JOURNALISM'S BARBED-WIRE FRONTIER

by NORMAN E. ISAACS

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With part of the proceeds, the UHM Journalism Program is sponsoring a series of annual Carol Burnett Fund Lectures on journalism ethics.

Norman E. Isaacs, the chairman of the National News Council, delivered the first of these public lectures on March 3, 1982, in the University's Campus Center Ballroom.

The Journalism Program is distributing this reprint of his talk in the belief that his comments deserve a wider audience.

John Luter
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ERRATA SHEET

Please note the following corrections:

page 7. Third paragraph, last line should read: "article in Nieman Reports, when he wrote:"

page 11: Second paragraph, first line should read: "Northampton is a city...."

page 11: Fourth paragraph, third line should read: "Frank Gannett Lecture...."

Wherein the author likens his craft and art to a mistress

You are confronted with a man who has had a stormy, lifelong love affair with journalism. I have charged it with being unfaithful, with lying, and even with being corrupt on occasion. Yet for all this, mine has been a lasting devotion to the central idea that it is too vital, too compelling, too important ever to consider the thought of desertion.

Age and experience have taught me that I often expected and demanded too much in terms of personal commitment. Like most journalism executives, I have often had well-meaning doctors and lawyers ask querulously why journalism wasn't a profession like theirs, abiding by standards of licensing and carefully drafted codes. The answer, of course, has always been to explain that licensing is an impossible constraint where ideas are concerned and that any code in communications, even when admirable in thrust, has to be voluntary. In such discussions I have often felt presumptu-

ous enough to ask why medicine and law, despite licensing and codes, have also revealed an equally astonishing tolerance for mediocrity and dishonesty among those in their groups whose credentials are clearly open to challenge.

This sounds, I know, like an attempt to justify journalism's failings. I am simply casting those who fail the journalistic trust into the too-standard mold of those in other fields who lose their idealism. My principal unhappiness is about the so-many journalists who seem to resist growth and change. Certainly, the techniques and the reach of communications in the 1980s are explosively advanced from what existed 80 and 90 years ago. Nevertheless, when one studies the actual qualitative values of the old journalism and the new, one is made restive by the recognition that the major changes have been principally in engineering and technique. Precious little progress has been made in developing genuine intellectual and ethical approaches to the practice of journalism.

The more things change, the more they remain the same

I am going to read a passage written in 1900 by Henry Watterson in his *Louisville Courier-Journal.* Weigh what was being said more than 80 years ago while keeping in mind what journalism's critics are saying today:

> *Journalism is without any code of ethics or system of self-restraint or self-respect. It has no sure standards of either work or duty. Its intellectual landscapes are anonymous, its moral destination confused. . . The journalist has few, if any, mental perspectives to fix his horizon; neither precedent nor map of discovery upon which his sailing lines and travel lines have been marked.*[1]

There was no question but that Watterson was reacting to the excesses of "Yellow Journalism," as practiced in that wild period highlighted by the short Spanish-American War, that came about largely because of the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor in February 1898.

No one ever discovered why the *Maine* blew up. And no one has ever authenticated the cable supposedly sent by William Randolph Hearst to his artist, Frederick Remington, who was in Cuba with correspondent Richard Harding Davis. That was quoted as reading: "Please remain. You furnish the pictures. I'll furnish the war." Whether true or false, the actuality remains that America was in a jingoistic and expansionist mood — demonstrated by the annexation of independent Hawai'i that same year — and that Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* led much of the nation's journalism into a frenzy of war fever. The frenzy was to make President William McKinley's

efforts at conciliation be pictured as cowardice. Many newsmen in the period complained that some reporters made not the slightest effort to check rumors and terror stories fed them by the Cuban independence propagandists operating out of New York. Any reading of history confirms that journalistic excesses and outright war propaganda have a kind of counterpart in the symbiotic relationships that now exist between politicians and journalists everywhere in this country.

