

important and journalists less important than is popularly recognized. Journalists are less important not because they simply transmit, mirrorlike, the real world to readers—far from it—but because they refract the views of reality held by powerful news sources. News, as Leon Sigal writes, is “not what journalists think, but what their sources say.” And, as he continues, it is mediated by “news organizations, journalistic routines and conventions, which screen out many of the personal predilections of individual journalists.” Indeed, some of the essays argue that journalists consciously deny themselves power. Daniel Hallin holds, for instance, that reporters only rarely paint in a full setting for straight news stories in an intentional effort to make the news story a kind of minimalist art, stripped bare of the dramatic power a stage set can provide.

But if individual reporters are less important than we often imagine, the product they create is of greater importance than we often acknowledge. The news strengthens common understandings that hold a heterogeneous and sometimes explosive society together. The news tells us “where” we are in the world. The news reinforces and teaches us central understandings of “when” we are—how to understand a life, how to understand the lifetime of modern society. The news reinforces certain understandings of what authorities to defer to, what events to treat respectfully, what groups and topics to regard as trivial, what kinds of explanations to seek out. In a world where the news media provide so much of our information about what lies beyond our immediate ken, and at the same time offer unspoken guidelines about how to read that information, how to absorb it, how to take it into our lives, it is important to know how to read not only the news, but journalists and journalism itself. The essays that follow take this as their task.

WHO?

Sources Make the News

LEON V. SIGAL

Police Kill Woman Being Evicted; Officers Say She Wielded a Knife

A 67-year old Bronx woman being evicted from a city housing project for nonpayment of rent was fatally shot by a police officer yesterday after she slashed at another officer with a butcher knife, the police said.

Authorities said the woman, Eleanor Bumpurs, who was described as “violent and uncontrollable,” was shot in the chest when an officer assigned to the police Emergency Service Unit fired his shotgun. Members of the unit are specially trained to deal with emotionally disturbed people.

Deputy Inspector Thomas Coyne said the officer fired after efforts to restrain the woman failed, because he “feared for the safety” of the other officers.

“It appears that the shooting was within department guidelines,” he said, but he added that a department inquiry into the incident had not been completed. All shootings by police officers are also investigated by a district attorney’s office and presented to a grand jury.

Mrs. Bumpurs lived alone in a three-and-a-half-room apartment at the Sedgwick Houses, at 1551 University Avenue and West 174th Street in the High Bridge section. She paid \$89.45 a month and owed five months' rent, according to Val Coleman, a spokesman for the city's Housing Authority.

"For months both the Department of Social Services and the Housing Authority were trying to reach her to see if something could be done to help her, but no one could get through to her," Mr. Coleman said.

This story appeared on page 3 of the "Metropolitan Report" section of the *New York Times* on Tuesday, October 30, 1984. Its subject, the "who" in the news, was Eleanor Bumpurs, a person not likely to make the news except as the perpetrator or the victim of a crime, and if she did, not likely to be displayed as prominently in the *Times* as in the city's two tabloids, the *Daily News* or the *Post*. The only other "who" in the story, Officer Stephen Sullivan, does not appear in person until the tenth paragraph, where he is identified by a police spokesman as the officer who shot Mrs. Bumpurs while an attempt was being made to pin her with a U-shaped restraining bar.

He said the officers tried using the bar to restrain Mrs. Bumpurs, who was described as about 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighing 300 pounds, but Officer Stephen Sullivan fired his shotgun when she lunged with the knife at one of the officers.

The other people who appear in the fourteen-paragraph story are its sources, Deputy Inspector Thomas Coyne, the police spokesman, and Val Coleman, a Housing Authority spokesman. Apart from the somewhat unusual circumstances of the case, the story's disclosure—at a Police Department press briefing—was routine. So was the story's appearance on an inside page of the *Times*, the day after the incident. So, too, was the announcement of two official investigations.

Two days later, the *Times* carried a very different story, this time on page 4 of its "Metropolitan Report" section. It began this way:

Police and Victim's Daughter Clash on Shooting

A police official yesterday defended his department's tactics in the fatal shooting Monday of a 66-year-old woman in her Bronx apartment and said there were no plans to revise procedures for restraining emotionally disturbed people.

Also yesterday, a daughter of the woman questioned aspects of the police account and asserted her mother was physically unable to attack the officers.

The police official, Deputy Chief John P. Lowe, said the police had decided against using tear gas or Chemical Mace to disable the woman, because "the theory was that she was elderly and we would be able to handle her without too much trouble."

Four more paragraphs followed detailing the circumstances of the encounter and quoting Deputy Chief Lowe's description of the events as a "tragedy." Two other sources then made their appearance:

In an interview yesterday, Mrs. Bumpurs's daughter Mary questioned aspects of the police account, saying her mother "suffered from high blood pressure and arthritis."

"And she had trouble moving quickly," Miss Bumpurs said. "Shotguns are for elephant hunting, not for an old woman who was terrified by people breaking into her apartment. They were there to kill her, not to subdue her."

Miss Bumpurs said she and other relatives had advised Mrs. Bumpurs, who lived alone, not to allow strangers into her apartment. "We had told her, 'Mom, don't open the door for nobody,'" Miss Bumpurs said. "When they busted the door open, of course, she got terrified and picked up a butcher knife. What would any old woman have done?"

George Kramer, manager of the Sedgwick Houses, where Mrs. Bumpurs lived, said Miss Bumpurs and other family members had been told of the eviction. However, Miss Bumpurs disputed his statement. She said if the family had known about the problem, it would have paid the back rent.

The story's remaining seven paragraphs rehearse more details of the first story. In this second story the subject is no longer Mrs. Bumpurs but the police officers who burst into her apartment. The origin of the story is not routine. Unlike the first story, based primarily on a Police Department press briefing, this story draws on interviews initiated by the reporter with three new sources. One source not in an official position, the dead woman's daughter, provides details which focus attention on police behavior.

Who is news seems to depend on who the sources for news are, which in turn depends on how reporters gather news.

WS

Who Is News?

