

ethic of “street justice” has reigned for much of Los Angeles’s history. Half of these justifiable homicides were committed by citizens with guns, suggesting “an armed population, some of whom may have been waiting for their chance.” Justifiable homicides peaked (as a percentage

of all homicides) during the 1940s, perhaps explaining part of the post-war dip in the homicide rate.

In 2003 the overall homicide rate for the city stood at 8.3 per 100,000 residents, as low as it was in the late 1960s, but still quite high, especially in a period when

other big cities saw declines in their murder rates. Monkkonon, in a bleak coda, expresses doubt that metropolitan Los Angeles, splintered into dozens of jurisdictions, can muster the concerted effort needed to “accept its history, and change it.”

PRESS & MEDIA

The Tabloid Solution

THE SOURCE: “Bye, Bye, Broadsheet” by Michael Wolff, in *Vanity Fair*, Oct. 2005.

“IT’S LIKE AN IPOD,” SAYS EDITOR Alan Rusbridger proudly of his new, petite *Guardian*. Shrunk down to near-tabloid size, the venerable left-wing newspaper has become the third British broadsheet daily in the past few years to decide that small is beautiful. Could a shift to the smaller format be the salvation for today’s troubled American newspapers as well—or are these changes anachronistic newsprint’s last gasp?

The trend began in the fall of 2003, when the 200,000-circulation *Independent*, left-wing *Avis* to *The Guardian*’s Hertz, launched a parallel tabloid version of its broadsheet self—and immediately experienced a 20 percent rise in circulation. It soon

broke earlier vows of continued fidelity to the older format. “Going tabloid—with big, bold, lacerating, crowd-pleasing, anti-war, anti-American, anti-Blair front pages—does for *The Independent* exactly

what every worrywart (especially the ones at *The Guardian*) has said that the tabloid format would do: It makes everything louder, more simplistic, and appealing,” writes Michael Wolff, a *Vanity Fair* contributing editor.

The next desertion from the broadsheet ranks was far more shocking. Following swiftly on *The Independent*’s heels, *The Times* of

London—for two centuries the very model of “the billowing, luxurious, upper-class broadsheet, with its sweeping view of the world”—also turned tabloid. In the eyes of critics, this was only the latest chapter in the once-hallowed newspaper’s sad quarter-century descent into mediocrity under the ownership of Rupert Murdoch. Yet the tabloid format, Wolff points out, turned the paper’s blandness into a virtue in an era when people feel pressed for time. The new tabloid *Times* is “pure function,” a “news pill.”

Newspaper competition, a thing of the

EXCERPT

Death of the Scoop

News is cheap, and the big Washington stories that transfix the media pack are in many ways the cheapest of all because all of the major outlets are on them together. Keeping track of who got which story first would be a full-time job, and an absurd one.

The true exclusive isn’t the story that beats the clock, or the pack. It’s the one that the pack never cared about. The one that reported the news so well, you remembered it days later, wanted to read it again, marveled at how it changed your understanding of the world. It’s the one that never had to call itself an exclusive, because that was obvious.

—WILLIAM POWERS, a *National Journal* columnist, at *NationalJournal.com* (Nov. 4, 2005)

past in most American cities, is alive and well in London, which has five upmarket dailies and a half-dozen or so mid- and down-market tabloids. And the new quality tabloids have proven acceptable even to people whose upper-class status previously required them to turn up their noses at the rubbishy tabs. The broadsheet *Guardian*, whose circulation had been about 400,000, found itself losing readers not only to its left-wing competitor, *The Independent*, but to *The Times*, and even to a free morning tabloid put out by the mid-market *Daily Mail*.

The Guardian's "iPod" solution, unveiled in September, is a smaller paper that is about three inches taller than the standard tabloid and

Could a shift to the smaller format be the salvation for today's troubled American newspapers—or would it be newsprint's last gasp?

is trying "to do the opposite of what a tabloid does," observes Wolff. It retains the broadsheet's "classic, hierarchical, multi-story front page," and it preserves "that crucial, elemental newspaper distinction: the fold," which serves the editorial function of distinguishing the important front-page stories from the lesser ones. With this anti-tabloid "emphasis on order, discern-

ment, modulation," the great left-wing paper is hoping "to occupy the pride of place once held by *The Times*, as paper of record, as paper at the center of British political life." It's also hoping, of course, to win back the circulation lost to the other quality tabs.

Since *The Independent* went "compact," editor Simon Kelner says, 55 broadsheets around the world have followed suit, including, most recently, *The Wall Street Journal's* European and Asian editions. No major broadsheets in the United States have made the change yet, says Wolff, but there's little doubt that the big American newspaper chains, and even *The New York Times*, are watching "the British experiment" very closely.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Cardinal Error

THE SOURCE: "The Design of Evolution" by Stephen M. Barr, in *First Things*, Oct. 2005.

WHEN CARDINAL CHRISTOPH Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, lashed out at neo-Darwinism in a *New York Times* op-ed piece last summer, it was front-page news. After all, the cardinal reportedly is close to Pope Benedict XVI. Was Schönborn signaling that the church might align itself with the intelligent design movement, in opposition to the scientific theory of evolution? Such an alignment, notes Stephen M. Barr, a theoretical particle physicist at the Bartol Research Institute of the University of Delaware,

would contradict the Catholic Church's long-standing position on evolution.

Barr thinks the cardinal's op-ed argument is a muddle. Schönborn says that by neo-Darwinism he means "evolution" as used by mainstream biologists. Yet elsewhere in the article, he writes that "evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense [is] an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection." Barr calls this Schönborn's "central misstep": "He has slipped into the definition of a *scientific* theory, neo-Darwinism, the words 'unplanned' and 'unguided,' which are fraught with *theological* meaning."

Christians believe that nothing in

the universe occurs outside God's providential plan. But, says Barr, that doesn't mean that "random" events can't occur within that plan. As used in scientific discourse, *random* "does not mean uncaused, unplanned, or inexplicable; it means uncorrelated." Consider an analogy: A writer of prose, unlike the author of a sonnet, does not make lines end in syllables that rhyme. As a result, the sequence of syllables will show no correlation between them—that is to say, they exhibit randomness. But that doesn't mean that the work was "unguided" or "unplanned," or that the words were not chosen. Similarly, Barr writes, "God, though he planned his work with infinite care, may not have chosen to impose certain kinds of correlations on certain kinds of events, and the motions of the different molecules in a gas, for example, may exhibit no statistically verifiable correlation."