

# Cato Policy Report

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## Counting the Errors of Modern Journalism

by Brian Doherty

Despite all the rhetoric from Thomas Jefferson down to the latest self-important musings of journalists about journalism's being the first, best hope for a healthy polity, your newspaper is lying to you. While assuring you that it provides precise information about public policy issues, in many cases it is only pushing speculation and rumor in the guise of fact. Most of the time you have no independent way to confirm its claims, so how can you tell when a newspaper is lying?

Here's a hint: watch out for the numbers. Newspapers are filled with contextless reports of the latest things government officials have said or decided. But newspapers do like to throw in a number now and then to add verisimilitude to the tales they tell.

Brian Doherty is assistant editor of *Reason* magazine.

Knowledge of the media's inability to get it straight, especially when dealing with numbers and statistics, has become widespread enough to inspire a widely reviewed book—*Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America* by Cynthia Crossen. It has also given rise to a new magazine, the quarterly *Forbes MediaCritic*, the latest addition to the Forbes family of publications.

While ideologues of all persuasions like to blame media inaccuracies on political biases, the causes of journalism's troubles are, unfortunately, inherent in the way daily newspapers, those first drafts of history, are written: hurriedly and by generalists who, even if they are unfailingly scrupulous (which can't always be assumed), are often ignorant of the topics on which they write and depend blindly on what others tell them—and what others tell them is very often biased. Unfortunately, those first drafts of history are all

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most laypersons read.

### The Problems with Numbers

Our intellectual culture is drunk on numbers, addicted to them: we need them in every situation, we feel utterly dependent on them. As sociologist Richard Gelles aptly put it in a July 25, 1994, *Newsweek* story on the media's problems with numbers, "Reporters don't ask, 'How do you know it?' They're on deadline. They just want the figures so they can go back to their word processors." The culture of the poll dominates: the foolish notion that not only every fact but every thought, whim, and emotion of the populace can be stated in scientifically valid and valuable numbers.

The lust for numbers can, at its best, lead people to do hard research and dig up interesting and useful information. More often, however, it leads to dignifying guesses with misleadingly precise numbers. For example, it wasn't enough to know that people were dying in Somalia; as Michael Maren reports in the Fall 1994 *Forbes MediaCritic*, reporters felt it necessary to latch onto some relief workers' guesses and repeat them over and over, only occasionally letting slip honest acknowledgments that no one really

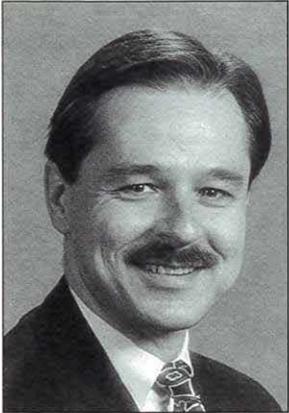


Brit Hume of ABC News congratulates Cato Mencken Research Fellow P. J. O'Rourke at a Cato reception for O'Rourke's latest *New York Times* bestseller, *All the Trouble in the World*.

(Cont. on p. 11)

# The Opportunity before Us

## Editorial



Electing a Republican government, like entering a second marriage, is a triumph of hope over experience. We've all seen eloquence and determination fail when they come to face to face with the Washington establishment. But when a president who earlier in the year sought to nationalize one-seventh of the American economy leaks word that he might abolish a cabinet department or two—departments that Ronald Reagan never threat-

ened—well, then, something seems to have changed in the political calculus.

Few elections seem to send as clear a message as did that of 1994. It was a revolt against business as usual in Washington, to be sure, an anti-incumbent vote. But we can hardly fail to notice that not a single incumbent Republican senator, representative, or governor was defeated; the voters were mighty particular in what Peter Jennings called their "uncontrolled two-year-old rage." At the state level, 500 legislative seats switched from Democratic to Republican control; only 11 went the other direction. It's hard to remember a more ideological election—1932, perhaps?

Why the big switch from 1992, when voters elected a Democratic president and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. hailed a new generation of government activism? In the first place, Bill Clinton received only 43 percent of the vote against the weakest incumbent since Herbert Hoover; 57 percent of the voters indicated a preference for more fiscally conservative candidates. Second, Clinton at least sometimes in 1992 campaigned as a New Democrat who understood that government needed a lot of reform. Third, Clinton's two years in office reminded voters of what they don't like about Democrats—the tax increase, the massively bureaucratic health care plan, the obsession with race and gender.

So the "less government, more freedom" themes of the Cato Institute, as the *Wall Street Journal* put it, have won the election. To quote Robert Redford in *The Candidate*, "What do we do now?"

There has never been a better opportunity to reverse the long buildup of power in Washington. The Cold War is over, confirming the failure of socialism and freeing us from the perceived need for a huge military establishment. The soaring levels of federal spending and the deficit, along with Ross Perot's campaign, have made more Americans committed to

drastic spending reductions. Federal programs have failed so clearly, and federal bureaucrats have so overreached in their grab for power, that Americans are ready for a Congress that slashes away at the bureaucracy.

In February the Cato Institute is releasing a handbook for the new Congress, with more than 100 suggested policy changes. Among the major themes we will stress there and elsewhere are the following.

First, it is time to restore the notion of limited government as established in the Constitution. As Roger Pilon writes in the handbook, "Under [the Constitution], the powers of the federal government in general and the Congress in particular are *delegated* by the people, *enumerated* in the document, and thus *limited*." Most of what the federal government does today is nowhere authorized in our fundamental law. Members of Congress should thus set out to restore the authority of the Constitution, to acknowledge that many programs lack constitutional sanction, and to identify the precise constitutional authority for any new legislation they seek to pass. "Not authorized in the Constitution" should be a key criterion in looking for programs to eliminate.

Second, many programs—from the Small Business Administration to the National Endowment for the Arts to Amtrak—sound nice and don't cost much, but there's a \$400 billion deficit looming. If a program isn't essential, then we can't afford it.

Third, it's important not just to slow the growth of federal spending but to eliminate programs. The Small Business Administration is a program that was wrestled almost to the ground during eight years of the Reagan presidency, but during the first four of the Bush-Clinton years, it popped back up as big as ever. This time, kill it and salt the ground.

Fourth, Congress and the American people must find the will to deal with middle-class entitlement programs. The Kerrey-Danforth commission has published some frightening numbers about transfer payments, but that isn't the most important reason to worry about middle-class subsidies. Rather, as David Frum points out in *Dead Right*, middle-class welfare undermines the bourgeois virtues of self-reliance, family, thrift, prudence, sobriety, and fidelity.

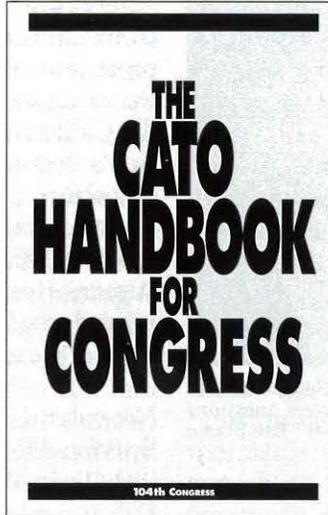
Congress should not underestimate the readiness of the voters for radical reform. The U.S. welfare state is by no means in as critical condition as was the Soviet empire in 1988, but it too is costly, counterproductive, ill suited for the information age, and bereft of intellectual defenses. If the new leaders of Congress have the courage and vision of Yeltsin, Walesa, Havel, and Klaus, we too now have a chance to reestablish civil society and limited government.

