

**THE RISE OF THE “NEW NEWS”
A Case Study of Two Root Causes
of the Modern Scandal Coverage**

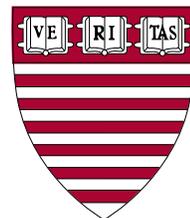
by

Marvin Kalb

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The Joan Shorenstein Center
on the Press, Politics and Public Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Telephone (617) 495-8269 • Fax: (617) 495-8696
Web Site Address: <http://ksgwww.harvard.edu/~presspol/home.htm>

INTRODUCTION

Never in history have the educational and professional standards of American journalists been higher; seldom in history has the performance of American journalism been lower than in the first half of 1998, when the Monica Lewinsky scandal obsessed the nation. Rumor and opinion have been passed off as fact. Highly partisan sources have been used, anonymously, as if they were disinterested fonts of knowledge. Working reporters transformed themselves into opinionated commentators and within minutes shifted back into the pretense that they were objective observers. News stories routinely smacked of "attitude." And that great curse of American journalism, cynicism, covered the world like the label on a Sherwin Williams paint can.

In the following analysis, Marvin Kalb uses coverage of the Lewinsky scandal to explore how the press has changed—or been compelled to change—the traditional way it conveys information to the public. New information technologies have dramatically increased the pressure to work fast, too often at the sacrifice of accuracy and objectivity. And Kalb persuasively traces part of the lapse of standards to the profit motive. Television networks and newspapers, now owned by market-dependent financial interests, sacrificed traditional objectivity and professionalism in hopes of winning bigger audiences, higher ratings, more national attention and greater profits, if only for a moment—for only the moment matters. Tomorrow is another contest, and there is no real penalty for being wrong so long as the money comes in. Reporters who would once have been slapped down for letting their opinions leak into a news story now found themselves invited onto TV talk shows to air their personal views. Television, especially, has blurred any distinction between reporter, commentator and principal; all are just talking heads. Yes, you could sometimes find "the press" among the faces on *Meet the Press*; you can also find maidens on *Maiden Lane*. The hard part is figuring out exactly which ones they are.

"Journalists have become too big for their britches," Kalb writes. Merely reporting fact is no longer enough for them. Now they must analyze and interpret. The result has been a period far more cynical than that previous low point in American journalism, the McCarthy era. Then, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) made the most outrageous accusations about Communists

in government and reporters blandly relayed his accusations without question or skepticism. Their "professional" reasoning was, "He said it. It's not my job to question it." But say this for McCarthy-age journalism: When McCarthy made an accusation, you knew the source was McCarthy and you could credit or disbelieve him as you chose. Contrast that with the sleazy performance of today's reporters who write leads like, "Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr has evidence that President Clinton suborned perjury, lawyers with knowledge of the case said yesterday." In the McCarthy days, the source was known to be not merely a partisan but a recklessly irresponsible one; today reporters routinely pretend that their sources are dispassionate, disinterested and non-partisan. Throughout the Kenneth Starr investigations, journalists have reported one side of an adversarial proceeding, Starr's version of events, without revealing that fact to their readers or viewers.

In his four-year investigation of President Clinton, Independent Counsel Starr has managed, as a by-product, to corrupt the American press. He would leak information to chosen reporters on the condition that they not identify him as the source and not question his motives or his facts. One of the difficulties in appreciating the magnitude of this transgression is that many of the accusations from Starr and his allies have proven to be accurate. There was, in fact, a semen-stained dress. Clinton did, in fact, cover up a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky by lying about it to close aides. An outsider looking at the insidious inter-relationship between Starr and the reporters who covered him (by accepting his version of events unquestionably) might conclude, "No harm, no foul." But there is harm. Among the casualties is the notion of truth, which was once the objective, however unobtainable, of journalism. The quest for truth, the notion of credible evidence and believable testimony have been replaced by spin. Today it is Starr's spin vs. the President's spin, not Starr's testable evidence vs. the President's rebuttal. As Kalb has memorably written elsewhere, journalists too often abdicate their role of trying to sift this conflicting evidence and instead transform themselves into drama critics, interpreting for the public how one side's spin will fare against the other's. "So tell me, Steve," says the TV host to his guest reporter, "how will this play with the public?" At this point, the

reporter needs to know nothing at all. He can merely pontificate.

Is there any way to restore standards? Kalb points out how the much-derided mainstream media have lost their monopoly. Instead of three TV networks, there are now a variety of cable outlets, plus the Internet and talk radio. Internet gossip Matt Drudge could never establish a widely read newspaper with correspondents, printing presses and delivery trucks to match, say, the *New York Times*. Drudge is absolutely capable, however, of setting up an Internet Web site that competes on an equal footing with the *Times* Web site. And if both Drudge and the *Times* are playing the game of "spin," who can judge between them?

This new confusion and breakdown of traditional standards puts a far greater burden on

news consumers to become their own sifters of evidence, their own judges of credibility, their own decipherers of hidden motives and biased sources. We can no longer rely on the press to give us a straight version of yesterday's events. News now comes with analysis and interpretation built-in, and on the worst of the networks and newspaper chains—Rupert Murdoch's, for example—it approaches propaganda. The only answer to the blurring of roles and the lowering of standards is, "Think for yourself." Easier said than done.

Lars-Erik Nelson
Columnist
New York Daily News

THE RISE OF THE “NEW NEWS” A Case Study of Two Root Causes of Modern Scandal Coverage

by Marvin Kalb*

This study is about press coverage of the first few weeks of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. It is not about whether President Clinton lied, or encouraged others to lie; he said on August 17, 1998 that he had been less than truthful but never encouraged others to lie. Nor is it a reprise of the worst in American journalism, which was on ample display during that time and which, when appropriate, will be cited.¹ It is, rather, an attempt to answer the frequently asked question: what is wrong with American journalism? Asked another way: why has it lost the trust and confidence of so many of its readers and viewers? The answer does not lie in the sudden collapse of professional standards; it does lie in the rise in recent decades of a host of substantial challenges posed primarily by (1) new technologies and (2) a recent restructuring of the economic underpinning of the industry. Both of these challenges have forced a revolutionary transformation of the news business from a public service into a predominantly commercial enterprise, where profit tends to trump service at just about every bend in the road. The effect has been to change the very definition of journalism and to produce a “new news.” (This transformation has also coincided with a drastic decline in confidence and respect for political authority, growing out of the Vietnam and Watergate experiences, and with the sudden end to the Cold War, which left newsrooms without a central, organizing focus for the news. But these latter issues are for another study.)

Our story follows a traditional narrative path. Part One features Michael Isikoff, an old-fashioned investigative reporter for *Newsweek* magazine, who finds himself scooped by the new technology of the Internet on a highly competitive story about President Clinton and a White House intern. Next we shall explain the conceptual framework for our analysis of the emergence of the “new news.” Then, in one section after another, we shall provide illustrations and explanations of the new technology, the new economics and the “new news.” Finally, in a conclusion, we shall discuss what we have learned and what yet remains to be learned.

Marvin Kalb is Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy and Edward R. Murrow Professor of the Press and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

**Amy Sullivan*, a graduate student at the Harvard Divinity School, provided invaluable assistance in the research, drafting, and writing of this paper. She is a careful, dedicated student of press/politics. In the early months of our work, she was joined by Kendra Proctor, a graduate student at the Kennedy School of Government, who helped us with research and insights into this study. Together they composed an exceptional team and greatly enriched the study.

Part One: Curtain Raiser

On Saturday evening, January 17, 1998, after almost 48 hours of writing, editing and frantic phoning for last-minute tidbits about a story linking President Clinton to a sexual relationship with a former White House intern, reporter Michael Isikoff argued with his *Newsweek* editors that his gangbuster exclusive ought to be published in the next issue. They refused, believing that the story needed more work. The bulldog in Isikoff kept arguing. His editors stood firm. Finally, exhausted, Isikoff drove home and, almost immediately, fell asleep.

Unfortunately for *Newsweek* and Isikoff, today's news cycle never sleeps.

On Sunday morning, when Isikoff awoke, his wife informed him that "someone named Matt Drudge called last night," but she didn't want to disturb him. Suddenly, Isikoff understood that his exclusive might no longer be exclusive. There was a good chance that for the second time in six months Matt Drudge, author of an Internet gossip column called the *Drudge Report*, had scooped Isikoff on his own story. In fact, Drudge, a thirtysomething who wears a Walter Winchell fedora, was the first "reporter" to put the name "Monica Lewinsky" into play in an item he posted on the Web that Sunday evening. For the scorekeepers, this was a major scoop, an illustration of the competitive power and speed of the Internet to beat *Newsweek* and other mainstream news organizations to a story. Once on the Internet, the story was everywhere—and everybody's.



If Hollywood were casting the role of an investigative journalist, it would have to look no further than Michael Isikoff. Blessed with a perpetual look of skepticism, Isikoff is a rumpled, bespectacled, dogged reporter. Colleagues say his commitment to investigative reporting borders on the obsessive, not unlike the sleuthing of Woodward and Bernstein during Watergate. Isikoff was a college student when the dynamic duo put Watergate at the top of the list of national embarrassments. Inspired by their work, he became a reporter upon graduation and eventually landed a job covering politics at the *Washington Post*.

Among other assignments, Isikoff covered the 1992 presidential campaign. Like many of his colleagues, he followed the Gennifer Flowers story;² but unlike most other reporters, he continued digging after the election. Isikoff combed

through the voluminous records of the Federal Election Commission. He discovered that the Clinton campaign had not reported any payments to a private investigator who was hired to look into the so-called "bimbo eruptions." Isikoff later explained: "That was something I fixated on. If you look at FEC reports as some of us do, you can find . . . every last nickel reported under expenditures . . . But here was a rather substantial portion of funds going to a private investigator for the Clinton campaign, and it was nowhere reported."³

From the *Washington Post*, Isikoff moved across the corporate street to *Newsweek*, where he pursued investigative reporting with a zeal for scandal. Soon on Isikoff's radar scope were the names of Paula Jones, who was in the process of suing Clinton for sexual harassment in Arkansas; Kathleen Willey, a Democratic Party volunteer in Virginia; and Linda Tripp, a staffer at the Pentagon who had served in the White House under Presidents Bush and Clinton. Slowly Isikoff began to connect the dots. In early 1997, he learned that Willey was claiming Clinton had "groped" her at the White House. His only confirmation was a hesitant Tripp, so Isikoff therefore had no "story"—until July, 1997, when Jones's lawyers subpoenaed Willey. They too had heard about Willey's claim.

Isikoff sensed that he was on the edge of a big story, and he began to write his account when, unexpectedly, he crossed paths with the up-and-coming Mr. Drudge. On his Web site, Drudge wrote that Isikoff would soon report that another woman—not just Jones—was claiming that Clinton had sexually harassed her, and that he had done so in the Oval Office, meaning the alleged incident took place while he was President. For the first time, Drudge on the Internet beat Isikoff of *Newsweek* with a story. It was later estimated by a proud Drudge that curious White House staffers, eager for every juicy detail, clicked onto his Internet page more than 2,000 times in one day. Interestingly, though, most Washington reporters ignored the Isikoff-Drudge report of Willey's allegations.

When Isikoff first made contact with Tripp at her job in the Pentagon, she told him that she didn't believe Willey's story and claimed to have seen the volunteer leave the Oval Office after the alleged grope, looking quite pleased with herself. Later, Tripp informed Isikoff that he was "on the right trail, but barking up the wrong tree." Enter Monica Lewinsky, though at this stage not by name. Tripp said that a former White House intern had told her that she was

having a sexual relationship with the President. Tripp was taping her conversations with the intern. In October, 1997, Tripp introduced Isikoff to her New York book agent, Lucianne Goldberg, and they offered Isikoff an extraordinary opportunity: did he want to listen to the tapes? Though Isikoff was severely tempted, he declined. As a journalist investigating a story, he did not want to become part of the story. He wanted to avoid any actions that would make him a "co-conspirator. . . . That's not a situation I wanted to be in."⁴

During the fateful week of January 12, 1998, Isikoff felt two strong emotions: he was getting tantalizingly close to the biggest story of his career, but at the same time, he was losing control of it. Part of the reason was that independent counsel Kenneth Starr had also been told by Tripp about her surreptitious taping of Lewinsky. Starr, who had been investigating a number of other allegations against the White House and Clinton, now received official permission from Attorney General Janet Reno to expand his mandate still further to include the Lewinsky matter. He persuaded Tripp to tape Lewinsky once more in a calculated effort to implicate the President in the scandal.

Once Isikoff learned about Starr's expanded mandate, he felt he had proper justification to publish his story. To provide a full account of the story beyond the hearsay accounts he had gleaned from Tripp, Isikoff now had to listen to the incriminating tapes. On Friday, January 16, 1998, he tried desperately to get copies of the Tripp-Lewinsky conversations. He had been told about the content, but he wanted to hear copies or read transcripts. At the same time, he phoned a source in Starr's office to ask for a comment about his story, which contained references to Lewinsky and Vernon Jordan, a well-known Washington attorney who had been helping Lewinsky get a lawyer and a job. His source pleaded with Isikoff not to publish his story and not to call either Lewinsky or Jordan, implying that the independent counsel's office was attempting to "flip" Lewinsky and involve her in a sting of Jordan, presidential secretary Betty Currie, and possibly even President Clinton.⁵ Isikoff had intended to call both Lewinsky and Jordan—they were, after all, major characters in an unflattering story, and they deserved the chance to respond before publication. Still, Isikoff agreed to play ball with his source in Starr's office and not attempt to call either Lewinsky or Jordan until that evening.

Shortly before midnight, Isikoff caught the equivalent of a touchdown pass. From a source he still refuses to name, but who is widely believed to be Goldberg, Isikoff finally obtained copies of tapes containing 90 minutes of highly explosive conversations between Tripp and Lewinsky about the former intern's story of an affair with the President. If Isikoff had had any doubts about proceeding with his story, the tapes erased them, even though they raised one huge problem. Nothing in the taped conversations involved Jordan in a conspiracy to obstruct justice—a major part of Isikoff's piece. However, the picture woven by the two women did present a stunning story about a presidential escapade with a 21-year-old intern. Isikoff kept pressing his editors to publish the story, but he encountered stiff resistance. His editors were reluctant to publish unsubstantiated allegations that could disrupt Starr's still secret investigation of the Lewinsky affair. They were under no professional obligation to cooperate with Starr, or to be mindful of the delicacy of his investigation—"Hell, it's not like this was the Bay of Pigs,"⁶ Isikoff complained. But, in fact, like any number of other editors facing controversial decisions relating to government secrets, they bent over backwards to be as "responsible" as possible.

The battle between Isikoff and his editors ran into Saturday—decision-day—but there was still no decision regarding whether or not to publish. Even though Clinton had frequently been associated with rumors of womanizing, this story was different. It placed a sitting president in a sexual relationship with a White House intern; and *Newsweek*, though locked in a fierce competitive war with *Time*, did not want to be—or appear to be—sensationalist. All day, in both New York and Washington, editors argued the pros and cons of publication. Conversations on conference calls grew increasingly hot and angry. Around Washington, reporters picked up tips to the effect that *Newsweek* was agonizing about publishing a bombshell. *Time* heard that it might have something to do with Starr's investigation. A few newspaper reporters had sniffed the same scent. And so, unsurprisingly, had the White House, which that day, coincidentally, was obsessed by the President's deposition in the Paula Jones lawsuit.

Normally, it is the reporter who calls the official source. This time it was the deputy chief of staff at the White House, John Podesta, who called Isikoff, asking in effect what he knew. Isikoff knew enough to substitute a question for an answer. What did the White House

know? Podesta responded that the White House had heard something about “Starr tapes” and “obstruction of justice.” Because Isikoff knew that Podesta had helped Lewinsky get a job interview, he quickly assumed that Podesta would connect Lewinsky to the Starr investigation. But, much to Isikoff’s surprise, Podesta made no such connection, and Isikoff decided to probe a bit further. Adopting a deliberately casual tone, Isikoff asked, “Is the name Monica Lewinsky familiar to you?” Podesta replied that he thought she had been an intern. “What’s the deal [then] with Bill Richardson, getting her an interview with him?” asked Isikoff. Podesta answered that Lewinsky was looking for a job and he helped her. Isikoff thanked him and hung up with the knowledge that at least some top advisors at the White House had not yet made the link between the former intern and his exclusive story.

