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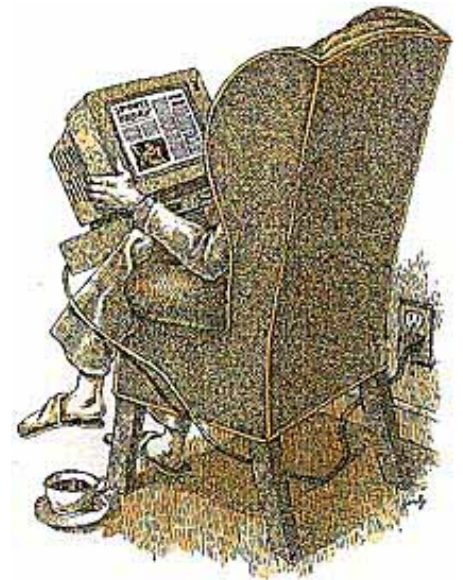
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# An Unfettered Press



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**Published by the United States Information Agency, 1994**  
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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The American Press

The communications industry is the largest private sector employer in the United States, and the news media make up the largest segment of that industry. Generating information, not just delivering it, is a growth business in the United States.

The American news business used to be a largely domestic enterprise, but no longer. Satellite delivery of 24-hour Cable News Network broadcasts and same-day publication of the *Wall Street Journal* in Asia and Europe are symptomatic of the U.S. media's new global reach.

Change has occurred in other aspects of the industry besides mere growth, however. American journalism itself has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent years, partly as a result of new technology and partly as a result of the changes in the society it has chosen to mirror. This is not surprising, since change itself is a hallmark of American culture. Whether it chooses to call itself an observer or not, the American news industry is a full-fledged participant in that culture, as well as in its country's democratic political system and its free-market economy.

Protected by government interference by a brief, 200-year-old clause in the American constitution, the press has emerged as the self-appointed monitor of official life, recorder of public events, and even unofficial arbiter of public behavior. The U.S. news industry is also a very big business. Daily newspapers alone generate some \$32 billion in advertising revenue a year. Magazines -- and there are more than 11,000 of them -- circulate more copies than there are Americans to read them. Every household has at least three radios, and more than 95 percent own televisions.

Needless to say, the press was not always such a mass medium. The American press started in the 18th century as a small instrument of the literate elite and an unapologetic participant in partisan politics. It was a pamphleteering press, operated by colonial postmasters and opinionated printers. It was not for at least another century that the American press had transformed itself into a fairly nonideological communications instrument, in step with the desires, dynamism, and diversity of the country itself.

But change notwithstanding, the American press has maintained two fundamental constants over the past two centuries: (1) its independence from government, and (2) its reliance on public acceptance -- if not approval -- for its financial survival.

Today, the press is better known as the media -- the plural for "medium" (or means of conveyance) and a reflection of its many components in the electronic age. For it is no longer the written word but sight and sound that dominate the communications industry.

Some recent studies claim that 65 percent of Americans depend on television for their daily diet of news. Nevertheless, that statistic can be misleading because it assumes that television fully satisfies the public's appetite for news. Within that same 65 percent there are many who read newspapers and magazines, listen to the radio, and receive a vast array of newsletters and brochures (much of it unsolicited advertising in their mailboxes). Now they must deal with the newest member of the communications family: the fax. Add the VCR, computerized mail, and something called interactive video, and it is no wonder Americans complain about "no time in the day" to do all the things they want or need to do.

One of the consequences of all these choices is increased competition in the information and advertising marketplace for a person's attention, and this scramble has helped blur the once-clear line between

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information, entertainment, and commerce. Journalism is no longer quite so easy to define as it was just a decade ago. The American news business is currently facing what the psychiatric profession calls an "identity crisis." This is particularly true in the newspaper industry, which is watching its role (and its revenue) shrink in the electronic age. Connected with this is the concern, as well as some evidence, that America's reading habit is diminishing, largely as a result of television and home video.

But it is highly premature to sound a funeral dirge for the print media. Nearly every American town of any size (10,000 population or more) still has its own newspaper and access to a metropolitan daily as well.

The story of the American press is a complex one, reflecting the pluralism of the country itself. A favored description is diversity. Nevertheless, there are some common threads that bind the media in the United States. Here are some of the most important of its common traits:

- The American news industry is a **business**.
- The industry views itself as a **public trust**.
- The news industry is largely **unregulated**.
- There is no uniform **definition of news**.
- The mainstream press is generally **nonideological**.
- America's press tradition is community based.

**A Business:** The American press and broadcast industries are mostly profit-seeking enterprises and must be financially healthy in order to survive. Only a small percentage are subsidized (less than 20 percent of the broadcast industry, less than 1 percent of the print media). Most depend upon commercial advertising for the bulk of their income -- about 75 percent. In 1991, the media overall earned \$130 billion in advertising revenue.

A newspaper owner/publisher is often more a business person than a journalist, while the editor is usually the keeper of the paper's news mission. The publisher, who has the ultimate say in what the product looks like, may not want to carry news that will hurt his business, while the editor in the American system is usually ruled by the dictum: "If it's news, publish it." In the best of the business, the publisher gives the editor ultimate authority over the news.

One of the ways in which the information side of the industry guards itself against the profit motive conflict is by clearly separating the business department from the news department, insulating each from the influence of the other. Recently, however, this traditional insulation has broken down to some degree as newspapers, news magazines, and broadcast news programs have stepped up the fight to gain more "market share."

With so many media outlets and new opportunities for advertisers to reach consumers in other ways, media competition for the advertising dollar is fierce. Critics say this heavily contributes to a policy of pandering to an audience's desires and prurient tastes, rather than to the audience's needs. Proponents of the system say, on the other hand, that attention to one's marketplace is the most effective way of serving the public, and that the role of the press is not to dictate or lecture to its audience.

At the heart of this new devotion to "customer service" is the advent of group ownership and the decline of innercommunity newspaper competition. The result is a more homogenous industry. Most "family-owned" newspapers and local broadcast stations have been purchased by large media conglomerates, and this has adversely affected individuality -- a trend in non-media industries as well.

The overwhelming criterion for success in America's group-owned media is profitability. This, coupled with the fear that Americans are spending less time reading the news, has radically changed the look of the American paper. Following a format started by the Gannett-owned *USA Today*, most newspapers have introduced more color, eye-catching graphics, shorter stories, and more entertainment news to appeal to the television generation.

This is not to suggest that group ownership and a growing preoccupation with profitability are intrinsically harmful to journalism. As ironic as it may seem, some of the most profitable news organizations are also the best ones because they have used their expanding income to finance better quality coverage. As with other wide-open press systems, the recurrent accusation that the mass media engage in sensationalism in order "to sell newspapers" is a difficult charge to refute. But it is important to note that the American working journalist is not concerned about the employer's profits; getting on the front page, yes, but selling newspapers, no. And what appears in the news columns of today's papers is still largely the purview of working journalists, not business people.

**A Public Trust:** Treating itself as both a business and a public trust can cause conflict, if not confusion,

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within the news industry, not to mention in the eyes of the public.

Nevertheless, the "public's right to know" remains at the core of America's free-press philosophy and guides the way it conducts itself, particularly in relations with government. Some call this relationship "adversarial." Others prefer to think of it more benignly as simply a monitoring role, without the influence of opposition.

It is a relationship in which officials try to tell their version of events or avoid publicity altogether, while the press looks for mistakes and fights attempts to suppress information. Largely in response to pressure from the media, a number of state legislatures have passed "sunshine" laws that require government meetings to be held in public. There is also a federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which gives requesting citizens -- usually journalists -- access to government records and documents not classified for security reasons.

In short, the American press enjoys its role as the "watchdog of government." The power that comes from this largely self-appointed role has earned the press the honorific title "the fourth estate," after the three official branches of government (legislative, judicial, and executive). It is also this role that prompted Thomas Jefferson, one of the founders of American democracy, to say some 200 years ago that if he had to choose between government without newspapers or newspapers without government, he "should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

It was this vision of how a democracy should work that prompted the framers of the U.S. Constitution to make free expression the first amendment of this charter's "Bill of Rights." In reality, the amendment simply said that Congress cannot enact a law infringing free speech or a free press. That brief clause has been the beacon and the shield for the American press for over two centuries, but it is not carved in stone for eternity. It is tested almost daily in the courts, on the streets, and in the corridors of power. So far, this First Amendment protection has withstood these tests.

As part of this protection, the American news media enjoy a certain immunity from official reprisal. It is extremely difficult, for example, for a public official to win a libel suit against the media, because the courts have ruled that government servants must be open to special scrutiny and accountability in a democratic system. American journalists have also won a number of battles to protect the anonymity of news sources from government inquiry, but that war periodically erupts.

One area of continuing uncertainty is that of national security and government secrecy. Historically, American journalists have enjoyed more latitude in this arena than, for example, the British press. Periodically, the federal government warns journalists they can be prosecuted under existing law for compromising American intelligence-gathering efforts. But this has not been seriously enforced or pursued in recent years.

The American media is far more vulnerable to legal action from private citizens, whose right to privacy can be in direct confrontation with what the press calls the public's "right to know." Libel is a civil rather than a criminal offense in the United States, but the enormous size of monetary awards and penalties levied by the courts in recent years has had a "chilling" effect on journalistic enterprise, according to many in the news industry.

The increase in libel suits is just one example of what the American press perceives as diminishing support from the public. A 1991 survey by the American Society of News Editors indicated that more than a quarter of the public polled would not support any protection for the press if the Constitution were voted on today, and less than half of those polled would give it some protection. This is a reflection of negative views of the media as arrogant, biased, inaccurate, and intrusive.

Credibility surveys vary on the question of who the American people trust more -- their press or their government. The answer varies with time and circumstance. Following the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s, the press enjoyed a high degree of public confidence. But following scandal coverage that led to a senator's withdrawal from the 1988 presidential race, the press came under sharp criticism on charges of exceeding the bounds of good taste and privacy.

In general, the American press believes that too many citizens confuse media self-interest with the public interest. While journalists worry about these perceptions, they tend to see them more as a public relations challenge than a mandate for significant change.

**Unregulated:** A serious publication like the *New York Times* and a fictional tabloid sold in supermarkets both call themselves newspapers. There is no law, no government agency, and no person to say



otherwise, because there is no licensing requirement for newspapers to operate and no enforceable definition of what constitutes a legitimate news publication.

In addition, the American news industry and journalistic profession do not regulate themselves in the same sense as the legal and medical professions do, for example. The press does not require minimum standards for membership, does not issue or revoke licenses, and does not regulate professional standards. Rather, each news organization and journalist association adheres to its own codes and standards.

The decision as to whether one is eligible and qualified to be a journalist in America is also solely up to the employer. However, more and more American journalists are graduates of journalism schools, a trend that helps standardize minimum qualifications throughout the country.

Despite the individualism and diversity, there is a remarkable similarity of values and practices in the mainstream news industry. These values stress the importance of public service, impartial reporting, and balance of opinion. Most American newspapers also take pains to separate information from opinion by clearly differentiating the news columns from the editorial section.

Although there is no official regulation of the press, there are unofficial "checks" and "balances" against journalistic excess, both outside and inside the industry. The external checks include libel laws and self-appointed press monitors. Competition also tends to help keep news organizations "honest." The internal checks include the appointment by some newspapers of an "ombudsman" to investigate public complaints, publish self-criticism, and enforce internal standards.

Different from the print media, the broadcast media in the United States require a government (federal) license to operate, because the space-limited airwaves are regarded as public property. There are, however, safeguards against political discrimination in the licensing process, and there have been remarkably few examples of ideological or political bias in issuing or revoking licenses. Government decisions on broadcast licensing are primarily aimed at ensuring competition and diversity.

**News:** There is no universally accepted definition or set of definitions for "news" in the American media. This is because there is no single role designated for the press. Among the roles the American press has chosen for itself are to inform, to educate, to reform, to entertain, to incite, or all of the above.

Within a broad range of definitions, however, there is general agreement as to what is newsworthy and what is not. The most prevalent characteristics include: the activity of officials and celebrities; government action of any kind; events that are new or bizarre (such as crime and disaster); revelations that are titillating or shocking (involving sex and scandal); and new social trends.

Emphasis on the unusual is a mainstay of modern American journalism, explained by the adage: "If dog bites man, it is not news; if man bites dog, that's news." The public tends to have a love-hate relationship with this definition. On one hand, the audience is entertained or provoked by the news; on the other hand, it is resentful that "normal life" tends to be ignored.

There was a time in America when few would argue with the cantankerous editor who declared: "News is what I say it is." With renewed attention to the desires of the buying public, such editors are hard to find today.

In an effort to be more useful and relevant to the buyer, one of the most successful innovations in recent years has been to enlist the press in the cause of consumer service -- investigating buyer complaints, exposing business fraud, and offering marketplace advice.

Perhaps the greatest source of pride in American journalism is the tradition of investigative reporting, largely aimed at exposing abuses of power. The Pulitzer Prize, the most coveted award in American journalism, is given annually for superior investigation and public service. In recent years, the business community has come under the kind of press scrutiny that was traditionally reserved for government, even though access to business information is usually harder to obtain.

**Nonideological:** During this century, the mainstream media in the United States have remained largely non-ideological. Very few mass-circulation papers, magazines, and broadcast stations are affiliated with political organizations, parties, or movements. It was not always so, but purposeful nonaffiliation has been a hallmark of the American press for more than a century. This characteristic -- both a source of professional pride and a result of economic self-sufficiency -- is one of the main features that distinguishes the American press from many others around the world.

Although most papers, and some stations, voice a political preference in their editorials, news reporting is generally nonpartisan. Editorial opinion is often based on the merits of an issue, and it is not unusual for these opinions to stray outside a particular ideological framework.

Not everyone believes the American press is free of ideology. Conservative critics say the American news media -- particularly those based in New York and Washington -- reflect a "liberal bias." By that they generally mean that the press is too quick to criticize authority and does not support America's interests.

Left-of-center critics, on the other hand, accuse the press of government cronyism and uncritical reporting about Washington's policies and practices. American journalists tend to feel most comfortable when attacked by both sides of the ideological spectrum. They believe it confirms their impartiality.

In fact, there is a pattern of political preference within the news industry, albeit undeclared. Studies have shown that American reporters tend to be more liberal than editors and program directors, who, in turn, tend to be more liberal than publishers and station owners. These leanings may rarely be visible to the public, but instead are part of the dynamic tension that pervades the American newsroom.

Traditionally, the U.S. government has stayed out of the news business. The only government-owned or -controlled media in the United States are those that broadcast overseas, such as the Voice of America. By law, this service is not allowed to broadcast within the borders of the United States, so most Americans have had only peripheral exposure to it.

There is partial government subsidy of public television and radio in the United States, but safeguards have been built against political interference. As a matter of fact, public broadcasting news programs tend to be more anti-establishment than those of commercial broadcasting and are thus perceived as being more critical of government.

**Community Based:** The American press has always had a local, rather than a regional or national, character. Although new technology has broadened this horizon considerably, the U.S. media still concentrate to a large degree on the needs and interests of viewers, listeners, and readers in the immediate neighborhood. There are strong economic reasons for this, but it is also a reflection of American provincialism.

The history of the United States is streaked with isolationism, and the press has often reflected this inwardness. Actually, studies have shown that most of the world's press systems tend to be more provincial than international.

One of the most common complaints of visitors to the United States is that there is so little international news relative to America's strong presence around the world. In fact, there is a great deal of international news reaching America, but only a small portion of it is carried by the community-focused mass media. And that portion carried in one community may not be carried in another because of the different interests of the residents.

For example, in Chicago there is a large Polish-American population, and consequently the press there gives prominence to news of Eastern Europe. Since New York has a large Jewish population, Mideast news is big there. Also, much of the international news reaching the States finds its way to specialized publications with limited circulation.

It is true that the American correspondent corps is based in fewer than one-half of the world's nations. Most of the approximately 700 foreign correspondents are clustered in the so-called major capitals. Consequently, most foreign news is reported from and is written under these datelines.

American correspondents are also frequent targets of criticism that they are not fully prepared in language or in background to cover a foreign country in depth. But the days are gone when a reporter was snatched off the police beat to cover an event in some far-off land.

American correspondents are better prepared for their assignments than they were just 10 years ago, although their employers still tend to favor general professional competence over geographic specialization. One reason for this is the requirement of mobility. A reporter in Cairo, for example, has to be ready at a moment's notice to cover a major event anywhere in North Africa or the Middle East because the U.S. correspondent corps is stretched so thinly around the globe.

The size and scope of the overseas press corps is largely an economic issue. To keep one correspondent

abroad costs an average of \$250,000 a year.

As a general rule, the American press does a fairly thorough job of covering the "big story" overseas, tailored to an American audience. But it gives little attention to the day-to-day news abroad, and it does not cater to the foreign audience.

More than 90 percent of America's daily newspapers depend on the news agencies (wire services), primarily the Associated Press, for news of the world outside their own regions. This is because only a handful of the largest newspapers have their own national and foreign staffs. They include the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Most of these papers have established their own news services, thus giving newspapers more choices than they have had in the past. This profusion of select services is given as a prime reason that United Press International (UPI) has lost so many customers in recent years.

Some critics of American news coverage abroad detect an inordinate amount of coverage priority given to countries high on Washington's official agenda. But they stand on less firm ground when they argue that coverage and commentary mostly conform to U.S. foreign policy objectives. There are just too many examples to the contrary, stretching from Central America back to Vietnam.

For better or for worse, the American media will remain a strong force in public life. Modern society has become too dependent upon quick and reliable information for it to be otherwise. But the shape of that future remains uncertain.

In just a handful of years, the American news business has already undergone tremendous changes as a result of a transformation in technology, market forces, and public tastes. Too many new players have entered the information field for journalism to ever be the same as it was. But the profession never really stood still for long anyway.

The daily newspaper industry, trying to catch up with the electronic media and other newcomers, seems to have suffered most in this recent transformation. But as long as the American press remains largely immune from government interference, there will always be new opportunities for the industry and new choices for the public.

Whatever happens, it will be the public that decides the future of the American news industry. That, free-press advocates say, is the beauty of the system.

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## Constitutional Protection

By Robert S. Peck

The early teenage years are often a difficult time for many American youngsters. They hold passionate opinions on issues both large and small, but are still considered too young to be taken seriously.

Mary Beth Tinker was a 13-year-old student in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1965. She had heard Senator Robert F. Kennedy suggest that Americans wear black armbands to protest the Vietnam war and in support of a proposed Christmas truce. Mary Beth and a group of friends who attended different schools in the city decided to wear armbands to school later that week.

Mary Beth was aware that she was risking suspension from school. The school board, two days earlier, had voted to suspend students wearing armbands as a "disruptive influence." And Mary Beth's algebra teacher had warned his students that he would expel any student who came to class with an armband.

On December 16, 1965, a determined Mary Beth and several students at other schools wore armbands. When she entered her afternoon algebra class, Mary Beth was sent to the principal's office and was promptly suspended.

To challenge the policy, Mary Beth and other students brought a lawsuit, claiming that the suspensions violated the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees "freedom of speech." The students lost at the trial court level. The judge ruled that the armband policy was reasonable, designed to prevent disruptions in the classroom by students who disagreed with the stand of Mary Beth and her friends.

The issue went before the United States Supreme Court three years after the students had been suspended. There, the students won.

The Supreme Court noted, in its opinion *Tinker v. Des Moines School District*, that neither "students nor teachers shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate." Still, the Supreme Court declared that these rights must be applied carefully "in light of the special characteristics of the school environment."

In upholding the students' First Amendment rights, the Court found that school officials "sought to punish [the students] for a silent, passive, expression of opinion, unaccompanied by any disorder or disturbance. Any departure from absolute regimentation may cause trouble. Any variation from the majority's opinion may inspire fear. Any words spoken, in class, in the lunchroom, or on the campus, that deviate from the views of another person may start an argument or cause a disturbance. But our Constitution says we must take this risk, [and] our history says that it is this sort of hazardous freedom -- this kind of openness -- that is the basis of our national strength and of the independence and vigor of Americans who grow up and live in this relatively permissive, often disputatious society."

The Court further stated: "In our system, students may not be regarded as closed-circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate. They may not be confined to

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the expression of those sentiments that are officially approved....Students are entitled to freedom of expression of their views."

Incredible as it may seem, this small controversy, generated by five students suspended for wearing armbands, was of such significance that the nation's highest court found it necessary to examine the issue and settle it by reference to the U.S. Constitution, the supreme law of the land. In their battle with school officials, these young students were guaranteed the same free expression rights that the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, two leading American newspapers, had available when the federal government sought to prevent publication of a classified study about U.S. involvement in Vietnam that came to be known as the "Pentagon papers."

In 1971, the newspapers had received copies of the study from a former government employee. On June 13 of that year, the *New York Times* began publishing articles based on the study. When the government learned of this, the Department of Justice went to court asking for an order to prevent publication, which was granted.

The government did not accuse the newspapers of preparing to reveal military secrets. Instead, it asserted that the government should be the sole judge of national security needs and should be granted appropriate court orders to enforce that view.

The newspapers claimed that the constitutional guarantee of freedom of the press meant that they could not be censored. They also argued that the government was merely trying to prevent antiwar activists from benefitting from information in the documents that was more embarrassing than militarily sensitive.

On June 30, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the newspapers in *New York Times v. United States*, and the documents were subsequently published. The Court said that it is not enough for the president to say national security would be jeopardized by publication. The Constitution, the Court held, has a "heavy presumption" against interference with press freedom. While it may be possible for the government to convince the Court that dire consequences would result from publication of classified documents by newspapers, the government had failed to prove that result in this instance.

The First Amendment's protection of freedom of expression, validated in the *Tinker* and *New York Times* cases, enables the American people to engage in an uninhibited form of debate. The words of the First Amendment are deceptively simple: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." The Fourteenth Amendment, added to the Constitution in 1868, has been interpreted to apply that protection of freedom of expression to every governmental body, from Congress to local government boards.

This right to speak out is a cherished one, perhaps more than any other right. Americans are not hesitant to criticize public officials as important as the president and as commonplace as the garbage collector. They study and comment on every conceivable subject without fear of reprisal from the government.

