not an intellectual and had graduated from a non-Ivy League university, his ambition was to attract the best and the brightest to journalism. He wanted college graduates, and especially graduates from the elite schools, to enter journalistic ranks. Until the 1950's, reporting was generally viewed as a blue-collar job, even at the elite papers.

He encouraged a new generation of highly educated reporters to enter the ranks of newspapers. Many of them cut their teeth covering the civil rights movement, which was another good vs. bad story, but with a twist. This time, the bad guys were often police and public officials, and these new reporters had the confidence to challenge authority. The next big story for many was Vietnam, where they arrived with an attitude that was distant from the in-it-together era of Scotty Reston. Halberstam, for instance, infuriated President Kennedy with his reporting that challenged the official version of events. And Halberstam and many in his generation of reporters were Scotty's boys, either literally or by inspiration. Scotty himself was less critical of the war. Indeed, his fury over the Pentagon Papers' revelations of systematic governmental lying was prob-

ably prompted in part by having believed many of those lies.

The best of Scotty Reston was that he loved both journalism and his country, and he had a solidly anchored gyroscope that told him when one took precedence over the other. His was not a compass that was influenced by fear, but by compassion and maturity.

The fall of journalism since Scotty's day is not that too many negative and invasive stories are published. It is that so many of them seem to be published without a sense that an honest and responsible person in authority thought the matter through and then did what had to be done. What has been lost is a sense that there is a Scotty calling the shots. But it is important to remember that if Scotty *were* calling the shots, there are things that we know about politics and politicians that readers would likely not be told. Knowing less, while sometimes a blessing, is a painful bargain to strike. ■

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Reporting in Southern Africa

A prominent white journalist revisits his reporting during apartheid and reflects on the news media's work today.

One Man's Africa

John Ryan

Jonathan Ball Publishers. 346 Pages. 14.99 Pounds.*

By Wilson Wanene

One of the eight well-dressed men, on the last day of the seven-month trial, clenched and unclenched his fists as he and his co-accused stood, waiting for his sentence to be read. The ticking of the courtroom clock became audible

for the first time as an uncomfortable silence settled in. Before anyone realized, it was being announced: life.

The scene was from Pretoria, South Africa in 1964. It was the conclusion of what came to be known as the Rivonia

Trial. The man who toyed with his fists was Nelson Mandela who, with members of his African National Congress and the Communist Party, had been accused of treason and attempting to topple the state through sabotage.

The trial turned out to be a seminal event in South Africa's history. Mandela would not be released until 1990. By then, his image had evolved into an iconic figure of resistance, as apartheid's dismantlement got underway. Four years later, Mandela emerged as the country's president after the first all-race election.

In John Ryan's "One Man's Africa," the trial is just one of the events he recounts from his long career as a journalist, which included stints in South African newspapers such as the *Sunday Chronicle*, *Sunday Express*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Eastern Province Herald*, and *Cape Argus*. Put simply, Ryan's book demonstrates how the newspaper's feature story can be a witness to history.

A South African and 1970 Nieman Fellow, Ryan's account is interesting in several aspects. He covers not only his own country—from the 1960's to the end of the 1990's—but also Southern Africa as well, a region deeply affected by the economic and military dominance of South Africa, which was itself a unique case due to apartheid.

Reporting on Resistance Struggles

Reporting under apartheid was tricky business. Journalists were targeted for recruitment as government agents by South Africa's notorious Bureau of State Security, which later became a part of the National Intelligence Agency. Once an agent actually presented Ryan with a briefcase in his office stuffed with hundred dollar bills, which he declined. Also, there were strict limitations placed on the press, especially during tense periods like in 1985 when marking the 25th anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre, in which 69 blacks were shot dead by police while trying to return their identity books that by law they had to carry with them. Newspapers had to constantly consult with lawyers to determine how to run stories. And scare tactics were employed by the

police, especially towards female journalists, such as hanging dead cats on their front doors.

Also, the Police Act made it an offense for anyone to publish "any untrue matter" about the police without being fairly certain the story was true. At newspapers, the burden of proof lay with journalists. But they often relied on witnesses who feared for their safety and didn't want to be identified. "Editing a newspaper in these circumstances," Ryan recalls, "was like walking blindfolded through a minefield."

Mozambique and Angola gained their independence from Portugal in

from its bases in Namibia. To assist the Angolan government in the fighting, Cuba eventually deployed 50,000 troops in the country. All of this impoverished the two countries even more as whites fled and took their skills with them. In 1975, Ryan points out, Mozambique had 3,000 doctors taking care of 10 million people. Only 300 of them remained three years later.

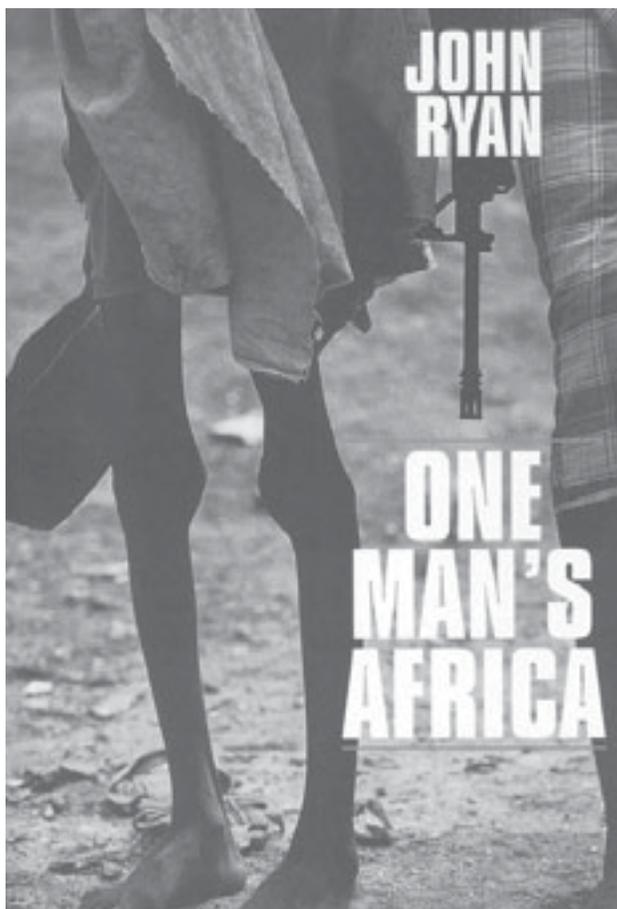
Zimbabwe, on the other hand, became the last British colony to be freed when it won independence in 1980, after a guerrilla war, but ethnic tensions simmered. And presently the country is in a whole different crisis after the government allowed its supporters to invade white-owned commercial farms.

Until recently, South Africa had a strange place in the popular imagination of black Africans outside the Southern Africa region. The country existed, yet it did not. This was due to the diplomatic isolation imposed on South Africa by black African nations due to its racial policies. As a result, it's not hard to imagine how, in the pre-Internet age, the reporting of a white South African journalist would not have likely come to the attention of an African editor outside the region. His readers would more likely see reports picked up from Western foreign correspondents or the wire services.

In any case, the majority of Africans get their news from the radio. (The U.N. estimates that one of every four Africans owns a radio.) The 1976 Soweto uprising, for instance, in which thousands of black South African students demonstrated against being taught in Afrikaans, resulting in over 500 deaths, was major news. Africans heard of such events through their country's state run station, the BBC, VOA, or similar radio services.

A White Journalist During Apartheid

"One Man's Africa" therefore serves an important purpose: it conveniently



1975 only to plunge into bloody civil wars. Both governments were pro-Marxist. In each case, South Africa backed the rebel force. In Mozambique it was the brutal Mozambican National Resistance or Renamo, its Portuguese acronym, while in Angola it was the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola or Unita. South Africa conducted many strikes into Angola

compiles, in one volume, the long career of an honest journalist who operated under apartheid's looming shadow. For an African based outside Southern Africa, it's enlightening.

Ryan's method is to present past stories he filed in their original form while adding context and hindsight commentary. For the South African reader, this may simply be rehashing. But for the outsider, it works quite well. Most importantly, one gets to see that even under a racially divisive system, there were newspapers and reporters calling things as they were. This is all the more striking since Ryan is a white South African. And he makes it clear, with pride, that he wasn't alone.

The book is written in a liberal voice, but it's different in tone—in subtle ways—from, say, the regular accounts by an American or British foreign correspondent. Ryan is a white South African. This makes him an African but not in the usual sort of way, and he puts his uniqueness to use. He has a wry humor that hints at his European ancestry. However, there's also a slight though appealing brashness of someone who's all too familiar with his environment.

For example, one gets an interesting peek into a world that a black journalist would find tricky to penetrate. "As a group, white Rhodesians [now Zimbabweans] could be patronising and even blindly insensitive to a degree many white South Africans would consider bad form," he writes. "Many spoke about their domestic workers in front of them. They ignored strange blacks who performed a service for them—like porters and waiters."

But being a white journalist also has its disadvantages. During the Soweto riots it was very risky for Ryan and his white colleagues to enter black townships where the action was. Instead, his newspaper group relied on novice black journalists it recruited who, in turn, performed beyond expectations. Sadly, though, they could not be given bylines, for to do so would be to endanger them.

Much of what Ryan reports is gloomy. By 1989, for instance, 600,000

Mozambicans had perished due to the civil war, which finally ended in 1992. Of these, 380,000 were children. (The country has a population of 18 million.) These deaths, he points out, amounted to 15 times the number of Americans killed in Vietnam. In Angola, the civil war pretty much continued from independence until last year, when hope for peace became more realistic following the killing of Jonas Savimbi, leader of Unita, the rebel force.

In this strife-torn nation, Ryan had a haunting interaction in 1989 with nine-year-old Miguel Isisho Lungi. Two years before, the boy had stepped out of his parents' hut at night to relieve himself. Unfortunately, he walked over a Unita land mine that blew off his right leg below the knee. Ryan writes: "That thing wasn't there in the afternoon,' Miguel says reprovingly. 'Why did they put it there? I think it's bad, what they did.'"

There are also many interesting encounters and anecdotes in the book. And some of the descriptions are surprising, such as the active bullfighting business that once existed in Lourenco Marques, or Maputo, as the capital of Mozambique is now known. Reading about Angola and Mozambique is a refreshing departure, since Portuguese colonialism isn't as well known in the English-speaking world as British and French colonialism. Lisbon, in dealing with its five African colonies—which also included Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe—wasn't overly concerned with stipulating social relations between blacks and whites. Instead, the focus was on exploiting them as protected markets for its goods and their products, such as Mozambican sugar and cotton, which were imported into Portugal at prices set much below market price.

South Africa's Press Today

As interesting as the book is, a few suggestions could improve later editions. Its publisher is based in South Africa. Either by design or not, it has the general feel of an account prepared for an audience already familiar with

the geography and basic political terrain of Southern Africa. "One Man's Africa" could use an index. A map of Southern Africa would not hurt. It could also contain a short chronology of major political events of the region. Such features would assist readers from outside the region.

The book is not just about events taking place in this region, but it also has a lot to say about the craft of journalism in South Africa: the risks or rewards of leaving one newspaper for another, salary worries, the importance of having a courageous editor heading the newsroom, and so on. By the time of Ryan's retirement in 1999 he is clearly concerned about what he views as cases of government interference with the press, which smack of the experience during the previous oppressive apartheid era. But now it's happening in the new, nonracial South Africa.

He is also worried that affirmative action in the newsroom is getting out of hand. Too many blacks and mixed-race South Africans, he states, are being promoted to editorial positions that require more experience than they have, while senior white editors are being pushed to take early retirement. But Ryan regards these problems as temporary setbacks in a nation that for so long deprived so many of its people of so much.

This book deserves a wider audience. Hopefully, more such books will come out to shed light to the outside world on how journalists managed to carry out their work despite the burden of apartheid. ■

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*"One Man's Africa," approximately \$24, is not available in the United States, but can be found online at www.africabookcentre.com.

Weblogs and Journalism

At a time when access to the high-speed Internet is getting easier and do-it-yourself publishing software abounds, Weblogs are cyberspace's quick-moving, multilinked, interactive venues of choice for millions of people wanting to share information and opinions, commentary and news. In launching the Chicago Tribune's Weblog in August, columnist Eric Zorn—who writes that paper's daily Weblog Breaking Views—described his new role as “leading the Tribune into this emerging hybrid media form.”

In this section of Nieman Reports, bloggers and journalists (some of whom wear both hats) write about the points of convergence and divergence of Weblogs and journalism. What separates these forms of communication? How do they influence each other? Is what's happening on Weblogs changing how journalists do their jobs and, if so, in what ways? Can news organizations embrace Weblogs and maintain the standards of the craft?

Weblogger **Rebecca Blood**, author of “The Weblog Handbook,” tackles the issue of how Weblogs and journalism are connected. Many bloggers, Blood argues, are a part of what she calls “participatory media,” highlighting and framing news reported by journalists, “a practice potentially as important as—but different from—journalism.” Blood does not expect that bloggers will adhere to the journalistic standards of fairness and accuracy but regards transparency “as the touchstone for ethical blogging.” **Paul Andrews**, a Seattle Times technology columnist and Weblogger, contends that blogs, acting as catalysts, “are transforming the ways in which journalism is practiced today . . . [by nudging] print media to richer and more balanced sourcing outside the traditional halls of government and corporations.” **Bill Mitchell**, editor of Poynter Online, envisions Weblogs as improving journalism by helping news organizations “become more interesting, more credible, even essential.” As he writes, “Especially when big news breaks, it's tough to beat a Weblog.”

Tom Regan, who cowrites two blogs on The Christian Science Monitor's Web site, gives examples of how bloggers “have forced traditional news organizations to change the way they covered a big story” and examines several areas of threat that some journalists feel from Weblogs. **J.D. Lasica**, a blogger and senior editor of the Online Journalism Review, observes that blogging communities exist on “grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, commentary and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources and story ideas. The relationship is symbiotic.” And he contends, blogging is beneficial to news organizations. Former investigative reporter **Paul Grabowicz**, who teaches journalism students about Weblogs at the University of California at Berkeley, believes blogging can help journalism “to regain the public trust” by inviting readers to participate instead of seeming impervious to correction. “. . . this don't-bother-calling-me attitude—all too common in journalism—is a message that has been taken to heart by the public.”

Sheila Lennon, a blogger and features and interactive producer at The Providence Journal's Web site, explains how bloggers expand the news media's agenda “by finding and flagging ideas and events until traditional media covers them in more depth.” She shows how her paper's Weblog gave readers a way to share information about Rhode Island's deadly

nightclub fire in February and how that “reporting” helped to shape the paper’s news coverage. **Dan Gillmor**, technology columnist and blogger for the San Jose Mercury News, uses his newsgathering approach to illustrate how blogging conversations with readers provides ideas and information for his reporting. While he is enthusiastic about this participatory journalism, he recognizes that “Some of this journalism from the edges will make all of us distinctly uncomfortable and raise new questions of trust and veracity.”

Glenn Harlan Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee, publishes two Weblogs and thinks that blogging—with its ability to gather information quickly and from everywhere in the world—will have a salutary effect on news coverage. As analysis and punditry replace more expensive news gathering operations, Reynolds says that Big Media would “be well advised to beef up their foreign bureaus and start reporting more actual news.” By raising funds from readers to report via Weblog from the Iraq War, freelance journalist **Christopher Allbritton** showed how interactive Weblog reporting can be done. While acknowledging that blogs are not likely to “replace The New York Times,” he writes that “blogs should be the seasoning—or maybe the garnish—in a reader’s well-balanced media diet.”

Eric Alterman, who writes a Weblog for MSNBC.com, shares with us thoughts from his introductory Altercation blog column in which he ruminates on what blogs are and why he, unlike a lot of other bloggers, likes having an editor for his blog. He says, “Ideally, I think every blogger would benefit from having an editor—and from knowing a little bit about the way journalism is produced (and conceived).” **Mark Glaser**, a columnist at Online Journalism Review, describes bloggers’ insatiable appetite for being linked and notes that “the attention of bloggers can’t help but make journalists do a better job in their reporting.”

Keven Ann Willey, editorial page editor at The Dallas Morning News, writes about the paper’s new Weblog, which lets readers find out more about the thinking that individual editorial board members bring to the process of forming the newspaper’s point of view. “It’s a delicate thing, blogging our opinions in ways we hope will help clarify and enhance—not confuse and degrade—what we do and why we do it,” she says. At the Houston Chronicle, former reporter **Steve Olafson** was fired after he created a personal Weblog and wrote commentary on it using a pseudonym. “My message to editors is this: Embrace the blog; do not fear it.” Hartford Courant editor **Brian Toolan** explains why he demanded that a staff editor stop writing opinion pieces on his own Weblog. “This is not an issue of freedom of speech,” he writes. **Mike Wendland**, who has two Weblogs and is technology columnist at the Detroit Free Press, describes how blogs connect him to new story ideas. “. . . with blogging, when readers can add comments and suggestions to my posts, my assumptions are routinely challenged, corrected and defended.”

Jane E. Kirtley, a professor of media ethics and law at the University of Minnesota, writes about the protection Webloggers have (or don’t have) under the First Amendment. But, as she points out, “. . . once somebody’s published material goes outside our borders—which is inevitable in cyberspace—all bets are off.” **Larry Pryor**, who directs the Online Program at University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communications, shows us how professors use a Weblog as a teaching tool with journalism majors, who produce the blog’s content under close supervision of editors. “I’ve seen how it [working on the blog] helps students to make their writing more concise and focused,” Pryor says. ■

Weblogs and Journalism: Do They Connect?

‘... the vast majority of Weblogs do not provide original reporting—for me, the heart of all journalism.’

By Rebecca Blood

We are entering a new age of information access and dissemination. Tools that make it easy to publish to the Internet have given millions of people the equivalent of a printing press on their desks and, increasingly, in their pockets. Unless we understand the difference between amateur reporting and personal publishing—and recognize Weblogs as just one form these activities might take—we will not be able to fully understand the implications they have for culture, journalism and society.

Let's start with the Weblog—a frequently updated Web site, with posts arranged in reverse chronological order, so new entries are always on top. Early Webloggers linked to selected news articles and Web pages, usually with a concise description or comment. The creation of software that allowed users to quickly post entries into predesigned templates led to an explosion of short-form diaries, but the reverse-chronological format has remained constant. It is this format that determines whether a Web page is a Weblog.

Note that the form preceded the software. Easy-to-use software has fueled the fast adoption of the form, but Weblogs may be created without it. The Weblog is arguably the first form native to the Web. Its basic unit is the post, not the article or the page. Bloggers write as much or as little as they choose on a topic, and although entries are presented together on the page, each post is given a permalink, so that individual entries can be referenced separately.

Hypertext is fundamental to the practice of Weblogging. When bloggers refer to material that exists online, they invariably link to it. Hypertext allows writers to summarize and contextualize

complex stories with links out to numerous primary sources. Most importantly, the link provides a transparency that is impossible with paper. The link allows writers to directly reference any online resource, enabling readers to determine for themselves whether the writer has accurately represented or even understood the referenced piece. Bloggers who reference but do not link material that might, in its entirety, undermine their conclusions, are intellectually dishonest.

Are Weblogs a Form of Journalism?

The early claim, “Weblogs are a new form of journalism,” has been gradually revised to “some Weblogs are doing journalism, at least part of the time.” As even the enthusiasts now concede, Weblogs used to record memories, plan weddings, or coordinate workgroups can't be classified as journalism by any definition. So in any discussion about Weblogs and journalism, the first question to ask is: Which Weblogs?

The four Weblog types most frequently cited are:

- Those written by journalists;
- Those written by professionals about their industry;
- Those written by individuals at the scene of a major event;
- Those that link primarily to news about current events.

Weblogs maintained for respected news organizations will certainly qualify as journalism if they uphold the same standards as the entire organization. But some argue that independent sites maintained by journalists automatically constitute journalism, simply because their authors are journalists. A Weblog

written by a journalist does not necessarily qualify as journalism for the same reason a novel written by a journalist does not: It is the practice that defines the practitioner, not the other way around. The case of Jayson Blair, recently fired from The New York Times for fabricating stories, illustrates that whatever the journalist's reputation or affiliation, journalism is characterized by strict adherence to accepted principles and standards, not by title or professional standing.

Some advocates of Weblogs as journalism point to the Weblogs produced by industry insiders as the future of trade journalism. They argue that, while reporters tend to rely on only a few sources even when reporting very complex stories, Weblogs written by the people working in a field will naturally convey a more complete version of the news about their profession. But those with a stake in the public perception of an issue—as working professionals invariably have—are those we can rely upon least for an unbiased perspective. Their commentary, done with integrity, can be a great source of accurate information and nuanced, informed analysis, but it will never replace the journalist's mandate to assemble a fair, accurate and complete story that can be understood by a general audience.

Personal accounts are more problematic: Is an eyewitness account journalism and, if so, when? Depending on the event? Depending on the inability of another individual to compile a more complete version of the story? Depending on the skill or training of the person writing the account? The standards used to determine when a personal recollection becomes a journalistic report are likely to vary from case to case.

This leaves link-driven sites about

current events. There are certainly similarities between the practices behind these Weblogs and some of the activities required to produce a newspaper or news broadcast. Just as a newspaper editor chooses which wire stories to run, the Weblog editor chooses which stories to link. But bloggers are never in a position to determine which events will be reported. And just as opinion columnists use news accounts as a springboard to present their interpretation of events, bloggers are usually very happy to tell you what they think of what they link.

But is blogging a new form of journalism?

Frankly, no. I'm not practicing journalism when I link to a news article reported by someone else and state what I think—I've been doing something similar around the water cooler for years. I'm engaged in research, not journalism, when I search the Web for supplementary information in order to make a point. Reporters might do identical research while writing, but research alone does not qualify an activity as journalism. Bloggers may point to reader comments as sources of information about the items they post, but these are equivalent to letters to the editor, not reporting. Publishing unsubstantiated (and sometimes anonymous) e-mails from readers is not journalism, even when it's done by someone with journalistic credentials. Credible journalists make a point of speaking directly to witnesses and experts, an activity so rare among bloggers as to be, for all practical purposes, nonexistent.

Instead of inflating the term "journalism" to include everyone who writes anything about current events, I prefer the term "participatory media" for the blogger's practice of actively highlighting and framing the news that is reported by journalists, a practice potentially as important as—but different from—journalism.

Weblogs as Participatory Media

So when I say Weblogs and journalism are fundamentally different, one thing I mean is that the vast majority of Weblogs do not provide original reporting—for me, the heart of all journalism. But Joan Connell, the former executive producer for opinion and communities at MSNBC, has said she believes Weblogs are journalism only when they are edited. This will be poorly received by those journalists who have embraced the form for its freedom from professional standards and processes. Of course, bloggers unaffiliated with news organizations may state their

... the vast majority of bloggers will continue to have a very different mandate from journalists.

opinions quite frankly, unworried about placating editors, offending advertisers, or poisoning relationships with sources.

When bloggers do report the news, the form is usually incidental to the practice. When policy analyst David Steven decided to document the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, he set up a Weblog so that he could easily post reports on each day's events. He attended news conferences. He interviewed conference speakers. He summarized the proceedings in the Daily Summit¹. But this was not a triumph of the Weblog form. It was made possible by the free availability of easy-to-use publishing software. That the end product was a Weblog was irrelevant to Steven's purposes—and to those of his readers. For two weeks, Steven was on the frontline, reporting, editing and publishing news from the Summit. Journalism? I believe so, though Connell might disagree.

Perhaps the biggest reason millions of amateur writers produce Weblogs is that the easiest-to-use Web publishing tools produce only that format. Blogs have become the default choice for personal Web publishing to such a degree that the two ideas are conjoined. When commentators talk about Weblogs as the future of journalism, they sometimes seem to mean, "personal publishing is the future of journalism," or "amateur reporting is the future of journalism"—but neither of these need manifest in the Weblog form.

Whether personal publishing and amateur reporting begin to appear in different forms will depend on the availability of tools that allow nonprofessionals to create and contribute to other kinds of publications. A Korean Web site called "OhmyNews" employs more than 26,000 "citizen reporters" who submit articles on everything from birthday celebrations to political events. The publication is credited with helping to

elect South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, who granted his first postelection interview to the site. This is amateur reporting, but it is not blogging.

I see the wide adoption of Weblogs as just the first wave of an age of online personal publishing. As Weblog software evolves into content management software, look for a surge of other kinds of online publications, many of which will be updated periodically instead of continually. If these publications employ a Weblog, it will be as an annotated table of contents rather than as the focus of the site. Amateur reporting will become more widespread, particularly with the proliferation of mobile devices that can upload photos and text. These devices will be pervasive, but little of this content will be widely seen, partly because there will be so much to pick through. Such content will be widely distributed only when it has the import of the Rodney King video.