That Mrs. Bumpurs or her daughter made news at all is unusual. Ordinary people appear in the news relatively infrequently, though the frequency rises as they are caught up in official proceedings—arrests, trials, congressional hearings, even unemployment lines. Herbert Gans has studied who is news. He distinguishes between Knowns (political, economic, social, or cultural elites) and Unknowns (ordinary people) and finds that the Knowns make the news—in the newsweeklies and television news he studied—roughly four times as often as Unknowns. Four sorts of Knowns, incumbent presidents, presidential candidates, House and Senate members, and other federal officials, were the subjects of over half the domestic news stories on the network news and in newsweeklies Gans studied. The people in the news are most often the sources of news. Presidents and those around them are the most prominent examples, but it is not at all unusual for other people in official positions, like Deputy Inspector Coyne and Deputy Chief Lowe, to be in the news.

News, Gans found, is primarily about people, what they say and do. Fewer than 10 percent of all the stories he studied were about abstractions, objects, and animals. That "whos" are news is a matter of journalistic convention.

The human interest story is news personified. Long a staple of the tabloids and the tube, human interest stories find their way into

today's elite newspapers, too. Early newspapers, like the newsletters of today, catered to a narrow segment of elites, providing them with recent commercial, financial, or political tidings. The penny press, first appearing on the streets of London and New York in the 1830s, substituted newsstand sales for subscriptions, used the human interest story to attract a mass rather than an elite audience, and used its mass appeal to raise revenues from advertising as a substitute for political and mercantile subsidies. The commercialization of the press spawned new patterns of news coverage, and journalists began reaching beyond political and shipping news to sample the rich variety of everyday social life in the city—crimes, accidents, the occasions of high and low society. The commercialization of news led to novel forms of presentation: the journalist was quick to borrow techniques from fiction writing to convey how events in the news felt to those who experienced them—the human interest story. Even in elite newspapers, the human interest story still survives as a genre side by side with the news story as a legitimate convention of journalism.

The peopling of the press goes far beyond such occasional human interest stories. The so-called in-depth interview, "up close and personal," in which the story is the interview, has become a recurrent feature of all newspapers. So is the "Man in the News," which provides details, sometimes intimate details, of the private lives of people caught up in public events—an obituary of the living, often with all its reverence. And sometimes news coverage extends to ordinary people, putting a human face on the raw statistics of social currents—interviews with farmers facing bankruptcy, families on welfare, troops in the trenches, perpetrators and victims of crime—in which the individual stands for a social aggregate.

Politics personified is also a staple of the news diet. The press typically reduces politics to a clash of personalities, pitting Ronald Reagan against Tip O'Neill, Caspar Weinberger against George Shultz, or Lyndon Johnson against Ho Chi Minh. Summit meetings of heads of government seem to exacerbate the journalistic inclination to personalize politics, as if the fate of the earth hung on a meeting of minds between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. Television, with its compulsion to provide visual embodiment to

abstraction, carries the pretense of personification beyond mere name recognition: needing celebrities to stand for political values and programs, it creates celebrities where there were none by re-presenting the same people again and again to represent social and political groups—Ted Kennedy to stand for liberals and Jesse Helms, the radical right; Gloria Steinem for and Phyllis Schlafly against the women's rights movement. Newspapers, too, feature the same few names repeatedly reacting to events of the day. As a matter of journalistic convention, identifiable individuals stand for groups, institutions, and values in the polity. Persons symbolize the impersonal in the news.

Personification can shade over into anthropomorphism. At times, for instance, the press portrays the president as if he were the embodiment of the government, if not of the whole country. It has written of "Reaganomics" as if President Reagan had repealed the laws of supply and demand, personally tamed inflation, and set the economy on an upward course. While such coverage is no doubt partly inspired by a White House eager to take credit for good tidings, the press often willingly plays along. It now lays responsibility for the seizure of American hostages by Iranian militants at Jimmy Carter's door, anthropomorphizing historical forces in a way the Carter White House encouraged it to do when it wanted to generate an air of crisis in order to get the electorate to rally round the president in anticipation of a tough challenge from Ted Kennedy in the 1980 presidential primaries. As a result, the press treated Carter as a symbol of the nation's ineffectuality, Reagan of its resurgent confidence.

As people become surrogates for institutions in the minds of journalists, it is reflected in news-gathering practices and press coverage. The press often treats Tip O'Neill and Robert Dole as if they were the Congress, its committees and subcommittees, and its byzantine procedures—at least to judge from the time the press spends interviewing congressional leaders and covering their press conferences, not to mention the space it devotes to what they say as opposed to what Congress does. The pattern of coverage is reminiscent of Liebling's Law, formulated by press critic A. J. Liebling, who posited that the importance of a news event is inversely related to the number of reporters assigned to cover it.

Personification even informs journalists' conventions of explanation. They tend to ask who was responsible rather than what was the cause. In attributing agency to personal, not impersonal causes, journalists ask "who" rather than "why." The penchant for pinning responsibility on people is a legacy of the muckraking tradition, which assigned blame for economic conditions to economic royalists and trusts more than to the workings of capitalism. The tradition lives on in the conventions of contemporary journalism, indeed, in the worldviews of journalists themselves. Asked to account for the way a particular event was covered, journalists talk about the predispositions of reporters, editors, or publishers more readily than about journalistic practices.

Yet more than journalistic convention accounts for the who of news. Understanding who is news and who is not begs a prior question: who provides the news?

Who Is a News Source?

News is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen.

Reporters are seldom in a position to witness events firsthand. They have to rely on the accounts of others. Some developments—socioeconomic trends, swings in public opinion, shifts in official thinking—may not manifest themselves in events. Reporters tend to draw on the observations of others to describe these occurrences. And even when reporters are in a position to cover an event directly, they feel bound by convention to record what sources say has occurred rather than to venture, at least explicitly, their own version of the event.

