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

ed the age's heightened interest in the self, writes Kramer, a graduate student in history at Columbia University.

In his classic *Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927), medievalist Charles Homer Haskins argued that the century's cultural and scientific flowering gave birth to modern Western civilization. More recent scholars, Kramer notes, have also examined religious thought in the period, finding "a new level of self-awareness or concern with the inner life."

Before the 12th century, Kramer says, the purpose of penance was to reconcile the sinner to the Catholic Church, "which then mediated with God on the sinner's behalf." In Abelard's influential interpretation, however, the object became the sinner's *direct* reconciliation to God.

Abelard—whose theological thinking twice won him condemnations for heresy from ecclesiastical councils—accepted the prevailing doctrine that a sinner's reconciliation to God had three parts: repentance, confession, and satisfaction. But he regarded oral confession to a priest or others as, in a sense, superfluous: God, being omniscient, already knew the sinner's mind. "[W]ith the sigh and contrition of the heart which we call true repentance . . . we are instantly reconciled to God and we gain pardon for the preceding sin," he maintained.

Even so, confession—which was generally regarded as obligatory by the early-12th-century schoolmen (and which was mandated by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 as an annual duty for Christians)—still was useful, Abelard maintained.

In his *Ethics*, Kramer says, Abelard "explains that the faithful confess their sins to one another in order to obtain prayers from one another and 'because in the humility of confession a large part of satisfaction is performed and we obtain a greater indulgence in the relaxation of our penance.' Confession to priests is also instrumental for the imposition of appropriate satisfaction, although we may punish our sins sufficiently according to our own sentencing. Thus, the primary purpose of confession is to make known what had been hidden." Though God alone could truly judge that hidden, inner self, "shame and its expiation are human matters."

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Neandertal Scientists

"Who Were the Neandertals?" by Kate Wong, in *Scientific American* (Apr. 2000), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017–1111.

Were Neandertals (a.k.a. Neander*th*als) more like modern humans than many of us care to admit? Were they (gasp!) our ancestors? A fierce scientific debate rages, reports Wong, a *Scientific American* staff writer.

Neandertals first came to researchers' attention in 1856, when a partial skeleton—a heavy skull with arched browridge and massive limb bones—turned up in Germany's Neander Valley. Scientists assigned the newfound hominids to their own species, *Homo neanderthalensis*. Then, a half-century later, came the sensational French discovery of the "Old Man" of La Chapelle-aux-Saints, prompting scientists to draw the now-familiar portrait of Neandertals as primitive protohumans. After 200,000 years in Europe and western Asia, they said, the dimwitted brutes—stooped, lumbering, apelike—were driven to extinction, unable to compete once intelligent, sophisticated *Homo sapiens* arrived on the scene.

Scientists subsequently determined that Neandertals actually had the same upright posture and way of moving as modern humans have. Even so, such characteristic Neandertal features as robust skeletons, short limbs and barrel chests, prominent browridges and low, sloping foreheads, protruding midfaces and chinless jaws, says Wong, still clearly indicate to many paleoanthropologists "an evolutionary trajectory separate from that of moderns."

Other scientists, such as Milford H.