



To read is not necessarily to believe. Many tabloid readers may just enjoy tall tales.

stream media.

The six major tabloids, all published in Florida by two rival corporations, are a mixed lot. That very diversity, Clausen argues, suggests that the stereotype of the tabloid reader—"a gullible, semiliterate gum-chewer of lower-class origins and pathological tastes"—is just "a figment of the educated imagination, encouraged by the mainstream press to emphasize its superiority." If tabloid readers were *that* dumb, they would not be reading at all.

What do the 3.8 million mostly female readers of the *National Enquirer* get for their 95 cents? Of course, there are the inevitable Elvis stories ("Elvis & His Mom Were Lovers"). But readers also get a great many other celebrity features, often salacious in nature. Clausen judges that "many, possibly a majority, of the pieces inside [the] *Enquirer*—concerning greedy officials, the freak accidents of ordinary people, physical-fitness techniques, and the love lives of minor Hollywood stars—would not look out of place on the pages of the average daily newspaper."

The *Enquirer's* 3.4-million circulation sister, *Star*, ordinarily resembles *Parade* or *People*, Clausen reports. In January 1992, *Star* moved out of its usual orbit to break the Gennifer Flowers—Bill Clinton story. The mainstream press then picked it up. A *New York Times* analysis uneasily acknowledged that a "sympiotic relationship has arisen between the two extremes of American journalism."

Some tabloid fare is indeed quite extreme. The *Globe* (circulation: 1.2 million), in particular, tends to feature sadistic sex-killings and the like. The *Globe's* sister publications are less gamy. The *National Examiner* (805,000) is "a less slick version of *Star*, with a pronounced secondary affinity for the occult." And *Sun* (350,000) deals largely in "ordinary people who have . . . bizarre adventures." The *Weekly World News* (816,000), an *Enquirer* sister publication, Clausen says, takes "the sense of arch fun far beyond *Sun*."

Do tabloid readers believe everything they read? Not necessarily, says Clausen. But then, according to some surveys, neither do many readers of the mainstream press.

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### *The Puritan Founders*

Thomas Jefferson and the Framers of the Constitution are usually considered America's founders. In his classic *Democracy in America* (1835–40), however, Alexis de Tocqueville put forward a different candidate: the Puritans. As the astute French visitor saw it, says North Carolina State political scientist Kessler, a people's character is more important than even the best-written constitution, and it was the Puritans

"Tocqueville's Puritans: Christianity and the American Founding" by Sanford Kessler, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1992), Journals Dept., Univ. of Texas Press, 2100 Comal, Austin, Texas 78722.

who first brought the "spirit of freedom" to America and who decisively shaped the national character. The Constitution worked, in Tocqueville's view, "largely because the Puritans made a critical mass of Americans self-governing, public-spirited citizens before the document was written," Kessler writes.

Christianity was the primary source of American principles, Tocqueville thought. The Puri-

tans who migrated to America in large numbers during the 1630s took the "spirit of religion" and their passion for orthodoxy from the Old Testament and the "spirit of freedom" from the New Testament. Christ, according to Tocqueville, was the first figure in history to teach that all human beings had an "equal right . . . at birth to liberty," a teaching that initiated the gradual spread of democracy throughout the world. Martin Luther's (1483-1546) forceful introduction of the "spirit of freedom" into the ecclesiastical realm fragmented Christianity and ultimately led to the exodus of the Puritans from England to America. It also led, as Tocqueville perceived in the 1830s, to the eventual secularization of American life.

The New England Puritans extended the "spirit of freedom" into the political realm, Tocqueville said, and this enabled them to put the "boldest speculations of humanity" into practice. "According to Tocqueville," Kessler writes, "Puritan political innovations formed the basis for American constitutionalism . . . . The Mayflower Compact and other like covenants established the right of free and equal individuals under God to form a 'civil body poli-

tic' and made consent the *de facto* basis for political authority." Local independence was widely established by 1650 and Puritan governments were highly democratic. "As the doctrine of popular sovereignty gradually spread to most of the English colonies, it shaped American mores, embedding the 'spirit of liberty' deep within the American character."

By the 1830s, Tocqueville observed, that spirit of freedom had overcome the "spirit of religion" within Christianity itself. Orthodoxy became far less important, zealotry gave way to toleration, and the miraculous and otherworldly aspects of Christianity were de-emphasized. Piety became more centered on the self than on God. Tocqueville feared that the new individualism could lead to a "passionate and exaggerated love of self," threatening all forms of virtue. Certain elements of the "spirit of religion," he thought, remained vitally important. Still, he found most Americans of his day "orderly, temperate, moderate, careful, and self-controlled citizens." He considered them, Kessler says, "far more able than their Puritan ancestors to protect the Christian legacy of equal freedom."

## ***The End Of Toleration***

"The Virtues of Toleration" by John Gray, in *National Review* (Oct. 5, 1992), 150 E. 35th St., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Ours is a society that prides itself on its openness and acceptance of differences. It is our misfortune that we have made the older idea of toleration, as defended by Milton and Locke, unfashionable, laments Gray, a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford.

Toleration was an expression of confidence that the good and the bad could be distinguished—in contrast, Gray notes, to today's conventional wisdom that standards of belief and conduct are entirely subjective. The whole logic of toleration was that it was being practiced with regard to *evils*. "When we tolerate a practice, a belief, or a character trait, we let something be that we judge to be undesirable, false, or at least inferior." The rationale was that human beings are imperfect and that virtue must be acquired by hard effort. It cannot be imposed. "We were enjoined to tolerate the shortcomings of others, even as we struggled with our own."

That venerable outlook goes against the modern grain, Gray observes. The thought that humans are "flawed creatures whose lives will always contain evils" is at odds with the post-

Christian view that "only stupidity and ill will stand between us and universal happiness." And the inherently judgmental nature of toleration makes it offensive to revisionist liberal thinkers such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. They think justice requires "that government . . . practice *neutrality*, not toleration, in regard to rival conceptions of the good life." That, Gray points out, mandates "nothing less than *the legal disestablishment of morality*." Morality is viewed as "a private habit of behavior rather than a common way of life."

But in reality the state must still decide "what is to count as a *bona-fide* way of life" deserving neutral treatment. In practice, Gray says, favored groups such as blacks and women are granted legal privileges, while unfashionable groups, such as smokers and heavy drinkers, are subjected to moralistic intrusions into their personal lives.

Policies that create group rights, Gray maintains, are inevitably arbitrary and unfair. The departures from the old-fashioned ideal of toleration, he warns, "are all too likely to breed more old-fashioned intolerance."