The operative convention is objective reporting. Objectivity in journalism denotes a set of rhetorical devices and procedures used in composing a news story. Objectivity, in this sense, has no bearing whatsoever on the truthfulness or validity of a story. Nor does it mean that the story is free of interpretation or bias. No procedure can assure truth or validity or avoid interpretation and bias. Objective reporting means avoiding as much as possible the overt intrusion of the reporter's personal values into a news story and minimizing explicit interpretation in writing up the story. Report-

ers do this by eschewing value-laden vocabulary and by writing in the third-person impersonal, not the first-person personal. Above all, they try to attribute the story, and especially any interpretation of what it means, to sources. In matters of controversy, they attempt to balance sources with conflicting perspectives, if not within a single story, then from one story to the next as coverage continues over time. Keeping the reporter out of the news means relying on sources. Who reporters talk to thus tells a lot about news.

Social location restricts reporters' sampling of news sources. Reporters are not free-floating atoms in a mass of humanity. They occupy fixed places, geographically and socially, that bound their search for sources of news. They work out of the newsroom or a few bureaus in major cities around the country and the world. In those places, they are often assigned to beats in fixed locations. That puts them in a position to come into frequent contact with some sources and not with others.

Organizational routine further restricts how wide journalists cast their nets for news. Putting out a daily newspaper imposes a very strict regimen: every day, editors have another news hole to fill; every day, reporters need new stories to file. Their daily routine is all the more compelling because of limitations on money and staff.

Coordinating the activities of everyone involved in producing and distributing a daily newspaper imposes a routine on news gathering—the deadline. Stories must be written and edited, pages composed, several editions printed and delivered. Since each stage of production and distribution depends upon completion of a prior stage, it is essential to set and meet deadlines. Technological innovation in the form of computers has eliminated some steps in the production process, lengthening the time that reporters have to file their stories and revise them, but deadlines still impose an arbitrary cutoff to news gathering, enjoining reporters to write up the information they have in the hope of filling in the blanks another day. To satisfy the requirements of turning out a daily newspaper on deadline with a limited budget and staff, editors have to assign reporters to places where newsworthy information is made public every day. Reporters need sources who can provide information on a regular and timely basis; they are not free to roam or probe at will.

Social location and reportorial routine have a lot to do with who gets caught in the news net. Reporters are assigned to police headquarters because they know reports of crimes and arrests will flow in from precincts around the city which are too numerous to cover individually. Thus, the first version of stories such as that about Mrs. Bumpurs's death will be the official police version, and other versions will emerge only as reporters follow up the story with other sources—if they try. They may not have the time to locate additional sources and still file the story before that day's deadline. Follow-up will have to wait another day, if editors can spare a reporter to do it.

Because of the need for new stories every day, the scarcity of money and staff, and the readiness of government agencies to put out information in a form ready for transcription, newspapers and wire services allocate more of their national staffs to covering Washington than any other place. By contrast, most news organizations do not have a large enough staff to cover business and finance. Business and financial coverage consumes significant staff resources because most industries are decentralized and there are few places to locate reporters where they will be in a position to gather business news quickly and efficiently. The obvious exceptions, the financial community in New York, the automobile industry in Detroit, and the entertainment business in Los Angeles and New York, are the ones most likely to receive routine coverage. Consequently, corporate executives are unlikely to make the news apart from business or trade journals unless they go out of their way to attract attention or become the object of government scrutiny—in a criminal or anti-trust investigation or a congressional hearing. It is not surprising that many attentive readers of the press can recall the names of their governor, senators, and member of Congress, but have trouble naming the heads of ten major American corporations.

In relying on sources, reporters follow other routines of news gathering. Legwork, in journalistic parlance, denotes a set of standard operating procedures, a program, for news gathering: interviewing people either in person or by telephone rather than gathering and analyzing statistical data or poring over books and documents in a library. Mostly, reporters confine their research to newspapers and periodicals, as well as old clippings culled from the

morgue, or these days, from computer storage. Legwork does not proceed at random. Reporters, whatever their assignment, have a network of contacts, potential sources of information developed over the years with whom they check periodically—"touching base," they call it.

A beat is little more than the formal routinizing of periodic checks with a network of contacts. Beats are locations where newsworthy information is likely to be dispensed routinely in a form readily transcribed into a story. Routine channels used for disseminating information and hence for news gathering include press releases, daily briefings, press conferences, and background briefings—press conferences where the identity of the source is cloaked.

Coverage of the American government, in particular, is structured along beat lines. The White House, Capitol Hill, the State Department, the Pentagon, the Supreme Court, and the Justice Department each have a group of reporters on more or less permanent assignment there. Organizing reporters by beat limits the range of their activity and also identifies them as convenient targets for potential sources wishing to disseminate information to the press, and through it, to other audiences.

Reporters assigned to a beat make the rounds of officials. Above all, they are held responsible for maintaining access to senior officials on their beat and to official spokesmen, variously designated press secretary, public information officer, or assistant secretary for public affairs. Yet not all reporters cover a beat the same way. Michael Grossman and Martha Kumar have discerned four patterns of news gathering on the White House beat:

Routine Coverage. Newspapers everywhere rely on the wire services for coverage of spot news. Correspondents for the press and radio services of the Associated Press, for instance, are responsible for following the president's every movement—"covering the body," they call it—as well as all press briefings. Consequently, they rely very much on formal channels in the White House press office for their information.

Horizontal Coverage. News organizations that have abandoned spot news coverage to the wire services, typically the major regional dailies with small Washington bureaus, free their reporters to roam

from beat to beat following up stories that emanate from the White House daily briefing. Newspapers with more than one reporter assigned to the White House beat also encourage such coverage.

Protective Coverage. Reporters who work for news organizations with arch rivals—the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, or ABC, CBS, and NBC—try to protect against being scooped by their competitors. For network correspondents, this often means tailing the president without filing a story, just to make sure he does not make news in their absence—and in their competitor's presence. For *Times* and *Post* correspondents, protective coverage means digging for details, background information, and analysis to fend off editors' queries about angles to be found in a rival's story.

Anthropological Coverage. Not as bound by daily deadlines or space constraints, some reporters, typically those who work for weekly magazines such as the *New Republic*, and the *National Journal*, or for the *Wall Street Journal*, avoid spot news coverage altogether and concentrate on filing longer, in-depth reports on the operation of the White House as an institution, the character and relationships of the people who work there, or longer-term developments in politics and policy.

