

dent Dan Quayle is that he is "a fool." As a result, Ullmann says, nearly every story about Quayle highlights his gaffes. "To treat him seriously is to invite charges that you are either crazy or in the tank with Quayle. I wrote what I thought to be a balanced article on Quayle in 1989, but a fellow reporter castigated me for a major lapse in judgment."

Few members of the huge White House pack get to see the president on a regular basis. Most rely on a rotating pool of reporters for their knowledge of what goes on at "photo opportunities" and the like.

Even some reporters who travel overseas to cover a presidential trip do not see the president in person. But gazing directly upon the presidential person is simply not a necessity any more—not when reporters can glean just as much from watching him on television. Indeed, thanks to Cable News Network and the availability of electronic transcripts of official briefings, "reporters can now cover the White House in absentia," Ullmann observes. He does not recommend the practice, but it would apparently make all too little difference in the press's coverage of the presidency.

## Radio Wars

"The Battle for the U.S. Airwaves, 1928-1935" by Robert W. McChesney, in *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1990), University of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6220.

In retrospect, commercial broadcasters' near-monopoly over the radio airwaves seems to have been almost inevitable. But it did not seem that way back in the 1920s and early '30s, says McChesney, a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Although scholars have not stressed the fact, there was opposition to the network-dominated, advertising-subsidized system of radio broadcasting that was then emerging.

During much of the 1920s, most radio stations were owned and run by newspapers, department stores, or other businesses, and were used mainly just to generate favorable publicity. But there were also nonprofit broadcasters—most of them affiliated with colleges or universities. By 1925, there were more than 200 nonprofit stations—about two-fifths of all the radio stations in the country.

Few people at the time foresaw the rapid rise of the commercial networks—the National Broadcasting Company was established in 1926 and the Columbia Broadcasting System a year later—or the expanded role of commercial advertising. The Radio Act of 1927, hurriedly passed by Congress after a federal judge ruled the Commerce Department's licensing of stations unconstitutional, created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to allocate

broadcast licenses. The commission was told only to favor applicants that best served the "public interest, convenience or necessity."

When the FRC's allocation plan emerged in 1928, however, the networks were the big winners. The commission set aside 40 channels nationwide for use by powerful 50,000-watt stations, and left the other 50 available channels for simultaneous use by some 600 weaker stations across the country. Broadcasters in the same region had to share (and fight over) the frequencies. In 1927, NBC and CBS held less than seven percent of all broadcast stations; by 1931, the networks, after the number of hours broadcast and the level of power used are taken into consideration, accounted for almost 70 percent of U.S. broadcasting. And by 1934, radio commercial advertising had mushroomed to \$72 million a year.

The immediate losers in all this were the indigent nonprofit broadcasters. The FRC has "taken away all of the [broadcast] hours that are worth anything," complained the director of a station at the University of Arkansas. Between 1927-34, the number of nonprofit stations fell by two-thirds.

As this was happening, the "displaced and harassed" nonprofit broadcasters, par-

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ticularly those associated with colleges and universities, began to organize in opposition. Educational broadcasters formed the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER) with the aim of getting Congress to reserve 15 percent of the broadcast channels for educational use.

But the opposition movement faced in NBC, CBS, and the National Association of

Broadcasters, "one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington." FDR had more important battles to fight, and on June 18, 1934, he signed into law the Communications Act of 1934 which created the Federal Communications Commission and marked the effective end of the war over the airwaves. The commercial networks had won.

## *Elite No More*

"Reporters Who Cover Congress" by Stephen Hess, in *Society* (Jan.-Feb. 1991), Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Washington reporters not so long ago bore little demographic resemblance to journalists elsewhere in the country. The scribes and newscasters in the nation's capital appeared to constitute (for better or worse) something of an elite. Overwhelmingly male, overwhelmingly white, disproportionately from the Northeast, they boasted more formal education than other journalists. Most held undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts rather than journalism, and one in three had gone on to earn an advanced degree. In recent years, however, according to Hess, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, the Washington press corps has lost much of its elite cast, especially with the influx of TV reporters from stations in the hinterlands.

For one thing, Washington reporters' Northeastern "slant" has disappeared. In 1978, more than one-third of them came from the Northeast, although only a fourth of the U.S. population lived in that part of the country. A decade later, however, according to a survey of 190 reporters who cover Congress for state, local, or regional audiences, the proportion of Northeasterners in the press corps almost matched their proportion in the population.

The difference in formal education has diminished, too, as more reporters outside Washington have come to possess sheepskins. In 1971, only 63 percent of daily newspaper reporters nationwide were college graduates; in 1988, 85 percent were.

Washington reporters also have changed, with their educational background becoming more like that of those

beyond the Beltway. In 1978, 62 percent of all Washington reporters had majored as undergraduates in the liberal arts. Among journalists elsewhere in the land, the preferred major was less intellectual—journalism. Now, that is true among many of the Washington types, too, especially the TV ones. In part, Hess says, this may reflect "the recent drive of women and minorities to get into journalism" through the proven track of professional education.

Women especially have increased their presence in Washington journalism. Whereas one-fourth of the reporters accredited to the congressional press galleries in 1979 were female, one-third were a decade later. "It can now be assumed that Washington has caught up with the rest of the news industry, which [still] lags behind the rest of the nation's professional population by about 10 percent," Hess writes. Among Washington's regional reporters who worked for radio or TV in 1988, nearly 40 percent were women.

The influx of TV reporters from local stations has opened a new breach within the Washington press corps. Unlike the network reporters of old, today's TV reporters tend to be younger than the print ones, are less likely to have graduate degrees, and are more likely to have majored in journalism. Unlike such giants of television journalism as Eric Sevareid and David Brinkley, few of the new TV reporters ever worked for newspapers or the wire services. The absence of such rigorous reporting experience clearly is no bar to membership in today's Washington press corps.