Former Supreme Court Justice William Brennan described the rights of free speech and a free press contained within the First Amendment as embodying "a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials." The Constitution accepts criticism of high government officials because, as the late Justice Hugo Black put it, no "country can live in freedom where its people can be made to suffer physically or financially for criticizing their government, its actions, or its officials."

The American commitment to freedom of expression can be traced to colonial times, before the United States won its independence and before it wrote its constitution. In 1735, New York publisher John Peter Zenger was tried for "publishing a false, scandalous, and seditious Libel, in which...the King's immediate representative here is greatly and unjustly scandalized." What Zenger had done was publish attacks on the Royal Governor [of the colonies] accusing him of corruption and incompetence.

Zenger was found guilty under the law of libel at the time, but his lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, successfully appealed to the jury to recognize the truth of Zenger's accusations and strike a

blow for those who speak or write the truth. "Men who injure and oppress the People under their Administration provoke them to cry out and complain," Hamilton told the jury, "and then make that very Complaint the Foundation for new Oppressions and Prosecutions."

Hamilton asked the jury to put aside the charges against Zenger and instead judge the larger issue before them: "The Question before the Court and you, Gentlemen of the Jury, is not of small nor private Concern, it is not the Cause of a poor Printer, nor of New York alone, which you are now trying: No!.... It is the best Cause. It is the Cause of Liberty."

Hamilton's successful defense of Zenger became the foundation for an American dedication to a free and freewheeling press that continues to this day. As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., wrote in 1918: "The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas -- that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market....That, at any rate, is the theory of our Constitution."

By expressing one's opinions, individuals are free to use reason and logic to win supporters. The expressions may sometimes be unreasonable and illogical, but it is not, the Constitution says, the responsibility of government to make that determination. The expressions must be permitted so people may judge the truth.

All American politicians, including such revered figures as founders -- and later presidents -- George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, have felt the sting of the press. In the U.S. constitutional system, the press occupies special ground, calling upon government officials to account for their actions and publicizing their failures so that voters may better judge them. Despite the ill treatment he received from the press of the 18th and early 19th centuries, Jefferson had no doubt of its importance. "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government," he wrote in 1802, "I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

A free press, as guaranteed in the First Amendment, plays a watchdog function in a democratic society: bringing people the information they need to exercise independent judgment in electing public officials who favor policies the people support. James Madison, who is regarded as the "Father of the U.S. Constitution" and was the fourth president of the United States, wrote: "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or perhaps both." A free press is thus an essential part of a democratic society; it enables the people to make informed choices.

The heavy presumption against censorship, which the Supreme Court acted upon in the Pentagon papers case, protects more than newspapers. When the Bill of Rights (comprising the first 10 amendments to the Constitution) was ratified, no one could anticipate the diversity of 20th-century communications. Radio, television, and computerized communications were beyond even the most vivid imaginations in 1791, when the First Amendment was added to the Constitution. Still, the concept of a free press has been applied to all these forms of communication. Broadcasters have First Amendment rights but, because the frequency spectrum is limited and people do not have equal access to the broadcast medium, their right of free expression is not identical to that of published or spoken communication. Broadcasters are considered public trustees of the airwaves and must serve the people -- for example, by carrying a certain amount of programming devoted to news and public issues.

Freedom of expression also recognizes that citizens can best influence their government's direction when they work together. The drafters of the First Amendment, understanding this, assured people the right to gather peaceably and to submit their grievances to the government for action. The First Amendment right to petition for redress of grievances has its roots in the English legal tradition and the confrontation of the barons at Runnymede, England, who forced King John to subscribe to the Magna Carta in 1215.

These rights of assembly and petition have played important parts in American history. Americans have made use of them to seek the abolition of slavery and the extension of the right to vote to women. In a democracy, public officials ignore the will of the people, as expressed through assemblies and petitions, at their own peril. Elected officials who are unresponsive to the people will find themselves replaced by others.

Freedom of association has also been found to have a constitutional basis within the rubric of free expression. Though this is not explicitly stated, it is considered a necessary part of the goals protected by the First Amendment. If people cannot associate with one another, if they

cannot form coalitions or organizations, they cannot unite in common cause to change governmental policies. The freedom of association recognized by the courts allows people to meet together and prevents government from prohibiting participation in an organization, as well as from meddling in the internal affairs of that organization.

Freedom of expression has always been an easy concept to accept in the abstract. Few ever advocate a regular system of censorship. However, when interests clash as they often do, when the message is hateful or insulting or embarrassing, when one person's freedom of expression begins to affect the rights of others, it becomes a most difficult right to adjudicate.

It is these hard cases that tend to make it to the courts, which are expected to render wise decisions about how far expression can be permitted to go. The Constitution's protections and the tradition of liberty enjoyed in the United States have allowed public expressions to be bold and daring. They are powerful enough to protect both the *New York Times* and a 13-year-old girl in Iowa named Mary Beth Tinker.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The Right to Know

By Richard A. Bumstead

Constitutionally protected free speech. Freedom of the press. They represent, as former U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan once wrote, "a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials."

But something is missing. How can spirited and informed debate on public issues take place, particularly debate that embarrasses officials, if the public does not know what is going on -- if government cloaks its activities in secrecy and evasion? The historical record shows that, at one time or another, government at all levels -- federal, state, and local -- stands guilty of this charge.

It is the self-appointed role of the American press to inform the public about government activities, thereby sparking debate. Reporters continually look for stories that will play on the front page -- stories about corrupt government officials, or agencies that fail to do what is required by law, or government policies gone wrong. The press maintains that it gets little cooperation from government. Officials prefer to release information that reflects favorably on their activities -- and to duck embarrassing questions. The relationship between government and the press is, at bottom, adversarial, and most reporters prefer it that way.

Over the years, reporters have developed ways of getting at the truth. They rummage through records that are unquestionably public, such as the *Congressional Record* or the minutes of meetings held by public boards. Reporters develop sources in government, officials they trust and who trust them, and who will talk "off the record" about what is really going on. They exploit the "leak," information given to them surreptitiously by sometimes disgruntled government employees who want to draw attention to illegal activity. They build stories by interviewing scores of people, none of whom knows the real purpose of the questions posed.

In 1966, the U.S. Congress passed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), giving reporters a new way of getting information on government activities. By law, they can demand to see government records -- not just the ones that have traditionally been open to the public, but, with a few exceptions, all that are records generated by government operations.

What kind of records? On the federal level, records such as a study done for the Atomic Energy Commission on cancer rates among 30,000 workers in an atomic weapons facility, federal audits issued two weeks before the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's 1986 Challenger disaster that revealed improper equipment monitoring at the Marshall Space Flight Center, and audits of defense contractors that disclosed federal tax dollars being used for travel and entertainment expenses.

Before the Freedom of Information Act became law, such records would never have been made public. The law favored the government's right to say who could examine and copy its records. In 1789, when the federal government was first established, department heads were given responsibility for keeping and safeguarding records and, by extension, prescribing their uses. In

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the beginning, officials relied on the common-law practice of opening public records only to those who had an interest in them, commonly called the need-to-know doctrine. State and local governments followed this common-law rule as well.

Over the years, the power of state and local government officials to deny access to records had been whittled down by legislation and court decisions, generating a patchwork of law and regulation that few reporters could master. All too frequently, a reporter found that he or she had no clear-cut right to certain information. On the federal level, Congress made an attempt to liberalize rules of access to federal records in 1946. The Administrative Procedure Act of that year said that matters of official record should be made available to the public, but added that an agency could restrict access to its documents "for good cause found" or "in the public interest." The need-to-know doctrine still lived.

How did this need-to-know principle work in practice? A government official would make a judgment -- yes or no -- on whether someone requesting a particular document or report needed to know what was in it by virtue of his or her position, or job, or what he or she intended to do with the information. And there was no appeal from some official's denial of access to the records.

As a practical matter, this put a reporter -- or a citizen -- at the mercy of some officious clerk. Here is an example from my own experience. In the early 1970s, I was working as a free-lance writer in the northeastern U.S. state of Massachusetts, trying to put together a story on the costs of running state-supported colleges, whose campuses are scattered throughout the state. I had a hunch that some colleges were receiving a disproportionate share of the budget at the expense of other schools -- a theory that, if true, would have made a good story. I wanted to compare each college's expenditures to determine if any campus was favored.

I appeared at the one place that had these figures in a central file -- the state board of higher education in Boston. "I'd like to see the college budgets for last year," I politely said to each of the several people I was shunted to. Invariably I was asked two questions: "Whom do you represent?" and "Why do you want this information?"

I replied, truthfully, that I represented myself, and what I wanted the information for depended on what I found -- answers that no one found satisfactory. Finally, the assistant to the deputy chancellor for education in the state suggested that I write a request to the chancellor himself, and he would consider it in due time. The classic brush-off.

I had gotten this kind of response before and had learned to keep my temper in check. Whom I represented and what I was going to do with the information had no bearing whatsoever on my request. A new Massachusetts law had given me -- in fact, any person -- the right to examine and copy any document generated by the state government in going about its business (with certain understandable exceptions, such as law enforcement records).

I wrote a letter to the chancellor, citing the law, and asked to be shown these documents two weeks hence. On the appointed date, a clerk ushered me into the board room and gave me the documents I wanted to examine, no questions asked. It was, I believe, the first brush of a rather obscure state agency with the Massachusetts open-records law. No longer was a person in Massachusetts required to establish a need to know what was in records. He or she had the right to know.

Today, all states have right-to-know statutes. They include three essential elements: presumption of a public right of access to government records, placing the burden of proof on government officials who want to withhold information; enforceability of this public right in court; and statutory exemptions to disclosure of certain information, such as tax returns.

The preamble of the right-to-know law in the state of California catches the democratic spirit that underlies such legislation: "In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

"The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created."



The right-to-know laws enacted by state legislatures invariably were accompanied by another kind of law that made the job of monitoring government activities much easier -- the open-meetings law. Such a law requires that any government agency run by a board must give public notice on when and where it meets, must open the session to the public, and must conduct no public business (with certain exceptions) outside this session. The state board of higher education in Massachusetts, for example, a group appointed by the governor to coordinate state higher education, was compelled by the Massachusetts open-meetings law to do its business in public.

The open-records and open-meetings laws have made an amazing difference in how reporters and state government officials operate, says an editor on the *Arkansas Gazette*: "The attitude has changed -- not only of reporters but of public officials. School boards that have never been covered now provide not only notice of their meetings but a desk and chair for the press. Small towns as well as large ones are opening their meetings to the press, some of them before being asked. Many reporters have reproduced copies of the laws and carry them around with them in their billfolds. They are much more militant than before. When the Alcoholic Beverage Board left the state capitol and tried to hide in a member's private office downtown to conduct business, the press marched into the office and demanded to be admitted. Just last week the state real estate commission and the private real estate board tried to hold a closed joint meeting on the guise that the state board was merely a guest of the private group, but the reporters put the pressure on and were admitted."

The federal government was not immune to this nationwide movement to open up government records and meetings. Prodded by newspapers and by groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Congress held several committee hearings on the subject over an 11-year span. Not one administrative official testified in favor of proposed right-to-know legislation, seeing it as a threat to executive prerogative.

Nonetheless, Congress passed the Freedom of Information Act in July 1966. It applied the right-to-know principle to federal records. President Lyndon Johnson was said to have signed the legislation reluctantly. Eight years later, the act was amended to make it more effective. That same year, another statute, the Privacy Act of 1974, was enacted, giving individuals the right to access information contained in their own federal records. And in 1976, the Congress passed, and President Gerald Ford signed into law, the Sunshine Act, the federal equivalent of state open-meetings laws.

The FOIA established that "any person" has a right, enforceable in court, to access records of executive branch agencies of the federal government. It does not apply to records maintained by the U.S. Congress, the federal court system, or the president's executive staff in the White House. Other, more restrictive rules govern the accessibility of such records.

To get information from the federal government under the FOIA, any person -- a reporter, citizen, even a foreign national -- files a request in writing describing the information he or she wants and addresses it to the FOIA officer in the agency that has the records. One can ask to inspect the records or to receive copies. The agency may charge reasonable search and copy fees. The agency has 10 days in which to provide the records sought or to state the exemption in the FOIA that allows it to refuse.

Information that falls within certain categories is generally withheld; these restricted categories are national security, trade secrets and confidential commercial information, internal agency memorandums, records that invade a person's right to privacy, law enforcement investigations, and information specifically exempted by prior law (for example, information contained in tax returns). If a request is denied, one may appeal the decision first to the agency for another review, and finally to a federal court. The government bears the burden of proof that the information requested is indeed exempt.

Over the history of the FOIA, however, many government officials have construed the act as narrowly as possible, forcing requesters to go to court for clarification. Numerous court cases have been filed over what constitutes a reasonable fee for search and copying expenses. In 1990, a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, Colorado, was told by the U.S. Department of Energy that her newspaper must pay \$1 million in search and copy costs to obtain the travel records of the former Secretary of Energy. Often an agency, citing the volume of FOIA requests, fails to meet the 10-day response deadline, and the courts have been reluctant to insist on compliance.

In addition to procedural roadblocks, innumerable cases have been adjudicated over substantive issues. What, in fact, constitutes a public record? How does the Privacy Act of 1974 impinge on the Freedom of Information Act? Which prevails -- the president's security classification system, by which certain documents are marked "secret" or "top secret," or the FOIA? Such questions have generated a cottage industry on FOIA case law. Each year, the U.S. Justice Department publishes a case list for what must now be an army of FOIA attorneys. The most recent list contains 371 pages of citations, plus a 260-page annotated guide to the FOIA's legal history.

The upshot is that many journalists avoid using FOIA procedures. Says an investigative reporter at the *Fresno (California) Bee*: "Generally, I avoid FOIA at all costs. I don't have a lifetime to wait on the information coming through FOIA."

Any reporter who believes his or her FOIA request is not being handled properly can seek help from the Freedom of Information Service Center in Washington. It is a project of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press to monitor government's compliance with the FOIA and educate reporters in FOIA procedures. The press associations in each state also monitor how well state and local governments are complying with local open-records and open-meetings laws.

"People don't use FOIA as often as they should, because they believe it is too cumbersome and time-consuming," says Rebecca Daugherty, director of the center. "And it's a shame. There are terrific stories being produced from use of FOIA. And we know there are many other stories waiting to be written."

One such story was published in 1989 by the *Constitution*, the leading newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia. It suspected that local banks were not lending an equitable amount of money to blacks to buy homes in black neighborhoods -- a form of discrimination prohibited by federal law. But how to prove it? Asking bank officials would have produced a noncommittal but politic answer, something like "I am sure our bank's lending policies conform to the law." And, indeed, their records may not have been organized to provide a ready answer even if bank officials volunteered to research the question.

But there was one untapped source. Under federal law, banks are required to report each home loan to the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council. Here was a federal record of bank home loan lending practices in Atlanta, accessible under FOIA rules.

The *Constitution* filed a FOIA request for the data and received seven computer tapes listing 109,000 real estate loans made in Atlanta over the prior six years. The newspaper then arranged for a computer center to match the data with census tracts, which give the racial composition of inhabitants. The findings startled Atlanta, which prided itself on its race relations: Whites received more than five times as many home loans from Atlanta's banks as blacks of the same income.

"The numbers you have are damning," said the chairperson of a leading Atlanta bank. "Those numbers are mind-boggling. Atlanta bankers are discriminating against the central city, but it's not a willful thing."

After months of "uninhibited, robust, and wide-open" public debate, Atlanta banks revised their lending practices and committed millions of dollars to home mortgages in black areas. And the *Constitution* won a Pulitzer Prize, one of America's highest journalistic awards, for making imaginative use of the right-to-know law.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## Editing the *Washington Post*

By Marilynne Rudick

Leonard Downie's glass-walled office in the newsroom of the *Washington Post* provides the perfect vantage point for overseeing the newspaper's operations. During his more than 30-year career at the *Post*, says Downie, he has seen the journalist's job get tougher and more specialized as the news gets more complex.

But Downie, who has been fascinated with journalism since he delivered newspapers as a boy in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was born in 1942, thinks the rewards are unmatched. For him, the greatest challenge is "making the *Washington Post* better, year after year, and continuing to make it still better the year after that."

His years at the *Post* -- as a reporter covering the city, doing investigative reporting, editing metropolitan and national news, overseeing day-to-day coverage as managing editor, and serving as London correspondent -- afford him a solid perspective on the role of the American press.

For the most part, American newspapers are locally, not nationally, based, notes Downie, who became executive editor of the *Post* in 1991. Each paper "has a certain personality that best fits its own community. If you go around from city to city, you will see quite a different newspaper."

Downie characterizes the *Post's* 800,000 daily and its 1.1 million Sunday readers as "the best educated, the most interested in news, in the country." And while the *Post*, as the premier paper in the U.S. capital, is read by public officials and executives throughout the world, he emphasizes that it is still essentially a local paper.

"The largest staff at the *Post* is composed of metro [local area] reporters and editors; its financial base is local advertising."

While localism is important, Downie cites the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and the independence of the press, as the cornerstone of American journalism.

"That means that government can never control or influence the press." Growing out of that, says Downie, "is a legal tradition that limits the control of private interests to whether or not they choose to buy advertising." As a result, he says, "all stories are as complete as possible, as close as possible to being the whole story. We want to be fair, accurate, and complete."

American newspapers go to great lengths to separate facts from opinion. "A reporter's opinion should not figure into the story at all," Downie explains. "What a reporter contributes to a story is expertise and analysis. Many of our reporters become experts in fields that readers need help in, whether it's government and politics, or economics, or nuclear energy.

"That's different from having the reporter's personal opinion injected into the story," says Downie. "We have a separate part of the newspaper -- the editorial page and the page opposite

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the editorial page -- which contains signed individual opinions." Downie does not believe that the power of the press extends to creating, rather than reporting, news -- a charge leveled by some media critics.

"What it might create," he concedes, "is priorities, because we have limited resources. And so in our picking and choosing about what we are going to find room for in a newspaper, we are creating priorities to some extent."

But far from creating news, Downie contends, "the press most often follows the public mood, rather than leading." He relates one prime example of the press lagging behind the public: the story of aerosol spray cans in the mid-1970s.

"A scientific study came out that chemicals in these cans were harming the ozone layer," he says. "And we ran some stories about it, but no one in the media crusaded about this, and there weren't editorials or a lot of front-page stories.

"Yet all around the country," he continues, "people stopped buying aerosol cans. With just the information by itself...the American people...decided that they did not want to take this risk and stopped buying the product."

Sometimes, in following the public, the press appears to be more powerful than it actually is, Downie says. "We appear to be powerful because we are surfing along on the top of this wave of public interest, and it may look like the media is leading something we are only reflecting. Or, sometimes, a story itself is so powerful that it completely captivates the American public and creates an illusion of media power."

But "our power," Downie maintains, "lies in finding out facts."

Among the facts that newspapers seek out are those about government. Some see the press as adversarial to government, but Downie sees the job of the press as making the government accountable to voters.

"This means that we should not be in cahoots with the government, but it does not mean that we have to fight with it either," he says. "You have to hold it accountable. And if all we had was good government, then we would be writing stories about good government. But if there are problems as well as successes, our duty is to report both of them."

Some have charged that the press has gone too far in ferreting out information, but Downie comments: "If you take careful surveys of this sentiment, you find that people are upset for one of two reasons: it [the press] has held up in a bad light someone or something they care about, or the investigative stories get too far into ordinary people's privacy, and readers feel personally invaded. But if you ask the same people who are offended by these stories if they want more investigative reporting, they always say they do."

Downie is aware of the responsibilities that go along with investigative reporting. "You're always balancing the public's right to know with the right of privacy," he says.

At the *Post*, each sensitive story is evaluated independently before a decision is made to publish. Among the considerations is whether a story is libelous -- whether it might defame.

"You have to make sure that your story is as fair and accurate as it can be, and if it's not, you have to keep working it until it is, and maybe sometimes you're never satisfied by that standard and you never publish it," Downie says.

Another consideration may be whether the story will jeopardize national security. The *Post* also looks at whether a story will cause personal harm. For this reason, the paper will not write about a kidnapping in progress.

Downie acknowledges that sometimes the decision to publish has serious consequences. He cites a *Post* story about alleged wrongdoing in a congressional office. When the story hit the front page, a congressional aide -- the focus of the story -- took his own life.

"We all felt badly about it," Downie acknowledges, "but we had no idea in advance that he was

potentially suicidal. And there was no way that we could have prevented the suicide."

It is Downie's belief that some people are so public that they have virtually no rights to privacy -- such as Supreme Court justices, "among the dozen most powerful positions in this country."

Several years ago, there was a public uproar when a newspaper printed a list of videotapes that had been rented by a nominee to the Supreme Court. The *Post* did not publish the list.

"In this particular instance, I didn't see any relevance to that information," says Downie, but he defends the reporter's right to seek out this kind of material. It's the press's job to seek information, and the responsibility of the information holder to decide whether to divulge it, he stresses.

"In this country, if you take an oath as an employee of the federal government to protect national secrets -- and you divulge a real national secret to the media, and the media publishes it - - the person who divulged the secret is liable to punishment, not the media."

Holding the media liable, Downie says, would "chill any freedom of the press."

Given this privileged position, how good a job does the press do? Downie comments: "There are a lot of good newspapers in this country, and there are a lot of just plain mediocre newspapers, and a lot of, unfortunately, really bad newspapers, in the sense that they don't provide their readers with very much information. The press could always do better."

Becoming better, Downie says, includes making information more accessible and understandable.

"Our readers are busy people, with lots of things competing for their time." As a result, "in even the most serious stories you want to find interesting ways to tell them, so that you catch the readers' attention."

Among the competitors for the readers' attention is television. American newspapers, he says, compete with television for national stories -- the presidency, defense -- and local police and fire stories.

"But a whole lot of other things go virtually uncovered by television because they are not remotely visual. Also, television can seldom go into the kind of depth that a newspaper can. So people see something on television [that] they're really interested in, and want to read more about in tomorrow's paper.

"Some people thought that television would make newspapers obsolete, but what it did was to change the nature of newspapers. Newspapers provide the extras that television cannot provide."

Downie sees increased specialization as another change occurring in newspapers. The daily newspaper is, in reality, many specialized newspapers -- national news, local news, sports, entertainment, business, and health -- all rolled into one.

"The *Post* is too big for one person to read every day...instead we know that different parts of the paper are read by different people according to their special interests."

