

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-