Weblogs will be used in mainstream journalism, without question. But the vast majority of bloggers will continue to have a very different mandate from

 ¹ Daily Summit <http://www.dailysummit.net/>

journalists. It is unrealistic to apply the standards of journalism to bloggers who rarely have the time or resources to actually report the news. In my book, "The Weblog Handbook," I deliberately reject the journalistic standards of fairness and accuracy in favor of transparency as the touchstone for ethi-

cal blogging. As media participants, we are stronger and more valuable working outside mainstream media, rather than attempting to mirror the purposes of the institution we should seek to analyze and supplement. ■

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Is Blogging Journalism?

A blogger and journalist finds no easy answer, but he discovers connections.

By Paul Andrews

Are bloggers journalists? Certainly they can be. Several journalists keep Weblogs, although only a handful of them actually get paid to do so by their news organizations. The vast majority of journalists do not blog. Over the past few years I've asked a number of them why they don't, and the most prevalent responses are that it is not in their job description and doing so would not serve their purpose. They use their best reporting in the stories they write. What is left over for a blog?

When I mentioned on a panel once—speaking to a group of veteran journalists—that I spend an average of two hours working on my Weblog each day, an audible gasp could be heard throughout the room. Who could afford to take two hours from their reporting tasks every day? It's a reasonable question. I'm a freelancer now, so I can do this, but I know from 25 years as a full-time reporter that there would have been no room for blogging in my daily workload.

On the flip side, most of the million or so bloggers (it's a tough crowd to estimate) would not call themselves journalists. Many are teenagers, working through their own identities and connecting with other like-minded kids. The majority of blogs are simply personal Web sites, posted because blogging software automates much of the HTML coding needed for Web publication. This convenience appeal has led some to predict that the medium

will fade once the even greater convenience of real-time, word processor-like editing of any Web site becomes the norm.

Perhaps a better question to pose would be, "Is blogging journalism?" Does the Australian hip-hop laddie's categorization of his favorite local bands qualify on some level as reporting? Is the blog posted by a corporate information technology manager for internal staff consumption serving as a journalistic venue in some sense?

Though reportorial contributions have been made by the Web generation, it is fair to say the vast majority of blogging does not qualify as journalism. If journalism is the imparting of verifiable facts to a general audience through a mass medium, then most blogs fall well short of meeting the standard. Many blogs focus on narrow subject matter of interest to a select but circumscribed niche. And the blogs that do contain bona fide news are largely derivative, posting links to other blogs and, in many cases, print journalism. The top "news" blog, Jim Romenesko's Poynter Online site, is composed almost exclusively of linked references. Consider Google searches: When you search on current news topics, you get established journalism sites. By contrast, searches on abstruse topics are often headed by blog links.

Without the daily work of print journalists, one wonders if even the news-conscious blogs would contain any real news.

Blogging's Effects on Journalism

Yet I believe that blogs—in tandem with another much-underestimated medium, the e-mail list—are transforming the ways in which journalism is practiced today and perhaps are giving impetus to new journalistic venues that have not yet clarified themselves. Author Elbert Hubbard once said editors separated the wheat from the chaff—and then printed the chaff. Bloggers print, link and comment on the wheat. In doing so, bloggers often nudge print media to richer and more balanced sourcing outside the traditional halls of government and corporations. A recent example is the potential for touchscreen voting machine fraud—an issue that bloggers and e-listers have aired for months but that is just beginning to get attention from mainstream media. Just as importantly, blogs serve as a corrective mechanism for bad journalism—sloppy or erroneous reporting. To the extent that a blogger knows something about a particular topic, he or she can take a news report into a more detailed and illuminating realm. And the personal viewpoint tailored to Weblogging has always played a vital role in journalism, from standing columns to the op-ed pages.

So where's the disconnect? If bloggers can be journalists and blogs contain aspects of journalism, why aren't more journalists bloggers? And why isn't more blogging journalism? As

with any human pursuit, there's a difference in skill and expertise between paid and nonpaid practitioners. Bloggers, in general, know little about independent verification of information and data. They lack the tools and experience for in-depth research. They don't know how to fact-check. Assigned to do an investigative report on, say, police corruption, a typical blogger would not know where to begin. Calling a typical blogger a journalist is like calling anyone who takes a snapshot a photographer. Could a blogger "cover" the D.C. sniper or report on Congress? And a Weblog would hardly provide the appropriate vehicle for full-fledged investigative journalism.

Journalism implies that a disinterested third party is reporting facts fairly. To do that job well requires considerable training and the cooperative work of many minds. The process can be corrupted, as the Jayson Blair imbroglio confirmed. And in general, blogs cannot supplant the work that journalists do. But there are occasions when Weblogs can be ahead of news reporting.

In the spring of 2002, when I passed by a San Francisco peace demonstration at the Golden Gate Bridge, I witnessed an act of police aggression. Without any observable provocation an 11-year-old girl was roughly grabbed, thrown to the ground, and handcuffed. I took photos of the incident and posted a written report on my blog. As far as I know, my reporting was a scoop. I saw nothing about this incident on TV that day or the next morning in the local newspapers.

But then, video of the incident surfaced from someone with a camcorder. A San Francisco TV station used the video along with interviews with the girl and her parents and testimonials from onlookers. An investigation was launched, and the story was pursued for several days.

My blog was the first to report this story—and what I did was journalism in the sense that I brought forward verifiable facts about an actual event. But it required a mass medium to give the story enough notoriety for an investigation. I know, too, that if I'd been

covering the event for a news organization, I would have gathered more information, including the girl's identity, a comment from the police, and several eyewitness accounts. But even if I'd done such a complete report for my Weblog, it's doubtful my account of the incident would have prompted a police investigation.

Blogs can serve also as catalysts to journalism. In the early hours of September 11, 2001, blogs became the best available source of eyewitness reporting. And late last year a Weblogger picked up Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's comments about Strom Thurmond from a C-Span broadcast and ignited an online firestorm that, in turn, prompted mainstream news organizations to become involved in reporting the story. Online information sharing has pressured the Bush administration into several retractions and has even led to key resignations, as in the case of Richard Perle's resignation as chairman of the Defense Policy Board and the State of the Union retraction concerning African-supplied uranium to Iraq. In both situations, it should be noted, print media provided the initial investigation and reporting. But whether the outcome would have happened without the online feedback cycle is open to debate. By widening the disclosure circle through information sharing, Weblogs have contributed to the truth-finding process. But so have e-mail lists, personal Web sites, community Web sites, and other Internet mechanisms that no one would confuse with journalism.

During the Iraq War, a blog from inside Baghdad got considerable attention for its street-level portrayal of daily events. Although the blog initially was questioned as possibly bogus, eventually reports surfaced that the blogger, Salam Pax (not his actual name), was authentic. In any case, his blogged observations from Iraq provided some of the best eyewitness reporting during the war.

The Iraqi's Weblog succeeded largely because U.S. news organizations either could not or did not tell the "inside Baghdad" part of the story. Many American reporters were embedded

with military units, unable to break free and do independent reporting. In Baghdad the movements of the few foreign reporters who remained there during the war were closely monitored by Iraqi officials, which made street reporting all but impossible to do. Mass-media coverage of the war that most Americans saw was so jingoistic and administration-friendly as to proscribe any sense of impartiality or balance. In this context, a pseudonymous blogger's reports from Iraq took on more credibility than established media institutions.

The Iraqi's blog and my experience as a journalist who blogs tell me that there is something unique to blogging's contributions, but it is discrete and separate from what we think of as journalism. The Weblog does not lend itself to factual documentation as much as to observation, analysis, background—the kinds of amplitude that lend greater interpretations and understanding to raw information. And blogs, because they offer instant interactivity, are much better at engendering dialogue and exchange. In the sense that many minds contribute to greater understanding, blogs can take journalism's who-what-where-when and how pyramid better into the realm of why.

It might be that mass media of tomorrow will evolve further toward the blogging paradigm and journalism will expand from a centralized, top-down, one-way publication process to the many-hands, perpetual feedback loop of online communications. For now, to the extent that bloggers' efforts prod journalists to be better at what they do, they are a valuable adjunct to—but not substitute for—quality journalism. ■

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Weblogs: A Road Back to Basics

‘Weblogs will not save journalism as we know it. However, they might end up improving journalism as we know it.’

By Bill Mitchell

When newsroom leaders brainstorm what’s next for journalism these days, the talk runs more to the basics of the craft—and the business—than to the horizons of technology. With many consumers dismissing much of the journalism they read, see and hear as not that interesting, credible or essential, the time doesn’t seem quite right for discussions of flat-panel delivery or reusable paper.

Right now, editors and publishers look to organizations such as the Readership Institute for help in reclaiming the fundamentals. Meanwhile, journalists scramble to be more compelling in their storytelling, more engaging in their presentation, and transparent in their ethical decision-making. Amid this understandable return to basics, there’s at least one technological innovation that can help. It’s the Weblog, the quirky, inexpensive tool journalists can use to persuade readers, viewers and listeners that they ain’t dead yet.

Technology makes Weblogs easy to create and consume, but it requires imagination, enterprise and commitment to make them engaging and useful for readers. Newsroom bloggers—mostly columnists and beat reporters—are using Weblogs to connect with the audience between editions (and broadcasts) with news, information, links, tips, ideas—even fun. And they are using material that once

remained stuck in notebooks or was shared in e-mails to friends and colleagues.

Weblogs are providing journalists with more edge—helping them show more personality, style and immediacy than they might have ever displayed in their regular reports. “The surprise, to me, was how I immediately changed my writing style just because of the change of media,” says Carla K. Johnson, medical reporter at The Spokesman-Review in Spokane and author, since creating it in May, of the paper’s Health Beat¹ blog. “The style is more intimate, playful and free. Let’s have some fun here.”

Daniel Weintraub, political columnist at The Sacramento Bee, launched his California Insider² blog just a month before Johnson did. He shares her view of the impact of the process on the craft: “The biggest surprise is how it’s helped my writing. I had always heard that a writer should write every day, but I was never able to write for no audience. ... Writing an online journal, I’ve discovered that when it comes time to write my column, everything flows even easier than before.”

When Weblogs Work Well

Weblogs will not save journalism as we know it. However, they might end up improving journalism as we know it.

They can help news organizations become more interesting, more credible, even essential in the lives of the people they serve. Especially when big news breaks, it’s tough to beat a Weblog³. Think Florida Today⁴ on the day the shuttle exploded or Jim Romenesko⁵ during the Jayson Blair fiasco.

Weblogs also help journalists serve different niches within their audience. A newspaper is necessarily a smorgasbord; readers with intense interest in one area sometimes go away hungry. A Weblog can provide the added depth and detail they crave.

Sometimes it’s the readers who provide the depth and specialized knowledge. Dan Gillmor, technology columnist for the San Jose Mercury News and author of the eJournal Weblog⁶, is writing a book about what he describes as “We Media ... what happens to journalism and society when every reader can be a writer (editor, producer, etc.).” As Gillmor explained in a recent Columbia Journalism Review article⁷: “Our readers collectively know more than we do, and they don’t have to settle for half-baked coverage when they can come into the kitchen themselves. This is not a threat. It is an opportunity. And the evolution of We Media will oblige us all to adapt.” [See Gillmor’s article on page 79.]

Weblogs also enable groups of journalists to join forces on a common topic, as Poynter’s Steve Outing and 20 contributors do in their daily briefing⁸ on new media issues. Says Outing: “Some of the best Weblogs aggregate the collective intelligence of a group of journalists or an editor-led Weblog group that brings in the expertise and voices of community members. It’s an exciting new form of journalism that’s just barely been tapped.”

Any journalist who has covered state

¹ Health Beat <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs/healthbeat/blog.asp>

² California Insider <http://www.sacbee.com/static/weblogs/insider/>

³ Poynter Online <http://www.poynter.org/weblogs>

⁴ Florida Today <http://www.floridatoday.com/journal/020103landing.htm>

⁵ Romenesko <http://www.poynter.org/RomBlair>

⁶ eJournal Weblog <http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor>

⁷ CJR <http://www.cjr.org/year/03/1/gillmor.asp>

⁸ Outing’s E-Media Tidbits <http://www.poynter.org/tidbits>

'... Weblogs require an extraordinary combination of skills not usually demanded of any *single* journalist in the newsroom—reporting, writing (including headlines), editing and news judgment, to name a few.'

or national politics during the past 15 years should get the Weblog idea pretty quickly. I recall becoming an instant addict to The Hotline⁹ when Doug Bailey and his colleagues pioneered it back in the 1988 presidential campaign. Now administered by the National Journal, The Hotline addresses the intense need for up-to-date information among reporters and politicians by providing a one-stop source of coverage of all state and national races. Another example of a Weblog serving both journalists and others is one kept by Worcester (Mass.) Telegram & Gazette religion writer Kathy Shaw. On her Weblog she has chronicled coverage of the clergy sexual abuse story seven days a week since March 2002. After Romanesko, the clergy abuse tracker¹⁰ is the most popular page on Poynter Online.

Like most new things, Weblogs carry risks. In the hands of an inexperienced journalist, a Weblog can degenerate into a pool of personal opinion even less interesting than last night's meeting of the zoning board of appeals. Unchecked, it can jeopardize the good name of the paper or the station. Weblogs are not for newsroom beginners. Done right, Weblogs require an extraordinary combination of skills not usually demanded of any *single* journalist in the newsroom—reporting, writing (including headlines), editing

and news judgment, to name a few.

By way of refresher, a Weblog is a personal publishing platform that enables its author to post news or comments easily and directly to the Web, usually with links to entries produced by other Webloggers or to the articles of journalists whose work has been published online. But most of what exists in the blogosphere

is not journalism. Some bloggers create public versions of personal journals, chronicling and assessing what's happening in their lives. Other blogs resemble a makeshift journalism review, but not the sort where the work of journalists is critiqued by *other* journalists. These are more like a free-for-all exercise in which anyone with a computer and a connection to the Internet can evaluate the media. Some of the criticism from the readers' perspective is eye opening and interesting. Some falls into the rant category, produced without much regard for spelling or grammar, not to mention accuracy, fairness or insight.

So why would a journalist want to venture anywhere near such a neighborhood? Clues can be found at the Readership Institute¹¹, that says nothing about Weblogs but characterizes various attitudes as typical motivators of readership: "regular part of my day ... looks out for my interests ... something to talk about ... makes me smarter ... touches and inspires me ... I connect with the writers ... all sides of the story ... guides me." Produced with those kinds of comments in mind, a Weblog can help journalists build stronger connections to readers.

The Institute also lists comments reflecting why readers are drifting away from newspapers: "wasting my time ...

drowning in news ... too much ... makes me anxious ... bothered by errors." Weblogs can help journalists address these concerns, too.

The most comprehensive list of blogs produced by journalists is maintained by Jonathan Dube, a senior producer at MSNBC.com and the publisher (with the American Press Institute) of CyberJournalist.net¹². From there, click to Weintraub's California Insider and his archives to get a sense of the ways in which a Weblog can surpass print on a story like the California gubernatorial recall. The Insider provided Weintraub with a range of storytelling dimensions beyond what he could deliver with his three-times-a-week, in-paper column on the Bee's op-ed page. What follows are some examples:

- The Weblog lets him publish breaking news without regard to newspaper deadlines. At 6:30 a.m. on July 28, for example, Weintraub posted an item headlined: "Arnold Will Not Run." The 41-word item began: "Arnold Schwarzenegger will not run for governor, a very knowledgeable source close to the actor has told me." After lunch, he updated the blog with a denial from the Schwarzenegger camp that any decision had been made. Still, Weintraub was sticking by his story: "I'm still hearing otherwise." Nine days later, Weintraub had to eat his words with this late afternoon post: "Arnold Running for Governor."
- Provides links to published stories and commentary. On sites where registration is required, Weintraub even offers readers the use of his personal ID and password.
- Gives tips to loyal readers about Weintraub's upcoming appearances on political talk shows on TV.
- Does live reports, as in one at 3:32 p.m., July 23: "I'm blogging live from the Secretary of State's office, where Kevin Shelley is expected to announce the official Davis recall signature count sometime after the close of business today."

Some journalists might find more that is worrisome than appealing in

⁹ The Hotline <http://nationaljournal.com/about/hotline/>

¹⁰ Clergy Abuse Tracker <http://www.poynter.org/abuse>

¹¹ Readership Institute <http://www.readership.org>

¹² CyberJournalist.net <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/cyberjournalists.html>

these reports—such as going with the Schwarzenegger report at dawn, without any review by an editor; linking to reports by the competition; promoting your own TV appearances; blogging *live*, for heaven's sake. Not to mention the extra work.

The Appeal of the Blog

As practiced by Weintraub and a growing cadre of others, Weblogging pushes journalists to do their work on the edge. Gone is the safety net provided by prior editorial preview and additional time to think and rethink before publishing. Weintraub's incorrect Schwarzenegger post underscores the main danger of journalism by Weblog—accuracy sacrificed in pursuit of immediacy. That's a risk for journalists working on any platform, of course, and it highlights the importance of such core journalistic values as precision and transparency.

"My language was too vague," Weintraub said in a follow-up e-mail exchange. "Instead of reporting that a source told me Arnold would not run for governor, I should have reported that a source told me an announcement was being planned to reveal that Arnold was not running for governor. The source was right. The facts changed along the way. And I used less than precise language to communicate those facts."

Weintraub said he wasn't sure whether he would discuss those details with readers of his blog. Not to do so, at least in my view, would be a mistake. If journalists are going to expose readers to the risks of real-time reporting, credibility demands discussion and disclosure when the process falls short.

I can wring my hands as much as the next 55-year-old editor, I suppose, but I still find a lot more to like than lament in the Weblogging trend. Despite the problems with his Schwarzenegger re-

A Guide to Various Weblogs

Weblogging Pioneer

The pioneer among blogging columnists is Dan Gillmor¹ of the San Jose Mercury News. [See Gillmor's story on page 79.] He is writing a book about what he calls "We Media." If you're interested in learning more about Weblogs—or starting one up—Gillmor has created a good primer² and he links to it from his eJournal.³

Dave Barry's Blog⁴

If you are looking for an example of marketing to readers, check out the way Barry thanks and credits readers who send him some of the raw (often very raw) material he uses to produce his print column.

Beat Reporters and Critics

For examples of the beat reporters or critics who use Weblogs, click on the collection of Weblogs at spokesman-review.com⁵ and Ben Mutzabaugh's guide to air travel, the Today in the Sky⁶ blog on USAToday.com.

Tracking an Ongoing Story

Weblogs can also be useful to track news about a single news story breaking in multiple spots—and publications—throughout the world. Since March 2002, Kathy Shaw, religion writer at the Worcester (Mass.) Telegram & Gazette, has maintained a daily Clergy Abuse Tracker⁷.



¹ "We Media" article <http://www.cjr.org/year/03/1/gillmor.asp>

² Gillmor Blog primer http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/business/columnists/dan_gillmor/ejournal/2529085.htm

³ Gillmor eJournal <http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor/>

⁴ Dave Barry <http://www.davebarry.blogspot.com/>

⁵ Spokesman-review.com <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs>

⁶ Today in the Sky <http://www.usatoday.com/travel/today/sky.htm>

⁷ Clergy Abuse Tracker <http://www.poynter.org/abuse>

port, Weintraub's blog represents a significant contribution to political reporting. Day after day, often hour by hour, Weintraub lifts the shade to give readers a view behind the scenes of the back and forth of political coverage as it unfolds. As he explained when he introduced his blog¹³: "Blogs by their nature are more spontaneous than traditional commentary. While I will strive as always to keep the facts accurate, the opinions I express might be more apt to evolve over time, as more informa-

tion becomes available."

In an e-mail interview¹⁴, Weintraub described some of the differences between what he tries to accomplish in his print column and his blog: "In [the] column I always strive to reach a broad audience. I see myself as a translator, breaking down complex policy issues. ... The blog is much more shorthand, chatty, stuff designed for insiders. But I am guessing even that appeals to a certain segment of the broader audience. ... Response has been fantastic."

Weintraub and Johnson file directly to the Web, with editors reading behind them simultaneously or later in the day. That's also how it works with Jim Romenesko's column on Poynter Online, with Romenesko filing directly



¹³ Weintraub blog

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/politics/columns/weintraub/story/6414174p-7366437c.html>

¹⁴ Weintraub Interview <http://www.poynter.org/weintraubblog>

to his page and News Editor Julie Moos or I reading after the material is posted. "If I have a question about propriety," Weintraub says, "I'll consult with my editor just like on anything I write." Romenesko does the same.

In an e-mail interview¹⁵, Johnson said her blog adds no time to her work-week because she uses the blogged items in her weekly Health Beat column in the paper. Adds Weintraub: "If you are a regular reader of both, you are essentially seeing me come up with an idea, advance it, and draft it on the Web before polishing it up for the print version. In that sense, it's a time saver."

It also appears to be a relationship-builder—both for Weintraub and the paper: "It's been a great source builder. People are calling me and e-mailing me with stuff unsolicited, at a much greater rate than before Now stuff is flying over the transom." The two-way dimension of Weblogs is crucial. The image of stuff flying in over the transom should excite newsroom leaders as much as it does a columnist like Weintraub. Opening up this kind of back and forth with readers carries a cost for newsrooms. What arrives will have to be checked out, and that means additional reporting time.

So add Weblogs to the issues newsroom leaders must address, along with the more familiar matters of readership, credibility and transparency. Maybe it's time the bosses lifted the shade, too. Why not follow the lead of their more enterprising staffers and launch blogs of their own? Boss blogs—what better way for people in charge to connect with customers and discover what's next for journalism? ■

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 ¹⁵Johnson Interview <http://www.poynter.org/johnsonblog>

Weblogs Threaten and Inform Traditional Journalism

Blogs 'challenge conventional notions of who is a journalist and what journalism is.'

By Tom Regan

On July 16, 2003, a burgundy Buick LeSabre drove through the Santa Monica Farmer's Market at 60 miles an hour. The 85-year-old driver killed 10 people and injured scores of other shoppers. Within minutes of the accident, reporters from newspapers, radio and TV stations were rushing to the scene. But if they were hoping for a scoop, they were already too late. That's because a blogger named Andy Baio (www.waxy.org) had already blogged the entire incident.

Baio's office, where he manages the Web site staff of a large investment firm, is located beside the Farmer's Market, and he saw the event unfold from his window. Even though Baio isn't a journalist (or is he?), he did what any good journalist would do. He reported what he saw. He also took advantage of his medium and included a map of the area and, as photos and film

began to appear on other Web sites, he provided links to fresh coverage.

Throughout the day, often in a personal way, Baio described the scene of carnage outside his office. Almost as affecting (and totally missed by the body-count-driven traditional media) is his description of how quickly life came back to normal on the following day, as vendors quickly set up shop again. And then at the bottom of his blog, Baio allowed his readers to post comments on what had happened. What they posted added layers to the coverage of this story; as some people raged against the elderly driver, others debated at what age should people not be allowed to drive.

Weblogs Push Journalists

During the past year, Weblogs have risen to near the top of the media's collective consciousness. There are

several reasons for this awakening: More well-known journalists have started blogs in the past year, and Web sites of well-known media brands have created blogs to help cover news, politics and other issues. But more important to their ascendancy has been the fact that on at least two noteworthy occasions, Weblogs have forced traditional news organizations to change the way they covered a big story.

Perhaps the best known example is the untimely political demise of former Republican Senate majority leader Trent Lott. When Lott first made his now well-known comments about how the country would have been better off if voters had elected then segregationist presidential candidate Senator Strom Thurmond in 1948, not a single media outlet picked up on the significance of the remarks, even though plenty of reporters were there to hear him say it. Thus, the job of reporting this story

was left to bloggers, who kept the story alive for days until the mainstream media woke up to what had happened.

The second example involves the resignation of New York Times's executive editor Howell Raines. For a while, it looked as if Raines might survive the Jayson Blair scandal. But political blogs such as Andrew Sullivan and Glenn Reynolds (at www.Instapundit.com) again refused to let the issue die. [See story by Reynolds on page 81.] While the bloggers' ongoing postings about Raines were not the only factor that led to his dismissal, they played a role.