So that I am not misunderstood, let it be clear that there are many journalists in both print and broadcasting I respect and admire. They are thoughtful people with open minds. They tend to worry about the state of communications and they try their best to serve constructively. Unhappily, as I view the scene, these people constitute a minority among the army of those who serve as reporters and editors. That there are charlatans and incompetents in the rest of society comforts me not at all.

I am also a devout believer in the press being totally independent, that it must be a constant goad for progress. Our language is filled with words that mean one thing and then another. So while I can object to and fight any proposal to license the press, I cannot accept as proper any journalism that claims license for anything and everything it may disseminate. There is, after all, truly a world of difference between licensing and license.

That which is impossible may be nonetheless desirable

Some of this kind of license goes on today in many branches of communications. Eric Sevareid attacked this aspect in an article in *Neiman Reports,* when he wrote:

> *Militant young men and women, in both newspapers and broadcasting, argue that even the quest for objectivity is a myth, that the prime purpose of the press is not to report the world but to reform it, and in the direction of their ideas. We have all read the learned articles that tell us that objective news accounts deceive the reader or hearer, obscure inner truths that the reporter perceives. He must therefore personalize the news, infuse it with his own truth. They would not leave this to the editorial writer, columnist and commentary writer, whose work is clearly marked away from the hard news. They believe that this will give integrity to news columns and news broadcasts. I believe it will ruin them.*[2]

Right here we have laid out for us one of the several schisms that exist in the approaches to journalism. There are

many, indeed, who grow heated arguing that to yield on anything risks sapping the foundations of the total freedom. And then there are others who hold that the exercise of responsibile judgment is to act in the cause of a free press and that without it the risk to continued freedom grows ever greater.

I am among those who believe this latter profoundly. And I come to it from a record that could hardly be classed as timorous. In my young days I took pride in a reputation as a solid investigative reporter and later as a crusading editor. Further advancement came not for this — but from the recognition that crusades weren't won by sloppy performance, but through enormous attention to detailed, provable documentation. How did this transition from the rough-and-tumble excesses of the "Front Page" era of the 1920s to a sense of care come about? Through the accident of exposure. All of us are profoundly influenced by others and I am one of those greatly fortunate people to have been exposed to men who had the touch of greatness. They were to convince me that journalism had to rest on an ethical base or it could not be other than a lost cause.

Watterson's reaction to Yellow Journalism was shared by others around the country. In 1910 the Kansas Publishers Association adopted standards dealing with business, circulation and news operations. It condemned "the practice of reporters making detectives and spies of themselves in their endeavors to investigate." It spoke to the rights of those accused of crime and attacked press reports "slyly couched, even before an arrest." It was contemptuous of the "publication of rumors and common gossips or the assumptions of reporters." And it went on to say that "No reporter should be retained who accepts any courtesies, unusual favors, opportunities for self-gain or side employment from any whose interest would be affected by the manner in which his reports are made." [3]

Concerning "rumors and common gossips"

So the record is that those of us who preach for stronger ethics are hardly brave pioneers entering into uncharted jungle. Rather, we are simply the newest volunteers in an old cause. We pursue the goal, recognizing that what we confront is a frontier laced with rows of barbed wire. We try to snip away even when there often seems less than hope of making any substantial breakthroughs.

I have not come to belabor you with historical antecedents or to harp on the difficulties of making advances, but to explore with you whether there might be steps that a reasonable number of journalists could accept in the near future —not only as ethical duty, but in the spirit of professional advancement, which is about as much as can be asked.

