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cal outlook are slight. When social change does take place, Ladd notes, the young are likely to embrace it most fully. Twentysomethings today are the most likely of all age groups (89 percent of young women, 84 percent of young men) to reject the view that a woman's place is in the home.

Sometimes, Ladd acknowledges, decisive events do drill distinctive social and political

values into a generation. The Depression Generation, for example, has long leaned strongly toward the Democrats. The young people who have come of age politically since the late 1970s have sharply broken with the New Deal past: They have given a big share of their votes to the Republican Party. But that alone does not make the twentysomethings profoundly different from other generation.

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## PRESS & MEDIA

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### *The Imperial Editors*

"The New High-Tech Press Pack" by Tom Rosenstiel, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

There is nothing new about news editors using Associated Press (AP) or other "wire" stories to second-guess their own reporters. But informa-

tion technology has taken the second-guessing to new heights—and that is a very mixed blessing, according to Rosenstiel, who writes about politics and the media for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Editors at major news organizations now receive a torrent of information from third parties. Into the newsroom computers flow transcripts of all public utterances by the president and cabi-

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### *The Corruption of Journalism*

In *Nieman Reports* (Spring 1994), Michael J. O'Neill, former editor of the *New York Daily News*, limns the impact of moral relativism on the news media.

*This is the central ethical problem facing the media today—the corruption of journalism by the culture of entertainment, by new technology that informs by image and emotion, and by an intellectual elitism that rejects objective rules of behavior in favor of limitless self-expression and moral relativism. "Why has moral discourse become unfashionable or merely partisan? . . ." asks the scholar James Q. Wilson. "Because we have learned . . . from intellectuals . . . that morality has no basis in science or logic. To defend morality is to defend the indefensible." The old rules based on moral intuitions have therefore been replaced, Wilson says, by a freedom-of-choice morality in which one picks and chooses values as casually as "ice cream flavors."*

*In this process, right and wrong become sub-*

*jective judgments rather than objective measures of human conduct. Reality and truth are only what we say they are—they have no existence outside our own fictions. Our celebration of laissez-faire lifestyles is extended to the outer frontiers of moral behavior. So we have the spectacle of producers not being the least bit troubled when they butcher facts, truth, and just about everything else to create fanciful docudramas like Oliver Stone's JFK. Or we see a Joe McGinniss cynically defending his departure from "traditional journalism" to steal from William Manchester, to invent quotes and private thoughts, and to create phony scenes in order to hype his own garbled version of Ted Kennedy's life. . . . Instead of outrage and denunciation, there is general acceptance.*

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net members; of every press briefing at the White House, State Department, and other departments and agencies; even of every political talk show on television. The editors can tune in to CNN and to C-SPAN. When they sit down to edit their reporter's story, they can refer to other versions prepared by rivals at AP, Reuters, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Newsday*, and other organizations. Drawing upon these sources, editors, with or without the assistance of the reporter, often turn the story into a seemingly comprehensive "take" on the day's subject, a presentation of the collective journalistic wisdom of the day. It may not be the best that journalism could offer, however. "Theoretically," Rosenstiel notes, "more sources of information should make the news more accurate. But in practice, some editors use news accounts—sped to them instantly—that their reporters on-the-

scene know are off the mark."

With the shift in power from the reporter in the field to the editor in the newsroom has come a devaluation of original reporting. Even some reporters now prefer to stay in their information-laden offices. Michael Duffy, a *Time* correspondent who covers the White House, says that he no longer attends the daily White House briefings and usually does not show up even when the president makes himself available to the press. But not being there may have its price. "What happens when you get out of the office," says Michael Barone of *U.S. News & World Report*, "is the serendipitous, the unexpected, the thing that changes your view." Yet the reporter in the field who discovers "the unexpected" may well find it hard to overcome the conventional wisdom developing back in the newsroom—and may not even be consulted.

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## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

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### A Postmodernist John Dewey?

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

**R**ichard Rorty is not exactly a household name. But his provocative philosophical and political views, expressed in several books and countless essays, have attracted unusual interest and controversy, both inside and outside the academy. Rorty, a professor of humanities at the University of Virginia, considers himself a "Deweyan pragmatist." He tries to wed pragmatism, à la John Dewey (1859–1952), the eminent American philosopher-activist, with today's Nietzschean "postmodernism." Rorty has been vigorously attacked by critics on both Left and Right. The former—such as Michael Billig in *New Left Review* (Nov. 1993)—object to his insufficiently radical political stance, while the latter—such as Richard John Neuhaus in *First Things* (Dec. 1990)—charge him with undermining the intellectual foundations of democracy.

Rorty takes some comfort from the two-sided nature of the assault. "If there is anything to the idea that the best intellectual position is one

[that] is attacked with equal vigor from the political Right and the political Left, then I am in good shape," he writes in *Common Knowledge* (Winter 1992). But there has been another, perhaps not so easily elided, line of attack on Rorty's positions: that he is far from the Deweyan pragmatist he claims to be.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty rejected "foundational epistemology," which accepts the possibility of finding propositions that faithfully "mirror" or accurately represent the world "as it really is." In proceeding without foundations, he believes that he is being consistent with pragmatism. "All too tersely stated," Gordon D. Marino, a philosopher at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, writes in a profile of Rorty in *Commonweal* (May 6, 1994), "pragmatism is the view that there is no absolute truth. 'Ideas become true just so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience' (William James). Rorty may have an