

the nation's biggest experiment with choice, but it's too soon to judge results. The best studies of voucher programs—which generally allow parents the widest array of school choices to put their kids in any school, public or private—show “modest to moderate test score improvements for some, but not all, students who participate.” In New York City, programs that allow students to choose to attend certain public schools within their local school district appear to have helped lift test scores of *all* kids, including those who did not exercise choice. Perhaps, the authors speculate, the competition for students induced all the local schools to improve. Their bottom line: “While not all of these studies conclude that choice enhances performance, it is significant to note that the best ones do, and that [we] did not find *any* study that documents significantly lower performance in choice schools.”

What about concerns that students who enter private schools under voucher plans won't absorb democratic values? Studies show that “students in private schools, and

particularly students in Catholic schools, are either more tolerant of others and know more American civic values than others, or are statistically equal to public school students.”

The “most important question” about school choice is “stratification,” note Teske and Schneider. There's not much question that white, better-educated, and more affluent parents are better informed about school choices than other parents and are more likely to take advantage of chances to improve their child's schooling. Some systems seem to promote more racial and economic separation than others: Magnet schools perform poorly in this respect, while charter schools tend to better reflect the makeup of the general population. The authors say aggressive outreach efforts aimed at poor and minority families might mitigate the problem. They also wonder if the stratification seen in some school choice systems is significantly worse than what occurs in more conventional systems. To answer such questions, of course, more studies are needed.

PRESS & MEDIA

Covering the War

A Survey of Recent Articles

It's too early for anyone to assess the news media's coverage of the war on terrorism—that will likely take as long as the assessment of the conduct of the war itself. Professional criticism of print and TV coverage in the war's early days has been spotty. But the judgment from one quarter has been swift and severe: A November 16 Gallup poll (www.gallup.com) shows that only 43 percent of the public approves of the news media's handling of the war on terrorism. No other institution—including the Postal Service—had less than a 60 percent approval rating in the poll.

What have reporters and editors done to deserve such obloquy? They certainly haven't rocked the boat, according to John R. MacArthur, publisher of *Harper's* and author of *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (1992). Writing in the *Nation* (Nov. 19, 2001), he divides his scorn between the

Bush administration, which made it “next to impossible” for reporters to get near the combat in Afghanistan, and the “supine” press. “Evidently afflicted with a guilt complex after Vietnam, the owners of the major newspapers and networks long ago ceased to protest Pentagon manipulation, and now they feel justified by simple-minded polls that show reflexive support for ‘military security.’”

Almost from the day hijacked jets crashed into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, most discussion of press coverage has focused on what it means for American reporters to be objective in such a conflict. The debate has had a series of defining moments: a teary Dan Rather's declaration that he stood ready to “line up” behind the commander in chief; Tom Brokaw's publicized decision not to wear an American flag lapel pin on TV; the offhand statement by ABC News president David

Westin that he had “no opinion” on whether the Pentagon was a legitimate military target; and the memo from CNN chair Walter Isaacson telling reporters to balance images of U.S. attacks in Afghanistan with reminders of the assaults that provoked them.

Pointing to the Westin statement, Dorothy Rabinowitz writes in the *Wall Street Journal* (Nov. 6, 2001) that the fear of violating the neutrality principle is one of the “terrors” that dominate today’s newspeople; their World War II predecessors were capable of questioning the official line, but “the only terror” they felt was that the war effort might fail.

In *U.S. News and World Report* (Nov. 19, 2001), Rabinowitz’s fellow conservative columnist John Leo takes a different tack, scolding the news media for being “overly submissive,” notably in its “timid” response” to Washington’s request that the TV news networks edit any statements by Osama bin Laden. People in the news media “know they will lose audience if they seem to resist pressure

from Washington or deal neutrally with terrorists,” Leo notes. And war does impose special responsibilities. “But the news business has to find a way to say clearly that it expresses its patriotism by protecting the public’s right to know what’s going on.”

In an article written before September 11, former ABC News correspondent C. Robert Zelnick surveys the history of military-press relations since World War II. “Documented incidents of reporting that actually harmed the United States military or security interests are nonexistent,” he writes in the *Responsive Community* (Winter 2001–02), “although there are a handful of instances where irresponsible press conduct could have produced serious harm.” Defense officials who try to keep the press on a “short leash” are simply aiming to control the “editorial slant of what is reported.”

