

says Mac Donald, “Edwards chides them: ‘Are you looking at the people following you around in the store?’”

Likewise at Exeter, according to college counselor and dorm adviser Cary Einhaus, “Diversity is absolutely explicit. We talk about it at the dining-room table, at faculty meetings. It’s part of our common language here.” Or, as Mac Donald puts it: “Young people quickly learn that their teachers see an awareness of difference, not commonality, as the highest civic good.” An Indian student at Phillips Academy recounted in the school newspaper how back home in Texas “I was never made to feel that I was any different [from the white students] and the kids never found the need or desire to speak about race relations.”

But at Phillips, her classmates “tend to classify the community into its various racial groups.” All to the good, in the new atmosphere of Phillips: “I have never felt more Indian,” she wrote.

All of the top prep schools actively recruit minorities, despite the fact that black and Hispanic admission test scores

are often lower than those of white and Asian American students. Attempting to empower these students by emphasizing their racial differences is wrong-headed, Mac Donald argues: “A student who is failing trigonometry will be helped by tutoring and hard work,” not by reading books on racial identity.

The race and gender agenda also tends to crowd out traditional learning, Mac Donald says. One English teacher at Exeter told her that “most Exeter graduates have no idea whether Chaucer preceded Yeats.” Literature courses are fractured into “identities,” such as “Gay Voices and Themes in Literature and Film” or “The Voices of Women Writers.”

The private preparatory schools, says Mac Donald, once pulled talented youth “from all classes and all parts of the nation—whom they could fashion into a cadre of informed, public-spirited leaders.” Today, they are in danger of squandering an “unprecedented opportunity: to create an integrated ruling class that will carry us beyond our self-lacerating obsessions with race.”

PRESS & MEDIA

Friendly Fire

“The Civilian Casualty Conundrum” by Lucinda Fleeson, in *American Journalism Review* (Apr. 2002), Univ. of Maryland, 1117 Journalism Bldg., College Park, Md. 20742-7111.

How many civilians did U.S. forces inadvertently kill in the war in Afghanistan? Critics, many eager to show that the number was large—more perhaps than the thousands of Americans killed on September 11—complained that the U.S. news media soft-pedaled civilian deaths and were too slow coming up with a total. Fleeson, a former reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, is having none of it.

“Obtaining accurate accounts of civilian deaths is one of the most difficult challenges of war reporting,” she writes. “Journalists must weigh conflicting information, exaggerations and lies as they constantly debate: How many sources do we need? How reliable are eyewitnesses, who might be in shock or have political agendas? What good are second-hand accounts?” Compounding the usual

difficulties were Afghanistan’s terrain and “near Stone Age conditions.” Correspondents had to travel in armed convoys and risk encounters with “bandits, warring tribes, land mines and stray bombs.”

Unfazed by the absence of hard data, some American academics used the Internet to gather news accounts from around the world and came up with their own estimates of civilian deaths: 3,767 as of last December 6, said Marc W. Herold, an economist at the University of New Hampshire, Durham. But the studies depended entirely on others’ accounts, including ones that uncritically accepted second-hand reports. Herold, for example, relied on an opinion piece that merely asserted that 400 civilians had been slaughtered and on other reports that repeated unconfirmed Taliban claims. The foreign

press, which displayed reports of civilian casualties more prominently than the U.S. news media did, gave more credence to such Taliban claims.

In January the Associated Press did a painstaking on-the-scene reconstruction. Laura King, an AP special correspondent, poured over hospital records, visited bomb-

ing sites, interviewed eyewitnesses and officials, and coordinated reports from fellow AP reporters elsewhere in Afghanistan. Cautioning that the figure King arrived at still was not definitive, Fleeson writes that “the February 11 story concluded that the civilian death toll probably ranged from 500 to 600.”

Misreading the Arab ‘Street’

“Media Coverage of the Gallup Poll of ‘The Islamic World’” (Mar. 6, 2002), National Council on Public Polls’ Polling Review Board, www.ncpp.org/islamic_world.htm; “The Poll That Didn’t Add Up” by Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, *The Washington Post* (Mar. 23, 2002), 1150 15th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20071.

“In poll, Islamic world says Arabs not involved in 9/11.” That was the shocking headline on the front page of *USA Today* on February 27. Reporting on a Gallup poll of residents in nine predominantly Muslim countries, the article noted (as did reports from other news organizations) that 53 percent of the respondents viewed the United States unfavorably and that only 18 percent in the six countries that let Gallup ask the question believed that Arabs carried out the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Shocking proof that the Muslim world hates America? Hardly.

The National Council on Public Polls, a leading professional watchdog organization, called the Gallup study “important and fascinating,” but faulted *USA Today* and Cable Network News (CNN) for making it seem (as did other news organizations) to be a study of “the Muslim world.” Only about 40 percent of the world’s Muslim population lives in the nine surveyed countries (Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco,

EXCERPT

Who Needs the Evening News?

Defenders of evening-news broadcasts tend to describe them as a redoubt of sobriety and responsibility in a “news environment” dominated by loudmouthed punditry (think Chris Matthews and Bill O’Reilly) and gross sensationalism. And in a sense, critics say much the same thing: that the problem with the nightly news is that it’s too dull and dowdy to compete.

*Having recently spent three weeks as one of the 25 million or so Americans who watch the networks’ flagship broadcasts (a habit that, like many millions of other Americans, I gave up long ago), I have a news flash for both sides: If the network news divisions think they are producing an evening broadcast so noble that it deserves to be defended from the corporate huns, they’re kidding themselves. And if the evening news isn’t dramatic enough for those corporate honchos, it’s not for lack of trying. It’s not just the much-noted increase in “soft” news features that now eats up a large portion of each broadcast; even the hard news now comes with a hard sell in which emotional impact trumps intellectual content with appalling consistency. The evening anchors may still look and talk like paragons of wisdom and integrity right out of our nostalgia-clouded memory of *The Good Old Days*, but their broadcasts are something else.*

—Rob Walker, a columnist for *Slate*, in *The New Republic* (May 20, 2002)