and without a single daily newspaper story under her belt," observes John Cloud, editor of the *Washington City Paper* (Oct. 20, 1995), Shalit is writing major stories for national publications. That fact, he notes, seems to reflect "the current mores of magazine journalism, which is often more interested in forceful wording and fluid writing than spick-and-span reporting."

Despite Shalit's mistakes, it is apparent she struck a nerve. Are there enough minority journalists to satisfy industry-wide affirmative action plans without sacrificing quality? "That's hard to tell," Downie says, in an interview with Alicia C. Shepard, a contributing writer for the *American Journalism Review* (Dec. 1995), though for the *Post*, standing "at the top of the food chain," talent is not a problem.

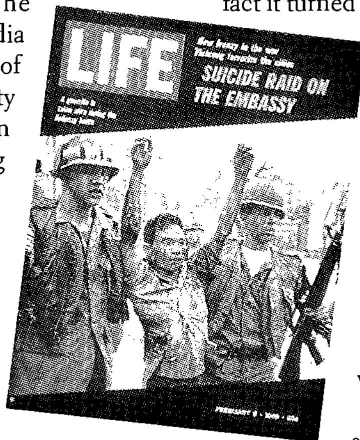
The controversy sparked by Shalit's article does, however, lend support to one of her points: "By focusing obsessively on the ideals and the instruments of diversity, by exhorting its staff to reflect endlessly on their own resentments, the *Post* is ensuring that the resentments will never be transcended."

Who Lost Vietnam?

"Vietnam in Retrospect" by Peter Braestrup, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Fall 1995), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

For nearly three decades, many critics—and many champions—of the press have insisted that the news media, particularly TV news, turned Americans against the Vietnam War. Not so, contends Braestrup, a former Saigon bureau chief for the *Washington Post* and author of *Big Story* (rev. ed., 1994), a study of Vietnam news coverage.

"TV folk saw their nightly, two-minute reports as the ultimate act of truth-telling," bringing the grisly reality of war into the nation's living rooms, he notes. But a study by media specialist Lawrence Lichty of Northwestern University found that out of more than 2,300 network evening news reports from Vietnam between August 1965 and August 1970, only 76 showed heavy fighting, with dead or wounded visible.



For two years after the U.S. troop build-up began in 1965, according to Lichty's analysis, network TV reporting was, on the whole, favorable to the American effort. "After that, coverage began to shift," Braestrup says—a change that reflected the "growing political discord at home." News reports increasingly questioned whether the U.S. venture would ultimately succeed.

But scholars have found no convincing evidence that TV war coverage had any special impact on public opinion at home, Braestrup points out. In the 1950-53 Korean War, there was press censorship and no TV coverage, yet the slow decline in public support that occurred then, apparently in response to lengthening casualty lists, was roughly the same as the falloff in mass support over a comparable period during the Vietnam War.

Television portrayed Hanoi's surprise Tet offensive in January 1968 as a calamity for the U.S.-South Vietnamese side, when in fact it turned into a grave military setback for Hanoi. But "the 'disaster' portrait painted by television, and too slowly corrected by print, did not cause the disarray in Washington," Braestrup says. "In the absence of presidential leadership and after years of White House ambiguity and claims of 'progress,' LBJ's political crisis was a self-inflicted wound."

Indeed, during Hanoi's massive tank-led Easter offensive four years later, there was "no quick rush to judgment" by correspondents. President Richard Nixon, "no media favorite, responded with decisive actions—sending ships and aircraft, mining Haiphong harbor, bombing North Vietnam, making a new conditional peace offer. He took charge and gave shape to the story." It was the nation's political leaders, not the press, who wrote the U.S. script during America's longest war.