

CHRISTMAS GIFT

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The cover and feature story of the November 3 issue of *Look* magazine presented a thought-provoking study of the “Doctor and American Medicine.” Using authoritative quotations and considerable detail, *Look* probed deeply into the problems that challenge the nation’s doctors and its medical services.

Illuminating reports like this one appear with almost semi-annual regularity in *Look* and other important periodicals. While American Medicine has come to expect this kind of spotlighting of its activities, the occasional criticisms expressed in some of these articles at times have created a feeling of annoyance among physicians. Some have developed the impression that Medicine as a profession is too often singled out for this kind of national publicity.

Such is not really the case. For over one month now, the *Bulletin*, inspired by *Look*’s recent informative piece, has kept its staff of Senior Editors busy with an exhaustive investigation of another of the nation’s honorable professions about which all America is concerned.

If some may recognize a similarity in reportorial style to that of *Look*’s article, it is because our staff editors were so impressed by the quality of the *Look* story that an inevitable imitation of journalistic excellence could not be avoided.

Coming as it does just before the Holiday Season, the *Bulletin* is pleased to present a special supplement—an issue within an issue—on the Communications Industry, as a Christmas bonus to its medical readers. We want to soothe Medicine’s unfounded fears that it alone among the professions is beset with problems. We hope this offering will serve as a welcome and reassuring Christmas gift to all.

CHRISTMAS BONUS ISSUE 1964

THE CHALLENGE TO OUR EDITORS

- Why do your editors censor news?
- Do your journalists slant reports?
- Is your newsmagazine run by incompetents?
- Do TV commentators annoy you?
- Are your newspaper costs too high?
- Are you getting brainwashed?

“Where the hell is Little Orphan Annie today?” screamed a man’s voice over the telephone. Senior Editor Ross MacGarble wiped a worried brow, tried to soothe his angry caller, jumped into his high-powered car, and rushed two days of comic strips to his indignant subscriber. He explained patiently his paper’s policy of omitting comic strips that are deemed not in the public’s interest.

In another community one recent Friday morning, a pathetic 72-year-old widow became so nauseated after reading a Morrie Ryskind column she had to be rushed to a hospital and kept on oxygen and intravenous fluids for three days before she could return home in time to collect her unemployment insurance. Significantly, the gentle oldster was kept waiting in the emergency room for one hour and ten minutes while interns were feverishly transfusing an A.M.A. official who had suffered an inconsequential gastric hemorrhage while reading Walter Lippmann over a second cup of coffee laced with an expensive imported brandy.

All over the nation in thousands of communities Americans are becoming more and more disturbed about the disruptive state into which their news media have fallen. News and factual information, except in a few weighty papers like the venerable Boston Globe and in magazines like Playboy, have been pushed aside to make way for more advertising copy and a bumper crop of news analysts and GNP charts. It is estimated that there are 34,251 communities across the nation with no newspapers of their own. Citizens are forced to depend on news filtered through large metropolitan dailies, which often arrive 12 to 14 hours after coming off the presses, or on the unsatisfactory blurred images and sounds emanating from faulty television sets. With the import of excellent Japanese transistor radios drastically curtailed by restrictive legislation, many must get their news only from poorly made, mass-manufactured American imitations that often go dead in the middle of the weather-girl report. Hundreds of cities no longer get the Sunday night Ed Sullivan show because of “selective” programming on TV. It is reported that as many as 22 of the nation’s newspapers even do not carry the column of Presidential Award winner, Ralph McGill.

Americans in every state are concerned about their news media; the poor quality of news interpretation too many of us receive, frightening differences in editorial points of view, erratic and delinquent newspaper delivery, blackouts in TV and radio programming, disinterested and materialistic editors and publishers, rapidly rising costs. All are serious complaints.

Costs are skyrocketing. Price increases up to 500% are common. Afternoon dailies that once sold for two cents now cost five cents or more; Sunday papers have gone from five and ten cents as high as 25 and 30 cents; newsmagazines once bought for ten cents now sell for 35 or 50 cents. Newspapers that used to arrive in time for an early breakfast now appear in mid-morning or not at all. The prices of radio and television sets have risen precipitously; repair bills have reached astronomical figures.