Variations in coverage thus reflect differences in the staffing, routines, and competitive environment of news organizations.

Regardless of these differences in patterns of coverage, all reporters assigned to the White House do have one responsibility in common: they are supposed to gain and maintain access to the most senior officials on their beat, above all the president, on an exclusive basis if they can. Again, this is a matter of convention. By convention, reporters choose authoritative sources over other potential sources. But what makes a source authoritative? With the rise of the beat system, authoritativeness came to be identified with the ability to exercise authority in important political and social institutions. Presidents and governors, the heads of corporations and other private bodies, and those designated to speak in their behalf were all judged to be authoritative sources. In the 1920s and 1930s, celebrities such as Charles Lindbergh, Charlie Chaplin, Albert Einstein, or Babe Ruth still qualified as authoritative sources; their opinions on any subject were deemed worth reporting, and by im-

plication, worth accepting. Even today, the appearance of celebrities at congressional hearings merits press coverage, but celebrity is less and less synonymous with authoritativeness. Indeed, by 1920 Walter Lippmann was able to write:

The established leaders of any organization have great natural advantages. They are believed to have better sources of information. The books and papers are in their offices. They took part in the important conferences. They met the important people. They have responsibility. It is, therefore, easier for them to secure attention and speak in a convincing tone.

Whether or not this is so, journalists came to believe it, and once they did so, relying on authoritative sources became for them a habit of mind, a convention.

The convention of authoritative sources gave journalists a criterion for deciding whom to seek out in covering governmental institutions. As the press increasingly organized its news gathering around government, and especially the federal government, authoritativeness began to vary with formal responsibility for public policy: the higher up an official's position in government, the more authoritative a source he or she was presumed to be, and the better his or her prospects for making the news. The convention of authoritativeness has so strong a hold on journalists that they will take the word of a senior official over that of subordinates who may be in a better position to know what the government is doing from day to day. In the absence of any foolproof criterion for choosing sources who are likely to provide valid information, journalists are uncertain about whom to believe. They cope with uncertainty by continuing to rely on authoritative sources. The presumption of hierarchy—that those at the top of any organization are the people in charge and that those in subordinate positions do what their superiors tell them to—underlies the journalists' criterion for selecting sources even though journalists themselves recognize that this presumption is often of doubtful validity.

The presumption of hierarchy enables those at the top who know of misfeasance or malfeasance by subordinates to cover it up and

inhibits journalists from uncovering cover-ups. During Watergate, when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* filed a story that Howard Hunt, as a paid consultant to the Nixon White House, had been conducting an investigation of Senator Edward Kennedy, the *Post's* metropolitan desk pushed to have it featured on page one. But executive editor Benjamin Bradlee was uneasy about relying on sources whose authoritativeness he questioned and whose identity he did not—and under claim of reporter's privilege, could not—know. "You haven't got it," he insisted. "A librarian and a secretary say this fellow Hunt looked at a book. That's all." Woodward protested that a "responsible White House source" had explicitly said Hunt was conducting an investigation of Kennedy. Bradlee tried to satisfy himself by asking Woodward and Bernstein about their sources' rank in government. Woodward, "a little unsure about the rules on disclosing sources to the executive editor," asked if Bradlee wanted the source's name. "Just tell me if he's at the level of Assistant to the President," the editor replied. Woodward described the official's position. Learning that the information had come from a junior White House aide and a former administration official, among others, Bradlee was unimpressed. He rewrote the lead and relegated the story to an inside page. "Get some harder information next time," he said as he walked off. "Hardness" of information, in the journalist's creed, seems to depend on the authoritativeness of its sources.

The president, by convention, is *the* authoritative source in the United States. He has no peer. Even when it is apparent that he is out of touch, or lying, whatever he says is still presumed to warrant publication and to reflect accurately what the government is doing. When it does not, that, too, is news, but reporters' practices are not always well suited to discover it. There are some memorable exceptions, of course, and Watergate is one. For the *Washington Post*, unlike newspapers based outside the capital, the Watergate break-in was a local news story, not a national one, and it covered the story that way, assigning two young metropolitan desk reporters who followed the standard operating procedures of crime reportage. The routines and conventions of White House reporting were ill designed to uncover the Watergate story, but the routines and

conventions of police reporting were better suited to that task. They put Woodward and Bernstein in contact with law enforcement officials, including a key source in the FBI, who enabled them to unravel the cover-up. Yet even after their initial exposés, other newspapers continued to run versions of the events supplied by the White House press secretary and other senior officials. Indeed, so compelling was the convention of authoritative sources that the *Post's* own White House correspondents continued to doubt the accounts of Woodward and Bernstein. The *Post* itself routinely printed White House denials of its own stories, although that did not keep the facts of Watergate from eventually emerging. The convention of authoritativeness may assure a hearing in the news for those in authority, but it is no guarantee of a "good press" so long as other sources are willing and able to talk to reporters.

Reporters will go a long way for authoritative sources, not only more readily accepting their versions of reality, but also acceding to the rules of disclosure they may set, embargoing stories until a release time they find convenient, cloaking their identities, at times even killing a story outright at their request. Tacit alliances form between reporters and officials on the beat, as each uses the other to advantage within his own organization. Reporters exploit their contacts in government to get the stories, especially the exclusives, they need to get ahead in their news organization. Officials exploit reporters' need for news to deliver messages to target audiences in an effort to muster and maintain support, both in and out of government, for themselves and their preferred courses of action. Similar alliances form between columnists and political groups, sometimes based on ideological affinity: Joseph Kraft had close ties to Henry Kissinger; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak are known for their network of contacts among the radical right in Congress and among neoconservatives and the AFL-CIO. News making thus affects who gets ahead—both in the press and in the government.

A case in point is an April 30, 1985, page-one account in the *Washington Post* of a dispute over a speech President Ronald Reagan was scheduled to deliver to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Both the lead paragraphs and the headlines, "Reagan Aides Clash Over Trip Speech" on page one and "McFarlane, Buchanan Clash Over Trip" over the jump, or continuation of the story, play up the personal aspects of differences over the rhetorical tone of the draft. But subsequent paragraphs elaborate the story line to suggest that the dispute was more than a clash of personalities between national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane and White House communications director Patrick J. Buchanan. It involved a struggle between factions within the administration over alliance relations and policy toward the Soviet Union and Nicaragua.

