

The Fate of the Vietnam Veteran
(Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Workers, Sept. 1989)

	ALL VETERANS	Vietnam Theater	Outside Vietnam Theater	NONVETERANS
Average.....	\$519	\$498	\$551	\$511
White	522	508	551	524
Black	451	405	558	363
Fewer than 4 years of high school.....	389	403	376	333
4 years of high school	478	463	491	447
1 to 3 years of college	522	499	575	532
4 or more years of college.....	759	625	835	737

The Vietnam veteran of popular mythology is a perpetual misfit, chronically unemployed or worse. A new study in Monthly Labor Review (June 1992) by Sharon R. Cohany of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tells a different story: Many of the eight million Vietnam-era veterans earn more than their nonveteran peers. (Unemployment is identical among the two groups.) Overall, veterans have more schooling than their peers, chiefly because relatively few are high-school dropouts, but the four million who served in the Vietnam theater are less educated than other veterans.

Sowell believes that the time has come to examine closely what colleges and universities are really doing. The institutions' "pious state-

ments," he suggests, should be regarded "with the same skepticism that is applied to self-serving statements from other institutions."

PRESS & MEDIA

The Origins of Trash Journalism

"The Wicked World: The *National Police Gazette* and Gilded-Age America" by Elliott J. Gorn, in *Media Studies Journal* (Winter 1992), Columbia Univ., 2950 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027.

Before the *National Enquirer* and tabloid television, before the *New York Post* and other scandal sheets, there was a lurid and extremely popular publication by the name of the *National Police Gazette*. "Murder and Suicide: A Gush of Gore and Shattering Brains All Around the Horizon" was just one of its regular columns. Under the direction of Richard Kyle Fox, an immigrant from Belfast, the magazine flourished in the late 1870s and early '80s, and paved the way for the "yellow journalism" of the '90s.

The *Police Gazette* started out in 1845 as a sober chronicle of the crimes of the day, but after the Civil War it began moving toward sensationalism. It didn't move close enough, how-

ever. By the mid-1870s, when Fox acquired it, the *Gazette* was near extinction. He breathed new melodramatic life into the weekly, splashing its pages with much more graphic images of "murders, seductions and horrible accidents—all that was gruesome or thrilling." Writing in the "new" *Gazette* was strictly informal, with the emphasis placed on rumor and gossip—and on the well-told "story." The aim was entertainment, not enlightenment. "Coverage of sports—especially illegal blood sports like boxing and cockfighting—of vaudeville and variety shows, and of sexual scandals, particularly among the socially prominent, grew increasingly important to the *Gazette*," Gorn

writes, "but crimes of violence, the more bizarre and blood-soaked the better, were the journal's lifeblood."

Fox's formula proved to have broad appeal. Circulation of the New York-oriented weekly soared to 150,000. The *Gazette* was to be found wherever men congregated—at saloons, hotels, liveries, and barber shops. The lesson of the *Gazette's* success, Gorn says, was not lost on the publishers and editors of daily newspapers. By the 1890s, many of them were packaging the news "as a series of melodramas and atrocities, of titillating events covered as spectacles, complete with illustrations."

Fox had sensed the enormous potential audience among the wage earners of the Gilded Age. To workers seeking escape from dull jobs—or just relief from the Victorian ethos—his *Gazette* offered vicarious excitement.

The *Gazette* had its critics, however. In it and its competitors, complained Anthony Comstock, founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, "we . . . have a thing so foul that no child can look upon it and be as pure afterward." He called on parents to keep "vile and crime-full illustrated papers" out of their homes and to boycott stores that sold them. Comstock, who had the backing of J. P. Morgan and other prominent figures, gave the illustrated papers "too much credit for polluting American life,"



A lurid racism was a Gazette staple. Chinese-Americans were shown "luring even little girls into their dens . . . and, after stupefying them with opium candy, debauching the poor creatures."

Gorn believes. Still, he adds, Comstock had a point. "The moral universe he and his friends grew up in was beginning to fall apart."

Out of Context

"TV's Talking Headaches" by Janet Steele, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (July-Aug. 1992), 700 Journalism Bldg., Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. 10027.

During the Persian Gulf War and its Desert Shield prelude, TV news filled the airwaves with "talking heads"—retired colonels, erstwhile government officials, and think-tank gurus. In the space of eight months, 188 such worthies made 843 appearances on network

news programs. Rarely, however, were the specialists asked "to provide background, context, or analysis," laments Steele, a University of Virginia communications professor. All that television journalists wanted was "a never-ending supply of predictions."