Dissension and unrest are widespread throughout the country among citizens and within the news profession itself about the materialistic attitude and concern with money matters evidenced by many in the communications industry. There is a documented report of one prominent national figure who has managed to amass a fortune in millions by the manipulation of television monopolies and subsidies. Walter P. Clambake, the renowned television commentator, reportedly receives an income in excess of \$500,000 yearly for his news programs and various sideline endorsements. Winken and Blinken, whose popular news program, "Ham on Wry," got the nod in top ratings several years ago, spend their vacations in plush resorts at home and abroad and drive around in fleets of air-conditioned Lincoln Continentals. "I get a lousy 70 bucks a week," complains Griswold Sobbins, "for two hours every day on Cap'n Blotto's Kiddie Korral and drive a second-hand Volkswagen, while some of them crumbs are hauling down \$100,000 a year for regurgitating undigested news."

Editors formerly dedicated to preserving liberty and freedom of the press are now too busy taking polls, philosophizing and travelling about the country on expense-paid junkets – trends that threaten to undermine a once noble calling. Shamus T. Ginsberg, now of the Institute of Public Information and Deception, in a study of American newspapers, found that one editor was away from his desk 286 days out of the last 365. Ginsberg noted that in the recent election 45.1% of the nation's editors supported the Republican ticket. Says Hobart J. Perkins, proprietor of eastern Vermont's largest newsstand, "This kind of irresponsibility has got to be stopped, or we will end up without Social Security."

In a report based on six months of research in thirty communities from coast to coast talking to publishers, editors and newsboys, it was found that 92% of them were disturbed about deficiencies in the news profession. "Things are getting out of hand," observed publisher Herschel S. Blight when interviewed at the Thoroughbred yearling auction where he had just purchased two colts for \$180,000 to add to his modest racing stable. "Some of these writers are demanding salaries as high as \$50 a month for pecking out a weekly column that my grandson could write better."

The communications industry as a whole is also worried about its public image. Many national associations and guilds of radio, television and publishing that used to hold their yearly conventions in customary intellectual and cultural centers like New Orleans' famed Vieux Carre, Miami Beach and Acapulco, now have taken to scheduling meetings in the Bible belt, often in conjunction with Billy Graham revivals. Phineas Frugg, a director of the Publishers Welfare Society, is pleased with his organization's efforts to remold its public relations: "It's high time we learned that all uplift is not confined to the tassel-twirlers on Bourbon Street." But not all newsmen agree. Quentin Groots, famed war correspondent, voiced this complaint about the industry's new preoccupation with decency: "Where are the old rum-pots and free-loaders of yesteryear? The public used to respect the disreputable, two-fisted, chain-smoking editor who could toss off two columns of copy in a drunken stupor while being held up to his typewriter by a couple of floozies. Now they all want to go respectable. They worry about cancer of the lung. Security is the watchword. They spend all their time lecturing to Leagues of Women Voters and university forums, or else they are up in Washington as subsidized advisors smoking filter-tips and sipping watered Martinis." Groots still proudly wears the lapel button of the third highest military award. The decoration was bestowed for gallantry in action above and beyond the call of duty when Groots singlehandedly overcame a platoon of marauding GI's and rescued five cases of champagne destined for an Army Commander's surprise birthday party at Caserta during the bitter Italian campaign of World War II.

Criticism of the way newsworthy events are presented and interpreted is prevalent throughout the land. Gomer S. Cringe, president of the new National Council for Moderation of Extremism, finds a deplorable lack of quality in present day news analyses. "Facts are all right in their place," says Cringe, "but the public nowadays has had the benefit of progressive education and is impatient with eighteenth century reporting. They don't care if Susie Jones was hit over the head with an axe and cashed in. They need to understand her lack of motivation and the sociologic implications involved. The newspaper that sticks to reporting uninterpreted news is living in pre-historic times." Samuel Finke, chairman of Americans for Serfdom, says, "The industry needs more men, the caliber of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in it. Men who are at home in the discotheques and who can lead us to greatness."

"Things have certainly gone to pot when a former President has to come and criticize the industry in public," says retired syndicated columnist Westbrook Haggler complaining about the poor quality of news distortion. "The smear and scatter technique used by some of these juveniles masquerading as columnists would not have raised an eyebrow in my day."