"In recent weeks," it reads, "McFarlane reportedly has become steadily more critical of Buchanan and the speech writers who report to the communications director for positioning Reagan in ways the security adviser considers unnecessarily combative and ideological." The dispute began over speeches on Central America, "where McFarlane privately has contended that the more combative tone has undermined efforts" to gain congressional approval and allied support for aid to the Contras fighting the Nicaraguan government. "But yesterday's clash," the story continues, "shows that the dispute extends to issues beyond Central America," presumably to relations with the allies and the Soviet Union. That interpretation is denied by a source at the end: "One senior official said that the problem was one of tone as much as of ideology. 'The speech writers want a game-buster every time,' he said." The implication was that at issue was not so much the substance of policy as the desire of speech writers to win "applause back home" and the contrary concern of foreign policy specialists that words calculated to appeal to "the American Legion in Philadelphia" might only deepen Western European disaffection with American policies. Even after the speech was supposedly toned down, it occasioned a walkout by left-of-center deputies in Strasbourg. The article also prompted a demand by ten radical-right House members that White House chief of staff Donald T. Regan "find and fire" those responsible for such leaks, attacking Buchanan. That demand was itself later leaked to columnists Evans and Novak.

Who talked to the *Post* reporter and why? One clue comes from the byline: Lou Cannon. Cannon has covered Reagan administra-

tions ever since the president was governor of California, and he has numerous contacts among senior officials in the White House and elsewhere, especially among the more moderate and long-standing of the president's aides. Other clues come from Cannon's own characterization of his sources: "a senior official," "an administration official often critical of Buchanan," "one official," and "one senior official." Cannon also expressly rules out Buchanan as a source. Obvious candidates include McFarlane or one of his senior aides on the National Security Council staff, Michael K. Deaver, who worked on advance arrangements for the trip to Europe, including the much criticized visit to the Bitburg cemetery, and Richard R. Burt, assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs. All three were experienced in the ways of Washington. The initiative for the story came from a White House official prepared to vent his unhappiness with Buchanan, possibly Deaver, who was reacting to sniping from White House aides over Bitburg. Cannon then followed up the lead by contacting two or three other officials prepared to speak on a not-for-attribution basis. The target for the leak seems to have been not the public, but the president himself in the interest of prodding him to intervene and rein in Buchanan, since the dispute over the speech had already been resolved in favor of McFarlane's draft. If so, it backfired. Not only did it fail to bring Reagan in on McFarlane's side, but it also seems to have alienated chief of staff Regan, unhappy over what he took as indiscipline. It was the friction between Regan and McFarlane that culminated in McFarlane's resignation within the year.

The question of "who" is critical to both the content and the origin of Cannon's story. Although the dispute involved officials with different organizational interests as well as personal stakes in policy, the story highlights the clash of personalities in the White House, the who rather than the what or why of the controversy. Ascertaining who Cannon's sources were is essential to assessing just how personal or impersonal the dispute was.

As this example suggests, knowing how news is made is the key to understanding what it means. That requires, first, remembering that governments seldom speak with one voice. While the air may resound with the administration line, it also carries contrapuntal

themes, which vary in pitch and intensity but are usually audible to the discerning listener. Since news tends to emerge from the government as the by-product of policy disputes or policy changes, interpreting the news requires that readers determine what is at issue in the dispute or change. It also requires readers to make inferences about the sources of information, the positions they hold in public life, the stands they are taking on the issues in dispute, potential targets for their words, and their possible motives in uttering them to reporters. Knowledge of the organization and politics of news making may enable readers to reconstruct the origins of a story—to infer from what it says or implies who its sources may have been, what channels reporters used in gathering its contents, and why the sources spoke to them. Often the story makes this explicit. Sometimes, in the case of background briefings, the fact that a backgrounder has taken place is evident from the simultaneous appearance of similar stories in more than one newspaper, all without attribution. Careful comparison of the various accounts and knowledge of the political context of the moment will enable the reader to make an educated guess about the story's origin. Other times, in the case of leaks to individual reporters, the source may be harder to pin down, but even then, the story may contain clues about the source's department or agency or policy orientation, if not to his precise identity.

Who the sources are bears a close relationship to who is news. One study found that as a consequence of reporters' social location, news-gathering routines, and journalistic conventions, nearly half of the sources for all national and foreign news stories on page one of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were officials of the United States government. Most transmitted information through routine news-gathering channels—press releases, press conferences, or official proceedings. People not in a position to be covered routinely by reporters on a beat are much less likely to make the news. Ordinary people get into the news in two ways: when their paths cross that of a reporter on a beat, typically when they are caught up in official proceedings, or when reporters are set loose from routine journalism to do investigative reports. Mrs. Bumpurs is an example of the first; her daughter, of the second.

Who Is Not in the News?

Ordinary people are not the only ones who seldom appear in the news; journalists themselves are usually absent. That is not to say that the press itself is not news. It is. Indeed, the press can be obsessively self-absorbed with its own workings, especially when it sees its freedom being infringed. But the convention of objectivity dictates that in writing a story the reporter leave himself out of his account—that neither his person nor his point of view intrude conspicuously. Writing in the third person allows others to speak their parts, but allows the reporter as author to remain immanent.

In the 1960s, what Pete Hamill christened "the new journalism" came into vogue. By putting himself as well as his personal impressions and conclusions into his stories and saying so in his own words, the new journalist called attention to himself as author and to the news story as a genre. Television has forms for accommodating the journalist's persona; indeed, the journalist finds it hard to stay out of a television news story. At a minimum, he provides the voice-over, narrating what the film or videotape is trying to show the audience. Often he appears on camera to introduce the story and reappears at the end to deliver a short summation, "the closer." And the anchorman has no place to hide. The newspaper reporter, by contrast, can remain behind the story without manifesting himself in it. New journalism thus posed a deliberate and self-conscious challenge to the rhetorical pose of objectivity adopted by news journalism. As such, it drew immediate fire from traditionalists. A columnist like Hamill could get away with asserting his presence in a story, but news reporters could not. New journalism was nowhere to be found in the news columns; it has been relegated to the magazine and style sections of the newspaper.