With this kind of track record, wouldn't journalists welcome bloggers with open arms? Instead, many journalists tend to regard bloggers as a sort of mutant breed, viewing them with skepticism and suspicion. In the eyes of many journalists, blogs are poorly written, self-absorbed, hyper-opinionated, and done by amateurs. At the same time it's true that blogs are often crammed with blunt and sarcastic comments about what a poor job journalists are doing, with bloggers calling journalists' work stagnant, hyper-elitist, and arguing that they spend too much time writing for each other rather than for the public.

Who's right and who's wrong? They both are.

Blogs are quickly becoming a very influential media tool, one that can challenge conventional notions of who is a journalist and what journalism is. But if bloggers are to continue to help shape the political, cultural and media arenas, they will need to adopt some of journalism's practices that they now eschew, often because of laziness.

Creativity at the Edge

To better understand why journalists often hide their fear of bloggers behind masks of professional indifference, turn to Michael Lewis's "The Future Just Happened." Lewis explores how technology, and the Internet in particular, has created dramatic upheavals in three worlds that previously existed with rigid codes and were ruled by a kind of "priesthood": Wall Street, law and the

music business.

Two important lessons can be gleaned from what Lewis discovered: Creativity almost always happens at the edges of society, not in the center, and the one thing the Internet does more than anything else is to allow small groups or individuals to undermine elites. In Lewis's book, he showed several examples of how these quite powerful institutions found themselves on the defensive because "untrained" people outside the traditional circles of power—and who were often bored high school or college students—were able to duplicate or surpass the services they offered.

Weblogs now present a similar threat to traditional media. This threat—to the gatekeeper role that big news organizations have played—represents a more immediate challenge than the large-scale introduction of the Internet did during the mid-1990's. Back then, the fear was that the Internet would take away huge chunks of readers and audience from traditional media. (That hasn't really happened yet, but it will during the next two decades as the Internet generation ages.) What skillful bloggers are demonstrating to traditional media is how they no longer get to decide on their own what is news anymore. In the case of Senator Lott, for example, traditional media seemed to decide his comments weren't newsworthy. Without blogs and the Internet, it is likely that decision would have ended the story. But bloggers didn't share that news judgment and so they kept pounding on his remarks as insensitive, if not outright racist. The bloggers were right.

Blogs also threaten to expose journalism at one of its weakest points—its lack of personal contact with readers and audience and the sense that journalism and its practitioners are disconnected from the communities they are supposed to serve. As young people begin to be interested in the news, they are finding that blogs can be a better place to keep up with events than their local or national media outlets. And unlike so many cities and towns in America, where there might be one newspaper (most likely owned by a

chain), and where the local radio and TV stations have little, if any, variety of programming or opinion, a person can find dozens of informative blogs by people of every political persuasion. Two or three good blogs can often provide a richer and more varied picture of an event than all the TV news outlets, cable and broadcast, put together.

But bloggers have problems that often undermine their credibility. Too many are poorly written, and bloggers often defend this tendency by saying it shows the realism of their work. At a recent conference on blogging in Boston, Dave Weinberger, one of the real founders of blogging and author of "The Cluetrain Manifesto," described it this way: "As rhetoric, I think it's important that it [a blog] is written badly. It's daily. You have a sense that it's closer to the person's authentic self. By reading a first draft, you tend to be 'forgiven' by the readers for the mistakes you make."

Nonsense. While forgiveness might occur the first time a reader visits a blog, the experience wears thin fast. While most readers will overlook a typo or two in a piece (many won't, by the way), if mistakes repeatedly show up, they undermine the writer's credibility. Bloggers might not want to admit this, but neatness counts in the long run.

Accuracy counts, too. But bloggers promise a more immediate experience of the news, one in which accuracy isn't regarded by the blogger as being the most important element. Sometimes this works, especially on a breaking news piece, creating a kind of unfolding drama, as happened with the Santa Monica market tragedy. But if accuracy is sacrificed too often, or if a blogger brushes it off as inconsequential, audiences will drift away. People want reliable news sources, even very personal ones, they can trust.

Then there is the prickly question of editing, viewed by many bloggers as the equivalent of death by Chinese water torture. Editing, they argue, undermines the experience of the blog and interrupts the writer's flow of thoughts and words. Editing does all

these things, but truthfully sometimes it's not so bad for a writer's thoughts to be interrupted. This posture also exposes a basic conceit of bloggers—the belief (or hope) that everybody reads what they've posted as soon as they post it, which, of course, doesn't happen. So this means that more than a few bloggers would benefit from taking a second look at what they are about to post or having a second set of eyes give it a quick read.

At The Christian Science Monitor, our blogs are edited, often by two or three people, before they are posted. I have no doubt this editing process improves the quality of the blog without sacrificing its freshness. If the feedback we've received from our readers is any indication, they believe this as well. Adapting the role of an editor to the blogging situation seems an example of how traditional media and bloggers can learn from each other. And when they are willing to do this, then the work of each will be improved.

The Best of Both Worlds

Some media organizations believe that blogs can be an important part of their

overall news package. Each day at the Monitor, our Daily Update blog on the war on terrorism and in Iraq is regularly among the top five most read pieces on our Web site. Meanwhile, The Dallas Morning News has decided to create an editorial blog where editorial writers can shed light on how they—as individuals and as a board—arrive at the opinions they publish. [See story by Keven Ann Willey on page 88.] As J.D. Lasica wrote in the Online News listserv, this accomplishes several things: It adds transparency to the usually hidden editorial opinion process, frees editorial writers to write in a more lively and personal fashion, and lets the public see that the paper's editorial board isn't monolithic. [See Lasica's story below.]

Other news organizations are experimenting with the idea of allowing their writers to do blogs as a supplement to their regular reporting, but it's still a learning process. While editing is a useful way to improve the quality of a blog, overediting a blog will kill its sense of voice and community. Learning to let go is going to be very difficult for a lot of editors who are used to an almost Stalinesque control over their

writers' output and the way that output is presented to the public.

Meanwhile, the rest of us in traditional journalism, especially those who care deeply about what's happening to the media, can be thankful that bloggers exist. At a time when media control is more concentrated and when presenting "fair and balanced news" can be just another way to limit voices and disguise a corporate or political agenda, bloggers are the dam-busters of the media world. Long may they blow open holes in the gatekeepers' firewalls so that all the voices that are being ignored or silenced can find ways to be heard. ■

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Blogs and Journalism Need Each Other

'The transparency of blogging has contributed to news organizations becoming a bit more accessible and interactive . . .'

By J.D. Lasica

Suggest to an old-school journalist that Weblogs have anything to do with journalism, and you'll be met with howls of derision. Amateur bloggers typically have no editorial oversight, no training in the craft, and no respect for the news media's rules and standards. Does the free-for-all renegade publishing form known as blogging really have anything to do with journalism?

Well, yes it does.

Consider:

- During the peace demonstrations in February, Lisa Rein took to the streets of San Francisco and Oakland, California, camcorder in hand, and taped video footage of the marchers and speakers, such as Representative Barbara Lee, Harry Belafonte, and antiwar activist Ron Kovic. She posted the video on her Weblog, complete with color commentary, providing much deeper coverage of the events than a viewer would get by watching the local news.
- At technology and media conferences, such as PopTech, South by Southwest, and Digital Hollywood, bloggers in the audience have reported conference events in real time, posting photographs, speaker transcripts, and summaries and analysis of key points a full day before readers could see comparable stories in the daily newspaper.
- On Super Bowl Sunday, a 22-year-old blogger in Los Angeles named Jessica Rios braved the freezing cold

to attend a televised outdoor concert by the British group Coldplay. She came home and blogged it, giving her take on the concert and reporting the band's play list. Like hundreds of others who watched the show and wanted to learn the names of the songs played, I turned to the Internet. I came up empty when I visited abc.com and coldplay.com. But hundreds of us found them (through Google) on Rios's blog.

Rios probably didn't know it, but she was committing a random act of journalism. And that's the real revolution here: In a

world of micro-content delivered to niche audiences, more and more of the small tidbits of news that we encounter each day are being conveyed through personal media—chiefly Weblogs.

Call it participatory journalism or journalism from the edges. Simply put, it refers to individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analyzing and disseminating news and information—a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media.

Weblogs are the most popular expression of this new media form. Blogs have exploded in popularity in the past year, fueled by greater access to bandwidth and low-cost, often free software. More than a half million people have taken up the tools of self-publishing to create personal journals on subjects as diverse as politics, microbiology and tropical fish.

"Blogs are in some ways a new form of journalism, open to anyone who can establish and maintain a Web site, and they have exploded in the past year," Walter Mossberg wrote in his Wall Street Journal technology column last March. "The good thing about them is that they introduce fresh voices into the national discourse on various topics and help build communities of interest through their collections of links."

Mossberg's description of Weblogs as a new kind of journalism might trouble hidebound journalists. But it is a journalism of a different sort, one not tightly confined by the profession's traditions and values.

Mainstream news operations are businesses supported by advertising. As hierarchical organizations, they value

Call it participatory journalism, or journalism from the edges. Simply put, it refers to individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analyzing and disseminating news and information—a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media.

smooth production workflows, profitability and rigorous editorial standards. Weblogs adhere to a different set of values. Bloggers value informal conversation, egalitarianism, subjective points of view, and colorful writing over profits, central control, objectivity and filtered prose.

Clay Shirky, an adjunct professor at New York University who has consulted on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies, sees the difference between traditional media and Weblog communities this way: "The order of things in broadcast is 'filter, then publish.' The order in communities is 'publish, then filter.' If you go to a dinner party, you don't submit your potential comments to the hosts, so that they can tell you which ones are good enough to air before the group, but this is how broadcast works every day. Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact."

Creating a New Media Ecosystem

Many traditional journalists are dismissive of bloggers, describing them as

self-interested or unskilled amateurs. Conversely, many bloggers look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, elitist club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press.

Shirky suggests the mainstream media fail to understand that despite a participant's lack of skill or journalistic training, the Internet itself acts as an editing mechanism, with the difference that "editorial judgment is applied at the edges ... after the fact, not in advance," as he wrote on the Networks, Economics and Culture mailing list in January.

Seen in this light, Weblogs should not

be considered in isolation but as part of an emerging new media ecosystem—a network of ideas. No one should expect a complete, unvarnished encapsulation of a story or idea at any one Weblog. In such a community, bloggers discuss, dissect and extend the stories created by mainstream media. These communities also produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, commentary and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources and story ideas. The relationship is symbiotic.

Lisa Rein, who videotaped the peace marches, borrows television news segments and retransmits them on her Weblog. She regularly records "Meet the Press" and presidential candidates' appearances on C-SPAN, then uploads the video clips to her blog, a practice she says is permitted under fair use. She also attends technology and law conferences, videotapes the speakers, and transfers that footage as well. The tools have become so easy to use that Rein—literally, a one-woman personal broadcast network—has attracted an international following. She now uploads video to her blog several times a day.

"There are just so many interesting things happening in our lives that would

make great programming," she told me. "The networks aren't interested unless it will attract millions of dollars in advertising revenues. Meanwhile, there are people and events all around us that are meaningful and that people would love to watch."

Managing Editor Scott Rosenberg wrote in Salon last year: "Weblogs expand the media universe. They are a media life form that is native to the Web, and they add something new to

our mix, something valuable, something that couldn't have existed before the Web.

"It should be obvious that Weblogs aren't competing with the work of the professional journalism establishment, but rather complementing it. If the pros are criticized as being cautious, impersonal, corporate and herd-like, the bloggers are the opposite in, well, *almost* every respect: They're reckless, confessional, funky—and herd-like."

Readers Become Part of the News Process

The emerging relationship between Weblogs and traditional journalism promises to be fitful and stormy. Earlier this year The Washington Post's Leslie Walker suggested that readers will never be able to rely on Weblogs for dependable news and information because bloggers don't cling to the same "established principles of fair-

Benefits Blogging Brings to News Outlets

What benefits do Weblogs bring to journalism? Several.

Pushing the envelope. Weblogs are helping to expand the boundaries of experimental forms of transaction journalism. Freelance journalist Christopher Allbritton, a former reporter for The Associated Press, asked his Weblog readers to finance a trip to Iraq at the outbreak of hostilities there. Some 320 people donated more than \$14,000 and helped him launch Back-to-Iraq.com. His readers then served as his editors during three weeks of dispatches during which Allbritton broke news on the fall of Tikrit and highlighted the Balkan-style ethnic tensions among Kurds, Arabs, Turkomen and Assyrians. [See Allbritton's story on page 82.] Similarly, freelancer David Appell, a physics PhD who has written for Nature, asked his readers to donate \$20 apiece to fund his investigation of the politics of the sugar industry. He wrote a report after raising \$425.

Influencing at the edges. We see sentiments first expressed on Weblogs bubble up into the mainstream media days or weeks after they first surface in the blogosphere. Similarly, all too often the mainstream media tend to dispose of stories in a fast-paced news cycle, with even important news events falling off their radar screen after 48 hours. Bloggers say, hold the phone, we're not done with this yet. Blogs keep stories alive by recirculating them and regurgitating them with new angles, insights and even newsworthy

revelations. Weblogs were credited with helping to get the mainstream news media interested in the racially insensitive remarks by Senator Trent Lott that led to his resignation as Senate majority leader.

Enhancing reader trust. News organizations such as MSNBC, The Providence Journal, The Dallas Morning News, and The Christian Science Monitor have embraced the Weblog form in some part of their editorial operations. [See articles by Tom Regan of the Christian Science Monitor, Sheila Lennon of The Providence Journal, Eric Alterman at MSNBC.com, and Keven Ann Willey at The Dallas Morning News on pages 68, 76, 85, and 88.] These news organizations realize that Weblogs offer an opportunity for newsrooms to become more transparent, more accessible, and more answerable to their readers.

Independent journalists and pundits such as Andrew Sullivan, Doc Searls, and Joshua Marshall have found that publishing a Weblog increases their authority and credibility in the eyes of readers. Time magazine media critic James Poniewozik described the perception gap between the audience and the media about trust this way: "Journalists think trust equals accuracy. But it's about much more: passion, genuineness, integrity." Weblogs and a commitment to open dialogue instill trust in the relationship between news media and audience.

Repersonalizing journalism. Blogs present a vehicle for expressing thoughts and reportage that doesn't always fit the contours of a traditional news report. Television reviewers have begun blogging their experiences with network executives and Hollywood stars during the annual summer Television Critics Association press tour in Los Angeles. Political writers are using blogs to bring daily commentary to the campaign trail. But more important, blogs offer an opportunity for readers to hear a journalist's voice and personality. Newsroom-sanctioned Weblogs promise to show journalists as human beings with opinions, emotions and personal lives—and yes, with warts and foibles. Weblogs could usher in a refreshing new openness in newsrooms by attaching a face and personality to reporters. Blogs could show that newspapers aren't monolithic corporations but a collaborative team of individuals with varying viewpoints and who have more in common with their readers than they could possibly know from reading their print articles alone.

Fostering community. When journalism becomes a process, and not a static product, audiences discard their traditional role as passive consumers of news and become empowered partners with a shared stake in the end result. Weblogs offer one way to promote that kind of interactivity. ■ —JDL

ness, accuracy and truth” that traditional journalists do. Bill Thompson, a visiting lecturer in the journalism school at City University, London, wrote in Britain’s *The Guardian*: “Blogging is not journalism. Period.”

Perhaps. But there’s another possibility: that journalists need to move away from the notion that journalism is a mysterious craft practiced by only a select priesthood—a black art inaccessible to the masses. We forget the derivation of the word journalist: someone who keeps an account of day-to-day events.

Years ago I met Frank McCulloch, a legendary editor at *The Sacramento Bee* and *Los Angeles Times* and an ex-Marine who was Saigon bureau chief for *Time* during the Vietnam War. An ink-stained member of the old guard, McCulloch believed that journalism was a simple thing. Find the right people. Ask the right questions. Write it up. “This ain’t rocket science,” he often said.

Exactly. Citizens are discovering how easy it can be to play reporter and publisher. To practice random acts of journalism, you don’t need a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection, and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: Report what you observe, analyze events in a meaningful way but, most of all, just be fair and tell the truth as you and your sources see it.

Bloggers can do that. Few bloggers fancy themselves journalists, but many acknowledge that their blogs take on some of the trappings of journalism: They take part in the editorial function of selecting newsworthy and interesting topics, they add analysis, insight and commentary, and occasionally they provide a first-person report about an event, a trend, a subject. Over time, bloggers build up a publishing track record, much as any news publication does when it starts out. Reputation filters—where bloggers gain the respect and confidence of readers based on their reputation for accuracy and relevance—and circles of trust in the blogosphere help weed out the charlatans and the credibility-impaired. If the

blogs are trustworthy and have something valuable to contribute, people will return.

I’m constantly astounded at the breadth of knowledge displayed by bloggers on subjects as diverse as wireless networking, copyright infringement, sonnet poetry, and much more, all written with a degree of grace and sophistication. Many readers have begun to turn to gifted amateurs or impassioned experts with a deep understanding of niche subjects, rather than to journalists who are generalists and cover topics a mile wide but an inch deep.

Now, is all blogging journalism? Not by a long shot. Nor is it likely that blogging will supplant traditional media or, as some have suggested, that blogging will drive news organizations out of business. When a major news event unfolds, a vast majority of readers will turn to traditional media sources for their news fix. But the story doesn’t stop there. On almost any major story, the Weblog community adds depth, analysis, alternative perspectives, foreign views, and occasionally first-person accounts that contravene reports in the mainstream press.

We need, then, to stop looking at this as a binary, either-or choice. We need to move beyond the increasingly stale debate of whether blogging is or isn’t journalism and celebrate Weblogs’ place in the media ecosystem. Instead of looking at blogging and traditional journalism as rivals for readers’ eyeballs, we should recognize that we’re entering an era in which they complement each other, intersect with each other, play off one another. The transparency of blogging has contributed to news organizations becoming a bit

more accessible and interactive, although newsrooms still have a long, long way to go.

Old media may have something to offer the young turks of blogspace, too, in the trust department. Bloggers who dabble in the journalistic process would do well to study the ethics rules and conflict of interest policies of news organizations that have formulated a set of guidelines derived from decades of trial and error. The conventions of journalism—accuracy, credibility, trustworthiness and being straight up with your readers—are guideposts that any good blogger should engrave on her wall. More needs to be done to make this collaboration a deeper and more meaningful phenomenon.

Transparency of Reporting

“Journalists must invite their audience into the process by which they produce the news,” Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel write in their book *The Elements of Journalism*. “This sort of approach is, in effect, the beginning of a new kind of connection between the journalist and the citizen. It is one in which individuals in the audience are given a chance to judge the principles by which the journalists do their work. The first step in that direction has to be developing a means of letting those who make up that market finally see how the sausage is made—how we do our work and what informs our decisions.”

Many journalists who blog are doing just that—exposing the raw material of their stories-in-progress, asking readers for expert input, posting complete text of interviews alongside the published story, and writing follow-up

We need, then, to stop looking at this as a binary, either-or choice. We need to move beyond the increasingly stale debate of whether blogging is or isn’t journalism and celebrate Weblogs’ place in the media ecosystem.

stories based on outsiders' tips and suggestions. As for readers who blog, giving them a stake in the editorial process—by letting them provide meaningful feedback or suggesting story leads—increases loyalty and understanding and spurs them to share their positive experience with others.

The authors of a research study, "Interactive Features of Online Newspapers," sum it up this way: "Journalists today must choose. As gatekeepers they can transfer lots of information, or they can make users a smarter, more active and questioning audience for news events and issues."

Journalism is undergoing a quiet revolution, whether it knows it or not. Readers will always turn to traditional news sites as trusted, reliable sources of news and information—that won't change. But the walls are cracking. The readers want to be a part of the news process.

We will always need a corps of trained journalists to ferret out impor-

tant stories, to report from remote locations, to provide balance and context to the news. But beside big media journalism we are starting to see a mixture of commentary and analysis from the grass roots as ordinary people find their voices and contribute to the media mix. Blogs won't replace traditional news media, but they will supplement them in important ways.

What's ahead? Certainly a much larger role for amateurs in the news process. Weblogs are only one part of the puzzle. For instance, in late June 2003, NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corp.) carried news of a serious highway accident. The scene was carried live via video from a bystander who was playing the role of journalist by shooting the action with his portable camera phone. Mobloggers—tech-savvy users who post photos, video and text to Weblogs from their mobile devices—just held their first convention in Tokyo. In Daytona Beach, Florida, a janitor created his own one-man TV station

and occasionally Webcasts live news events.

All of this portends important changes as journalism expands its tent to include citizen participation. Ultimately, bloggers and the phenomenon of grassroots journalism have just as meaningful a role in the future of news on the Net as do the professionals. ■

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Weblogs Bring Journalists Into a Larger Community

'... we need to drop grandiose claims of being aloof, objective observers and be more transparent about how we do our jobs.'

By Paul Grabowicz

One of the most alarming aspects of the Jayson Blair affair was how few people mentioned in his stories complained to The New York Times about his deceptions. This problem is not unique to the Times. In the wake of the scandal an Associated Press Managing Editors' survey found many readers viewed newspapers as so arrogant, uncaring or disingenuous that it was a waste of time to try to correct errors. A July 2003 Pew Research Center survey similarly reported that 62 percent of the public believed news organizations try to cover up mistakes rather than admit to them.

Clearly major changes are in order if news organizations are going to re-

establish credibility with readers and viewers. One step would be to embrace the growing sphere of Weblogs, which break down many of the existing barriers between journalists and the public.

What Weblogs Offer Readers

Weblogs are easy-to-create Web pages reporters can use to post short, regularly updated news items or commentary on issues they are covering, with links to longer stories and background information elsewhere on the Web. Anyone who has authored a Weblog knows the blogging community doesn't share the hesitation of newspaper read-

ers in pointing out errors. Even the slightest misstep on a journalist's Weblog is likely to elicit a batch of quick responses.

More importantly, a Weblog thrusts a journalist into a larger community where a posting is picked up and passed from one blogger to the next, each adding comments and expanding the discussion. As such, Weblogs are far more animated than the often-stilted forums at news Web sites. They elicit a much broader conversation in which what people have to say about what's been written is regarded as being of equal importance.

Reporters can use Weblogs to post items that expand on their regular news

stories. This can be similar to the traditional “Reporter’s Notebook,” written by journalists covering government or political campaigns. Instead of a highly structured narrative, designed as a finished product for passive consumption, the Weblog writing style is more informal and approachable, inviting the reader to participate.

Weblogs can engage readers in a dialogue about a story even as it’s being formulated. San Jose Mercury News technology columnist Dan Gillmor, a pioneer in journalism blogging, uses his eJournal¹ to float story ideas and get reader input on whether and how he might pursue them. Recently he’s invited his Weblog readers to review his outline for a book on technology and journalism. [See story by Gillmor on page 79.]

Weblogs also can give readers insight into the reporting process itself. This helps strip away the mystique—and misunderstanding—that surrounds so much of what we do as reporters. An example is the string of e-mail dispatches that producers of the “In Search of Al Queda” documentary posted to Frontline’s Web site as they did their filming². While not formally a Weblog, the producers’ very personal descriptions of how they reported the story show how a Weblog-like format can involve the public in a story from the beginning.

Journalists and Weblogs

For Weblogs to become a tool journalists use in their reporting, journalists will have to re-examine the concept of objectivity—the idea that we are detached, dispassionate chroniclers of fact. When we did a class at the University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism a year ago on creating a Weblog to report on digital copyright³, one of the main issues we confronted was the clash between journalistic objectivity and the informal,

free-flowing format of the Weblog.

That Weblogs and the Internet challenge objectivity is only appropriate, since it was a different technology and media form that fostered it. The advent of the telegraph and wire service in the 19th century allowed distribution of stories to many different newspapers and favored neutral presentations that would offend the fewest and appeal to the most. The evolution of mass media in print and broadcast similarly demanded each news product be tailored to the widest possible audience, with objectivity seen by many news managers as a means to that end.

In the era of digital technology and Web publishing, the mass-market model of news delivery is being displaced by one that emphasizes diversity and dialogue. Rather than presenting a single, homogenized view, the Web, and the blogosphere in particular, is a wide spectrum of perspectives and opinions. It’s a medium where people respond better to a more personal writing style, as usability studies have shown. And this medium is all about communication (e-mail tops every survey as the most favored use of the Internet), something the concept of the detached and impersonal journalist shuts off.

I once heard an award-winning national journalist say she responded to criticisms of her work by telling people their argument was not with her but with the people she quoted in her stories. It was as if no human was involved in the process of reporting and writing the story—just some disinterested bystander stringing together what others had to say. So there was no point talking with her. Not surprisingly, this don’t-bother-calling-me attitude—all too common in journalism—is a message that has been taken to

When the concept of objectivity came up ... none of the students voiced much support for it.

heart by the public.