The increased specialization is changing the reporter's job. The *Post* has a physician covering health and a lawyer covering the Justice Department. It is no longer enough, Downie observes, for a reporter to be smart and to have a flair for writing. Increasingly, a reporter must develop a specialty.

It is all part of the job getting tougher and the news business more complex.

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## Publications

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*An Unfettered Press*

### The Small-Town Newspaper

By Denise Hyland

Shortly after Brenda Tallman had arrived as publisher at the *Plattsburgh Press-Republican* in northeastern New York State, in 1986, she learned an important lesson about small-town newspapering in the United States.

"You have to remember that the person you are talking about is probably related to the person you are talking to," she says with a slight grin.

Understanding human nature is absolutely essential to the survival and growth of America's small-town newspapers. Through the eyes of newspaper people, the grand designs of the U.S. Constitution's protection of press freedom appear less monumental when they are viewed alongside patterns of long-standing, close-knit relationships in a place like Plattsburgh.

Tallman, who has been in the newspaper business for all of her adult life, is an emphatic defender of press freedom. Since coming to Plattsburgh, she has had to resist community pressure on several occasions for the sake of full, fair, and accurate news coverage.

But in a small city like Plattsburgh, with a population of 26,000, one need not recite the constitutional protections from the rooftops. The sensibilities and close associations of small towns can be taken into account, Tallman believes, without damaging a newspaper's right to unfettered publication.

"Our role as a small-town newspaper is to make people aware of their surroundings and the changes that are taking place," Tallman explains during an interview at the modern newspaper plant, located in the downtown area. The population demographics have remained relatively stable for generations in Plattsburgh.

Government-related industries such as prisons, customs, and border patrols (Plattsburgh is some 45 kilometers from the U.S.-Canadian border) employ a large percentage of the civilian population.

"People who live here went to school with one another; they know everybody's sins and weaknesses; they remember the 'F' [failing grade] on the mathematics test in secondary school," explains Tallman. "Certainly we are mindful of the readership and the community we serve, and the makeup of the area. So we do some things that other papers don't. It's important if someone has won an award, and we do a lot of the 'chicken dinner' [community activities] stuff. That's our purpose."

The *Press-Republican* has a circulation of over 23,000 in a three-county area, placing it among the ranks of hundreds of other small U.S. dailies. Because their audiences are much smaller, more specific, and more familiar, community media such as local newspaper, television, and radio operations must approach the news differently from their big-city counterparts. Coverage is targeted to the needs and desires of a narrow audience. Thus, happenings that might rate only a line or two, if that, in a metropolitan paper receive full-blown attention in the local media.

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A typical Sunday edition of the *Press-Republican*, for example, included a feature story, with a photograph, of a local woman leaving for a two-year Peace Corps stint in Thailand; an article, with a photograph, about a young doctor returning to her hometown to practice family medicine; and complete coverage of a fire-fighters' association awards banquet, with four photos.

The same issue also contained an article about a town governing board meeting, an interview with a construction worker alleging a chemical spill cover-up, information on a fatal airplane crash, and several pages of national and international news.

"National and world news do have some relation to our readers' lives, but our main goal is local news and commentary on that news," Tallman says. "That's going to be good, bad, and ugly."

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press regardless of who opposes publication of specific stories. Running a successful newspaper is a balancing act of giving the readership what a free society needs to know as well as what it wants to know, even if these goals sometimes seem at cross-purposes.

As the publisher, Tallman reviews each day's editorial pages before they are printed, and she has veto power over them. She has been known to ask some tough questions, but for the most part Tallman gives her editors free rein over the news pages.

"I have never rejected an editorial, but I have suggested that a word or two was too harsh," she says.

The *Press-Republican* is 1 of 22 dailies owned by Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., a subsidiary of Dow Jones & Company, Inc., publisher of the *Wall Street Journal* and 23 other dailies. With a combined circulation of 2.6 million, these publications make Dow Jones the sixth largest newspaper company in the United States.

Tallman has over 20 years of experience with Ottaway. As publisher, she oversees the *Press-Republican's* editorial, advertising, circulation, and production departments and is responsible for the paper's overall operations. Under her direction, the newspaper published its first Sunday edition in September 1987.

Although it is the journalism side of publishing that usually gets public attention, Tallman says each department plays an integral role in the paper's success.

"All of our efforts can go down the drain [fail] if any one of the pieces is missing," she says. "The thing that I like most about what I do is getting people to work together as a team."

Tallman got started in the newspaper business as a typesetter at age 18.

"My grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Holdredge, was a printer. He published a small paper in Norwich, New York, in 1906, a controlled-circulation weekly, mailed to every house. I think he was ahead of his time," Tallman says with obvious pride.

"I used to be fascinated by him operating the linotype machine."

Holdredge died in 1964, just one week before Tallman started her first job with a newspaper.

"We never got to compare notes," she says with regret.

She advanced quickly into classified advertising sales. Then, as one of a three-person staff at a weekly newspaper, she sold advertising, photographed and developed the page plates, took the plates to the printer, and loaded the papers and drove them to the post office.

"When you are not afraid to get your hands dirty, you can learn so much by doing," she says. In 1971, Tallman landed a sales job at the *Oneonta (New York) Daily Star*, another Ottaway paper. From there, Tallman was promoted to the *Traverse City (Michigan) Record-Eagle* in 1975 as classified advertising manager, and she moved up to publisher's assistant in 1978. Tallman

became the Record-Eagle's general manager -- the first woman to become a top executive in the Ottaway company.

Assuming the top position at the *Press-Republican* in 1986 was a natural progression for one so versed in the everyday mechanics of small newspapers.

The *Press-Republican*, unlike its national media counterparts, does not often deal with heady issues such as political corruption or financial shakedowns. But true to the journalistic ideal, Tallman steadfastly resists any outside influence on or interference in the newsroom.

In 1986, for example, a national news magazine listed Plattsburgh Air Force Base as a facility that the U.S. government might close or modify in a military cost-cutting move. The *Press-Republican* set out to explore the potential impact of a closing.

"Some people wanted us not to say anything about the possible closing, in order not to stir things up," Tallman recalls. "They said we would then be creating fear in the community. But our readers had the right to know what was going on, and we kept trying to find out for them."

She received a phone call from a powerful community leader who strongly suggested that the paper ignore the entire issue, but Tallman adamantly refused to be swayed, and she instructed her editors and reporters to continue their investigations.

During a two-year period, the paper ran several stories on the possible closing, many of them on the front page. Its editorials were opposed to the closing. When the government issued the list of targeted bases, Plattsburgh was not on it, although it subsequently was slated for closure some years later.

"People do want us to tell them the tough stuff, too," she says. "We have the area's best interests at heart. Certainly we are not going to be around too long if we do not subscribe to the consensus. But that does not mean we are not going to state what we feel is the best thinking on the issues."

The *Press-Republican* also broke the story of three county officials who spent \$7,000 in public money on one business trip to California -- as much as a neighboring county's legislators budgeted for an entire year's travel expenses. A four-part investigative series culminated with an editorial entitled "Spending Practices Obscene."

Tallman believes that those paid by the public must answer to the public -- through the watchful eyes of the media -- for everything they do during work time. But when looking into the private lives of public officials, the issues, she feels, are less clear-cut.

"I think we need to take every case on its own and assess it and review it," Tallman says. "I think scrutiny [of a person's personal life] is appropriate if what they are doing could affect their public performance."

She believes that legitimate news should be printed as news, no matter whom it involves. If, for example, the mayor's teenage son were to be arrested for driving while intoxicated and the mayor asked that the arrest go unreported in the newspaper, "we would not be inclined to honor that request."

She adds: "I cannot fathom a time when it would be in the public's interest to refrain from printing that kind of information about a particular person."

Sometimes, the small-town newspapers find themselves in a battle over First Amendment principles that their counterparts in larger cities rarely have to justify. Tallman describes a particular incident to illustrate how sensibilities in a smaller community differ from those in a big city -- and how it may be necessary to explain the practicality of constitutional protections to citizens who seldom deal with such issues.

"A local restaurant and bar was the first in the area to offer male dancers as entertainment. We ran a photo on page one -- of the audience response, not of the dancers -- and an irate man called up to say he was going to cancel his subscription because of it. He didn't feel that this information belonged in a family newspaper.

I explained that our obligation is to let the readers know what is going on in our community. We are telling you this is something new, and it's here.

"I asked him: 'What if we didn't report this, and you had decided to take your family for dinner there that night?' Well, he understood what I was saying, and he didn't cancel his subscription. But he had been angry about it, and he didn't know whom else to tell."

Like an increasing number of newspapers across America, the *Press-Republican* offers a "Speak Out" service to its readers. Individuals can telephone a special number and give their opinions freely on current issues or anything else that is bothering them. Comments are then transcribed by a secretary, edited for length and clarity, and published anonymously.

"Sometimes people just need to lash out, and we want to provide them with an opportunity to do so," Tallman says. "If they had to give their names, it would not work, because there's a fear of possible retribution in some cases."

In the interests of neutrality, Tallman has no affiliation with outside organizations. "I try to walk a very straight line on that," she says. To some in the community, such a connection might threaten to slant a paper's coverage.

Journalists, like other people, have individual beliefs, values, and opinions. Sometimes, they may be tempted to incorporate their personal views into their articles.

But Tallman says personal views should be put away before pens are put to paper, commenting: "We have to go the extra mile to make sure that bias is not in our articles. We have to choose our words carefully."

Are journalists as tough and unfeeling as some Hollywood movies have tended to portray them? Tallman does not think so.

"For the most part, I don't find journalists cold and calculating," she declares. "They are caring and understanding people, but they do have a job to do and they need to stay as neutral as possible, so they can represent the facts as they present themselves."

And that, says Tallman, is no easy task.

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Denise Hyland is a free-lance writer in Rochester, New York.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The Business Side of a Newspaper

By Peter Hadekel

*In the preceding story, publisher Brenda Tallman discussed the editorial functions of her newspaper, the Plattsburgh Press-Republican in New York State. Here, interviewed by Montreal Gazette columnist Peter Hadekel, she turns her attention to business considerations.*

Running a small-town newspaper in the United States is not unlike operating any other business. Competition for the customer dollar is strong, and management has to look for new ways to contain costs and to expand revenues.

Brenda Tallman has met those challenges successfully. She has managed to cut costs without affecting the newspaper's quality. In addition, she has moved aggressively into growth areas such as commercial printing and special publications, while launching a Sunday edition of the *Press-Republican*.

Tallman is proud of the fact that the cost-cutting has not meant shrinking the "news hole" -- the amount of space devoted to news. "We feel very strongly that we need to continue to put out the product that our customers are accustomed to receiving," she says.

Newspapers, of course, are in business to make a profit for their shareholders. And small-town newspapers in the United States historically have been profitable operations.

The *Press-Republican* is the only daily in the city of Plattsburgh. Although the newspaper faces competition from two other papers at the perimeter of its 7,800-square-kilometer circulation area, the *Press-Republican* dominates the local newspaper market.

As a consequence, it has grown into one of the larger private businesses in the town, with 200 full-time and part-time employees and annual revenues estimated at \$10 million.

Some small-town newspapers have used their dominant position in the marketplace to make money from advertisers while ignoring editorial quality. It has been a profitable formula for some, at least for a time, but that is not the philosophy of the *Press-Republican*, which produces a colorful and lively newspaper with a strong accent on local news and sports.

"Our main goal," Tallman says, "is to produce a good newspaper." That goal is one shared by the *Press-Republican's* parent company, Ottaway Newspapers, Inc., which has adopted the attitude that "quality is our only product," says operating vice president Richard Barker.

Being part of a large newspaper group has helped the *Press-Republican* serve its market better. More than 20 years ago, it moved into a modern plant with new presses that provide excellent color reproduction. The paper submits an annual capital investment budget to Ottaway. Recently, for example, the *Press-Republican* was authorized to spend \$90,000 on new equipment that will trim and fold newsprint into tabloid (magazine-sized) pages for use in special publications.

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Its affiliation with Ottaway does not mean that the *Press-Republican* is being subsidized by other newspapers in the group. It must pay its way on an operating basis, which means that Tallman must keep a close watch on expenses. That is not easy in a sluggish economy without laying off staff or cutting back on the size of the paper -- neither of which Tallman has done. Most of the paper's costs are for wages and benefits, and for the purchase of newsprint.

"We have tried to be resourceful and frugal," she says. "We have come up with some creative ideas, including a thorough review of how we buy our supplies and if we are getting the best possible cost." That means scrutinizing everything -- right down to the type of notebook the newspaper buys for its reporters.

The 36 journalists and editors at the *Press-Republican* are paid an average of \$500 a week and receive a package of benefits that includes medical and dental insurance and a pension plan. The company also offers benefits such as a vision plan covering eye care and an employee assistance program that counsels workers with personal problems. The journalists do not belong to a labor union, but 11 employees in the composing room, 5 pressmen, and 3 workers in the distribution center are covered by union agreements. A union attempt to organize the paper's entire staff was voted down.

Tallman describes labor relations at the paper as good, although she acknowledges that some of the changes she has introduced have met resistance. "There is a lot of change going on in many businesses, and that can create concern for all employees. We have not done things overnight here. People are aware that we have done things as gradually as we could. Part of the process involves explaining the need for change."

One of Tallman's strengths as a manager is her ability to relate to her employees. "She connects with people very, very well," says Ottaway's Richard Barker. Under Tallman, the *Press-Republican* has adopted a participatory style of management in which department heads are encouraged to take risks and make decisions on their own.

"We allow dissent because we feel we need that," she says. "A person is entitled to his or her opinion and should feel comfortable expressing that dissenting point of view without fear of chastisement." However, she adds, "there is a fine line between someone who is always negative and someone who has severe misgivings about something."

Tallman's commitment to people means the newspaper spends a considerable amount of time and money training employees and supervisors on everything from how to sell advertising to how to write a better news story.

Each department submits an annual training budget, and employees are occasionally sent out of town to attend training workshops and conferences. A satellite dish on the roof of the *Press-Republican* building allows the newspaper to tune into televised training courses produced by the Newspaper Association of America, an industry trade group.

About 75 percent of a newspaper's revenue comes from the sale of advertising, with the balance derived from home-delivery subscriptions and single-copy sales.

The most lucrative advertisements a newspaper sells are so-called display ads by department stores, automobile dealers, or other major retailers. In a paper of the *Press-Republican's* size (typically 24 pages each weekday), a display ad can fill up to one-half of a page.

Other staples of the paper's regular advertising base are classified and help-wanted ads. The pages of the *Press-Republican* contain about 60 percent advertising and 40 percent news, a standard ratio in the industry.

In addition to the advertising printed as part of the paper's regular press run, the newspaper inserts color advertising brochures known as "pre-prints." Produced by major national retailers and distributed with the newspaper for a fee, pre-prints are a growing source of revenue for small-town papers.

Despite its local monopoly in the newspaper market, the *Press-Republican* faces real competition for advertising from television and radio. More than a dozen radio stations serve small pockets of the circulation area. Three television stations in the region are carried by cable into the Canadian city of Montreal, about 100 kilometers away, to a potential market of 3

million inhabitants, many of whom like to shop across the border.

Keeping advertisers happy is one of the most difficult challenges facing any American small-town newspaper. There is a fine line between reporting aggressively on local matters and offending commercial interests that may have a stake in the issue. Over the years, most good newspapers have tried to build a wall between the newsroom and the advertising department, and advertising managers suggesting stories about clients have usually been rebuffed.

For Tallman, the issue is straightforward. "Our news columns are not for sale," she says bluntly. "The *Press-Republican* will not compromise its editorial standards, nor allow itself to be intimidated, simply to hold on to an advertiser's business."

*Press-Republican* editor Jim Dynko recalls several news stories that elicited angry responses from local advertisers. On one occasion, an automobile car dealership threatened to cancel its advertising because of a story in the paper about a sports car built by another company.

Another time, a reporter wrote a story about problems dealing with real estate agents when buying a new home. "The local realtors went crazy; they cut back their advertising, and there was a little apprehension about it," Dynko reports. "But eventually they came back.

"From time to time, someone will call up and suggest a story and remind us of how much they are spending on advertising in the *Press-Republican*," Dynko adds. "But we do not want to know who is buying and who is not."

That does not stop the newspaper's business side from making a real effort to court advertisers. One of the *Press-Republican's* plans is to develop a computer software program that will allow it to customize an advertising budget for a business as small as a local shoe store.

Building the paper's advertising base goes hand-in-hand with increasing circulation. The *Press-Republican* has about 16,000 home-delivery subscribers and sells another 7,000 or so copies a day in stores and vending boxes.

Those numbers have not grown recently, which is why Tallman plans an aggressive circulation drive. The campaign will include television and radio promotion of the paper in areas where circulation is weakest.

Also, to develop a new generation of younger readers who will continue to purchase the paper as they get older, the *Press-Republican* supports a "Newspaper in Education" program, which gets the paper into schools as a classroom tool. One feature of Plattsburgh's program is a student press corps of writers and photographers who produce their own newspaper with the help of the *Press-Republican*.

To develop the teenage and college-age market, Tallman has started a new publication aimed at young consumers called *What's Up*. It is distributed free every two weeks. She calls it an "artistic success," but it has yet to attract as much advertising as she would like.

When asked about the future of her newspaper, Tallman is characteristically optimistic. She is eager to explore new ventures to deliver information into subscribers' hands. And she is open to new ideas. "It is a key to our future growth," the publisher says.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## Rights and Responsibilities

By Robert H. Estabrook

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has a much quoted clause that reads as follows: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." From that fundamental precept in what is known as the Bill of Rights derives what is to me perhaps the most basic ethical tenet of journalism in the United States: The press is independent of government.

The founders of the United States were suspicious of the tendency of government, even the best-intentioned government, to become tyrannical at times. Governments are composed of human beings, and human beings can and do commit wrongs. For this reason, the authors of the First Amendment envisaged the press, despite all of its imperfections, as a kind of critic, with a role apart and distinct from that of government.

Clearly, nothing in the Bill of Rights says that newspapers and government cannot cooperate on occasion. But the intent of the founders was that the press and government should not become institutional partners. They are natural adversaries with different functions, and each must respect the role of the other. Sometimes a free press can be a distinct annoyance and an embarrassment to a particular government, but that is one of the prices of liberty. A free press is responsible to its readers, and to them alone.

Independence is at the very heart of any statement of ethical principles respecting the conduct of the press. The proprietors of a newspaper may choose to ally it with a particular political party or interest, but an increasing number of newspapers and journals in the United States are politically independent as well as independent of government. This means not that they refrain from endorsing a certain political party or a candidate for public office, but rather that they owe no prior allegiance and that they make the endorsement voluntarily, as an exercise of their independence.

From this it follows that an independent press must cherish that role by resisting pressures of all kinds -- from local as well as national government, from special interest groups in the community, from powerful individuals, from advertisers. This is a noble standard that is sometimes more difficult to follow in a small community than in a large one. It may be relatively easy for a large, well-financed newspaper to risk the displeasure of a particular interest group or advertiser. But on a small paper, where the support of such an advertiser or interest has a direct bearing on the ability of management to meet the payroll, it takes courage to resist pressure.

From this also flows the point that the newspaper and its staff should exemplify independence in their actions. Not only should they be independent in fact, but they must be seen to be independent. A newspaper that rewards its friends with unwarranted, flattering stories or fawning editorials will not long be respected. A newspaper whose reporters also are on the payroll of a special interest group or who accept free trips or lavish gifts will find it hard to be convincing in its criticisms of corruption or other unethical practices in government.

Occasionally, newspapers attempt to justify the acceptance of gifts or services. A conscientious

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reporter will hardly be corrupted, so the argument goes, by a free meal or ticket to a sports event or to the theater. Perhaps not. Nevertheless, appearances are important. I know of one newspaper that accepts every trip or gift that is offered, on the theory that by taking everything, it will be seen to be incorruptible. I have a different view, and I suspect that some of the newspaper's readers may also: Newspapers ought to pay their own way.

Admittedly, in small communities, journalists sometimes may encounter problems in maintaining an independent role. There are pressures to participate in volunteer services, in clubs and business associations, and even in local government. Conflicts of interest may arise frequently.

Journalists cannot expect to be walled apart from the community in which they live. But neither can they serve two masters with opposing interests. A conscientious editor or reporter will at least be aware of the conflicts and keep his or her professional responsibilities foremost in mind.

What special responsibilities does the press incur in return for the protected status its freedom enjoys? None that is explicitly spelled out. A newspaper has the right to be captious, or partisan, or untruthful, or bigoted, or whatever else its conscience allows it to be. And although newspapers are answerable to the laws of libel, within a very large compass they continue to set their own responsibilities. The underlying idea is that, from the clash of opinions and ideas presented by a free press, ultimately something resembling truth emerges.

In practice, however, truth does not always emerge unless someone digs it out. And there is no single patented version of what constitutes truth. In a community where only one newspaper exists -- which increasingly is the pattern in the United States -- a reader may not encounter differing opinions unless the newspaper chooses to present them. Radio and television are not always effective substitutes.

But this is not such a calamity as it once would have seemed, because there is more and more sense of professionalism among American journalists. This means recognition of the importance of fair and balanced reporting in which opinions that differ from those of the writer, or the newspaper, or a government official are nevertheless accurately portrayed.

It is rare to find a newspaper in the United States today that does not deliberately separate its own opinions from the objective presentation of facts. News stories and analysis are presented on the news pages, with their origins and sources identified wherever possible. The newspaper's own opinions are presented on the editorial page, which may also carry signed columns from syndicated writers or staff members of the newspaper itself.

American newspapers today recognize the responsibility to open their letters columns and opposite-editorial pages to all views. Many newspapers receive far more letters than they can publish and therefore must choose what they regard as a fair representation, editing for libel, decency, and germaneness. Many newspapers employ ombudsmen, who act as a sort of public advocate in listening to complaints, offering remedies, and appraising the performance of the paper. Most newspapers also recognize their responsibility to correct errors promptly, often in a box that appears in the same location in each issue.

Of course, a newspaper may endorse the highest standards of ethical conduct and still have its reputation sullied by the behavior of some of its staff members. Arrogance and contempt for the rights of others are one of the surest ways to bring this about. Newspapers need to guard against undue intrusions on the privacy of persons about whom they are reporting. A photograph of a person jumping off a building or plunging into a fire may be dramatic, but editors ought to debate long and hard over whether they are violating someone's rights or dignity by publishing it. Does the publication serve a defensible purpose, one that will be understood by readers? Or is it using an indignity to pander to curiosity?

