
SOCIETY

line, might not, due to lower living costs, actually be poor.

Murray calls for a new national survey of people whose incomes are officially below the poverty line. He predicts that such a survey will "slash the accepted count of poor people" by reducing the estimates of rural and small-town poverty dramatically. And most of the poor, he argues, will not see themselves as victims, but will instead "be seen as living lives that they choose to live."

PRESS & TELEVISION

Press and Science

"The Culture of Science Journalism" by Dorothy Nelkin, in *Society* (Sept.-Oct. 1987), Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Nineteenth-century American science journalists had a flair for false drama best described by a New York *Sunday World* reporter. Suppose, he wrote, you are assigned to write a story explaining the significance of Halley's Comet. "Get some good nightmare idea like the inhabitants of Mars watching it pass. Then you want a quarter of a page of big type heads . . . and a two-column boxed freak containing a scientific opinion which nobody will understand, just to give it class."

Today's science journalists, writes Nelkin, a sociologist at Cornell, are less flamboyant than their predecessors. But "the early efforts to communicate science to the public" helped frame the way today's reporters cover scientific issues.

Modern science journalism began in 1921 when Edwin Scripps, a newspaper publisher and founder of the United Press, saw that there was a market for articles about scientific developments written in "plain United States that the people can understand." He founded the Science Service, the first syndicate to distribute news about science. Science Service editor Edwin Slosson urged his writers to pack human interest and adventure into their stories. Advertisements for the service informed editors that "drama lurks in every test tube," and promised stories packed with "the pure thrill of primal discovery."

The generation of science journalists who emerged in the 1940s continued the Science Service style. While science journalists of this era frequently lacked technical training (longtime *New York Times* science editor Walter Sullivan, for example, began his career as a music critic) they nonetheless continued, unquestioningly, to praise any scientific change, describing new pesticides as "revolutionary developments," and praising "cosmic breakthroughs" in the space program.

During the 1960s, some journalists called on their colleagues to be more critical. Today's science writers keep their distance from the technical bureaucracies they cover, but still admire scientists and maintain a sense of wonder about scientific discoveries. The *San Francisco Chronicle's* David Perlman concluded that the grandeur of scientific advances keeps science writers "endlessly excited" about their jobs. "For science by definition," Perlman wrote, "is young and exciting and elegant."