To be sure, there are many values in journalism that need to be preserved—honesty, integrity, accuracy, fairness, inquisitiveness and thoroughness. But if we’re going to reconnect with readers, we need to drop grandiose claims of being aloof, objective observers and be more transparent about how we do our jobs. When the concept of objectivity came up in our Weblog class last fall, interestingly none of the students voiced much support for it. Instead we settled on more basic principles for our Weblog—to provide “factual” information that was “thought provoking” and would invite a “conversation that will increase understanding.”

Weblogs also pose some dangers for journalism. They encourage quick posting of information, while journalism has distinguished itself with an editorial process that vets stories before they are published. In the case of Dan Gillmor’s Weblog, the Mercury News addresses this issue by having an editor check Gillmor’s entries right after he posts them. For our journalism school Weblog, we decided postings had to be reviewed by another student or professor before they went public.

Weblog postings also often rely on secondhand information, with commentary and links to what has been published elsewhere. But original, in-depth reporting is essential to journalism, and reporters’ Weblogs should be designed to supplement and not substitute for that.

Like other digital media, Weblogs make it easy to correct errors after the fact, which can create the impression that mistakes are just being covered up. In our class we adopted a policy that any significant corrections would be accompanied by a note explaining what had been changed and why.

Weblogs are no panacea for all of what ails journalism. In the case of

¹ Gillmor eJournal <http://weblog.siliconvalley.com/column/dangillmor/>

² Frontline <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/search/behind/>

³ Digital Copyright <http://journalism.berkeley.edu/projects/biplog/>

Blair, numerous blogs dedicated to picking apart the reporting of The New York Times failed to catch his deceit before the Times did. But this also highlights the all too common relationship the press has with Weblogs—the imperious media giant under siege by hostile outsiders. Journalists need to break out of this us vs. them cycle

and be part of the community if we're going to regain the public trust that is essential to journalism. ■

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New Media Program director. He co-taught "Creating an Intellectual Property Weblog" and teaches in a class that is using a Weblog to report on China's attempts to control the Internet. He's also a contributor to E-Media Tidbits, a group Weblog.

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Blogging Journalists Invite Outsiders' Reporting In

'To be interesting, the blog must have a discernible human voice: A blog with just links is a portal.'

By Sheila Lennon

On February 20, 2003, 100 young men and women who went to The Station nightclub in West Warwick, Rhode Island never came home. The band began to play, sparklers flashed, and the soundproofing foam on the walls caught fire. Flames spread, the music stopped, and the dying began.

There was no way to know the names of everyone who was at the Great White concert that night. Identifying some of the dead and badly burned took days. Rhode Islanders banged on local news Web sites looking for the latest bit of information. The Providence Journal Web site¹ published news nearly around the clock, not waiting for the newspaper's next day's press run.

Initially, we created The Station Fire Weblog² to collect links to news coverage of the fire elsewhere on the Web. I searched with Google's help and found fresh information in victims' hometown papers, on roadie.net³, on Internet "heavy metal" sites, and net radio station KNAC.com in Los Angeles

(hometown of Great White), and on the Web site of guitarist Ty Longley, who died in the fire. I also scanned newsgroups for messages by survivors and friends of the fans and bands.

By constantly updating this blog and publishing information live, we conveyed to readers that any news they sent would be acted on and published immediately. A link at the top of our Weblog asked, "Seen something this blog should point to? E-mail Sheila," and it gave my address.

Readers responded. Amid the confusion, people were trying to sort out what had happened and looking for more information. Journalists, government officials, firefighters, medical professionals, witnesses, survivors and friends pooled their knowledge, and I blogged it all. Friends and relatives of victims e-mailed the URL's of pages friends had made to track the condition of victims⁴ and solicit donations for their medical and living expenses. Survivors had started discussions at the Yahoo Groups site, and they wanted

to get the word out. Readers with expertise in pyrotechnics, insulation or firefighting contributed information and speculation. I passed these and the other pieces of this story gathered through the blog onto the newspaper's editors leading the fire coverage.

Still today one can revisit the chronology of this "reporting" process as it unfolded by reading from the bottom of Week One of The Station Fire blog. There's no equivalent for this experience in print.

A Blogging Journalist

The Station Fire Weblog was an ad hoc blog created to handle the huge flow of information created by a breaking news story. I maintained this in addition to my daily blog, Subterranean Homepage News⁵ on www.projo.com.

Day-to-day I am a newsroom blogger on the mainstream news site of The Providence Journal, which is the major metropolitan daily in the capital of Rhode Island. I've been online since January 1990, when I assigned a story about local computer bulletin boards and then wrote a column about my adventures in connecting to them. After 14 years as a features editor at the newspaper, I moved to [projo.com](http://www.projo.com) four years ago. As our Web site's features producer, I sit among reporters and editors in the paper's newsroom. As its

¹ The Providence Journal <http://www.projo.com>
² The Station Fire Weblog <http://www.projo.com/cgi-bin/include.pl/blogs/stationfire/week1.htm>
³ roadie.net <http://www.teslatheband.com/news/jeffrader.htm>
⁴ Fire victims update <http://www.ornatesky.org/updates.htm>
⁵ Subterranean Homepage News <http://www.projo.com/blogs/shenews/>

blogger, I often discover that I'm about three days and a world of information ahead of my print colleagues. As I sit in the thick of story changes and newsroom buzz, my brain is always partially on the Web.

Being a Web-savvy reader, I often found myself bored by much of the news. I wanted more than the traditional fare of politics, government, cops and courts, relieved occasionally by chirpy features. In no time at all, my browser's bookmarks filled up with links to Web sites I liked and trusted—sites that tracked stories about our digital future, niche magazines, the best of somebody's smart daily finds.

Early blogs gave me a sense of who was pulling these links together and what they cared about. It was news their authors considered important to their lives. I found I agreed. The art and music news I cared about was not the celebrity doings of The Associated Press entertainment wire. Blogging artists and musicians show us what they like, what's happening. They spread their culture to anyone who seeks it out. I came to understand what I think of as the giant brain on the Web, a vast aggregation of human knowledge distributed among millions of computers.

Thanks to the Web, the world seems exponentially better reported than it was a dozen years ago. Good bloggers, like good journalists, like to gather interesting information and share the desire to pass it along. We serve our readers. This message has been drummed into me during my 18 years as a newspaper editor.

When I started Subterranean Homepage News, my daily blog, in March 2002, I wanted to show readers the news and ideas I was finding under the radar of traditional media outlets. Although the Web site and my blog are considered part of the Journal, the staffs are separate. My Web-savvy managers syndicate my blog, offering it to

23 other Belo sites including The Dallas Morning News. They seem to consider the blog cutting-edge online journalism and encourage experimentation. I have never been reproached for anything I have written. I do run potentially controversial items past my boss. The only time I have been told not to run something was when I attempted to link to the union Web site (that I also maintain) during a byline strike. I was told that the lack of an equivalent company site was the reason. They promote my blog by name on the cover of *projo.com* every day I publish and seem pleased by the recognition it has garnered in serious online news and Weblog circles. As a senior editor, trusted to observe the ethics and principles of journalism, I have enormous freedom to explore the possibilities of blogging as a new way to gather and report news and information of interest to online readers.

My default blogger hat reads "Wire editor for the Web." I write in my own voice, not my official "journalist" one, and create "blog items" from pieces available. To be interesting, the blog must have a discernible human voice: A blog with just links is a portal. At times, I might link without comment just to help a good site or story rise to greater attention. Even when bloggers don't editorialize much, their interests and bias will be evident in what they choose to point to. On my blog, my news judgment operates in the information-rich environment of the Web; I write for a more informed reader than the newspaper does.

Moving Past the Gatekeepers

If the news media's power is in setting the nation's agenda, bloggers enlarge that agenda by finding and flogging ideas and events until traditional media covers them in more depth. Good

stories have that kind of energy; they behave on the Web as though they are alive, ready and eager to spread. If enough bloggers find something important and blog it, expressing opinions and linking to others' opinions, then the idea rapidly multiplies. Very quickly, the story has legs and often will enter into the mainstream media and bubble out to readers, listeners and viewers. Perhaps some kind of action will result because of this news. But one thing is certain: More blogging about it will occur.

I assume my readers are getting daily top stories elsewhere, so I don't usually blog those. I want to find what other news is percolating out on the Web. It's from obscure fringes of the Web that my blog's news springs.

To understand better the Web's participatory journalism, listen as David Weinberger, the coauthor of "The Cluetrain Manifesto,"⁶ explains why he volunteered for presidential candidate Howard Dean⁷: "They understand that it's about giving voice to the 'ends' of the Net (aka us), that it means they lose some control of their message, that they need to enable groups to self-organize, that it's about listening and conversations more than about center-out broadcasting." Web-savvy news organizations understand this, too. When only news organizations could afford publishing technology, all journalism was "top down": We publish, you read (or view or listen). But the Web offers everyone low-cost access to a vast readership.

Last September, David Gallagher interviewed me for a New York Times story on journalist bloggers⁸. Only one sentence of our e-mail interview was in his final story, so I published the entire exchange on my blog for those who might find it interesting⁹. I was probably not the first blogger to do this, but the involvement of two high-profile Web journalists bumped the story up and caused quite a stir in news circles and was widely linked. Subsequently, a reporter from the American Journalism Review interviewed me for a story about the incident and its implications; that reporter published the entire interview as a sidebar.



⁶The Cluetrain Manifesto <http://www.cluetrain.com>

⁷Howard Dean's Internet advisor <http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/mtarchive/001843.html>

⁸Gallagher's story <http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/CPC/archive/blogs/23BLOG.html>

⁹Lennon's interview <http://lennon2.com/indexnyt.htm>

Some journalists were troubled by this “bottom-up” approach—the notion of the source, not the journalist, deciding what to publish. It exposes the reporter’s selection process, provides context for quotes selected for publication, and could be used as a “gotcha” by disgruntled interviewees. (Gallagher, who is also a blogger, wasn’t fazed by my parallel publishing.) The important point is that widely available, inexpensive Web publishing lets anyone get out his or her story and perspective. Bloggers then link to it and thereby spread the word. News organizations are no longer the gatekeepers on stories—the Web has flung the gates wide open. But sometimes only the Web journalist has both access to the full story and the means to publish it widely.

Newsroom bloggers, who have unlimited free access to the newspaper’s archives, can also allow a story’s building blocks to remain visible. Closed, paid archives at many news organization sites lock up the journalistic record. Two days before Providence’s former mayor, Vincent “Buddy” Cianci, Jr. entered federal prison to serve a 64-month racketeering-conspiracy sentence, Morley Safer, on the CBS television news magazine “60 Minutes,” let him whitewash his history, unchallenged. Safer’s story suggested that Cianci was a colorful victim of overzealous federal prosecution. Many Rhode Islanders, who had decades of experience with both the quick-witted mayor and his sordid past, were shocked.

Situations like this contribute to a growing credibility gap between what the media report and the public believe. Providence Journal columnist Bob Kerr published a powerful column about the shabby journalism done on “60 Minutes:”

“Viewers will hear Cianci discuss the infamous night in 1983 when he invited Raymond DeLeo, a onetime friend, to his house in Providence after

Journalists: Want to blog?

Take advantage of the newness of blogging to newsrooms and become a blogger before the publisher turns the assignment over to his/her favorite columnist. Just blog. Make a prototype. Show it to your boss. Push for getting it out on the Web. Put it where readers can find it. Use blogging software or the html editor that’s part of your browser. If you’re a freelancer without a Web host, free Web space probably is included in your account with an Internet Service Provider. If you want your own domain name, inexpensive basic hosting can be had from about six dollars per month and up. ■ —S.L.

learning DeLeo and Cianci’s wife were having an affair. They will hear Cianci say he and DeLeo ‘had a fight.’ They will hear Cianci say that the cigarette involved ‘wasn’t even lit.’ They will hear Cianci say that he ‘lost a happy home’ because of the confrontation.

“What viewers will not hear is that DeLeo was unable to fight back because of the presence of an armed Providence police officer and a group of Cianci friends. They will not hear that the corner of DeLeo’s left eye was burned by the cigarette. They will not hear that the Cianci’s marriage was already over at the time, that they had been to court to start divorce proceedings.”

Kerr’s words were behind the registration wall of the news site and thus made no sound. Access to news on projo.com is available only to readers who will answer demographic questions about themselves. Bloggers, search engines, and even many reporters often will not link to stories that require registration to read. At Subterranean Homepage News, which can be read without registration, I blogged

excerpts from both Kerr’s column and the 1984 report of the mayor’s court appearance at which he admitted, under oath, to the charges as part of a plea agreement. The evidence that the mayor was lying was buried in our paid archives. Our attempt to correct the bad journalism done by “60 Minutes” is headlined, “To 60 Minutes: Here’s Buddy Cianci’s 1984 admission of guilt.”¹⁰ I hope soon every newspaper’s archives will be freely available on the open Web. There is a constant need for public access to these records.

After a Rhode Island State Police raid last month on a tax-free smoke shop opened by the Narragansett Indians, Indian activist Sheila Spencer Stover of Bunn, North Carolina, whose Indian name is Firehair Shining Spirit, wrote an e-mail to the governor of Rhode Island, to the secretary of state, and to me, the projo.com blogger. She wrote in support of the tribe’s claim that it’s a sovereign nation, subject only to federal warrants.

Firehair wrote: “Remember after Hurricane Bob, then Tribal Chairman John Brown was asked if he was going to be helped by the state of Rhode Island? He replied, ‘We are a sovereign nation, we do business with the federal government’—this article may still be archived with your paper.” She used this incident to argue that the tribe had established a precedent for sovereignty by getting federal aid directly from FEMA after the 1991 hurricane. Back then, as she reminded me, smiling state officials beamed with pride at the groundbreaking move.

I dug the 1991 “Tribe to get \$12,000 for hurricane damage” story out of The Providence Journal’s archives and published it¹¹ along with her e-mail. Later, I asked Firehair why she had written to me. “I went hunting on Google for e-mail for the ProvJournal, and for whatever reason, the link to your page is what hit me in the eye. There are no coincidences—it got to the right place, now, didn’t it?” she replied.

Indeed, it did.

Rhode Islanders were having a hard time understanding the tribe’s claim to be exempt from state law. While the tribe’s views were mentioned as part of



¹⁰ “60 Minutes” article <http://www.projo.com/cgi-bin/include.pl/technology/shenews/archives/weekthirty-seven.htm#60min>

¹¹ ProJo <http://www.projo.com/cgi-bin/include.pl/blogs/shenews/archives/weeksixtyfour.htm#firehair>

longer news reports on the incident, only the most attentive readers were able to wade through the legal claims and counterclaims. Firehair pointed readers to this clear precedent, as reported years earlier in *The Providence Journal*. And, as a blogger with an unlimited news hole, I could offer space for her sidebar and resurrect the 1991 story so Rhode Islanders could read it.

Participatory journalism is likely to

become the norm in the future: Inviting informed readers to participate in stories can only bolster our credibility and trust. Excluding their reports will lead to rogue publishing that challenges the truth of our reporting and our relevance. ■

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Moving Toward Participatory Journalism

‘If contemporary American journalism is a lecture, what it is evolving into is something that incorporates a conversation and seminar.’

By Dan Gillmor

In March 2002, at the annual PC (Platforms for Communication) Forum conference in suburban Phoenix, a telecommunications chief executive found himself on the receiving end of acerbic commentary from a pair of Weblog writers who weren't impressed by his on-stage comments. Joe Nacchio, then the head of Qwest Communications, was complaining about the travails of running his monopoly. As he was speaking, Doc Searls, a magazine writer, and I were posting on our blogs via the wireless conference network and a lawyer and software developer, Buzz Bruggeman, was “watching” the proceedings from his office in Florida. At one point, Bruggeman e-mailed each of us a note directing us to a Web page showing this CEO's enormous cash-in of Qwest stock while the share price was heading downhill. We noted this information in our blogs and offered virtual tips of the hat to Bruggeman.

Many people at the conference were also online, and some were amusing themselves by reading our comments. As these exchanges were posted, the audience's mood toward Nacchio chilled. Were we responsible for turning the audience against him? Perhaps our blogging played a small role, though I'm fairly sure he was more than ca-

pable of annoying this crowd all by himself. But the real-time nature of this process was important and instructive, if not entirely novel in today's communications-infused world. The essential element was the partnership with readers—a feedback loop that started in a suburban Phoenix conference session, zipped to Orlando, headed back to Arizona, and ultimately went global.

A Passive Audience Becomes Active

This exchange—and its consequence—reflects the power of blogs that is central to the participatory journalism of tomorrow. We're learning new techniques, and the “we” needs to be understood in its largest sense, because enormous new power is devolving into the hands of what has been a mostly passive audience. I've been lucky enough to be an early participant in this form of participatory journalism, having been urged almost four years ago by one of the Weblog software pioneers to start my blog. It was a natural fit: I was writing about technology for a newspaper in Silicon Valley, where my readers were both highly knowledgeable and likely to be online.

My audience is never shy about letting me know when I get something

wrong. Over the years, they have made me realize something that is now one of my guiding principles: My readers know more than I do, sometimes individually on specific topics, but always collectively. This is similar for all journalists, no matter what their beat is. And having readers' feedback and participation presents a great opportunity and not a threat, because when we ask our readers for help and knowledge they are willing to share it—and, through that sharing, we all benefit.

If contemporary American journalism is a lecture, what it is evolving into is something that incorporates a conversation and seminar. This is about decentralization. Centralized news-gathering and distribution is being augmented (and some cases will be replaced) by what's happening at the edges of increasingly ubiquitous and interwoven networks. People are combining powerful technological tools and innovative ideas that are fundamentally altering the nature of journalism in this new century.

There are exciting possibilities for everyone in this transition—for journalists and active “consumers” of news who aren't satisfied with today's product and for newsmakers. One of the most exciting examples of a newsmaker's understanding of the

possibilities has been the presidential campaign of Howard Dean, the first serious blogger-candidate, who has embraced decentralization to the massive benefit of his nomination drive. Meanwhile, "amateur journalists" are busy creating their own brands, and the political beat seems to be where the most interesting action is found.

Meshing a Newspaper Column With a Blog

For the journalist who starts a blog, the challenges are different. Blogs usually reflect an individual voice. In my case, this made perfect sense since I was already a columnist at the San Jose Mercury News and therefore expected to share my voice and opinions in print. So when I began my blog, I dropped mini-essays onto it without worrying about compromising the objectivity that beat journalists at traditional news organizations try to maintain. Yet I'm convinced that almost any reporter could successfully do a blog, even if its

In an era when the public has a pervasive distrust of journalists, listening strikes me as a good way to improve our relationship with the audience.

purpose was only to keep readers informed about some of the little stuff that wouldn't otherwise make the paper or broadcast. Think of the blog as an ongoing "Reporter's Notebook." Team blogs—covering larger topic areas—can also work well.

Based on my experience as newspaper columnist *and* blogger I'd urge newspapers and other media organizations to offer readers the opportunity to do blogs, such as Salon's experiment, in which the online magazine worked with a blogging software vendor to let readers create Salon-branded blogs at a low price (about \$40 a year). Not even a well-staffed big-city newspaper can hope to cover every aspect of civic life, but it has readers whose in-

formation and perspectives could contribute much to improving and broadening the coverage. But editors can still invite audience members to be part of the conversation in a much more genuine way.

The most worthwhile part of blogging is the conversation and the listening. I have regular readers who drop by my blog. Many get the headlines via RSS syndication feeds and offer suggestions or comments. (RSS is an XML data format that lets programmers create so-called "newsreaders" to parse and display RSS data, bypassing the browser entirely for more convenient access to the blog.) Sometimes I indicate what I'm working on and invite readers to tell me what they know about the topic. Naturally, if I think I have a story alone, I don't tell my competition. But getting additional angles and ideas about a topic is never a bad idea. I generally learn more from people who disagree with me than from those who think I'm right. In an era when the public has a pervasive distrust of jour-

nalists, listening strikes me as a good way to improve our relationship with the audience.

A disruptive trend? Sure. Some of this journalism from the edges will make all of us distinctly uncomfort-

able and raise new questions of trust and veracity. Collectively, we will need to develop new hierarchies of trust and verification, using formal and informal gauges of reputation. Of course, lawyers will make some of these new rules. They always have, always will.

I also worry about the way today's dominant media organizations—led by Hollywood and the recording industry—are abusing copyright laws to gain absolute control over digitally stored material. They want to shut down some of the most useful knowledge-spreading tools in this new era, such as peer-to-peer technology. Meanwhile, they are increasingly in league with governments that want to shield their activities from public scrutiny. As different

kinds of online journalists emerge, governments and newsmaking organizations are making rules that effectively decide who is a journalist via the credentialing process; this isn't new, but as more and more people declare themselves to be journalists, the issue will arise more often.

In a worst-case scenario, blogs and other participatory journalism could someday require the permission of Big Media and Big Government. Consider, for example, U.S. policies that are encouraging concentration of media organizations even as the number of Internet Service Providers (ISP) shrinks. In a few years, it is possible the only viable ISP's will be phone and cable giants; they'll be able to decide what gets delivered at what speed to online customers. That even Microsoft has joined a coalition demanding rules to prevent such conduct indicates how far this budding duopoly's power could reach. That would be an outrage and a disaster for self-government.

I'm optimistic, however, largely because the technology will be difficult to control and because people like to tell stories. With this transition to participatory journalism, the news audience will be fragmented beyond anything we've seen, but news will be more relevant than ever. We'll all need better tools to gather it collectively and then make sense of what's been gathered.

In the end, this emerging media universe is not about the journalists. It's about people's ability to become more fully engaged as customers, families, neighbors and citizens. Blogs are only one of the tools of tomorrow's multidirectional news media—a powerful early indicator of where we're headed. It will be bumpy ride, but a worthwhile journey. ■

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Weblogs and Journalism: Back to the Future?

A blogger predicts that Weblogs might push Big Media back to better news reporting.

By Glenn Harlan Reynolds

The growth of Weblogs as a new form of journalism has gotten a mixed response. On the one hand, many people, including many journalists, are intrigued by the notion of a self-publishing platform that allows writers to work without the bother of editors, publishers and accounting departments. Having been interviewed by quite a few journalists over the last couple of years, I have noticed that most of them get around to asking me if I think it would be possible for a journalist to make a good living as a blogger. Some have even implored me to try to maximize the revenues from my own blogging as a means of opening the door for others.

On the other hand, some people disdain Weblogs. Matt Drudge has made very clear that he has no interest in being called a “blogger.” He regards himself as a traditional journalist in the ink-stained tradition of the prewar years (notwithstanding the lack of actual ink). Other writers have dismissed Weblogs as mere personal diaries, as nothing more than a collection of annotated links to other people’s work, or as parasites on the body of real journalism.

But Drudge’s misgivings and those of others notwithstanding, I think that Weblogs are doing pretty well in both the money economy and the attention economy, though I suspect that their impact will be greater in the latter than in the former. But to understand the influence of Weblogs, it’s probably useful to break the subject into two parts.

The Money Side of Blogging

On the money side, Weblogs’ impact is trivial, though it’s growing. Some marketers have tried to exploit the blogosphere in order to generate buzz, but with extremely limited success (Dr Pepper, for example, tried to use phony

blogs to generate interest in its “Raging Cow,” a “milk-based soft drink with an attitude.” The failure of this project, however, may have had something to do with the unappealing nature of the product itself.) Some journalists are making money from Weblogs: My InstaPundit site, despite a near complete failure on my part to exploit it as a source of revenue, generates a few thousand dollars a year. Andrew Sullivan has tried much harder and, in two “pledge weeks,” he raised well over \$100,000.

Other freelance journalists, such as science writer David Appell, have solicited money from their readers to allow them to cover particular topics. Appell asked his readers to finance an article on the World Health Organization’s relations with the sugar industry; readers contributed more than he had requested within a few days. Thin-media mogul Nick Denton has managed to turn a profit with Gizmodo.com, a gadget-blog supported by referral fees from merchants like Amazon, and there are probably similar ventures elsewhere that I’ve missed. But so far blogs haven’t really lived up to journalists’ escape fantasies, and for the moment Big Media is in the driver’s seat where money is concerned. With the exception of Sullivan, almost everyone making real money from blogging is making it from Big Media outlets: Mickey Kaus at Slate, Eric Alterman and I at MSNBC.com, and so on. [See Alterman’s article on page 85.] That may change in the future, and I expect it to, but we’re not there yet.