Reporters enjoy no special rights beyond those of other citizens. They must be aggressive in pursuing facts. Indeed, one of the most important functions of a free press is to serve as a watchdog. But its staff members have no dispensation to be rude or discourteous. Television has many sins of its own, but one thing it purveys very quickly to viewers is whether reporters at a news conference are behaving arrogantly or with unnecessary brusqueness. Some, lamentably, seem to have become actors who view their function as making the news, not merely reporting it.

Apart from idiosyncratic behavior, newspapers also may be affected by a phenomenon that I

call "prizemanship" -- the presentation of stories by a reporter or by a broader decision of newspaper management in a fashion calculated to win one of the prizes now offered to newspapers and to individual journalists. A few years ago, the *Washington Post*, my former employer, won a Pulitzer Prize for a story about an eight-year-old narcotics addict. Subsequent investigation by others led to an acknowledgment by the reporter that she had made up the story in order to illustrate a situation. She resigned, and the newspaper returned the prize in embarrassment. I have no doubt that there are similar fictional stories not identified. Even if you do not invent "facts," it is relatively easy to present them in such a way as to make a dramatic impression upon prize judges.

Prizes are not bad, but the best ones are those that are conferred by outsiders, without the knowledge or the participation of the journalist or newspaper. Conscientious journalists and newspapers must resist the temptation to display or doctor a story in such a way as to advance a purpose not directly related to the news.

There is one further precept in my own code of journalistic conduct -- beyond independence, noninvolvement, objectivity, fairness, and willingness to correct errors. That is a recognition of our own fallibility. Journalists have no special mandate from God, and a little humility on our part is much in order.

The truth sometimes has many sides. No one has a monopoly on it. Even in the dedicated pursuit of truth, error is frequent, and innocent persons may suffer. A cardinal journalistic sin, in my view, is that we journalists tend to take ourselves too seriously and have an inflated view of our own importance. Therefore, I should like to see posted above the desk of every member of the press the advice Oliver Cromwell gave to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1650: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

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Robert H. Estabrook, a former foreign correspondent with *The Washington Post*, is the editor and publisher emeritus of the *Lakeville Journal*, a weekly community newspaper in Connecticut.

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## Libel Law in the United States

By Steven Pressman

In 1637, an English writer named William Prynne made the unfortunate mistake of writing a book that criticized the queen. Brought before a panel of judges, the hapless Prynne was found guilty of libel and ordered to spend the rest of his life in prison. As an added punishment, he had his ears lopped off before he was hauled off to jail.

Had Prynne been living in modern-day America rather than 17th-century England, he undoubtedly would have been free to write his book -- whether about the queen or a U.S. president -- without worrying about losing his ears or ending up in prison.

Libel is a legal term that describes a written form of defamation, which the dictionary defines as a "false or unjustified injury to someone's good reputation." Sometimes the word slander is used in the same breath as libel. The two terms mean the same thing, except that slander usually refers to defamatory statements about someone that are spoken to others rather than written in a newspaper, magazine article, or book. Today the legal differences between libel and slander have all but disappeared due largely to the dawning of the electronic age. American television networks, for example, are sometimes sued for libel even though news reporters and correspondents "speak" their words to a viewing and listening audience rather than to a reading audience.

For the United States, the laws that control libel and slander first began to take shape even before the colonies gained their independence from Britain. One of the most famous American cases involved New York publisher John Peter Zenger, who was imprisoned in 1734 for printing political attacks against the colonial governor of New York. Zenger's lawyer established a legal precedent by arguing successfully that truth is an absolute defense in libel cases. Up until then, it had never mattered much whether the allegedly libelous statements about someone were true or false. Since the Zenger case, however, someone can sue successfully for libel only if the defamatory information is proven to be false.

The Zenger case established another precedent that remains in place today. Libel cases, which are part of civil (rather than criminal) courtroom proceedings, may be heard by juries, and it is up to the jury to decide whether a publication has printed libelous information about someone. If so, it is also up to the jury to decide how much the libeled individual has suffered and what kind of monetary damages he or she is entitled to receive as compensation. In the United States today, about 90 percent of all libel trials are heard before juries.

The 18th-century framers of the U.S. Constitution guaranteed freedom of the press by writing that protection into the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. Even so, the Supreme Court of the United States -- the highest court in America -- for years refused to protect the media from libel lawsuits by relying on the First Amendment. Instead, libel laws varied from state to state without a single coherent rule in the nation.

That all changed in 1964 when the Supreme Court issued a ruling that revolutionized libel law in the United States. The famous decision in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* once and for all created a national rule that squared more fully with the free press guarantees of the First

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Amendment. In its ruling, the Court decided that public officials no longer could sue successfully for libel unless reporters or editors were guilty of "actual malice" when publishing false statements about them.

And just what is malice when it comes to proving libel? Retired Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., who wrote the *Sullivan* decision, defined it as "knowledge that the [published information] was false" or that it was published "with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not." In other words, public officials no longer could sue for libel simply by proving that something that had been broadcast or printed about them was false. Now they would have to prove that a journalist had knowingly printed false information while making little, if any, attempt to distinguish truth from lies.

The Supreme Court later extended its so-called Sullivan rule to cover "public figures," meaning individuals who are not in public office but who are still newsworthy because of their prominence in the public eye. Over the years, American courts have ruled that this category includes celebrities in the entertainment field, well-known writers, athletes, and others who often attract attention in the media.

For purely private individuals, the test for proving libel is not as difficult. Although Supreme Court rulings such as the *Sullivan* decision apply everywhere in the United States, most states continue to have their own libel laws that cover private individuals. Usually those laws require that public figures who believe they have been libeled prove that a journalist has been negligent when publishing false information about them. Negligence, like malice, is a legal term that generally means carelessness on the part of a reporter or editor. Because private individuals have more reason than public officials to be left alone in the media, American libel laws recognize that they are entitled to more legal protection against false statements made about them.

Every year hundreds of libel lawsuits are filed against newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations in the United States. Typically, these cases are brought by current or former public officials, by entertainers, or by business executives who feel they have been damaged by critical media publicity -- usually accusing or suggesting that the person has engaged in unlawful, improper, or questionable activities.

In December 1990, for example, a judge on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court won a \$6 million libel verdict against the *Philadelphia Inquirer* newspaper because of a series of articles it carried in 1983 that suggested he was guilty of influence peddling. And in one of the largest libel verdicts ever reached against the media, a former district attorney from Texas named Victor Feazell was awarded \$58 million in April 1991 after a Dallas television station accused him of accepting bribes to fix drunken driving cases. "This verdict sends a message to the rest of the media to get your facts straight," Feazell said after the jury announced its verdict.

Two months later, a state district court judge not only upheld the judgment but included a provision adding a 10 percent annual interest charge to the award if the station appealed the case and lost. A settlement was reached shortly afterwards.

A jury in Chicago, Illinois, awarded businessman Robert Crinkley \$2.25 million in May 1991 because a *Wall Street Journal* article falsely linked him to bribery payments made to foreign officials. Crinkley said the newspaper story prevented him from being hired after he left his former employer. The jury agreed that he was a victim of libel even though the newspaper published a correction to its original story. The award was thrown out in September 1991 by circuit court judge Howard Miller. Miller ordered a new trial on damages after ruling that the evidence in the case was insufficient to support such a large award. Crinkley's lawyer began planning his appeal.

In these and other cases, the person bringing the libel suit has the burden of proving that he or she has been libeled. In other words, a public figure must prove that a reporter not only published false information but also did so recklessly and maliciously without attempting to determine whether it was true. Libel cases are not limited to disputes between the media and the people they cover. In July 1989, the American Express Company admitted to spreading false information about an international banker who controlled New York's Republic National Bank. When the banker's attorney threatened to sue for libel, American Express confessed to its role and agreed to donate \$8 million to charities as a settlement in the case.

Besides making distinctions between public and private figures, American courts also have ruled

that various kinds of published information are generally immune from libel charges. For example, it is almost impossible for a writer to be found guilty of libel if the writing deals with opinions rather than facts. "Under the First Amendment, there is no such thing as a false idea," the Supreme Court said in a 1974 libel ruling.

Not long ago, the owner of a restaurant in New Orleans sued a food critic for writing unflattering things about his eating establishment. Too bad, the Louisiana Supreme Court told the restaurant owner, before sending him back to his kitchen empty-handed.

More recently, Jerry Falwell, an American religious leader, sued a magazine after it published a biting satire of Falwell that mocked his piety. Indeed, a state of Virginia jury awarded Falwell \$200,000 after concluding that the magazine had inflicted "emotional distress" on the well-known clergyman. But the U.S. Supreme Court later threw out the award by explaining that satire, no matter how scathing and upsetting to its target, was protected by the First Amendment.

Floyd Abrams, a New York lawyer who specializes in representing media organizations, estimates that individuals who sue for libel win about 75 percent of the cases that end up before a jury. But the media succeed in reversing jury verdicts most of the time after they appeal to higher courts. Abrams says the reason is that jurors often do not fully understand or apply the proper legal standards that cover libel cases. As a result, it is common for media organizations to carry libel cases to intermediate appellate courts if they lose at the first stage of a trial.

In recent years, a number of American courtrooms have turned into stormy legal battlegrounds because of widely publicized libel cases that have made headlines the world over. One such case started in 1976 when the tabloid *National Enquirer* printed a small item about Carol Burnett, a popular television actress. The newspaper falsely reported that Burnett had gotten into a nasty argument with former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a restaurant in Washington.

A jury in Los Angeles eventually awarded Burnett \$1.6 million, concluding that the *National Enquirer* had never bothered to find out whether the item was true. An appellate court later reduced Burnett's libel award to \$200,000, agreeing that she had been libeled but ruling that the *Enquirer* should not be so harshly punished for its errant behavior. Still, the actress was satisfied with the result. "If they had given me only one dollar plus carfare, I'd have been happy because it was the principle," Burnett said after the case was over.

In other cases, principles have all but disappeared under an avalanche of legal tactics that sometimes turn libel trials into expensive battles that leave no clear winners.

That happened after former U.S. Army General William Westmoreland sued the CBS television network for \$120 million. Westmoreland was angry about a 1982 CBS news program that had accused him of exaggerating American military progress during the Vietnam war. After an 18-week jury trial in New York City, Westmoreland and CBS reached a private settlement that amounted to a surrender on both sides.

"In the end, the trial came to a termination as cloudy and unresolved as the Vietnam war itself," wrote Rodney Smolla, a libel expert and law professor at the College of William and Mary.

In the wake of Westmoreland's case, several legal experts have criticized the way libel matters are handled in the American legal system. Some of them blame media organizations for relying so strongly on the First Amendment's free press guarantees. Daniel Popeo, a lawyer in Washington, says that the First Amendment unfairly protects the media but not the "victims" of unfair media coverage.

Journalists respond with their own set of complaints about libel lawsuits. Yes, they say, the courts have made it difficult for most people to win libel cases. But the threat of being sued also causes many news organizations to shy away from publishing controversial stories. Large media outlets like CBS or the *New York Times* have the financial resources to battle expensive libel lawsuits. But smaller newspapers and television stations find it more difficult to afford such a costly burden.

The ongoing debate over libel has prompted at least one proposal for a new set of libel laws that would make it easier for public officials and others to prove their cases. The proposal -- drafted by a private committee of lawyers, law professors, and media representatives -- also

would eliminate large financial awards that can be assessed against media groups found guilty of libel.

Over the past quarter of a century, the courts have favored the media in libel matters, "but such victories have been hard fought and costly, absorbing millions of dollars in attorney fees and thousands of hours in lawyers' offices and courtrooms," according to Roslyn Mazer, a media lawyer in Washington.

Bruce Fein, former general counsel for the Federal Communications Commission, a U.S. government regulatory agency, is one of the lawyers who helped to draft the proposed set of libel laws. Fein says the ultimate goal is to ensure more accurate reporting by journalists so that members of the public are better informed about important public events. But he also thinks it is important that the media still have wide latitude in deciding what to publish. "In a democratic society," says Fein, "everyone has to take some lumps in the media."

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## Publications

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*An Unfettered Press*

### Minorities in Journalism

By Lolita Rhodes

"We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us...." -- from *Freedom's Journal*, the first black American newspaper, published by John Russworm. New York City, 1827.

John Russworm's observation may seem like yesterday's news. But for minority journalists, it is as timely now as when it was written in 1827.

"We need to be here to tell our story. We tell our story best," says Gregory Lewis, who covers the African American community for the *San Francisco Examiner* in California. "We need to be there in the meetings where decisions are made on how things are covered."

America prides itself on being a melting pot. But the distinct cultures and personalities of its people remain intact. Minorities in America may embrace American values, but they hold on to their own uniqueness. And minority journalists make sure that uniqueness, that perspective, is included in the media's coverage of minorities.

There are some 53,700 journalists in the United States, reports the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Of that number, 5,600 (a little over 10 percent) are minorities. A further breakdown reveals that 2,890 are African American, 1,587 are Hispanic, 983 are Asian, and 177 are American Indian.

The number of minority journalists has almost doubled since 1984, when they claimed only 2,900 positions in newsrooms, according to the National Association of Minority Media Executives. These journalists come from a variety of backgrounds. Some left the world of academics, others always knew they wanted to be journalists, and some, like Gregory Lewis, stumbled into journalism by accident.

Lewis, a North Carolina native, grew up reading five newspapers, and he was not satisfied with their coverage of black people. "My community was always obscured and distorted," says Lewis.

In the 1970s, when he was a student at Marshall College in West Virginia, Lewis had dreams of being a lawyer. But a story in the local newspaper about an organization he headed, Black United Students, changed his future.

The day the story appeared in the newspaper, a piece on black militants ran next to it. Lewis's picture, which was included with the story on Black United Students, looked instead as if it was part of the story on black militants. His group's agenda leaned toward urging the college to hire black professors, to make changes in the curriculum, and to make the campus a better place for black students.

Some members of the community responded angrily, and Lewis even received death threats. Although he thought the story on Black United Students was well-written, he questioned the newspaper's placement of it, and he met with the editor to express his displeasure. To his

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surprise, they talked freely and at length about all kinds of issues, including coverage of the black community. The editor even went so far as to offer Lewis a summer internship. But Lewis had other plans.

He later encountered another editor from the newspaper who again talked to him about working and set up an interview.

Ironically, the night before the interview, the building Lewis lived in burned. The next day he went to the interview and ended up being a source for the paper's story on the fire.

The reporter listened raptly and said: "If you can tell a story that well, you can write."

Lewis has been in journalism ever since, a craft he says he loves. Today, he still champions the rights and issues of African Americans, although he says he has mellowed with time.

"I'm more into teaching peace now," he says. Along with that, he tries to bring an awareness to the people who read his pieces. The revolution quietly continues on.

"I hope I bring a more realistic and accurate picture of what it's like to be black and live in the [San Francisco] Bay Area, to be black and live in California," says Lewis.

Often the role of the minority journalist is that of watchdog, making sure that stories about people of color are handled sensitively. Sometimes minority journalists serve as interpreters of their culture.

One black editor shared a story of how her white colleagues wanted to edit out some rap music slang in a story about rap because it was not clear to them. They totally missed the nuances of the phrases.

Lewis has had similar experiences. Once the word "griot" (which refers to an African storyteller, the keeper of knowledge in a village) was edited out of a story he wrote about African storytellers. His editors deleted the word because they were unfamiliar with it.

Diversity in the newsroom enables television stations and newspapers to be on the cutting edge, to report on trends while they are still happening. For example, Lewis, who is president of the Bay Area chapter of Black Journalists, wrote one of the early stories chronicling the rise in popularity of black activist Malcolm X and the accompanying Afrocentric paraphernalia. He remembers seeing children reading Malcolm X's autobiography, of seeing the medallions they wore, and saying, "This is a story." He was right.

Minority journalists also bring to the business their bicultural nature, which is much like that of many of the audience for whom they write.

"I am a journalist who happens to be Hispanic, but that means I have a great deal of responsibility in that I represent the Hispanic community," says Diane Alverio, a reporter for WFSB-TV in Hartford, Connecticut. She also serves as president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, which boasts some 2,000 members.

"I bring to this newsroom a very critical frame of reference. A different perspective, a different view of these communities," Alverio says. "I do educational stories. I really feel I have a deeper understanding of what the parents and children go through because I have lived through it. I come from the same background as them."

For Alverio and other Hispanic children, being Hispanic in Connecticut often meant speaking one language at home and another at school. It meant operating with different value systems in the two places. For example, the overnight camping trips that are common for white schoolchildren might not find approval in a Hispanic home.

About 20 percent of Connecticut's population is Hispanic, Alverio says. But newsrooms do not always reflect that. Alverio works constantly to bring about change. "I'm the unofficial 'equal employment opportunity' officer here," Alverio notes.

It is not simply that management is opposed to hiring more people of color, she says. "The

intent is there, but it just does not happen."

Managers such as Peter Neumann, Karla Garrett Harshaw, and Ray Marcano say they would like to see more minorities working in the newsroom.

Says Neumann, news director at WEAR, a television station in Pensacola, Florida: "The worst thing we could do is have a newsroom full of people exactly like me." Neumann is white.

"They [minorities] bring a better variety and perspective on stories, and they make us as a newsroom function better. I hope to live to see the day when there are no 'minorities,' and we just look at people as people."

Echoes Ray Marcano, news manager for sports at the *Dayton Daily News* in Ohio: "I think it's important for newsrooms to be diverse....newspapers have to be able to reflect things that go on in the whole community."

Harshaw, editor of the *Springfield News-Sun* in Ohio, is one of the few black women editors of a major daily newspaper. As a minority manager, she sees her role as making sure that all people's views, perspectives, and cultures are represented in her paper.

"It's important that we give a voice to the voiceless as a credo of journalism," Harshaw says. Religious groups and community activists, as well as people of color, need a forum.

"In addition to that, I like to think that being here helps sensitize others in the industry to issues of diversity," Harshaw says. "I think to some extent you have to become a part of the system. It's not just good enough to criticize. You also have to become a part of the solution."

Minorities in the newsroom also strengthen ties with the community at large by being a contact, a kindred spirit who understands the issues that matter to them. It also leads to better and more complete coverage.

"Many of the groups that get a lot of coverage know someone on the inside, and they are very comfortable lobbying for coverage. Often, minorities do not feel they have the same sort of access," says Harshaw. "I think that learning there is a minority on the staff or one in management makes them feel they have more access to the paper. They feel more comfortable interacting with us as an institution."

Regarding an oft-heard comment in black, Hispanic, and Asian communities that a newspaper is not covering the community fairly or effectively, Harshaw offers her perspective: "I think the lack of coverage of minorities in a community is an act of omission rather than an act of commission. Because we are not more diverse, I think there is an ignorance about these communities. Frequently, we do little to get out and establish sources, to understand what is important to those people."

Doing a thorough job of covering the black community is one thing on which *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reporter Afi-Odelia E. Scruggs prides herself.

"I'm aware by being black that there is always another version...that the official version is not always the right one," Scruggs says. "There is always another viewpoint."

It's up to her and other minority journalists to present that viewpoint to readers, she adds.

Scruggs believes journalism is her calling. "I feel I was divinely guided into journalism. I feel that my mission as a journalist is to tell the truth and to challenge the reader and myself.

"As a layperson, I am very knowledgeable about black cultural history," Scruggs points out. "That's a research interest of mine. What I bring [to the newsroom] is a depth of knowledge because of my interest in the Civil Rights era...because I lived through it."

When she was a reporter at a newspaper in Mississippi, Scruggs wrote about black cultural history and southern history. Her six-part series on the demographics of the blues, on how it went from being a black music form to one embraced largely by whites, was especially well-



received, she recalls. It was the first time the paper had taken a look at how the music was marketed and who the up-and-coming musicians were, she says.

Stories about people of color are not always so well-received, Scruggs cautions. Often, it is difficult to even get them into print.

Steven Chin, who covers Asian American affairs for the *San Francisco Examiner*, sometimes runs into the same problem, but he sees it as a challenge. Chin believes one of his roles is to serve as an educator.

"You are constantly educating people. That's what diversity is all about. Some people might look upon that as negative, but it's important that newspaper newsrooms create a culture that creates that kind of dynamic.

"One of the reasons I got into the business," Chin adds, "was to help provide a more well-rounded view of Asian Americans in the media. I never imagined having a full-time beat doing it. But I consider myself fortunate having the opportunity to do it."

Before coming to the *Examiner*, Chin was a community historian, working on an oral history project. "The experience of studying history, of working in the community, and of just being a Chinese American allows me to come in with a certain framework, a perspective and an understanding of America's racial dynamic and how it plays out with Asian Americans." Chin's Asian American beat, which was created almost four years ago, is still relatively new. At the time it was established, it was the only such beat in the country, although others soon followed, and beats that specifically cover minorities are a staple in most of today's newsrooms. Often, minority reporters are assigned to cover them. But is this always the way to go?

"I feel that any good and sensitive reporter can do an adequate job covering a beat," Chin says. But there may be some elements that are harder to grasp in certain stories, he adds, unless one has experience in "living the issues of race in America."

Ridding the media of such stereotypes is a daily part of life for WDTN television anchorperson and reporter Marsha Bonhart.

"I bring a certain amount of sensitivity," says Bonhart, who lives in Dayton, Ohio. "I like to think I make them think. I hope I serve as a conscience."

Although their numbers appear to be on the upswing, minority journalists still see the need to increase their presence in the newsroom, to increase sensitivity to their issues, and to make sure their voices are heard and that they have an opportunity to "plead their own cause."

The *Examiner's* Gregory Lewis says he looks forward to the day when his son and daughter can "practice the craft of journalism and not have to deal with the 'isms.' Racism. Ageism. Sexism."

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Lolita M. Rhodes is an editor with the Journal Newspapers in suburban Washington.

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## Publications

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*An Unfettered Press*

### Targeting an Audience

By Marilynne Rudick

A look at the magazine racks at American bookstores and newsstands is a visual reminder of the enormous changes that have taken place in the media over the past 15 years. The size of display racks has exploded. The dozens of mass circulation magazines that Americans used to read have been overshadowed by thousands of publications geared to the specialized interests of readers.

