

Local TV news programs have become Americans' "most popular source of information," says Hess, but their diet of crime, fires, and fluff leaves "little room for stories about municipal government or elections." A survey of 13 top-market cities during the month before the 1996 elections showed that only seven percent of the stories were about politics (compared with 22 percent about crime).

Hess doesn't think the shift is merely a reaction to political change. Political power

may have shifted from Washington to the states, but coverage of the statehouses has also declined. (See *WQ*, Autumn 1998, pp. 127–129.) Rather, he says, the shift emerged from within the news business itself. An influential 1980 report by focus group researcher Ruth Clark for the American Newspaper Publishers Association and work by TV consultants pointed the way toward "consumer-driven" journalism. "Self-help information was in. Celebrity features were in. Hard news about government was out."

Big Brother or Small Beer?

"Prime-time Propaganda," "Propaganda for Dollars," and "The Drug War Gravy Train" by Daniel Forbes, in *Salon* (Jan. 13, 14, Mar. 31, 2000), www.salon.com, and "White House Blasts *Salon*" by Robert Housman, in *Salon* (Apr. 20, 2000), www.salon.com.

Should the federal government have a say in the story line of *Chicago Hope* or other TV series? Should it be providing magazines with financial credits for articles whose content it approves? In its war against drugs, charges freelance writer Forbes, the government has been engaging in precisely those practices.

In late 1997, Congress authorized the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to buy \$1 billion in antidrug ads over five years, so long as the TV networks or other media provided matching antidrug ads or editorial content free.

Not wanting to give up lucrative advertising, six networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, the WB, Fox, and, this past season, UPN—elected to use programming for some of the matching antidrug messages. According to Forbes: "In certain cases, the drug czar's office was allowed to review scripts and suggest changes before a show was broadcast. In some cases, the networks inserted government-approved anti-drug messages into TV sit-

coms and dramas in order to satisfy their obligations to their government 'client.'" Virtually none of the producers and writers involved in crafting the antidrug episodes knew of the arrangement with the government, however.

Forbes also says that *Parade* and five other magazines submitted some published articles for ad credit. But the drug control office did not review articles before publication. The editors involved all denied being influenced.

Perhaps because few question the government's antidrug message, the nation's usually hyperactive media watchers by and large have yawned at Forbes's disclosures. Tom Goldstein, dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism, told Forbes the arrangement with the magazines struck him as "highly dubious." But Jacqueline Leo, president of the American Society of Magazine Editors, said, "Given all the things editors can be pressured about, this doesn't ring my chimes."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

God Knows

"'We Speak to God with Our Thoughts': Abelard and the Implications of Private Communication with God" by Susan R. Kramer, in *Church History* (Mar. 2000), Divinity School, Duke Univ., Box 90975, Durham, N.C. 27708–0975.

During the "renaissance" of the 12th century, religious thinkers such as Peter Abelard (1079–1142?)—the famous French theolo-

gian who is best known to nonscholars for his tragic love affair with Héloïse—proposed a new purpose for penance, one that reflect-