On Saturday night, the battle between reporter and editor had to end. It was decision time, and *Newsweek* chairman and editor-in-chief Richard Smith made the most controversial decision of his career. Apparently calculating that the Isikoff story would remain his exclusive property for another week, Smith decided to hold the story for the next issue—it needed more work, he thought. Obviously, he did not know at the time that Drudge had been briefed about the Isikoff scoop and that it would shortly be all over the Internet.

By the time Isikoff rolled out of bed on Sunday morning, his story was already rolling across the screens of thousands of computers all over the country. Drudge had struck pay dirt—a titillating tale of a President with a wandering eye and a young intern with a fluttering heart. He didn’t have the details, but he published the headlines on his Web site. Drudge peddled unconfirmed information—what might be called gossip; Isikoff tried, as a responsible reporter, to publish news. Over a period of many months, Isikoff had carefully cultivated his sources, combed through hundreds of pages of election rules and regulations, refused to cross ethical lines and listen to incriminating tape recordings and pursued this story when there were few leads and little encouragement. Isikoff prided himself on being a product of the old school of journalism (however in the current environment that needs to be defined), but he had been scooped by the new school and quickly learned that he had to adapt in order to survive. And adapt he did!



From Sunday, January 19, 1998, when Drudge ran the bare outlines of the Isikoff scoop on the Internet, until Wednesday, January 21, 1998, when the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* published the details of an alleged Clinton-Lewinsky liaison on the front pages, *Newsweek* agonized about its decision to delay publication. Had it made a mistake? Drudge, undeterred by the fact that he had very few details, continued running paper-thin accounts of the scandal, generating a flood of publicity for his Web site and fanning the flames of scandal.

On Sunday morning, it was time for Washington’s press/politics junkies to gather ritualistically around their television sets for the talk shows. The topic of conversation on ABC’s *This Week* was Paula Jones. In a comment that must seem painfully amusing in hindsight, former-Clinton-advisor-turned-ABC-pundit George Stephanopoulos questioned whether the Jones lawsuit would have any effect on the Clinton presidency: “What worse can come out than already has been out? He has been accused of murder, my goodness, from Jerry Falwell. What else can come out?” A few minutes later, another roundtable participant, Bill Kristol, the conservative editor of the *Weekly Standard*, became the first person to mention the Lewinsky story on television. Kristol told the TV audience that “the story in Washington this morning is that *Newsweek* magazine was going to go with a big story based on tape-recorded conversations, which a woman who was a summer intern at the White House, an intern of Leon Panetta’s . . .”—when suddenly he was cut off by Stephanopoulos. “And Bill, where did [the story] come from? the *Drudge Report*.” Stephanopoulos argued that the Internet column had been discredited and should be ignored. Both men were then interrupted by Sam Donaldson, who ended the exchange between them with an interesting disclaimer: “I’m not an apologist for *Newsweek*, but if their editors decided they didn’t have it cold enough to go with, I don’t think that we can sit here without—unless you’ve seen what they were basing their decision on—how could we say *Newsweek* was wrong to kill it.”

Nevertheless, the story gained a flicker of visibility when *Washington Post* reporter Peter Baker reported in Monday’s edition that “commentators on ABC discussed reports that *Newsweek* killed a . . . sensational story alleging a long-running tryst involving Clinton while he’s been president.” That evening on the CNBC

talk show *Equal Time*, host Bay Buchanan asked Democratic strategist Jennifer Laszlo about the Kathleen Willey rumors. Laszlo promptly retorted: "I don't think that it is true. It's been reported by *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff, who's also claiming that the president had sex with an intern in the same article. My belief, Bay, is that he has perhaps confused reality with the movie *Wag the Dog* and that they're making up all kinds of allegations."

Still, the story began to develop legs. Reporters for other news organizations called every possible source for a sliver of hard information about Lewinsky. Very few sources had any hard information at all. No matter. The *Union Leader* in Manchester, New Hampshire—not known for its Clinton sympathies—featured the rumored story on its editorial page, labeling it another "Bimbo Eruption" in its January 20 edition.

By Tuesday, January 20, 1998, the pressure cooker of Washington journalism was on the edge of exploding. The *Washington Post*, helped by its sister publication, *Newsweek*, pulled together the strands of this sensational story. So did the Washington bureau of the *Los Angeles Times*. At 10:30 P.M., eastern time, as they prepared their front pages, both newspapers also released the story to their Internet Web sites. Jackie Judd of ABC News came up with the same story at roughly the same time, perhaps from these Web sites, from independent reporting or from a combination of the two. She was ready to broadcast the story on *Nightline* at 11:30 P.M., but anchor Ted Koppel chose to feature the Pope's visit to Cuba instead. Undaunted, she put the story on ABC radio and the ABC Web site. Within a matter of moments, the Lewinsky story was everywhere, and *Newsweek's* beleaguered editors reached two quick conclusions: they had to (1) put the entire Isikoff story on the Internet, since the next issue of the magazine would not hit the newsstands until the following Monday; and (2) blanket the airwaves with its own people, boasting not only about their journalistic prowess (they had more details than anyone else) but also about their sense of journalistic responsibility—after all, they argued with questionable logic, they hadn't published the Isikoff story the previous weekend, because they thought it needed more work.

Isikoff took to this chore like a happy warrior. On January 21, 1998, shortly after dawn broke in the nation's capital, Isikoff embarked on a tour from one studio to another, telling the tale of Monica Lewinsky to listeners and

viewers on such programs as *Imus In The Morning*, *The Today Show*, *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* and *The News with Brian Williams* on MSNBC. Undoubtedly Isikoff would have appeared on even more programs if he had not already had a commentator's contract with NBC.

Isikoff understood the power of the new school of journalism to propagate a story, to generate a public presence on the road to becoming a kind of talk show celebrity, to parlay a string of media appearances into lucrative lectures and, if possible, to use his newfound notoriety to enhance his position at *Newsweek*.

For Isikoff, it would not have been "too wild a dream," to quote the late Eric Sevareid, to imagine himself at this heady moment playing the role of Michael Isikoff in a movie about the Lewinsky scandal.

Part Two: Conceptual Framework

For anyone old enough to recall the role of the *Washington Post* in the unraveling of the Nixon presidency, the front page of the January 21, 1998 edition must have evoked familiar memories. The lead story was headlined "CLINTON ACCUSED OF URGING AIDE TO LIE." It was as if Watergate had suddenly joined hands with Whitewater, and a president's fate was again hanging in the balance. Written by three reporters—Susan Schmidt, Peter Baker and Toni Locy—the story focused on an expanded investigation by independent counsel Kenneth Starr into the President's private life and featured such legalistically ominous phrases as "obstruction of justice" and "subornation of perjury." Highlighted were unfamiliar names, such as Monica Lewinsky and Linda Tripp, that would quickly come to be associated with scandal, sex, corruption and—the day was still young—possibly even impeachment.

The White House, already battle-hardened to embarrassments of this sort, dressed for combat with political enemies and a press corps that has been ambivalent about Bill Clinton—admiring his political skills and feisty determination, but sharply critical of his duplicity and ethical slipperiness and worried that he was, too often, taking them to the cleaners. For most of the reporters, the *Post* story was like a shot of adrenaline, converting many into 1998 pop-out caricatures of Woodward and Bernstein, the two reporters who, more than any other, uncovered the cover-ups that ultimately forced Richard Nixon to resign from office on August 8, 1974, one step ahead of almost certain impeachment

Table 1. White House Press Briefings and Monicagate

Date of Briefing	Total Number of Questions Asked	Lewinsky-Related	Other	Percentage of Questions Related to Lewinsky
1/21/98	128	113	15	88%
1/22/98	97	81	16	83%
1/23/98	79	52	27	66%
1/26/98	117	84	33	72%
1/28/98	40	34	6	85%
1/29/98	100	64	36	64%

by the House of Representatives. They immediately sensed that Monicagate was Clinton's Waterloo; though he had survived other scandals with relative impunity, he would almost certainly drown in this one.

From the moment the story appeared, reporters seemed in a rush to win Pulitzers covering the president's anticipated collapse. Time-honored standards and practices were either ignored or discarded with the result that in the early weeks of Monicagate—the focus of this study—American journalism hit a new low. Questions were raised about the very nature of

journalism and its impact on public opinion and policy. Was the frenzy of the moment a journalistic aberration, an odd coming together of embarrassing coincidences? Did it prove that journalism had mysteriously lost its compass—and, along with it, its ethical and professional standards? Or, were we witnessing the tip-of-the-iceberg excesses of a new journalism, produced by a combination of powerful forces?



The daily press briefing at the White House was as good a place as any to measure press performance. It was a living laboratory; a besieged spokesman using his podium as a shield, scores of reporters firing skeptical questions at him and, in the back of the briefing room, which covers the pool once used by President Kennedy, dozens of television cameras carried these tumultuous exchanges "live" to the watching world. For most reporters, the news environment had already been bursting with speculation about the President's upcoming State of the Union address and about the consequences of another buildup of US military power against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. These two big stories dominated the journalistic landscape—but now came Monicagate. Within hours it dominated every other story, paralyzing the political process and threatening an administration. How did the White House press corps respond?

On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of that first week of the new scandal, the President's spokesman, Mike McCurry, was asked a total of 304 questions, an average of about 100 questions per briefing, significantly higher than the norm, which in January and February ran about 40 to 50 questions. To be specific, on January 21, 1998, 128 questions were asked; 113 were about Monica Lewinsky. On January 22, 1998, 97 questions were asked; 81 were about

Nightline programs on Monicagate

- "Dark day at the White House"
- "Crisis in the White House"
- "The First Family in Full Battle Regalia"
- "Scandal at Home"
- "White House Intern"
- "Who is Ken Starr?"
- "The Clintons versus the Media and the Right Wing"
- "New Revelations in Crisis in Clinton White House"
- "Hardball Politics or Obstruction of Justice"
- "Battle Lines—Roots of a Scandal"
- "Battle Lines—How did it get so personal"
- "Battle Lines—Hunt for truth in new media jungle"
- "Jones v. Clinton"
- "The Developing Saga of Kathleen Willey"
- "The Starr Investigation—Why it's taking so long"
- "Ken Starr's End Game"

Monica. On January 23, 1998, 79 questions were asked; 52 were about Monica, 23 about the President's address. And so this pattern continued into the next week as well. On January 26, 1998, the Monday before the day of the President's State of the Union address, 117 questions were asked; 84 concerned Monica, 20 the address itself. All told, in the week beginning with January 21, 1998, a full 75 percent of all questions directed to spokesman McCurry concerned the mushrooming scandal.

The White House questions and answers flooded the newsrooms and provided nonstop chatter for the radio and television talk shows. They also sparked a round of hot stories on Capitol Hill and leaked responses from Starr's office, which found itself engaged in a roaring battle with the President's minions all over Washington. The pursuit of scoops reached wild levels of distortion and exaggeration with one reporter out-sensationalizing another, using unchecked sources and rarely pausing to check a "fact." Even the best of journalism ran with the Monica story as if no other existed. *Nightline* dedicated every program for three weeks to different aspects of the Monica scandal. "Crisis in the White House" was the most commonly used title for these programs, but others were called "The First Family in Full Battle Regalia," "White House Intern," "Who is Ken Starr?" or "The Clintons versus the Media and the Right Wing."

It was not that Monicagate produced a new form of journalism; it was rather that the story accented and accelerated a trend that had been apparent for the preceding 20 years. The trend was rooted in two newly emerging factors that gradually but inexorably changed the core values of the business. One was the new technological revolution that started with the explosion of cable television in the late 1970s and continued through the rise of the Internet in the late 1990s; the other was the radical change in the economic ownership and management of the industry. Both the new technology and the new economics transformed the news business from one proudly tied to public service to one unashamedly linked to the pursuit of public titillation and maximum profit.

The New Technology

For the past 20 years, we have been the beneficiaries—or the victims—of a vast technological revolution that has transformed the way we get and process information. In the late 1970s, most Americans (more than 80%) watched one of three evening newscasts on CBS,

NBC and ABC—that's where they got most of their information about the US and the rest of the world. Now they have the same three networks—though fewer than 40 percent of Americans have been watching their evening newscasts in recent months—but they also have three cable news networks, ten weekly news magazines in primetime, three cable business news networks, two sports news cable networks, all with corresponding Web sites featuring constantly updated news reports; and the number keeps growing, exponentially.

Take CNN, for example. Cable News Network is not just CNN, but a cluster of CNN offspring, such as CNN Headline News, CNN International, CNNfn, CNN/SI, CNN en Espanol, two radio networks, seven Web sites, CNN Airport Network, the Better Health Network, the College Television Network and a syndicated news service called CNN Newsource. In much the same way, by acquiring cable network affiliates, NBC and Fox try to emulate CNN with mixed results.

This has been called the fractionalization of the communications market. Where once there were a handful of news sources, there are now hundreds, each struggling to compete for a smaller share of an increasingly distracted audience. The guessing game of how to attract audience shares has become a profit-motivated obsession. Cable television feasts on, among other things, talk shows, largely because talk has proven to be the cheapest form of television information and entertainment, the combination of which has been dubbed "infotainment." The effect has been that talk, unconstrained and unchecked, has befuddled the viewer or listener into believing that whatever is seen or heard can be equated with news.

A few years ago, some observers predicted a 500-channel universe; although this prediction proved to be wildly inflated, it did point people in the right direction. There has been a huge increase in cable channels, and the public has responded with enthusiasm. More and more Americans are buying cable services and watching cable networks—enough so that, in the first week of July, 1998, for the first time, the 42 basic cable operations outperformed the top four broadcasters at ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC in every category of measurement: total viewers, ratings and audience share. The cables attracted 21.6 million viewers; the broadcasters, 21.3 million. The numbers were not all that impressive, given the size of the potential audience in the US (ratings normally dip during the summer

months anyway), but the trend line was clear. In 1994, 22 percent of the average audience share went to cable; four years later, the number jumped to 36 percent.⁷

Perhaps even more significant than the expansion of cable has been the rather sudden emergence of the Internet as a force in national and global communications. Once the exclusive resource of the Pentagon and scientists, the Internet has now blossomed into a fairly commonplace tool in industry, universities and many homes. It should therefore not be surprising that just about every newspaper and magazine has its own Web site, or two or three. During Monicagate especially, editors and producers often hurried to put their stories on the Internet before they had even been published in the morning papers. Clearly many Americans have turned to the Internet for their daily dose of news. In 1995, only 4 percent did; now 20 percent do.

A safe prognosis is that the use of this new technology will gallop along with increasing speed.

The New Economics

In December, 1962, William Paley, who created CBS, outlined his ambitious plans for the future of CBS News to a small group of CBS correspondents. One of them, Charles Collingwood, cautioned that this could be very expensive. Paley responded: "You guys cover the news; I've got Jack Benny to make money for me." Those were the days when news was assumed to be a loss leader—serious, imposing, important, but never profitable. Benny and the other entertainers were supposed to make a profit, and they did, in part so that the reporters could go about their business without having to worry about money. They satisfied Paley's desire for respectability and legitimacy. "My jewels in the crown," he called them.

Thirty-six years later, the current Chairman and CEO of CBS Corporation, Michael H. Jordan, disavows the idealistic views of his predecessor: "Yes, we want to hold on to journalistic and other standards. But I don't aspire to that Paleyesque role. This is a business."⁸ So it is. The crown was turned on its head in the early 1980s, when it was discovered that news could not only buy respectability—it could also make unimaginable profits; but it then had to live by the rules of any other profitable enterprise: it prized its stars but lost its soul to the demands of the marketplace. News has become a big, big business, controlled not by powerful families,

but by media moguls who place a higher priority on the size of their profits than on the value of their contributions to society.

