

Muckraking backfires on Washington media ————— **continued from page 16**

the 'holy-shit' story, to greater individual freedom given reporters and a corresponding lack of rigorous editorial supervision.

"There is a tendency to let things get through the net," said William Haddad, former investigative editor with the *New York Post*.

"I think part of the problem is the over-ambitious reporter who has to make it more dramatic, and I think the real problem is the editors who may be afraid of some theoretical invasion of the privacy or right of the reporter," Haddad said.

Cohen insisted that it was next to impossible to stop a reporter determined to print lies from getting those lies in the newspaper, at least from time to time. But Haddad had the final word: "Editors send signals to their reporters," he said, signals that created the atmosphere at the *Post*, for example, that let Jimmy's World get on the front page, and before the Pulitzer Prize judging panel.

Why do newspapers close? In the view of *Philadelphia Daily News* senior editor and columnist Chuck Stone, a black, the *Washington Star* closed because it never came to terms with the fact that Washington D.C. was a black city.

In general, Stone said newspapers across American are not responsive to readers' interests.

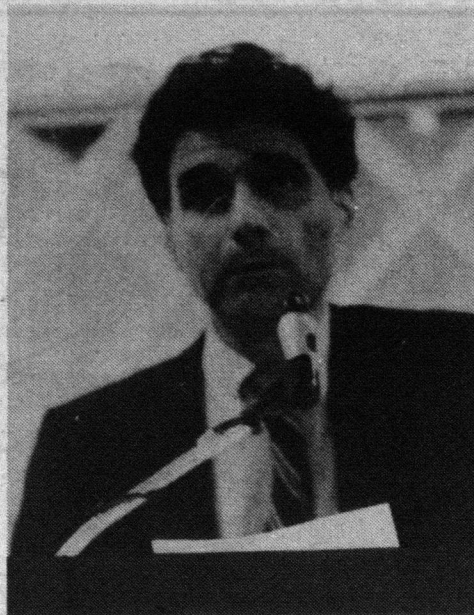
"We tend to go with the exotic politics, government, foreign affairs. Very few people cover minorities, blue collar, and poor people stories," Stone said.

"I think that newspapers are losing circulation today because people are shifting from being readers to viewers. This is particularly acute among the lower income and poor people."

Those lower income, poor people do not likely appear very high up on the corporate media advertising profile. In all of this, the increasing corporate chain ownership of media outlets newspapers, radio, and television stations make the diversity of news coverage and point of view more limited.

"It's a problem when you've got an institution whose principal motivations and driving forces are greed and fear," said Bob Armstrong, co-author of the Pulitzer winning book *The Brethren*.

"I think most of the established, corporate media is interested in a substantial return on investment, and that is the major thing that propels the



Ralph Nader

"Someone might suggest that even advertisers have to pay some respect to the First Amendment."

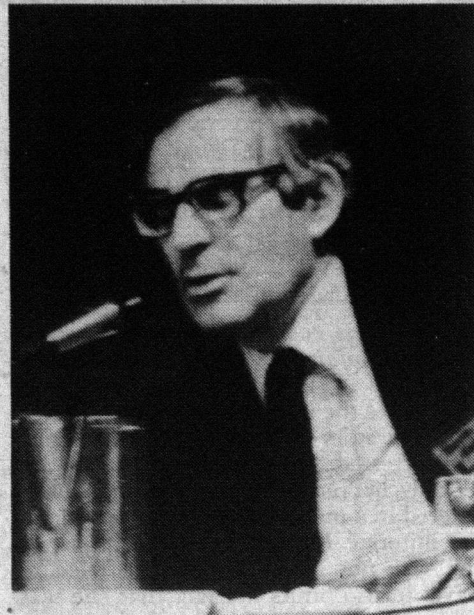
overall allocation of space and resources on a newspaper," Armstrong said.

Ben Bagdikian in the Nader conference keynote address, "Journalists as Corporate Captives, agreed that big business has assumed enormous power by controlling the American media.

The most significant fact is that corporate media are part of the overall corporate elite and will not challenge the basic precepts of the corporate system. Within this broad "corporate censorship," the media can operate 'freely and independently.'

"The corporations of our media generally insist that they do not interfere in the editorial product. All they do is appoint the publisher, the editor, the business manager, and determine the budget," Bagdikian said.

"If I wanted control of public information that is all I would want." Yet, Bagdikian and others hesitated to confront head-on the owner's rights to control "public information." The First Amendment in the U.S. enshrines Freedom of the Press, but does that extend to freedom to throttle the press? Do owners and advertisers have a First Amendment obligation to print or broadcast "All the news..."



David Halberstam

"Investigative journalism is at best, dogged work, at its best, it is rarely glamorous."

"Someone might suggest," suggested Ralph Nader at a panel discussion of "Who Decides the News?," "that even advertisers have to pay some respect to the first amendment."

"If they pull out (their advertising from a medium that opposes them) then they're going to determine who is going to get what news in the country because the press lives off the ads," Nader suggested.

"Someone may say that even a businessman or woman has an interest in broader issues than just economic interests," he said.

Nader did not say that was his view, but Richard Viguerie, publisher of *Conservative Digest* and author of *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, was more forthright:

"Unlike liberals, I do not feel any compulsion to help those (media) who are trying to destroy me," Viguerie said, touching off on the most interesting dialogues during the whole journalism conference, which follows in part:

Viguerie: Conservatives have been very unhappy with big business and with business in general because they have not done more of a careful spending of their

dollars, that they have been very lackadaisical about giving dollars to those who basically had a very unfavorable opinion of them.

That's a very irresponsible thing to do. You boycott. The left is a past master at withdrawing financial support from those organizations they do not approve of. What's wrong with that?

This is America. That's what America is all about.

Member of the audience: I'm talking about the press' ability to print the truth, to find out exactly what is going on. And when a corporation says If you do that we're going to pull out our ads, obviously we're not going to find out what's going on.

Bill Kovach (Washington Editor of the *New York Times*: If I understand you, the premise is that withholding my money from a publication I'm infringing on that publication's First Amendment rights. I don't see how that works. The First Amendment doesn't say anything about that.

William Greider (senior editor with the *Washington Post*, and author of the infamous *Conversation with David Stockman*): If the advertiser withdraws as they sometimes do, the newspaper then makes, I presume, a series of decisions: shall it go ahead and print this truth that the advertiser doesn't want. It is still free to make that decision. The advertiser has not changed that in any way.

Nader: I think the point was that the logical extension of one advertiser pulling out and other pulling out all their ads would be to in effect destroy that publication's economic base and therefore prevent the exercise of free speech, and should an advertiser have a broader vision of concern about that, beyond simply buying and controlling space in the publication.

James Ridgeway (Washington editor of the *Village Voice*: The reality of the situation is that if you're in the business you have these pressures brought on you all the time. In large news enterprises this is all done through an institutional arrangement and it really has to do less with specific stories than it does with the total approach toward the 'business system.' But of course these guys are constantly after the media in one way or another they're always going to be after you and for the smaller papers the implications are pretty clear.

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We will be interviewing at the Canada Employment Centre, 4th Floor SUB, U of A., Thursday, April 8th, between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Please make appointment at CEC office in advance.

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