Blogs do help to sell books and music. Novelist Claire Berlinski let bloggers read chapters of her novel, “Loose Lips,” in manuscript; the resulting buzz helped get it published, and it’s now under option to Robert De Niro’s production company as a potential film. I’ve noticed that an approving

link from my own site or from other high-traffic bloggers often drives books up into the upper reaches of the Amazon rankings. Some musicians, like punk-rocker Dr. Frank, have done well using blogs to market their music. And Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean has used blogs as a fundraising tool with considerable success.

Blogging Gets Lots of Attention

On the attention side, however, things are far more dramatic. A few decades ago, there weren’t many voices in the public sphere. There were three national television networks, most towns had only one newspaper, and the opportunities for most Americans to have their views heard were limited indeed. Couple that with the generally favorable attitude toward authority and large institutions that prevailed in the post-war years, and journalists had the opportunity to enjoy monopoly profits in the attention economy. (Will any journalist enjoy the influence of a Scotty Reston or a Joe Alsop again? It’s doubtful.) Even after the Vietnam and Watergate era brought most big institutions into disrepute, journalism rode high—and even capitalized on the growing “celebrity culture” to turn news anchors and correspondents into superstars.

This situation began to change even before the advent of the Internet, as technological advances in low-cost offset printing made alternative weekly newspapers a common place. The Washington City Paper may have been no match for The Washington Post, but it was at least another voice. Most Americans, though, were still shut out. Talk radio opened things up a bit more, but it was still a matter of the host sharing the megaphone for a few minutes out

of an hour in between commercials for baldness cures and investment newsletters.

But as James Lileks famously remarked, the Web is a conversation. Bloggers get lots of e-mail. Some (mostly those with lower traffic, because it becomes quite unwieldy past a certain point) allow readers to post comments. And Web-based tools like Technorati—which lists all the Weblog posts connecting to a particular article or Weblog item—make it very easy to see what people are saying about, well, pretty much anything. What's more, blog readers are joining in the conversation. Readers of my site e-mail me suggested links, and some send first-person reports (sometimes with photos taken via digital camera or cell phone) from places as far-flung as Afghanistan, Iraq, Paris and Caracas. The same holds true for other Weblogs, as well.

Communication of this horizontal nature is likely to have several impacts. First of all, the term "correspondent" is reverting to its original meaning of "one who corresponds," rather than the more recent one of "well-paid microphone-holder with good hair." Second, the realization that anyone (or lots of people, anyway) can report news

or write opinion pieces just as well as famous people is likely to undercut the status of celebrity journalists and pundits. Tiger Woods is a golf celebrity because he can play golf better than anyone. Most media celebrities, on the other hand, became famous because other people lacked access to the tools of the trade. That's changing now.

Blogs' Impact on Journalism

Mass participation in reporting and punditry will have some downsides, but for those who actually care about the craft of journalism it's likely to have upsides, too. During the wave of consolidation and corporatization that swept the media world beginning in the 1980's, the reporting of actual news got short shrift. Bureaus were cut, correspondents were laid off, and actual newsgathering was often outsourced to stringers and wire services. Analysis and punditry (that, conveniently enough, were cheaper) were supposed to provide the value-added that would allow media institutions to distinguish themselves.

There were two problems with this approach. One was that a strategy of corporatization didn't sit well with a strategy of using opinion to achieve

distinction in the marketplace: Corporations are boring, and so is punditry that has been run through the strainer of a corporate mindset. The other was that technology was undermining this strategy. Everybody has an opinion and, thanks to the Internet, it's easy to share them, opening up boring, corporate-mindset punditry to a vast range of more interesting competition.

What this means, however, is that the most powerful application for 21st century media is likely to be hard-news gathering, something that news media organizations are still better at than their atomized competitors on the Internet. If Big Media outfits want to compete with the blogosphere, they'd be well advised to beef up their foreign bureaus and start reporting more actual news. And that, I think, would please both bloggers and traditional journalists. ■

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Blogging From Iraq

With a borrowed laptop, rented satellite phone and reader-generated budget, an independent reporter sends back stories from the war.

By Christopher Allbritton

In late March, I had to make a choice. I was stuck in Cizre, Turkey, hoping to get into Iraq to cover the war. Syria and Iran had closed the borders. Turkey had closed its borders weeks before. Should I try to sneak into a war zone by boating across the Tigris near the Syrian-Turkish-Iraqi border? Or should I pay \$3,000 and take the smugglers' route across the Turkish border, through snow-draped mountains and Turkish snipers accompanied by three

guys with AK-47's?

I took the mountainous route, and readers of Back-to-Iraq.com, the Web site that I started last year, were able to read all this, practically as it happened, thanks to a revolution in technology and a lack of sanity on my part.

But perhaps I should back up a bit. In the fall of 2002, I started a Web site using off-the-shelf blogging software. I had returned to New York from northern Iraq, where I did some freelance

reporting, but I was having a hard time selling my stories. I was frustrated with editors who seemed to care little about the Kurds who live in this region of Iraq. Or perhaps the market was simply glutted after several stories had been published that spring.

Based on my reporting experiences, I started writing stories for my Web site. At about the same time, I came across SaveKaryn.com, a scheme by erstwhile spendthrift Karyn Bosnak to

erase her credit card debt by asking strangers for money over the Web. She had become a minor cause célèbre and eventually raised about \$13,000.

Blogging From Iraq

I decided to try my hand at “blograising.” Instead of offering warm appreciation to the donors, as Karyn did, what I could offer were first-hand accounts of life in Iraq. And with funding from readers, when war on Iraq was declared, as I presumed it would be, I planned to report on that for the donors using a premium e-mail list to distribute copy and pictures. With this plan, my Weblog, www.Back-to-Iraq.com, was born.

By the time the bombs dropped on March 20, I had raised \$8,000. Within the next few days, another \$2,000 was contributed, and I bought my ticket to Istanbul. I planned to travel to Ankara, meet up with John Courtney, an ex-Marine who had discovered Back-to-Iraq while he was waiting in Turkey, also looking for a way to get into Iraq. Together we would somehow make our way into the country.

Using a borrowed laptop and a rented satellite phone, my plan was to send back stories and pictures. There would be no editors, no advertisers, no strings attached. I’d have to rely on the training I had from Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism and the experience from when I’d worked as an international editor and national writer at The Associated Press and apply this to the blog. But now I had the freedom to report and write what I witnessed and experienced. It also meant that I had no backup should things go wrong.

This brings me back to the decision I had to make in March. Either I figure out how to get into a war zone or go home. But going home no longer seemed like an option since I had more than 320 donors to my Weblog, donors who would eventually give more than \$14,000 to get me to Iraq so that I could report on the war as an “independent journalist.” By then there were also about 25,000 daily readers of B2I, as my Weblog came to be called, and



On the day Kirkuk fell to the Kurds, hundreds of Iraqi conscripts surrendered. A group of POW’s and their Kurdish guard pose for pictures before being sent to Arbil for processing. *Photo by © 2003 Christopher Allbritton.*

posting comments and suggestions. Instead of having one editor, I had thousands. And they wanted me there.

This was journalism without a net, on the Net, and it had never been done quite like this before.

But was what I was doing journalism? I had no official press credentials, only my reporting experiences in the region from the previous year. Nor did I have any major media outlet behind me with which to impress either sources or other journalists. And with no editor to guide my story selection or to read my words before they were published to a worldwide audience, there was no one to offer me story advice or curb my rhetorical excesses.

Yet I believe that B2I is an example of journalism. It was about a guy with a notebook asking questions and then telling people the answers to his questions. It was about bringing the stories I saw and heard to people interested in reading them from a corner of the world (the northern front prior to the fall of Baghdad and Tikrit) that wasn’t widely reported on. And my reporting was done without any outside pressure being applied, the kind that some-

times can bias what gets reported. My reporting created a connection between the readers and me, and they trusted me to bring them an unfettered view of what I was seeing and hearing.

Readers Respond to His Reporting

When I asked readers why they supported B2I, Lynn McQueary responded: “Back-to-Iraq definitely brought stories that the mainstream media didn’t. As an independent journalist, you didn’t have to work within the confines of what would be ‘acceptable’ to print.” Trish Lewis liked that I had “the independence it gave you the reporter. No agendas except your own, which is perfectly acceptable to me. No one is totally objective. But you were free to do what you wanted. Also, you gave more personal perspectives of ‘behind the scenes’ of what it takes to do what you do, which was terribly fascinating to me.”

Once the idea sunk in that readers like these women were my actual editors, interesting things happened. So that readers would know where I was,

prior to beginning the two-day trek across the mountainous border between Turkey and Iraq, I filed from a meadow 10 miles from the Iraqi border. In that story, I sent this cliff-hanging close, "We're leaving in 15 minutes. When next I write, I should be back in Iraq."

Later, after I referred to my mountain journey as being "like a Bataan Death March," I gave a very public mea culpa. Some of my readers had lost relatives on that much more hellish journey and had complained on the site's public comment section about my choice of words.

Because many readers asked about the Turcoman people who live in Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk, I did a story about them, explaining some of the ethnic politics of the region and how the Turcoman people were attempting to drag Turkey into the powder keg so they might get a shot at Kirkuk's oil revenue. I never saw another story about the Turcoman's role, so I was glad that my readers led me to doing this story. Over time, I started report-



An Arab fighter in Tikrit poses for a picture while a factory burns in the background. Tikrit had mostly fallen to the Americans, but still many armed factions roamed the city. *Photo by* © 2003 *Christopher Allbritton.*



A father and son flee a burning factory after Kurds—or U.S. attacks—set it on fire. *Photo by* © 2003 *Christopher Allbritton.*

ing in a more focused manner, as I worked to fulfill specific reader requests while still also relying on my own instinct for news.

Through it all, I maintained a personal tone in my writing as I tried to let people know what it felt like to be working and surviving during such an extraordinary event. My antiwar stance had been well-known to anyone who had read B2I before I left for Iraq, yet once I was there I reported what I witnessed as straight down the middle as I could. When a crowd of Kurds shouted how glad they were that the war had started, I reported it as they said it. When they told me how much they liked Fox News because "Fox News is true!" I reported that, too.

When I wasn't able to get a direct source on a story, I didn't write it. And I kept my commentary to a minimum while I was in Iraq; readers already knew my opinions, so they didn't need to hear them repeatedly. I strongly believe that if blogs are ever going to be taken seriously as a journalistic medium, their authors will have to be as conscientious in their reporting conduct as any mainstream outlet.

Weblogs and Journalism

None of this should suggest that Weblogs will replace The New York Times. Instead, blogs should be the seasoning—or maybe the garnish—in a reader's well-balanced media diet. Their quirky, scrappy tone, their in-your-face opinions, and the personal scale of the publication are the main attractions of Weblogs. But none of those matter if the reporting is nonexistent or sloppy. I hope B2I showed that the qualities that make blogs unique and exciting can coexist with the standards of quality journalism.

This is an important goal if U.S. journalism is to reverse its crisis of credibility. For various reasons, a lot of Americans say they don't trust their media. Weblogs written by those with some journalism training can renew that trust through the sense of personal connection that can be established through the interactivity of the medium. With this trusting relationship, bloggers can do good journalism. But with the chatty nature of the blogging medium, this trust and credibility can also be damaged. There is,

however, the corrective power that derives from the medium's interactivity. For example, during the war, when Sean-Paul Kelley of *The Agonist*, a well-known and wildly popular blog, was plagiarizing from *Stratfor*, a well-regarded military-intelligence newsletter, another blogger caught him and tipped off *Wired.com*, which eventually did a story on the scandal.

I started B2I not only to cover a war and advance my reporting career but also because I think complicated news stories benefit from having as many sets of eyes on them as possible. No news organization has a monopoly on truth, and independent journalists like me can pursue stories that mainstream journalists won't cover. Because of my smaller and more focused audience and their interests, I told stories that revealed the humanity of a war zone,

such as my story about stumbling into a village party in Taqtaq the night Baghdad fell and being mobbed by delirious Kurds so happy to see Americans in their midst.

Truth is elusive but it is always something more than merely a collection of facts. At times, it can be revealed through a mosaic of coverage that educates and enlightens readers. In my farewell note on B2I, I wrote: "While truth may be the first casualty in war, I hope I was able to save a small shard of it. But it's hard to say. Many times since I've been here, listening to the claims of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Turcoman or Assyrians, I've thought that there is no such thing as Truth, only myths that people tell their children to get them through to the next generation. History doesn't exist here, at least not in the American sense. The past is never

really past, and history isn't something that happened long ago—it's very much alive and kicking. In this ancient place, a land of empires, gods, gardens, wars, blood and beauty, at the heart of it, you will find only stories. I hope I've been able to bring a few of them home to you." ■

Christopher Allbritton is a writer in New York and has written for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, The Associated Press, The (New York) Daily News, and various magazines and Web sites. He is working on a book about his experiences in Iraq and looking for funding (or an assignment) to cover another conflict.

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Determining the Value of Blogs

'Without, say, the imprimatur of *The New York Times*, a blogger has only his or her reputation to recommend the work'

By Eric Alterman

When I began blogging for MSNBC.com in May of 2002, I wrote what I considered to be a reasonable-length introductory column. But as I was unused to the format, I did not realize that I was beginning with a faux pas, failing to adapt to my new medium. One generally friendly blogger liked what I had to say, but thought it went on at such inexcusable length he compared it to Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past." Looking back on it today, I'm rather glad I did it. After all, how often do you hear the words "Marcel Proust" and "Eric Alterman" in the same sentence these days? Not often enough, I say. Anyway, here is a portion of what I had to say back then:

"Blog. Blogorrhea. Blogosphere. Blogistan. Blogdex. Blogrolling. Warblogging. Where it will all end,

knows God! I wish someone had gotten to the naming committee before this whole movement got rolling. I hate the word 'blog,' but I like the format, particularly as a writer. (What's not to like?)

"Even if I could somehow get used to the word, one problem with blogs remains definitional. It's hard to know exactly what qualifies. Is Matt Drudge a blogger? Is Jim Romenesko? Are the mysterious folks at *Mediawhoresonline.com*? I dunno. Does it matter? John Hiler of *Microcontent News* asks, 'If all bloggers followed a journalism code of ethics, their blogs would be objective and edited . . . but would they still be blogs?' In his proposed Code of Ethics for *Amateur Journalism*, he argues, 'Weblogs are inherently biased and unedited.' Scott Rosenberg proposed

in *Salon.com* that 'the editorial process of the blogs takes place between and among bloggers, in public, in real time, with fully annotated cross-links.'

"Well maybe then *Altercation* ain't a blog. I have an editor. This is in part because I want one and in part, I imagine, because the good folks at MSNBC.com do not entirely trust me without one. Editors are a pain, but they have saved me from approximately a million embarrassing mistakes. I'm sure I will make a bunch even having one, but I'm happy to admit that *www.Altercation.msnbc.com* will be edited by those folks whose initials appear in the middle of the address.

"To tell the truth, as someone who has benefited from editors' suggestions for more than 20 years, I don't even get the contrary argument. The biggest problem great writers face is when

they think they get to be too big to be edited. Have you read the last book by David Halberstam?¹ I didn't think so. Have you seen the new Star Wars? Here's what Stephen Hunter wrote in The Washington Post, I think quite accurately. 'Memo to George Lucas: Hire an editor, bud. You're a great man. So what? You still need an editor. Everybody needs an editor, and nobody needed an editor more than the writer-director of this film.' Well, if George needs one, who am I ...?"

Evaluating Blogs

The issue to which I tried to address myself that day is the same one that preoccupies me now. What is the role of "truth" and "evidence" in our contemporary political and cultural debate and discourse, and do blogs help or hurt its case? On the one hand, Weblogs are quite obviously a net negative. Just as bad money forces out good, so too does bad information. Because blogging requires no credentials whatever—not even the judgment of an editor or personnel resources person—absolutely anybody with access to a computer can do it. That means a vast increase in the net amount of crap swirling around out there, unedited, unchecked and largely untrue. With-

out, say, the imprimatur of The New York Times, a blogger has only his or her reputation to recommend the work, and the very nature of the beast seems to encourage carelessly conceived statements and baseless charges. Now that blogging appears here to stay, it is even harder and harder for amateurs to sift through the morass of information available to them each day and decide what to believe. Matt Drudge brags that he is 80 percent accurate. Well, that 20 percent can do an awful lot of damage.

But the value of blogs is the flipside of their downside. In the world of journalism, an awful lot of what is both true and important is overlooked for a variety of reasons, many trivial, a few not. The concentration of media ownership and increasing conservatism of so many journalistic institutions open up a crying need for alternative sources of information and opinion that cannot find a home elsewhere in the media. When inventive blogging is combined with the self-discipline of journalism—as, say, in Josh Marshall's Talking Points Memo, it can significantly advance our knowledge and put pressure on journalists to do a better job with their own reporting and evidence.

But it is not only the journalists. During the Trent Lott brouhaha, the anonymous liberal blogger Atrios did

an amazing job of finding documents from Lott's past that continued to keep the story alive as they simultaneously broadened our understanding of its larger implications. I'm sure a number of such examples can be found in the blogosphere's short history. The problem, per usual, is sifting the wheat from the dross.

Ideally, I think every blogger would benefit from having an editor—and from knowing a little bit about the way journalism is produced (and conceived). As that seems awfully unlikely, we will have to settle for everyone—journalists included—learning a little bit more about blogging. I know my own work, both as a journalist and a historian, is a great deal richer for it. At least that's what my editors tell me. ■

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¹ At the time I wrote this, I was referring to "War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and Generals."

The Infectious Desire to Be Linked in the Blogosphere

'Weblogs offer journalists tangible ways to achieve that Number One feeling.'

By Mark Glaser

Writing a Number One pop single has been a dream of mine, stored in the vault of my overambitions near "topping The New York Times Bestseller List" and "inventing the greatest thing since sliced bread." Unlike the music business, which I once covered, for print journalists, there are few Top 40 charts to climb.

Print journalists can chart the num-

ber of major newspapers that pick up their stories or how often their articles make the front page or are talked about by TV pundits. Or they might make radio or TV show appearances. There's always the Google option, with a name search bringing a downpour of links to stories online.

Weblogs offer journalists tangible ways to achieve that Number One feeling. I write a column for the University

of Southern California Annenberg School's Online Journalism Review (www.ojr.org) as well as a regular newsletter for the Online Publishers Association (www.online-publishers.org). After I wrote columns about bloggers and described how they raised the level of public and media scrutiny of Senator Trent Lott when he made his now-infamous birthday comments about the late Senator Strom Thurmond and how

they covered the war in Iraq, I noticed the incestuous, snowballing sensation of getting linked in the blogosphere.

The Chain of Weblog Links

Here's how it goes: Interview a top blogger such as Glenn "InstaPundit" Reynolds or Josh "Talking Points Memo" Marshall, and they will likely link to your final article. Those links lead to links from their blogging "children," those other bloggers who lap up their every word online. Then, they tell two friends, who tell two friends, and so on.

The end result is placement for your story on Weblog charts such as the Daypop Top 40 or MIT's Blogdex (the "Weblog Diffusion Index") or Popdex ("the Web site popularity index"). When I started covering Weblogs, I only used these charts to see what bloggers were squawking about. I never thought I'd be on the chart myself. Keep in mind that making the chart doesn't necessarily mean bloggers love you; it only means your words are linked to a lot of other Weblogs. The authors of these other Weblogs could just as easily be tearing you apart as praising your work.

But it doesn't really matter. After getting a few links in the blogosphere for OJR columns that quoted top bloggers and contained "blog" in the headline, I had a little brainstorm. What if I created a graph charting the most influential bloggers on the media? What if I included Top 10's from various top bloggers? The idea was to create something original, perhaps controversial, but worthy of the attention of journalists and bloggers alike.

Nudging this plan forward was one driving ambition: Could I pen a column that would hit the top of the blog

charts, lodging itself up there in a Beatlesque way, awaiting my next brilliant blog analysis? Sure, there were considerations of fairness, accuracy and artistic beauty. But could this chart shoot straight to the top?

My editors at OJR were willing to put

When print journalists start to write blogs, they begin to look at issues on a daily, possibly hourly basis, creating a news cycle that's more like cable TV news.

resources behind it, and an illustrator helped get the graph in working order. After I struggled with the graph for a few days and nights—and got great input from top bloggers such as Andrew Sullivan and Jeff Jarvis—the beast was ready to be unleashed onto the blogosphere. But there was one final touch. When I asked the Big Bloggers to list their Top 10 most influential blogs, I allowed them to list themselves. Sure enough, almost all of them did; Sullivan listed himself at Number One.

The column and graph went live on OJR's Web site on June 19, and I sent out a brief promotional e-mail to some colleagues. At 9:09 p.m., Glenn Reynolds posted a quickie link to the column. "Hmm," he wrote. "I'm not sure that this chart is an accurate reflection, but you can decide for yourself." A little later, Jarvis weighed in: "Debate starts ... now!" And it did, with an avalanche of links over the next few days.

Sure enough, some people weren't happy with the chart. A blogger called

Pandagon said the graph was "beyond pointless." Another named Atrios says he got "no respect" for being left off the chart. The most consistent quibble was that I put blogger/journalist James Lileks on the left side of the graph, when he really is a right-winger. (This

being online journalism, we were quickly able to update the chart with him on the right.)

But with all this back and forth, my column about the chart was listed on the Daypop 40 in the 20's and on Blogdex in a similar spot. Did this story have the juice to make it to the top? I obsessively read each blog link to my story, whether it was a simple link or a senior thesis on the subject. Many bloggers had similar reactions, calling the chart "egos on parade" or a "circle jerk" for its elitist, self-referential nature. And Andrew Sullivan and others who ranked themselves highly took a fair amount of criticism, as expected.

Others feigned being upset at being left off the graph. Still others made their own Top 10 lists and changed the topic to their favorite blogs or they made their own categories for blogs. This was the whole point of my exercise, in its artistic sense—to get the ball rolling, get people thinking, stir things up, and hear what people had to say.

Journalism in an Echo Chamber

This is where the blogging phenomenon really changes journalism. In part, because of Weblogs, journalists are being brought down from their ivory towers. Many journalists would like to think their reporting on a war or an election or a baseball game is the final word. But when reporters' e-mail addresses were first published at the end of print

When they allow comments on their blogs, they are opening up an important public dialogue with readers, creating a forum for their work that invites feedback for each story or blog entry they write.

stories, the dynamic started to change. Then, online forums and feedback loops gave readers more input and led to greater interaction.

The Weblog format provides an even bigger voice for nonjournalist readers by giving them ways to attack, counter-attack and fact-check stories in ways that did not exist before. The echo chamber aspect of the blogosphere means that unknown Joe or Jane Blogger can post a thought, which is then picked up by one blogger after another until a reporter at a major news organization responds. One blogger, for example, picked up on a truncated quote of President Bush used by New York Times's columnist Maureen Dowd, finding that she was twisting his meaning. Newspapers that had picked up Dowd's column ran corrections; one paper even dropped her column. But the Times has yet to

formally comment on the matter.

Whether it's a scathing attack on a story or heartening praise, the attention of bloggers can't help but make journalists do a better job in their reporting. With bloggers breathing down their necks, only the most insulated media personality could ignore the avalanche of criticism (or praise) that comes from the blogosphere. When print journalists start to write blogs, they begin to look at issues on a daily, possibly hourly basis, creating a news cycle that's more like cable TV news. When they allow comments on their blogs, they are opening up an important public dialogue with readers, creating a forum for their work that invites feedback for each story or blog entry they write.

After my minor obsession with tracking my column died down a bit, I stumbled onto a cached copy of the

Blogdex showing my story at Number Two. Later, I found out that I also hit Number Two on the Daypop Top 40. OK, it wasn't Number One, but even hitting that lofty runner-up position brought me a weird, unbridled pride knowing that somewhere, somehow, a blogger was humming my tune. ■

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Readers Glimpse an Editorial Board's Thinking

Creating a Weblog offers 'a way for us to demystify what we do and how we do it.'

By Keven Ann Willey

Some of the most common questions readers ask about newspaper editorial boards are:

- How does the editorial board of your newspaper—of *any* newspaper, for that matter—determine what the paper's position is on a particular issue?
- Who are the people who sit on the board, and how do they think?
- Do they think?

It was largely with these questions in mind that the editorial board of The Dallas Morning News launched its Weblog in July and alerted readers to its existence. Called DMN daily (DallasNews.com/opinion/blog), this blog is believed to be the only Weblog of its kind in the nation.