  
—David Boaz

Stresses Constitutional Limits on Federal Powers

# Cato Issues Handbook for Congress on Policy Reforms

Since the election Cato has been busy arranging a suitable reception for the new Republican-controlled Congress. "Until now," said president Edward H. Crane, "Cato has sought to move the United States toward free markets, individual liberty, and limited government by speaking to the country's educated lay public. We will continue to do that. But the election of so many new members of Congress on a 'less government, more freedom'



platform provides an opportunity that must not be ignored. Over the next two years—years of potentially historic significance—Cato will be aggressively providing Congress with market-liberal ideas, proposals, and intellectual ammunition."

The *Cato Handbook for Congress*, with more than 100 recommendations on domestic and international issues, is scheduled for release in February. The book will set out a solid market-liberal program, achievable within two years, aimed at rolling back the power of government and expanding individual

freedom. Chapters by the Cato policy staff and outside contributors will address such issues as welfare, health care, the budget, taxes, education, term limits, Social Security, regulation, the military budget, NATO and other commitments, foreign aid, and free trade. To heighten Congress's awareness of its responsibility for keeping the government within constitutional bounds, the handbook will stress the idea that

the U.S. Constitution creates a national government of *limited* and *enumerated* powers. *The Cato Handbook for Congress* is being given to all members of Congress and is available for purchase for \$25.00. Cato is also planning to hold a seminar for new members of Congress to give them a chance to become familiar with the Institute and to meet the policy staff.

In recent weeks newspapers and magazines have remarked that the Republicans swept to victory on the strength of the Cato message of, to quote the *Wall Street Journal*, "less gov-

ernment, more freedom." The *Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Economist*, among other publications, have noted that Cato's voice has become, in the *Journal's* words, "increasingly influential among GOP lawmakers." Indeed, another *Journal* article—headlined "Cato Institute's Influence Grows As Republican-Dominated Congress Sets Up Shop"—said, "When Cato takes aim at something, its shots tend to ricochet for a while." Another *Journal* article compared 1994 with 1980: "The debate [in Washington] shows a larger change between the character of this election and the last great Republican surge, the Reagan landslide of 1980. Philosophically, that victory came to be symbolized by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think tank strong on business and foreign policy. By comparison, the 'less government, more freedom' slogans this week echo the libertarian Cato Institute." *Post* columnist E. J. Dionne Jr. wrote in December that Cato has a growing role "as a generator of ideas that find their way into the Republican legislative proposals and rhetoric." Also taking notice of Cato's rising influence, the *Economist* quoted Crane as saying, "The 20th century is a grand experiment in government, and it's failed." ■

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*Book Party for P. J. O'Rourke*

## Lord Bauer Says Population Growth Is Not a Disaster

### Cato Events

**O**ctober 11: A "New Perspectives for the Nineties" city seminar was held in Chicago. The keynote address was given by Stephen Chapman, an editorial writer at the *Chicago Tribune*. Jim Rogers, author of *Investment Biker*, gave the luncheon speech. Also participating were Cato president Ed Crane and staff members Mike Tanner and Ed Hudgins.

**O**ctober 12: A Book Forum marked publication of *Separating School and State: How to Liberate America's Families* (Future of Freedom Foundation) by Cato senior editor Sheldon Richman. In his remarks, Richman said that government-run schools will always be inferior to private schools because the former are immune to the free market's discovery process.

**O**ctober 14: Publication of Cato Mencken Research Fellow P. J. O'Rourke's new book, *All the Trouble in the World: The Lighter Side of Overpopulation, Famine, Ecological Disaster, Ethnic Hatred, Plague, and Poverty*, was celebrated at a Book Party.

**O**ctober 19: Noted development economist Peter Bauer lectured on "Population Growth: Disaster or Blessing?" Lord Bauer said that population growth and density are not barriers to economic advancement under the right institutional conditions. The lecture was cosponsored by the Institute for Political Economy.

**O**ctober 21: In a Policy Forum debate on U.S. immigration and the American economy entitled "Still an Open Door?" Professor Vernon M. Briggs Jr., a labor economist at Cornell University, and Stephen Moore, Cato's director of fiscal policy studies, coauthors of *Still an Open Door?* (American Univer-



Cato regulatory studies director Ed Hudgins listens as John Stossel of ABC News answers questions after a Cato screening of his special "The Blame Game."

sity Press), clashed on the economic impact of immigrants. Briggs argued that unskilled immigrants displace low-income American workers and called for a flexible policy that can be adjusted to economic change. Moore said immigrants create jobs through entrepreneurship and bring other pro-American values. Peter Skerry, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, expressed skepticism about Briggs's proposal for micromanaging the selection of immigrants, but he agreed that immigration particularly harms black workers.

**O**ctober 28: A Policy Forum looked at "Deregulating Electricity: Lessons from California." Robert L. Bradley Jr., president of the Institute for Energy Research, explained the significance of the California Public Utilities Commission's decision to stop subsidizing conservation programs and wind and solar power. John Hughes, director of technical affairs for the Electricity Consumers Resource Council, described how deregulation will revolutionize the electric utilities.

**N**ovember 3: "The National Biological Survey: Alleviating or Abetting Political 'Train Wrecks'?" was the title of a Policy Forum with Allan Fitzsimmons, president of Balanced Resource Solutions, and Eugene Hester, deputy director of the National Biological Survey. Fitzsimmons argued that an ecosystem is an intellectual construct not an objective phenomenon and that the federal government's ability to centrally manage the environment is no better than its ability to manage the economy. Hester said that the added ecological information produced by the survey will lead to better management but not necessarily more regulation.

## CATO INSTITUTE CALENDAR

### Seventh Annual Benefactor Summit

Tucson • Loews Ventana Canyon • February 9-12, 1995

Speakers include William F. Weld, William Kristol, Theodore Forstmann, and Edward H. Crane.

### New Horizons in Electric Power Deregulation

Cosponsored with the Institute for Energy Research  
Washington • Mayflower Hotel • March 2, 1995

Speakers include David Fessler, Robert Poole, Jerry Ellig, Robert L. Bradley Jr., and Stephen Littlechild.

### Global Monetary Order: What Next?

13th Annual Monetary Conference

Washington • Cato Institute • May 25, 1995

Speakers include Allan H. Meltzer, Clive Crook, Judy Shelton, Anna J. Schwartz, Alan C. Stockman, Richard H. Timberlake, Leland B. Yeager, George Selgin, Kevin Dowd, Owen Humpage, and Alan Walters.

November 4: A "New Perspectives for the Nineties" city seminar was held in Minneapolis. The keynote speaker was Jerry Jordan, president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Rep. Tim Penny (D-Minn.) was the luncheon speaker. Also participating were Cato staff members Michael Tanner, Ted Carpenter, and David Boaz.

November 30: John Stossel, a correspondent on ABC's *20/20*, hosted a screening of his television special "The Blame Game: Are We Becoming a Country of Victims?" The program documented how laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Civil Rights Act promote morally reckless behavior and irresponsibility. Stossel took questions from the audience after the screening.

December 5: Roberto Salinas León of the Center for the Study of Free Enterprise in Mexico assessed his country's prospects for continuing economic lib-



Lord Bauer answers questions after his Cato lecture on population growth.

eralization under new president Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon at a **Roundtable Luncheon** with the Cato policy staff and guests.

December 7: Clive Crook, deputy editor of *The Economist*, discussed America under the Republicans at a **Roundtable Luncheon** with the Cato policy staff.

December 8: A Policy Forum titled "Sex, Cyberspace, and the First Amend-



Cato's Roger Pilon and Ed Crane listen as Paul Jacob of U.S. Term Limits discusses state initiatives at a press briefing on term limits and the Supreme Court.

ment" looked at censorship, the relationship between sex and violence in the media and crime, and freedom of speech on the information highway. Marcia Pally, author of *Sex and Sensibility: Reflections on Forbidden Mirrors and the Will to Censor*, discussed her thesis that literature and films do not cause

people to act in particular ways and that censorship will not reduce violence. Stephen Bates, senior fellow at the Annenberg Washington Program, and Mike Godwin, staff counsel, Electronic Frontier Foundation, speculated about obscenity laws and community standards in the era of the Internet.