Exceptions to the rule are therefore all the more startling. On Friday, December 18, 1981, five days after the military crackdown in Poland, the *New York Times* ran a letter on page one from its bureau chief in Warsaw, John Darnton, to foreign editor Robert B. Semple, Jr., under a brief italicized preface inserted by editors. "Dear Bob," the story began,

At least twice in the past 24 hours the official Polish press agency has used the word "normalization" to apply to events here. For Poles and other East Europeans this is a dreaded code word.

"Normalization" is what happened to Czechoslovakia after a Warsaw Pact invasion crushed the "Prague Spring" of 1968. In the peculiar jargon of Communist officials, in which words can mean their opposite, it is the restoration of orthodox authority. To people it is the almost unbearably painful process of watching the dismantlement, piece by piece, of freedom and liberties painstakingly won.

As if the epistolary form were not itself an unprecedented breach of the news tradition, the assessment was a personal one, without the customary attribution to sources or the designation "News Analysis." And the reporter managed to insert himself into his story by the device of the third person:

For someone who has lived here for almost three years, it is as if a door that was gradually opened has been suddenly shut.

"I can't see you now," whispers a Polish friend, as he answers his door and steps into the hallway, closing it behind him. "Didn't you hear? I was detained. I just got out. I'm sure you're being observed."

"We can't talk here," says another Polish friend standing in a stairwell, with a glance at a man nearby, who said he was a taxi driver waiting for a customer. He may, or may not, have been listening.

Shortly thereafter, Darnton was forced to leave Poland. His unusual story not only received a place of prominence in that bastion of news journalism, page one in the *Times*, but also helped his coverage of Poland win a Pulitzer Prize for international reporting. But the story of Poland was an exceptional one; the controversy between new and traditional journalism has subsided, resolved in favor of the latter. Journalists remain an unseen presence in the news columns.

Who Makes News and Who Governs?

Readers, whether they are attentive citizens or interested public officials, tend to lose sight of the fact that news is not reality, but a

Structure
Biases
Content

sampling of sources' portrayals of reality, mediated by news organizations. To coordinate the activities of their staffs with a modicum of efficiency, newspapers can do little more than establish some standard operating procedures for sampling potential sources. Whatever procedure they adopt unavoidably biases their selection of content. While no procedure can assure a sampling to satisfy all readers, some procedures affect the likelihood that some points of view and some people will be systematically excluded from press coverage. While no procedure can exclude outright lies, stories that sample only one source or one group of like-minded sources are almost certain to be partial.

People who are routine sources for the press are also more likely to be favorably portrayed in the news. Partly, this is due to the skill they have in news management, in controlling the face they display in public. Partly, too, it is due to the relationship that develops over time between reporters and sources on the beat. News sources whom a reporter contacts regularly are, along with the reporter's own colleagues in journalism, an important audience for news. Reporters are more likely to hear from them than from anyone else. While most readers remain faceless, reporters must confront their sources again and again, some every day and face-to-face. The feedback that reporters get from sources—corrections, compliments, complaints, outrage, denial of access—probably has greater immediacy than the occasional reactions they get from the rest of their readership—letters to the editor passed along, telephone tips or criticism, comments from friends and neighbors. Feedback has impact in proportion to social distance. James McCartney, who covered Washington for many years, has written of reporters' "vested interests in their beats." "A reporter," he says, "may hesitate to take a critical view of regularly tapped sources for the very human reason that he prefers to be greeted pleasantly when he walks into an office, rather than to be treated as though he were poison. His vested interest is in maintaining a pleasant atmosphere."

The causes of uncritical reporting go deeper than that. A reporter's performance on the job requires that he remain close enough to his sources to infer what their often elliptical comments mean and to understand their implications. That requires trying to figure out

why he is being told something. Without putting himself in his sources' shoes, without role taking, reporters may misconstrue their sources' motive or miss it entirely, and with it, the nuances of what is being said. Yet repeated role taking may lead a reporter to embrace his sources' perspectives and to portray them sympathetically in print. The line between empathy and sympathy, between role taking and loss of perspective, is easily crossed.

Other reporters, assigned to different beats, hear from different sources. So do general-assignment reporters and those freed from their beats to undertake investigations. To the extent that their sources have different perspectives and preferences, the news will contain a range of political views. To the extent that reporters rely routinely on authoritative sources, their voices will predominate, but not necessarily to the exclusion of opposition voices. So even if journalistic practice predisposes reporters to rely primarily on people in positions of authority for news, it does not follow that the press consistently legitimates or delegitimizes those in authority.

Those who argue, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan was among the first to do, that the press is part of an "adversary culture," recruiting to its ranks people "more and more influenced by attitudes genuinely hostile to American society and American government" and consequently inclined to delegitimize those in authority by emphasizing controversy and "bad news," have not made a convincing case. There is scant evidence that recent recruits to journalism are more questioning of social norms than their predecessors were. Moreover, the relationship between news content and journalists' personal political beliefs is a tenuous one, not yet demonstrated by systematic studies. Nor should that be surprising. News is, after all, not what journalists think, but what their sources say, and is mediated by news organizations, journalistic routines and conventions, which screen out many of the personal predilections of individual journalists. The convention of objectivity constrains journalists from being overtly adversarial in their stories. If they are to be adversarial, they must seek out opposing voices willing to go on the record. In so doing, they are constrained by their social location, news-gathering routines, and the convention of authoritativeness in their choice of sources. These constraints confine the

selection of opposition voices largely, though not wholly, to those who themselves hold positions of authority in government or respectable groups outside. The quantity and quality of divergent opinion contained in the news thus depends on the presence of well-organized and well-positioned oppositions in and out of government, accessible to the press and articulate in stating their views.