Reader reaction was immediate and

overwhelmingly favorable. Traffic numbers topped 5,000 the first day, and we have every expectation of increasing those numbers in the weeks and months ahead. E-mails poured in raving about what fun it was for readers to essentially look behind the curtain of Oz. Editorial writers at competing publications worried about whether they'd lose out to the cutting aspect of this particular edge. A journalism professor wrote to us in praise of the teaching value of the blog to journalism students: "Students are already tuned onto blogs; your site will turn them onto the new journalism."

Blog, for the technologically uninitiated, is short for "Weblog," and it's the most rapidly growing form of journalism going. Blogging generally takes the form of online journal entries written by individuals—in this case, editorial

board members—with the comments often hyperlinked to the online news stories or commentary that sparked the blogger's comment. The ensuing discussions, debates, or "roundtables" become a sort of rolling dialogue, viewable by readers at any time from any computer.

The Transparency of Decision-Making

Our purpose for launching an editorial board blog at The Dallas Morning News was two-fold. First, it's a way to involve readers more in what we do, how we think, what actions we call for. The format opens us up to greater connections with readers, enabling us to better reflect our community. Second, it's a way for us to demystify what we do and how we do it. We demand trans-

parency from many organizations and businesses we cover, so it is reasonable to hold ourselves similarly accountable. Blogging also helps us to let readers know more about who we are and that we don't live in an ivory tower and use the editorial page to formalize some high-and-mighty group-think. Nor do we meet in some dark, dank, smoke-filled chamber and await orders from on high about what to say and when to say it. Rather, we are a group of smart, responsible, diverse, well-motivated, sometimes conflicted, fallible people striving to recommend actions and policies that we think are best for our community and the world.

We think carefully about what we say and do, often engaging in robust

debate in staff meetings before arriving at an editorial point of view. This debate enlightens and informs our recommendations on the editorial page, and it stands to reason that opening a window through which readers can observe that process, and even participate in it via e-mail to individual board members if they wish, will further enhance the quality of our work.

There are thousands of blogs, many of them little more than self-absorbed meanderings of would-be diarists. But some blogs are known for their insightful, spontaneous commentary and analysis. Readers can either chime in with their own thoughts or simply draw voyeuristic delight from observing the engaging real-time conversations that

materialize before their eyes. The best blogs are joys to read—quick, informative, provocative, witty and, of course, addictive.

That's what we're striving to provide with DMNDaily. On our blog, editorial writers have commented back and forth about political labels, what should happen next in the Middle East, whether the Bush administration was right to flash those photos of Saddam's dead sons, whether to call for the local police chief's resignation, and the merits of the "slow food" movement. We've explained to readers how we debate issues, arrive at conclusions, recommend candidates, and decide which letters to the editor and op-ed columns to publish.

Excerpts From the DMN Daily Weblog

Since The Dallas Morning News's editorial board Weblog began on July 20, editorial writers have been sharing their views and, in some cases, arguing amongst themselves for the wired world to see. Many of their comments draw reader responses, which editorial writers then post on the blog to elicit additional responses and discussion. And so on. Some of the postings by editorial board members appear below.

On political labels:

"I'm less concerned about the fact that there are labels out there like 'liberal' and 'conservative' than I am about the fact that far too many columnists and politicians whose every thought falls into one category or another. What we need are more folks who just call balls and strikes, without worrying whether what they believe or propose falls in line with one orthodoxy or another."—Ruben Navarrette

"Ruben, on the balls-and-strikes, call-'em-like-you-see-'em point, I can agree with you in a limited way, if by that you mean that a thinking person should not let his or her ideology get in the

way of the facts. But let's not make a virtue of a failure to think deeply and systematically about first principles. The position a thoughtful writer and commentator takes on particular issues will necessarily reflect certain principles the writer has decided, consciously or not, are true."—Rod Dreher

"I don't like the balls and strikes analogy. Don't we tend to praise people who have 'principles?' And by principles, don't we mean that they are consistent in their thinking? And by consistent in their thinking, don't we mean that we can slap a label on them? It's harder to pinpoint people's most important values or principles than to guide their opinions. But that's what we should aim to do."—Michael Landauer

On economic news:

"So the recession ended way back in 2001? I guess all those folks laid off since then will have to blame their woes on the recovery. Is there clearer evidence, though, that the economic reporting mechanism is out of touch with the forces that drive the U.S. economy?"—Jim Mitchell

On IBM's secret plans to move tech jobs overseas:

"This is the kind of story that makes this conservative madder than hell. ... It's not news that multinational corporations feel no loyalty to this country and its people. But when so many are out of work and feeling a lot of economic pain, the planned export of good tech jobs out of America ought to outrage us. IBM is aware that politicians might get angry. Will they? Only if the people do."—Rod Dreher

On the Kobe Bryant rape case:

"I propose 'Kobe's Law.' Let's just cut to the chase and make it a matter of law that any professional athlete (any celebrity, really) who is able to charm a woman enough that she will be alone with him in a hotel room therefore and heretowith has every legal right to have sex with her, whether she is willing or not. See how stupid that sounds? But by default, that is what people are proposing when they say it is not worth a trial because they were alone together."—Michael Landauer

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There aren't many—if any—editorial boards in the country blogging yet. It's a delicate thing, blogging our opinions in ways we hope will help clarify and enhance—not confuse and degrade—what we do and why we do it. The entries on the blog represent the individual views of board members, not necessarily the board's collaborative view. But it's those individual views that are so important to shaping the collaborative view that is published on the editorial page of the newspaper each day.

It's a challenge because it adds a new task to the workday. That's no small concern to journalists who have seen the demands on their time sky-

rocket in an era of corporate downsizing. But think about it: What could be more fundamental to an editorial board's job than sharing our opinions, explaining their foundation, and soliciting feedback from readers? It's our mission. Blogging isn't so much *more* work, as *different* work. It's a new communication platform across which we do what we do.

And it's a platform worth pursuing. Wrote one reader just days into our big blog experiment: "I've been reading the blog for a few days now, and I am perplexed. Most newspapers' (and their sites') so-called reporting is grotesque and, frankly, unfit for human consumption. Yet you folks actually make sense.

Are you certain you're journalists?" ■

Keven Ann Willey has been vice-president and editorial page editor at The Dallas Morning News since November 2002. Prior to that, she was editorial page editor at The Arizona Republic and under her direction those editorial pages were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for commentary published in 2000 and 2002.

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"Will we ever get to a point where there is no stigma attached to being a rape victim so that there'd be no need to shield the accuser's name from the public?"—Keven Ann Willey

On the photos of Uday and Qusay Hussein:

"Saddam's power has become so mythical that it is impossible to prove that he or his kin have been killed without solid evidence. The situation in Iraq forces us to do this. And frankly, after reading the laundry list of atrocities these two sons performed on their own people, I don't see how anyone could say they deserved any better."—Henry Tatum

On Arab hypocrisy:

"According to Reuters, 'many Arabs' are offended by the 'un-Islamic' display of Uday and Qusay's corpses. Oh, give me a break. When Muslim extremists murder Israelis or Westerners for the greater glory of Allah, it's hallelujah time. Besides which, where were these whiners when Uday and Qusay and their father were torturing and mass-murdering their Muslim brethren?"—Rod Dreher

On media hypocrisy:

"Liberals get away with murder when it comes to any of the causes advanced by any of their constituents. Witness the media uproar over Trent Lott's boneheaded comments about Strom Thurmond, who—as you recall when he was running for president in 1948—promised a white sheet in every closet. And then witness the quiet ('chirp, chirp') over Democratic Senator Robert Byrd (who once did wear a sheet) using the 'n-word' during an interview on Fox News. What a double standard!"—Ruben Navarrette

On California's governor:

"Do any Democrats worry that their party is taking precisely the wrong approach to Governor Gray Davis's recall in California? Dismissing those advocating the governor's recall as 'a little band of right-wing nuts' strikes me as unfair, untrue—and possibly—strategically foolish."—Keven Ann Willey

On life's little consolations:

"I'm sitting here at my desk at home, looking at a wedding picture of David Gest, Liza Minnelli, Michael Jackson,

and Liz Taylor. It reminds me that no matter how weird and depressing life gets, it could always be worse."—Rod Dreher

On the Catholic sex abuse crisis:

"Many Catholics hypothesize that Rome is reluctant to move against bad priests because the ranks are so thin it can't afford to lose a single one. But I believe the opposite: If Rome were to move against bad priests, it would improve the culture of the priesthood, which in turn would attract more good and holy men. Rather than thin the ranks, accountability would fatten them."—Tim O'Leary

On Texas politics:

"The good ole boys are trying to strip Grandma Strayhorn of some of her power. Looks as if the lieutenant governor and governor fear she'll run against one of them in 2006 and they want to cut her off at the knees. They don't like it that as comptroller she's had the cojones (that the word Ruben?) to buck them during the session."—Carolyn Barta ■

A Reporter Is Fired for Writing a Weblog

He wonders whether there is 'a place for Weblogs in the Fourth Estate firmament.'

By Steve Olafson

Memo to all professional journalists: Don't write a Weblog without permission from your bosses. It could get you fired.

I knew that. That's why I chose the nom de plume of Banjo Jones to write a Weblog called The Brazosport News while employed by the Houston Chronicle.

It was fun while it lasted. I opined, I poked fun. I waxed eloquent, I spun family yarns. I satirized, needled, deadpanned, criticized, japed. I adopted a tone and an identity, all under the guise of a fictitious person. Readers wrote fan mail. I gave away some Astros tickets. Some readers in Brazoria County, Texas, where I was posted in a "suburban bureau" (in my house), speculated about the real identity of Mr. Jones. But I kept quiet, silently enjoying what I considered a harmless creative outlet.

For a daily newspaper reporter of 26 years, it was exhilarating. In weblogging, there are no rules. You're not required to write about city council meetings, fatal car accidents, or the weather. Forget the inverted pyramid, forget space constraints, and forget the five W's and the H. All the pomposity, hot air, and ridiculousness you see and hear are fair game in a Weblog, but not necessarily in a daily newspaper.

So by day I was a news reporter for the Chronicle in its one-man Brazoria County bureau, located an hour's drive south of Houston, in an area marked by one of the world's largest chemical plants and six units of the Texas penitentiary system. By night I was Banjo. It was more fun being Banjo, though I was certain I could separate the two when necessary.

The Newspaper's Reaction

Once the management at the Chronicle learned of my dual identity, they didn't

see things quite the way I did. The reaction, uttered by the paper's editor in our only phone conversation, was "I am appalled."

The unmasking of Banjo Jones occurred when the managing editor of the newspaper in Clute, a target of occasional media criticism in Mr. Jones's Weblog, called the Chronicle to tattle. The local paper, a small daily, published a story reporting they were approached by an unnamed "newsmaker" about the Weblog and the true identity of its writer. Evidently, a column Banjo wrote about the death of his father was compared with the nonbylined, paid obituary that I'd written and placed in the Chronicle and my hometown paper, The Baytown Sun. That's the story I got from the reporter who "outed" me.

I confessed to the Chronicle editor and said I was sorry. He told me to take down the Web site. I did. Then the managing editor fired me a week later. The managing editor said he decided I had compromised my ability to be a Houston Chronicle reporter.

I do appreciate the uncomfortable—and apparently unprecedented—position in which I had put the newspaper. Still, I don't believe I had irretrievably compromised my ability to be one of its reporters. One public official who had been chided in the blog even wrote a letter to the Chronicle on my behalf. Maybe, I thought, management would view the blog as something done more for self-amusement than as a serious ethical lapse. Maybe they would just suspend me, I thought. My wife thought I'd be awarded a column after the smoke cleared and the Chronicle bosses realized how witty I could be.

If this had occurred in a more colorful bygone newspaper era, perhaps that would have been the outcome. But it didn't work out that way in today's self-conscious newspaper culture. "The

Front Page" days of Hildy Johnson are over. I knew that before I launched the blog—hence, the use of my pen name.

Naturally, I was embarrassed, especially when my termination received some media attention, including a story and picture in The New York Times. But the reaction among nonmedia people I know generally ran along the lines of, "What about freedom of the press?" When I tried to explain how reporters aren't supposed to express opinions, they would respond, "Well, what about all those reporters on TV?"

That's a little different, I'd tell them. Why is that, they wondered? I was tempted to invoke the A.J. Liebling quote, that freedom of the press belongs to those that have one, but that's not true anymore in the world of Weblogging. Everybody's got a press—sort of.

Blogging and Newspapers

I am not aware that the blogging phenomenon has caused the newspaper industry any tangible economic distress, but with many dailies losing readership, perhaps it's time for editorial reflection. My message to editors is this: "Embrace the blog; do not fear it."

Is there a place for Weblogs in the Fourth Estate firmament? Could Weblogs, somehow, win back paying customers, especially all those advertiser-coveted, disposable-income-spending young people who everyday sit gazing at a computer screen?

Some newspapers seem to be awakening to this possibility. It makes sense. With some ground rules and a bit of thought, the right sort of blogs could make the daily newspaper become at least of passing interest to a younger generation that right now doesn't seem to care much for newspapers. The ground rules would prohibit outright political partisanship, undue profan-

ity, and whatever else might keep an editor awake at night.

Weblogging, much like the rare good column writing you see in the traditional press, can open a dialogue with readers that newspapers could find useful. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if the reporter on the cop beat or at city hall or the state house could give readers another side of the news via a Weblog, a place where they can speak to readers in a bit more casual way. Perhaps the police reporter could share what it's like to work a crime scene. Or the state house or city hall reporter

might figure out new ways to make the business of government interesting.

If ground rules could be agreed to, might it not be interesting for the readers to listen in on the background stories reporters trade in coffee shops and bars? Or to learn why they got into the business? Or maybe just a brick-by-brick explanation of how a story was built? That's the sort of things Weblogs could do.

Having Weblogs as part of a news organizations reporting might even prompt some nonsubscribers to spend a few quarters on a daily paper now

and then by giving a personality to the byline. There are plenty of journalists who could write them without compromising their ability to be newspaper reporters, and they wouldn't have to use a pseudonym. ■

Steve Olafson is now based in Santa Barbara, California, where he is pursuing other interests, including freelance journalism.

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An Editor Acts to Limit a Staffer's Weblog

'This is not an issue of freedom of speech.'

By Brian Toolan

For several months this spring, the good citizens of cyberspace were contacting The Hartford Courant—and me in particular—with sentiments such as this one: “toolan’s misguided abuse of employee freedoms of expression could HARDLY BE MORE DISGUSTING ... arrogant editors are the bane of civilized discourse ... suffice it to say that i will be telling everyone that will listen to object in the strongest terms the illegal and dishonorable methods of toolan and his ilk ... he is no NEWSPAPERMAN ... HE IS A FOOL AND A LOU T”

This e-mailer, who seems to be a Californian (and is alarmingly accurate as it regards his closing remark), was angry—as were the others—because the Courant had directed one of its journalists to stop writing opinion pieces on a Weblog¹ he'd created. The site was created by Denis Horgan, who has worked at the newspaper for 22 years. For 17 of those years, Horgan wrote a news column, a stretch that ended in January when he was reassigned as editor of the Travel section. Horgan was not pleased with this

change and soon after it was made he unfurled denishorgan.com.

Removing Opinions From a Weblog

The principal components of Horgan's Weblog were opinion columns he wrote on a variety of topics, including the performance of Connecticut's governor, the decision to go to war with Iraq, President Bush's tough talk toward Syria, legislation on same-sex marriages, and the delicious misery that is being a fan of the Red Sox.

When the existence of Horgan's Weblog became known, I talked about it with him two times. In each discussion, I told him about my concerns, and he politely and patiently explained that he believed he had a right to do this, and he didn't see the conflicts I saw. He emphasized that his Weblog made clear that it was tended on his own time and had no association with his duties at the Courant. After a month of considering Horgan's position and weighing my concerns, I asked him to stop writing opinion columns on his

Weblog. He did, and placed a notice on the site that the columns were ended on the order of the editor of the Courant. Horgan also advised that he would be seeking counsel to determine how the action regards his rights.

Considerable controversy ensued, mostly online, though a few readers of the newspaper sent letters of protest. Horgan's supporters, many of them bloggers, decried the Courant's decision as a staggeringly ironic infringement of Horgan's right to free speech. One critic claimed it was the equivalent of silencing Thomas Paine. Denishorgan.com received numerous posts that lambasted the decision and cheered Horgan's consideration of legal recourse. Some argued that stopping journalists from blogging was an unnatural act and would be proven futile, too.

J.D. Lasica, who writes about journalism online, concluded: “Those of us who love newspapers wonder why fewer people trust the news media these days. We express puzzlement at why more and more talented journalists are leaving the profession. Some of the answers can be gleaned from this single episode of big media hypocrisy.” [See Lasica's article on page 70.]

¹ Denis Horgan's Weblog <http://www.denishorgan.com>

Frankly, I'm an agnostic about Weblogs. I know they're out there, but I have no strong feelings about blogging generally. I don't read them, but that's because I'm reading a whole lot of other things I find interesting, lots of it ink-on-paper, but lots of it online. So blog away.

Deciding to Act

I do have strong beliefs about the responsibilities of journalists and the obligations that come with editing a newspaper. It is tempting to suggest this was an agonizingly difficult decision that I made regarding denishorgan.com, but it wasn't. It was easy. Let me explain why I made the decision I did.

Behaving in a manner that safeguards the integrity of a news institution and avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest is central to the compact between a journalist and his employer. Journalists should operate in ways that don't display bias or predisposition. These are ethical considerations, not legal ones, but they are central to the conduct of journalism and must be zealously maintained.

Denis Horgan's public profile is a product of his long-standing relationship with the Courant. Horgan and the Courant are forged by tenure and highly visible roles. After his opinion column in the Courant was ended, Horgan created a new journalistic platform for himself and began opining on issues, institutions and public officials that reporters and columnists at the newspaper must cover. Even though he was no longer writing his column, Horgan could not separate himself from the Courant by simply declaring that denishorgan.com has nothing to do with the paper, particularly while he is at the paper in the role of an editor. Nor could he disconnect himself—in the public's mind—from his long-time position as a Courant columnist.

These realities combined to make

me believe that many readers of denishorgan.com would not differentiate the Weblog's Horgan from the one who once wrote columns for and still works for the Courant. Part of the appeal Horgan and his site held for online readers was directly attributable to his role at the Courant, yet the newspaper had no control over his comments and opinions. For example, if Horgan wrote a column about the unfitness of John Rowland to be Connecticut's governor, some people—including the governor, surely—could imagine that mindset

Journalists should operate in ways that don't display bias or predisposition. These are ethical considerations, not legal ones, but they are central to the conduct of journalism and must be zealously maintained.

prevails in the Courant's newsroom. That strikes at the credibility of the newspaper. It doesn't work.

This is not an issue of freedom of speech. It is about professional expectations and, when they are ignored, as in this case, the newspaper's standards and public responsibilities are compromised. Like most newspapers, the Courant has an ethics code. It has language that directs that "an individual's interests outside the paper should not come into conflict with—or create the appearance of conflict with—the staff member's professional duties at the Courant." Horgan, and others, argued that since he now edits the Travel section, his public views on public matters don't interfere with the newspaper's coverage of those same issues.

I don't accept that logic. I know some readers, who depend on the paper, would not accept it either, and I recognize how readers' perceptions can hurt the Courant. Lasica is right about one thing: Fewer people trust the news media these days. So why would an editor spit into that wind?

Horgan didn't have any discussion with editors at the newspaper before he launched denishorgan.com. But if he had proposed a Weblog in which he would write about more benign topics, like fishing or gardening or day-tripping in New England, it probably would have been approved. That isn't what happened.

While the decision to prohibit opinion writing on denishorgan.com was not difficult, disappointing Denis Horgan once more was. Horgan happens to be a terrific person, a kind and thoughtful man. Nor is this about loyalty.

Horgan has devoted much of his professional life to serving the Courant. He has supported the newspaper and its people in countless ways. In the midst of the debate about his Weblog, Horgan, as he has done for nine years without compensation, directed Hartford's National Writers' Workshop, an event that attracted 800 people for a weekend of

conversation about writing and journalism, done under the banner of The Hartford Courant. And he's doing a fine job running the Travel section. To date, no legal challenge has arisen.

As far as Weblogs and their future with daily newspapers, I can certainly accommodate the notion of Weblogs being part of a newspaper's online portfolio. In fact, the Courant has had devices like that in the past. But is a Weblog truly a Weblog if it is supervised editorially? If the answer is no and that anything but complete freedom is a perversion of the genre, then I think editors must ask themselves if they are comfortable having their news organization represented in that manner. I wouldn't be. ■

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Blogging Connects a Columnist to New Story Ideas

'... I have always suspected that many of my readers know more than I do.'

By Mike Wendland

One of the biggest frustrations for a beat journalist is not being able to get news into print or on the air in a timely manner. Budget crunches, dwindling news holes, and commercial-shortened news broadcasts make it increasingly difficult to get anything but the most urgent material out there as fast as we'd like. We do just fine with the big, breaking stories. Competition always makes sure they get in. But it's the more mundane, day-to-day developments that often get put on editorial backburners. And yet, for readers who are intensely interested in that beat, it is often those less urgent stories that they're looking for.

Working as technology columnist for the Detroit Free Press, readers would e-mail me all the time to find out why the latest news on this beat hadn't been printed yet. I shared their frustration. Then I discovered blogging and immediately realized that I'd stumbled upon one of the most significant developments in the dissemination of information since the printing press. It's the Internet, of course, that makes it possible, and the always-on mentality that is part of our wired world.

Connecting With Readers

With powerful, simple-to-use applications like Movable Type¹ and Blogger², I can now instantly update a story on my Weblog, comment on a technologi-

cal happening, or share a new Web site as fast as I can type the information and hit "post." Think of a diary. A news bulletin. A newsletter. A "hey-did-you-hear-this?" phone call. Or an "I-am-SO-fed-up-with ..." Instant Message rant. Call it "Zero Second News." That's what my friend Larry Larsen, the multimedia gizmo guy from The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, calls the news and information blogging makes possible. News that's happening now, almost in real time—not filtered, edited or delay-delivered, as with traditional media. It's a personal publishing system that allows anyone—in minutes—to have access to a worldwide audience.

Blogging is huge. Though estimated to be more than a million in number, it's only a guess at how many bloggers exist. And there is no accurate way to count them or to know who they are. Students, housewives, CEO's, senior citizens, government bureaucrats, music fans, religious groups, ordinary and not-so-ordinary people, as well as lots of journalists are blogging addicts.

For me, blogging is now a several-times-a-day activity. I started blogging in late 2001 and have three blogs I update several times a day. Mike's E-Journal³ is a general interest technology Weblog. Mac-Mike⁴ chronicles my switch from a PC system to a Macintosh system, and a blog called Ride⁵, which I started just for fun, deals with long distance bicycle rides and training, a personal hobby.

Lately, I've also been experimenting with something called MOBlogging (mobile blogging). Using a small handheld communication device called the Sidekick⁶, I snap pictures and instantly send them to my Weblog with short descriptive messages to create a sort of online documentary of my wireless life. On any given day, depending on what I'm blogging about, from 8,000 to

25,000 people read my blogs. My daily record, set during the Iraq War, was more than 88,000 unique accesses.

I do all of this at my own cost and on my own time, separate from my duties as a Detroit Free Press technology columnist and NBC-TV News Channel Internet correspondent. Why? Because it provides me contact with readers and viewers that is more immediate, personal and satisfying than any other form of communication I have experienced in 30 years of journalism.

I am astounded daily by what I learn in the blogging community. As a journalist, I have always suspected that many of my readers know more than I do. I love technology and do my best to stay on top of the issues and stories surrounding the beat. But with blogging, when readers can add comments and suggestions to my posts, my assumptions are routinely challenged, corrected and defended. Hardly a day goes by when readers don't tell me something I don't know or I don't find a new angle to a story.

When I posted on my blog a short item about a high-tech device that lets car dealers "turn off" a car if the owner fails to make a payment, two hours later a reader posted the name of a local dealer using it. When I commented on the Recording Industry Association of America and its legal attacks on music file swappers on the Internet, a reader posted a link to all the subpoenas that had been issued against individuals around the country.

By using reader comments, I've been able to write about new trends in fighting spam, an all but secret information monitoring and data collection program run by the federal government, and dozens of innovative new products, services and Web sites. All of this would likely have happened below my radar screen if readers hadn't posted



¹ Movable Type <http://www.movabletype.org>

² Blogger <http://www.blogger.com>

³ Mike's E-Journal <http://www.mikesejournal.com>

⁴ Mac-Mike <http://www.mac-mike.com>

⁵ Ride <http://www.mikesejournal.com/ride>

⁶ Sidekick <http://www.danger.com>

story tips as comments to my posts. On my MOBlog, I uploaded a picture of my vegetable garden and noted how something had eaten the leaves of my green bean plants. A reader identified the culprit as a muskrat.

