

leverage over their host cities. *But*, he adds, something vital would be lost: “the stability and tradition fans cherish. A truly competitive sports world would be as chaotic as the computer and entertainment markets.” The quality of play might be affected, too, as the number of players multiplied. Bernstein thinks some sort of change may be in order, but nothing so radical.

Morris and Kraker have a different idea: community ownership of teams, à la the Green Bay Packers. (They also favor revenue sharing among teams, to make them all “equal,” as now required in the National Football League, and would oblige leagues to grant expansion fran-

chises to cities abandoned by their teams.) “Professional teams have become an integral part of our community fabric and our emotional and civic lives,” they maintain. “This may justify stadium subsidies in certain communities, but common sense dictates that when an owner demands a subsidy two to three times the value of the team itself, fans would be much better off purchasing the team themselves” (assuming the owner will sell it).

Maybe so. But the Packers “are not a model likely to be copied soon,” Bernstein notes. “All the major professional leagues [now] prohibit public ownership.”

A Bright Side to Public Housing

“Are Public Housing Projects Good for Kids?” by Janet Currie and Aaron Yelowitz, *NBER Working Paper No. 6305* (Dec. 1997), National Bureau of Economic Research, 1050 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

The disastrous failures of Chicago’s infamous Robert Taylor Homes and other massive urban high-rise “projects” have given public housing a bad name. Currie and Yelowitz, economists at the University of California, Los Angeles, suggest that it may be undeserved.

The focus on the worst projects, they say, obscures the fact that projects differ. Of the 3,300 local public housing authorities in the country, 70 percent operate relatively small, more human-scale projects of fewer than 300 units. Moreover, not all the high-rise projects are as bad as the worst. The very fact that New York and other large cities have long lists of poor families waiting to get into public housing indicates it may be the best alternative available to them.

But, the authors ask, is it

best for their children?

Combining data from the Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and taking into account such factors as the family head’s age, marital status, race, and educational status, Currie and Yelowitz find that children in the projects fare better than children of similar background who do not live in public housing. The project families are less likely to suffer from overcrowding, and the boys, at least, are less likely to be held back in school.

Though the children living in projects might be better served by a housing voucher program that would provide subsidies for private-sector apartments, the authors conclude, it appears that public housing has gotten a bum rap.



A public housing project in St. Louis, Missouri: A better life?

PRESS & MEDIA

No News at the Statehouse?

“Missing the Story at the Statehouse” by Charles Layton and Mary Walton, in *American Journalism Review* (July–Aug. 1998), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783–1716.

“You can vote any way you want to up here,” Carolyn Russell, a state representative from Goldsboro, North Carolina, was told when she

first arrived in Raleigh in 1991, “because the folks back home will never know.” Even as power and money have been devolving from

Washington to the states, newspapers have been paying *less* attention to state government, report freelance writers Layton and Walton.

“In capital press rooms around the country,” they write, “there are more and more empty desks and silent phones. Bureaus are shrinking, reporters are younger and less experienced, stories get less space and poorer play, and all too frequently editors just don’t care.” Nationwide, only 513 newspaper reporters and 113 wire service colleagues now cover state government full-time. The number of newspaper reporters has fallen in 27 states since the early 1990s (while rising in 14 states and staying the same in nine). Much of the decline is due to cost cutting by major chains, such as Gannett and Knight-Ridder.

“Fewer reporters means fewer stories,” note Layton and Walton. “In the daily crush, state news loses out to crime stories, lighthearted features and lifestyle reporting—all of which editors insist readers prefer, even though [scientific opinion] research shows otherwise.”

An influential research program conducted two decades ago by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau and the American

Newspaper Publishers Association had an especially unfortunate impact. On the one hand, their telephone survey of 3,000 newspaper readers showed that they read newspapers mainly for hard news; on the other hand, a companion series of focus groups in 12 cities indicated that people wanted “personally helpful” stories. Editors chose to believe the unrepresentative focus groups, with their lively quotes, rather than the scientific phone survey, with its daunting array of statistics. In succeeding years, many editors altered their papers accordingly, giving readers *less* of what they said in surveys they wanted. In a 1991 survey of reader preferences, not only did hard news triumph over features, but state news did very well, ranking ahead of 28 other categories, including crime news, health news, and “news that’s helpful with everyday living.” But “the flight from government coverage and hard news” continued, note Layton and Walton.

