



Opening Shot



ON THE DAY OF TERRI SCHIAVO'S DEATH, the press converges for its story. What do the different elements in this photograph say to you? In your opinion, how appropriately was the Schiavo dispute covered by both the print and the electronic media? Imagine you were the editor of a newspaper and were setting up story ideas. List the major angles you think should be covered and the best ways to do so.

Talking Points

IN THIS issue are several stories about major news outlets that disseminate news with a particular point of view, whether it's religious or a certain political slant. Their programs bring to mind one of the great quotes about journalism by the redoubtable press critic A.J. Liebling that "Freedom of the press belongs only to those who own one."

How does Liebling's comment relate to the programming choices of these networks, which include the Christian Broadcasting Network, Sinclair, and others? Why is it that — if the ratings are accurate — more and more people seem to be seeking out news sources that support their own point of view rather than challenging or helping to form it?

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STATIONS OF THE CROSS, PP. 32-39:

How do you define news? How can a media owner with a specific agenda alter that definition? Does CBN? What concerns about Christian-based broadcasting are raised by this story? Do you agree or disagree with them? Explain. Why are evangelical broadcasters often closely aligned with conservative political interests? How has that affected national politics? What did the outcome of the Schiavo case say about the reach of the Christian broadcasters? What impact might the Schiavo case have on CBN and on Christian broadcasting in general over the next few years? What impact do you expect CBN to have on national politics as we approach the next presidential in 2008? On which issues will it be most potent? How should mainstream news organizations and politicians meet the challenges posed by CBN? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Research the financial backers of CBN. How do their political and religious leanings influence the content of CBN? Watch CBN news and talk shows, and discuss the content, quality, and accuracy of its reporting, and the larger messages inherent in its broadcasts. Who are they aimed at? How successful is CBN in getting its message across? Compare and contrast CBN's news programs with those on Fox, CNN, or the major networks. Is CBN's target audience well-served by the breadth and focus of its news programming? Why or why not? The article raises the question of the tax-exempt status of the NRB. Research the laws on this issue. Is the NRB violating the law with its political agenda? Explain.

THE STRUGGLE AT 60, PP. 40-47:

Research the history of CBS News. Compare and contrast the vision of its founders with that of CBN, Fox, CNN, and Sinclair. Why did CBS News occupy such an important position at the network in its early years? How and why has that changed? Who was Edward R. Murrow? Why is his legacy still so powerful? What was *See It Now*? What were its major stories? What influence did it have on the development and history of *60 Minutes*? According to the story, why has *60 Minutes*'s quality slipped? How much of that slippage do you think has to do with the declining importance of news since Murrow's time? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Watch two weeks of *60 Minutes* and *60 Minutes (Wed.)*. Compare their strengths and weaknesses. Imagine you are a CBS network executive. Write a memo suggesting how to improve both shows, suggesting the kinds of stories they should cover and new ways of doing them. Use specific examples, if possible.

Letters Follow-up

What is the the Iraqi National Congress? Citing examples, discuss the impact it had on reporting before the war and the reasons behind its influence.

AFTER RUPERT, PP. 51-52:

How is News Corp. an extension of Rupert Murdoch's personal vision? How do you think that affects the work of individual reporters and editors? Would you want to work for a Murdoch-owned media outlet? Why or why not? According to the story, why is News Corp. vulnerable? Who is his competition? Based on the descriptions in the story, whom do you think would be the most effective heir in maintaining the company's financial success? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Research Rupert Murdoch's holdings in the US and discuss and evaluate his impact on American journalism, politics, and culture. Overall, would you say that Murdoch has been a positive or negative influence in the US? Compare his impact on journalism with that of other press barons in American history such as Hearst, Pulitzer, etc. What happened to their news empires following their deaths? What lessons of succession do they hold for Rupert Murdoch as he approaches the end of his life and work?

BETWEEN WINTER AND SPRING, PP. 54-59:

When and why were restrictions placed on Syrian journalists? How have they eased somewhat since 2000? What hurdles do journalists in Syria still face in trying to report accurately? Imagine yourself as a journalist in Syria. Would you attempt to defy the system? Why or why not? What alternative news sources are there for Syrians? What impact will the Web have on press freedom, not only in Syria but in other oppressed nations around the world? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Research how the Syrian press covered the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. How accurate and objective were the news reports? Compare and contrast the press in Syria to at least two other Middle Eastern countries of your choosing. What is at the root of restrictions on their freedom? In light of these issues, discuss the role that the Voice of America (pp. 28-30) could and should play in keeping people informed. Listen to the VOA. Does it fulfill its potential in terms of enlightening listeners and keeping them properly informed about the world around them? Why or why not?

Between the Lines

- 1) Should more women be added to the roster of op-ed columnists? What differences, if any, would it make?
- 2) Find a copy of one of the prize-winning stories listed on pp. 8-10. Read or watch it and discuss its importance and why it deserved such praise. What lessons can you take from the way it was written and reported?
- 3) Are ombudsmen necessary additions to newspapers? What purpose do they serve for readers, reporters, and editors? If you were a reporter or editor, would you welcome or resent an ombudsmen at your newspaper? Explain.

A TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR EDITING GONZO, PP. 61-65:

Define "Gonzo" journalism. What personal qualities made Robert Love capable of editing Hunter Thompson? What made Thompson such an unusual talent? Did drugs and alcohol have a positive or a negative impact on his talent? Would he have been as effective had he led an abstemious life? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Read one or two selections from Thompson's work. How was he able to find truth in his flights of fancy? Compare his search for truth to the search by Heda Kovály (pp. 67-69). Compare what both of them found from their own experiences in life.