Networks became so profitable in the deregulated Reagan years of the 1980s that General Electric acquired NBC, Loews bought CBS and CapCities picked up ABC. By the mid-1990s, as one megacorporation after another expanded its technological horizons, pushing profits into the stratosphere, network ownership changed hands again. Westinghouse bought CBS, Disney purchased ABC for a cool \$19 billion in cash and stock, Time-Warner acquired CNN, Fox was created and conglomerates continued to wire the world, with satellites, faxes, cellular phones and cable television. What happened in the US set the standard for what then happened around the world.

How profitable is this new world? In 1996, NBC produced three hours of television news a day. Two years later, NBC, using its newly-developed cable subdivisions of CNBC, MSNBC and others as markets, produced and fielded 27 hours of news a day. The time may not be filled by the same professionally polished program of yesteryear, but each hour sets aside at least 12 minutes for commercial advertisements. A minute can generate \$50,000 in ad revenues, or \$100,000, or \$1,000,000, depending on the program, the time and the size of the audience; but news now makes enough money to be considered a profit center. In this brave, new world, NBC manufactures news in much the same way and with much the same motivation that GE manufactures light bulbs.

Newspapers followed the same pattern. Most have been purchased by chains; few remain in family hands. Annual profits run routinely into double digit terrain. At the *Los Angeles Times*, Mark Willes, the recently-appointed publisher with no journalistic background, decided that each editorial department was to be run not just by an editor but by a business manager as well. Two executives now made editorial decisions—the editor and the business manager. Every story had a price tag. Every decision raised a question Paley would likely not have recognized or tolerated: can we afford to cover this story?

The "New News"

This technological revolution and this profit/business-centered news have—not surprisingly—transformed the ethics, values and standards of journalism. Both should also be viewed against a background of massive change

in two other areas: the decline of mutual trust between the White House and the press, and the end of the Cold War. Vietnam and Watergate served as harsh wake-up calls to journalists who previously gave the benefit of the doubt to politicians and presidents who professed to tell the truth. The “kerosene journalism” that has grown in the post-Watergate decades has dramatically altered the relationship between public officials and the people who cover them—and nowhere is this difference more pronounced than in White House coverage.

Additionally, the end of the Cold War has left news outlets with what appears at first glance to be a vacuum. It isn’t actually a vacuum. History continues; but journalists have concluded from poll data that the American people aren’t interested in foreign and serious news—and they tend to ignore it. Without one central story around which to focus and compare other stories, a free-for-all followed. While this absence of an overriding focus has had some positive effects—the coverage of education and health issues has risen dramatically in news coverage—the opportunity is mostly being squandered by the domination of tabloid stories. In this world, anything goes and, more often than not, scandal is king-of-the-hill.

A “new news” has surfaced in this sharply changed atmosphere. Although the appearance of this “news” is familiar, its content has substantially changed.

What are some of the characteristics of the “new news?”

1. Sourcing—or the Lack Thereof

In one of their books about Watergate, Woodward and Bernstein relate a conversation with their editor, Ben Bradlee, regarding the sources they were using to write their groundbreaking stories. Although Bradlee understood the need to keep promises of anonymity to sources, he wanted to be certain that his reporters were not relying on “people who have. . . [a] big ax to grind on the front page of the *Washington Post*.” Getting the story was important, but making sure the sources were reliable and honest was even more important. The two reporters write that the discussion “satisfied Bradlee’s reportorial instincts and responsibilities as an editor.”⁹

One of the most noticeable casualties of good journalism during the first weeks of the Lewinsky story was sourcing. Many news organizations dropped the unofficial industry-wide practice of requiring two solid sources for

information and still others used flimsy, questionable sources, such as the reports of other news organizations or anonymous individuals whose bias or identity was almost never characterized. The new practice clashed directly with images of the old journalism typified by Woodward, Bernstein, and Bradlee. The result was a lack of clarity in the press—where were the allegations, leaks, details coming from? Readers and viewers were left to wonder while journalists promised total anonymity to sources in return for the latest crumb of information.

2. “Out There”

Once the Monica story was “out there,” it fueled a prairie fire of copy-cat journalism. For a period of time, a dress stained by presidential semen was highlighted in the news. Oral sex was discussed on normally serious newscasts. A White House valet—named—was widely identified as someone who had actually seen the President and Monica in a compromising position. Was there confirmation? No. Were there denials? Yes. Did the denials discourage reporters from returning to the same stories—and rerunning and repeating them time and again—with videotape? No.

In January, 1992, after a tabloid broke the story of Clinton’s affair with Gennifer Flowers (she said they had a twelve-year-long affair; after first denying it, he later admitted to one instance of romance), a producer for NPR’s “All Things Considered” proposed to anchor Linda Wertheimer that they use the story, too. Why?, Wertheimer asked. Because it’s “out there,” the producer argued. The anchor’s response was a classic line from another era: that doesn’t mean it has to be “in here,” she said.

In the ensuing six years, the distinction between “out there” and “in here” vanished in the crush of competition. The Chinese wall that used to separate tabloid from traditional news was breached and in some places shattered. During the O. J. Simpson trial, the *New York Times* used a tabloid as its source for a major story. During Monicagate, ABC used Matt Drudge. The “new news” has emerged on television as endless, coifed chatter and in print (in newspapers and on the Internet) as the highly commercial and homogenized packaging of information, whose reliability is often uncertain.

NBC anchor Tom Brokaw has spoken of the “big bang theory of journalism.” Defined roughly as follows: a rumor or hint of official wrongdoing is heard on a morning talk show, repeated at the office water cooler, echoed on

later talk shows, mentioned at an editorial meeting and at the White House, gossiped about in offices, overheard on the bus or metro, until later in the day it is transmogrified into “news” by simply being “reported” on an evening news program. According to this theory, a reporter can even check and confirm the existence of such a rumor, and once checked and confirmed, change the rumor or hint into a fact, or a sort of fact—suggesting a very odd journey through a maze of whispered talk and gossip until ultimately it is transformed into perceived truth, or something close enough to the truth to be accepted as a reliable piece of information, a fact. But, in this world of the “new news,” what is a fact? And how reliable is it?

3. *Rush to Judgment*

These days, cynicism and distrust are the middle names of Washington journalism. But it was not always this way. During hot and cold wars, presidents and reporters were reading essentially from the same sheet of music. The Nazis were a common enemy, and patriotism bound the press to the cause of “unconditional surrender.” On December 7, 1941, for example, the date President Roosevelt said would “live in infamy,” Edward R. Murrow of CBS joined the president for a late dinner at the White House. No reporter had yet been briefed on the devastating dimensions of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but Roosevelt told Murrow everything—without any inhibiting groundrules. As Murrow walked back to his hotel, he considered doing a broadcast—the news, after all, was sensational, important, and he had it from a superb source. There is little doubt that the modern equivalent of Murrow would have rushed to a studio and broadcast his exclusive, assuming, quite properly, that in the absence of any cautionary groundrules, the President intended to disclose the extent of the catastrophe—but didn’t want to do so officially; but Murrow was operating at the time on a different set of ethical and professional standards. He returned to his hotel and retired. News of that magnitude could—in those days, anyway—wait.

Then, for more than four decades after World War II, the Russians were the bad guys, and the West the good guys. Relations between reporters and politicians were not always smooth during these rocky and dangerous times, but neither were they as strained and adversarial as they appear to be at this time. Ben Bradlee maintained a close friendship with President John Kennedy—Bradlee the enterprising editor at

Newsweek, Kennedy, a friend from their days in fashionable Georgetown. This closeness allowed Bradlee to get some sensational inside scoops, but it also obliged him—for the sake of a friend he honored—to look the other way on a few embarrassing tales. TV anchor Walter Cronkite of CBS, once described as “the most trusted man in America,” also maintained friendly relationships with a number of presidents, including President Johnson. Drinks and dinner were often on their agenda, and just as often the President made comments, which were assumed to be off-the-record even if they concerned hot issues such as Vietnam and race, largely because, as Cronkite later wrote, “it was clearly private time, and it should remain such.”¹⁰ There were rules, and the rules were respected.

The election of Richard Nixon marked the beginning of the end of this era of relative goodwill between president and reporter. Nixon was paranoid about the press, imagining every reporter to be a member of an enemy camp. During Watergate, he even produced an “enemies list.” He developed a communications strategy specifically designed to bypass the national press and—through televised speeches and carefully circumscribed appearances—talk directly to the American public. Nixon’s vice-president, Spiro Agnew, prior to his forced resignation on corruption charges, delivered a series of speeches viciously attacking the credibility and integrity of the mainstream media. Nixon conducted a campaign aimed at undermining the press—but he failed abysmally. The people had a right to know the truth about their president, and they ultimately learned the truth. The *Washington Post*’s reporting of the Watergate scandal led to Nixon’s resignation. The *Post*, the press and the American people won—a journalistic triumph of historic proportions.

But there was a down side of equally historic proportions. Watergate fostered a climate of cynicism about the political process, affecting not only the public but the press, which seems only to have deepened with each administration. Martin Tolchin, a former *New York Times* reporter who now publishes the *Hill*, a weekly newspaper, has expressed the unhappy view that journalists now assume that “public officials and those in authority are per se dishonest, incompetent, untrustworthy and more interested in their own careers than in the problems of their constituents.”¹¹ Tom Brazaitis, Washington bureau chief of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, is even blunter. “Hell, we’re the cheerleaders of cynicism.”¹²

With widespread cynicism came a loss of respect. During the Ford administration, reporters joked about whether the president could walk and chew gum at the same time. During Ronald Reagan's terms, reporters ridiculed his apparently limited command of detail and fact, as he frequently resorted to note-cards for information most presidents were expected to know. There was criticism of George Bush's awkward windmill hand motions and stilted speaking style; and when in the early days of the Clinton administration, reporters were arbitrarily banished from easy access to the spokesman's office, they ripped into the new president, and haven't stopped since. Everything was considered fair game, from the trivial to the towering, until finally the Lewinsky saga, for which the President bears ultimate responsibility, brought him to ruin.

The sad result is that, in recent administrations, the residual respect between president and press lingering from earlier times appears to have vanished. A presumption of presidential guilt and complicity in wrongdoing now saturates journalistic copy about the White House and its occupants. We have reached a point where, until the president can prove that he is telling the truth, reporters presume that he is lying, dissembling, cutting corners for the purpose of evasion. In this age of contrived images, Clinton has always wanted to be seen as one of the boys—not an aloof leader, but an ordinary citizen, a baby boomer not above disclosing his choice of underwear on television. *Time* magazine once ran a cover story about Clinton called, "The Incredible Shrinking President," raising a question about the relevance of the chief executive and suggesting the shriveling up of presidential power. When communication is instantaneous, and the clamor for comment is constant, commentators comment—endlessly, whether they are informed about the subject or not. The rush to judgment is now an inescapable feature of the "new news."

4. Blurring the lines

For a long time, journalists were observers—they were not the observed, they were not celebrities. Now they are both the observed and the observers—they have lost their distinctiveness as journalists but gained another kind of distinctiveness as instantly recognizable personalities. No longer will the new technology allow them to be flies on the wall of history. Television, more than any other tool of communication, facilitates the blurring of the

line between journalism and politics. A government official leaves his White House job and becomes a commentator on PBS's *NewsHour* or ABC's *This Week*. David Gergen and George Stephanopoulos are two prime examples. So what?, one may ask. The apparent answer is that the public, after a while, has difficulty distinguishing who's who among the Washington power elite—who's the reporter? Who's the official? Who's telling the truth? Who's shaving the truth? Indeed, what is the truth? In a democracy, the truth-teller holds the keys to the kingdom. The journalist used to be the truth-teller, but now?

Former *Washington Post* editor Russ Wiggins was one of the first to spot the problem. "Journalists belong in the audience," he'd often tell his reporters, "not on the stage." At the time, in the early 1970's, many journalists would have agreed with Wiggins—that is, until they saw their real-life colleagues, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, portrayed in the movie version of their best-selling book, *All The President's Men*, by such Hollywood stars as Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. Suddenly, the honorable but hardly lucrative craft of journalism created new horizons; instead of a pat on the back for a story well done, journalists began to search the rainbow for a pot of gold. The placement of a good story on the front page used to be regarded as the highest form of reward; now a good story can also be seen as a stepping stone to an occasional TV appearance, maybe a book, even a movie. Reporters now appear regularly in movies, sometimes simply playing the role of a reporter, at other times playing themselves.

Ben Bradlee, in his memoir, wrote that coverage of the Nixon scandal converted the reporter into a star. "Watergate," in his words, "marked the final passage of journalists into the best seats of the establishment."¹³ Once in the best seats, journalists were expected to produce more than just good, clean copy; now they were also expected to deliver their opinions, and their opinions carried weight in a universe dominated by televised celebrities, strong personalities, controversial insights, right or wrong. The upshot for many is that journalists have become too big for their britches. For journalists who want to offer commentaries on television, deliver speeches for hefty fees, even appear in the movies in cameo roles, the once glorious if somewhat mundane pursuit of the truth now seems too humble a calling. The temptation to perform, to pontificate, to rise above the story

becomes irresistible; and as the editorial walls separating straight reporting from commentary, political participants from political observers, crumble in a heap, journalism is transformed into a profitable profession.

Journalism, largely because of the lure of money and glamour, has become an attractive alternative to politics. Susan Molinari, a rising GOP star from Staten Island, leaps directly from politics to an anchor's chair at CBS. After a year, the ratings, which she was expected to boost, do not revive, and she goes down in television history as a flop. Bill Bradley, a respected Democratic Senator from New Jersey, leaves Capitol Hill, partly to prepare for a presidential run. But he needs frequent exposure on television to be considered a live option; he talks himself into filling the role of "liberal commentator" on CBS. His pieces are well-written, they make sense, but his voice is flat and he too is dropped, rather embarrassingly. But many other politicians take to playing reporters or commentators with ease. Superficial similarities abound. Both enjoy the publicity, both love television, both play to the crowds, both happily give their opinions on anything from Bosnia to baseball. So it is no surprise really that when Mario Cuomo vacates the Governor's mansion in New York, he practices law but also hosts a radio talk show. Pat Buchanan shifts between presidential campaigns and CNN's *Crossfire* without missing a beat. Bill Press, leader of California's Democratic Party, and Geraldine Ferraro, Democratic vice-presidential candidate in the 1984 campaign, represent the left (to Buchanan's right) on *Crossfire*. CNN is also home to Jesse Jackson, when he is not running for president, but it is also home to hundreds of first-class reporters, who are usually overworked and underpaid. CNN stands for Cable NEWS Network; it is not supposed to be a televised waystation for politicians between campaigns.

David Broder, dean of political columnists in Washington, watched the turnstile between politics and journalism, and on November 19, 1988, he expressed his alarm at the National Press Club. "We damn well better make it clear we are not part of the government," he declaimed, "and not part of a Washington insider's clique where politicians, publicists and journalists are easily interchangeable parts. Once we lose our distinctive identity, it will not be long before we lose our freedom." He spotted a "new hybrid creature" slipping suspiciously between the two worlds of politics and journalism—an "androgynous political insider . . .

blurring the lines between journalism on one side, and politics and government on the other." Speaking from an ethical podium of unblemished accomplishment, Broder added: "We all know them. The journalists who go into government and become State Department or White House officials, and then come back as editors or columnists. . . . One day, he or she is a public official or political operative; the next, a journalist or television commentator. Then they slip into the phone booth and emerge in their original guise."

There are other characteristics of the "new news," including a fluffy lightness to the presentation of serious information and a predisposition to emphasize sex and sensationalism in an appeal to higher ratings and circulation. The tendency to go downscale is too painfully obvious and persistent. During the Cold War, the sheer awareness on everyone's part that nuclear war was a possibility kept our eye on the sparrow's fall. Survival was a central concern in determining a priority for news. Now anything goes.

