

PRESS & MEDIA

The King of Radio

“Still Going” by Marc Fisher, in *American Journalism Review* (Oct. 1998), Univ. of Maryland, 1117 Journalism Bldg., College Park, Md. 20742-7111.

“HELLO AMERICANS! THIS IS PAUL HARVEY! SSTTAANNDD BYYY FOR NEEEEEEWS!!!!”

At age 80, famed radio commentator Paul Harvey, opening each newscast with this trademark line, is still going strong from his studio on Paul Harvey Drive in Chicago, reports Fisher, a *Washington Post* editor. Culling arch, outrageous, and heartwarming items from the wire services and newspapers, he serves them up each day in his distinctive staccato style (complete with . . . pregnant pauses) to more than 1,300 radio stations, from rural backwaters to large cities.

“Dismissed decades ago as a clichéd relic of Richard Nixon’s Silent Majority, derided by the media elite as a flag-waving, red-bashing dispensary of easy bromides and patriotic pap,” writes Fisher, “Paul Harvey News & Comment’ remains by leaps and bounds the most popular program on American radio.” Harvey’s newscasts, which

air mornings and middays, regularly attract five of the 10 largest radio audiences each week, Fisher reports. Harvey’s top-rated 8:30 A.M. newscast attracts an average of five million listeners, while 2.5 million tune in to his daily afternoon “Rest of the Story” recitations, “those dramatic, if formulaic, historical vignettes in which that failed painter turns out to be . . . Adolf Hitler.”

Harvey still celebrates Main Street and believes that the business of America is business. But his political views have changed somewhat. Once an archconservative backer of Senator Joseph McCarthy, he later became a critic of President Richard Nixon’s Vietnam War policies and an advocate of abortion rights. He

now finds himself “smack in the middle of the road,” says Fisher.

“The last of the wartime generation of radio commentators . . . is also a bridge to the new era of radio talkers,” Fisher points out. Rush Limbaugh and others “have stretched



Paul Harvey, for Middle America

Carving Up the Times

Author Richard Reeves, a reporter for *The New York Times* during 1966–71, tells in *Media Studies Journal* (Fall 1998) how the *Times* changed after it created a separate Metro section in the 1970s.

[The] lasting importance of the Metro section did not have as much to do with the reported as with the reporters. Instantly, local coverage became second-front and second-class Times citizenship. No more Homer Bigarts with Pulitzers from two wars were sent out to cover fires in Yonkers. Then came the “Sections”—and still further sectioning of the paper. Both the staff and the coverage of the paper were fractionalized.

The “product,” as they say now, may have become more attractive to niche advertisers. But it may have alienated many readers. People busy pursuing happiness can use the bulk and confusion of the paper as an excuse (or reason) not to buy it every day. The Times may be better—I think it is—but now only parts of it are necessary as opposed to nice. Who needs pages of recipes, suburban lifestyles and shopping hints?

the concept of radio commentary from minutes to hours, but remained true to Harvey's basic formula of personalizing the news, turning the events of the day into a longform diary of American life." The continued popu-

larity of Harvey and his formula, Fisher suggests, is a reflection of "an American craving for belonging, an insistent desire for community in a nation that has grown . . . scattered and rootless."

Media Theory Down Under

"The Poverty of Media Theory" by Keith Windschuttle, in *Quadrant* (Mar. 1998), P.O. Box 1495, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia.

Australian students aspiring to careers in journalism are flocking to programs granting degrees in communications and media studies. Little do they realize, writes Windschuttle, author of *The Killing of History* (1997), that the large doses of media theory they will have to swallow are directly opposed to journalism's underlying principles.

Those principles, he notes, include a commitment to "reporting the truth about what occurs in the world," and to informing their readers, listeners, and viewers, not just pleasing their employers or advertisers. And, of course, journalists should be committed to good, clear writing. "However, in most of the media theory that is taught within Australian communications and media degrees," Windschuttle says, "none of these principles are upheld. In fact, they are specifically denied, either by argument or example."

Australian institutions of higher learning that began to offer journalism as a subject in the mid-1970s felt it necessary, he says, to offer something besides mere vocational education. Enter British cultural studies, a movement created by English literary critics, most of them Marxists. In their view, objective understanding of any "real world" is impossible; the "real world" is nothing but a "text" to be read by literary analysis. By the late 1970s, Windschuttle writes, media students were being taught "that capitalist ideology was generated in the form of a system of linguis-

tic rules by the agents of the ruling class who worked for the media. Ideology was transmitted by communication signals and lodged not in people's conscious minds but at a level of 'deep structure' in their unconscious." The readers, listeners, and viewers, in short, were "little more than robots."

Over the years, Windschuttle notes, the fashions and gurus in media theory have changed, but assumptions about the influence of language and culture have not. Just as French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard claims there is no way to be sure that the 1991 Persian Gulf War really took place, so media theorist John Hartley, until recently a professor at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Australia, maintains that audiences are mere fictions serving "the need of the imagining institution."

Once exposed to media theory, most journalism students come to regard it, Windschuttle says, as "a largely incomprehensible and odious gauntlet they must run."

Most of the media theorists in Australia "have never even set foot inside a newspaper office or television studio," Windschuttle observes. He would like to see the veteran journalists who also teach in Australia's universities step up to write general textbooks and develop "their own theory"—in short, compete "head on" with the addled theorists. Most of the students, he suggests, would be very grateful.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Does Knowledge Destroy Faith?

"Rationality and the 'Religious Mind'" by Laurence Iannaccone, Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke, in *Economic Inquiry* (July 1998), Texas A&M Univ., Dept. of Economics, College Station, Texas 77843-4228.

Social scientists have long been inclined to look upon religion as an irrational vestige of the premodern world, destined any day now for

extinction. *Everyone knows* that as science advances, religion retreats, and that as people become more educated, they grow less reli-