December 13: Economist Christopher Lingle examined "Democracy, Development, and Freedom in East Asia" at a Policy Forum. Lingle, a former senior fellow at the National University of Singapore, left that country recently when the government sought to arrest him for publishing an article critical of authoritarian Asian governments in the *International Herald Tribune*. He said that Asian economic liberalization may lead to political liberalization in the long run, but meanwhile, people continue to suffer from violation of their civil liberties. ■

## Cato Book Issued in China at Last

After a long wait, the Chinese edition of the Institute's book *Economic Reform in China: Problems and Prospects*, based on a Cato conference held in Shanghai in 1988, was published by Fudan University Press in October. The English edition, coedited by Cato vice president for academic affairs James A. Dorn and Fudan's Wang Xi and published by the University of Chicago Press and the Cato Institute, came out in 1990 and is now on sale for \$5.00.

The Chinese-language volume was delayed for more than five years because of official reaction to the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and because Milton Friedman, a contributor to the volume, had met with a former head of the Communist party who had fallen out of official favor. The way to publication was apparently cleared when Friedman returned to China in 1993 and visited with Jiang Zemin, the Communist party general secretary and presi-

dent. That meeting was attended by Wang Xi and a former president of Fudan University, Xie Xide, who wrote the preface to the Chinese edition.

In his foreword, Dorn, who recently returned from China where he was a guest lecturer at Fudan University, writes, "While the prospects for China's future development are bright, there are also problems. Foremost among these are the need to eliminate corruption and reduce uncertainty by establishing a rule of law, the need to increase the security of property rights, the need to restrain government spending on inefficient state enterprises, the need to control inflation, and the need to create a modern system of banking and finance."

Wang Xi adds in his foreword, "Although we may not agree with all of the views expressed by the Western scholars in this volume, nevertheless, many of the analyses contained in their papers are worth studying and taking into serious consideration." ■

*Do Movies and Music Cause Violence?*

## Sex, Cyberspace, and the First Amendment

### Policy Forum

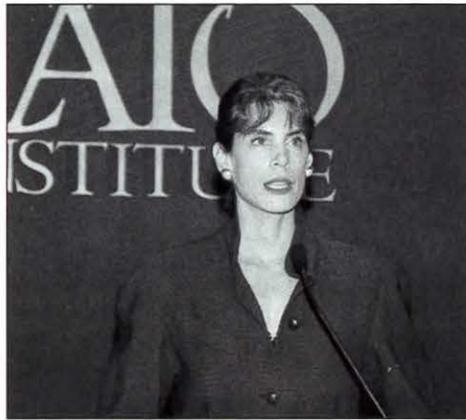
The Cato Institute held a Policy Forum in the F. A. Hayek Auditorium on December 8 to discuss whether sex and violence in the media can lead to real-life effects and how those issues are being confronted in the world of on-line information. The speakers were Marcia Pally, president of Feminists for Free Expression and author of *Sex and Sensibility: Reflections on Forbidden Mirrors and the Will to Censor*; Stephen Bates, senior fellow at the Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies and author of *Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of Our Classrooms*; and Mike Godwin, on-line counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

**Marcia Pally:** I want to begin by giving an indication of what is being censored today so we may have some idea of the range and scope of possible on-line censorship of the Internet. By the end of the 1980s book banning by public bodies had increased to three times the 1979 level, according to the American Library Association. The most censored books at that time included *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men*, 1984, *Slaughterhouse Five*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and all the works of Steven King and young-adult author Judy Blume. Also included were dictionaries—Webster's Seventh, Random House, Doubleday, and American Heritage—that give the definitions of dirty words.

The films banned by public bodies between 1980 and 1990 included *A Passage to India*, *Victor Victoria*, *A Clockwork Orange*, Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Splash*. In 1992 the American Library Association reported a 28 percent increase in book-banning efforts above the increases seen through the 1980s. Also in 1992 People for the American

Way reported a 50 percent increase in censorship in the public schools, the greatest rise in book-banning efforts in a decade. In 41 percent of the cases, efforts to restrict books were successful.

According to the American Library Association, in 1991 the fastest growing group of censored books was on the occult; the second fastest growing group was books on health and family life issues, particularly works addressing AIDS education, sex education,



Marcia Pally: "The claim that sexual imagery causes aggression finds no support either in field studies or in laboratory studies."

and drug abuse. By 1993 the emphasis had switched, with attacks against materials believed to be occult taking second place to challenges against AIDS education, sex education, and discussions of homosexuality.

It's worthwhile asking what the appeal of censorship is before we get into legal issues. Why do people want to censor?

Censorship in the United States is offered to the public as an elixir of safety, like the traveling salesman's tonics that would "cure" whatever ailed you. Proponents of censorship suggest that their cure will bring an improvement to life: rid yourself of pornography, or of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and life will be safer, happier, and more secure. Get rid of bad pictures, and you are rid of bad acts. This is the great soothing appeal

of censorship—the promise of a better life, if only some magazine or movie or text is banished.

Will life improve if we ban some image, rock music, or movie? The mass-market pornography and rock 'n' roll industries took off only after World War II. Before the 20th century few people, save a wealthy elite, saw any pornography whatsoever. Certainly they heard no rap or rock 'n' roll. Yet violence and sexism flourished for thousands of years before the printing press and the camera. Today countries where no sexual imagery or Western music is permitted—countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China—do not boast strong records of social harmony or strong women's rights records. For millennia teenagers have managed to become pregnant without the aid of sexual imagery, rock 'n' roll, or matrimony. In *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman note that up to one-third of births in colonial America occurred out of wedlock or within eight months of obviously hurried marriages.

In light of the historical record of violence and sexual abuse, it is unlikely that their cause lies in a Johnny-come-lately industry such as mass-market pornography or rock 'n' roll or rap. Banning sexually explicit material is not likely to reduce those abuses or assist women and children. The social science data come to the same conclusion. There are a few points that I'd like to go over.

First, the claim that sexual material is more violent today than it was earlier is unfounded. Longitudinal studies show that sexual material was decreasing in its violent content through the 1980s. Second, the claim that sexual imagery causes aggression finds no support either in field studies or in laboratory studies. That conclusion was reached by the surgeon general's report and—surprising to many peo-

ple—by the Meese commission. The publicity around the Meese commission's report suggested that sexual imagery does cause violence, but the overview of the science by Dr. Edna Einsiedel found that it does not.

Third, the idea that kinky or "degrading" sexual imagery promotes violence against women is also without support in the scientific data. The only reliable conclusion the surgeon general's report reached was that subjects exposed to "kinky" sexual imagery estimated the prevalence of varied sexual practices more accurately than did control subjects.

Fourth, the research on sexually violent images is the least conclusive. A good deal of material seems to suggest that if you show males violent, nonsexual material, their aggression will increase in the laboratory. Yet if you show people Jane Fonda workout tapes in the laboratory and require that they follow the aerobic program, their aggressive responses will increase following the movie. The common denominator is physical arousal. If you increase heartbeat, blood pressure, galvanic skin response, and adrenaline level, a subject's actions will be enhanced—not only aggression but also generosity and kindness. That tells us little about how violence occurs outside the laboratory and more about banning Jane Fonda.