Part Three: New Technology

In the first two weeks of Monicagate, there were many illustrations of the power of the new technology to affect the nature of news coverage. We shall focus on five of them.

1. The Elusive Blue Dress

Matt Drudge's contribution to the frenzy of January 21, 1998, was an exclusive item on his Internet Web site to the effect that Lewinsky had a dress with "potential DNA" evidence pointing directly to the President. Drudge, who had introduced Lewinsky to the public, now seemed to be suggesting that the former intern had a dress stained by presidential semen. Most reporters could not yet focus on this explosive item, because they were still catching up with the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and ABC on the original story; and for the better part of a day, the story of the stained dress remained a Drudge exclusive.

If Drudge does, in fact, become the Walter Winchell of the age of the Internet—and he shows every sign of becoming Winchell and more—he will forever have Monica Lewinsky to thank for his success. For it was this story that put Matt Drudge and the Internet on the map of American journalism.¹⁴ Within a matter of hours, he was being invited to cross the moat separating Internet gossip and information from mainstream journalism and to appear on programs such as *Meet the Press* on NBC. And, of

course, he accepted one invitation after another, becoming in a very brief period of time the personification of the route by which an item on the Internet makes the journey to, among other destinations, ABC's *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*.

Stop one was the *Today* show on January 22, 1998, Drudge sitting opposite host Matt Lauer—one Matt to another—on the highest-rated news program on morning television. Drudge was determined to impress not only Lauer and other big-name television personalities, but also the many millions of potential Internet customers who might be enticed to visit his still relatively unknown Web site. "I have reported that there's a potential DNA trail that would tie Clinton to this young woman." With this one statement, uttered with total self-confidence, Drudge introduced his "dress" story to a national audience. By its very mention on the *Today* show, it acquired a semblance of journalistic legitimacy.

Lauer seemed sufficiently impressed to raise the allegation with his next guest, Michael Isikoff. Lauer later explained the Drudge-Isikoff sequence by saying that he had to pursue the story—even if in the process he gave it extraordinary exposure on the *Today* show—because, he said, it was "out there. People were starting to talk about it." But at this point a question could easily have been raised: which people, and how many? Was Lauer really talking about only his executive producer? His writer? Other colleagues on the program? In fact, only a handful of readers of the *Drudge Report* were even aware of it, until Drudge took advantage of his appearance on *Today* to push the story. Isikoff refused, at least at this point, to join Lauer in heady speculation about Lewinsky's wardrobe. "I have not reported that, and I am not going to report that until I have evidence that it is, in fact, true." Lauer pressed Isikoff with a few more questions, but to no avail.

Of course, Drudge never mentioned his source, and Lauer never asked him for a source, apparently on the rather questionable assumption that a tale-teller, unlike a journalist, had no obligation to have or disclose one. A few days later, the *New York Daily News* reported that the source was none other than Tripp's New York book agent, Lucianne Goldberg, who had actually been talking to both Drudge and Isikoff. In an interview, she acknowledged, "The dress story? I think I leaked that . . . I had to do something to get their [the media's] attention. I've done it. And I'm not unproud [sic] of it." At

this point it was not clear whether Goldberg had concocted a story about a stained dress, or simply leaked a true story in order to get press attention. There might be a dress; there might not be such a dress—what was relevant was that an Internet gossip-page item had suddenly appeared in mainstream journalism, another question added to the bushel of other unanswered questions demanding immediate answers.

Goldberg, though unnamed, was also the source of Peter Jennings' lead story on *World News Tonight* on January 23, 1998—a report that came to ABC after numerous stopovers at radio, TV talk shows and the Internet. By this time every news junkie knew about an incriminating dress, and every reporter wanted to advance the story. Jackie Judd, who had quickly become ABC's star reporter on the scandal, thought that she had new and solid information. Jennings, in his introduction to Judd's report, characterized the source as "someone with specific knowledge of what it is that Monica Lewinsky says really took place between her and the President." Judd stated that "according to the source, Lewinsky says she saved, apparently as some kind of souvenir, a navy blue dress with the president's semen stain on it." Was there such a dress? Was it stained by presidential semen? Judd's report strongly suggested that the answer to both questions was yes. Everything in Judd's report depended ultimately on the reliability and accuracy of her source—the ubiquitous Lucianne Goldberg. And did she have firsthand information? Did she have unimpeachable evidence? No, she too was relying on a source. Months later, in a groundbreaking article by Stephen Brill in the inaugural issue of his new magazine, *Brill's Content*, the source was identified as Linda Tripp. Goldberg was quoted as saying that she was not sure whether the dress story was actually mentioned on the famous Tripp tapes. "In fact," Brill wrote, "Goldberg is not sure that Tripp said Lewinsky had talked about having *saved* a dress, as opposed to a dress simply having been stained. 'I might have added the part about it being saved,' Goldberg told me."

Early Saturday morning, January 24, 1998, many newspapers across the country carried a UPI report from Washington that quoted the unnamed ABC source on *World News Tonight* as having said, "Lewinsky saved a navy blue dress stained with President Clinton's semen." UPI offered no qualifications, no sources other than ABC, no reservations—meaning UPI added

no independent reporting of its own to this story. The story of the dress had undergone a revealing metamorphosis—from an unsourced Drudge item on the Internet to an unnamed, single-sourced hearsay report on an evening news program to a definitive statement of fact on a wire agency.

That evening, as *Time* and *Newsweek* were putting the finishing touches on their latest issues, *Time's* Web site, foreshadowing what would appear in the magazine itself, reported that "a source familiar with the investigation" said that "Lewinsky once unfurled a dress soiled by what she said was the President's semen. Holding the garment like a trophy, she told Tripp, 'I'll never wear it again.'" Who was *Time's* source for this quote? Only a source loosely and vaguely described as one "familiar with the investigation," hardly hard journalism, which suggested *Time* wanted the appearance of something original, and it settled on the "unfurled" dress.

In the chaotic frenzy of the first weekend of Monicagate, the talk shows on radio and television greeted the dress story as a dream come true. The alleged dress inspired irresponsible punditry as well as tsk-tsk commentary on the dangers of sourceless news. *Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter provided an excellent example of sober commentary in a journalistic environment gone wild. On MSNBC, which in fact converted the scandal into a nonstop series of reports, he argued against wild speculation. "We don't know where [the dress story] comes from, and yet it's in the bloodstream now and it's very, very difficult once it gets into that national conversation to get it out again." Alter then quoted an appropriate aphorism from Winston Churchill—"a lie makes it halfway around the world before the truth can get its pants on"—as a way of underscoring the speed with which rumors can enter the national consciousness and gain a degree of acceptability.

A week after the story first broke, the CBS Evening News tried to put the dress genie back in the bottle. It reported that "no DNA evidence or stains have been found on a dress that belongs to Lewinsky." CBS, in this way, continued to confirm the existence of a possibly incriminating dress but not one containing Drudge's "DNA" nor ABC's "semen stain." Again, evidence was flimsy to non-existent; and yet when a story of such mass interest erupts, it ought to be justified as "news" by more than its appearance on the Internet and its subsequent pick-up by CBS and other mainstream

news outfits. To be considered reliable, reportable news, it should be independently verified.

The dress story stood as an example of journalistic excess diminished over time by the absence of any hard evidence and by the rise of new and distracting issues. Only much later in the reporting of Monicagate, when the endgame began in late July, 1998, did the dress re-emerge as a presumed fact. Lewinsky was reported to have delivered a navy-blue dress to Starr as part of an immunity agreement. Several journalists used this disclosure to vindicate their earlier reporting, conveniently forgetting that all of those stories were based on one highly questionable source. Even Michael Isikoff—he of the *Today* show dismissal of the dress story—told *Hardball's* Chris Matthews on August 3, 1998: "As you know, when it was first reported in January, there were a lot of snickers and a lot of cynics saying, 'Oh come on' . . . skeptics that the dress really existed and you had people like Steve Brill talking about the phantom dress and how horrible it was that the media would go with such stories. I mean, the fact is that the dress has a lineage and, in fact, it was first discussed, first shown, by Monica Lewinsky to Linda Tripp late last fall." Revisionism runs deep in today's newsrooms.

2. "Breaking News" in the 24-hour News Cycle

Once upon a time, in that quaint era of journalism preceding the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle, reporters did, on rare occasions, open a television report by declaring "CBS News has learned . . ." It was, for its time, an arresting phrase—a way of capturing the audience's attention for a story of major importance. It was usually an exclusive story, the result of an exhaustive investigation or an illuminating leak. Only on CBS, the announcement seemed to be shouting, could you get journalism of this quality and insight. Overused, the catchy phrase ("CBS News has learned . . .") could have lost its value; properly used, it only served to underscore the special nature of the report that was about to be aired.

But now, in the era of the 24-hour news cycle, as competition among the various cable networks has reached levels of ferocious combat, the urge of even the best reporter to announce exclusive ownership of a fact or even of a rumor has become almost irresistible. All-news networks and Internet Web sites have been posting an inordinate number of bulletins ("news flashes," as they are sometimes called),

partly because they want to show off their technological and journalistic prowess and partly because they want to discourage their restless viewers from migrating to other places. The effect has been to dilute the value of a bulletin.

On CNN, it is not the word “bulletin” but rather the phrase “BREAKING NEWS,” splashed across the screen to the accompaniment of a Beethovenian musical coda, that is used to introduce a host of major (and not so major) news stories, such as assassinations, election results, wars and earthquakes. Properly used, the dramatic phrase (“BREAKING NEWS”) can attract an audience for important news. Over-used, it can easily lose its appeal and be seen as a PR device of little value.

On Saturday, January 24, 1998, at 6 P.M., “BREAKING NEWS” suddenly filled CNN screens, and the bearded and respected Wolf Blitzer, a correspondent of uncommon ability, appeared with the White House as backdrop. He looked exceptionally serious, perhaps because he realized that he was about to step into highly treacherous terrain with the first authoritative report that the President might have to resign as a result of the alleged affair. “Despite the President’s public and carefully phrased public [sic] denials,” Blitzer intoned, “several of his closest friends and advisors, both in and out of the government, now tell CNN that they believe he almost certainly did have a sexual relation[ship] with . . . Lewinsky, and they’re talking among themselves about the possibility of a resignation”

White House officials watched Blitzer’s report in their offices, learning for the first time about the resignation rumors with astonishment and anger. They could—at the same time—see Blitzer on CNN and on the White House lawn only a few hundred yards away. Several wanted to wring his neck; a few later expressed their outrage to him personally, truly disgusted by the fact that a reporter of Blitzer’s stature would air a report on CNN so loaded with innuendo, rumor, ambiguity and a strong sense of presidential guilt.

Because Blitzer was presumed to have excellent sources in and out of the White House, his report picked up an instant following among journalists with less imposing contacts, and it rapidly made its way through the food chain of Washington journalism. It marked a high (and low) point in scandal coverage, a superb illustration of the misuse of bulletins for the dissemination of gossip and rumor.

First Blitzer elaborated on his comment that “several of [the President’s] closest friends

and advisors, both in and out of government” believed that (1) he had an affair with Lewinsky and (2) he would have to resign as a result. Using language alternately so condemning and yet so qualified, Blitzer reached for the presidential jugular, only to seem at the same time to be pulling back. He said the President’s friends “*don’t know for sure* and they were, of course, not present, *if in fact it did occur*. They think that it’s *probable*; it’s *almost certain*, that it occurred, *probably*, for the most part. And I got different explanations talking to these people—for one, they say they *think* there is a track record. This is *probably* not the first such *alleged* incident, and they say that the information that they’ve been gleaming from *various sources appears to be very, very compelling*.”

Throughout the evening and on into Sunday morning, CNN led its news and talk programs with variations of Blitzer’s “exclusive” story. Unnamed FOB’s (Friends of Bill) thought that it was “almost certain” that the President had a sexual relationship with Lewinsky “probably, for the most part.” The affair was first described as “alleged” but then later the “information” was described as “very, very compelling.” From the beginning, the story lacked the hard edge of a news bulletin. It was presented as a breathless expose, typical of the times and perfect for talk show fodder. And, indeed, it was feverishly debated on one talk show after another, acquiring, through sheer repetition, the appearance of established fact. There was never any confirmation, but that hardly mattered.

There was no salon in Washington that had not heard and discussed a rumor about the President’s womanizing. The Blitzer story, packaged as “BREAKING NEWS” in the hothouse environment of a 24-hour news cycle, merely reinforced the already widespread perception that the President was a morally corrupt leader—a man of superior intellectual capabilities mixed with an uncontrollable sex drive. Normally this would have been the story discussed around the office watercooler or at cocktail parties and, increasingly, on a succession of talk shows that thrive on endless chatter about the rich and powerful. But it would not have been the essence of a news bulletin—at least, not until recent years when the line separating commentary from news seems to have melted in the competitive heat of the “new news.”

3. A Super Bowl Bulletin

Nothing is more sacrosanct in American television than coverage of the Super Bowl.

Networks battle for the privilege of carrying this premier sporting event. Commercials produce hundreds of millions of dollars. No one—but absolutely no one—is allowed to break into this carefully constructed extravaganza, preparations for which run two uninterrupted weeks. But on Super Bowl Sunday, January 25, 1998, even the nation's most sacred sports ritual proved vulnerable to the hyped bulletin. If anyone needed additional evidence that mainstream news was being forced to change its underlying values to compete with the new technology of cable, the Internet and the 24-hour news cycle, it was provided dramatically by NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw—he of the “big bang theory of journalism.”

The story actually began a few hours earlier. On ABC's *This Week*, Jackie Judd, citing sources unnamed and perhaps even unknown, disclosed that one or two witnesses might have seen an “intimate” encounter between the President and Lewinsky. How would the Sunday pundits handle the possibility of witnesses? They loved it. A few even predicted that trapped in this manner, a deer frozen in headlights, the President would have to resign—and soon. NBC felt that it had “no choice” but to do the improbable, and what up to that moment would have been deemed the impossible. At exactly 4:30 P.M., less than two hours before kickoff, anchor Tom Brokaw and White House correspondent Claire Shipman broke into the Super Bowl buildup with a bulletin.

Brokaw popped up on the screen and declared, “there's an unconfirmed report that, at some point, someone caught the president and Ms. Lewinsky in an intimate moment.” The usually unflappable anchorman then turned to Shipman for more details. Normally he would have provided them himself, but he didn't have any. Nor, for that matter, did Shipman. “Well,” she replied, “sources in Ken Starr's office tell us that they are investigating that possibility but that they haven't confirmed it.”

It was obvious to anyone that NBC had nothing to add to ABC's story, and the ABC report was based only on unnamed and unknown sources. Undoubtedly NBC tried to generate independent confirmation, but failed, leaving it in the painfully embarrassing position of having to echo a rival network's claim before one of the largest audiences ever to gather around the tube. Such a story would not ordinarily merit time on *NBC Nightly News*, much less justify a breaking news bulletin, but in the crazy, competitive madness of scandal coverage, NBC felt that it had no choice but to demonstrate that it was on top of

every nuance of this developing story. Brokaw later admitted that competitive pressures drove NBC to its extraordinary decision to interrupt Super Bowl coverage. “I guess it was because of ABC's report,” he explained. “Our only rationale could be that it's ‘out there,’ so let's talk about it.”¹⁷

One of Brokaw's colleagues, who refused to be identified, characterized the network's motivation a bit more cynically. “Our anchor and White House reporter come on the air and say, here's something that we don't know is true, but we just thought we'd tell you anyway just for the hell of it, so we can say we reported it just in case it turns out to be true.”¹⁸

Is his cynicism misplaced?

4. An Embarrassing Retraction

The story of a “witness” to a private meeting between the President and the intern, already reported by ABC and NBC, led to an embarrassing retraction.

