

tor Sarah Crichton explains, "we're tracking a generation."

One assumption behind all of these changes, notes Porter, is that educated Americans will not read anything unless it

is served up like baby food. But it could be, as one former "big three" editor puts it, that readers simply did not care for the pabulum that the newsmagazines were dishing out in the first place.

The Bad News Bias

"Economic News on Television: The Determinants of Coverage" by David E. Harrington, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1989), Univ. of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

As a rule, good news is no news in the minds of many journalists.

That formula certainly seems to apply to TV network news coverage of the U.S. economy—with some curious exceptions.

Harrington, a Kenyon College economist, surveyed the three television networks' reports on inflation, unemployment, and the gross national product (GNP) during the economy's turbulent years between 1973 and 1984. He found "reports about increases in the unemployment rate were, on average, 48 percent longer and 106 percent more likely to lead the evening newscasts than reports about decreases in unemployment. For the inflation rate, reports about increases were, on average, 29 percent longer and 61 percent more likely to lead the evening news broadcasts." Reporting on the GNP like-

wise emphasized the bad news.

But these patterns prevailed only during *nonelection* years. Harrington found that the bad news/good news differences shrank during congressional election years; they virtually disappeared during the presidential election years, 1976, 1980, and 1984.

Why? Possibly because TV newsmen deem favorable economic news more politically significant during election years, Harrington speculates. Or broadcasters may strive for greater "balance" during election campaigns. In any event, network coverage of the economy is not balanced much of the time, and that has consequences. As economist Herbert Stein notes, Washington "must respond to the picture that is in the public mind, even if that picture is unrealistic."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

James vs. James

"William and Henry James" by Ross Posnock, in *Raritan* (Winter 1989), Rutgers Univ., 165 College Ave., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

"I'm always sorry when I hear you're reading anything of mine, and always hope you won't," Henry James wrote to his brother William around 1904. "You seem so constitutionally unable to 'enjoy' it."

William James (1842-1910), the philosopher and father of Pragmatism, and Henry (1843-1916), the famous novelist, often chose to regard (and portray) themselves as a study in contrasts, and most scholars have agreed. Posnock, who teaches at the University of Washington, says it comes

down to a series of all-too-tidy dualisms: "active, manly, inquisitive William; contemplative, sissified, withdrawn Henry."

Their father, Henry Sr., had inherited great wealth and acquired a rococo taste for intellectual and theological speculation. The boys' various homes, an exasperated William wrote in 1865, swarmed with people "killing themselves with thinking about things that have no connection with their merely external circumstances."

It was too much for him. During the late

1860s, he suffered a prolonged bout of "neurasthenia," as depression was then known. He emerged only after latching on to the principle of "free will" and the importance of action over thought. "I will abstain from the mere speculation . . . in which my nature takes most delight," he wrote in 1870. He declared that "there is something diseased and contemptible, yea vile, in theoretic grubbing and brooding."

Strange thoughts for a philosopher. Yet, they were characteristic of William and of Pragmatism. What he really tried to do, argues Posnock, was to build a body of thought to *confine* rather than free his will—his will to speculate.

Pragmatism was, in effect, William's attempt to clear what he regarded as the paralyzing underbrush of metaphysics from philosophy, opening a path for the autonomous, energetic individual. Yet, even as he came to be celebrated (wrongly) as a prophet of hard-nosed efficiency, he defined the radical pragmatist as "a happy-go-lucky anarchistic sort of creature." And he retained a certain sympathy for those who indulged in the idle curiosity that he so sternly repressed in himself, though he relegated them to the margins of life as mystics, saints, or primitive peoples.

Henry, by contrast, had thrived in his father's house. The boundless curiosity that his brother found so enervating, he found energizing. He soaked up experience, says Posnock, and converted it into fictions. Yet, the two were in fact not so very different. Henry, though younger, was in many ways the more mature of the two brothers. At least he grasped more rapidly the truth that thinking *was* doing. After reading *Pragmatism* (1907), he wrote to William, "I was lost in wonder of the extent to which all my life I have . . . unconsciously pragmatized." And an interest in the turbulent flow of human consciousness was as much a hallmark of Henry's novels as it was of William's philosophical writings.



Henry James and his brother William at the turn of the century. Henry once wrote that he was grateful to live on the "crumbs" of his elder brother's "feast" and "the echoes of his life."

God and Country

It is one of the great might-have-beens of history. In July 1938, two Jesuit priests drafted a papal encyclical condemning racism and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany at the request of Pope Pius XI. But the head of their order, Wladimir Ledochowski, who feared communism more than fascism, delayed the transmission of

the document to the Pope. Pius XI died in 1939, probably never having seen it. His successor, Pope Pius XII, was not inclined to challenge Hitler.

Could the encyclical have prevented the Holocaust? O'Brien, a visiting professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, thinks that it might have. Earlier, in 1937,

"A Lost Chance to Save the Jews?" by Conor Cruise O'Brien, in *The New York Review of Books* (April 27, 1989), 250 W. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.