Bliss Gallupin, astute young columnist of a large southern daily and recent winner of the Red China Fair Play in Reporting Award, is upset about the hate-mongers who fill their columns with personal piques and vilifications calculated to influence the reading public. "It's disgusting. The lengths to which some of these unwashed extremist sympathizers went in defending the obviously incompetent Republican candidate during the last campaign speak poorly of our profession. Although I have been criticized for never descending to calumny and trying to

maintain a tolerant middle-of-the-road policy, I have heard about two of these so-called columnists who were depraved enough that they peddled marijuana to unwed mothers. On several occasions I saw another one of these loathsome hacks enter the same men's room in the Y.M.C.A. basement where the Goldwater-Miller fascist supporters tried to frame lovable Walter Jenkins."

Study after study has shown that a shocking shortage of trained personnel is one of the communications industry's greatest problems. Journalism courses at most of the nation's high schools report a dropout rate of 60% or more. Many oddball college eccentrics, once a prime source of talent for the nation's news industry, are now attracted to more rewarding fields like psychoanalysis and the ministry; others prefer to remain in university centers where they can continue post-graduate training in establishing meaningful relationships with members of the opposite sex.

In spite of its manpower shortage, alarming discriminatory practices continue to exist throughout the communications field. Less than one percent of the country's females write news columns. The number of Negro editors in the country is appallingly small. "I won't say there is a racial prejudice," says journalism major, Cadmium Green, "but when I applied for an editorial desk at the local newspaper, I was told they had no vacancies." And the situation is even worse in the specialty of television news analysis, which seems to be in the hands of a tightly organized, exclusive group."

No aspect of the profession seems free of blemish. In one area a state's largest newspaper, which professes to have the world's greatest sports staff and sports coverage, gets thousands of calls each fall weekend from irate readers who complain that they can find nothing in the sports section except accounts of the local football game. "Every Sunday I'm waiting to see who won in the sixth at Bowie, and all I can find is football games and ten pictures of the same play where some jerk is catching a pass," moans Elbert T. Hotwalk, a disenchanting subscriber. Hotwalk also did not discover that this year's Olympic games were over until three weeks after the last gold medal was presented. "Them sophomores was too busy describing belly serieses and average punt returns to worry about Olympians."

Aging pundit Waldrupp Slippshod, the wise and revered dean of the nation's political writers, sees only trouble ahead for the communications industry unless steps are taken to reverse the present trends. "We have lost our direction," says Slippshod. "It is the responsibility of all of us who are the straight thinkers and intellectuals of our profession to lead the way back to sanity. The disturbing rise of rationality and dissent among the nation's journalists has exerted a stultifying effect on our progress toward the Great Society and Ultimate Oblivion. It is obvious, even to the unlettered, that sinister forces are at work within our ranks creating a climate of reason and distrust, and this can only lead to a national disaster unless we, the leaders in enlightenment face up to our challenge squarely. We must adopt a firm but punitive attitude toward those divisive elements that call for individualism and outmoded constitutionality. The sincere but misguided extremists of the near-Left, mid-Left, Right and Center must be directed

back to sensible middle-of-the-road moderation and socially-conscious conservative liberalism. They must be made to realize that the responsible members of the news profession, first and foremost, have the public interest at heart. Our duty to the people of this great nation must always be to insist, perhaps on penalty of federal reprimand, that the dissemination of news be carefully screened and intelligently edited so as to promote a satisfying uniformity of opinion that will guide and move us forward as a truly united America. Only when all dissent is tranquilized, and only when all of the communications media are brought into a harmony that speaks with one voice in the defense of Liberty, shall we have achieved success and realized the glorious motto of our founding fathers that underlies all Freedom, 'E Pluribus Unum'."

So says Slippshod. And millions of Americans across this great continent know in their hearts he is right; that he speaks with a wisdom and confirms his senility. If the communications industry faces up to its challenge, we will solve our massive problems of news dissemination and emerge from this troubled period with better information for all.

If the industry stubbornly fails to meet the challenge, inevitably, necessary changes must be imposed, and the destiny of a once great profession will slip from the grasp of its hard working members into the unsympathetic hands of others.

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "Editorial", Dec 1964, Vol. XI No.12, p.8