On Monday evening, January 26, 1998, the *Dallas Morning News* posted a story on its Web site, which ran in Tuesday's early edition, saying that there was indeed a “witness” to a “compromising” meeting between Clinton and Lewinsky and that two “attorneys familiar with the obstruction-of-justice investigation,” vaguely linked to Starr's office, were the sources for the story. The *Dallas Morning News* said, “There is at least one witness who saw [the president and Lewinsky] together in a compromising situation.” Once on the Internet, the story spread like wildfire through every parched newsroom in Washington. Almost immediately, it was picked up by the Associated Press. Larry King on CNN interrupted his interview show to read the AP dispatch. Geraldo Rivera on CNBC, not to be outdone, read it to his audience, too. A few hours later, Ted Koppel opened *Nightline* with the same report. This story was clearly news.

Yet, when *Nightline* went off the air, shortly after midnight, the *Dallas Morning News* did what no news organization had yet done—it issued a retraction. With obvious embarrassment, the paper acknowledged that “the source for the story, a longtime Washington lawyer familiar with the case, later said the information provided for Tuesday's report was inaccurate. The source is not affiliated with Mr. Starr's office.” There were supposed to have been two sources; now suddenly there was one.

We know that the *Dallas Morning News* was not the only news organization to run with

the original ABC story, but it was the first to rush into print with additional details that were inadequately checked and confirmed. Were it not for the excellent reputation of the *Dallas Morning News*, it is likely that its report would not have echoed through the corridors of journalism on Monday evening. Larry King later explained, "You get handed something, you read it . . . it wasn't the *New York Post*. It was the AP and the *Dallas Morning News*."¹⁹

Editor Ralph Langer took on the confusion about whether there were one or two sources. In the formal retraction, he said that the paper had "unwittingly relied on only one source to publish its original story. Because of a 'miscommunication' between Dallas and the Washington bureau, senior editors mistakenly believed a second source existed." Even more embarrassing to Langer and his colleagues was the fact that the original source proved to be unreliable, initially confirming the story when it was read to him on the phone, but later calling back in a panic to deny it.

As the official explanation by the *Dallas Morning News* evolved, the two people who originally served as sources for the story only later to retreat into anonymity have since been identified as one of Washington's famous couples—Joseph DiGenova and Victoria Toensing. Both are veteran Washington insiders, currently acting as outside counsel for the Republican staff of a House committee investigation of the Teamsters union and its ties to the Democratic Party. In addition, DiGenova and Toensing represent GOP congressman Dan Burton in a controversial ethics probe, and Toensing also represents Marianne Gingrich, wife of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, on yet another ethics probe. In other words, if anyone needed a model couple for an advertisement about committed Republican operatives in Washington, DiGenova and Toensing would have perfectly fit the bill. Yet, in their many TV appearances, their political affiliation often goes unnoted—they are usually introduced simply as "legal analysts." More to the point, the *Dallas Morning News* never mentioned their GOP ties either.

An x-ray of these sources for an especially sensitive and important story is quite revealing. Toensing first learned about a possible "witness," when she was approached by a friend of a former White House staffer who had heard another White House staffer claim to be the one who saw Clinton and Lewinsky in an "embarrassing" situation. The information—at this point—was third-hand. Toensing was asked

whether she would consider representing the "witness" if this person decided to talk to Starr. Husband DiGenova happened to overhear wife Toensing discussing this possibility, and he then conveyed his understanding of the situation to *Dallas Morning News* reporter David Jackson. In other words, DiGenova's overheard and unsubstantiated understanding was fifth-hand.

"I thought they'd check it," DiGenova later explained. "All I did was give them a vague tip of what I had heard Vicki talking about on the phone."²⁰ From "vague tip" to hard news. Journalism often follows a helter-skelter libretto, in which a chance occurrence can play as prominent a role in a news story as a carefully researched analysis. For example, on Monday afternoon, January 26, Toensing told friends in Starr's office that they might soon be hearing from a possible "witness" to a Clinton-Lewinsky encounter. Jackson, meanwhile, checked DiGenova's information with a source in Starr's office; he was told that one of Starr's colleagues had also heard about a "witness." Jackson then felt that he had not only two sources but also the making of a good story. Unbeknownst to him, at just about that very time, Toensing heard that the "witness" had decided not to go to Starr. She then assumed that this part of the unfolding drama was dead.

But it wasn't. Shortly after 5 P.M., Jackson telephoned DiGenova to double-check his story. DiGenova was not in his office; he was away doing a television interview program—so Toensing took the call. When she heard Jackson's tale, she told him that it was not true. "If my husband told you that, he's wrong," she said. Jackson faced an awkward dilemma: to go with the story, or to kill it. He decided, after consultation with his editors, to go with it. He wrote the story for Tuesday morning's paper, and he posted it on the *Dallas Morning News* Web site, where, as we know, it made a splash. The AP bulletined the information about a "witness" to a possibly compromising encounter.

At 9 P.M., Toensing happened to be watching CNBC's Geraldo Rivera. She was stunned to hear Rivera read the AP dispatch about a "witness." That evening, as the story picked up momentum in Washington, Jackson called Toensing once again; and she told him, in no uncertain terms, that if he had only her and her husband as sources, the story was essentially sourceless—it was wrong. Jackson brought the depressing news to his editors, and the decision was made shortly after midnight to kill the "witness" story.²¹

The “witness” saga demonstrated that the Internet had transformed the news cycle for most newspapers. In the old days, the publication of “exclusives” had to wait for the morning (or afternoon) edition of the newspaper. No matter how tempting it might have been to publish the news earlier, there was no place to do it. Tabloids, many years ago, ran special editions—“extras”—with the latest news, but economic considerations reduced this option to a distant memory. The new technology now allows newspapers to scoop themselves by putting exclusives on the Internet before they are actually published in the papers themselves. In turn, this breakthrough encourages editors and reporters to go on radio and television talks shows to sing their own praises before many of them have even checked and double-checked the accuracy of their stories.

The *Dallas Morning News* had the courage to check and to kill its “exclusive.” But it had to pay a damaging price in the form of a retraction.

5. Even the Wall Street Journal

After two weeks of scandal coverage, even the respected *Wall Street Journal* fell victim to the temptations of the Internet.

On Wednesday afternoon, February 4, two star investigative reporters for the *Wall Street Journal*, Brian Duffy and Glenn Simpson, drafted an incendiary story to the effect that a White House steward had told Starr’s grand jury that he had seen Clinton and Lewinsky alone, presumably in or near the Oval Office, and later, after they had left the room, he found tissues with “lipstick and other stains” on them. The reporters tried checking their story with the White House press office, but they did not wait for a response. The *Journal* posted the story on its Web site and prepared it for publication in Thursday’s edition. In less than an hour, Washington bureau chief Alan Murray, a highly respected reporter, began promoting the Duffy-Simpson story on a CNBC talk show. It was now “out there.”

But, by the time the story appeared in Thursday’s paper, it had been changed. Instead of the steward telling his tale to the grand jury, he was now telling it to Secret Service agents at the White House—a small but important distinction in a criminal investigation. Why the hurry then? Why put the story, which apparently still needed checking, on the *Journal* Web site? Murray admitted to Brill that “he had heard that ABC was also on the story and that he wanted to beat them.” But there was more to

his admission. According to Brill, he also “acknowledged that his paper had just completed a joint venture agreement with NBC to provide editorial content to its CNBC cable network and that, ‘yes, it was in my mind that we could impress them with this.’”²²

The steward story bore a striking resemblance to other “witness” accounts, but, surprisingly, it did not spawn a rush of similar stories, perhaps because after two weeks of sensational tale-telling, the Washington press corps, rapped sharply for lousy reporting, began to grow a bit cautious about sourcing. ABC’s *World News Tonight* mentioned only that the steward had been called as a witness before Starr’s grand jury and that “he might have been in a position to observe Mr. Clinton without the president’s knowledge.” NBC’s Tom Brokaw said that *Nightly News* decided that the story, while compelling, “didn’t have legs.”²³ Finally, on Monday, February 9, *The Journal* retracted its story of February 4–5, saying only that the steward “told a grand jury he didn’t see President Clinton alone with Monica Lewinsky, contrary to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* last week.” Managing editor Paul Steiger apologized for the error. “We deeply regret our erroneous report.”

Part Four: New Economics

New technology changed the physical character and reach of journalism. Changes in the economic structure of journalism precipitated an irrevocable transformation of the nature of news—marked, most recognizably, by the rise of “soft” news, the proliferation of pundit television and the power of ratings.

The Bottom Line

Somewhere during the merger-mania of the 1980s, as family-owned businesses all but disappeared, news organizations became less involved with disseminating information and more concerned with turning profits. Critic David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times*, one of the sharpest students of journalism’s bottom line, wrote: “There is little question that the shift from individual and family-ownership to public ownership has increased the demand for higher short-term profits.”²⁴ NBC *Nightly News* is now expected to generate revenue in the same way that *ER* makes money for the network. By using news divisions to generate the same type of profits produced by entertainment programming, network executives have required news organizations to restructure their format. PBS’ *NewsHour* may be the best place to find straight,

serious news—"it takes courage to be boring," said ex-anchor Robert MacNeil; other networks can no longer afford the luxury of being simply serious. Colorful graphics, new sets and easily digestible "soft" segments compete to attract today's rushed viewer.

Newspapers have also joined this new economic world. Walter Cronkite has bemoaned the fact that "stockholders in publicly held newspaper chains are expecting returns similar to those they'd get by investing in industrial enterprises."²⁵ In addition, financial incentives are now linked to the performance of many newspaper editors and reporters, blurring the line between public service and personal gain. As a result, more print organizations are inching closer to the *USA Today* model of "news lite," ironically at the same time that *USA Today* is trying to be more like the *Washington Post*.

All of this economic pressure comes at a time when competition from cable networks and the Internet has splintered the reading and viewing audience. These new technologies fit smoothly into the world of profit margins because of their easily created products. Internet Web sites are inexpensive to maintain, so a man like Matt Drudge, who was once described as having no real job, can operate out of a one-bedroom apartment in Hollywood and suddenly become the buzzman around which a corner of the political world revolves.²⁶ Cable news networks fill their programming schedules with pundit talk shows, instead of relying upon expensive field reporters. Even with a small ratings percentage or readership, these outlets can make money simply because of their low cost and niche market.

In stark contrast, broadcast networks have been consistently losing viewers for the past decade. In an effort to stay above the swirling waters of the new economic system, networks have been forced to restructure their conceptions of news and its place within programming. News must not only inform, but entertain and attract viewers who are "shopping" for news alternatives.

"Soft" News

Out of this whirlwind mix of news, entertainment and profits has emerged the television newsmagazine. Once limited to *60 Minutes* on CBS, the genre has exploded. In the fall of 1998, the three major broadcast networks plan to air newsmagazines six nights a week—up from just two nights in 1983. It's not hard to see why. During the week of August 10–16, 1998, six out of the top ten shows in the Nielsen ratings were

newsmagazines. This trend held constant during the summer re-run months, even though the newsmagazines themselves were airing old programs—or updated versions of old programs. An additional incentive is the relatively cheap cost of these shows—an hour of *Dateline* costs NBC about \$450,000, compared with the \$1.2 million that networks pay to produce the average hour-long drama.

The proliferation of newsmagazines is not on its own a sign of declining journalism. *60 Minutes* used to be synonymous with hard-hitting reporting and investigative work. However, in the crowded field, newsmagazines now rely on "soft," human interest stories to attract viewers. In the first six months of 1998, *60 Minutes* aired 22 episodes—a total of 62 different stories. Of this number, an astounding 60 percent were celebrity profiles, "can you believe?" investigative reports, or lifestyle pieces. Only a small amount—13 percent—would qualify as "hard" news, and every one of those stories dealt with international issues. The remaining 17 stories, including the problematic Kathleen Willey interview, would normally be defined as falling between "hard" and "soft" news.

**Table 2. 60 Minutes Story Segments—
January Through June, 1998**

Quality of Segment	Number of Shows	Percentage of Shows
"Soft" News	37	60%
"Hard" News	8	13%
Remainder	17	27%
Total	62 segments	100%

The same "softening" of news has taken place inside print newsmagazines. The focus has shifted significantly from foreign and domestic policy news to "lifestyle" and "news you can use" coverage. While 45 percent of newsmagazine covers in 1987 featured straight news topics, the total number dipped substantially to only 20 percent by 1997.²⁷ Straight news fails to generate the type of newsstand sales that follow covers featuring Princess Diana or the cast of *Seinfeld*. And in the new news market, the consumer knows best. A survey of network news, magazines and major papers, conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism concluded that celebrity, scandal, gossip and other "human interest" stories have

increased from 15 percent to an astonishing 43 percent of the total media coverage in the past twenty years.²⁸

Pundit Heaven

As the broadcast networks have battled to recapture a share of the viewing audience, all-news cable networks have fine-tuned their own specialized product—political talk. The tantalizing combination of low cost and acceptable ratings has nourished a growing slate of political news and opinion shows. And while the genre displayed its potential during earlier events like the Gulf War and the O. J. Simpson trial, it has found its fountain of youth with the Lewinsky story.

CNN, the veteran of 24-hour news, boasts ten shows devoted to political talk and news, including the incredibly successful *Inside Politics*. *IP* began as an outlet for following campaign news, but now stays on-air even between election cycles to lend its particular brand of political insight to any kind of news. No matter what the legislative or policy issue of the day, on *IP* it can easily be cast in purely political terms, with winners and losers. “What’s going on up on Capitol Hill today?” We may not learn about the day’s policy debates, but we will certainly get the latest information on Newt Gingrich’s struggle for control of the GOP. The more recent additions to the cable news line-up have copied this approach to politics as a model for forming both straight news and discussion programs.

The newest kid on the block, Fox News Channel, was launched in October 1996 and can already be seen in 33 million households around the country, because of incentives owner Rupert Murdoch offered to cable operators. Ordinarily, a start-up news channel would not automatically be added to the basic offerings in a cable package, but by making it profitable for cable operators, Murdoch established his access to a large viewing audience from the beginning. The new network has six full-time political talk shows, including the scandal spawn *Matt Drudge Show* and a summer addition, *The Beltway Boys*, starring veteran pundits Fred Barnes and Morton Kondracke.

NBC’s sister channels round out the cast of cable news networks climbing aboard the Lewinsky bandwagon. MSNBC operates as both an on-line site and a cable news channel, using political talk as a springboard for filling its programming schedule. Nine hours of purely political news and talk every day include the

made-for-Monica nightly show *White House in Crisis*, starring ex-ESPN anchor Keith Olbermann. NBC’s business news channel—CNBC—has found politics more profitable than business and economic talk. Its schedule is packed with shows like *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, *Equal Time*, *Rivera Live* and *Tim Russert*. From 7:30 P.M. to 3 A.M.—with the exception of a 30-minute break for business news—CNBC is all politics, all the time.

Compared to the traditional broadcast networks, which normally only have an hour or two of punditry per week, cable networks can fill 24 hours a day with political talk, enhancing their ability to capitalize on a scandal. These huge stories do not just boost ratings for one evening or one show—they create a market that never before existed. As Steve Brill has noted, a single scandal can “ignit[e] a rocket under the entire revenue structure of the enterprise,” doing for a network what coverage of the Iran hostage crisis did for ABC and *Nightline* in the late 1970s.²⁹ The day the Lewinsky story broke on January 21, 1998, MSNBC producers immediately discussed using this new scandal to create a new show. *White House in Crisis* debuted on February 3, a mere two weeks after the scandal coverage began, and quickly signed on respected journalists, including the *Washington Post*’s E. J. Dionne, to act as commentators for the nightly program.