But besides my blogs, I find myself reading more and more blogs, a few of which are written by journalists. Some argue that blogs represent the democratization of journalism with the rise of the "citizen reporter." Not surprisingly, many journalists cringe at such thoughts. Not me. The Internet has

made access to news and information universal. That means that what journalists report and write is put out there in the midst of unprecedented amounts of related information. This lets Web-savvy news consumers analyze, compare and fact-check the information we, as journalists, provide. In the long run, blogging is likely to lead to better journalism as sloppy journalists are put on notice by a public that can use technology to promote accuracy and good reporting. For now, I intend to keep on blogging. ■

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Bloggers and Their First Amendment Protection

Web writing is a protected right, but more limits exist outside the United States.

By Jane E. Kirtley

The freewheeling world of the blogosphere seems like the last bastion of truly free speech. To publish in it doesn't require a lot of money, an expensive printing press, or a transmitter tower. Anybody with access to a computer, a modem, and a little software can share their thoughts with the world through a Weblog. And many of the intensely personal and highly opinionated Weblogs proliferating on the Internet inhabit a world apart from the sometimes-dreary realm of meticulously sourced and fact-checked traditional journalism. Bloggers are a law unto themselves.

Or are they?

From the early days of popular use of the Internet, the rallying cry of netizens was that cyberspace was the new frontier, subject to no laws. But governments around the world, shaken by the implications of the new communication technology, quickly tried to figure out how to harness and control use of the Internet.

Securing Bloggers' First Amendment Rights

In the United States, Congress, state legislatures and the courts have struggled to strike a balance between

encouraging free speech on the Internet and protecting other competing interests, such as copyright, national security, and the right to reputation. But in its landmark 1997 ruling in *Reno v. ACLU*, the United States Supreme Court declared that the First Amendment applies to communications on the World Wide Web, protecting them to the same extent that they would be if published in a print medium, such as a newspaper. The high court found that cyberspace, unlike the broadcast media, is neither a "scarce expressive commodity" nor an invasive one that enters "an individual's home or appears on one's computer screen unbidden," the historical justifications for government licensing and control. "The interest in encouraging freedom of expression in a democratic society outweighs any theoretical but unproven benefit of censorship," Justice John Paul Stevens wrote for the majority.

This is as good as it gets in First Amendment jurisprudence. It means that those who choose to communicate on the Internet receive the highest level of constitutional protection for their speech. And it means that they will benefit from the 70-odd years of court opinions defining the scope of the First Amendment. Prior restraints

are presumed unconstitutional, for example. Libel suits are subject to myriad constitutional safeguards, including requiring proof of some kind of fault on the part of the publisher before a plaintiff can recover, even if he can show that the statement was false. Most invasion of privacy suits will be rejected if the publisher can demonstrate that the subject of the story was "newsworthy." Violations of copyright may be excused if the publication constitutes "fair use."

And a person doesn't even have to be recognized as a "journalist" in order to invoke these protections. As far back as 1972, in *Branzburg v. Hayes*, the Supreme Court said that "liberty of the press is the right of the lonely pamphleteer ... as much as of the large metropolitan publisher." The question of whether or not a blogger "qualifies" as a journalist for these purposes is largely a matter of semantics, not constitutional law.

So bloggers are entitled to claim all the benefits of the First Amendment. And they may be able to invoke statutory protection as well. Existing state laws protecting reporters' confidential sources might or might not apply to a blogger, depending on the language of the statute. Although some statutes limit

their coverage to full-time employees of for-profit traditional news media, many are expansive in scope, ensuring that they will cover anyone who engages in gathering information and disseminating it to a wide audience.

And in June, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which grants providers of "interactive computer services" immunity from defamation claims arising from content provided by third parties, extends to those who operate Web sites and listservs, even if they exercise some editorial control over that material. It is logical to assume that the same analysis would apply to Weblogs. (This is only one Circuit Court's opinion, of course, and it might be appealed. Whether the ruling would be sufficient to reassure news organizations who shy away from endorsing their reporters' Weblogs, or who choose to prohibit them because of fears that they will be held liable for whatever the blogger publishes, remains to be seen.)

Interpreting These Freedoms Worldwide

So does that mean that bloggers are free to upload whatever they want, without worrying about being sued for it? Absolutely not.

Whatever immunity might exist for links to third party sites or to postings submitted by readers, an individual who publishes a Weblog can still be sued for any material he writes himself. Assuming the subject of a story claims that it is both false and defamatory, that means that during the course of litigation the blogger could face a protracted examination of his newsgathering techniques. For example, did he attempt to verify the accuracy of the story, or did he simply repeat an unsubstantiated rumor, as Matt Drudge admitted to doing in his report that Clinton staffer Sidney Blumenthal "had a spousal abuse past"? Did he rely on anonymous sources? Did he, in other words, act negligently or with reckless disregard for the truth? If a court finds that he did, he might lose the suit.

Granted, libel suits, at least in the United States, can only be based on false statements of fact. No one can be sued for pure statements of opinion that can neither be proven true nor false. But many blogs are a robust mixture of idiosyncratic opinion and unsupported allegations—a volatile and potentially lethal combination that can undermine invocation of the opinion privilege, which depends on showing that the underlying factual statements on which the opinion is based are true.

And once somebody's published material goes outside our borders—which is inevitable in cyberspace—all bets are off. A blogger can brandish the First Amendment and Section 230 all she wants, but a foreign court has no obligation to pay any attention to them. Those courts will, for the most part, apply their own, often Draconian, laws to libel suits brought before them. Although this is old news to traditional journalists, who have long faced the prospect of fending off lawsuits and even criminal prosecutions brought against them in other countries where their work product is distributed, it might surprise those who publish on the Internet to learn that they are vulnerable to suit anywhere their blog is read.

That is what the Australian High Court ruled in December, when it decided that "Diamond Joe" Gutnick, an Australian national who claimed he was defamed by an article published by Barron's, could file his libel suit in his hometown of Melbourne, Victoria, once he was able to show that a handful of readers downloaded it there. As the chief justice wrote in his opinion, "... those who post information on the World Wide Web do so knowing that [it] is available to all and sundry without any geographic restriction."

Libel lawsuits are not the only thing bloggers need to worry about. Many countries have statutes that make it an offense, or even a crime, to "insult" or "offend the dignity" of someone, even if the criticism is absolutely true. And many countries enforce mandatory "rights of reply," which compel publication of responses by individuals and

corporations who claim that they have been the subject of inaccurate reports. The Council of Europe, in late June, published a proposed recommendation to extend these "rights of reply" to media publishing in the online world, including any "service available to the public containing frequently updated and edited information of public interest." That sounds like your typical Weblog to me.

Some bloggers would point out that many of them already do this sort of thing voluntarily. They update their blogs, often printing retractions or modifications to erroneous postings, and freely publishing responses from disgruntled readers. They don't need laws to make them act responsibly. But there's a big difference between making an editorial choice because you believe it enhances your credibility and doing so under compulsion of law. It's the difference between operating in the land where the First Amendment rules and where it doesn't.

What about those other bloggers, who play by their own rules and who believe that doing elementary things like fact-checking would somehow compromise the spontaneity of their medium? All I can say to them is, "Good luck, keep your head down, and think twice about traveling abroad if you don't want to get hauled into a foreign court."

When it comes to the law, let the blogger beware. ■

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A Weblog Sharpens Journalism Students' Skills

'Students—the writers and editors—publish a respectable, if not professional, product every day on the World Wide Web.'

By Larry Pryor

For a long time schools of journalism have looked for ways to work with the novices who arrive each September. Educators know the value of reporting experiences for students outside the classroom, but for perhaps two semesters, until lessons take hold, accuracy and libel hazards are real. Beyond internship and part-time job programs, various training tools have been developed, including in-house, neighborhood or even city-wide school publications, student news services and state house bureaus—all conducted under close faculty scrutiny. Many of these efforts have been costly, hard to administer, and disruptive to students' academic work. New media technology offers a solution in the form of Weblogs.

At the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, we began using a Weblog as a teaching tool in 1999. It predates Weblog technology and the recent flourishing of Weblogs as unedited expressions of an immediate and personal nature. During our last semester, more than 75 students were involved as part-time writers and editors with our site, which we call OJC¹.

From the start, OJC had the Weblog characteristics of discrete, dated entries dealing with latest developments in a topic—in our case, online journalism—of interest to a niche audience. But we have not encouraged quirky, individualized voices. Our Weblog is more like a chorus with a distinctive sound. The multiple authors all work with their editors with the common goal of finding and publishing useful information on a focused topic.

Beyond internship and part-time job programs, various training tools have been developed, including in-house, neighborhood or even city-wide school publications, student news services and state house bureaus—all conducted under close faculty scrutiny. Many of these efforts have been costly, hard to administer, and disruptive to students' academic work. New media technology offers a solution in the form of Weblogs.

Working on the Weblog

It is mostly freshman and sophomore journalism majors, working closely with editors, who write on the Weblog. They are expected to produce at least two news briefs a week as part of a lab requirement in the school's introductory Core Curriculum. (We expose incoming students to print, broadcast and online writing, both as undergraduates and graduate students.) The editors are paid graduate students who have completed a course in copyediting. Core students can also work for the campus newspaper, The Daily Trojan, or at Annenberg Television News, which produces an evening news report distributed on cable TV.

Many students decide to work for the OJC Weblog because of its numerous advantages, the greatest of which is wide, daily exposure. Students—the writers and editors—publish a respectable, if not professional, product every day on the World Wide Web. And this

publication is used by journalists, newspaper and broadcast executives, as well as government officials involved in media policy issues. In June, the Web site got about 30,000 page views. The content also goes out in a daily e-mail newsletter to about 2,100 subscribers. One of the benefits of OJC might be that it is put together by younger people. A lawyer with the Federal Trade Commission e-mailed us that he liked OJC's "quirky selection of relevant news items."

Each news brief is between 60 to 200 words long with a headline of five to 10 words. It is linked to the original source for the story and to related Web content. The students prowl the Web at all hours of the day and night, and they can do this from computers at home or at school libraries or during the day from our Online Newsroom. As reporters, they look worldwide for stories related in some way to online publishing. Examples of such stories include: "TV execs use Internet to get new ad revenue," "Asian publishers catch on the news SMS," "Corbis hits Amazon with copyright suit," and "Aus-

 ¹ OJC <http://www.onlinejournalism.com>

tralian journalist plagiarizes via Internet.”

What Students Learn

The students are taught to paraphrase the original story, selecting key facts and good quotes. The original story is then prominently attributed, and the link that appears at the end of each news brief makes clear again where the content came from. Writers are encouraged to add style, personality and perspective to their pieces. But, in the words of supervising staff member Joshua Fouts, “We find, in general, that only the most experienced students will actually do so.”

Faculty members prod the editors and writers to do more original writing, but they also urge caution in doing so. “We don’t want them to just re-gurgitate the original text,” said Michelle Nicolosi, an instructor who works closely with the editors. “Where do you draw the line between a straight report and opinion? ... If the items don’t directly state a relationship with journalism, the writers can give that context. If an item says ‘broadband access up in Japan,’ the student then explains that this is important to online journalism in Japan because it means there will be a bigger audience for online news. They do not add opinion, only context.”

There are many benefits for students who work on the Weblog. “Motivated students get much-needed writing experience,” Fouts said. “They also get clips, which the [computer] system gathers and assigns to a page dedicated exclusively to the writer.” This also offers them opportunities to gain exposure to potential employers. In the words of our managing editor this year, Melissa Milios: “I think the managing editor title is a good thing for the resumé and having my name in more than 2,000 people’s inbox every day doesn’t hurt, either.”

Milios and the five “shift editors” earn between eight and 10 dollars an hour for five to 10 hours of work per week. “I learned a lot in terms of managing a large team [of reporters] and balancing that with a very heavy academic load,” Milios says. “I learned how to work with writers of all ability levels to put out a professional publication. I ended up doing quite a lot of writer training and my editing skills definitely improved.” Another editor, Heather Somers, who got an editing internship at the Los Angeles Times

dents to find and translate stories from other languages and cultures. “I have learned different perceptions of what journalism should be in the United States and Japan,” said Sayo Haruki, a communications graduate student who gravitated to OJC because of its global scope. “Understanding what would make a newsworthy story from different points of view has opened up new horizons for me as an international student.”

In my work as an instructor in the Core Curriculum, I’ve seen how it helps students to make their writing more concise and focused when they work for OJC. And we receive reports from the editors on the students’ performance, and we use those reports in determining a student’s final grade. “The Weblog reinforces the Core classes,” said Dana

‘Because of the inexperience of many of our undergrad writers ... it was imperative for us to triple-check not only their grammar, but the names and facts in their briefs. We discovered—through checking—that they frequently got stuff wrong.’

this summer, said she found OJC to be “great practice.” As she observed, “Because of the inexperience of many of our undergrad writers ... it was imperative for us to triple-check not only their grammar, but the names and facts in their briefs. We discovered—through checking—that they frequently got stuff wrong.” And, she said, “Let’s just say Jayson Blair is not alone. This is one reason why the editor position is so critical.”

We also indicate to students working on the Weblog that Internet searches are not a substitute for using shoe leather and digging into file cabinets. Some students, no doubt, will see the computer as a reporter’s shortcut. But subsequent reporting classes should make it clear to them what it takes to find facts.

The young writers gain not only from working in such a concise format, but they also like “learning the skill of hunting down good materials for the digest,” said Keiko Mori who, like many of our students, is multilingual. When possible, faculty members urge stu-

Chinn, a lecturer who coordinates the Core Curriculum. “They are exposed to work process issues they don’t get in class, like taking direction and meeting deadlines. They get the idea of how a news organization actually works.” ■

Larry Pryor is a professor at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication. He worked as a writer and editor at The (Louisville) Courier-Journal and the Los Angeles Times. From 1982-1986, Pryor was the news editor of Times Mirror’s pioneering videotex project, Gateway, and in 1996 became the editor of the Los Angeles Times’s Web site, latimes.com, joining the journalism faculty at USC a year later. He is director of the school’s Online Program and is on a sabbatical in 2003 to do research on the use of “immersive” 3-D technology to tell news stories.

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Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

‘Sister in the Band of Brothers’

A reporter accompanies the 101st Airborne during the Iraq War and turns the experience into a book.

By Katherine M. Skiba

My book was conceived in the days leading up to Christmas 2002 at Fort Benning, the vast Army installation in west central Georgia, just across the Chattahoochee River from Alabama. U.S. military officials consider Benning the world’s premier training ground for infantrymen, but there I was, with 59 other journalists, huffing and puffing my way through “media boot camp,” a Pentagon program designed to make reporters, photographers and broadcasters combat-ready.

There were 10 women in my class of 60, and we had what was regarded as a mark of distinction or pain in the rear: a documentary crew representing an Academy Award-winning documentary was trailing our every move.

It puzzled me that they found women correspondents training for war so out of the ordinary; I didn’t think I was special. I’d been to some hot spots around the world, but so had many people in the class. The focus on the women trainees made me feel sorry for the men in the class, since they were being slighted, just as all of us were being pushed and prodded.

But after enduring the camera, the lights, and the microphone for five days, I had one overarching thought: If this is so interesting, I’ll tell my own story. It’s estimated that only roughly one in 10 of the 700-plus embedded journalists were women.

During the war in Iraq, I was assigned to the Army’s 101st Airborne

Division, writing stories and shooting photographs for my paper, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and phoning my reports to its affiliated television and radio stations. After 45 days in the field, I returned home and launched into a book, the provisionally titled “Sister in the Band of Brothers: Bringing the War in Iraq Home to America.” As this was the first war to feature a large number of embedded journalists as well as popular use of the Internet, my stories were read coast to coast.

When I left for the war late in February, I had no idea whether I’d see any action—or so much bang-bang that I wouldn’t make it home alive as, sorrowfully, was the fate of 17 of our professional brothers and sisters. I ended up having a war that was chiefly three things: challenging, frightening and exhilarating.

I accompanied the 101st Airborne’s 159th Aviation Brigade, comprised of Black Hawk and Chinook helicopter pilots who ferried troops and supplies to the frontlines. Seven hours into the war, the unit, then in Kuwait near its borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia, had the distinction of being the first to be targeted by an Iraqi Ababil-100 missile, the crown jewel in Saddam Hussein’s arsenal. Traveling faster than the speed of sound, the weapon was destroyed nine miles from our camp by a U.S. Patriot guided missile. I lived out a nervous hour in a foxhole during the attack, mouthing the Act of Contrition and remembering the letter I’d penned

to my husband just after President George W. Bush’s ultimatum to Hussein and his sons: “Marry someone nice,” I urged my husband. “Fish a lot. And forgive me for doing this.”

These days, I still ask my husband forgiveness since I’ve been spending hour after hour alone in my den with maps, photographs and my sand-coated notebooks, writing a memoir. Tom Vanden Brook, a reporter for USA Today, has proven to be an astonishingly understanding spouse. My editor, Marty Kaiser, was supportive of my request for a book leave, agreeing that a story like this might never come my way again. It would have been easier on many levels to take a long, post-war vacation and move on to the next story, but what I experienced left an indelible impression.

Writing the story of my war, from the “keyhole view” of the conflict I had side-by-side with about 1,700 soldiers, has meant discarding some of the cardinal rules of journalism that, after 25 years with metropolitan dailies, are nothing if not second nature. I’m no longer objective. I’m not taking pains to keep myself out of the story—since I’m the narrator. Plus, I weave in my husband Tom’s experience living alone back in the States, getting an overview of the war while working on his paper’s rewrite desk and wincing at the creature who came home speaking “Army,” which is to say, stringing together nouns and verbs laced with derivations of the F-word.

Speaking of language, I can swear in my book. I can use foreign words. I can use fancy words verboten in most newspapers. I can even invent words. All of that is delicious fun after one too many by-the-book copyeditors. But I now stand before copyeditors with enhanced respect—and belated gratitude—since, as Joni Mitchell counseled, “you don’t know what you’ve got ’til it’s gone.” My book has demonstrated

that I am not the precision grammarian I had fancied myself. Meantime, I’ve ditched my *Journal Sentinel* stylebook and, for the first time since college, picked up *The Chicago Manual of Style*. At midcareer, I’ve finally come to terms with a fetish—for dictionaries.

I’ve had to modify the style and pacing of my writing, since my early drafts of chapters—rife with short, choppy paragraphs—were judged “too

staccato.” Rather than blurt out my best stuff to grab the reader at the beginning, I’ve learned to slow down, lead the reader by the hand, reveal things one at a time, hint, foreshadow, even tease—all while moving the narrative forward. Meanwhile, urged by my agent to “dig deeper,” I’ve learned a lot about myself, my motivations, and my past. I’ve made discoveries about my own marriage, too, and can assure everyone that after the book is done, I won’t be interviewing my husband again for some time. In June, two months after I’d returned from the war, Tom pointed out that he and I had never actually sat down and discussed whether I should go; it seemed to him a foregone conclusion on the part of the cyclone he had wed nine years earlier. That stung.

I regard authors differently now, never before appreciating the discipline, strength, staying power, and solitude needed for a 250-page book. Sure, I’ve done magazine pieces and multi-part series, but writing to this length is a new undertaking. I feel at times like I’m sewing a quilt, which is an odd metaphor since I’m not handy with a needle and thread. But I’ve held onto that image, since once the synopsis and chapter summaries were finished—a very good road map of the story—each subsequent chapter seemed no more intimidating than one more square of the quilt.

Keeping my focus has meant turning down social invitations left and right, and these, of course, multiplied when I came home safe and sound and the people who prayed for my safety wanted to see me in the flesh—and hear all about it. I apologize profusely when I turn down friends, fearing that they regard me as an *arriviste*, but I’m the same ink-stained scribe I always was, only trying to find an audience—something else I’d taken for granted all these years—and finish my story. ■

Katherine M. Skiba, a 1991 Nieman Fellow, is a Washington correspondent for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

✉ kskiba@journalsentinel.com



Reporter Katherine M. Skiba found herself on the other side of the lens when a missile alert sent soldiers from the 101st Airborne to a foxhole. A gas mask, helmet, bullet-resistant vest and canteen were standard equipment for embedded journalists. The photo was taken on the first day of the war in Iraq at Camp Thunder, a U.S. installation in Kuwait near the borders of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It was the temporary home of the helicopter unit she accompanied, the 159th Brigade, part of the 101st Airborne Division. The brigade was the first U.S. military unit threatened by an enemy missile when the war began. *Photo by Capt. Jeff Beierlein, 101st Airborne Division.*

—1947—

Jay Geddes Odell, Jr., former managing editor of *The New York Star*, died on January 11, 2000 in Venice, Florida. He was 88.

Odell began his journalistic career as an unpaid cub reporter for the *Marshalltown, Iowa Times-Republican*. In 1937, he relocated to Pennsylvania to work as an editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, until his work was interrupted by World War II. Odell volunteered for the Naval Reserve and saw active duty throughout the Pacific. He was awarded the Silver Star for the Marine assault on Tarawa. After the war, Odell returned to the *Inquirer*.

In his eulogy for his father, Jay Scott Odell says: "It has been enlightening to read through my father's papers and discover how cautious and precise he was in training his men to carry out their missions. ...

"The same qualities were integral to his work as a newspaper reporter and editor, and he many times warned me (as he had earlier admonished reporters working under him) against the dangers of, in his words, 'great galloping assumptions.' He wanted to know the facts, wrote pages of notes in a tiny barely decipherable shorthand all his own, and only then, perhaps, entertained the luxury of speculation...."

After his Nieman year, Odell became managing editor of the *Star* and later editor and information officer for the New York and Washington-based Committee for Economic Development. In 1956, he moved to Venice, Florida with his wife, the late **Adalberto LaVoie Odell**. In Venice, Odell was active in real estate development along the Keys and in a number of civic activities, such as the founding of the first public library in the city and the coast guard auxiliary, search and rescue activities.

He is survived by his son, three grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

—1948—

George Anthony Weller, former war correspondent, died on December 19, 2002 in his seaside villa near Rome, Italy. He was 95.

Weller began writing for *The New York Times* a few years after graduating from Harvard College in 1929 and moved to the *Chicago Daily News* around 1939.

Weller received a Pulitzer Prize for reporting in 1943 for his account of how a Navy pharmacist's mate followed a medical manual to perform an appendectomy to save the life of a sailor aboard the submarine *Seadragon* in enemy waters. He also received a 1954 George Polk Award for foreign reporting while with the *Chicago Daily News* syndicate.

—1949—

Grady Clay's fifth book, a collection of his commentaries from "Crossing the American Grain," will be published this fall by Butler Books. The commentaries are broadcast each week on public radio WFPL's "Morning Edition." Clay, a longtime resident of Louisville, Kentucky, was for many years urban affairs editor of *The Courier Journal* and, for 25 years, editor of *Landscape Architecture*.

—1952—

William "Bill" F. Freehoff, Jr. died on June 17, 2003 in Johnson City, Tennessee. He was 84.

Born in 1918 in St. Louis, Missouri, while his father was fighting with the Third U.S. Division in France, Freehoff graduated from the University of Missouri with a journalism degree. After having served in World War II, Freehoff worked at the old *Kingsport News* where he would go on to become the paper's editor. Following his Nieman year, he worked at WKPT radio and television as editorial director.

He is survived by his wife, **Jane Lewis Freehoff**, two daughters, and two grandsons.

—1955—

Ian Cross, from New Zealand, advises that his novel, "The God Boy," started in Theodore Morrison's English class and published worldwide, is being entered by UK Penguin Books into

its Penguin Classics series for publication August this year.

—1958—

Peter John Kumpa, former foreign correspondent and Washington bureau chief for *The (Baltimore) Sun*, died from cancer on February 23 in Baltimore, Maryland. He was 76.

During his 40 years at the *Sun* papers, Kumpa had many assignments, including news editor, White House correspondent, and diplomatic correspondent. As Washington bureau chief, he directed coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign, the Watergate investigations, and the end of Richard Nixon's presidency.

Kumpa also served eight years as a press assistant to the Maryland state senate historian and was a member of the board of governors of the National Press Club.

He is survived by his wife, the former **Margaret Balch**; four daughters; three sisters, and five grandchildren.

—1966—

Wayne Woodlief, chief political columnist at the *Boston Herald*, is the recipient of the 2003 John Gardner Public Service Award. Prior to his 10-year tenure as a columnist at the *Herald*, Woodlief was the paper's chief political reporter for 15 years.