The picture is not entirely bleak, they observe. “Thanks to computers and to campaign finance disclosure laws in all 50 states, journalists have the power to explore the secret

In the Mencken Tradition

The *New Republic* writer and two *Boston Globe* columnists who were fired this year for passing off fiction as non-fiction were following in the footsteps of some of journalism’s most illustrious names, observes Burt Solomon, a staff correspondent for the *National Journal* (Aug. 22, 1998).

Two of American journalism’s most gifted and respected practitioners, A.J. Liebling and Joseph Mitchell, both formerly of The New Yorker, used the generous incorporation of fictitious characters and scenes to raise their narrative reporting to a literary level. . . .

The truth is, if anything, journalistic standards have been on the rise in recent years. Reporters are better-educated than ever, and the doctored quotes and composite characters that have so appalled onlookers of today’s journalism were actually far more common—and more commonly accept-



ed—in the past. The Hearst papers are credited, through their relentlessly sensationalist and, at least partially, fictive reporting, with instigating the Spanish-American War. H. L. Mencken, the creator of journalism’s 20th century voice, bragged in his memoirs of making up stories to scoop a rival and of inventing from his desk in Baltimore eyewitness accounts of naval battles taking place half a world away in the Russo-Japanese war.

world of money in state politics, something previous generations could only dream of.” *The Indianapolis Star and News*, owned by former vice president Dan Quayle’s family, have led the way, showing in hard-hitting series how the Indiana legislature had been “hijacked” and “plundered” by “an extraordinary coalition

of about 40 big-business interests, led by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.” “As editors seek alternatives to ‘boring’ governmental process stories,” say Layton and Walton, “database journalism (despite a name that suggests geeks-at-work) has the power to rivet readers with accounts of how democracy operates.”

Consider the Alternatives

“Chaining the Alternatives” by Eric Bates, in *The Nation* (June 29, 1998),
33 Irving Pl., New York, N.Y. 10003.

In the good old antiwar days, “underground” weeklies such as the *Phoenix New Times* were the proud “alternative” to the tame “establishment” press, and their mission was clear: not just to write about the world, but to change it. No longer, observes Bates, a staff writer for *The Independent*, a locally owned alternative weekly in Durham, North Carolina. Grown so prosperous that corporate chains now compete fiercely to buy them, many alternative papers have put their radicalism behind them. Instead of fighting capitalism, they are embracing it.

Founded by college students and dropouts in 1970 as a vehicle of antiwar protest, *New Times* has evolved into a national chain, *New Times Inc.* It owns eight alternative weeklies, from Miami to San Francisco, as well as an advertising group that represents six other papers. In the early years, *New Times* was put out by a nonhierarchical collective, whose members each made \$55 a week. Today, writers for the chain’s papers get annual salaries of \$35,000 or more, while in 1995 cofounders Michael Lacey and Jim Larkin, according to an internal memo, each pulled down \$300,000.

New Times Inc. “still takes on everyone from corporate polluters to corrupt politicians,” Bates reports, “but it also takes pains to distance itself from its radical past.” Not all alternative papers had any radical past to shed, Bates notes. “Many evolved from free shoppers, campus entertainment listings and record store promotions, devoted to cashing in on the young, hip,

urban demographic that movement papers had helped forge.”

In the last four years, *New Times*, *Stern Publishing* (which owns seven papers, including New York’s *Village Voice*), and other corporate chains “have snapped up alternative weeklies in major markets like Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Montreal, and have begun expanding into mid-size cities,” Bates says. Of the 17 million “alternative” readers, more than half are now served by chain-owned weeklies.

The trend, Bates says, “is being driven largely” by the prospect of advertising revenues, which since 1992 have nearly doubled, to \$345 million. With publications in multiple markets, chains are able to attract national advertisers, notably cigarette and alcohol advertisers. “They understand how to reach 18- to 34-year-olds efficiently,” notes Richard Karpel, executive director of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN). Over the last two years, national ad revenues for the 109 AAN members have almost tripled, with nearly 70 percent of the money coming from the tobacco industry. (Another major source of revenue for alternative papers is graphic sex ads.)

In *Advertising Age* two years ago, AAN assured potential advertisers that the alternatives’ “primary mission is journalistic, not political, and they are all in business to make a profit.” If that is so, asks Bates, “then what makes them alternative?”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Kantian Christianity

“The Christian Democracy of Glenn Tinder and Jacques Maritain,” by Robert P. Kraynak, in *Perspectives on Political Science* (Spring 1998), 1319 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1802.

For much of its 2,000-year history, Christianity was indifferent or hostile to democ-

racy. Today, however, virtually all churches and Christian theologians are its champi-