By contrast, some researchers have investigated how violence occurs in life. In her field studies, Dr. Susanne Ageton found that, among adolescents, membership in a delinquent peer group accounted for three-quarters of all sexual aggression. Other factors, including exposure to sexual material and attitudes about women, accounted for 19 percent. Dr. Judith Becker, who served on the Meese commission, found that crimes committed by adolescents, like those committed by adults, are linked to sexual and physical abuse experienced in childhood and to alcohol consumption, not to exposure to sexually explicit material.

Fifth, the claim that more sexual

crimes occur in geographical areas where sexual material is more available is also without support. Studies in the early 1980s, notably by Drs. Larry Baron and Murray Strauss, suggested that areas with higher consumptions of sexual material experienced higher sexual crime rates. In their later studies they discovered a confounding factor—the number of unmarried males between the ages of 18 and 30. When that variable is factored in, all other correlations disappear. The only factor that predicts sexual crime rates is the num-



Stephen Bates: "A vibrant libertarian-anarchist counterculture dominates a lot of the Internet."

ber of young unmarried men in an area.

Finally, I would like to say that the research in Canada, Europe, and Asia confirms the U.S. research on the supposed causal link between sexual material and crime rates. I recommend to you the Fraser committee report from Canada, the 1990 report from Great Britain by Drs. Dennis Howett and Guy Cumberbatch, and the extensive longitudinal studies in Denmark by Dr. Bert Kuchinsky, who found that after the liberalization of obscenity laws, sex crimes in Denmark decreased. Following the liberalization of obscenity laws and the increase in available sexually explicit material in other European countries, sex crimes decreased or remained the same. Note also that Japan has perhaps the most

violent pornography on the planet; it has almost nothing to do with sex and a great deal to do with violence. Yet Japan reports one of the lowest sex crime rates in the world. Reporting of sex crime rates in Japan decreased in the 1980s when one would have expected, with the emergence of feminism in Japan, reporting of sex crimes to have increased.

If sexual lyrics and images do not cause violence, public attention should turn to what does. Violence is caused by long-standing familial, economic, and political problems, and it is those that need addressing. However popular it is today to blame two-dimensional media, basic values about men and women, race, religion, sex, money, work, and the mores of violence are learned early, at home.

Let's return to the question of why censorship is so appealing. If the social science data don't support it, if there are so many other substantive causes of violence, especially sexual violence, why does censorship remain such a popular solution or apparent solution to life's problems? First, it offers the boost of activism. Sexual imagery is visible, tinged with the illicit, and far easier to expunge than deeply rooted injustices. Well-meaning citizens believe they can fight pornography, beat it, and win. Effectiveness is an important emotion, especially to Americans with their famous "can-do" mentality. Feminists are exhausted by fighting a sexist economy and sexual violence, and most Americans are at a loss in the face of a difficult economy and rapid changes in gender roles, family, and race relations. Censorship is a boon to those who want to feel they control their lives in complex times. In that respect, censorship has the same appeal as the fantasies that it assails. It provides a frightening but beatable monster—sexual material—and the pledge of a happy ending. As long as life is insecure, that promise will have a market. Like monster movies and pornography, blaming images is a fantasy that sells.

### Cyberspace (Cont. from p. 7)

Censorship has another appeal, which pertains particularly to today's topic of cyberspace. Blaming new-fangled technologies for social ills is a common effort; it is part of feeling singular, important, and special. Each generation is sure that it is unique and that the inventions of its day have the power to alter life in ways no other gadgets have. The first congressional hearing on television violence was convened in 1952, when fewer than 25 percent of households in America had a television and when the violence rates in this country were among the lowest in this century. So eager were people to blame the new-fangled thing called television for something, that they blamed it for a problem they didn't have. And before television was thought to be the cause of violence, detective magazines and comic books were held, irrefutably, to cause juvenile delinquency. Before the comics, the nickelodeon surely gave the unwashed foreigners restive ideas. And before the nickelodeon, the novel surely was overturning Western civilization, and before the novel, when the masses were not literate, crown and church banned improper harmonics and bawdy ballads and fig-leaved some of Western civilization's greatest art.

I would like to suggest that blaming images, sexual or nonsexual, will neither prevent violence or rape, nor will it fell sexism. Image blaming has no business being the basis of legislative or judicial remedies for sexism or violence. Consider the case of Ted Bundy, who, in his effort to avoid the death penalty, suggested that pornography made him murder and mutilate dozens of women. During his trials, some other information about Mr. Bundy came to light. For the first several years of his life, he and his mother and his mother's sister lived with his grandfather, who had a bit of a temper. In addition to terrorizing the family and torturing animals, he threw Bundy's aunt down

a flight of steps, breaking several of her bones. By the age of three, Bundy was sticking butcher knives in his bed. Shortly thereafter, the effects of the grandfather's violence became so aggravated and so obvious that the family insisted that Ted and his mother move out of the house. But pornography made him do it?

Would that the cure for society's troubles were just a matter of eliminating bad words and images, would that it were so single issue or so easy. Censorship has always been more of a problem than a solution. It purges society of books, movies, music, and now cyberspace information—especially controversial information—while it leaves hate, racism, sexism, poverty, and violence flourishing just as they did before the printing press and the movie camera. Worst of all, censorship flatters us into thinking that we have done something to improve life, while we ignore what might be done.

**Stephen Bates:** I find two things about the Internet intriguing. One is that it's almost pure communication; it's like a public square where people don't drive or smoke or do drugs or do any of the other things that government traditionally regulates.

The other thing is that the on-line world is a fascinating, rambunctious frontier culture. The Electronic Frontier Foundation is a very apt name. A century ago Frederick Jackson Turner, in his great essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," wrote, "At the frontier the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant." That's the Internet today. A vibrant libertarian-anarchist counter-culture dominates a lot of it—sort of the 1960s reborn. Just this morning I found in a bookstore *Chaos and Cyberculture* by Timothy Leary. He's back!

There's a very strong thread of anti-authority and generally anti-censorship sentiment on the Internet. A partial exception is advertising. There seem to be a lot of people on line who, to paraphrase Robert Nozick, approve

of any act between consenting adults except an act of capitalism.

But more interesting are the sexual and related things that are sooner or later going to start upsetting would-be censors. There are some users on the Internet, and it may be a relatively small number, who seem to equate self-restraint or self-censorship with official governmental censorship, and they'll post anything just for the shock value. So without a great deal of trouble, you can find on the Internet bomb recipes, suicide guides, guides to hacking everything from computers to telephone systems, child pornography—you name it, it's probably out there somewhere. As I say, it may just be a handful of teenagers who are putting out some of the worst stuff, but they are testing the limits for everybody else, and they're putting their material out in a place where everybody can get it.

Obscenity and pornography are especially difficult to deal with on the Internet because the law traditionally regulates them by imposing restrictions on space and time. In a community there will be an adult entertainment district, like Times Square or the Combat Zone in Boston. In a bookstore geared toward the general public, the dirty magazines will be behind the counter, or the dirty videos will be back in a different room. So there's a sort of zoning to keep children out. In the nation as a whole the courts gauge what constitutes obscenity on the basis of community standards so that, as the Supreme Court once suggested, we don't need to be forcing the sensibility of Times Square onto the Bible Belt and other places in the country. In the over-the-air broadcast spectrum there are rules limiting adult programming to evening hours. The purpose of all the restraints is to reduce the unintentional exposure of adults, so that adults will know what they're going to get before they encounter it, and to reduce the possibly intentional exposure of children—to keep them from getting "adult" information no matter how much they want it.