Business and computer enthusiasts, for example, have *PC* and *Byte*. Those with home-based businesses can choose *Home PC* and *Home Computing*. Executives have *Fortune*, *Success*, and *Money*, as well as *Chief Executive*, *Government Executive*, *Black Entrepreneur*, and many more.

There are publications for almost every conceivable occupation and job specialty, as well as most leisure activities.

The focus on smaller niche audiences is not limited to magazines. It cuts across all media, including newsletters, newspapers, and broadcasting.

The American media trend toward serving special interests began about 15 years ago and took its cue from retailing. Instead of doing all their shopping in a large department store, American consumers began to shop at boutiques that offered specialized merchandise and knowledgeable sales personnel, says Torie Clark, vice president of public affairs at the National Cable Television Association (NCTA). The trend spilled over into the media, which began catering to the specialized information and entertainment appetites of American consumers.

In the magazine industry, says John Griffin, president of the Magazine Division at Rodale Press, Inc., niche publishing was a response to reader demand. The result was an information explosion resulting in thousands of new publications. In 1992 alone, almost 700 new magazines were introduced, according to the writer's handbook, *Writer's Digest*. Much of this growth was in magazines targeted toward lifestyle, parenting, fitness, food, and shelter.

But Rodale, one of the oldest and most successful magazine niche publishers, came about not because readers were clamoring for information, but because of the personal philosophy of the company's founder, J.I. Rodale. The company, which now publishes 10 health, fitness, and lifestyle magazines, grew out of Rodale's belief that American agricultural practices, which relied heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, were harmful. To put forth his philosophy of organic farming, J.I. Rodale launched *Organic Farming and Gardening* in 1942. *Prevention* magazine, started in 1950, expanded on his philosophy of healthy living by telling people how to stay well.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when America's enthusiasm for natural and healthy living caught up with Rodale's philosophy, the company had already been established as a leader in the field of healthy living, explains Liz Reap, assistant magazine publicist for Rodale. The company broadened its niche to include a focus on active sports. It began developing new magazines and acquiring ones such as *Bicycling*, *Mountain Bike*, *Runner's World*, *Back Packer*, and *Scuba Diving*.

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In health, it expanded beyond *Prevention*, by launching *Men's Health*, then *Heart and Soul*, geared to the health concerns of African Americans. Because Rodale is so knowledgeable about health and fitness, it could see that there were holes in the market, explains Reap. For example, while there were many traditional men's magazines such as *Playboy*, *Esquire*, and *GQ (Gentlemen's Quarterly)*, no one was addressing the health needs of men. Launched in 1986, *Men's Health* quickly took off, growing to 1 million circulation in 1994.

And newsletters can be even more targeted than magazines. While Rodale's *Backpacker* profitably targets 140,000 enthusiasts, a newsletter might target 1,000 backpack equipment manufacturers. There is scarcely an industry that has not spawned a newsletter, says Rebecca Evans of the Newsletter Publishers Association, whose organization includes 700 members who each publish from 1 to 60 newsletters. Each new trend seems to translate into a flurry of new newsletters. Current hot topics are on-line technology, the information superhighway, and health care reform. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) resulted in a host of new newsletters, says Evans.

Quick to jump on new trends is Phillips Publishing International, Inc., the largest newsletter publisher in the United States. Over the past 20 years, it has grown from a home-based business producing two newsletters to a virtual publishing empire of more than 60 newsletters. Started by Tom Phillips on a shoe-string -- \$1,000 -- it now has yearly revenues of over \$140 million.

Phillips's consumer newsletters focus on health and finance. For annual subscription fees of between \$40 and \$100, it offers monthly issues of newsletters such as *Health and Healing*, which emphasizes natural healing, and *Cardiac Alert*, which details advances in cardiac disease research and prevention. A group of financial newsletters includes *Straight Talk on Your Money*, featuring practical advice on everyday money concerns.

Subscribers to its consumer newsletters tend to be "those who take an active interest in their health or financial well-being. When they have a problem, they tend to seek help," explains Thomas Callahan, Phillips's public relations assistant.

Phillips's business newsletters, geared to senior executives, cover virtually every aspect of the telecommunications, banking, aviation, defense, and energy industries. The company's communications industry newsletters include *Mobile Phone News*, *Satellite News*, *Video Marketing News*, and *Fiber Optics News*. For the banking industry, it offers *Banking Automation News* and *Credit Risk Management Report*. The defense and aviation industries are served by newsletters such as *Defense Daily*, *Space Exploration Technology*, and *Air Safety Week*. Energy industry offerings include *Oil and Gas World* and *Petromoney*.

Busy executives pay between \$200 to \$800 a year for these highly focused newsletters, which may be published as infrequently as once a month or as frequently as daily. One of Phillips's newsletters, *Cablefax*, is delivered daily by facsimile technology.

Executives are willing to pay a high price, says Callahan, because the newsletters provide crucial information in a very accessible way. "An executive in the fiber optics industry isn't going to find the information he or she needs from mainstream publications. Our subscribers get it quickly, and it doesn't take much time to absorb....It's geared to somebody who does not have the time to pour over lengthy feature articles in a magazine. It provides the facts in a half-page or one-page article. It tells readers what effect the story situation has on their business."

Newsletters also appeal to subscribers because they normally are not advertiser supported. "It's not biased by who advertises," says Callahan.

Sandwiched into the media mix between magazines and newsletters are special interest newspapers. Supported by advertisers as well as subscribers, they are larger than a typical newsletter of 4 to 10 pages and have a shorter production timetable than magazines. While some niche newspapers are industry based (such as *Variety*, the daily newspaper of the entertainment industry), many are local or regional in nature. A growing number are city or regional lifestyle newspapers that offer alternative points of view to a mass market daily newspaper. Others are sports oriented, targeted toward specific sports such as stock car racing, or to supporters of local sports teams.

A growing group of specialty newspapers target the local business community, such as the 27

business weeklies published by American City Business Journals.

These business journals differ from national business newspapers and the business sections of city newspapers in focus. "We target small and medium-sized businesses, specifically people who own their own business," explains Bob Menaker, managing editor of the *Washington Business Journal*, owned by American City. "We try to cover what the *Washington Post* (Washington's mass circulation daily) does, but we cover it in a different way. We cover niches that the *Post* can't bother to get into -- such as who got what contract, who has been promoted, moved, or transferred....We see ourselves as a business resource....In every article, we ask ourselves, 'How can we help our reader?' "

Readers respond well to local business newspapers, says Whitney Shaw, vice president of American City Business Journals. "Most major markets now have a local business journal. It is an industry that was born maybe 15 years ago and is still growing rapidly."

While offering targeted information to readers, niche newspapers offer up a highly specialized and targeted audience for advertisers. "Advertisers love it," says Shaw. A computer firm, for example, that supplies office management software can be sure of reaching the small businesses it targets. "It's easier for advertisers to embrace the concept of target marketing instead of the scatter-shot approach (of advertising in a mass market publication), where they wonder, 'Am I reaching my audience? Am I paying for thousands of readers who I don't care about reaching?'"

The trend toward targeting special interest audiences is not limited to print media. The electronic media, particularly cable television, has embraced the concept of targeted programming -- a concept it calls narrowcasting, to distinguish it from television networks that broadcast to mass audiences. In the case of cable TV, narrowcasting was partially fueled by technological breakthroughs -- satellite technology that facilitated program delivery and increased the channel capacity of cable systems. Program entrepreneurs rushed to fill the newly created channels. Modern cable systems now deliver between 40 to 50 channels, and the technology promises a future where 500 channels, of entertainment and information are possible.

This technological revolution came about at the same time that program executives were finding that "not everybody is interested in the same 10 broad categories" of programming, but that "a lot of people might be interested in a particular category," for instance sports, food, fitness, or public affairs, says NCTA's Torie Clark.

Since the late 1970s, when the first cable entrepreneurs began offering movies and sports events on dedicated channels, program networks have targeted virtually every special interest. A cable subscriber, who typically pays \$30 a month, gets a package that includes about 40 channels of specialized programming from some 100 program networks now available. (Subscriber revenue supports 35 percent of the program costs; advertiser fees, 65 percent.) A typical cable system might offer its subscribers the following:

- ESPN: a mix of live sports events, a sports news program, and lifestyle and fitness programming. A second sports channel, ESPN 2, targets a younger audience (18- to 34-year-old males) and entices them with sports such as volleyball, surfing, and skydiving.
- BET, Black Entertainment Television network: movies, sports, family programs, talk shows, news, and information targeted toward African Americans.
- CNN, Cable News Network: 24 hours of news programming, including analysis and talk shows, and a second channel of briefer, "headline" news.
- C-SPAN 1 and 2: two public affairs channels that feature live coverage of the U.S. Congress and related hearings and programs.
- GALAVISION: Spanish-language movies, novellas, sports, news, and children's programming.
- LIFETIME: programming geared to women.
- MTV: a music video channel targeted to a teenage audience.
- SCI FI Channel: movies and TV series featuring science fiction and fantasy.
- COURT ROOM TV: live coverage of public trials and related programming on legal issues.
- A & E, Arts and Entertainment network: featuring arts, mysteries, and biography series.

Filling in the program mix are a glut of competing movie channels, a variety of home shopping networks that allow viewers to order merchandise by telephone, and a host of regional and local sports channels.

These existing services face fierce competition from programmers clamoring for channel space for newly conceived channels that focus, among other things, on golf, fitness and health, game shows, history, fashions, and home and garden programming.

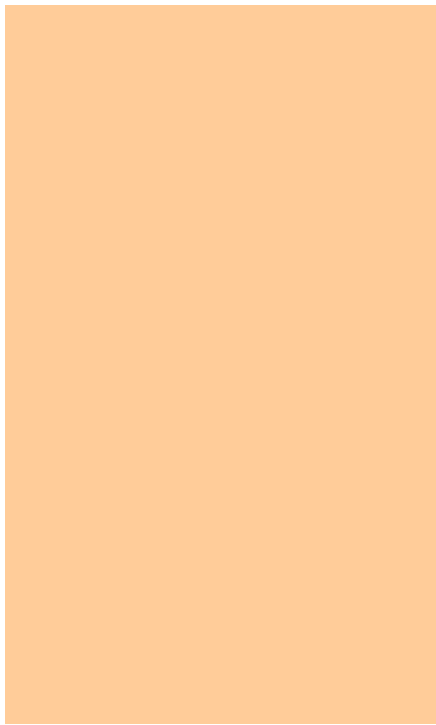
TV viewers have responded enthusiastically to the concept of narrowcasting. In 1983 and 1984, when narrowcasting was in its infancy, mass-market broadcast networks were watched by 69 percent of American TV viewers, and cable only 3 percent. By 1993, cable had captured 30 percent of the audience, reducing the audience for broadcast network TV to 53 percent.

In general, says Clark, subscribers feel the money they spend for cable programming is well spent. "People feel if it's a topic they are particularly interested in, that they are getting their money's worth."

Whether called niche publishing or narrowcasting, the concept of targeting specialized interests has changed the landscape of American media. "People have a limited amount of time that they are going to spend on information. If you identify areas of information that matter to people, they are willing to pay for it," observes Whitney Shaw.

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Marilynne Rudick is a Washington-based free-lance writer.



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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The Electronic Media

By Christopher Sterling

The first experimental broadcast stations operated in the United States in the years prior to World War I. They had sporadic schedules of but a few hours a week. The first broadcast in the world was probably done by Reginald Fessenden in 1906 from a transmitter south of Boston, Massachusetts.

AM (or medium wave) radio broadcasting began on a regular basis in late 1920, when several stations first went on the air, primarily to sell radio receivers (the first stations were owned by major electrical manufacturers). In 1922, the number of stations shot up from about 30 to more than 500 -- with 30 to more than 500, with no overall supervision or regulation about access to spectrum. The public craze for radio dates to this time. Only after much pressure from radio operators did the U.S. Congress finally agree to set up a regulatory scheme to license stations in 1927.

Until 1941, broadcasting consisted only of AM stations and networks. In 1926 to 1928, both the CBS and NBC networks began operation, rapidly establishing the pattern of advertising-supported entertainment programs that still characterizes the American system of electronic media.

Just before the United States entered World War II (December 1941), FM (or VHF) radio and television broadcasting was approved for regular operation. Only a few stations of either service got on the air before a wartime freeze on most civilian construction, which lasted until 1946.

From 1945 to 1952, the industry and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grappled with allocation problems for FM and television, and getting both services up and running. FM was moved from its old allocation to the present 88-108 MHz in 1945.

Television networks owned by ABC, CBS, and NBC began regular operation in 1948. Then, just as the public's appetite for television was at its height, the FCC had to suspend accepting applications for new television stations from 1948 until 1952, while crucial decisions were made to add UHF frequencies (to the 12 VHF channels already in use) to allow more television stations in more communities and to reserve some frequencies for noncommercial TV stations. In a parallel proceeding, color television standards were issued late in 1953 (though color was not commercially important until the late 1960s).

The number of stations on the air grew slowly after 1952 as both television and AM expanded. For much of that decade, FM radio stagnated due to lack of original programming, limited numbers of receivers, and almost total disinterest in the secondary radio service by advertisers because of tiny audiences. Only after 1958 did the number of FM radio stations begin to climb as interest in high-fidelity sound aided its expansion, which was pushed further by agreement on FM stereo standards early in 1961 and requirements after the mid-1960s that most FM stations program differently from co-owned AM operations. That gave the medium an identity of its own for the first time, and by 1979, more people listened to FM than AM. A decade later, three quarters of all radio listening was to FM stations.

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Competition for broadcasting was slow in developing. The first community antenna television (CATV, now usually called cable) systems began operation in the Rocky Mountains and in the Appalachians, where small towns could not get signals from distant markets and were too small to support stations on their own. Only a tiny proportion of Americans were "on cable" until well into the 1970s.

In 1975 came two separate developments that would show the way to a more competitive future in electronic media. Sony placed the first Betamax VCRs on sale, and Home Box Office, a pay-cable service, announced plans to begin use of a domestic communications satellite (domsat) transponder to deliver its signal across the nation.

Fifteen years later, two-thirds of all American households had VCRs and could "time-shift" their viewing, about 60 percent had "basic" cable television service (that supported by advertising), about 30 percent subscribed to one or more pay cable networks, and virtually all national electronic media program services were distributed to stations and cable systems by means of domsats.

Cable program networks expanded rapidly after the late 1970s, with Cable News Network (CNN) and others beginning operation by 1980. At the same time, the number of noncommercial and independent (of network affiliation) stations grew, giving viewers more choice of programming.

Where the networks dominated prime time viewing (usually between 7 and 11 p.m.), controlling about 90 percent of those watching television in 1980, a decade later their share of the TV audience had dwindled to between 55 and 60 percent. The audience was making increasing use of competitive cable services, rental movies for their VCRs, and independent or noncommercial broadcast stations.

Broadcasting in America is based on a system of privately owned local radio and television stations and cable television systems. While these outlets are widely diversified in their ownership, nearly all subscribe (contract for) one or more national program services or networks.

In round numbers, there are nearly 12,000 broadcast stations in the country -- more than 5,000 AM and 5,000 FM stations -- and nearly 1,500 television stations. Major markets often have 30 or more radio stations and five to seven television stations.

Federal regulation allows any company or individual to control up to 12 AM, 12 FM, and 12 television stations, no more than one of each kind in a given market. There are no ownership limits on the number of cable systems or subscribers one company can control. Telephone companies are not allowed to own cable systems where they also provide telephone service, a limitation presently under attack by the telephone industry. One owner cannot control a television station and cable service in the same marketplace.

Most television stations sign a contract with a national network in order to carry its programs. Fewer radio stations are network affiliates.

There are four major television broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox), which each owns a few stations in large markets (called O&Os, for owned-and-operated) and is affiliated by contract with about 200 other stations across the country.

There is no ownership connection between the networks -- they are held independently of one another. Network programs are beamed to O&O and affiliate stations by means of satellites. The broadcast networks (except Fox) each operate news divisions that present daily newscasts and specials. Entertainment programming is leased from independent companies.

There are nearly 60 cable networks, all of which are distributed nationally by means of domestic satellite transponders that beam signals to the "headends" of cable systems for distribution to homes. Of these networks, a few are pay networks (Home Box Office, owned by Time Warner, is the oldest and largest), where viewers subscribe by paying a monthly fee averaging nearly \$10 to \$50 a month. The rest are advertiser-supported services such as Turner Broadcasting System, the Discovery Network, and the USA Network.

Many cable networks are very specialized -- in comedy, weather forecasts, business news. More services are announced all the time.

Dozens of radio networks -- most of them music services -- deliver programming by satellite or mailed recordings. A few provide regular news services.

Broadcasting and most cable services in America are supported by the sale of advertising time. Of all advertising dollars spent each year, television takes about 22 percent and radio another 7 percent. Cable advertising is negligible thus far -- perhaps 1 percent of the total. For comparison, newspapers account for about 29 percent of all advertising dollars. The largest portion of broadcast advertising revenue comes from sales to local advertisers.

Most commercial television stations devote between 10 and 12 minutes per hour to advertising, usually less in prime-time hours. Radio stations carry more advertising -- often 18 to 20 minutes per hour. Cable advertising is relatively undeveloped thus far.

The electronic media industries are not large. About 100,000 people work directly in radio or television broadcasting, mostly for local television stations. The typical radio station may have just two or three employees in small markets and up to several dozen in bigger cities. Increasing use of automation has cut the size of station staffs.

Television outlets have anywhere from 25 to several hundred employees. Cable systems have many employees in customer relations and repair, but only a few are needed in technical operation and program categories.

Most of this article deals with commercial broadcasting, since that is the most widely available and most listened to service. But there is an alternative service in both radio and television -- noncommercial service.

The first noncommercial radio stations went on the air in the 1920s (and, experimentally, even earlier). Many school systems and universities operated stations -- but most had given up their licenses by the early 1930s under financial pressure, lack of sure need for the facilities, and demands for their frequencies from commercial operators. By the end of World War II, there were only about 25 AM educational stations on the air.

When the FCC approved FM radio on its present spectrum in 1945, it set aside the lowest 20 channels for noncommercial operation.

Beginning in the late 1940s, and growing steadily ever since, the noncommercial radio industry had expanded to some 1,400 outlets by 1990.

Key to that expansion was a rising federal government funding role. Prior to 1963, there was no federal funding for noncommercial radio. The chief national supporter, through grants, was the Ford Foundation. Formation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967 and its creation of National Public Radio (NPR) a year later gave the noncommercial stations their first nationwide identity.

Noncommercial television stations lacked reserved channels until 1952 and got them then only after several years of government debate over the idea. The first stations, mainly on the UHF band, went on the air in 1953 and 1954. Early years saw the slow growth of stations, usually for lack of financing. Well into the 1970s, many major U.S. cities and some whole states lacked even one noncommercial station.

As with radio, Ford Foundation funding was central to the survival of the pioneering noncommercial stations, most of which were run by universities or community organizations.

The creation of CPB and its formation of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) helped give the scattered noncommercial television stations a national identity. Increased federal funding and those national programs pushed the number of noncommercial stations to well over 300 by 1990. Several states operate networks of public TV stations, enabling statewide coverage of important events.

Until recently, about half of all money helping to support the noncommercial stations and networks came from taxes -- federal funds through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or state taxes in support of stations in that state. Tax support by 1990 amounted to under 40 percent of total revenues. The remainder comes from businesses providing program grants

(called underwriting), individual donations, foundations, and other sources.

Public broadcasters agree that their chief problem is and always has been to raise sufficient money to operate. They note that public radio and television in the United States operate with a fraction of the revenue of commercial broadcasting. Some critics have suggested that the lack of a clear agreement on the role of a noncommercial service in the largely commercial American system is at the heart of the continuing quest for funds.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the two network operations, National Public Radio for radio and the Public Broadcasting Service for television, largely represent noncommercial broadcasting in the Washington policy arena. NPR connects some 250 noncommercial radio stations -- the larger and better-financed outlets. It provides popular news programs in the early evening and weekday mornings. NPR produces much of what it provides to stations.

On the other hand, PBS only operates the interconnection of the television network. All PBS programs are produced by a few major public TV stations (such as those in Boston, New York, San Francisco, and Washington), overseas broadcast systems (especially those in Britain), and independent producers. Through a complicated "Station Program Cooperative" voting process each year, PBS member stations vote their support dollars for programs they want.

Proponents of public service broadcasting have argued for years that only noncommercial stations can offer the culture, education, and other programs to balance the largely entertainment fare offered by the networks and cable.

Critics say that as the number of channels received in most houses increases, and as VCR ownership surges past two-thirds of all American homes, noncommercial broadcasting is too expensive to continue to support. Those who desire such programs can receive them less expensively by means of videotapes or other methods, while the channels now held by noncommercial stations could be put to far more efficient use by others.

The development of children's, science, and other specialized cable networks has only added pressure on noncommercial broadcasters to justify why they should continue to enjoy reserved channels and other exemptions from rules that apply to other broadcasters.

The chief and continuing problem for the electronic media generally is the appetite of stations and channels for program material. The entertainment programming that occupies most network time (and makes up the majority of syndicated programming) is produced by independent companies, most based in southern California.

Prime time is the most important competitive showcase for television network programming and is largely devoted to comedy and drama programs. Schedules are set early each year to begin the new TV season in September. Unsuccessful programs (those with low ratings) are replaced throughout the year as needed.

Local network affiliates simply carry network programming in prime time and many daytime hours. Remaining time is nearly all filled with other entertainment programming (chiefly game shows and reruns of network material) offered to stations on a syndicated basis (the station buys the rights to air a program two or three times over a given period, usually exclusive rights for that city).

Virtually no television entertainment programming is produced locally -- it is far too expensive.

The vast majority of radio programming consists of various types of recorded popular music. In major cities, some stations emphasize news and talk formats, but most exist to play records and provide short newscasts -- and lots of advertisements! Radio networks were important until the 1950s, when television competition killed them off. In recent years, use of satellites to distribute radio program formats has revived some degree of national programming.

Some surveys suggest that most Americans get most of their news (especially national and international coverage) from television. With the rise of CNN and other cable information services, this may be even more true. Many Americans get their view of the world from five-minute radio newscasts or short items on network or local station programs.