Sharing the Wealth

The only requirements for a basic political talk show are a studio, a few chairs and a stable of guests willing to share their opinions. That cast is never hard to find in a loquacious city like Washington, but it is even easier when newswEEKlies use the shows for self-promotion. Print and television organizations have entered into a marriage of convenience to fill seats on pundit shows and enhance the visibility of certain newspapers and magazines. Fifteen years ago, *New York Times* reporters and columnists were not allowed to appear on television interview programs; now they are encouraged to appear. The *Wall Street Journal* has an agreement with NBC to provide information and reporters to CNBC. Several newspapers employ media consultants to coach their Washington correspondents for television appearances. Print reporters are courted by networks for exclusive contracts as political commentators. The rules of the game are to be witty, quick and get the company name out.

Newsweek has been the most blatant and adept at this venture. Editor Evan Thomas has

described how the magazine's "PR department decided to do a blitz on television and get all of us out there . . . It's something the newsweeklies always want to do nowadays—get mentioned and get noticed—and in this story we really wanted to be identified with it because it was our story."³⁰ Michael Isikoff identified a direct financial tie-in for reporters when he revealed that "Newsweek actually pays you to go on [political talk shows] . . . because they consider it a promotion for the magazine."³¹ In the span of sixteen hours on Thursday, January 22, *Newsweek* reporters and editors appeared 40 times on television or radio. Editors and reporters, and even correspondents with no direct connection to the story, trooped around town to remind everyone of *Newsweek's* exclusive role in the saga.

The media blitz by PR departments may be paying off—in anticipation of increased newsstand sales, *Newsweek* increased its press run by 50 percent for its February 2 issue. Its main competitor, *Time*, published 100,000 extra copies of the January 25 magazine.³² The cover images of Lewinsky hugging the president may have more to do with sales than the television appearances of a handful of reporters and editors, but these talking heads seem to be in their new roles for good.

The Elusive Rating

Now that journalism revolves more around generating profits than performing a public service, success is judged by sales and ratings. Television seems particularly susceptible to the lure of a pot of gold at the end of the ratings rainbow. While "soft" news provides ratings stability, it is the sensational, scandalous story that provides the spike in the ratings. Every story with even the potential of becoming a ratings winner is pursued by networks in the hope that it will translate into profits. Even if the story does not pan out, failure to cover it could result in lower ratings for a network. Dan Rather candidly explained: "The answer is fear. That everybody is afraid that a story will take off and be 'a stone cold ratings winner' and fear runs rampant in every newsroom in America."³³ It all seems to have started with coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial. "If I went to our research people," Rather said, "the first thing they would do is pull out their hole card ace, which is, well, look what happened in the O. J. Simpson case when the ratings went up."³⁴

So what do ratings numbers tell us about the power of the Lewinsky story? Good news for

cable, indifferent results for the broadcast networks. During the first three months of 1998, CNN's primetime programming jumped 22 percent to a 1.1 rating, representing 802,000 households. CNBC's overall schedule also increased viewership by 40 percent, equaling a 0.7 rating. The newer networks of MSNBC and FNC were not monitored by Nielsen last year, but Fox executives say that their 0.3 rating for the first quarter is three times higher than last year's numbers, while MSNBC's rating for just the first day of coverage jumped 131 percent, eventually settling down to a 0.4 rating.

It is important to keep the ratings in perspective. Although the all-news networks have clearly benefited from the Lewinsky story, they still trail many other cable outlets in the ratings competition. Comedy Central, for example, earned a rating of 0.7 for the first quarter of 1998, with Nickelodeon at 1.9, and Lifetime at 1.8. Even so, combined cable outlets have been steadily gaining ground on the big four broadcast networks. Just four years ago, broadcast networks had a 3 to 1 advantage in attracting viewers, but that gap is now just under 2 to 1.

In stark contrast to the rise in ratings for cable networks, broadcast networks did not benefit from all-Monica coverage during the first days and weeks of the scandal. In fact, during the first two days of coverage in January, *CBS Evening News* showed absolutely no rating change, *NBC Nightly News* posted a 2 percent increase and *ABC World News Tonight* gained the most with a moderately impressive 6 percent increase. The total audience share for the first two weeks of coverage showed virtually no change for any of the three networks. Ratings were actually higher for some of the networks during the first week of January, for reasons obviously unrelated to the Lewinsky story. Even so, network executives continued to trumpet the call of "ratings" in order to justify the domination of scandal stories, special programs, and breaking news reports.

The executive decision to require news divisions to become profitable has caused an unstoppable chain reaction in news. Pressure to produce profits has led to a reliance upon ratings and sales. How do news organizations "sell" their product? Often, by watering it down to attract a common denominator—"soft" news television programming, magazine spreads and *USA Today*-style newspapers reflect this strategy. In addition, executives look for programs that are easy to produce, cost very little and are capable of attracting significantly large

audiences. Throw the ingredients of Monicagate into this cauldron and a new breed of journalism emerges.

Part Five: “New News”

The new news is more immediate, more sensational, more market- and profit-driven than previous incarnations. It is not merely the appearance of news that has changed, however; the very nature of journalism has been altered. Never has this been more apparent than during the early coverage of Monicagate. We shall look at four characteristics of the new news, magnified through the lens of scandal.

1. Sourcing

Monicagate broke in a story on the Internet, written by a man widely ridiculed within the journalism community. Matt Drudge told a squeamish audience at the National Press Club in June, 1998, that the editorial review and oversight of the *Drudge Report* consists solely of his personal judgment regarding the credibility of a source. He almost never requires more than one source for a report and rarely gives any distinguishing clue about the origin of his information. While this total reliance on anonymous sources is not a fixture in American newsrooms, it is a disease that is catching. Within recent years—most dramatically in Monicagate coverage—viewers and readers have noticed substantial changes in how reports are (and are not) sourced. Even with a story containing charges as explosive as Monicagate, an alarming number of journalists were less likely to abide by traditional “Woodward-and-Bernstein” standards of journalism.

The Committee of Concerned Journalists conducted a study of how sourcing was used in print and television during the first two weeks of Monicagate. Their findings should disturb anyone who cares about the future of journalism. Only 26 percent of the stories during this period were based upon named sources—the most open type of reporting. The remainder—the vast majority of reports—were based on anonymous sourcing. Although anonymous sources are acceptable and sometimes necessary, stories based entirely on such sources leave readers and viewers with as many questions as answers. Even so, a full 40 percent of reports based on anonymous sourcing relied on a single source for the information. And although anonymous sourcing dominated reporting during the first few weeks of the scandal, journalists were more likely to characterize these sources in the

vaguest possible terms—“sources said”, “sources told our news organization”—than with a specific job description or indication of political/personal bias.³⁵

As the first adrenaline rush of Monicagate wore off, the press took a collective breath and began to revert to more traditional practice. Between the first frantic weeks in late January and the slower pace of March, the use of two or more named sources rose from 1 percent to 4 percent of all reporting—still nothing to write home about. The use of two or more anonymous sources dropped from 15 percent to 8 percent of the total coverage, as dependence on anonymous sources declined.³⁶

Cyberspace has generated a corresponding cyberspeed for the new news—if journalists take a few minutes to track down an additional source or double-check their information, they risk losing their exclusive story to any number of competitors. Exacerbating this new competitive speed is the breakdown in traditional editorial safeguards that have resulted from new economic pressures. Many news organizations have been forced to cut or eliminate fact-checker positions that might wave red flags at shaky sources. The *Wall Street Journal* and *Dallas Morning News* are just two of the most prominent news organizations to be embarrassed by inaccurate information or inadequate sourcing. Both relied upon anonymous sources for their reporting and were burned for their efforts.

The no-holds-barred premiere of Monicagate on the *Drudge Report* was an embarrassment to traditional journalism, but it was the type of tenuous reporting that was expected of Matt Drudge. In contrast, the first television report of Monicagate on ABC's *Good Morning America* should have been rock-solid. Instead, at 7 A.M. on January 21, 1998, Jackie Judd used one anonymous, uncharacterized source as the basis for the explosive charge of an obstruction of justice investigation involving President Clinton. Half an hour later, her story was bolstered by the appearance of another source. Did it matter that she had not felt comfortable enough with this source thirty minutes earlier to use it in her original story? The explosive nature of the story obviously persuaded Judd to air her report with just one source in order to break the news. That very quality and substance of the charge, however, should also have urged caution. Sources are not mere items on a check-off list that are necessary before an unsubstantiated report can become a “story.” They are important guidelines that journalists ought to respect.

2. "Out there"

In the not-so-distant past, stories entered the national dialogue only after extensive coverage in major newspapers, nightly reports on one of the major television news shows and subsequent analysis in barbershops and water coolers around the country. With the advent of new technology, an item can emerge on an Internet Web site, worm its way into a late-night comedian's act, appear as a topic on a morning radio show and catapult onto the pages of the *New York Times*—all within the span of a few hours. The number of outlets available to track news reports gives some sensational items the appearance of being "everywhere." And if it's on the radio and television, and in the paper and news-magazine—everywhere you turn—it seems that it must be true.

In other words, many news outlets feel compelled to report a story not because they have individually followed it or have even verified the sources, but simply because it exists in the public domain. Stuart Taylor, of the *National Journal*, calls this phenomenon "creeping relevance," explaining that once such a story moves from tabloid rumor to mainstream news item, it acquires authority simply because of its widespread currency.³⁷ The more an item is reported, the more entrenched and "out there" it becomes, until the pressure on most news outlets to cover it is intense. Dan Rather has commented on this urgency to report questionable stories by explaining that "the basic fear, the gut fear is if we don't do it, somebody else is going to do it. And they're going to get on a ratings rocket up and you're going to look stupid and be selling insurance or real estate. That's the basic fear."³⁸ His explanation has less to do with a news organization's responsibility to share breaking news with its audience than with the competitive fear of losing viewers to a news organization that is willing to cover a sensational story.

One danger of the "out there" justification is the tendency to mistake what is often referred to as "elite opinion" for general public interest. This can be even narrower than the stereotypical "inside the Beltway" mentality and represent the views of a small number of political junkies within journalism. Read closely the explanation Don Hewitt, executive producer of *60 Minutes*, gave for the decision to allow Kathleen Willey to share her detailed allegations against President Clinton on his show: "If it wasn't the Oval Office and it wasn't a subject that people were talking impeachment over—

I'm not, but they are—I would imagine that we would not be as graphic as we would let her be on the air."³⁹ What Hewitt does not say is that speculation about impeachment was being generated almost exclusively by television commentators. Up to that point in mid-March, most members of Congress and other public officials had studiously avoided the term. The American public did not seem focused on the possibility at all. Hewitt's decision seems based more on a media-created maelstrom than a national consensus.

Many editors and producers use the lofty excuse that they are providing a public service by reporting stories that their audiences have already heard about and expect to be covered. George de Lama, an editor at the *Chicago Tribune*, said that his paper picked up the ABC story of a witness to an encounter between Lewinsky and the President, because "we figured that our readers had seen it and had access to it. So we had to acknowledge that it existed." However, de Lama also acknowledged that "in retrospect, I wish we had not published it . . . It soon became clear to us that there's gonna be all kinds of stuff out there floating around and we should just publish what we know independently."⁴⁰

None other than Michael Isikoff echoed this sentiment when he was pressed on the *Today* show to comment on the dress story minutes after it first made its television debut. "I've heard a lot of wild things, as I'm sure you have," he told Lauer, "but you don't go on the air and blab them." Maybe not, but a common practice during Monicagate has been to blab first and verify later.

3. Rush to Judgment

Copies of the *Washington Post* hit the streets of Washington early on the morning of January 21, 1998, bringing the names "Monica Lewinsky" and "Linda Tripp" to doorsteps across the city. A short time later, before the sun had even risen at 7:21 A.M., Sam Donaldson issued the first impeachment prediction. Appearing on ABC's *Good Morning America*, Donaldson declared that "if sufficient evidence exists to really prove that [the President suborned perjury], well, clearly an impeachment investigation will begin on Capitol Hill of a very serious nature."

Donaldson's comments were followed in short order by those of George Stephanopoulos, his ABC colleague who had been one of Clinton's closest aides. An obviously rattled Stephanopoulos—he managed to confuse Cokie

Roberts for Donaldson—told the nation that “there’s no question that, as Cokie said, if [the allegations] are true, they’re not only politically damaging, but it [sic] could lead to impeachment proceedings.” Stephanopoulos regained his composure long enough to caution that the media was focusing on “just questions right now, and that’s why I think we do all have to take a deep breath before we go too far here, without underestimating their seriousness.” The warning was appropriate, but Stephanopoulos and his colleague had already gone “too far” by submitting the concept of impeachment for national consideration.

ABC legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin noted that speculation can give a dangerous validity to ideas that are really just being tossed around by journalists. Toobin himself refused to engage questions about impeachment possibilities because of the inherent risk of prematurely discussing such serious issues. “The problem,” he explained, “is that if, for example, you engage in a . . . long discussion about the legal elements of obstruction of justice, you are presupposing that there was an obstruction of some kind.” In addition, “a discussion about the elements of impeachment presupposes that there’s some relevance to an impeachment discussion. Worst of all, all of the Lewinsky discussions were based on the one hundred percent certainty that they had a sexual relationship, and there is pressure in that direction because it makes the discussion interesting.”⁴¹

While debates about worst-case scenarios of impeachment or resignation add spice to political talk shows, when they are based on unconfirmed allegations, the speculation is at best moot and at worst irresponsible. According to the Committee of Concerned Journalists, a majority of the allegations leveled against the President in the first few weeks of Monicagate were voiced by commentators and not by their sources. The opinion that “Clinton is in trouble” was attributed to “administration”, “congressional” or other sources only 32 percent of the time, while the other 68 percent of allegations were made by pundits or reporters. Similarly, the idea that “Clinton is dissembling” was reported as the opinion of sources only 23 percent of the time—Sam Donaldson and Co. were responsible for three-quarters of the charges that the President was intentionally misleading the country.⁴² Journalists may feel vindicated by the President’s subsequent admission that he “misled people,” but the speed at which they reached this conclusion is still a valid issue.

On the January 26 broadcast of *This Week* on ABC, Bill Kristol, who worked for Vice President Dan Quayle in the Bush Administration, offered his candid assessment of President Clinton’s veracity: “Everyone knows he’s lying . . . lies beget lies. Washington is now, I think, drowning in deceit and it cannot go on long.” Kristol’s presumption of guilt is characteristic of the journalism that has emerged since Watergate. President Nixon’s unconcealed contempt for the press, combined with the discovery of his deception, only reinforced the skeptical component of American journalism. Former *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee wrote that “journalism was forever changed by the assumption—by most journalists—that after Watergate government officials generally and instinctively lied when confronted by embarrassing events,” and admitted that he was not immune to this altered mindset. “I found it easier to cope with Washington by assuming that no one ever told the complete truth.”⁴³ The disconnect between politicians and the press has only worsened since Watergate; for his book, *Out of Order*, Tom Patterson asked reporters why they consistently portray presidential candidates as liars and was given the answer, “Because they *are* liars.”⁴⁴

This conviction, combined with President Clinton’s record of shading the truth, spawned a collective rush to judgment that was best exemplified by the White House correspondent for ABC News. On the January 25 broadcast of *This Week*, Sam Donaldson informed his round-table colleagues that the end of the Clinton presidency was imminent. “If he’s not telling the truth, I think his presidency is numbered in days,” Donaldson predicted. “Mr. Clinton, if he’s not telling the truth and the evidence shows that, will resign, perhaps this week.”

4. Blurring the Lines

Are there any rules in the “new news” to govern the growing field of punditry and its tenuous relationship to straight reporting? Should audiences be able to differentiate between the words of a reporter who appears on the evening news and the opinion of that same reporter later in the evening on *Larry King Live*? Should it matter that individuals leave politics and walk right into contracts with news organizations? Should readers be wary of the fact that the author of the column they’ve just read about the scandal of the day is currently in negotiations to work for one of the major players in the story? The following examples from Monicagate raise

these questions and more, while providing very few answers.

Commentators or Reporters?