The Internet erases all those barriers. To start with, the Internet is a faceless, global network, and it's almost impossible to keep something out of one place if it's accessible elsewhere on line. There was the Karla Homolka murder trial in Canada, where it was illegal to reveal information about the trial. Someone on the Internet created a newsgroup called alt.fan.karla.homolka and started posting news day by day about what was going on in the trial. The Canadian police told system operators in Canada to get rid of that group. They obliged, but it was still pretty easy to access it from Canada. Even people with just E-mail accounts, if they know what they're doing, can get material from Usenet.

The result is that community standards become essentially unenforceable. On the information superhighway, unlike the gravel highway, there is no distinct red-light district. The red-light district is potentially everywhere and nowhere.

It's also timeless. The Internet never closes; you can't limit adult material to certain times of day. And it's faceless. There's no way of knowing the age, the nationality, or the gender of people sending and accessing information.

That has implications for both law and politics. First, the legal implications. I take it as a given that, for better or for worse, obscenity law isn't going to go away. I believe that for-profit services that are providing on-line sexually oriented material are going to run into some problems. The Amateur Action bulletin board service based in Milpitas, California, is a timely example. That bulletin board had thousands of pornographic images available by modem for \$99 a year. The system operators were convicted of obscenity last summer in Memphis. Their material was all right by San Francisco area standards, but it violated Memphis community standards. That raises the question of whether it's going to be the Bible Belt, not Times Square, that forces its sensibility on the rest of the country.

My sense is that the courts are not going to back down. They will simply say, you shouldn't have let somebody from Memphis join your bulletin board if you didn't want to be hauled into court. That was the approach the Supreme Court took a few years ago in a case about dial-a-porn. There, the court said you don't have to establish a national standard, but you may have to tailor your messages to the sensibilities of different localities.

Distinct from a members-only bulletin board is the Internet itself, including Usenet, the FTP sites, and the other



Mike Godwin: "The Internet interprets censorship as damage and routes around it; it is practically impossible to censor material on the Internet effectively."

areas that are accessible to anybody without charge. The Usenet binary photo groups have carried some of the Amateur Action images that were judged obscene in Memphis. But it's very tough to enforce obscenity law against the public areas of the Internet. People access the pornography without a transaction; nobody's giving a credit card number or writing a check. There's no easy way to find out where a viewer is based. The courts may require system operators to try to make it difficult to get material that may be illegal, but there's no easy way to block it entirely; there's no technological solution. A lot of systems now have stopped carrying a Usenet newsgroup where pedophiles post images, for instance, but there are still ways to get it.

In some ways the political questions are more interesting than the legal ones, especially as the Internet moves into public schools. The effect on the public school is akin to that of having every user in the country suddenly in charge of buying books for the high school library. Not just the Carl Sagans of the world but also the porn freaks, skinheads, anarchists, racists, hackers, Holocaust deniers; all those people are now spewing information into public high school libraries. And because public high schools are giving students Internet accounts they can access from home, it has the additional effect of blindfolding the librarian, who doesn't really know what students are doing.

There's been little protest so far, and I'm not entirely sure why. When I was writing a piece for the *New York Times*, I called several conservative organizations that had often make a fuss about school books. None of them was on line, none of them was paying any attention to the Internet. Sooner or later they're going to hook up and raise an enormous ruckus.

**Mike Godwin:** We are now dealing with the second wave of Internet publicity. Those of you who were following news coverage of the Internet noticed that there was an immense amount of publicity in 1993. Many of us predicted then that there would be a second wave of Internet publicity in which people complained about the first wave, which they said did not talk about the dark side of the Internet. What is the dark side of the Internet? For many people the dark side is that people talk about sex there. I think it's instructive to look at a *Los Angeles Times* story that appeared in July about the discovery of a cache of pornographic images on computers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories. The story was a hopelessly confused mish-mash of various computer terrors—computer crime, espionage, and criminal copyright infringement—but what led the story was the porno-

### Cyberspace (Cont. from p. 9)

graphic images.

That story illustrates a certain media hunger for stories about the downside of the Internet, especially when they have to do with sex. But stories about stockpiles of pornographic image files are unlikely to make people who spend a lot of time on the Net do more than yawn. Every time a new technology is developed there are people who feel the impulse to use it to communicate sexual thoughts, and there's a tendency to say that, because it could carry sexual material, the new technology needs to be regulated. We are seeing that now in the wave of prosecutions of bulletin board systems. Back in 1990 the characteristic computer crime was computer intrusion or credit card fraud. By now we have trained the law enforcement community to respond to computer crime, and it turns out there aren't that many computer crimes out there. What is out there is a lot of interest in sex.

And the interest in sex varies from place to place. The *Amateur Action* case would not have been at all unusual had it occurred entirely in Tennessee. There would have been no pornography from that bulletin board system in Tennessee had not an industrious postmaster decided to download the images from Milpitas, California. The California bulletin board system had no clients in Tennessee other than the postmaster who, with the assistance of an assistant U.S. attorney in Memphis, set out to prosecute people in California because the kinds of images their bulletin board carried were so deeply offensive that the Tennessee postmaster and assistant U.S. attorney didn't believe they should be available anywhere.

Before *Miller v. California* there was a national standard of obscenity that was pretty much arbitrated by the Supreme Court. Then Warren Burger's majority opinion in *Miller* set up the analysis

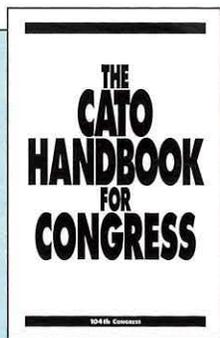
based on community standards with which we are now all quite familiar. The rationale, as Stephen said, was that we didn't want to have Times Square dictating the standards for Kansas City. But cyberspace now gives the potential for having Kansas City dictate the standards for Times Square.

Chief Justice Burger was recognizing a community's interest in preventing adult business from spoiling the neighborhood in some way. But now we have being sent out on the Internet material that can't really spoil the neighborhood because it really isn't there; it's only on the computer of the person who's receiving it. Especially in cyberspace jurisprudence, I think *Miller* contradicts *Stanley v. Georgia*, which says that an individual has a right not to be prosecuted for having obscenity in his own home. People are increasingly living, not in geographic communities, but in virtual communities; their primary connections with other people are not grounded in the accident of geography but in voluntary associations based in cyberspace. We will have to revisit community standards, or the most conservative jurisdictions in the country will dictate the standards for the most liberal ones.

It's very interesting to see what kinds of excuses people will seize upon to censor and to see what their agendas really are. At Carnegie Mellon University, for various reasons, administrators were shocked to discover that sexual

materials were being distributed over the Internet. Their first impulse was to ban every newsgroup on Usenet with the word sex in its name. That included the safe sex discussion group and the discussion groups for survivors of sexual abuse who were, no doubt, startled to discover that they were producing pornography. The ostensible reason for banning those newsgroups was fear of criminal liability either for carrying obscenity or for exposing minors to sexual materials. But I think there was a deeper fear: the administration was afraid of having to explain to donors and alumni that sexual material was available on the university's computers. Because of their own personal sense of offense and fear, they reached out for a fairly tenuous legal justification for their attempt to censor Usenet.

Censorship of the Internet will cause us to review government's attempts to censor. The Internet, you know, was designed to withstand a nuclear attack. Censorship is a bit less powerful than that. As John Gilmore once commented, the Internet interprets censorship as damage and routes around it; it turns out to be practically impossible to censor material on the Internet effectively. Perhaps top-down government censorship isn't what we need. Perhaps we should focus our attention on empowering individuals to choose what they see and what they don't see, on empowering people to make their own choices. ■



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**Journalism** (Cont. from p. 1)

knew how many people were actually dying and that no one was taking the trouble to attempt accurate counts.