News is popular with audiences and advertisers. The evening network half-hour newscasts get

most of the news viewership. In recent years, CNN's two news networks have become something of a viewing habit with many Americans, given their 24-hour availability in homes that have cable television.

Other serious information programming -- interviews, public affairs programs, documentaries -- are in decline because audiences are small.

The content of all these programs is largely determined by the networks (or local stations for their own local evening newscasts -- major attractions for advertisers and audiences). National news agencies provide considerable input, but most American networks have their own reporters and use stringers in more remote areas.

Certainly the best-known American television program for children is "Sesame Street," a product of the Children's Television Workshop in New York, which first aired on public television in 1969. "Big Bird," "Kermit the Frog," and other characters are known around the world in various national versions of this highly successful combination of live action, animation, and lessons.

The television networks all reach children Saturday mornings with action-adventure cartoons.

Professional and college football is the most popular continuing sports coverage on television. Radio and television also present hours of baseball and basketball coverage, with less time given to other sports. The general public also gets very interested in Olympic coverage. There is some evidence (falling audience ratings) that audiences may have reached the saturation point with certain sports coverage.

Since about 1930, ever-better means of researching and reporting audience listening and viewing habits have had a major impact on program trends. A.C. Nielsen (a division of Dun & Bradstreet) and Arbitron (part of Control Data Corporation) are the major national ratings firms. Nielsen reports network and local market TV ratings, while Arbitron reports local market television and radio ratings. There is no ownership connection between these companies and any broadcasting entity.

Ratings are gathered because advertisers need to know who and how many are watching programs -- this information being crucial in deciding which media to "buy" for a given product. Broadcasters (and increasingly cable networks) "sell" audiences to advertisers, using ratings to measure their reach -- how many of the potential audience are in the actual audience.

Ratings are based on the principle of sampling. For example, Nielsen draws its national ratings from a sample of about 4,000 homes scientifically selected to represent various geographic regions of the country, along with different economic and social groups. These ratings are said to be a fair representation of national listening patterns, plus or minus about 3 percent.

Ratings are gathered by different methods. Most recent -- and controversial -- is the use of the people meter, a device requiring viewers to punch in on a remote control device when prompted by a computer in their receiver.

Older methods include telephone surveys of various kinds and keeping paper diaries of listening or watching activity over a week or so.

In the United States, the electronic media play a vital role in the election campaigns for both local and national office. Television time is expensive and makes up the largest portion of election campaign budgets.

It is now traditional (but certainly not required) for presidential candidates to debate one another on television a few times during the campaign. These "debates" are usually in the form of candidates answering questions rather than directly arguing with one another.

The media in the United States and elsewhere are also said to have an agenda-setting effect on listeners. If the media cover a given event or problem area, then surveys show that most viewers more readily think of that issue as a serious matter.

Two provisions of the American Constitution govern the regulation of communications. The

Commerce Clause (Article I, Section 8) gives Congress the right to regulate commerce between and among the states and between the states and foreign countries. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the press. From these two precedents, both over 200 years old, comes all governmental activity in communication.

Congress first passed laws regulating wireless in 1910 and 1912. Only in 1927 was the first law passed specifically to regulate the licensing of broadcasting stations. That law created the all-important "public interest, convenience, and necessity" (PICON) standard by which licensing and other regulatory decisions are judged.

Congress felt broadcasting needed regulation, in part because the industry itself had requested it to reduce interference on the air, but also because there was (and is) insufficient spectrum to accommodate all who wish to broadcast. Further, the electromagnetic spectrum is held to be a natural public resource, and thus government oversees its use by licensing services needing spectrum.

In 1934, Congress passed the more comprehensive Communications Act, which brought telephone and broadcasting regulation under one agency and which still governs federal regulatory policy, though it has been amended several times since. That law continued the "PICON" standard and established the FCC.

The Federal Communications Commission consists of five commissioners who are appointed by the president and approved by the U.S. Senate, and some 1,800 civil servants who provide the legal, engineering, and economic expertise required to regulate modern telecommunications. The FCC's annual budget is about \$110 million, relatively small by federal government standards. The FCC's Mass Media Bureau of some 300 people oversees broadcasting. Its chief function is to license stations.

Broadcast stations are licensed for seven years (radio) or five years (television), and these licenses may be and usually are renewed time and again. The licensing of services is the single most important function of the FCC. Cable systems, on the other hand, are franchised by local communities, and there is little federal regulation of cable.

The FCC has the authority (delegated by Congress) to set technical standards for telecommunication services. Until the early 1980s, companies and industry groups would test competing systems for a given standard and would recommend a standard to the FCC which would usually then approve (mandate) that standard. The standards for black-and-white and color television (the NTSC system) and stereo FM were derived in this fashion.

With its decision on AM stereo broadcasting in early 1982, the FCC moved away from that approach, leaving it to the undefined "marketplace" to decide on a specific standard. The very limited success of AM stereo suggests that the marketplace approach does not work well in this case.

There is little regulation of programming in America. The primary reason for this is the First Amendment to the Constitution. There are federal limits on the use of obscene program materials, and there are requirements on access by candidates for political office.

Otherwise, the amount and type of programming provided by stations and cable systems are a matter of managerial choice, not government fiat. Most particularly, there is no government control over the broadcasting of news and public affairs programs.

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## Publications

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*An Unfettered Press*

### The Sweet Sound of Conflict

By Rona Mendelsohn

Every weekday night at 11:30, America tunes in to one of its premier television news shows, "Nightline." Presided over by Edward (Ted) Koppel, the half-hour program on the American Broadcasting Company's (ABC) television network has an average audience of six or seven million -- a huge number for a show that is broadcast at an hour when most people are in bed.

Yet many remain awake across the United States to watch Koppel, who is based in Washington, conduct his live, unedited interviews -- frequently with people who hold opposing views.

"Ideas must be able to conflict with one another," Koppel explains. "Our system of government works best when conflicting ideas have a chance to be heard. When people of totally different viewpoints argue with one another, out of that process of debate comes intelligent government."

Koppel not only interviews some of America's most prominent political figures, he also, on occasion, moves his entire show abroad. In 1985, for example, Koppel spent a week in South Africa. There, in what *Newsweek* magazine described as "an historic moment," he was able to get South Africa's then minister of foreign affairs, Roelof F. Botha, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak to each other, although indirectly through television monitors. In 1988, Koppel broadcast five nights of shows from Jerusalem. These included live interviews with then Israeli minister of foreign affairs Shimon Peres and, by satellite, with Palestine Liberation Organization spokesperson Bassan Abu Sharif.

Koppel defines the difference between his television news program and other commercial television broadcasts as one of concentration. "We devote a half hour of time to one issue," he says, "which gives us an opportunity to focus a little more attention on it." This intensity of focus contrasts with the widespread dissemination of news that is characteristic of his competitors.

Without censorship or central control, television broadcasting competes with all other media to inform an American public bombarded with news. "If you were just dropped into New York City or Washington from some other country, and no one had given you any kind of briefing or background on what to expect, you would feel disoriented," Koppel comments. "There is information coming at you from every corridor. I have often been amused to think of what it must be like to be an intelligence operative from another country here in the United States, because your problem is not finding information -- your problem is sifting through all the information and determining which is accurate and which is not."

What American television does well is to bring people up to date "very efficiently," says Koppel. "Business people, actors, politicians, statesmen, and diplomats all know that if they want to reach a large number of American people, they will reach them best, or at least most quickly, through television -- and reach the largest number."

Koppel notes that in every city in the United States where cable TV (stations that transmit via cable rather than the airwaves) is available, viewers can choose from as many as 30 to 40

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different programs presented simultaneously 24 hours a day. The problem for viewers is overcoming this "information saturation," he points out.

Koppel's award-winning program sometimes breaks the news, conducting investigative journalism that may well appear later in America's newspapers. "My job really is to try to look beyond what my guests are trying to sell and see if that is a legitimate line or if there is something there that warrants further investigation."

The realm of investigation that Koppel roams is broad. He interviewed former U.S. national security adviser Robert McFarlane about money provided to the Nicaraguan contra forces. And in another program, he reviewed the arguments that were to be presented to the U.S. Supreme Court on whether a murderer with mental retardation should be given the death penalty.

"The level of independence, at different times and for different news organs, is extraordinary," Koppel says about the U.S. media. "It does not exist anywhere else to the degree that it does here in the United States."

Of course, the government makes its case as best it can. According to Koppel: "There are a dozen things that are being done every single day by different branches of government to try to put the proper 'spin' on the story or to present the story in such a way that it reflects best on the government. Or, if there is a negative story, to release it so close to our deadline that we do not have time then to check with other people who might have conflicting versions."

These subtle attempts to shape the news often fail, Koppel says. "In commercial television, the pressures on us are not political pressures, they are economic pressures," he explains. On commercial television in the United States (as distinguished from public, government-assisted television), advertisers buy time to promote their products during commercial breaks in the programs. If, for instance, these advertisers find that "Nightline's" audience is declining, they may take their advertising dollars elsewhere. Koppel therefore feels a responsibility to entertain his audience occasionally, as well as keep his viewers informed.

"Sometimes you do programs that are not terribly important but are entertaining." On a day without a major story, Koppel does not mind using a pre-recorded program featuring, for example, popular musicians such as guitarist B.B. King and jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

And sometimes a particular story turns up that both informs and entertains. In 1987 and 1988, for example, "Nightline" ran 11 shows on scandal-plagued television evangelists Jim and Tammy Bakker. When both Bakkers appeared together on "Nightline," the show got the highest ratings in its history.

Koppel considers it a "gift to 'Nightline' every once in a while to have a story like this, because it meets all the criteria: Millions of people wanted to watch, yes, but it was also legitimate news at the time."

Koppel majored in speech at Syracuse University in New York State and received a master's degree in journalism from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

He began his journalistic career as a writer-reporter for a New York radio station in 1963. In 1966, Koppel moved to ABC-TV, where his major stories included the Vietnam war and Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign. He was ABC's Hong Kong bureau chief from 1969 to 1971 and its chief diplomatic correspondent from 1971 to 1980. He left the network for a year, in 1976, to care for his children while his wife, Grace Anne Dorney, attended law school. During that year, he did radio broadcasts from home, anchored the network's Saturday night television news, and co-wrote a spy novel with a fellow journalist.

In 1979, Koppel hosted "The Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage," the show that was a precursor to "Nightline." "Nightline" became permanent in March 1980.

Koppel does not recommend that aspiring journalists study journalism. Instead, he says, they need to know something in depth, be it economics, philosophy, history, art, or music.

"It does not really make any difference because, basically, this is a trade. It is not an academic skill," Koppel says. "The skill lies in the ability to absorb information and translate it into a simpler, easier-to-understand form. It lies in taking arcane or complex information from a

particular field and making it understandable to a mass audience. Television is, for the moment at least, the ultimate mass medium."

Koppel views himself as an eyewitness and a "marginal participant" in "all the important stories of my time." He knows that his influence and power are ephemeral. The power that the press in general, and reporters in particular, have is built on trust, he believes. "We have influence only for so long as our viewing public believes that we are not using it for our own ends. The minute that the viewers of my own program begin to believe that I have an agenda, that I am trying to achieve something, that I am trying to push them in one direction or another, then my influence is gone. My influence paradoxically rests in the perception of the viewer that I am not using it."

Koppel has a wide-ranging audience. Although some of his viewers are highly literate, educated, and affluent, Koppel is aware that less-privileged groups also watch his program.

Appealing as he does to a disparate audience, Koppel feels an obligation not only to pose hard questions to those who appear on his show, but also to be "kind of a representative of the viewer," he says. His object is to have the viewer identify with him when he is conducting an interview and thus to set personal opinions aside. His politics are never revealed on television, but *Life* magazine has reported that Koppel is a registered independent (not officially affiliated with any political party), and he always votes.

Although Koppel has been in the media since his school days, he finds that the news is never predictable. Relishing the randomness of each day's events, Koppel thrives on spontaneity. He never prepares in advance the questions he will ask his guests, preferring to respond to their reactions to the five- to seven-minute introductory video report on his show.

His advantage is that he can see his guests on a TV monitor (guests rarely appear face-to-face), but guests can only hear Koppel through an earpiece. They respond solely to Koppel's disembodied voice in their ear.

"The purpose of putting them in that electronic isolation is not to give me an advantage over them," Koppel says. "It is the only way that 'Nightline' can be done." Treasuring his staff's ability to put him in touch electronically with possible guests from anywhere in the world, Koppel is happy to work in an environment where "there has never been a day when I know with whom I am going to be meeting. I only know it is going to be the most interesting person who has anything to say on the most interesting subject of the day."

Having had the opportunity to interview most of the important political figures of his time, Koppel still looks forward to putting some of those he has missed on the air. He wants to talk with Pope John Paul II. He also hopes to have Cuban leader Fidel Castro on his program. His enthusiasm is unrestrained.

"The wonderful thing about this job is that I will never run out of people to interview," Koppel says. "There is no such thing as saying, 'I've got them all now,' because there is always someone new who comes along."

Did any of his subjects make a particular impression? One who did is former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who, says Koppel, "has a first-class mind. A half hour with him gives me a better insight into a foreign policy question than hours with others."

Koppel, like Kissinger, was born outside the United States -- in Koppel's case, Lancashire, England. In 1953, at the age of 13, Koppel emigrated to the United States with his parents; he subsequently became a U.S. citizen. His parents believed that in America there would be opportunities for him, Koppel recalls. And indeed there were!

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*An Unfettered Press*

### The Business of Radio Broadcasting

By Richard Schroeder

It is only 8:30 on Monday morning, and Mary Kinney already has a busy day planned. Kinney, an American radio advertising executive, is preparing for a morning meeting at the local power company, which is using the radio station Kinney works for to run a promotional advertising display at a home and garden show.

Kinney has worked on the joint promotion for two months, planning prize giveaways and cooking demonstrations (the power company sells natural gas used in home ovens and stoves). In return, it will buy advertisements on her radio station, WMJQ, the largest FM station in the city of Buffalo, on the U.S.-Canadian border in New York State, about 640 kilometers northwest of New York City.

As soon as Kinney is finished at the power company, she will run to a meeting with executives of a Canadian bedding retailer that is about to open its first store in Buffalo, an industrial city in a metropolitan region of 1 million residents. Kinney has only two weeks to arrange a promotion for the grand opening, which will include a day of radio broadcasts from the store. She hopes to land a lucrative advertising contract with the bedding company.

While Kinney prepares for the day's appointments, her station is broadcasting rock music, interspersed with commercials for local furniture, food, and department stores, to some 250,000 listeners. Down the hall, WBEN, the largest AM radio broadcaster in Buffalo and WMJQ's sister station, is giving 200,000 or more listeners their morning ration of local, national, and international news, sports scores, weather forecasts, and reports from its own helicopter on local traffic tie-ups. Every three or four minutes, the station airs an advertisement, usually 60 seconds long, for a local bank, supermarket, car dealership, or insurance company.

The two stations broadcast round-the-clock, 365 days each year. Broadcasts reach listeners throughout the western half of New York State, northern Pennsylvania, and across the border into southern Ontario, Canada. The fuel that keeps the studios operating, maintains the radio towers, pays 50 employees, and provides a profit for the owner is advertising. Without the money paid by advertisers who use radio ads to sell goods and services, the station would not operate for five minutes.

"Ninety-eight percent of our revenue comes from advertising; that's what carries everything," says Larry Levite, president and owner of Algonquin Communications, which operates the two stations.

"We are an unusual type of business in that we have two sets of clients," he adds. "Without the advertisers, you are out of business; without the listeners, you are out of business. So we have to take care of both of them and keep both happy. Sometimes it goes in two different directions: What keeps one set happy does not keep the others happy. Some listeners do not like commercials, but without commercials, I could not provide the other services that listeners want. Without commercials, I could not have a 24-hour news department or contests and games. The advertisers pay for that."

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Neither side comes out on top in this equation, Levite says. Because Algonquin's stations compete with other radio outlets, television stations, and newspapers for business from advertisers, it has to show that its stations have large and loyal groups of listeners who tune in and listen to the commercials. That means the stations work hard to provide programming that listeners want and enjoy, Levite says. Although there are no government restrictions on the amount of advertising the stations can carry, they have to present plenty of popular programming in order to keep listeners tuned in.

Intense competition from television, which dominates the attention of most Americans in the evening, has forced commercial radio stations to use specific types of programming and carve out niches that appeal to various groups of listeners. WBEN, for instance, used to air a typical radio mix of popular music, news, and call-in talk shows. But the high-quality sound reproduction of stereo FM stations lured away many AM listeners in the 1970s, says Kevin Keenan, program director for WBEN and WMJQ.

"The audience was going to the FM band because of the quality of the sound," he says. "AM had two choices: We could play music and lose listeners, or do something different and recapture the audience." WBEN, like many other AM stations, jettisoned its music format and switched to specialized programming. "We could have gone all news, all business information, all talk show, or all sports broadcasting," Keenan says. "Instead, our format is a combination of all those elements, with local news updated 24 hours a day. On the weekends, we have niche programming, like a home improvement show, a gardening show, and two different financial programs."

The format appeals to an audience of adults over 35 years old, Levite says. The listeners are those who want to hear national and international issues discussed on two popular syndicated talk shows aired by WBEN and hundreds of other AM stations across the United States, and who want to hear about local news and happenings from WBEN's own radio personalities.

Algonquin's FM station went in the opposite direction, playing light rock music aimed at young women. "Of course we have male listeners, but the music is more personal to a woman," Levite says. "About 65 percent of our audience is female, 35 percent male. It's targeted that way on purpose. It's a music format, entirely different from the AM."

Each station's format draws its own categories of advertisers, and Levite says he can figure out any station's format just by listening to its advertisements. "We try to match the advertisers to the demographics of the station," says Larry Robb, an Algonquin vice president who manages advertising sales for the FM station. The adult listeners attracted to his AM station are at a stage in their lives where they are planning for their children's college educations and for retirement, so they hear many commercials for financial services companies such as banks, insurance agencies, and stock brokerages. Since this audience has enough money to make major purchases, automobile dealers also air their commercials on WBEN. The FM station, however, given its appeal to young adult women who are usually beginning to equip a household and make consumer purchase decisions, carries advertisements for furniture, department, and grocery stores. Although it is a rock station, it avoids the beer and sports commercials aired by other rock stations that appeal to young men, Levite says.

Competition for advertisers is intense. The two stations compete against nearly 30 AM and 30 FM stations in Buffalo and southern Ontario, as well as four Buffalo television stations, four Canadian television stations, and a host of nationally broadcast cable television stations that handle some local advertising through Buffalo's three cable networks. A daily newspaper in Buffalo, several local magazines, and 20 weekly community newspapers also compete for advertising. Because much of the advertising is locally generated -- Levite estimates that 80 percent is local and 20 percent comprises national ads for big consumer companies like Coca-Cola -- the profusion of local advertising outlets makes for often stiff competition.

The radio stations use their inherent cost advantages to compete effectively. "We do not have the production costs that television and newspapers have," Levite says. "To buy a full-page ad in the Buffalo News costs a lot of money." Where a full-page ad in the daily newspaper may cost \$7,000, a 60-second spot on WBEN during its prime programming can cost as little as \$200. A one-minute ad late at night can cost as little as \$10, Levite says. The most expensive advertising slot is the morning commuter drive time, from about 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., when tens of thousands of people drive to work and school while listening to car radios. The second-most expensive time to advertise is late afternoon, when people head home in their cars. Also expensive is advertising during the two nationally syndicated daytime talk shows.



"The cheapest time to advertise would be 3 a.m. for \$10 to \$20," says Levite. "You would get a smaller audience, but sometimes you get the most bang for your buck at 3 a.m. The people who are listening to WBEN at 3 a.m. are really listening; they are not sitting there doing something else and using the radio for background noise. They are working alone someplace or they are insomniacs, and they are listening for companionship; they want the sound of a human voice."

Besides charging less for a commercial, the two radio stations write and produce ads for free. "We have three full-time people working in our production department, and we produce hundreds of commercials every week at no charge," Levite says. "If someone comes in and says 'I want to spend \$5,000 next month to advertise,' we will write the commercial and will voice it and produce it at no charge; that's part of our service, which is pretty standard in the radio business."

An advantage of radio production for local advertisers is that they can sound as professional as nationally produced advertisements, while local television ads, no matter how well-done, cannot compete technically with national television ads that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce and use technical capabilities beyond the capacity of local television production companies.

Advertising rates are determined by ratings -- assessments by independent rating companies of how large a station's audience is at various times of day. "We are one of those terrible businesses that have ratings; it's like a nightmare sometimes," Levite says. "You can be doing the best job in the world and have employees that work real hard, but if those 1,100 or 1,200 people who fill out ratings diaries for some reason are not your friends, you do not have good ratings." Arbitron, an independent rating company, hires radio listeners for 12 weeks at a time to keep diaries of their radio usage and then sells the results to advertisers.

Ratings are usually the top determinant of FM advertising prices, but "on stations like our AM, we tend to push results," Levite says. "When we talk to advertisers, we use lines like, 'If you want ratings, buy these stations. If you want to make money, buy us.' We have what we call 'cash register ratings.' We have clients who know that when they stop advertising with us, customers stop coming in and the telephones stop ringing."

To get results, radio advertisers need to run their commercials frequently. "Nobody buys once a week," Levite says. "On radio, it's 12, 15, 25 times a week. At any given moment, there might be 10,000 people listening, or there might be 55,000 people listening."

Although many of WBEN's and WMJQ's advertisers also buy ads in newspapers and other media, some prefer radio. "Advertisers who deal with a service that you shop for every day, such as supermarkets, like radio," Levite says. "They tend to buy a lot of radio time. Car dealers and companies that offer car products tend to buy radio time. After all, if you are in a car and you are listening to a radio station, what better place to sell a car?"

Some advertisers contact the station to place their ads, but most are found by account executives like Mary Kinney who spend 40 to 50 hours a week calling on potential customers. The six FM station and eight AM station sales executives usually arrive at 8:30 a.m. to set up appointments, return telephone calls from the previous day, and finish paperwork. By 10 a.m., they are out on the road, calling on customers, says Greg Ried, sales manager for WBEN. "They will try to see three to five people a day and spend a half hour to an hour a day getting into the advertiser's business and figuring out how to improve it," he says. "They get back to the station by 4:30 p.m., make appointments for the next day, and put together proposals for potential advertisers. Most of the proposals are written at home."

