Precious Things Considered . . .

Garrison Keillor, the wry man from Lake Wobegon who hosts public radio's *Prairie Home Companion*, takes an unusual swipe at another pillar of public radio in the *Nation* (Jan. 5, 1998). Keillor's popular show is distributed by Public Radio International, while *All Things Considered* is distributed by a competitor, National Public Radio (NPR).

All Things Considered *made its reputation on news reporting during the Watergate episodes. They produced a generation of excellent reporters. . . . They've mostly been overshadowed by what I consider to be rather precious commentators, people reminiscing about their childhoods and interviews with artists and writers who one sort of gathers are friends of the reporters. . . .*

Radio has a real obligation here, and I think that All Things Considered *has seriously failed this obligation in recent years. I think the program has for one thing utterly failed to report on the Republican revolution for control of Congress that has absolutely turned politics upside down in this country. This is not a minor phenomenon. I don't know if the reporters at NPR simply don't know Republicans, or they don't know how to talk to them, or what. But this is a crucial story. It goes on under their noses. To ignore that and to do little audio documentaries about old ballplayers and celebrate Paul Robeson's birthday and do a documentary on maple syruping in Vermont is just perverse.*

. . . And Defended

In the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 14, 1997), Richard Ohmann, a professor of English emeritus at Wesleyan University, explains the appeal of public radio.

Public radio has become central to the culture of a particular socio-economic group—the professional-managerial class, or "P.M.C." Public radio not only reflects key interests of this group, but also serves as part of the cultural tissue that holds its members together, helping—along with other ties, such as higher education, suburban living, marriage within the group, and a well-knit set of stylistic preferences in language, dress, exercise, and so on—to define the P.M.C. as a class. . . .

Above all, this "we" attracted by NPR's chosen mode of address—cultivated, fastidious, cool—is a group tolerant of complexity, eager for explanation, curious, intellectually versatile. Presumably, NPR, by crediting us with those qualities, flatters our sense of worth and identity. Needless to say, those qualities have practical value as well, having been part of our education and having come into play in the work that more explicitly defines the P.M.C.: investigating, planning, managing, negotiating, designing, creating.

NPR staff members . . . think of themselves as sharing the same qualities and values as their listeners, whom they describe less as an audience than as part of their "community." And why not? Staff members hold mainly non-technical, often Ivy League, degrees. They earn incomes comparable to those of their listeners, live in similar neighborhoods, read the Times. *They work with words and ideas. Hence, this circuit of cultural production and reception is an exchange chiefly within the P.M.C.*

Clicking on Profits

"Profits in Site?" by Scott Kirsner, in *American Journalism Review* (Dec. 1997), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783–1716.

Newspaper and magazine publishers "are beginning to see evidence that the Web isn't a complete charity case," reports Kirsner, a Boston-based freelance writer. Some, such as Gannett's *Florida Today*, which runs the *Space Online* Web site, have even broken

into the black. While the 12,500-circulation *Griffin* (Georgia) *Daily News* and some 120 other papers have shut down their Web sites, larger publishers, with the financial resources to be patient, are optimistic.

Forrester Research, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, consulting firm, expects publishing on the Web to be "a tough slog" until 2000. But then it should become profitable, with on-line advertisers (up to 75 percent of them, *national* advertisers) spending a projected $4.5 billion a year. By 2002, estimates another firm, Jupiter Communications, annual online advertising should reach $7.7 billion.

Today, Kirsner says, the bulk of most Web publishers' income comes from three types of advertising: display, classified, and sponsorships. To have their ad graphic displayed 500,000 times on the *New York Times on the Web* site, for instance, advertisers pay $20,000, or $40 per 1,000 "impressions." But that way of charging advertisers may be becoming obsolete, Kirsner says. In 1996, Procter & Gamble arranged to pay for its display ads on the Yahoo! search service according to how many times users clicked on the ads *and were delivered to a P&G site*—not just how many times the ad was shown. An even more frightening development, from an on-line publisher's point of view, is that some Web sites have begun selling ads on a"pay-per-transaction" basis: advertisers only pay if visitors to the site actually buy something.

To forge stronger long-term relationships with advertisers, "and perhaps to distract them from the new payment models," observes Kirsner, some online publishers "are offering both sponsorship packages and 'co-branded' areas—essentially 'advertorial' custom publishing products." The *New York Times*-owned *Boston Globe Online* has an "Emerging Business" area sponsored by Fleet Bank. *Florida Today*'s *Space Online* made sure it had the Kennedy Space Center and other sponsors aboard before its launch.

Web publishers are also running classified ads, long a big moneymaker for newspapers. *Boston Globe Online* expects classifieds to bring in as much as 35 percent of its revenue this year, up from less than five percent in 1996.

Though Web surfers are accustomed to free access, subscriptions are another potential source of revenue. The *Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition*, for example, derives more than 20 percent of its revenue from subscriptions. Other on-line publishers are also experimenting with subscriptions. Indeed, while there are some signs that the World Wide Web may become a paying proposition, "experimentation" is still the byword.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Putting Down the Puritans

"The Post-Puritan Paradigm of Early American Religious History" by Charles L. Cohen, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Oct. 1997), Box 8781, Williamsburg, Va. 23187–8781.

Starting in 1933 with the publication of *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650*, and continuing with such classics as the two-volume *The New England Mind* (1939–53), historian Perry Miller put the Puritans of 17th-century New England on the scholarly map. Without quite intending to do so, Miller turned them into the archetypal Americans, the elect of God with a special mission to create a New Jerusalem. In recent years, however, historians stressing the varieties of colonial religious experience have challenged the idea that the Puritans were all that important.

"In Miller's tale," notes Cohen, a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, "the New England saints designed an impressive intellectual edifice grounded on the covenanted relationship between themselves and God only to lament its buckling as succeeding generations failed to reproduce the founders' piety. [Jonathan] Edwards [1703–58] salvaged the scheme by modernizing an outmoded metaphysics with the enlightened harmonies of Isaac Newton and John Locke, and revivalists spread the Puritan dynamic of sin and redemption to south and west. By the Revolution, the New England mind had become America's."