The obsession with numbers leads to particularly egregious errors in reports on economic figures and aggregates and the federal budget. Those errors include calling spending that doesn't equal what had been planned a "cut" in spending, even if more is being spent than the year before; relying on static economic analysis, especially when calculating the effects of tax increases and their concomitant revenues (because they assume that people do not change their behavior when their taxes are raised, members of Congress and reporters make grievously wrong predictions about expected revenues); and relying uncritically on numerical tools such as the Consumer Price Index.

Especially during the 1992 election, "quintile" analysis of the effects of the Reagan-Bush years on income and tax-burden equality abounded, with hardly any explanation of the complications of such analyses. Those complications include the fact that when people in lower income quintiles become richer, they often move into a higher quintile rather than buoy the average of the lower one. Yet income added to the highest quintile can do nothing but increase that quintile's average income. That creates a misleading picture of the rich getting much richer while the poor stagnate.

Quintile analysis is also static, but income mobility is common in America, so it's not always the same people who languish in lower quintiles or whoop it up at the top. And quintile analysis often relies on households, not individuals—the top quintile can have more than 20 percent of Americans, the bottom less than 20 percent. But all of those complications are overlooked in the media's craving for numbers to toss around.

The media even ignore the fact that "counts" of macroeconomic variables can change retroactively—1993 data on 1992 quantities can be different from 1994 data. As an example, in 1993 the Bureau of Labor Statistics listed Arkansas as the state with the highest percentage rise (3 percent) in nonfarm employment from July 1991 to July 1992. Candidate Clinton touted that percentage in campaign ads. But by March 1994 the facts had changed. Although Arkansas was then thought to have had a 3.7 percent rise in employment during the 1991-92 period, it ranked behind Montana's 4.22 percent and Idaho's 4.21.

Macroeconomic aggregates, such as gross national product, on which the

**"The press's overdependence on frequently dubious aggregates muddles readers' understanding of what economics—and prosperity—is all about."**

media often rely for numerical ballast, are often riddled with conceptual problems, such as that of counting as additions to our national product any cash transactions, including the classic example of neighbors' paying each other to mow each other's lawns, and ignoring any noncash transaction that adds to economic well-being. Other economic numbers bandied about by the media, such as unemployment rates, job growth, and the "cost" of various tax increases or cuts, are often derived from random samplings, self-reported information, and guesswork. Economics is a study of human action, not of numbers; the press's overdep-

dence on frequently dubious aggregates helps disguise the problem and muddles readers' understanding of what economics—and prosperity—is really about.

**Where Do the Numbers Come from?**

There are many ways to mislead while allegedly presenting accurate counts or measures to the public. The most sinister is to simply make up numbers or make completely bald-faced guesses. That happens more often than you might think. The demand for information has far outstripped the supply. Coming up with reliable numbers to support all the things that journalists want to say and the public wants to know is often prohibitively expensive, in money or effort, or both. But the misuse and misunderstanding of numbers lead to erroneous reporting.

The total number of breast cancer victims has become a matter of much concern since the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society frightened the world with the declaration that American women face a one-in-eight chance of contracting breast cancer. That scary figure, however, applies only to women who have already managed to live to age 95; one out of eight of them will most likely contract breast cancer. According to the NCI's own figures, a 25-year-old woman runs only a 1-in-19,608 risk.

Those very precise figures are themselves based on a phony notion: that we know how many people *have* breast or any other cancer. As two journalists concerned about cancer admitted in the *Nation* (September 26, 1994), "Not only is there no central national agency to report cancer cases to . . . but there is no uniform way that cases are reported, no one specialist responsible for reporting the case." So any discussion of cancer rates in the United States is based on guesswork, and one can only hope that the guesswork is based on some attempt to be true to the facts as they are known.

**Journalism** (Cont. from p. 11)

In the case of other health threats, such as AIDS, we know that isn't the case. In *The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS*, journalist Michael Fumento documented the discrepancy between the rhetoric about the plaguelike threat of AIDS to the nongay and non-drug-using populace and official statistics on the actual prevalence of the syndrome, which indicated that no more than 0.02 percent of people who tested HIV positive were not in those risk groups. (And even such heterosexual AIDS cases as are recorded run into a self-reporting problem: many people may not want to admit to anyone that they have had gay sex or used drugs.) As Fumento explained, projections of the future growth of the AIDS epidemic (even ones that were not hysterical pure guesses tossed out by interest groups) were often based on straight extrapolations of earlier doubling times for the epidemic (which inevitably—for any disease—lead to the absurd result of everyone on the planet and then some dying of the disease) or cobbled together from guess piled on guess. Even when the Centers for Disease Control would lower earlier estimates on the basis of new information, or make clearly unofficial speculations about higher numbers, journalists would continue to report the higher and more alarming numbers.

In the case of figures about AIDS in Africa, even the most basic numbers are not to be trusted. Journalist Celia Farber documented in *Spin* magazine how African health officials inflate the number of deaths from the complications of AIDS, both because AIDS cases attract foreign aid money, whereas traditional African disease and death do not, and because there is no accurate method of counting.

One relief worker told Farber that counts of children orphaned by AIDS in an African village “were virtually meaningless, I made them up myself . . .

then, to my amazement, they were published as official figures in the WHO [World Health Organization] . . . book on African AIDS. . . . The figure has more than doubled, based on I don't know what evidence, since these people have never been here. . . . If people die of malaria, it is called AIDS, if they die of herpes it is called AIDS. I've even seen people die in accidents and it's been attributed to AIDS. The AIDS figures out of Africa are pure lies.”

In his autobiography, novelist Anthony Burgess gives further insight into the generation of “official” figures. He tells of creating completely fraudulent records of the classes he supposedly taught fellow soldiers while stationed in Gibraltar during World War II. His bogus “statistics were sent to the

**“The demand for information has far outstripped the supply.”**

War Office. These, presumably, got into official records which nobody read.” For the sake of accuracy, we can only hope so. But if a journalist got hold of those numbers, he'd be apt to repeat them.

Similarly farcical figures are taken completely seriously by journalists. For example, activist Mitch Snyder's assertion that the United States suffered the presence of 3 million homeless people became common wisdom for the bulk of the 1980s. Snyder's figure was made up; he simply assumed that 1 percent of Americans were homeless to get an initial number of 2.2 million in 1980, then arbitrarily decided that since he knew the problem was getting worse, the number would hit 3 million by 1983. He claimed to be working from extrapolations based on reports from fellow

homeless activists around the country, but there was no counting, no surveying, no extrapolation behind his assertion. And yet most major American newspapers reported the number; it became part of our received cultural wisdom.

In her recent book, *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*, Christina Hoff Sommers actually tried to track to their sources numbers spread by feminist activists. One of the much-reported stories she debunked was that 150,000 women a year die of anorexia, which an outraged Gloria Steinem reported in her popular book *Revolution from Within*. Steinem cited another popular feminist tome by Naomi Wolf as her source; Wolf cited a book about anorexia written by a women's studies academic, which cited the American Anorexia and Bulimia Center. Sommers actually checked with that group and discovered that all they'd said was that many women are anorexic. Oops.

Another feminist canard is that domestic violence is responsible for more birth defects than all other causes combined. *Time* and many newspapers had ascribed that finding to a March of Dimes report. Sommers tracked the assertion back through three sources, beginning with the *Time* reporter, and discovered that it was the result of a misunderstanding of something that had been said in the introduction of a speaker at a 1989 conference—no such March of Dimes report existed. Still, the errors of *Time* and the *Boston Globe* and the *Dallas Morning News* are in more clip files and data banks than is Sommers's debunking. The march of that particular error will doubtless continue.

A third famous feminist factoid is that Super Bowl Sunday sees a 40 percent rise in cases of wife beating. That claim, said to be supported by a university study, was made in an activist press conference. (The story was also spread by a group ironically named Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.)

