

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Opening Shot



BRETT BLACKLEDGE OF THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS seems overwhelmed after hearing that he had been awarded a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. Blackledge's series exposed corruption in Alabama's two-year college system and prompted sweeping changes in the state's education department. Find out how Blackledge and the Pulitzer finalists in his category did the reporting for their stories. What can you learn from the way they went about their work?

SUPERIORITY COMPLEX, PP. 26-27:

What does it say about the White House press corps that so many eyebrows were raised by a tough question put to President Bush by a British journalist? Do you think the question was impertinent? Why or why not? Why do American broadcasters put less emphasis on foreign news than the BBC does? Assess the impact of the decision to shutter many foreign news bureaus. Find a transcript of the March 2003 press conference that is referred to on page 27. Do you agree with Ewen MacAskill's assessment of it? What questions do you think should have been asked? Why do you think they weren't? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Watch BBC news on television and/or click onto its Web site. Compare and contrast its reporting to that of American network news broadcasts. Why do you think the BBC's popularity is growing in America? What aspects of its coverage do you think American broadcasters should adapt for their own programs? Read selections from the Web sites of the major British newspapers. Placing your comments in the context of the comments made about them and their American counterparts on page 27, compare and contrast their reporting and writing to each other and to any three major American newspapers. Do you think the more sensational British papers serve the interests of their readers? Why or why not?

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT, PP. 30-38:

From the point of view of the reporter, reader, and the military, what, according to the article, are the benefits and drawbacks of embedding? What do you think would be the best way for a journalist to cover the war? Can a reporter

Talking Points

IN THIS ISSUE, CJR takes its annual look at excellence in journalism. While relatively few journalists win such a prestigious prize as a Pulitzer, excellent work is produced by journalists every day — often under difficult circumstances. Few face conditions as harsh as those who are reporting from Iraq. This issue has the story of one such reporter, John Laurence, who, along with his camera crew, spent a year in Iraq living with a regiment of the 101st Airborne Division.

Aside from dodging bullets, Laurence risked the wrath of the men he was covering when he investigated a story about the torture of Iraqi citizens. And, as Laurence points out, in previous wars — most notably Vietnam — reporters have been targeted by soldiers who aren't always fans of the press. What do you think of embedding reporters? Is it the best way to cover the war? Would you risk your life to make sure an important story that might anger soldiers was nonetheless covered?

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be embedded without becoming too attached to the troops he or she is covering? Ultimately, do you think the author succeeded in doing so? Why or why not? Imagine you are a camera operator embedded with a unit. A soldier nearby is shot. Do you run to help the soldier, or should you continue to operate your camera? Explain. How would you deal with the fear of being in a war zone? What would you have done about the torture story had you been in the Laurence's position? Would you have pursued the story the same way he did? Would you have tried to mend fences with the soldiers? If so, how? Why do you think the soldiers became more friendly toward the author after they returned home?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: List some of the personal and professional qualities that the author brought to his work in Iraq and discuss them. Invite a journalist who has been to Iraq to talk to the class about his or her experiences.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF VICTOR PEY, PP. 38-43:

Why do you think the Chilean government has been reluctant to help Victor Pey? What might be a newspaper in the United States that would be considered similar to *Clarín*? Why is it or isn't it a good publication in your opinion?

Between the Lines

- 1) After reading "After the Falls" (p. 14), why do you think these successful reporters went bad? Draw up what you think should be a code of conduct for journalists.
- 2) Are people really as interested in the lives and deaths of celebrities such as Anna Nicole Smith as the airtime devoted to these types of stories seems to indicate? What is behind the fascination?
- 3) Reread the pullquote on page 21 and comment on it. How important is it for a journalist to question authority?
- 4) After reading about the sexual abuse suffered by female journalists overseas (p. 22), what do you think can and should be done to break through the culture of nondisclosure and also make reporting safer for female journalists?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Research and select a South American or Central American country that underwent a coup within the past fifty years. Research and discuss the role that the press in that country played in either supporting or opposing the coup. How important was the press's role in the government's rise and fall?

THE SHIELD BEARER, PP. 48-52:

What are shield laws? Why were they enacted? Do you feel they are important? Why or why not? How have protections for journalists been eroded since *Branzburg v. Hayes*? What do you think is behind efforts by the current Justice Department to compel more reporters to cooperate with legal proceedings? Why does Mike Pence believe that shield

protections are a legitimate conservative issue? Do you agree or disagree? Explain. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Find out whether your state has a shield law in place. If so, how far does it go? If not, why not? Research any case in which a journalist was sent to jail for refusing to cooperate with the government. Discuss the details of the case. What were its legal and journalistic ramifications? Find out where your Senators and Representatives stand on the Free Flow of Information Act. Why do they support it or oppose it?

NEW GRUB STREET, PP. 55-59:

Why is food writing getting more space in the press? Do you think it is as important as the article's author believes it is? Why or why not? How and why do you think the counterculture of the 1960s affected American food? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Do your own investigation into the questions asked by Michael Pollan on the bottom of page 55. List all the items you've eaten in a day. Find out what is in your food and where it came from. What conclusions can you draw from your investigation? Read the arguments about organic farming presented by *The Economist* on page 56. Research the facts. Based on your reporting, do you think *The Economist* is right or wrong? List five food stories that you think should be reported. Write one of them.

Quick Takes

- 1) Find out where the major presidential candidates stand on the information policies discussed in "Calling Uncle Sam" (p. 4). Write an article comparing and contrasting their views.
- 2) Select any one of the reporting winners of the Pulitzer Prize. Read the story or stories that won the award. Discuss the merits of the stories or series and what you learned about reporting from your selection. Choose any one of the winners of the National Magazine Awards. Read several issues of the magazine and discuss why you think it was awarded first prize in its category.
- 3) Find examples of English-language Indian newspapers (p. 24) online. Compare and contrast them in style and substance to your local newspaper or newspapers.
- 4) After reading "Soldiers' Stories" (p. 39), imagine you are the managing editor of *Army Times*. Make a list of ten stories that you think need to be written. Select one and explain how you would report it.
- 5) Read selections of a pioneering African-American journalist (p. 67) of your choice and discuss them. How do you think the work was affected by the author's race?