

Ford and other foundations, she says, have poured money into universities in efforts to promote “diversity,” ethnic studies, and gender studies. Between 1972 and ’92, women’s studies alone received \$36 million from Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mott, Mellon, and other foundations.

Though some conservative foundations have risen to prominence in recent years, Mac Donald says, they are vastly outnumbered, and outspent, by liberal foundations. In 1994, while the Olin Foundation, the leading funder of conservative scholarship on campus, gave a total of \$13 million in grants, the Ford Foundation contributed \$42 million in the fields of education and culture alone.

Despite their increased influence in



Disorders at a junior high school in Brooklyn’s Ocean Hill-Brownsville district brought police there in 1968.

American life, Lemann observes, foundations are largely spared the sort of scrutiny that government routinely gets from the news media and the voters. “That ought to change,” he believes. Mac Donald would doubtless agree.

PRESS & MEDIA

Misreporting the AIDS Story

“Aiding AIDS: The Story of a Media Virus” by David R. Boldt, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Fall 1996), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921. (*Forbes MediaCritic* has since ceased publication.)

In a *Wall Street Journal* exposé last year, reporters Amanda Bennett and Anita Sharpe revealed that at a 1987 meeting, officials of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) decided to exaggerate the risks to heterosexuals of contracting the AIDS virus. That, they believed, was the only way to drum up widespread support for measures to combat the disease, which mainly strikes homosexual men and intravenous-drug users and their sexual partners. “If I can get AIDS, anyone can” was the theme of the public service ad campaign the agency launched later that year. The front-page *Journal* article was “an exemplary piece of journalism,” says Boldt, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but it skipped over an important part of the story: “the news media’s deep complicity in aiding and abetting the heterosexual AIDS scare.”

When, for example, the CDC issued a press release indicating that the number of

heterosexuals with AIDS had doubled, the news media, for the most part, failed to explain that the increase was mostly due to a change in CDC bookkeeping. A February 1987 *Atlantic Monthly* story by Katie Leishman, “Heterosexuals and AIDS: The Second Stage of the Epidemic,” Boldt says, “made virtually no attempt to back up its alarmist contentions.” News stories disproportionately featured individuals from low-risk groups as AIDS victims. A 1987 study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that heterosexuals were eight times more likely to appear as AIDS victims in TV news reports than they were to contract the disease.

Over the years, Boldt points out, a few journalists, such as the *Chicago Tribune*’s John Crewdson and the *Inquirer*’s Donald Drake, read the “fine print” in the CDC reports and pointed out that the threat to heterosexuals was exaggerated. For their labors, they were roundly criticized, not only by

AIDS activists but often by people inside their own newsrooms.

Journalists played up the threat to heterosexuals for various reasons, Boldt says. Some were just ignorant or credulous. Others may have realized that it improved the chances of a page-one by-line. Others may have feared criticism if they bucked the trend.

Free-lance writer Michael Fumento was relentlessly attacked for his *Myth of Heterosexual AIDS* (1990), Boldt notes. Gay activists and public health officials called him and his book “irresponsible,” “mean-spirited,” “myopic,” “homophobic,” and “sex-

ist.” AIDS activists, according to Fumento, mounted a nationwide campaign to keep his book out of bookstores, and to a considerable extent, succeeded. Ironically, Boldt says, Fumento’s book is praised in some recent books by gay authors who have come to realize that “the anybody-can-get-it strategy” dilutes the efforts made for homosexuals.

Did the *Wall Street Journal* exposé finally put an end to the myth of heterosexual AIDS? “Probably not,” Boldt says. “Reporters long familiar with the story say that too many people now have too much invested in keeping the myth alive.”

Junk Mail Juggernaut

“Direct Mail: The Real Threat to Newspapers” by John Morton, in *American Journalism Review* (Nov. 1996), 8701 Adelphi Rd., Adelphi, Md. 20783-1716.

The rise of the Internet and its endless electronic offerings has partisans of newspapers deeply alarmed. Morton, a newspaper analyst with a brokerage firm, says that they ought to worry instead about a far more mundane threat: junk mail.

Encouraged by the U.S. Postal Service, Morton contends, direct mailers have sapped desperately needed advertising revenues from newspaper publishers and forced them into costly battles that divert them from their main mission. Ten years ago, newspapers claimed nearly 27 percent of all advertising revenues, while direct mail received 16 percent. By 1995, however, newspapers’ share had dropped to 22.4 percent, while the direct mail take grew to 20.4 percent.

Morton traces the rise of junk mail to the transformation of the U.S. Postal Service into a quasi-independent agency during the 1970s. At first, a revenue-hungry Postal Service increased the third-class postal rates

paid by direct mailers. Many advertisers fled to newspaper publishers, who could deliver the advertisers’ full-color brochures and coupons with the morning paper. Realizing its mistake, the Postal Service reversed course, not only trimming rates but allowing mailers to put several circulars in one package. A junk mail boom was born.

Now, says Morton, legislation is pending in Congress that would allow the Postal Service to offer even deeper discounts to high-volume mailers while raising first-class postal rates. The newspaper industry charges that first-class mail, while accounting for only 54 percent of the Postal Service’s volume, already pays 70 percent of the service’s costs. Letting the Postal Service have its way, in this view, would be tantamount to meddling in the marketplace. But even if the legislation does not pass, says Morton, junk mail will remain a far bigger threat to newspapers than anything cyberspace may have to offer.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Is There a Place for Theology in Academia?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Most of America’s private colleges and universities long ago undid the close ties they had at birth to Protestant denominations. Although “the trappings of Christian

institutions” were maintained into the 20th century, political scientist Isaac Kramnick and historian R. Laurence Moore, both of Cornell University, note in *Academe*