Similar claims began coming from other sources. Ken Ringle of the *Washington Post* took the time to double-check them and found that the university study's authors denied that their study said any such thing and that the other sources that claimed to have independent confirmation of the "fact" refused to disclose their data. When a concerned activist makes up a number, few bother to be skeptical, and credulous reporting tends to drown out the few debunkers.

Unfortunately, erroneous numbers in journalism are not always the result of sincere attempts to quantify the relevant data. If you can't imagine someone's making the effort to really count something, and if you can imagine any reason for the source's having an ulterior motive, best take the number with a large grain of salt. This is not a call for ad hominem attacks; it is merely a warning about when to look especially askance at numbers.

Even when one is following what seems on its face to be defensible standards of sample and extrapolation, ludicrous results can ensue. For example, Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation wrote that 22,000 Americans below the poverty line had hot tubs, and many conservative publications uncritically trumpeted the figure. But Rector's figure was "extrapolated" from one case in a survey sample. It's disingenuous to claim that because one poor family in a sample of 10,000 has a hot tub, 22,000 poor families have hot tubs.

Another example of numbers being attached to the uncounted, and probably uncountable, is the debate over species extinctions. Economist Julian Simon has explained that the conventionally accepted figures on the number of species disappearing yearly are based on no counts and no extrapolations from past knowledge; they are based on guesses about the current rate of extinction, and that rate is arbitrarily increased to produce the frightening number of 40,000 per year. Nor-

man Myers, one of the leading promulgators of that figure, admits that "we have no way of knowing the actual current rate of extinction in tropical forest, nor can we even make an accurate guess." Yet he is willing to make guesses about future rates.

Another much-touted scare figure, on workplace violence, was recently debunked in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. Reporter Erik Larson found that reports and statistics on the prevalence of workplace violence were shoddy or misleading in various respects. One report, which concluded

**"The lust for numbers often leads to dignifying guesses with misleadingly precise numbers."**

that workers have a one-in-four chance of being attacked or threatened at work, was based on the replies of only 600 workers, who represented only 29 percent of the people whom the survey had tried to reach, which made the groups largely self-selected within the original sample. Statisticians frown, with reason, on self-selected samples, which are very likely to be biased.

Larson also found that a Bureau of Labor Statistics report, which said that homicide is the second most frequent cause of death in the workplace, far from referring to coworkers or disgruntled ex-coworkers blasting away at their comrades, showed that three-quarters of the deaths occurred during robberies, and that many others involved police or security guards, whose jobs obviously are dangerous. But the media, and an industry of self-serving workplace violence consultants, inspired by half-understood studies and vivid memories of crazed postal workers, created an aura of

offices as the Wild, Wild West that caught the imagination of many. In this case, data were not so much bogus or warped as wildly misinterpreted.

### Checking the Checkers

It might seem paradoxical to condemn journalists for incessantly parroting errors when it is journalists themselves who occasionally expose errors. After all, who else would? The problem is, they don't do it nearly enough, and no one else ever does. Even though Larson's story appeared in the October 13, 1994, *Wall Street Journal*, it's a given that many other writers and TV reporters will have missed it and sometime in the future will again parrot false suppositions about the danger of mortal violence in the workplace.

The culture of journalism is based on the principle of the citation or quote: if someone else said it, or wrote it, it's okay to repeat it. Almost any editor or writer would scoff at that brash formulation. After all, journalists pride themselves on their withering skepticism, their credo of "if your mother says she loves you, check it out." But the reader would be terribly naive to believe that journalists, under the crush of daily deadlines, under the pressure of maintaining long-term relationships with sources, and occasionally under the spell of ideology, always meet that standard. In the future, you can count on it, someone will go back to some story about workplace violence, or the homeless, or wife beating, written before the debunking was done, and come to an incorrect conclusion. Dogged checking of sources is rare indeed.

I recently was intrigued by a figure in our self-styled paper of record, the *New York Times*. In an October 25 article about the miserable state of Iraq after years of international embargo, the author, Youssef M. Ibrahim, stated that, according to UNICEF, "in the last year there has been a 9 percent rise in malnutrition among Iraqi infants."

That figure struck me as somewhat

**Journalism** (Cont. from p. 13)

absurd, a foolhardy attempt to assert precise knowledge in a situation where obtaining it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. I tried to track the figure back to its source through the UNICEF bureaucracy. (There is a practical reason why many journalists end up accepting things at face value: the tracking of figures, especially through international bureaucracies, can be harrying and time-consuming indeed.) I was rewarded; although my initial supposition—that any alleged count was probably of dubious value—is probably true, I discovered that the “paper of record” couldn’t even read the UNICEF report right.

What UNICEF had actually said, with even more absurd precision, was that the total rate of—not the increase in—malnutrition among infants under one year old was 9.2 percent—a figure that seems shockingly low for an essentially Third World country suffering under an international embargo. It turned out that the survey was not done by UNICEF, as the *Times* had reported, but by UNICEF in collaboration with the government of Iraq—as almost anything done in Iraq probably must be. Precise figures from lands with tyrannical governments should never be trusted. And it should be remembered that in any hierarchy, even if the person at the top doesn’t have the literal power of life and death over those on the bottom, there’s a general tendency to tell those higher up only what they want to hear.

Given the preceding examples, you’d think that constant checking and rechecking of the sources of claims would be the rule in journalism. Unfortunately, it is not. Nor, apparently, is it in science. In *Betrayers of the Truth*, William Broad and Nicholas Wade reported on fraud and deceit—and acceptance of the same—in the scientific establishment. They found that, like journalism’s conceit about

checking on whether your mother loves you, science’s conceit of being built on an elaborate system of cross-checking and confirming the results of others is mostly a myth. Hardly anyone ever checks what other people claim to have found or done.

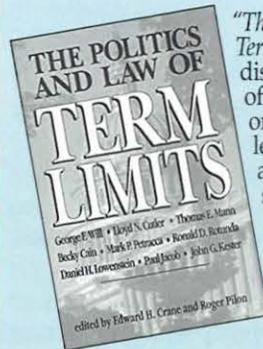
All too often readers assume that everyone is doing his work scrupulously and well, but unfortunately, that’s not always the case, as Broad and Wade, Sommers, Fumento, Larson, Farber, and others have shown. Readers should be much more skeptical than they are.

Almost every time I read a newspaper story about a topic of which I have personal knowledge, or about an event that I’ve witnessed, I find errors—sometimes in minor details, sometimes in key ones. Almost everyone I’ve asked about this says the same. But our knowledge of journalistic error in a few specific cases doesn’t translate

into a strong general skepticism.

Total skepticism is probably impossible. But greater awareness of the sorts of errors journalists tend to make can only help. Watch out for macroeconomic aggregates; try to figure out where huge counts are coming from and how they are being made; try to check the methodology and phrasing of polls; check on the self-interest of the groups that promulgate scary numbers; and remember that scary stories make great copy and should be mistrusted all the more for that reason.