During the 1991 Gulf War, the Pentagon sharply restricted press access to the battle-

EXCERPT

Reporter Behind the Veil

Hoda el-Salem is a young reporter with a good idea: She wants to write about what the teenage boys in her city do with their idle time after school. She knows it’s a big problem. She sees them herself, hanging out in parking lots, getting into trouble. And she knows the government is worried. Officials have proposed some new after-school recreation centers.

But Mrs. Hoda (as Saudis would address her) can’t drive over to the mall parking lot to interview the young men loitering there. She can’t talk with a kid at a fast-food joint, or wait outside his school. She can’t even call her government source on the telephone to ask about the recreation centers.

When Hoda goes outside her house in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, she has to put on a long, thick black cloak that covers every inch of her body. Then she puts on a black veil that covers all of her hair, and another black veil that covers all of her face. She can’t drive. She can’t talk to a man other than her husband or brothers, usually not even by phone.

She could fax a man some questions. But to do that, she has to get the fax approved by her editor. And that involves another fax, because the editor sits on the other side of a wall at their Arabic-language newspaper, Al-Riyadh. Hoda has never met her editor face to face, because he is a man and he works on the men’s side of the building.

Hoda works on the ladies’ side, in a small set of rooms sealed off from the rest of the building. To get there, she bypasses the front entrance of the modern skyscraper and instead heads around back, to a small, unmarked door near the loading dock, with a security camera above.

—Sally Buzbee, an Associated Press reporter, in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept.–Oct. 2001)

field, but it subsequently agreed with media representatives to operating principles that give Zelnick “some hope” for better access. In late November, a press contingent joined U.S. marines who established a base near Kandahar in Afghanistan but it operated under very tight restrictions, according to the *Washington Post* (Dec. 7, 2001). Meanwhile, correspondents operating independently in Afghanistan proceeded cautiously after eight journalists were killed by local forces. And the press increasingly questioned the government’s policies, especially on the home front.

In the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Nov.–Dec. 2001), lawyer and civil liberties advocate Floyd Abrams writes, “I am more concerned that we will fail to take terrorism seriously enough than that we will fail to protect our liberties diligently enough.” But as Washington inevitably encroaches on the privacy of citizens, press scrutiny becomes ever more important. “Give no ground on First Amendment issues,” he urges.

There’s also been a certain amount of introspection and self-criticism among jour-

nalists. *New York Times* staff photographer Vincent Laforet warned of media sensationalism in an October 25 note from Pakistan on the *Sports Shooter* Web site (www.manginphotography.com): “Don’t trust anything you see on TV and be [leery] of some of the things you read. . . . We covered a pro-Taliban demonstration last week attended by maybe 5,000 protesters. CNN stated there were 50,000. The BBC estimated 40,000. We’re continually hearing of ‘violent clashes with police’ when the TV stations report on non-violent demonstrations we covered ourselves.”

In *American Journalism Review* (Nov. 2001), former network news correspondent Deborah Potter writes that while the TV networks’ “coverage of the attacks and the recovery efforts was generally laudable, the networks’ efforts to explain the ‘why’ and the ‘what next’ seemed feeble by comparison.” Severe cutbacks in foreign coverage since 1989 have left the networks without enough infrastructure and experienced foreign correspondents to explain the wider world to American TV audiences, she says.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Philosophers vs. Philosophes

“The Idea of Compassion: The British vs. the French Enlightenment” by Gertrude Himmelfarb, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 2001), 1112 16th St., N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

We’re too quick to associate the 18th-century Enlightenment with the French philosophes. There was a British Enlightenment as well, and for Himmelfarb, professor emeritus of history at the Graduate School of the City University of New York and the author, most recently, of *One Nation, Two Cultures* (1999), it was the more admirable of the two.

The third Earl of Shaftesbury was the father of the British Enlightenment. In 1711, he introduced the concepts that would be key to British philosophical and moral discourse for the rest of the century, including “social virtues,” “natural affections,” “moral sense,” “moral sentiments,” “benevolence,” “sympathy,” and “compassion.” That last concept played a far larger part than either self-interest or reason in the British Enlightenment. Indeed, it was the

unique achievement of Enlightenment British-style to transform the religious virtue of compassion into a secular virtue. Unlike the French philosophes, British moral philosophers such as Adam Smith thought reason secondary to social virtues of the sort Shaftesbury proposed, and they invoked not reason but an innate moral sense as the basis for those virtues. Smith went so far as to make the idea of compassion the central principle of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”

Himmelfarb argues that the religious revival begun in England in 1738 by John