At the award ceremony, Woodlief was introduced in this way: "[Woodlief's] writing covers a wide variety of subjects, but his most frequent subject is Massachusetts politics, and his perspective is that of a reformer. ... The citizens of Massachusetts have benefited tremendously from his writing as has the cause of open, accountable, honest government."

The award was established by the Common Cause of Massachusetts to recognize "individuals whose work has significantly advanced the cause of open, responsive and accountable government."

—1970—

Wallace Terry, one of the first black

war correspondents in mainstream media, died on May 29, 2003 in Fairfax, Virginia, from Wegener's granulomatosis. He was 65.

Terry began his journalism career at Brown University, where he became the first black editor of an Ivy League newspaper. His bold interview of Governor Orval Faubus about the integration of Little Rock High School not only helped him become editor in chief of the Brown Daily Herald, the university's newspaper, but also led to a job offer to write for The Washington Post in 1958.

First at the Post, and later with Time, Terry covered the growing civil rights movement and increasing urban protests.

He was offered the assignment to report in Vietnam in 1967 and accepted the position "because it was the biggest

story in the world at the time," a reporter wrote in Terry's obituary in the Post. As controversy developed over the degree to which news coverage might have affected the war's outcome, Terry said he felt it his "sacred responsibility" to be fair and to tell the truth.

According to his wife, **Janice Terry**, one of Terry's observations during his tenure as the Time's deputy bureau chief in Saigon was of the "formation of bonds in combat between blacks and whites that endured thereafter." Terry went on to write a book detailing the experiences of 20 black soldiers, called "Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans" (Random House, 1984). In 1986, it became a PBS documentary.

Terry served as a race relations consultant to the commanding general of

the U.S. Air Force in Europe, was an ordained minister in the Disciples of Christ Church, taught at Howard University, and was on Brown's board of trustees. He was also a CBS radio and TV commentator and wrote for USA Today.

He is survived by his wife, Janice; two sons; a daughter; a sister, and two grandchildren.

Henri-François Van Aal died in Alicante, Spain on August 19, 2001. He was 68. A fellow Belgian Nieman Fellow from the class of 1982, **Claude Van Engeland**, writes:

"Henri-François was part of a tiny group of Belgian journalists who in 1956 developed the concept of a Belgian television news bulletin. By that time Belgian viewers could only watch a French news program prepared in Paris. Van Aal and his friend came up with a concept: United Press and Visnews would provide footage of international events, and a handful of cameramen would cover local news. They brought the thing to life, and it was an immense success. In 1960 [Van Aal] became the main presenter. He later on pioneered the concept of a Belgian weekly television news magazine. He was a Nieman Fellow in 1970, and upon his return he took a very active part in the development of Belgian television.

"In 1971 he switched to politics; he first rejuvenated the image of the Christian Democrat party and then ran a successful campaign for a seat in the Parliament. He then became deputy minister of foreign affairs and in 1974 became minister of culture.

"In 1979 [Van Aal] decided to abandon his political career and rejoined the Belgian state television amidst a very nasty dispute; many journalists claimed it was unethical to reintegrate a politician in[to] [the] newsroom.

"[Van Aal] never fully recovered from this dispute. He anchored various programs. He remained an excellent presenter and interviewer. But his main problem was the ever-increasing pace of television programs. [Van Aal] didn't like the concept of the 'sound bite' and

2003 Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism

Co-sponsored by The Poynter Institute, The Boston Globe, and The Oregonian

Friday, December 5-Sunday, December 7, 2003
Hyatt Regency, Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism will convene in Cambridge the first weekend in December. For the past few years, we've sold out every available seat—a quarter of them to editors and all to working journalists and writers. Most major dailies send staff, as do many news organizations from abroad. Narrative enriches coverage, attracts audience, and mobilizes the full talents of reporters and editors.

This year David Halberstam, Ken Burns, Nick Lemann, and Susan Orlean will deliver keynote talks, and a diverse group of more than 30 acclaimed journalists, authors and storytellers will cover the nuts-and-bolts of writing, reporting and editing narrative in nearly 60 pan-

els and solo talks. They'll focus on ethics, attribution and sourcing, on using narrative to sharpen and focus election-year coverage, on finding the right story in the sea of reported fact and, of course, on the step-by-step, start-to-finish intricacies of building fine narrative work, from topic selection through fieldwork, note processing, drafting, editing, building publication teams and narrative-friendly newsrooms.

You'll find speaker bios, sample articles, and registration forms at www.nieman.harvard.edu/narrative. A special rate is available for Nieman Fellow alumni/ae. Register early, as we're likely to sell out again. E-mail questions to us at nieman-narrative@harvard.edu. ■
—Mark Kramer

always insisted that in order to lead a good interview you need a few minutes to warm up your guest. He also found it hard to cope with new technologies like videotapes; he preferred to work on film support.

"In 1993 he decided to retire in his hometown of Alicante in Spain. He wrote two books: one about his experience in politics and a novel. ..."

—1972—

Robert Deitz, former executive business editor/columnist at the Dallas Times Herald, is retired. Following his years at the Times Herald, he became the editor in chief of Texas Business Magazine and the author of four books: "Other People's Money: The Inside Story of the S&L Mess;" "Presumed Guilty: The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair;" "Willful Injustice: A Post-O.J. Look at American Justice, Rodney King, and Trial by Race," and "Crisis in the Oil Patch: How America's Energy Industry Is Being Destroyed and What Might Be Done to Save It."

Deitz is now a grandfather of three and doing volunteer work at the Dallas Public Library.

R. Gregory Nokes recently retired from 16 years as an editor, national correspondent, and staff writer for The Oregonian. He also worked at The Associated Press for 25 years. He is currently working on a book of historical fiction dealing with the history of the Chinese in America.

—1973—

Wayne Greenhaw writes, "At the end of 2002 **Sally** [Greenhaw's wife] retired from the bench after 20 years as judge. We rented a house in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and immediately fell in love with the place and its lazy laidback lifestyle. Sally went back to take Spanish lessons in April, I joined her for a week, and we bought a house down there. We will be dividing our year between San Miguel and Montgomery, Alabama, where we have lived since leaving Harvard.

"This fall my 18th book is being published: 'The Spider's Web,' a novella and seven related short stories set in central Alabama in the 50's and early 60's. In the summer of 2003 I wrote the screenplay of my last novel, 'The Long Journey,' set in north Alabama in 1919. Since then, I've been working with a NY-LA producer to polish the story for the screen."

—1976—

Guenter Haaf, in July 2003, was promoted to the newly created job of an editorial director at Wort & Bild Verlag, Baierbrunn near Munich, Germany. One of his new tasks is to improve the quality of the editorial content of the six magazines (with a monthly circulation in Germany of 13 million) published by Wort & Bild. He will keep the editorship of Gesundheit ("Health"), one of the six magazines, a position that he has held since December 1998.

—1977—

Melvin Goo, former chief news editor at The Nikkei Weekly in Tokyo, spent two years, 1999-2001, in Taipei editing the Taiwan News. He is now traveling in Asia.

M.G.G. Pillai writes: "I [recently] had a bout of ill health—of what doctors diagnosed as 'unstable angina' for which I spent a week in [a] hospital...."

"I am otherwise well and tilting at windmills as usual, and active, both as a journalist and as an activist, though less as the former and more as the latter, have my own Web site—www.mggpillai.com—where you can catch my frequent rantings. Although I hobble around with a cane, my mind I hope is still active. This activist part of my life came in 1998 when the former deputy prime minister, Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim, was sacked, arrested, and beaten by the country's police chief, convicted in a kangaroo court for sodomy and corruption. If it could happen to him, could it not to me? And I stepped into the political arena, which I had

until then no desire to [enter]. I even seriously thought of standing for a seat in Parliament in the 1999 general election. That, in the end, I decided not to [do].

"My two sons are in their 30's—one a television journalist, the other a lawyer. My wife, [**P.C. Jayasree**], and I still live at the flat we have lived in for three decades...."

—1979—

John C. Huff, Jr., managing editor of The (Charleston) Post and Courier since January 2001, is the new executive editor of the paper. "The goal is to serve readers," Huff said in the paper's announcement, "by attracting their attention, winning their trust, and consistently providing them news and information of value. I think the way to do that is through creative, well-crafted and relevant storytelling, produced by committed, professional reporters, photographers, artists, designers and editors."

Huff spent 14 years at the Orlando Sentinel in such positions as national/foreign editor and deputy managing editor before joining The Post and Courier. At the Sentinel, Huff was the leader and force behind the newsroom's technological modernization.

—1980—

Daniel Passent, a columnist for Polityka, Zycie Warszawy, and Wirtualna Polska (one of the largest Internet providers in Poland), returned to Poland last year after serving five years as ambassador to Chile. He wrote his 10th book, "Diplomatic Disease," about his diplomatic experience. The book has become a bestseller, selling more than 20,000 copies. Passent also teaches at a private school for media and communication studies.

—1981—

Gerald Boyd resigned in May from The New York Times following the controversy over the work of reporter

Jayson Blair. Boyd became the Times's managing editor in 2001 after 20 years at the Times as a correspondent and editor. In 1993, he directed a team's coverage of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing when an improvised device exploded on the second level of the center's basement parking area. This coverage received a 1994 Pulitzer Prize for spot news reporting. In 2001, as editor of the newspaper's series "How Race is Lived in America," Boyd and his team of reporters won the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting.

On September 6, Boyd was inducted into the Greater St. Louis (Mo.) Association of Black Journalists' Hall of Fame at an awards dinner at Washington University.

David Lamb's book, "Vietnam, Now: A Reporter Returns," is out in paperback from PublicAffairs. Lamb reported on the war in Vietnam as a young correspondent. "Vietnam Now" is his account of his return to the country 30 years after the war's end to open the first peacetime Indochina bureau for the Los Angeles Times in Hanoi. Lamb said he hoped "to share with others the discovery of a country, not the rehash of a misguided war."

—1982—

Steve Oney is happy to report that his book, "And the Dead Shall Rise," will be published in October by Pantheon as its lead, nonfiction title. Seventeen years in the researching and writing, the book is a work of social history pegged to the enduring mysteries of the 1913 Atlanta murder of Mary Phagan and the 1915 lynching of her convicted killer, Leo Frank. The case gave birth to both the modern Ku Klux Klan and the Anti-Defamation League.

"'And the Dead Shall Rise' is a non-fiction Southern 'Ragtime,'" says Oney. "It's scrupulously researched, yet I wrote it with all the dramatic power I could bring to bear. It's about sex, race, money, politics, religion and the moral choices people make when swept up in exceptional events."

News for Nieman Notes

Nieman Fellows who would like to have an item appear in Nieman Notes—a job change, the publication of a book, an unusual adventure—please e-mail the information to Lois Fiore at lfiore@harvard.edu.

Oney, who for many years was a writer at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine, adds that "And the Dead Shall Rise" also has much to say on one other topic—the press. William Randolph Hearst owned a newspaper in Atlanta at the time of the murder and lynching—the Georgian—and Harold W. Ross, founder of The New Yorker, and Herbert Asbury, author of "The Gangs of New York," were among the reporters covering the story. Moreover, Adolph Ochs, publisher of The New York Times, used his influence to make the case a nationwide cause célèbre, raising consciousness in the North and provoking rage in the South.

Oney now lives in Los Angeles, where he has worked as a senior editor at California magazine and a senior writer at Premiere. He will be on a 10-city book tour during the fall and hopes to see many of his fellow fellows along the way.

—1983—

Nigel Wade, editor in chief of the Chicago Sun-Times from 1996 to 2000, is now enjoying retirement, dividing his time between homes in England and France. For 27 years Wade worked for The Daily Telegraph of London—mainly as a foreign correspondent in Washington, Beijing and Moscow—and then as an assistant editor and foreign editor for 10 years before going to Chicago.

—1986—

Gustavo Gorriti is journalist in residence at the Instituto de Defensa Legal (IDL) in Lima, Peru. He also writes a

column for Peru21 daily newspaper and continues his investigative reporting through several other venues.

—1988—

Emily O'Reilly, former political columnist with The Sunday Times in Ireland, has been appointed by the Irish government as the national ombudsman and Freedom of Information commissioner.

Rigoberto Tiglao, the presidential chief of staff in the Philippines, writes: "After my Nieman class, I spent over two years [at] the newspaper, Manila Chronicle.... After that I joined the Dow Jones-owned Far Eastern Economic Review and left that magazine as Manila bureau chief after nearly 10 years there. I became then the editor in chief of the Internet version of the Philippine Daily Inquirer (the biggest newspaper here), while at the same time an opinion columnist at that paper.

"In 2001 I joined the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's cabinet as presidential spokesperson. Starting this year, though, I assumed the full-time role as presidential chief of staff."

Tiglao can be reached at: tiglao@info.com.ph.

—1990—

Mary Jordan and her husband, **Kevin Sullivan**, foreign correspondents for The Washington Post who jointly run the Post's Mexico bureau, received the 2002 Sigma Delta Chi award for foreign correspondence for their series of articles about the corruption of Mexico's criminal justice system. The Society of Professional Journalists has recognized and awarded journalistic excellence with the Sigma Delta Chi awards since 1932.

—1991—

Kabral Blay-Amihere writes: "Although I am now into diplomacy I still

find time for journalism and actually teach two courses—Feature and Editorial Writing and Newspaper Management and Production at Fourah Bay College. Books on journalism are scarce in post-war Sierra Leone, and I would be grateful for any books from the Nieman family.”

Books can be sent to Blay-Amihere at: 13 Walpole Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

—1992—

Mark Seibel, former managing editor at The Miami Herald, has been appointed managing editor/international of Knight Ridder’s Washington bureau. Knight Ridder is the parent company of the Herald.

Seibel has been with the Herald for 19 years in a number of positions, such as foreign editor and director of international operations. Now he will supervise national and foreign security coverage for the 32 Knight Ridder newspapers. He will also direct the reporters of eight overseas bureaus and reporters covering the State Department, Pentagon and intelligence agencies.

Seibel’s direction of the Herald’s U.S.-Iran-Contra coverage won a Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1987, and his directed coverage of the raid that took Elian Gonzalez from his Miami relatives won another Pulitzer Prize for breaking news reporting in 2001.

Tom Witosky, a sports projects writer at The Des Moines Register, writes:

“We are all doing well here. I have had a very busy nine months of work including the investigation of former Iowa State basketball coach, Larry Eustachy, and his penchant for partying with college students on road trips.

“My wife, **Diane**, is also quite busy as a freelance editor with the books division of Meredith Publishing. She is working mostly on ‘how-to’ books in gardening these days. She is having great fun. Our son, Adam, has only one term left before graduation from Knox

Members of the Class of 2000 Reunite in Washington, D.C.

Several members of the class of 2000 gathered for a reunion weekend in June in Washington, D.C. **Thrity Umrigar**, visiting assistant professor of creative writing at Case Western Reserve University, recalls:

“Although the attendees were mostly those working and living on or near the East Coast, the weekend festivities [were] a time to catch up with old friends, to marvel at how much the little Nieman kids had grown, and to argue about the prospects of various Democratic presidential candidates and other political issues.

“On Friday evening, the group gathered at the National Press Club for drinks and free tacos and later migrated to **Jerry Zremski**’s home for pizza and more drinks.

“On Saturday evening,

Kwangchool Lee, the fellow from South Korea currently based in Washington, hosted a dinner at his favorite Korean restaurant. Surveying the [table] Lee, affectionately known as ‘The Chairman,’ made a moving speech about the importance of good friends, which set the tenor for the rest of the weekend.

“The group gathered for Sunday brunch at the Washington home of **Laura Lynch**, our fellow from Canada, and discussed the possibility of making the gathering an annual affair.

“Those attending the mini-reunion included **Bill Sperry**, Jack and Lucy **Krueger**, **Jim Morrill**, **Kathy Haight**, ‘Chairman’ and **Kim Lee**, **Mike Williams**, Jerry Zremski, Laura Lynch, **Eustathea Kavorous**, and Thrity Umrigar.” ■

College in Galesburg, Illinois, where he is majoring in creative writing. ... And our daughter, Racheal, just graduated from high school and will be attending Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa. She will be majoring in athletic training and playing goalkeeper for the women’s soccer team. As you can see, we are a very busy family these days...”

“I miss Harvard everyday.”

—1993—

Rick Bragg resigned from The New York Times this summer after questions were raised about the appropriate use of freelance writers to assist reporters in coverage of stories.

Bragg’s next project is a collaboration with the former prisoner of war Jessica Lynch on a book about her capture and rescue, “I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story.” The

Alfred A. Knopf book is due to come out in mid-November. Bragg is also the author of “All Over but the Shoutin’” and “Ava’s Man.”

Sam Hurst produced a three-hour documentary for PBS on modern Indian life and writes a column for the local newspaper, The Rapid City Journal. He also runs his own buffalo ranch 30 miles east of Rapid City, South Dakota on the edge of Badlands National Park.

—1995—

Lou Ureneck, former deputy managing editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer, will be joining the faculty of the College of Communication at Boston University as visiting professor of journalism and director of the Business & Economics Journalism Program this fall.

Ureneck began his journalism ca-

reer in 1974 at the Portland (Maine) Press Herald as a reporter and later became editor and vice president. He spent 22 years at the Portland Press Herald and Maine Sunday Telegram before joining the Inquirer in 1997, where he managed the front page and played a key role in the reorganization of the 210-person staff.

—1996—

Joe Williams has been named assistant managing editor for local news at the Star Tribune in Minnesota. He had been Living editor at The Boston Globe. In his new position, Williams will be in charge of local and state news coverage, overseeing the work of more than 80 reporters and editors in the Minneapolis and St. Paul newsrooms and the state capitol.

—1998—

Howard Berkes, National Public Radio correspondent, is now NPR's first-ever rural affairs correspondent. Berkes will focus on rural issues and culture for the next three years. It's the third time Berkes has pioneered a beat at NPR. The first came 22 years ago, when he became NPR's first staff reporter in the Rocky Mountain States. Berkes more recently developed an Olympic politics beat after breaking a portion of the story exposing allegations of bribery in the bidding for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. He and Congressional Correspondent **David Welna** (Nieman '98) have already teamed for a pair of stories on efforts to repopulate dying towns. Another teaming of Nieman takes place next year when Berkes and NPR Business and Sports Editor **Uri Berliner** (Nieman '98) will cover the 2004 Olympics in Athens, their third Olympics together.

—1999—

Chris Hedges, a reporter for The New York Times and author of "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning" (PublicAffairs, 2002), has another book

Alumni/ae Database Project Results

A number of notes in this issue are due to Lisa Gould's efforts to contact Nieman Fellows for the Nieman alumni/ae database project.

out, "What Every Person Should Know About War," published by the Free Press. In a Times review, Robert Pinsky writes, "Neither jingoistic nor pacifist, the book is about the moral authority of information, as it applies to the present and future nature of war."

—2000—

Kwangchool Lee, former deputy editor and anchorman for Korea Broadcasting System (KBS), was appointed in April to be the Washington bureau chief of KBS. He can be reached at: KBS Washington Bureau, 1076 National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045. Lee's e-mail address is: kclee@kbs.co.kr.

—2001—

Ken Armstrong, former legal affairs writer at the Chicago Tribune and currently investigative reporter at The Seattle Times, was on the Tribune's team of reporters that won the 2002 Sigma Delta Chi award for public service for a newspaper/wire service with a circulation of 100,000 or greater. The team's investigation of the Illinois penal system, which began in 1999, resulted in the discovery of 164 prisoners on death row who were found to be innocent.

After the Tribune reporters' investigation, George Ryan, who was elected governor as a supporter of the death penalty, called for a moratorium on death sentences. In 2003, hours before Governor Ryan left office, he commuted the sentences of 164 death row prisoners, an unprecedented move

since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976.

Maria (Consuelo) Saavedra, a TV reporter and anchor for Television Nacional de Chile, will begin the one-year Mid-Career/Master in Public Administration program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government this fall.

—2003—

Kevin Cullen, a projects reporter at The Boston Globe, is on the Globe's team of reporters who won the 2002 Sigma Delta Chi award for investigative reporting for a newspaper/wire service with a circulation of 100,000 or greater. The team's investigation of the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church produced a groundswell of public response and led to the resignation of Cardinal Bernard F. Law and changes in the way the church handles cases of clergy sexual abuse.

David Dahl, former deputy metro editor at the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, is now the political editor at The Boston Globe.

Dahl writes: "I'll be in charge of reporters covering the statehouse, mayor's office, and immigration. This is a great opportunity for my wife **Kathy** and our family. The kids love it here and are thriving in this rich educational and cultural environment.

"We couldn't have made this step without considerable advice and support from my fellow Nieman. Several of you gave Kathy and me wise counsel as I weighed the decision to leave the paper where I've worked for the last 20 years. Thank you all very much...."

Ronnie Ramos is now editor of The Times in Shreveport, Louisiana. He had been the managing editor at The News-Press at Fort Myers, Florida. ■

End Note

A Nieman Visit to Cuba

The fellows discovered risk-takers who ‘live with a wink, a fiction, and perhaps a few bribes.’

By David Dahl

As you roll through the streets of Havana, past red-scarved school children, 1950’s era cars, pock-marked buildings, a blue harbor framed by the Malecon, your mind wanders to this puzzle: What is missing from Cuba?

Airplanes, for one thing. The skies are virtually empty. Boats are all but missing, too; Cubans need a special license to fish off shore. Cell phones; they are missing, though not missed by visitors from the United States. And Fidel Castro is missing, too; you rarely see his image, but his presence is always felt.

A group of Nieman Fellows and friends of the program traveled to the Communist island in late May and found a country on the verge of change. Changing to what? It is hard to say. And when?

We’ve been waiting for Cuba to change for more than four decades.

Our visit took us first to Havana for four days and then to Cienfuegos and Trinidad, two small cities on the southern side of the island. Beforehand, several of us spent two days in Miami, where we learned from members of

the exile community how they view the place that remains the primary obsession for many in south Florida’s political community.

That there are no boats in the harbor, or few planes in the sky, is testament to Castro’s hold on the country.



1950’s era car in Trinidad, Cuba. Photo by Christina Andujar.

Look at the people and you see a resignation, a sullenness, especially in Havana, where families are packed into once-beautiful apartment buildings. During the day, many people mill about, with little to do; at night, the bars and nightclubs that cater to tourists explode with Son music.

For several years now, Castro has attempted to calibrate a dicey equation: Money from tourism and some foreign investment is meant to replace the loss of billions in Soviet aid after the fall of the USSR. But the influx of dollars brings an inevitable inequality,

and with it comes a taste of freedoms that have been denied since the revolution. A few weeks before our visit, Castro jailed 75 people—many of them journalists—who were fueling a nascent democratic movement.

Yet the imported freedoms—and with them, the good and bad of capitalism—still seep into the culture.

So it is that inside the Capitol, with its gold leaf ceilings, marble floors, and a rotunda that is said to be the third highest in the world,

there is a room that houses a cybercafé. Does the café offer a voice for democracy, here in the old Capitol where democracy ended in 1959? It would seem so, except that Internet access costs five dollars an hour—out of reach for most people in a country where wages can be six dollars each month.

And for those who can afford to use the Internet, the traffic is monitored by the government.

Another contrast emerges when we visit privately run restaurants called paladars. Hidden away in simple homes, they are known by many of the locals, tolerated by the government, but afforded only by tourists with dollars. We ate red snapper and lobster and smoked cigars in one unlicensed paladar that was run by a one-time engineer and lawyer. Risk-takers, they live with a wink, a fiction, and perhaps a few bribes.

Consider this conversation:

“Aren’t shellfish illegal here in Cuba?” we asked after eating a delicious lobster meal.

“That wasn’t lobster,” came the reply. “It was eggs with shells.”

At another stop in Havana, an artist has painted an alley with reds and blues and yellows, and believers have carved Santeria gods into the walls. When we visited, a band entertained a sweaty crowd of a couple hundred people jammed into the alley. When one of us brought out lollipops for children, she was immediately surrounded.

The people we spoke to at these stops were friendly, yet guarded, and frequently spoke from the same script. They insist they are friends with the Americans. It’s just the U.S. government, and the embargo, they oppose.

It is easy to imagine this place when Castro and his brother die and the United States and other industrialized nations stampede in, renovate the buildings that have stood since the 1500’s, bring back the casinos, stick a Starbucks on every corner, and load the airwaves with cell phones and commercial TV. Cuba will be cleaner, and wealthier, and its people free, but it will be far less insular than it was when we visited in 2003. ■

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Photos by Christina Andujar.



School children in Cienfuegos, Cuba.



A home in Trinidad, Cuba.



An art school in Cienfuegos, Cuba.