In contrast, those who argue that the press consistently legitimates those in authority assume a relationship between the weight that the press gives to authoritative sources and the public respect accorded them that has yet to be demonstrated conclusively. Again, this is not surprising. First, readers bring their attitudes toward authority with them when they pick up a newspaper. These attitudes tend to be formed in childhood and primary schooling, and hence are deeply rooted and resistant to change. Second, public opinion surveys show that the respect Americans accord to holders of authority in society, be they presidents, members of Congress, corporate executives, labor leaders, or government bureaucrats, varies considerably over time. Yet journalists' reliance on them as sources of news has remained fairly constant. Third, although those in authority do get to shape much of the information and interpretation that make the news, readers do not always believe them or agree with them.

Overall, the effects of news content on the process of social legitimation seem difficult to measure, tend to vary with the times, and will be marginal at most. Those who see news content as crucial to legitimation or delegitimation may only exemplify the phenomenon of selective perception of news by readers—social theorists included.

Reporters' reliance on official sources for news and the press's inclination to anthropomorphize politics may affect relations among the institutions of government more than the standing of the government as a whole. The White House, with its capacity to centralize dissemination of information and control access to dissident views within its walls, can present itself as a relatively unified, purposive institution personified by a single person, the president. The White House, reporters say, treats the press like a mushroom, keeping it in the dark and feeding it a lot of crap. It also has the

most prominent "who" in the news and in news making to exploit in trying to shape perceptions. The rest of the executive branch is not nearly as disciplined, though at times it, too, can appear to be a unified arm of the president to all but the closest observers. The Congress, by contrast, seldom looks unified or purposive in the news. Reporters, searching for conflict and trying to balance opposing views, present a picture of an institution riven by partisan, sectional, ideological, and personal differences, discordant, diffuse, even chaotic.

To the apolitical and to those predisposed to look upon the contention and confusion of democratic politics with disfavor, the Congress may seem like "a bunch of self-serving politicians" unworthy of attention or support. The sometime low esteem of Congress may be promoted by the impression that the news leaves on those who have this predisposition. Yet the portrait of the presidency as a unified, purposive actor may have perverse effects on its power as well. It may arouse unrealistic expectations, a belief that once the president says he wants to do something, it is as good as done. Americans may be especially prone to this form of rationalist fallacy. It may account, in part, for the sudden shift in popular attitudes toward defense between 1980 and 1982, away from concern that "more has to be done" on defense to acceptance that "defense spending is about right," after an election campaign in which both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan kept saying how much they were going to spend on defense.

The press's preoccupation with personality and style also leads it to confuse personal popularity with political power. The personal appeal of a president may not translate into political effectiveness if congressmen and bureaucrats of all political persuasions remain unconvinced of the popularity of the president's policies, however much the public may like him as a person. In his path-breaking analysis, *Presidential Power*, Richard Neustadt captures this distinction with his concept "public prestige." By public prestige, Neustadt means Washingtonians' expectations as to how the president's constituencies—and their own—will react to his proposals and programs. Washingtonians include elites in Washington and outside whose support or forbearance the president needs in order to do

what he wants done, such as members of Congress, bureaucrats, interest-group leaders, and corporate executives. It is his public prestige, not his approval rating in the polls, that is a resource a president can parlay into power. Popular presidents are not necessarily effective in getting their way, as Dwight Eisenhower's experience suggests and Ronald Reagan's second term may reconfirm. They may succeed in structuring the terms of public debate without winning it.

Journalistic practice may also affect the quantity and quality of opposition voices that reach readers. Politicians running for president have long complained about this. Yet estimations of the importance of the press at election time are often inflated. When press coverage can make a difference is in the preprimary stage of the campaign and during the early primaries. Then the press is, in Russell Baker's phrase, the Great Mentioner, paying attention to some candidates and not others, conferring name recognition on a few and thereby boosting their standing in the polls, which in turn helps them to raise money and garner additional press attention. Press attention matters more in a closely bunched field of relative unknowns than in a race between two well-known candidates. At the start of the quadrennial season, most news organizations practice zone coverage, assigning a reporter or two to cover the campaign. By the early primaries they switch to man-to-man coverage. Yet few news organizations have the money and manpower to cover all the candidates. Scarcity forces them to choose whom to cover, and this choice is critical for determining who gets attention, and with it, the chance to amass votes, volunteers, and funding. Senior editors make that choice, but they are influenced by what they hear from their political correspondents, read in the press, and gauge from the polls. Journalists are not alone in determining the attention that the press pays to some candidates and the way it portrays them, however. Until the first results are in, they rely on the campaigners themselves and on other politicians for judgments about electability. Within the press corps, moreover, some political correspondents and some newspapers exercise opinion leadership. After the first caucuses and primaries, the results determine who gets covered and who gets ignored.

If too much is made of the press's role in elections, too little may be made of its importance in governance, and in particular, in the formation and preservation of oppositions. The routines of news gathering and the convention of authoritative sources, when strictly adhered to, do help insulate reporters from the charlatans and hucksters who vie for attention. But they may also silence or distort opposition voices. Anyone not holding office in established institutions or recognized groups has no claim to publicity, but in mass movements or in riots, there may be no one in authority. Those who presume to speak for the movement or the rioters are often self-styled or self-appointed spokesmen. Reporters covering mass movements and riots continue to follow journalistic practice and seek out people in authority. The result frequently is that they turn to authorities in other institutions for information—police officers, social scientists, and again, public officials—many of them spokesmen for the very institutions under challenge from mass movements.

The decentralization of such movements, their characteristic refusal to appoint a unique official spokesman, and their need to resort to symbolic gestures in order to mobilize members or grab headlines generate press coverage portraying them as less than respectable, programmatically inchoate, and unlikely to succeed. Such coverage can have pernicious effects on the movement's internal organization.

