

but it mattered a great deal what they were paying attention to. Surveys conducted for the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, with which the authors are associated, showed that a narrow majority of Americans who said they got their news chiefly from the print media got none of the three facts wrong. Not surprisingly, those readers who said they paid close attention to the news were more inclined to get those facts right.

That wasn't the case, by and large, with the 80 percent of Americans who got most of their news from radio or television. In fact, among viewers who said they chiefly relied on Fox News (which set the theme for its war reporting with an American flag in a corner of the screen), the level of misperception *increased* the more closely they watched. For example, 80 percent of the close watchers thought that clear evidence had been found linking Iraq to Al Qaeda. Only 42 percent of

more casual Fox viewers got that idea.

Overall, 80 percent of Fox viewers got at least one of the three facts wrong. Other networks did not produce sparkling results either. The viewer "failure" rates: CBS, 71 percent; ABC, 61; CNN, 55; and NBC, 55. Among the small minority of Americans who got their news chiefly by watching PBS or listening to NPR, only 23 percent did not have all three facts straight. So the quality of news coverage did matter. Some news organizations, the authors say, failed "to play the critical role of doggedly challenging the administration" in power.

And news coverage wasn't the largest factor involved in misperceptions. People who said they intended to vote this year for President George W. Bush were 3.7 times more likely than others to misperceive at least one of the three facts. One explanation: Bush and other high officials made statements that could be construed as encouraging the misperceptions.

## *Stop the Presses?*

"My Times" by Howell Raines, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2004),  
77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114.

Is the day nearing when *The New York Times* will be no more? That prospect—and not the scandal over reporter Jayson Blair's deceptions that led last year to Howell Raines's resignation as the paper's executive editor—is one of the more interesting subjects of this much-noted article.

When Raines took the helm of the *Times*, six days before the events of September 11, 2001, the paper's circulation had fallen by 100,000 or more from its early 1990s peaks of 1.8 million on Sundays and 1.2 million on weekdays. (Roughly a third of the papers are distributed in New York City, another third in the rest of New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut, and the balance in the other 47 states.) Readers and potential readers—40 million of them, by one count—had become "smarter, more sophisticated, and broader in their range of curiosities and interests than the *Times* had," writes Raines. Though he assumes that newspapers will one day migrate entirely to the Web, the rivals he seems to fear the most all exist cur-

rently on paper; they include not just traditional daily competitors such as *The Wall Street Journal* but publications as various as *The New York Review of Books*, *The Economist*, and *Entertainment Weekly*.

In the top spot at the paper, Raines saw himself as a "change agent," and he engaged in a titanic struggle with "the newsroom's lethargy and complacency," its chronic slowness in anticipating the news, and its indifference to competition. The *Times*, he argues, remained strong in traditional areas, such as foreign-affairs reporting, but about culture, social trends, and business it had become stultifyingly dull: "One of our dirty little in-house secrets was that even we, who were paid to read it, often couldn't hack the Sunday paper."

The fall of the twin towers sparked a "magnificent" months-long effort at the *Times*, but the "culture of complaint" among certain segments of the staff was unrelenting. (Raines contributes some bitter complaints of his own about entrenched

mediocrity at the paper.) The Blair scandal brought staff members' unhappiness with Raines and his leadership to a head, and that discontent was at least as responsible for his downfall as the scandal itself.

The print version of the *Times* is the company's "economic engine." But ad revenues peaked at \$1.3 billion in 2000 and have since fallen to about \$1.1 billion. What Raines fears is that the Sulzberger family might eventually be tempted to sell

its controlling interest in the paper to an owner more interested in the bottom line than in journalistic quality. The *Times* "is the indispensable newsletter of the United States' political, diplomatic, governmental, academic, and professional communities. . . . And yet a harsh reality of our era is that if the *Times* ever ceased to exist, it would not be reinvented by any media company now in operation, in this country or in the world."

EXCERPT

## *The Newsroom's New Gods*

*Never so many newspaper investigations of newspapers: internal investigations, outside investigations, hand-wringing, soul-searching. All of it important. And yet, I'd like to suggest, there has been one investigation that has been left undone, one phenomenon left unexamined, even though it has reshaped the entire culture of newspapers—some might say the entire media culture itself. And might bear some responsibility for the mindset behind the scandals.*

*I'm speaking about the culture, indeed the cult, of management theory, about the management theory gurus who have become, as a rare outside study of the subject calls them, the "unacknowledged legislators" of American business culture. Who have been given a virtually free hand to "re-engineer" the way newspapers define their mission.*

*Could it be that little or no investigation of these consultants appears in newspapers because newspaper executives are so in thrall to consultant culture that reporters and editors fear to offend them by pointing out that the consultants have no clothes? Do newspaper management consultants enjoy the same immunity from examination that [former USA Today reporter] Jack Kelley's fabrications did?*

—Ron Rosenbaum, columnist, in *The New York Observer* (May 3, 2004)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

## *Lingering Doubters*

"'Godless Communism' and Its Legacies" by Stephen Bates, in *Society* (March–April 2004), Rutgers—The State University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, N.J. 08854.

Why are so many Americans so hard on atheists? In a poll last year, a majority (52 percent) took a dim view of those who deny God's existence, and—in the crucial symbolic test—more than 40 percent said they would not vote for an unbeliever for president. *WQ* literary editor Bates, who is writing a book about secularization in the United States, contends that Americans are suffering a hangover from the 1950s.

During that Cold War decade, he says, "a common enemy seemed to draw God and country closer together." Many Americans believed that what differentiated the Soviet Union from the United States was not the communist state's totalitarianism and terror, or its denial of basic freedoms, or even its command economy, but rather its rejection of God. Senator Joseph McCarthy warned in 1950 that the "final, all-out battle" would