For decades, the line between covering stories and commenting on them stayed fairly clear. Most newspapers confined analysis to the op-ed pages and television networks traditionally delegated editorial comment to one particularly prominent correspondent. Today stories labeled “news analysis” can commonly be found on the front pages of America’s major newspapers and, on television, White House reporters often conclude their pieces with a catchy (and, more often than not, cynical) comment.

This disintegrating line between reporter and commentator is of particular concern to those who work in politics and find their actions analyzed more often than they are simply reported. White House advisor Paul Begala, a master spinner for the Clinton administration, voiced a concern shared by many when he said: “I think what is . . . troubling are those who move from commentary to coverage, sliding back and forth from opining to reporting. That becomes very difficult for me to deal with when I watch a reporter or columnist offering very harsh opinions about me or my boss, and then they’re on the phone with me the next day trying hard to be objective, but you can’t.”⁴⁵

Michael Isikoff has defended the use of reporters as commentators by declaring that objectivity can be retained even in a discussion format. “I generally don’t express opinions,” he said about his appearances on political talk shows. “I’m talking about stories I’ve already written about, and I’m giving a context, and an analytical perspective on stuff that I’ve already reported on.”⁴⁶ Whether or not this is actually true, most of Isikoff’s colleagues do not pretend to be objective. Sam Donaldson morphs from White House correspondent by weekday to head knight of the roundtable by weekend. Similarly, viewers would be hard pressed to recall if a piece of information they heard on CNN came from Wolf Blitzer the reporter or Wolf Blitzer the host of *The Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer*.

It is certainly not a new occurrence for journalists to wear two hats—*Washington Week in Review* has been on the air for 31 years with the same format of print and television journalists who report and then analyze the news. However, as political talk shows have risen in popularity and number, many programs have dropped this old-fashioned concept of journalistic areas of expertise in favor of encouraging

more controversial debate. Margaret Carlson, a columnist at *Time* and a regular on the pundit circuit, admitted in a *Washington Post* interview that on television, “the less you know about something, the better off you are.” Carlson explained: “What’s good TV and what’s thoughtful analysis are different. That’s been conceded by most producers and bookers. They’re not looking for the most learned person; they’re looking for the person who can sound learned without confusing the matter with too much knowledge. I’m one of the people without too much knowledge. I’m perfect!”⁴⁷ Monica-gate, with its few on-the-record statements and, until the release of the Starr Report, even fewer facts, was the perfect know-nothing scandal for the know-nothing pundit class.

Journalists or Politicians?

Washington Post political reporter David Broder’s warning in 1988 of the rise of “an androgynous blending of politician and journalist called The Washington Insider”⁴⁸ has been echoed by Howell Raines, editorial page editor of the *New York Times*, who has written about “the flooding into journalism of people whose formative experience is in politics.”⁴⁹ Both worried that the shuttling back and forth of individuals between journalism and politics was blurring the lines that separate the two worlds, corroding the barriers that allow both “estates” to keep each other in check.

Movement between the worlds of politics and journalism is not new. John Chancellor and Bill Moyers held positions in both worlds; and Henry Kissinger and Jeane Kirkpatrick, once out of government, took to writing newspaper columns. However, this shuttling has accelerated in recent years, as government officials move from politics to journalism, back to politics, and then again back to journalism. Pat Buchanan seems to live with one foot on each side of the fence, and critics of White House aide Sidney Blumenthal dubbed his transition from *New Yorker* columnist to presidential advisor as a change “in title only.”

Those who leave the Clinton White House have been particularly blessed with media rewards and employment. George Stephanopoulos has an exclusive contract with ABC News and is a weekly participant on *This Week*, former White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers served as co-host for CNBC’s *Equal Time* before joining *Vanity Fair* and free-lancing on other networks, and former White House chief of staff Leon Panetta is a contributing editor to

the on-line magazine *IntellectualCapital.com*. Even disgraced former advisor Dick Morris proved that there is life after politics and scandal when the Fox News Channel hired him as a political commentator.

Yet are these political pros equipped to move seamlessly into the world of journalism? While their political insight can provide valuable context and background to events, politicians-turned-journalists do not always have the same instinctive objectivity that newsrooms still try to foster. Raines expressed concern about the increasing tendency in news organizations “to accept people who have been in the political world as arbiters of what constitutes good journalism. The problem is that people whose values were shaped in the government offices . . . view the world in a fundamentally different way from reporters and editors whose values were shaped in the newsroom.”⁵⁰ The distinctive identity of the press as outside observer is changed when the individuals who make up the press come from inside the halls of Congress or the White House. Can Stephanopoulos and Myers—two intensely loyal former staffers who have admitted feeling deeply betrayed by President Clinton—effectively provide commentary about an Administration they once helped lead? And even if they can, what is to stop other White House aides from promoting their own visibility and “spinning” ability with an eye toward a future career on television or in print? Nothing, of course.⁵¹

Reporter or Participant?

Monicagate has been unique in the number of journalists who have become involved as direct or indirect participants in the story. In addition to Michael Isikoff, who has attracted criticism for his involvement with sources who arguably used him as much as he used them, other reporters and commentators have joined the dubious cast of characters.

- Steve Brill, whose magazine *Brill's Content* premiered with an in-depth look at press coverage in the first weeks of the Lewinsky investigation, used an exclusive interview with Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr to hype his magazine in the mainstream media. Trumpeting the “revelation” that Starr had leaked information to reporters, Brill became the most sought-after man on television for one week in early summer. In a whirlwind of appearances that would be a publicity department's dream come true, Brill was interviewed on *Today*, *Face the Nation*, *Late Edition*, *Fox*

News Sunday, *Sunday Journal*, *Meet the Press* and *Reliable Sources* between June 14 and June 22. As with Isikoff's round of appearances in January, the reporter became newsmaker, for at least one news cycle.

- Regular viewers of the *NewsHour* on PBS are well aware that the program is a more serious, thoughtful alternative to the “new news” versions on broadcast networks. Even so, those watching April 14, 1998, might have been surprised by the quaint formality of the “editor's note” that ended the hour-long show. With his earnest demeanor, anchor Jim Lehrer told his audience: “It's about Stuart Taylor, who's been doing regular and superb reporting on the *NewsHour* about the Supreme Court. He will no longer be doing such reports, and I wanted you to know why.” What followed was an explanation of traditional journalistic principle and practice that sounded strangely unfamiliar and old-fashioned in the era of “new news.”

Like a parent patiently explaining the difference between right and wrong, Lehrer said that at the *NewsHour*, “we have always separated those who report the news from those who analyze or . . . comment on it . . . The distinction is very important to us. We believe Stuart's recent commentaries in print and other TV programs about the Starr investigation have caused some blurring of the lines and some confusion about his role with us.” What could have possibly prompted this public scolding?

Stuart Taylor writes a weekly column for the *National Journal*, contributes pieces to *Legal Times* and *Newsweek* and has been a regular correspondent on PBS's *NewsHour* since 1993. In March, Taylor was approached by someone in Independent Counsel Starr's office about the possibility of joining the staff to craft the Counsel's report to Congress on the President. Although these secret negotiations fell through, Taylor wrote a favorable *National Journal* column about Starr the next week, without disclosing to his editors or readers that he had been in contact with Starr concerning a job offer.

Once the news broke, Taylor was initially defensive, telling Howard Kurtz: “Did I owe it to my readers to disclose [the offer]? I didn't think of it.”⁵² He eased his stance the next week, apologizing in writing to his colleagues and readers for failing to disclose that he had seriously considered Starr's offer. The apology was not sufficient to breach the

standards required on the *NewsHour*. Taylor has had no shortage of requests for television appearances, putting him in the running for “most ubiquitous pundit”, but at least one news organization drew the line on reporters becoming part of the story they were assigned to cover.

- In March, 1998, in an episode of strange self-flagellation, reporter David Brock used an article in *Esquire* to apologize to President Clinton for his part in creating the feeding frenzy of sex scandal coverage. Brock is most famous for writing a December, 1993, article in the *American Spectator* that alleged sexual misconduct by Governor Bill Clinton and cited “a woman named ‘Paula.’” The article led to the discovery of Paula Jones, prompted her lawsuit and precipitated a string of official and unofficial investigations into the President’s personal life.

In an article advertised on the cover of the magazine as, “Dear Mr. President: Oops,” Brock changed his tune, arguing that investigation into the private lives of public officials encourages journalists to bring down politicians over moral peccadilloes instead of looking for actual corruption and deceit. “I . . . know that if we continue down this path, if sexual witch-hunts become the way to win in politics, if they become our politics altogether, we can and will destroy everyone in public life.”⁵³ It was a valiant attempt to reclaim a piece of his stake in the new scandal, but David Brock faded from interest after the obligatory week of hoopla over his “apology.”

- On April 30, several months after Joe DiGenova and Victoria Toensing unwittingly served as the sources for the retracted *Dallas Morning News* story, Howard Kurtz reported that the couple had signed a deal with NBC to make regular appearances on CNBC and MSNBC. Although the two were still officially on the majority staff of the House Government Affairs Committee, conducting a political investigation, the network apparently had no qualms about hiring them for political commentary. According to Kurtz, an NBC spokeswoman said, “as long as we clearly identify what their association is, there’s no conflict and we’re not doing any disservice to our viewers.” Kurtz noted, however, that in at least one newscast, Toensing was introduced only as “a former deputy assistant attorney general” and “an MSNBC legal analyst”—not

by her current occupation as GOP House investigator.⁵⁴

It is not unusual for networks to hire political players who have left their positions in government, but they rarely pay commentators who are still receiving government paychecks. Similarly, individuals who are arguably involved in investigations are rarely hired to comment on the situation. After thinking about these potential conflicts of interest—and following a huge uproar from livid Democratic congressmen—NBC withdrew the contract and declined to hire the controversial couple.

Part Six: At the End of the Day . . .

This case study has focused on journalistic excesses in the early weeks of Monicagate, explained by the rise of new technology, including cable television, the 24-hour news cycle, the Internet and other modern electronic wizardry; the new economic underpinning of the news industry, highlighted by the absorption of networks into megacorporations and newspapers into national syndicates, producing an overriding dedication to the bottom line rather than to public service; and finally, the emergence of the “new news,” which features “lite,” fluffy, often sensational coverage of trivial and serious issues. At the end of the day, it seemed to many journalists that they were being driven inescapably by technical and economic imperatives to sacrifice news values for profit maximization.

Technology and Economics

Andy Rooney, humorist for CBS’s *60 Minutes*, found nothing funny in the “new news,” even as practiced by the Tiffany network. “The emphasis is so much more on money than content in every decision that’s made,” he said, “that it’s discouraging to be here.”⁵⁵ Geneva Overholser, now a columnist but once editor of the *Des Moines Register*, where she was named “editor of the year,” echoed Rooney’s lament. “Too often by far,” she said, “being an editor in America today feels like holding up an avalanche of pressure to do away with this piece of excellence, that piece of quality, so as to squeeze out just a little bit more money.”⁵⁶

News has always been a money-making operation—it is a highly-competitive business. But, up until recent years, the quest for profit did not define the pursuit of news. Now in the lofty suites of managerial power in newspapers and networks, there is rarely an executive with

journalistic credentials, and everyone measures success by ratings points and bottom lines. Public trust is important but hardly a priority in a newsroom. ABC News recently hired a lawyer, David Westin, to replace a legend, Boone Arledge. The satisfaction of stockholder greed, especially in a marketplace of uncertain prospects after a long run of unbelievable optimism, determines the outcome of many news decisions. It is no longer the general satisfaction of the public interest. The model shaped by publisher Mark Willes of the *Los Angeles Times*, bringing the money manager into every editorial decision, has been copied by dozens of other newspapers.

Networks followed the same pattern. After the deregulation of the Reagan years, the Big 4 of ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC rushed into the vacuum, pushing for profit—and, it seemed, their public obligations be damned! And following passage of the sweeping Telecommunications Act of 1996, they continued to take advantage of the huge financial opportunities built into the legislation. Radio ownership, for example, no longer had any limitations. Own a dozen, own a hundred; one day you could own a thousand or several thousand, and dominate a radio market of some 16,000 stations. That appeared quickly to be the goal of Mel Karmazin, a rising star of CBS management, who began buying up stations with determined discipline until now CBS stands as a giant in the radio industry. William F. Baker and George Dessart, co-authors of “Down The Tube,” a study of what they call “the failure of television,” rip into the Federal Communications Commission for failing to uphold the public trust and consistently finding a way to accommodate owners and managers of radio and television stations. The FCC is guilty, they charge, of “misregulation and the failure to regulate at all.”⁵⁷ The incentives in the news business, as currently arranged, run in the direction of a further maximization of profit and minimization of public concerns. Nothing on the economic horizon suggests that news will awaken one day soon, as though from a dark, disturbing dream, and decide to be virtuous pursuers of truth.

Choice

Must it be this way? The evidence at the moment shouts yes; and yet the evidence is only the accumulated result of many decisions by reporters, editors, producers, writers and commentators. If they were to change their ways, the evidence would change. If they were, for example, to listen to Sandra Mims Rowe, editor

of *The Oregonian* and former president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, they might see the light. Speaking at an ASNE gathering in Washington, DC in April, 1998, Rowe pleaded with the editors to take the “high road.” “Other media that do not share newspaper standards,” she said, “are recasting the definitions of news. But we do not have to be pulled along . . . New media will not adopt our standards. . . . The high road is there if we will just take it. The notion that readers have created the demand for lowest common denominator journalism is false. We are doing that ourselves. We can and must stop.” Editor Rowe was lustily applauded. Her logic was unassailable. Her message was resonant and powerful. But there have been few takers. Many of her colleagues realized that they were under pressure to expand tabloid-style coverage from the O. J./Monica-type story to more mainstream stories about politics and economics, and they could do little if anything to break the momentum.

Whenever there has been a choice in recent years between the old news and the new news, the new news has often won. Jonathan P. Wolman, Washington bureau chief for the *Associated Press*, concluded unhappily that there was an “imbalance” in contemporary journalism between factual reporting, on the one side, and trashy, loose-lipped TV talk and published commentary, on the other. “The reporting has often been swamped by the commentary,” he said.

Essential Truths and Good Journalism

Still, though there were glaring examples of journalistic irresponsibility in the early days of Monicagate, the American people learned the essential truths about the scandal, suggesting, ironically, that poor journalistic practice, while deplorable and distasteful, did not necessarily deny them the information they needed to function in a free, open and raucous society. Even in the high-pitched roar of competitive journalism, they were able to read, hear and watch each episode of the scandal unfold in dramatic form. Moreover, there were shiny instances of solid, ethical and reflective journalism—rare in the early weeks of the scandal but there nonetheless.