The history of the movement against the war in Vietnam provides the best sustained example of how this can happen. Once the antiwar movement became a continuing story in the late 1960s, one to which some newspapers assigned reporters full-time, it was hard for movement leaders to say or do anything newsworthy that was not more extreme than anything they had already said or done. As long as reporters were routinely looking for the exceptional, there was always someone in the movement prepared to give them what they wanted, whether it was rhetorical excess or telegenic theater. Todd Gitlin has documented the consequences of news coverage for the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in *The Whole World Is Watching*. Once the news media turned the spotlight on the SDS, it generated a surge of new members, many from the South and Great Plains, whose radicalism was as much cultural as it was political and whose alienation was so thoroughgoing that they rebelled

against disciplined political action and even against organization itself. They took their cue from Bob Dylan: "Don't follow leaders." While the Old Guard of the SDS wanted to continue local grassroots organizing on a variety of issues and not turn the SDS into a national single-issue group, the new recruits—"Prairie Power," Gitlin calls them—were drawn to the SDS by its image in the news media as the most militant antiwar organization on campuses across the nation. Needing spokesmen for a movement that refused to choose them, the press, especially television news, focused on whoever held the bullhorn at rallies—the more radical-sounding and deviant-looking the better. As militancy intensified, only the militant were attracted to the movement, increasingly isolating it on the left. Having singled out one or two leaders, typically those with few followers, and having certified them as spokesmen for the movement, reporters kept coming back to record what they said. As the few got more and more media attention, they became celebrities, the movement's voice and identity in the news. Other leaders, not among the chosen few, began to resent the few who were. The more celebrated the few became, the more they themselves, not the movement or its political message, became the story.

In choosing "who," journalists prefer knowns to unknowns, and when they have no knowns, they create them. Through the news, these spokesmen acquired a following, but not a political base—an atomized, geographically dispersed audience whom they could mobilize occasionally by transmitting symbolic appeals through the news, not by face-to-face give-and-take and agreement on goals and strategy. They thereby gained not power but notoriety. "Fame is an asset," Jerry Rubin later wrote. "I can call up practically anyone on the phone and get through. People respect famous people—they are automatically interested in what I have to say. Nobody knows what I have done, but they know I'm famous." Celebrity may be an asset to the object of news attention, but it is a rapidly depleted one, and its acquisition helped shatter what little political organization the antiwar movement had.

The Vietnam Moratorium Committee, organizers of the largest one-day protest in American history on October 15, 1969, tried to avoid the pitfalls of such press coverage, but in the end they could

not control those attracted to the moratorium—or its public face. The Moratorium Committee wanted to differentiate itself from other, more radical groups and establish itself as the voice of the antiwar movement. Yet press coverage tended to obscure the differences among antiwar organizations. It also wanted to broaden the antiwar appeal, reaching off campus and across the nation to attract recruits of moderate, even apolitical persuasion, among adults as well as students. It decentralized activities rather than concentrating them in Washington, New York, Boston, and San Francisco, and held them downtown, away from college campuses. Yet the press paid the most attention to the largest rallies, often those at or near campuses. To project an appropriate image, the moratorium sought out public officeholders to address the rallies, scheduling them and other moderates to speak at midday and holding off radical speakers until later in the day, after reporters had left to file their stories by deadlines. It tried to give prominence to American flags, lest supporters of the war wrap themselves and their cause in the flag and lay claim to the nation's patriotic impulses. Even in its choice of symbol and name, the blue dove of the moratorium, not the red fist of a "strike for peace," it sought to convey moderation. Above all, it wanted nonviolent protest.

Yet no coherent political message came through the cacophony of voices in news dispatches; Vietcong flags carried by students in various states of dishabille were featured along with American flags and adults in conventional attire, especially in accompanying photographs; and stories dwelt on the few violent incidents while noting the generally peaceful nature of the protest. The Moratorium Committee had greater difficulty trying to define its program and its policy alternative. It never did figure out how to follow up its October 15 demonstrations and sustain press attention. And it never could frame a policy objective simple enough to transmit through the news and radical enough to appeal to militant antiwarriors, yet sophisticated and moderate enough to sound good to everyone else. Negotiating an end to the war would not do; the Nixon administration could always preempt that aim by tabling new proposals. In the end, the moratorium settled on a slogan, "Out Now," programatically simple, if politically unattainable, setting the stage for its

followers' disillusionment when it was not attained. News reports were quick to note the moratorium's programmatic incoherence and question its sustainability.

Press coverage of the nuclear freeze movement has recently retraced this pattern, with similar consequences for the movement. Who spoke authoritatively for the freeze was never quite clear to the press. At least two national organizations, one based in St. Louis and the other in Boston, competed with a host of local freeze organizations to define the movement's message. Meanwhile, President Reagan was shifting his stance, moving to the negotiating table and couching his proposals in language designed to appeal to disarmers. While the freeze seemed to stand for a halt in the development, production, and deployment of more nuclear weapons, Reagan was calling for deep reductions culminating in their elimination. While the slogans used by each side were simple, the reasons why a freeze made more immediate sense for American security were complex. The message never got through: the press, ever alert to contradiction and conflict, focused on apparent inconsistencies among freeze proponents. In the end, freeze supporters in Congress, taking advantage of reportorial routines on the Capitol Hill beat, displaced the grass-roots organizations as the arbiters of what the movement stood for. Even they had trouble spelling out whether a freeze meant a ceiling on weapons, or reductions, and which weapons developments would be halted and which permitted. Moreover, freeze-movement activity manifested itself mostly in door-to-door campaigning and public opinion. It could not compete effectively with the administration's ability to take new action. In the journalists' creed, newsworthiness poses a key question, "So what's new?" It was a question the freeze movement was not an answer to for very long. The press, with its short attention span, was soon distracted. That made it harder for the freeze to sustain the activism of its followers.

The defining condition of American democracy is the existence of potentially effective oppositions that are capable of replacing the administration in an election or that can affect the course of government even when they do not control it. The opportunity to voice opposition through the press is critical in this process. Who makes

the news affects who governs and who opposes. If the voices of government, by their ability to dominate the news, get to define the issues that are politically salient, opposition voices frame the lines of cleavage over which policy battles are fought and thereby help define which outcomes are politically practicable. The press, in amplifying some voices and muting others, in distorting some messages and letting others come through loud and clear, affects the nature of opposition and hence of governance. The press does not do so on its own: groups differ in their ability to make their voices heard and to direct and shape their messages for the public. Yet who makes news, and who therefore reaches their audiences, helps determine the direction of political life in the American republic.