PRESS & TELEVISION

When Newsmen Look at Newsmen

"Media, Rate Thyselves" by Michael J. Robinson, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Dec. 1983), 2233 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Suite 442, Washington, D.C. 20007.

U.S. journalists are often criticized for being too "negative" about the people and institutions they describe. They may be, says Robinson, director of the Media Analysis Project at George Washington University, but at least they are consistent: These days, journalists are also hard on one another.

Robinson surveyed network TV news broadcasts and six major newspapers and newsmagazines during the first quarter of 1983 to see what the Fourth Estate said about itself. The search yielded 93 editorial commentaries and hard news stories. Thirty pieces were neutral in tone. Among the remainder, negative items outnumbered the positive by 3 to 1.

The major news media-related story during the survey period concerned a Jacksonville, Alabama, TV crew that filmed an attempted self-immolation without intervening to stop it—clearly "bad press" for journalism. On other matters, commentators offered explicit criticism, ranging from Milton Friedman's outburst of annoyance, in *Newsweek*, over the media's "liberal bias," to Bill Moyers's critique of "shallowness" in TV news, aired on the CBS Evening News.

Many of the jabs were self-serving, notes Robinson. Print journalists needled their counterparts on the network news shows, who in turn chided local broadcasters. (Later in the summer, the networks gloated over the case of Chris Craft, a Kansas City TV anchorwoman who sued her employer, Metromedia, charging sex discrimination.) The *Wall Street Journal* ran a long article about the networks' troubles with lawsuits for defamation and libel. Robinson found one consistent exception to the snipe-at-thy-neighbor pattern: the *Washington Post*'s ombudsman Robert McCloskey, who six times discussed criticism leveled at the *Post* and sided with the critics five times.

It is fortunate that newsmen enjoy harping on the weaknesses of their rivals, Robinson concludes. Otherwise, who would police the press?

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Anti-Zionist Jews

"The State of World Jewry" by Norman Podhoretz, in *Commentary* (Dec. 1983), 165 East 65th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

The repercussions of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, designed to eliminate the Palestine Liberation Organization's strongholds, are still being felt among Jews around the world, but only a few have turned their backs on the Jewish state.

Protests erupted in Israel after the Lebanese Christians' 1982 attack on Moslem refugee camps at Shatila and Sabra, in Israeli-occupied Lebanon. But Podhoretz puts Israel "at the bottom of the list of those responsible."

Jewish doubts about Israel predate the 1982 war. Even after the creation of the Jewish state in 1948, notes Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*, there remained a minority of "anti-Zionist Jews." Some Orthodox Jews saw the establishment of the new state as a "forcing" of the messianic age promised in the Old Testament. Reform Jews feared that it was "a regression to tribalism," and socialists viewed it as "a monument to reactionary bourgeois nationalism." But when the Six-Day War of 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur War threatened Israel's survival and revived memories of the Holocaust, most such reservations vanished. For the first time in modern history, it was possible to talk of a world Jewish community.

In the West, Jews showed more interest in Jewish culture and religious observance. Despite official disapproval, Jews protested their second-class status in the Soviet Union, which has the third largest Jewish community in the world (behind the United States and Israel).

Yet, Podhoretz says, many of the former dissenters offered only conditional support to Israel, contingent upon its living up to their high ideals and behaving "in ways that they could easily approve." The Lebanon affair "became the occasion for going public with a reconsideration that had been brewing since the accession of Menachem Begin," the nation's first nonsocialist prime minister, in 1977.

The U.S. news media, however, vastly exaggerated the number of dissenters, Podhoretz contends. For most Jews in Israel, living "in a murderously hostile environment . . . had the enormously healthy effect of

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clearing their minds" of any doubts about Israel's right to exist and to act. Jews in the Diaspora also remained firm in their commitment: Nearly 90 percent of American Jews polled in a 1983 public opinion survey said that they were pro- or very pro-Israel.

Until the mid-1970s, neighboring Arab states made no secret of their desire to erase Israel. Now, they proclaim that they will settle for a Palestinian state on the West Bank, and that seeming concession has sown discord among many Jews about Israel's jeopardy. But the overwhelming majority of Jews around the world realize that the Arabs are still intent on Israel's destruction, Podhoretz maintains, and they have found "the moral courage to hold firm against overwhelming external pressures and insidious inner doubts."

Savagery and Sentimentality

"What is Wrong With Sentimentality?" by Mark Jefferson, in *Mind* (Oct. 1983), Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 108 Cowley Rd., Oxford 0X4 1JF England.

To be called "sentimental" in the 18th century was to be praised for one's emotional refinement. Today, the word connotes the sort of silliness seen in those who give Christmas presents to their dogs or get teary-eyed over the virtues of small-town America.

Sentimentality also has a darker side. The sentimentalist oversimplifies reality, making the object of his emotion sweeter and more blameless than it is. The danger arises, writes Jefferson, a British student of philosophy, because anything that threatens this picture of perfect innocence must be viewed, equally unrealistically, as "something unambiguously worthy of hatred."

Sentimentalists are not alone in misrepresenting reality. The "melodramatic" man, for example, seeks and finds emotional tumult where others might see none. But such fantasies are harmless, whereas sentimentality, writes Jefferson, creates "dangerous fictions"—fantasies that can lead to brutality.

Jefferson cites E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, where the British community's vague dislike for the chilly Miss Quested is suddenly transformed into the "sweetest and warmest" feelings when she claims to have been assaulted by an Indian man. As a sentimental symbol of the "purity . . . of English womanhood," she inspires violent loyalty. Even the chief local British official feels the urge to "flog every native" in revenge. In the American South, sentimental notions about the purity of Southern womanhood spurred many a lynch mob to action. During World War I, U.S. propaganda posters often capitalized on such emotions to mobilize domestic support for the war effort—depicting, for example, Belgium as an innocent woman under assault by a foul "Hun."

Obviously, sentimentality is often just what it seems—harmless, perhaps embarrassing. Life without any illusions would be "drab," writes Jefferson. But the illusions fostered by sentimentality can be surprisingly fraught with moral peril.