Many sales executives put in a minimum of 10 hours work a day, along with another hour at home. The work is rewarding: Successful sales executives can make \$20,000 in their first year, \$30,000 to \$40,000 the second year, and \$50,000 by the third year, Robb says. The station's top sales executives make \$80,000 a year. All of that money comes from commissions of 15 percent on each sale. The stations run bonus competitions once or twice a year: A target for advertising is set, and those who exceed the target get extra compensation. "Each person decides with the sales manager what their goals will be, and if they meet or exceed the goals, they qualify for additional money over the basic commission," Robb explains.

Job candidates do not necessarily have to have prior experience in radio, but they have to know how to sell, says Robb. "It's a different sell because it is an intangible." Robb hires sales

executives right out of college, from other sales fields, and from other radio stations.

Success in the business takes special talents, according to Greg Ried. "They have to show they can weather the beating that comes from selling," he says. "It's not the easiest job in the world; even though it can be a great career, it's not for everyone." The advertising executives would have little to do if their stations were not among the most successful in their market. A large part of WBEN's success is due to its popular radio personalities, Keenan says. The station has dominated the AM radio waves in Buffalo for the last decade with a surprisingly small staff of on-air announcers. Led by Bill Lacy, the top announcer in Buffalo in the 5:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. slot, the station gets by with five on-air broadcasters during the week and four on weekends, says Keenan.

Lacy is the linchpin of the weekday broadcasting schedule and is only the third person to work the station's all-important morning shift in its 63-year existence. "Bill Lacy is very important because he grew up here and knows the area so well," Keenan says. "He is a strong personality who really can relate to his audience, and he does as well as any top personality in the country." Lacy's easy-going commentary links the morning's heavy doses of news, sports, traffic, and weather coverage. In a town where radio salaries range from \$15,000 to \$200,000 a year, Lacy probably is one of Buffalo's highest-paid announcers.

Another important element in WBEN's success is having its own staff of reporters to cover local news, Keenan says. "For us, the most important element is our news, because that is our constant tie with the community. We do local news every 30 minutes. It's an excellent way to keep in touch with our listeners." The station uses seven full-time and four part-time news reporters and editors. The broadcast team is backed up by four full-time and two part-time producers who handle both the local broadcasts and the syndicated talk shows.

The increasing amount of syndicated programming carried by stations like WBEN brings the station full circle from radio's early days, when much of each local station's programming came from national radio networks. Those networks declined when television took hold in the 1950s, and by the late 1960s most radio stations carried only local programming. But the success of nationally syndicated talk shows in the 1970s increased the amount of national programming on WBEN and other stations.

Algonquin's ownership structure is a little unusual for a large urban radio operation because it is owned by the same man who runs it -- Larry Levite. Although it is not uncommon for radio stations in smaller markets to be owned by a single individual, most larger stations are owned by corporate conglomerates that have stations in several markets.

WBEN got its start, as many early AM stations did, as an offshoot of the city's largest daily newspaper, the *Buffalo News*. Many newspapers started radio and television stations before federal legislation in the 1960s put limits on the numbers of electronic stations that could be dominated by newspaper outlets in the same town. Although the law did not affect prior arrangements, it did have an impact when newspapers were sold, often forcing the divestiture of some broadcasting properties.

In 1978, the family that founded the *Buffalo News* sold the company to a media investor, forcing the sale of the newspaper's radio and television stations in Buffalo. Levite, who was running the station, found a group of local investors and banks to buy WBEN and WMJQ from the newspaper. Levite has done so well as owner-operator that he was able to buy out his partners a few years ago, and he is now sole owner. He gets to make all the decisions, but says he delegates the programming and creative decisions to talented employees.

The employees who oversee programming, such as Kevin Keenan, rely in turn on their producers and on-air personalities. "Bill Lacy has total control of the content of his program, for instance," Keenan says. "I have been here for eight years and program director for two years, and I have never told him not to say something. Larry (Levite) fosters that spirit of creativity." There is also a hands-off approach when it comes to advertising and programming. "There is a very clear division between advertising and programming," he says.

Levite gets to worry about the overall picture -- revenues, advertising trends, operating costs, obtaining credit from banks. Being an owner-entrepreneur is not easy, he says. "I get to do what I want, but I work harder. I get all the rewards, and I get all the headaches. When you have partners, they can share your problems, but they share your profits too." Although he says he loves running radio stations, Levite has a warning for would-be owners: "Ownership,"

he says, "should really be called `stress and aggravation.' "



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Richard Schroeder is a financial writer with the *Buffalo News*.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## On the Air in Springville

*When the 5,000 residents of Springville, New York, want to hear about happenings in their home town, they switch their radio dials from the large, powerful stations in Buffalo, New York, some 64 kilometers away, and tune in to station WFWC. Financial writer Richard Schroeder reports on how this small American rural radio station keeps Springville informed and itself in business.*

When the disk jockey at radio station WFWC delivers the weather report, all he has to do is look past his control board and out the studio's storefront window to see what the shoppers coming to adjacent stores in the Franklin Street plaza are wearing.

"It is an interesting location because our main studio is almost right out on the street," says Skip Tillinghast, the station's program director. "People feel free to pop in and say hello and drop off notices of community events."

The station's location in rural Springville, New York, (population 5,000) is ideal for its one newsperson, Fred Haier, who lives close by. The location allows him to work in the morning from 5:30 to 9:30, run home for lunch and a rest, and return for the afternoon news reports from 3:30 to 6.

Beginning with the farm report every morning at 5:30, WFWC broadcasts country and western music, local news, weather, and information on community activities to residents of Springville and the surrounding hills and valleys of this agricultural area in western New York State.

The AM station, with 1,000 watts of power and four full-time and four part-time employees, holds its own against dozens of major radio stations in nearby Buffalo because it offers the local advertising, news, and information often ignored by the bigger media outlets, says Lloyd Lane, general manager and part-owner of the station.

"We give them mainly local advertising -- the mom and pop Main Street businesses, the local hardware store, car dealers, the drug store," he says.

"When the local police shift turns over, we update them on the latest items on the village police blotter. And we are always looking for community news."

The station has followed closely plans to open in Springville a large discount store, part of a national chain of stores that are noted for providing tough competition for local businesses. WFWC also keeps Springville residents up to date on developments at a controversial experimental nuclear repository being operated by the federal government in nearby West Valley, New York.

WFWC is one of about 5,000 AM radio stations in the United States, more than half of which serve small towns and villages. Despite its size, the station's broadcasting mix and strategies are as sophisticated as those of larger urban stations.

Like its big brothers, WFWC targets the morning and afternoon "drive times," when workers and

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students drive from their homes to workplaces and schools, which is why the station's only newscaster works a split shift. Program Director Tillinghast is the broadcaster during the morning drive time, and another station employee handles the afternoon shift.

Every weekday from 5:30 a.m. to 6 a.m., the station runs syndicated farm shows on various topics, then follows up by broadcasting local produce prices.

Then comes Tillinghast's morning broadcast, a mix of 70 percent music and 30 percent local news and information. Every Wednesday morning, a local guest -- Springville's mayor, a school official, a business owner -- participates in a listeners' call-in show that is on the air for 30 minutes.

Most of the rest of the broadcast day consists of piped-in country and western music shows purchased from a syndication company in the western United States and transmitted to WFWC by satellite.

Virtually all of the advertising on WFWC is local, although it gets a few national ads from companies such as McDonald's, which operates a fast-food restaurant in the village.

Advertisers might include anything from a specialized graphics store to a furniture retailer or an auto parts outlet, says Peter F. Regan, the station's sole advertising salesperson.

Regan is a busy man. "I typically write the ads for my clients," he says. "I write the copy because I have the best insight into what they are trying to say. I also produce a lot of the ads myself, and I do the actual announcing. I like to get my hands into all the different aspects of it."

He discussed his work shortly after recording an ad for a local furniture store, which was having a sale before taking inventory of its stock. "This is it, the final days," said Regan, belting out the sales pitch in a booming baritone. "You'll find 40 percent off all in-stock curio cabinets. Discontinued bedroom sets for 50 percent. We want to sell it, not count it."

Regan spent several years managing a retail outlet before working in radio. "I know how I want them phrased," he says of his ads. "I have been in business management, so I know the other side. I know what it's like for someone who has to spend the advertising dollars."

WFWC enjoys a near-monopoly on local radio advertising. "In terms of radio, we are it. As far as our territory goes, people listen to Buffalo stations that penetrate the area. But when you think of the advertising dollars spent to buy time on one of those stations, you are paying a lot for listeners you will never see." The average local advertiser spends \$250 to \$500 a month at WFWC, with single ads selling for \$8 to \$10 a spot, Lane says. The only competition for advertisers comes from weekly shopping and community newspapers, he adds.

Lane, who bought the station with three partners in 1991, gets a workout running it and its sister station, WCJW, 48 kilometers away in the rural village of Warsaw, New York.

"I get into all the small decisions, everything from what equipment to buy to assisting in the scheduling of announcers," Lane says. "Right now we are short one person, so I am working a two-hour air shift every day. I had to rearrange my schedule so that I could fill the void."

Payroll costs are the station's biggest expense, comprising about half its budget, followed by interest on debt that Lane assumed to buy the station.

There is no big money in small-town radio, Lane says. The average announcer at WFWC earns \$14 to \$16 an hour. An advertising salesman can earn as much as \$35,000 a year in commissions.

Says Skip Tillinghast: "It takes a person who is more dedicated to the spirit of radio, rather than to making a lot of money, to succeed here."

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The High-Tech Trib

By Philip Moeller

Bob Gremillion and Jack Fuller can joke about it now, but there weren't so many happy faces in early 1992, when the Tribune Company in Chicago prepared to commit its 145-year-old flagship newspaper to a highly visible role in the electronic information business.

Gremillion runs the company's ChicagoLand Television regional cable news channel, which went on the air in January 1993 with 650,000 area households, a total that has since grown to 1.1 million, or more than 90 percent of homes with cable in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Fuller was then editor of the *Chicago Tribune* (he's since moved up to publisher of the newspaper). His mission, executed principally by Howard A. Tyner (then associate editor and now vice president and editor), was to prepare the newspaper's 650 news staffers to collaborate with the new cable channel. A TV mini-studio was set up inside the paper's fourth-floor newsroom, and a suburban news bureau shares space with the main newsroom and studio built for ChicagoLand TV in suburban Oak Brook.

With their worlds of television and print journalism about to merge, Gremillion and Fuller worried they would face confrontation between their staffs.

"You had to get the lions to lie down with the lambs," Fuller recalls. The task was made more difficult by the surprising discovery that each side thought they were the ones about to be led to slaughter. The TV side thought of the newspaper staff as a bunch of old, gnarled veterans who would eat them alive, he says, while the *Tribune* crowd feared that a parade of blow-dried (stylized hair), on-air performers would take over their lives.

The reality was much different. There were some rocky moments, but more than 140 *Tribune* staffers have made some 800 appearances on ChicagoLand TV during its first year. Appearances are voluntary and unpaid (the cause of some grumbling), but editors and staffers agree there has been little tangible opposition from the newsroom. And managers at ChicagoLand TV say they are delighted to have the skills and instant credibility that *Tribune* reporters, columnists, and critics bring to Chicago-area audiences.

ChicagoLand TV is just one of many efforts throughout the company to make electronic information available to readers. Tribune Company has developed or invested in most of the emerging communications technologies, and if it's good enough at doing this, Tribune executives think, the company will thrive in a digital future.

Tribune's electronic metamorphosis has been a result of its diverse holdings beyond its core newspaper franchise that includes the *Chicago Tribune*, and, in Florida, the *Orlando Sentinel* and Fort Lauderdale's *Sun-Sentinel*. The company owns eight independent broadcast TV stations that reach nearly 25 percent of the nation's households. It produces news and syndicated entertainment shows for those stations. It owns six radio stations. And its ownership of the Chicago Cubs baseball team was an early example of how professional sports, like the new communication technologies, could generate programming and merchandising opportunities.

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With numerous print, broadcasting, and programming holdings, Tribune has concentrated on buying and developing new types of content and expertise. In the past year, it spent nearly \$200 million to buy into the CD-ROM business (Compton's Multimedia) and to purchase two educational publishing companies (Contemporary Books and the Wright Group). It bought a large stake in America Online, the fastest growing of America's major online services, and created Chicago Online, which allows users to access *Chicago Tribune* stories and classifieds, send messages to *Tribune* staffers, and shop electronically. Tribune has also made minority investments in a number of small high-tech companies that are trying to develop information-technology products.

With the information revolution yielding more superhype than superhighway, at least so far, some of Tribune's investments could fall on hard times. The company notes that its big dollars have gone to buy Compton's and the two publishing houses -- established and profitable companies that have done just fine without an interactive multimedia explosion. The CD-ROM business, which certainly is in a fast lane on the superhighway, is predicted to post substantial gains. The number of personal computers in the United States able to handle multimedia CD-ROM disks is forecast to nearly double to 9.5 million in the near future, according to *Multimedia Business Report*, an industry newsletter.

Tribune declined to provide figures for its total spending on information ventures, but the money invested in high-tech start-ups is "modest" for a company with \$2 billion in annual revenues, according to a spokesperson. And Tribune's investment in America Online has earned the company an estimated \$35 million in paper profits so far, giving it some cushion against any high-tech loss.

As a result of all this, Eric Philo, a Goldman Sachs financial analyst who watches newspaper stocks, says Tribune's high-tech initiatives "continue to far outstrip other public newspaper companies' efforts."

"I think the company has always been willing to take good sound business risks," says Executive Vice President John W. Madigan, who is also president and CEO of its largest unit, Tribune Publishing.

More recently, the company has made major management and operational changes, stemming in part from its initial sale of stock to the public in 1983, which brought with it more exposure and the increased accountability of a publicly traded company. At the same time, however, it received brutally negative publicity from extended labor and business problems at the *New York Daily News* leading to the 1991 sale of the paper.

A further assault came from former *Tribune* editor James D. Squires. His 1993 book, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, chronicled his unhappy experiences with Tribune company.

"Among the many reasons I was so easily expendable at Tribune Company is that journalism, particularly newspaper journalism, has no real place in the company's future. No one ever uses the word," Squires wrote. "The company bills itself as an 'information and entertainment' conglomerate, and hopes that newspapers will become a smaller factor in its total business."

But Tribune managers note that the newspaper prospered during the recession and has added 50 news staffers since 1990, at a time when many papers have been cutting back. Nearly all those jobs came from stepped-up zoning efforts, and Tribune officials think that finding other outlets for their stories will help pay for more local reporters and editors.

The company also thinks cutting costs is part of the solution. Tribune "has moved decisively in recent years to exit unprofitable newspaper operations," Dean Witter financial analyst Jim Dougherty wrote. Those actions have come since Charles Brumback became CEO in 1990, and included selling the *Daily News*, closing the company's newspaper in Palo Alto, California, in March 1993, and selling off a majority stake in its large California newsprint operations, the QUNO Corporation, in February of the same year.

Soon after taking over the CEO slot, Brumback set in motion an assessment of the corporation's business prospects that laid the foundation for its current new media efforts.

"Simply put," he said, "our strategy is to develop content for our important local markets. We will provide information and entertainment as digitized text, graphics, images, audio, and video. We will deliver that content in any manner desired by the consumer -- print, broadcast, coaxial, fiber, or telephone. Our many initiatives will enable us to give consumers the opportunity to drill down deep to get what they want, when they want it."

The increasing involvement of Tribune Company news staffers in the company's electronic news and information products has had only a modest impact on how *Tribune* journalists do their jobs. But the forces it has set in motion -- business, technological, and attitudinal -- will surely change what journalists do, the definition of news, and what journalism means in an age when content will be king.

The creation of its 24-hour news cable channel, ChicagoLand TV, based in Oak Brook and closely linked with the *Chicago Tribune*, seems to have created a bridge that staffers feel comfortable crossing. But participants recall that it might have turned out differently.

"I think there was a sense in the newsroom a couple of years ago that the company was almost out of control," says *Tribune* Editor Tyner, "and that it was going off in a helter-skelter way" with acquisitions and plans to develop technology-driven information and entertainment products.

"What has happened has, I think, surprised everybody," he says. "The cable operation has been assimilated almost without a hitch, without undermining the traditional role of the newspaper. And I think, as we had hoped, people look on it as a legitimate extension of the newspaper, and not a threat."

Jack Fuller, Tyner's predecessor as *Tribune* editor, says he saw potential revenues from ChicagoLand TV as a way the newspaper could maintain staff levels in its newsroom and suburban bureaus. Tribune added more than 50 newsroom staffers during the past recession, although building up its suburban zones was accompanied by staffing trims elsewhere at the paper. But more staff would not have been enough inducement for the newspaper to cooperate with the TV venture, Fuller says, without top editors being convinced that the cable channel would be producing a news product that "was in character with the *Chicago Tribune*."

"It was clear that some way or another, there was going to be a convergence of all these various delivery means," he says, "and the sooner you got used to that and started learning the skills across disciplines, the better." Second, to finance a first-rate news operation, he says, "you'd better be able to sell content in multiple channels." The *Tribune* has spent heavily on suburban zoning, he notes, and ChicagoLand TV "needed exactly what we were building," a big, regional information-gathering network.

Michael S. Adams, director of news and programming for the cable operation, says, "We want information in any form possible," and he doesn't see the need for heavy visual and graphic backups found at most television stations. "We will accept things that allow the newspaper's database to be used on the air....After all, that's what it's all about, finding ways to convert the newspaper's huge database."

Adams says the station has stayed with a very low-key approach to using Tribune staffers and that on-air appearances have been designed so that print journalists don't have to be TV anchors and correspondents but can simply answer an anchor's questions. "I don't ask anybody to come on this channel and provide analysis when they are reporters," Adams says. "I ask them to come on and tell us what they know, not what they think."

This year, the *Tribune's* three other large suburban bureaus will also get remote-operated camera locations so their staffers can appear on the channel. There also are plans to promote parts of the newspaper more directly on cable.

In addition, the *Tribune* is expanding its news staff's involvement with Chicago Online. In February, four newsroom staffers began "tagging" stories -- embedding references in the *Tribune* newspaper to related stories that do not appear in the paper but could be accessed through Chicago Online.

John Lux, the paper's online editor in charge of the tagging effort, says he wants all sections of the paper to identify stories for tagging, but that he and his three colleagues are doing most of the work in coding the stories, preparing the tags and making sure users of America Online get

the right item when they enter a specific code number.

Lux says putting material online has reinforced his appreciation for editorial skills. "There's so much (junk) out there," he says. "You could be online 18 hours a day and never learn what you need to, so the editorial expertise is really important."

*Tribune* Features Editor Owen Youngman oversees the online group. He says while technology diverts resources from some news operations, it's a necessary and desirable transition.

"As technology has made some things easier and eliminated some tasks, editorial has taken them on, some willingly, some not," he says. "[But] we certainly don't want to be stuck with today's technology.

"A lot of people in the newsroom are like me in that they are interested in learning things and telling people about it," Youngman adds. "Given the opportunity to tell even more people [through new technologies], they will find a way to do it. Some are more eager than others, [but] the ethic in this newsroom is, preponderantly...to do more, to tell more.

"I'm not going to pretend that it's nirvana here....My fond hope is that what we do editorially in that editing, filtering, selecting, valuing process can be so valuable to people that we won't be subject to the whims of advertisers in what we choose to put out there."

Bill Barnhart, a financial markets columnist for the *Tribune*, is one of the regulars on ChicagoLand TV. He delivers 45 seconds or so on market averages and daily investment trends. Barnhart would like compensation for his appearances. He also says he's still uncomfortable in front of a TV camera. But, he adds, "I get a lot of feedback [from viewers and readers]. I don't deny it. So there are benefits."

James Coates, the paper's computer writer, is more involved in the electronic age via E-mail through Chicago Online and Internet, the vast network of computer networks. Coates puts his Internet address at the end of his columns and says he's getting 200 to 250 pieces of E-mail a week, which takes him four to five hours to handle.

Coates says the online work can be arduous, although it can lead to stories and helps keep him up to date with what's on the minds of computer users. However, he and Barnhart worry that *Tribune's* technology demands will pull them further and further away from the substance of their jobs -- a price they think the company is willing to have them pay.

"The Big Three [U.S.] automakers did not regain the trust of the public by buying faster trucks to deliver the cars," Barnhart says, making an analogy with *Tribune* high-tech efforts. "Every minute that I spend worrying about what goes on America Online is a minute I don't spend writing the news. It's clear that top management cares more about the technology than the substance."

Ted Gregory, a general assignment reporter, says "on the big-picture scale," *Tribune's* electronic projects haven't affected his work. However, sharing a newsroom with ChicagoLand TV can be disconcerting at times, Gregory says, but the hectic pace of television news has energized the suburban bureau. The TV staffers "are young people who are constantly running around and hustling after stories," he says, "so it sort of invigorated all of us."

Gregory, 35, says there is some sentiment that money spent on ChicagoLand TV is coming, in part, at the *Tribune's* expense. "I think you would find more than a handful of people who would feel that ChicagoLand TV is taking away something from the newspaper side," he says, "but I also feel that it's an investment that's innovative and progressive, so in a way, somewhere down the line, it will be a helpful thing for the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper."

Outside the company, *Tribune* watchers have more praise than criticism for the company's efforts. The *Tribune's* news staff is so large, they say, that it contains the full range of opinions about technological change. But for the most part, they say, staffers seem to have the view that new electronic skills will help their careers.

"I don't really quarrel with the decisions they're making," says Michael Miner, a veteran Chicago reporter and currently media critic for the *Chicago Reader*. "I don't think all the electronic dabbling is affecting the editorial product," he says, but agrees that *Tribune* investments in new

ventures are using dollars that otherwise would have gone to the newspaper.

George Harmon, an associate professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, says *Tribune* reporters he's talked to view the new technologies as an opportunity to reach more people with their news stories.

The basic process of reporting won't change, he notes. "I don't see how you cover a fire differently, for example, and I think a lot of reporters see it that way."

"I think it's a pretty smart strategy that Tribune is embracing," says Jeff Borden, who covers media and entertainment for *Crain's Chicago Business*. Referring to ChicagoLand TV and Chicago Online, he says, "I don't think it has had much of an effect on overall content or quality, at least on the print side.

