

mediate a peace between the Creeks and Cherokees in South Carolina, the Indians referred to each other as “red people,” while the English called them Indians.

Why did the Indians refer to themselves as red? Among some tribes of the Southeast, origin myths may have provided the inspiration. The Mesquakies of the lower Mississippi valley, for example, believed that the first humans were created out of clay “red as the reddest blood,” one scholar wrote. The tribe’s name means “red Earths.”

A second possibility is that Indians responded with red after the Europeans began calling themselves white. The first Europeans in the New World thought of themselves as Christians, but with the arrival of black slaves in the Carolinas in the early 18th century—some of them Christians—they began referring to themselves as white. Red was a natural

response for the Indians, Shoemaker notes, because red and white already had strong paired symbolic meanings: red generally stood for war, white for peace. Some tribes may have borrowed the color red from tribes like the Mesquakies.

It is unclear if the Indians saw red and white as racial categories (i.e. biologically linked to social, political, and cultural characteristics) or only as the equivalent of “school colors.” But whites in the 18th century did embrace race thinking. “It would take another century for the science of race to reach its full height and then one more century for the idea of race to be seriously questioned,” writes Shoemaker. “Perhaps we are now at the brink of the apocalypse, when the idea of race will be abandoned entirely and another system of categories will emerge to take its place.”

PRESS & MEDIA

Tabloids Invade TV News!

“Local News: The Biggest Scandal on TV” by Steven D. Stark, in the *Washington Monthly* (June 1997), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009; “News Lite” by James McCartney, in *American Journalism Review* (June 1997), 8701 Adelphi Road, Adelphi, Md. 20783–1716.

No matter what the community in America, the local TV news is much the same: crimes, disasters, and fluff, all served up by two relentlessly personable anchorpersons and their eager-to-please young correspondents, reporting and chatting “live” from various corners of the community and nation. It’s not just their shallowness that makes these news shows so objectionable, argues Stark, author of *Glued to the Set* (1997); it’s the fact that they’ve become so immensely influential. Sixty-five percent of adults in a 1996 survey reported watching the local TV news, compared with only 42 percent who tuned in to TV network newscasts.

Local news shows once were “an insignificant part of the television day,” Stark recalls. But in the late 1960s and early ‘70s, stations began to grasp the shows’ profit potential. They are relatively cheap to produce, and the local stations can keep the profits (which they can’t do with network programming). Local newscasts grew to a half-hour, right before the evening network news; then to an hour, even 90 minutes.

Taking the advice of media consultants, Stark notes, the stations began offering

“happy talk” news, with personable “anchors” as the principal attraction, and tabloidlike “action news” (a.k.a. “eyewitness news”), with “a high story count, an increasing number of striking visuals, and exciting upbeat music.” The formula worked. Such newscasts soon began to generate between one-third and one-half of local stations’ total profits.

By the 1980s, communications satellites and other technological advances enabled local stations to send their own correspondents to national and international events, scooping the network news programs. The Cable News Network, established in 1980, also began selling news footage to local news operations, and local affiliates of the Big Three broadcast networks then forced them to share their own jealously guarded film. Gradually, says Stark, local stations became “the average viewer’s window on the whole world,” and the locals’ tabloid style “became the trademark of national and international coverage.”

Now, the networks themselves are going “tabloid,” with the trend especially evident in the last year or so, says McCartney. A typical NBC evening news broadcast reports only

five or six traditional “hard news” items, compared with about 20 in the Huntley-Brinkley heyday. Instead of news about government and world events, the networks are giving

viewers the lowdown on such subjects as day-dreams, telephone psychics, and unidentified flying objects. Today, it seems, all TV news is “local.”

A Room of One's Own

“The White House Beat at the Century Mark” by Martha Joynt Kumar, in *Press/Politics* (Summer 1997), Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

In 1895, William Price, a reporter for the *Washington Evening Star*, took up a position outside the front gate of the White House, and from it, buttonholed politicians who had been in to see President Grover Cleveland. Soon, wrote Washington correspondent Delbert Clark in 1941, Price was joined by other reporters. For seven years, in good weather and bad, they persevered until finally, one wet day in 1902, President Theodore

It's a nice little story, and scholars and journalists have repeated it over the years to explain the origins of the White House press corps. But there's very little truth in the tale, says Kumar, a political scientist at Towson University, in Maryland.

In prosaic fact, she says, the newsworthiness of the presidency had grown so much by President Cleveland's administration that in 1896 Price and two other correspondents were given a table in a White House corridor at which to work. After William McKinley became president, he turned the whole second-floor corridor over to the press. During the Spanish-American War (1898), as journalist Ida M. Tarbell wrote that year in *McClure's*, a half-dozen or more reporters could routinely be found “in the outer reception-room of the business part of the White House, a corner containing a well furnished table and plenty of chairs.” In 1902, President Roosevelt gave White House reporters a large room in the new “temporary offices” (now the West Wing). Eager to use “the bully pulpit,” TR made himself more accessible to the correspondents than his predecessors had been, Kumar notes. He was the first president to meet regularly with reporters, but not the first to give them a home in the White House.



President Theodore Roosevelt skillfully used reporters to promote his aims with the public.

Roosevelt, taking pity on the rain-soaked wretches, “called in his secretary and then and there directed that a special room be set aside in the newly built Executive Offices for the sole use of the press. The Washington correspondents had come of age.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Death Debate

A Survey of Recent Articles

Six prominent philosophers took an unusual step earlier this year. Setting aside their differences on “many issues of public morality and policy,” they joined in urging the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold

two appeals courts' rulings and give terminally ill patients a constitutional right to kill themselves.

“Though academic philosophers have been parties to amicus briefs before, as mem-