- The *New York Times* was ready to publish a bombshell about the mysterious “witness.” Michael Oreskes, Washington bureau chief of the *Times*, had, he thought, more than the requisite number of sources and confirmations. “By the time I came in that afternoon,” he later recalled, “we had four sources. And we

were preparing to lead the *Times* with it the next morning." But, after cross-checking, Oreskes found out that his reporters were having second thoughts about their sourcing. It turned out that their four "sources" had all learned the same "facts" from the same "witness," who acknowledged that he personally had seen nothing at all. Everything was at least second-hand. Oreskes and his reporters decided to "kill" the story. "Sometimes," he reflected, "the story you're proudest of is the story you don't run."⁵⁸

- *NBC Nightly News* was sorely tempted to pick up the *Wall Street Journal* story about the steward who saw the President and Lewinsky in a "compromising" position. Anchor Tom Brokaw checked with Washington bureau chief Tim Russert. The story had not yet run in the newspaper; they were discussing its publication on the Internet. Did they have confirmation—on their own? No. Did NBC have any independent information on the steward's tale? No. Brokaw later told Brill: "The *Journal's* Web site story was moving toward a full-blown story. But we decided, after talking to Tim, that it didn't have legs."⁵⁹
- Nina Totenberg on *Nightline* provided an excellent example of the importance of identifying a source. The story focused on how, allegedly, President Clinton had briefed his assistant, Betty Currie, on what she should say before Starr's grand jury. The suggestion was that she had been "rehearsed" by the President, which, if true, could have been seen as the equivalent of "obstructing justice." Totenberg explained: "This story . . . is fairly clearly a leak from the prosecutor's office and with the exception of [the gifts] . . . It is their characterization of what Betty Currie has said."
- Sourcing, as we know, has been an aggravating problem from the first day of the coverage of Monicagate. Every news organization committed one sin or another—running with stories that had no independent sourcing, or broadcasting information that was second- or third-hand. Only the *NewsHour* on PBS used no anonymous sources during the early period of the scandal—the first two weeks researched and analyzed by the Committee of Concerned Journalists.
- There were rumors, in the early weeks of Monicagate, that the former White House intern had had an affair with her high school drama teacher. Since the high school was

located in Los Angeles, obviously the *Los Angeles Times* tried to convert the rumor into a confirmed story. "The allegation required a high level of confirmation," said Doyle McManus, Washington bureau chief. His reporters could not get confirmation from Monica or the teacher; nor was McManus persuaded that the story, even if confirmed, was relevant to the White House scandal. The story was not published. Later, the high school teacher decided to tell his story; and only then did the *Los Angeles Times* publish it. According to a report by the Committee of Concerned Journalists: "The story eventually broke when the teacher went public."⁶⁰

- Sometimes, the same journalist was guilty of hasty judgments on some days and very sound ones on others. On the Sunday before the Lewinsky story broke on January 21, 1998, Sam Donaldson told his *This Week* audience: "I'm not an apologist for *Newsweek*, but if their editors decided they didn't have it cold enough to go with, I don't think we can here." Later, he explained: "I hadn't heard anything about Drudge or anything else about this story. I just decided we shouldn't go on our air with a story that *Newsweek* had decided it couldn't go with."⁶¹

The Dewey-Lippmann Debate

What then is the essential obligation of journalism? Obviously, it is to provide the truth—or as much of the truth as can be obtained; and if truth were an easily definable commodity, it would be quickly accessible. But it isn't. For much of the twentieth-century, an old argument between the philosopher, John Dewey, and the journalist, Walter Lippmann, has echoed through the corridors of journalism. Complexities reduced to generalities, the argument could be framed as follows: should the press educate the public, or should it cater to the public's taste? Should it, it might be asked, go high-brow, or low-brow? Lippmann envisaged journalists as belonging to an elite corps of specially trained reporters and commentators—for example, political or diplomatic experts who not only reported on public policy but also provided editorial guidelines for elevating the entire process, for making policy better. Dewey objected to any form of journalistic elitism, believing that the best newspapers had only to reflect popular interest and curiosity to be fulfilling their fundamental responsibility to society. Journalistic legitimacy, in his view, was the natural consequence of tapping into the

people—it was a bottom-up process. Lippmann saw journalistic legitimacy as a top-down process—editorial copy that mirrored the educated vision of an elite group of reporters, who knew how to organize and explain information of the sort they felt the public needed.

Dewey's vision opened the door to tabloid journalism, though the respected philosopher could never have imagined such an outcome; Lippmann's vision led, in a way, to the best of the *New York Times*, PBS and NPR. Both visions imply, however, that the journalist is sovereign in his/her capacity either to broadcast street-corner gossip or to publish sophisticated analyses of foreign wars, but even the best of the journalists find that they now have to bend to the demands of the new technology and the new economics. Neither vision is an accurate reflection of the complicated reality of the business—at least, not at this time. "There's always been a balance," said Norman Pearlstine, editor-in-chief of *Time* magazine, "between educating your reader and serving your reader." True, but the balance in recent years (certainly since the O. J. Simpson trials, the paparazzi assault on Princess Diana, and Monicagate) has tipped dramatically in the direction of "serving" the reader or viewer; and in the process journalistic standards have fallen steadily.

The American Journalist

The profile of the American journalist has become decidedly Lippmannesque, perhaps not yet in salary terms but surely in educational achievement. In 1935, Leo Rosten, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, determined that roughly 50 percent of the Washington press corps had college degrees, but less than 50 percent of the national press corps had finished college, or even attended college. These numbers immediately suggested that journalism was a profession or a craft that required a high degree of educational training. By 1971, almost 60 percent of all journalists had college degrees. By 1982, almost 100 percent of the Washington press corps had college degrees, 75 percent of the national press corps had college degrees, and a third of them had even obtained advanced degrees. By 1992, more than 82 percent had college degrees, and a significant number of them had advanced degrees.⁶²

The White House press corps has a very special pedigree. While 80 percent of Americans with college degrees attended public colleges, 53 percent of reporters covering the President attended private schools.⁶³ It is a good thing that

many journalists still profess an allegiance to the old adage, "We're not in it for the money," because a higher education has not necessarily produced a very high salary—at least for those reporters who work for small or modest-sized newspapers with a circulation between roughly 30,000 and 70,000 readers. They are earning, on average, \$23,000 a year.⁶⁴ *US News & World Report* warned graduating college seniors in 1997 that journalism majors were starting their careers with salaries as low as \$22,000 a year.⁶⁵

Between a local newspaper and a local TV station, salaries were about the same—the average salary for a local TV reporter in 1995 was \$21,915 a year.⁶⁶ Major newspapers and networks pay a lot more. For example, in April, 1997, if you were a reporter with two years of experience, the *New York Times* would start you at \$67,000 a year. With five years of experience, the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* would start you at \$61,000 and \$57,000 respectively.⁶⁷ And if you were an experienced reporter in Washington, DC, where many star journalists work, you'd be doing quite well indeed—especially if you were working for a network, where salaries for a beat reporter could range from \$100,000 to \$350,000 a year, depending on the beat. But even if you worked for a newspaper or a magazine but somehow managed to break into the television talk show circuit, you would also be in six-figure terrain, because you'd be open to such additional benefits as television contracts and lecture fees—in other words, you'd earn very handsome salaries indeed, comparable to those of US Cabinet secretaries. Howard Fineman earns a reported \$160,000 a year from *Newsweek*, where he is a senior political reporter, but he has also signed a new \$65,000 contract with MSNBC.⁶⁸

In the old days, such moonlighting was discouraged; now it is encouraged by *Newsweek*, because it believes that it benefits from the free publicity generated by Fineman's appearances on television.

A quick survey suggests, therefore, that journalists these days tend to reflect Lippmann's elitism much more than Dewey's populism. They are among the best educated and best paid in the land, more powerful as an institution than at any other time in American history. And yet, in their daily and hourly product, they produce, for the most part, not an elitist formula for better government, not a detailed analysis of social security or Kremlin intrigue, but rather an increasingly fluffy, sexy and sensationalist vision of society, in which vice among our

leaders can be (and has been) converted into profitable enterprises. The cream of the crop has produced a harvest of shame.

The Hollywoodization of the News

Journalism is among the most analyzed and self-analyzed professions in America. From the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania to the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, one academic institution after another has been created in the past decade or so to critique the media's impact on society and public policy. This reflects, in part, the media's enormous power and importance. In addition, by 1998, as many as 20 foundations were providing support for media studies; nineteen industry groups and 46 professional organizations were engaging in forms of journalistic self-policing; and, in addition to the *Columbia Journalism Review* and the *American Journalism Review*, which publish excellent reports on the pros and cons of journalistic practice, there are the *Media Studies Journal*, *Brill's Content* and the *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, among others, which publish scholarly studies of the media and its impact on society. Dozens of media critics direct their fire at any infraction of journalistic ethics or practice as soon as one is spotted on the near horizon. CNN's Reliable Sources is a weekend salon for intelligent criticism of the media; and at other networks and in newspapers and magazines, such criticism has become routine.

Yet something is profoundly wrong. For, while there has been more self-flagellation and anguished navel-gazing, more scholarship and analysis, more foundation support, more unabashed care and criticism of the media than at any other time in American history—in other words, more pressure and encouragement to clean up its act—the effect on the practice of journalism has been very problematic. Indeed, though some journalists have argued that the relentless criticism of the press is a sign of strength and self-confidence, the evidence is overwhelming that standards have continued to fall. All of this well-intended criticism has apparently fallen on deaf ears—or journalists have heard the criticism but can do little to nothing to improve their ways.

In September, 1993, Dan Rather delivered a remarkably candid and forceful keynote address to the annual meeting of the Radio and Television News Directors of America. He based his address on Edward R. Murrow's 1958 speech to

the same organization. At that time, the legendary newsman had chastised the industry for failing to utilize "this weapon of television" in the battle against "ignorance, intolerance and indifference." Of television then, Murrow used words now familiar to many: "This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box."

Rather looked the 1993 news directors in the eye. "We've all gone Hollywood—we've all succumbed to the Hollywoodization of the news," he charged, "because we were afraid not to." Fear was one of Rather's central themes and explanations. "Just to cover our rear, we give the best slots to gossip and prurience." Corporate executives and sponsors "got us putting more and more fuzz and wuzz on the air, cop-shop stuff, so as to compete, not with other news programs, but with entertainment programs (including those posing as news programs) for dead bodies, mayhem and lurid tales." The "post-Murrow generation of owners and managers," Rather continued, "aren't venal—they're afraid. They've got education and taste and good sense, they care about their country, but you'd never know it from the things that fear makes them do—from the things that fear makes them make us do."

Rather is the \$7-million anchor, the heart and soul of CBS News, and yet he acknowledged then and since that "fear" of ratings and bottom-line "slippage" has forced him and his colleagues to "freeze" in the face of corporate pressures to do infotainment rather than hard news. He quoted one news director as ordering his staff to do more stories on Madonna and her sex life than on a papal visit to America. Rather all but begged them to put together "a few good men and women with the courage of their convictions to turn [the news industry] around."

Rather spoke these words in 1993. The *Oregonian* editor Rowe spoke her words in 1998. "We can and must stop," she said. But nothing positive happened between 1993 and 1998; indeed, the situation only worsened. Is the battle irreversible? Are the news directors, the corporate managers, the journalists in fact powerless to change their course for the better? Are they simply corks on an ocean of technological and economic turmoil? Both Murrow and Rather, straining to see a silver lining, quoted Cassius: "Men at some time are masters of their fates: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,

but in ourselves.” If Cassius meant, to update the analogy, that journalists can transform their craft into an agent of positive change for the whole society, then the evidence strongly indicates that he was wrong. If he meant, on the other hand, that journalists can do no more than reflect society, then he was right.

In 1962, columnist George F. Will wrote that we live in “an echo chamber lined with mirrors.” Today, it is only worse. We live in a national version of *The Truman Show*. The White House has become a virtual photo-op—populated by teams of lawyers and media advisers. Monica Lewinsky has lawyers, consultants and a spokeswoman. Linda Tripp has advisers on

her clothes, make-up and hair—and the press. Andy Bleiler, Lewinsky’s high school drama teacher, enjoyed his 15 minutes of fame at a press conference on his front lawn, orchestrated by a California PR guru, Michael Nason, who happens to be the uncle of Bleiler’s wife. Kenneth Starr has learned to smile in the presence of any camera, and he too has hired a press spokesman, who appears regularly on Sunday talk shows. And Bill Clinton confesses to infidelity in a nationally televised speech.

Monicagate is not the fault of the press, which only reflects society. Monicagate is a symptom of a society that gets the press it deserves.

ENDNOTES

1. On September 11, 1998, the Starr Report and a White House rebuttal were released to the public, ushering in a period of extreme political uncertainty. That, too, is not the focus of this study.
2. In January, 1992, at the beginning of the presidential campaign season, Gennifer Flowers sold a story to a tabloid called *The Star* saying that she had had a 12-year affair with Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas, then a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. Clinton denied the story, but it kicked off a series of allegations about womanizing that followed him into the White House. Later, Clinton confirmed that he had had only one sexual encounter with Flowers.
3. "Anatomy of an Investigative Story"—a Brown bag lunch with Michael Isikoff, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, April 21, 1998.
4. Brown bag lunch, April 21, 1998.
5. From an interview at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, April 21, 1998. Interestingly, in the September, 1998 issue of *Brill's Content* (p. 18), Isikoff denies having any conversation with members of Starr's team concerning the possibility of a sting operation.
6. Stephen Brill, "Pressgate," *Brill's Content*, August, 1998, p. 129.
7. From CNN Web site (www.cnn.com), July 7, 1998.
8. Ken Auletta, "The Invisible Manager," *The New Yorker*, July 27, 1998, p. 42.
9. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), p. 146.
10. Walter Cronkite, *A Reporter's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), p. 235.
11. Stephen Hess, *The Washington Reporters Redux, 1978-1998* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1998).
12. A speech reprinted in *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*, 1998.
13. Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 207.
14. The Starr Report was released to the public by way of the Internet. Journalists that day had only one source—the Internet.
15. Brill, p. 135.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
24. Neil Hickey, "Money Lust: How Pressure for Profit is Perverting Journalism," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1998, p. 31.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
26. Scholars such as Lance Bennett of the University of Washington argue that the Internet may open the door to direct democracy. It may simplify the process of campaigning by providing the voter with easy access to the candidate and his/her policy positions.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
29. Brill, p. 134.
30. Brill, p. 133.
31. Brown bag lunch, April 21, 1998.
32. Brill, p. 144.
33. "The Present and Future of Investigative Journalism"—the Goldsmith Awards Seminar with Dan Rather, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, March 13, 1998.
34. *Ibid.*
35. From the Committee of Concerned Journalists' report, "The Clinton Crisis and the Press," February, 1998.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Freedom Forum and Newseum News*, vol. 5, no. 5, June, 1998, p. 3.

38. Goldsmith Awards Seminar, March 13, 1998.
39. Jon LaFayette, "Indomitable Don—60 Minutes and 50 years at CBS," *Electronic Media*, March 23, 1998, p. 1.
40. Brill, pp. 141–142.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
42. "The Clinton Crisis and the Press."
43. Bradlee, p. 406.
44. Thomas Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 9.
45. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 3, number 3, Summer 1998, p. 10.
46. Brown bag lunch, April 21, 1998.
47. Howard Kurtz, "Thinking Out Loud: Journalism's Talking Heads Find it Pays to Have an Opinion," *Washington Post*, October 4, 1994. p. C1.
48. David Broder, "Beware the 'Insider' Syndrome," *Washington Post*, December 4, 1988, p. L2.
49. Howell Raines, "The Fallows Fallacy," *The New York Times*, February 25, 1996, p. D14.
50. *Ibid.*
51. There are rare exceptions. Bernard Trainor left the Marine Corps to become an accomplished reporter and analyst for the *New York Times*. A number of other generals signed contracts with networks during the Persian Gulf war, but they were primarily commentators on military strategy, rather than reporters. The main point remains valid.
52. Howard Kurtz, "Clinton Critic's Brief Starr Turn," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1998, p. C1.
53. David Brock, "The Fire This Time," *Esquire*, March, 1998, p. 144.
54. Howard Kurtz, "DiGenova & Toensig, Partners At Jaw," *Washington Post*, April 30, 1998, p. E1.
55. Hickey, p. 34.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
57. Jonathan Yardley, "Time to Change the Channel," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1998, p. X3.
58. Brill, p. 141.
59. Brill, p. 146.
60. "The Clinton Crisis and the Press."
61. Brill, p. 129.
62. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1996), p. 29.
63. Stephen Hess, *News & Newsmaking*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1996).
64. Hickey, p. 33.
65. *US News & World Report* Web site (www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond.grad/gbgrid18.htm), September 10, 1998.
66. Vernon Stone, "Paychecks and Market Baskets: Broadcast News Salaries and Inflation in the 1990s," Missouri School of Journalism Web site (www.missouri.edu/~jrvs/sals90s.html), September 10, 1998.
67. Lori Leibovich, "The Scoop on Newsroom Salaries," *Salon Magazine* (www.salonmagazine.com/media/1997/10/28money.html).
68. Brill, p. 134.