I believe at first there was a level of resentment in the newsroom," with staffers seeing new efforts as "just one more task in the day."

But reporters have not experienced a major disruption in their professional lives, Borden says. "The smart reporters...the reporters who know what's going on in the outside world, are understanding they won't be hurt" by new technology. To the contrary, Borden says, they will be helped if they learn to master other forms of media.

Electronic re-use of news content is clearly emerging as a factor in the newspaper's thinking, *Tribune* Editor Tyner says, although "I think at this point there have been no instances when editors have sat down and said, 'We have to have the nontraditional delivery systems in mind when we do this story.'

"We're re-examining all of the stuff we do," he adds. For example, Tyner says, the paper has assembled an unusually broad team to redesign its food section, and it's considering designing the section in a way that its content can flow more easily online.

Fuller says *Tribune* editors had to do some hard thinking a couple of years ago as they approached the new media, and that such deliberations are essential to becoming the masters of new communication technologies instead of the victims.

"We had to understand who we were," Fuller says, and state clearly those values of fulfilling its social and leadership responsibilities by providing serious, in-depth journalism.

"If we haven't identified very well our fundamental values, we're going to be scared," he adds. And communicating this to the newsrooms will be a major challenge to editors. "Most people in the newsroom feel these things. It's not like you have to teach them that these are their values," Fuller says. "You have to reassure them that they are your values."

In adapting its strategy, Tribune decided to focus on its local markets rather than chase the dream of national supremacy on some lane of the information highway. The company also decided it could not compete with phone companies and other players in the costly efforts to build distribution systems on that highway. Instead, it saw its future in creating content and using technology to find new and profitable ways to sell that content to consumers. And to do these things well, Tribune concluded, it needed to change the culture of the company, encouraging employees to embrace change and take risks.

"Back in '89, when [CEO] Charlie [Brumback] took control of the company, he started a strategic planning process," recalls Jim Longson, corporate vice president for technology. The extensive process "redefined the mission of the company," he says. "We came to the conclusion that while the company had done well, the '90s would be a different ball game."

"We've encouraged people to take risks," Brumback says. "We want risk takers, not risk avoiders. With a company like this, that wasn't easy. Back in the '30s and '40s and '50s and '60s, you got a job here because you knew somebody, and once you got a job here, you pretty much had a job for life." The company's personnel efforts, Brumback says, dealt "more with the nonperformers than with the performers. I want to focus more on the people who are productive, and we have done that."

Figuring out the proper role of technology in helping to execute the company's business strategies involved a major lesson, Longson says, which was "that our role as a company was not to develop technology but to take technology that others had developed and make it useful."

This has led to a number of still-evolving ways to apply technology, Longson says.

One is a return of sorts to the way newspapers were written 50 years ago, when reporters brought in the news and rewrite men wrote the stories. In an era when information is reproduced for a variety of media forms, Longson says, there will be a need for digital rewrite men and women who are capable of putting stories in the newspaper, online and into video and instant multimedia products as well.

Tribune Media Services' Voice News Network (VNN) offers audio news and entertainment that consumers access using touchtone telephones. Subscribing newspapers can capture these audio feeds and distribute them over their own audiotex systems for telephone information services. What VNN is really doing, TMS President David D. Williams points out, is creating a national electronic newsroom capable of delivering content in different forms.

VNN is also teaching Tribune lessons about how content may need to be changed once it's placed in a different medium. "As we get into electronic applications," Williams says, "you can't take what you do in print and just slap it down into another format...The value that somebody like us can bring is not only to gather the content but to repackage it."

Beyond ChicagoLand Television and Chicago Online, Tribune Company has ventured into numerous other technologies and media with an eye for expanding the kinds of information offered and the ways it is delivered.

"Now that we've identified the capabilities, we have begun to build and acquire the technologies to achieve these capabilities," says William S. Murray, Tribune Broadcasting's director of information systems and director of strategic technology.

The company's investments include minority stakes in StarSight Telecast (an electronic TV programming guide), Peapod (an online home shopping service), and Picture Network International (a digital database of photos and, down the road, other images). Tribune Media Services has emerged as the most technologically oriented of the major news syndicates, through sophisticated TV listings and the decision to go head-to-head with the Associated Press by providing stock listings and investment tables. TMS is providing content to a number of new electronic information services as well, including Apple Computer's expanded eWorld online service.

Tribune's television stations are partners in Time Warner's announced WB Network, which it hopes to build into a fifth major U.S. TV network alongside ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox.

Tribune's long partnership with Knight-Ridder in the KRT wire is being carried over to TV, as WPHL in Philadelphia will air the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* ambitious effort to generate an hour-long program each day modeled after its newspaper's contents. Tribune is also founding owner of the new cable channel called the Television Food Network. And its syndicated programming includes an interactive shopping show.

Now, several years after setting all this in motion, Murray says many of the traditional walls that exist in any old-line, hierarchical organization are coming down. He calls it a "culture of sharing" that, in effect, travels with the content as it crosses different divisions within Tribune. These are real "barrier bashers," he says.

Brumback says the pace of change within Tribune has been "painfully slow to me," but adds that he sees improvement. As if thinking that assessment too harsh, he adds, "But, yeah, I'm pleased where we are in comparison to other large metropolitan papers."

Fuller admits there are trade-offs for journalists in what Tribune is doing. But the conflicts between great news coverage and great newspaper profits existed long before information was digitized and put online.

"Our job is to make it possible to do good newspapering that makes a buck [dollar]," Fuller



says. "And it's not easy. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it....If you say it's your job to do good journalism and hang the buck, that's a recipe for no journalism. If you say it's your job to make a buck and hang the journalism, you'll soon find you're in another line of work."



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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## Electronic Newspapers

By Vic Sussman

Reprinted from U.S. News & World Report, May 16, 1994, published at Washington, D.C.

The newspaper arrives one morning, but something is missing. There is no delivery person tossing the folded papers into dimly lighted driveways, no familiar thunk. In fact, there is no paper at all. This newspaper is electronic -- a digitalized blend of text, graphics, color photos, sound, and full-motion video dancing across a book-size, portable computer screen. And it's wireless, so you can even take it to the bathroom.

This futuristic vision of the American newspaper is no longer science fiction. Newspapers are launching themselves into cyberspace with the enthusiasm they once had for Linotype machines. The Kelsey Group, a Princeton, New Jersey, media consulting firm, says more than 2,700 newspapers -- up from only 42 in 1989 -- are dabbling in electronic ventures. This includes everything from telephone delivery of personal ads and sports scores to fax-on-demand for readers desperately seeking restaurant reviews. The biggest gamble is to develop a true electronic newspaper, a mission that raises some jackpot questions: What is so special about a computerized paper, and will a substantial number of people pay to read one?

If there is an urgency about this, it is because Americans have clearly fallen out of love with the old-fashioned kind of paper. About half the population does not subscribe to one, while almost 50 percent of what should be the future generation of readers -- those ages 18 to 24 -- don't read newspapers at all. Big metropolitan newspapers have been sliding into decline since their heyday of authority in the 1920s, when many Americans were able to choose among competing papers; today, by contrast, many communities lack any newspaper at all. "I love newspapers," says journalism historian Donald Shaw of the University of North Carolina, "but they don't have to remain in their original form to survive."

The new model, says Roger Fidler, director of Knight-Ridder's Information Design Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado, is clearly going to be "digital ink on silicon paper."

Newspapers such as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Chicago Tribune* have already opened shop on national information services -- Prodigy, CompuServe, and America Online, respectively. The *Palo Alto Weekly* in California was the first American paper to post its editorial content in the dense undergrowth of the Internet, the global network of computer networks with some 20 million users worldwide.

Readers of these computerized papers don't see the familiar display of headlines and stories. California's *San Jose Mercury News*, for example, with its Mercury Center on America Online, presents a screen of small graphical boxes, each with a label like Entertainment, Bay Area Living, or Sports. Selecting any box automatically pulls that material on-screen. The opportunity for extensive browsing is a key feature of computerized newspapers, says Bill Mitchell, director of electronic publishing for the *Mercury News*. "We're trying to create a newspaper with more dimensions, with in-depth material linked to stories in the paper," says Mitchell. Various stories in the paper version of the *Mercury News* are tagged at the end with graphic symbols indicating that more information is available online: full texts of speeches, for example, or additional

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photos and related wire service articles that did not appear in the paper edition. Readers can also print out articles and retrieve photos and search through back issues of the paper -- without having to rummage through the garbage.

The ability to direct readers to vast amounts of information is what most distinguishes electronic newspapers from the traditional model, says Neil Budde, editor of the *Wall Street Journal* Interactive Edition. Paper newspapers are severely limited by space and publishing costs. But material that won't fit on paper -- court documents, legislative records, lengthy interviews -- can be tucked into a corner of cyberspace at minuscule cost, available to readers at a keystroke.

Many readers who are already overwhelmed by information may find the promise of more data a hollow blessing, of course. And indeed, the goal of electronic newspapering is ultimately to ease the consumer's data burden. One feature of electronic newspapers, for example, will be customized "news filters" that will deliver specialized information. Readers interested in everything from chess tournaments to obscure medical news will be able to have customized information automatically delivered to their computer screens along with the day's top news stories. Publishers are wagering that people will find this "Daily Me" feature of electronic newspapers worth paying for.

Electronic newspapers are also involving readers in two-way conversations, a historic departure from the traditional one-way flow. Most online newspapers have popular chat areas where readers can converse with writers and editors. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, with its Access Atlanta on Prodigy, even expects to use some of its readers as volunteer reporters to gather neglected minutiae like bowling scores and school lunch programs. "Our users are going to help us shape this system," says David Scott, the newspaper's electronic information publisher.

Journalists and publishers disagree about the value of interactivity. Gordon Thompson, a technology manager for the *New York Times*, thinks it is probably inevitable but fears it could overwhelm reporters, who "should be interviewing Boris Yeltsin, not becoming E-mail buddies." But Dan Gillmor, a technology columnist for the *Detroit Free Press*, calls his online activity "one of my most valuable tools." He routinely puts his electronic mail addresses at the end of each column and spends two hours or more a day wandering through cyberspace. Reporters and controversial columnists could wind up as online personalities, much like those in talk radio, says Rosalind Resnick, publisher of *Interactive Publishing Alert*, an industry newsletter.

However much the public enjoys a kaffeeklatsch, the crucial question for electronic publishers is how to make a profit, and few of the newspapers flirting with cyberspace dare yet to dream of glory. Henry Scott, group director of new business development for the New York Times Company, echoes the thoughts of many when he says, "This is a research and development project." How, for example, should advertising work in an electronic medium? Computer screens don't support lucrative full-page display ads, and few online services effectively mix advertising and text on a small screen. (Prodigy includes ads; CompuServe and America Online are experimenting with "nonintrusive" ads.)

One moneymaker could be classified advertising -- with a digital twist. Instead of passively scanning classifieds, users can now search by subject, price, and location. They can view photos of real estate and other products. In time, says San Francisco electronic newspaper entrepreneur Steve Outing, they may be able to subscribe to a particular classified, directing the system to automatically E-mail them all garage sale ads within their area code, for example, or all ads for red 1967 Mustang automobiles. American newspapers earn over \$11 billion a year from classified advertising alone, nearly a third of their total ad revenue, says the Newspaper Association of America. Competition for this turf will intensify as telephone and cable companies stake out claims.

The future newspaper, says Fidler, is going to be a versatile, wireless, flat-screen device he calls the "portable information appliance," or PIA. This magazine-size computer will offer a high-quality vertical display; readers will use a penlike pointer to browse, retaining the newspaper's serendipitous power to "expose you to things you didn't know you wanted." The PIA in Fidler's version will also display books, magazines, tax and insurance forms, and ads and is likely to be marketed much as computers are.

No one knows the future of the foldable paper newspaper. Bill Johnson, publisher of the *Palo Alto Weekly*, believes electronic newspapers won't replace the traditional model -- certainly not in small towns, where papers have less competition and play "a vital role in holding the community together." But Stephen Isaacs, acting dean of the Columbia Graduate School of

Journalism, which recently added a cyberspace component to its curriculum, disagrees. "Flattened trees are not going to be the medium for newspapers much longer," Isaacs says. He sees electronic newspapers as liberating for reporters and readers alike because information flow will no longer be limited by space. Electronic newspapering will usher in "the golden age of journalism," says Isaacs. "It's just too bad the journalists don't know it yet."

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Vic Sussman writes for *U.S. News & World Report*.

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## Publications

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### *An Unfettered Press*

## The Center for Foreign Journalists

By Daniel B. Moskowitz

In October 1991, Zimbabwean Regina Chigwedere and seven other African woman journalists spent three weeks in the United States learning about publishing, from the philosophical issues of ethics and the role of the press in an emerging nation, to the nuts-and-bolts of how to use computers to improve page design and how to write a livelier lead to a story.

Chigwedere had been a reporter on the *Herald* newspaper in Harare for six years, writing most of the women's page. But she felt that many issues that truly mattered to the women of Zimbabwe were given short shrift, and that they needed a publication devoted to their concerns. Nine months after the U.S. visit, Chigwedere published the first issue of *Living On*, a 30-page monthly magazine designed to fill that need -- a compendium of articles about health, domestic life, sex discrimination, economic betterment, and, yes, being attractive to men.

The venture has been extremely successful for a start-up -- the magazine sold 200 copies its first day on the newsstand and has attracted significant advertising. The U.S. visit, Chigwedere told a caller in Harare not long after launching the publication, "laid the foundation for most of what I am doing in my magazine today. If I had not gone, my magazine might still not be out."

The U.S. visit was organized by the Center for Foreign Journalists (CFJ), a unique private operation that is devoted to helping writers, editors, and publishers in developing countries tap into the techniques of American journalism and assess which are appropriate -- and which are not -- in their own countries. CFJ is located in its own wing of a sleek, modern building nestled among trees in Reston, Virginia, a short distance outside Washington. The workshops, seminars, classes, and training experiences offered by the center give practicing journalists a breather from meeting deadlines and paying the bills, "a chance to sit down and think about what you do and why you do it," explains Bryna Brennan, CFJ's director of training.

The center was founded almost a decade ago by three American journalists who felt that the United States' highly developed media industry had an obligation to share its know-how with colleagues in countries where news gathering and information dissemination often are only beginning to enjoy independence and professionalism. They saw the work of many Asian, Latin American, and African journalists as continuing the tradition of the fledgling American press, which in the 18th century ignited and spread the freedom movement that led what were then British colonies to win their freedom. Says former *Boston Globe* editor Thomas Winship: "I have yet to meet a serious journalist anywhere who does not lust for more freedom to report. It is part of our makeup."

Winship is one of the trio of founders of the center and now serves as chairman of its board. The other two are James D. Ewing, a former publisher of small-town daily and weekly newspapers and vice-chairman of the group, and George A. Krinsky, a former foreign correspondent and editor for the Associated Press worldwide news service, currently president of CFJ. To help them carry out the mission of the center, they have tapped an advisory board of top-notch journalists from around the world, including George Mbugguss, former group managing editor of the Nation Newspapers in Kenya; Cheong Yip Seng, editor-in-chief of Singapore's *Straits Times*; Harold Hoyte, editor-in-chief of *The Nation* in Barbados; and Katharine Graham, chairman of the Washington Post Company in the United States.

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To make their dream of a training and skill-trading operation a reality, Winship, Ewing, and Krinsky convinced a variety of U.S. publishers and broadcasters to provide seed money. The center's first program, in August 1985, brought together 16 journalists from 25 countries.

Since then, CFJ has run some 260 programs, serving more than 4,000 participants from 170 countries. For French- and Spanish-speakers, courses are given in their first language; otherwise, the programs are conducted in English.

The center's own operations -- the headquarters itself, staff salaries, research, and publications -- are paid for by contract fees, program grants, and a continuing infusion of donations from publishers, individuals, and other private sources. The programs themselves are funded by governmental entities -- the U.S. Information Service, the United Nations -- or by private foundations, often those with a particular interest in a subject or a specific region of the world. The World Wide Fund for Nature, for instance, supported the training of 13 reporters from five South American countries in environmental reporting, and the Asia Foundation paid for a session run for Taiwanese journalists.

In its initial years, the center offered almost any kind of course related to its mission for which it could get funding. But now it is so well established, Krinsky says, that it can focus on where the greatest needs are and be fairly sure that the money will be there. The program for African women publishers that Chigwedere attended, for instance, was conceived by the center's staff to serve a segment of the profession that is of growing importance in Africa.

A follow-up component was conducted in 1992. This entailed sending a two-person team of experts, one in periodical management and the other in desktop publishing and graphic design, to visit each of the program participants in order to provide on-site technical assistance in media management, publication design, business management, writing, and promotion.

Using the African women publishers program as a model, the center conducted a program for Chinese women journalists in 1993.

The instruction program is balanced between specific skills instruction and learning to think in new ways about the profession of journalism. "I got wonderful hands-on experience," says Janet Karim, editor of *Woman Now* in Malawi and a participant in the CFJ African women publishers' program. "But equally important, I was able to open up to suggestions on improvements that before used to offend me. I used to be easily offended by criticism."

The trick is to find what about U.S. journalism can be transferred to developing countries given the differences in resources and, often, in political values. As a CFJ publication notes: "While U.S. reporters are using third-generation computers to write their stories and retrieve background information, many of their counterparts...are lucky if they share a working manual typewriter."

To begin, the center outlines the picture of U.S. journalism, emphasizing that while the industry -- 1,500 daily newspapers, 7,400 weekly newspapers, 11,000 magazines, 20,000 newsletters, 12,800 broadcast stations -- views itself as a public trust, it is a business, and, on the whole, a highly profitable one. Unlike the press in much of the rest of the world, which sees itself established to present a particular point of view, the U.S. news media, center staffers emphasize, are, for the most part, audience oriented, intent on providing the information that editors believe their readers, listeners, and viewers want and need.

Sessions at CFJ almost always include a segment about journalism ethics, conducted with a fine-tuned understanding of cultural differences. In the United States, for instance, it is highly unusual for a reporter to take money from a source to write -- or suppress -- a story, but in some countries such side payments are an essential part of a journalist's livelihood. The center's approach is not to urge adoption of U.S. standards: "We explain how we do it here and why we do it," says Bryna Brennan, in order to spur discussion of what the appropriate rules might be in the attendees' own nations. "You are not giving them just answers, but you are raising questions."

Perhaps most significantly, U.S. journalists -- as the heirs of those scribes who fostered the American Revolution more than 200 years ago -- operate under a national constitution that guarantees them freedom of the press. In contrast, the constitutions of many other countries often put restraints on the ability of the press to question national priorities. In May 1993, Nigerian reporter Sunny Ofill commented in an article in an Alabama newspaper, where he was



serving as a guest staffer for three weeks as a follow-up to his classes at the center's headquarters: "After staying two weeks in Washington and seeing how the American press works, I am more invigorated in my struggle for freedom of the press back home."

In setting up a center for training journalists from other countries, George Krinsky remembers, "one of the first problems we encountered was the age-old problem of whether it is better to send trainers to them or bring the participants to us. We decided to do both." The center uses the classrooms at its suburban Washington headquarters for lectures and workshops, and it arranges for its participants to work side-by-side with American journalists at publications and broadcast stations throughout the United States. The programs can be brief introductions to American journalism for visitors brought in by USIS or other hosts, or they can be weeks-long, intensive advanced work in particular disciplines, such as health and science reporting or broadcast journalism.

But CFJ also sends American experts to other countries to run sessions that are less in depth but can reach considerably more persons. In addition, it has helped design an indigenous journalism training center in Ethiopia, and, using money from various U.S. foundations, is providing administrative and training support for the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, an affiliate of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

But the ideal programs are those that combine both home country and American experiences. For instance, in November 1992, 10 media managers from francophone Africa selected by USIS came to CFJ for a series of classes and practical work experiences interviewing U.S. government officials and covering events in the national capital. Then, in March of the following year, two experienced journalists, one based in Paris and one in California, and both fluent in French, went to Africa to conduct a series of workshops for a larger group of journalists, including those who had been in the United States and were able to share their impressions with their colleagues.

The reverse approach is used in a series of USIS-funded programs for journalists in Nigeria, the country from which, Krinsky says, there is both the largest number of inquiries about training and the strongest continuing contact with those who have been through CFJ programs. Each year, three workshops are held in the country, enrolling about 20 reporters each. Then, from those attending, the 10 who seem keenest about continuing are brought to the United States for workshops, lectures, and stints on local newspapers.

CFJ is different from most other teaching and training institutions in that it "organizes programs around people, instead of fitting people into set programs," says Krinsky. Most of its participants are selected by USIS or by one of the other sponsoring organizations, but in some cases, the center itself seeks out participants who fit a particular definition. And on occasion, a journalist writing the center can be slotted into a planned program or introduced to the outside agency making the selections.

Importantly, however, the training is not the end of the center's involvement with overseas reporters, editors, and publishers. It also runs consultancies, sending U.S. experts to follow up the workshops and internships with face-to-face meetings with the participants, gauging how well they have been able to apply their improved skills and offering advice on how to achieve their journalistic goals.

On one such consultancy, Kristin Helmore, who formerly wrote for the *Christian Science Monitor* and edited the magazine *African Farmer*, sat down in Harare with Regina Chigwedere in September 1992 and talked about Chigwedere's *Living On* magazine. The publication has been so popular that it has expectations of hitting a circulation of 10,000 in its third year of operation, but it is so thinly capitalized that it leads a hand-to-mouth existence financially. Helmore suggested adding regular editorial matter -- how-to articles about applying for a bank loan, writing resumés, drawing up a budget -- that would emphasize to potential advertisers that the publication is an effective environment for their promotion. She and Chigwedere pinpointed local businesses that would be likely advertisers, and then Helmore organized role-playing sessions in which Chigwedere pretended to be the owner of a business and the magazine's sales representatives went through a sales pitch -- an exercise that helped all of the representatives better understand how to present their case.

It is that kind of help that typifies what the center is doing. It zeros in on the specific problem -- be it presentation, editorial quality, or financial -- and then draws on the expertise of professionals to suggest solutions. But the training always emphasizes the need to adapt the solutions to local conditions. "It's working within their reality," Brennan says.

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