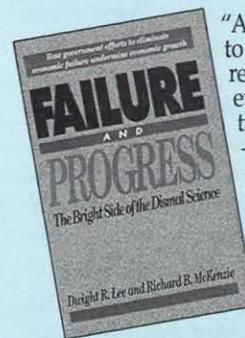
If journalism were merely entertainment, this wouldn’t be so important. But despite how bad they are at it, journalists’ conceit about their key role in public policy is, unfortunately, true. Bad information can only lead to bad policy. The first step in an intelligent approach to public policy is to get the facts as straight as we can, even when we don’t have precise numbers. ■

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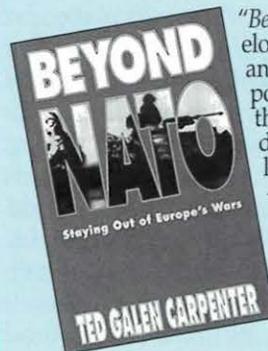
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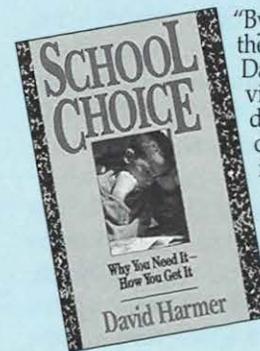
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*Iran-Iraq Policy Risky***Feds Can't Solve Crime Problem, Niskanen Study Says****Cato Studies**

Because so little is known about how to reduce crime, decisions on crime prevention and control should be decentralized, writes Cato chairman William A. Niskanen in "Crime, Police, and Root Causes" (Policy Analysis no. 218). Niskanen says that decentralization should begin with repeal of the 1994 federal crime law.

Niskanen presents a statistical analysis of the relations between crime rates and the level of public safety resources, controlling for the major conditions that affect each variable. His findings include the following:

- The number of crimes committed in the United States is much higher than that reported to police but has probably not increased over the past 20 years.

- An increase in the number of police appears to have no significant effect on the actual rate of violent crime and a roughly proportional negative effect on the actual rate of property crime.

- An increase in the number of corrections employees appears to have no significant effect on the violent crime rate and a small positive effect on the property crime rate.

- Crime rates are strongly affected by economic conditions. For example, an increase in per capita income appears to reduce both violent and property crime rates by a roughly proportional amount.

- Crime rates are also affected by demographic and cultural conditions. For example, the violent crime rate increases with the number of births to single mothers.

**Clinton's Ecosystem Plan Would Expand Federal Control**

The Ecosystem Management Initiative, launched by President Clinton as part of his effort to "reinvent" govern-

ment, signals a radical departure from past environmental policy. So writes Allen Fitzsimmons in "Federal Ecosystem Management: A 'Train Wreck' in the Making" (Policy Analysis no. 217). The purpose of the initiative is to avoid what the administration terms policy "train wrecks"—collisions of economic enterprise and environmental preservation—before they occur. It seeks to reach that goal by having the federal government manage and protect ecosystems throughout the country. Fitzsimmons shows that the assumptions behind the policy are incorrect. The nation is not facing serious environmental perils requiring drastic new federal policies.

Moreover, writes Fitzsimmons, the ecosystem concept, while useful within the realm of science from which it was borrowed, is inappropriate for use as a geographic guide for public policies. Instead of introducing science into public policy, use of the ecosystem concept interjects uncertainty, imprecision, and arbitrariness. Federal management of ecosystems would significantly expand federal control of the use of privately owned land, warns Fitzsimmons, president of Balanced Resource Solutions, an environmental-economic consulting firm in Woodbridge, Virginia.

**Persian Gulf Dual Containment Policy Misguided**

The Clinton administration's policy of containing both Iran and Iraq invites even more problems than previous administrations' ill-fated attempts to cultivate one regime as an alternative to the other, writes Barbara Conry in "America's Misguided Policy of Dual Containment in the Persian Gulf" (Foreign Policy Briefing no. 33). According to Conry, a Cato foreign policy analyst, dual containment is a risky strategy that relies on a vast and precarious network of alliances, assumes Washington can restrict Iranian and Iraqi military

buildups, and requires a prolonged U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region. Yet the United States has no vital interests in the area to justify a policy that is so costly and entails so great a risk of drawing America into regional conflicts.

If dual containment succeeds, even partially, in isolating Iran and Iraq, the consequences for the United States, Conry writes, may be grave. An anti-U.S. alliance between Tehran and Baghdad is not inconceivable. And in the event of either regime's breakdown, many forces in the gulf region will seek to exploit the ensuing chaos, making a regional war—which the United States will have little hope of avoiding—nearly inevitable. ■

**Cato TV Show Moves to Tuesdays**

*Cato Forum*, the Institute's weekly cable-satellite program on National Empowerment Television (NET) moves to a new night and time when it begins its second year in 1995. Beginning January 10, *Cato Forum* will be broadcast Tuesday nights from 9 to 10 p.m., eastern standard time. Each week *Cato Forum* features highlights from recent Institute conferences and seminars and in-studio debates on the hot policy issues of the day.

NET reaches more than 10 million households both directly by satellite and through a growing number of cable systems throughout the United States. *Cato Forum* can be received from Hughes Satellite Galaxy 7, Transponder 20 vertical. It is also broadcast each Tuesday morning at 8:30 on Manhattan's Time Warner (channel 34) and Paragon (channel 69) cable systems. ■

# “To be governed...”

## It's an entitlement

A [Buffalo] city official who admitted stealing at least \$200,000 in public funds resigned, then asked to be paid \$8,500 for 50 days of unused time off.

—*Washington Post*, Oct. 27, 1994

## Not to mention a point of extortion

Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly yesterday proposed building a \$300 million tourist center, shopping area and bus inspection station . . . that would be a mandatory gateway for tour buses visiting the city.

The Intermodal Transportation and Commercial Center . . . would generate \$70 million annually, according to the city figures.

It would do so by tapping into the thousands of tour buses that visit the city each year, each of which would be required to stop at the center for a \$95 safety inspection.

“All of the buses coming into the city will have a point of reference,” Kelly said yesterday.

—*Washington Post*, Oct. 27, 1994

## Whoops! Wrong sound bite

Australia's Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating on Wednesday again succeeded in splitting the country's opposition when a number of conservatives defied their leader and voted against . . . the Keating government's sexual pri-

vacuity legislation, which prevents the prosecution of adults engaging in consenting . . . sex in their own home. . . .

Australia's conservative politicians have opposed the new laws, citing traditional commitments to personal freedoms.

—*Reuter*, Oct. 19, 1994

## Spending other people's money isn't the best thing about government, it's the only thing

[Republican candidate for governor of Maryland Ellen Sauerbrey said] that she would return the money from her budget cuts to taxpayers, while [Democratic candidate Parris Glendening] would spend his savings on new programs.

“If you're not going to invest in education, public safety and jobs, why would anyone want to be governor?” Glendening replied.

—*Washington Post*, Nov. 9, 1994

## Good questions

Why is the [National Endowment for the Arts] necessary? Why can't the arts make it on their own?

[NEA head Jane Alexander] sighed. She'd heard the question many times. . . .

“There are a lot of things the government supports that one group or another doesn't like,” she went on, with energy. “Some city people don't know why they should be taxed to

subsidize wheat farmers when they don't live in a rural state. Why should childless people be taxed for public schools? Why should nonmotorists be taxed for highways, or middle-class people to pay for health care for the poor? Or people be taxed to support the arts? Because it is in the good of the whole nation.”

—*Parade Magazine*, Oct. 30, 1994

## It's sort of a preindustrial ambience

In Boston, Van Nuys, Calif., and Kansas City, Mo., . . . the U.S. Postal Service has removed clocks and other “non-user-friendly items” such as bulletin boards and calendars from 30 lobbies. . . . This is *not* about keeping customers from watching their lives tick away while buying stamps, says Postal Service spokesperson Sandra Harding. “Clocks look bureaucratic,” she says. “They are not an imperative part of the post-office experience.”

—*Newsweek*, Oct. 31, 1994

## An advance so strong that even the *Post* has noticed

Call it windy rhetoric, call it mere symbolism, but the pledge issued today for “free trade in the Asia Pacific” is a sign of capitalism's continuing advance worldwide following the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

—*Washington Post*, Nov. 16, 1994

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