The major codes — those of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi — stress the needs for responsibility and independence, upholding freedom of the press, sincerity, truthfulness, accuracy, impartiality, fair play. Back in 1922, the Oregon Editorial Association went so far as to include a section entitled, "Justice, Mercy, Kindliness." Every code refers to the obligation to "make prompt and clear correction of mistakes of fact or opinion whatever their origin." [4]

The problem all along has been two-fold. One has been trying to win acceptance of these honorable goals. The other is getting them implemented. The difficulties stem from journalism's inbred untidiness. Some of this is defensible because, for instance, when the iced-up airplane hit Washington's 14th Street bridge, there was no time to discuss ethics. The drive was for all the details and all the facts available as fast as was humanly possible. This once was one of newspapering's glamorous aspects — as it was with me in the long-ago days when I vaulted into the rear seat of an open-tonneau police car and it raced off, siren screaming, to the scene of some train-car crash three miles away. If the accident was bad enough, there was an extra in the works. But I have to ask, circa 1982, how many of today's newsmen were around in the days of the extras? The extra passed out of existence when news could be delivered by the medium of instantaneous transmission — radio. Now, even though haste is often necessary, print deadlines are fixed. In the instance of the Washington airplane tragedy, TV could show pictures all through the evening hours while the morning papers assembled the material, swiftly but with constant rechecking and updating, for the editions to be delivered late that evening and early morning. Times have changed for news people, but the vestiges of old attitudes hang onto the thinking processes like barnacles on an old ship.

The crucifixion of Lenny Skutnik

For that same Washington plane accident offers and intriguing look at journalistic patterns, where what starts as rational pursuit of a good story ends up as invasion of privacy. Tom Shales, *The Washington Post*'s TV writer, analyzed the case of Lenny Skutnik, the man who jumped into the Potomac River to save the drowning stewardess. Skutnik, Shales wrote, "paid what might be called the wages of virtue. He was turned into a pop celebrity, especially by local and national TV newscasters." Shales recited chapter and verse about the avid pursuit of Skutnik and commented: "The right to privacy is forfeit in this country once the media decide to take it away from you." [5] No wonder so many in the general public react with anger when they see the media mobs engulf anyone associated with an event, pursue them down streets, even to poking cameras into their homes. Cover

the stories, yes. Cover the participants, yes. Get the whole story as fully as possible. But at some point, a line has to be drawn. A Lenny Skutnik who tells freely what he did and why he did it and then wants to go home ought to be able to do it without being harried by a posse.

The Walter Burns School of Journalism

What we are going through is a replay of the "Front Page" era, decked out with minicameras, unprincipled gung-ho reporters, and backed by editorial chiefs more anxious to be popular with their staffs than with their own reputations for fair play and common sense. The passion of many of today's editors for gossip columns smacks of hypocrisy since so many of them are critical, if not contemptuous, of what they see as TV's groveling for ratings. Are not the gossip columns an equivalent out-reach for circulation growth? Certainly, names make news. But obviously, the information ought to be "newsy" and not malicious trash that would fail any responsible checking or press-agent pap. This is the kind of behavior where one is obliged to question editors' high-flown oratory about their dedication to fair play.

Editors with character and gumption seem to be rare these days. One of them is Edward Shanahan of the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* in Northampton, Mass. The body of an infant girl was found in a secluded, wooded section of town. An 18-year-old high school graduate of good family, clearly pregnant, suddenly was no longer so. She was charged with murder. It was a major page-one story. Shanahan said that in the ten years he had been editor he had never encountered the written and verbal abuse that descended on him and the paper. Many felt the coverage was as offensive as the baby's death had been.

A follow-up was clearly needed. Coverage was mapped out for a series on the issue of teenage pregnancy, the community resources for service, what other teenagers had done under the same experience. For a small daily, it took much longer to complete the story than would have been the case on a large operation. No matter. The day before the series was to begin, the judge set the murder trial date. Shanahan said the timing for publication was wrong. The staff pushed for publication. One big argument was that the story now had a momentum of its own. Another — mind this — was that Shanahan was betraying the reporter. She had put so much time and effort into the story that it had to be run *now*. Shanahan held his ground that publication then was not responsible.

His account of the problems of accountability in a small city is a textbook classic. His dozen reporters are not only unseasoned, but transients. They see the newspaper as a place to gain experience and then move on. Their verve is valuable, but the editors need to do a lot of teaching. Shanahan, recognizing that it is hard for these young

reporters to exercise the sensitivity required at the community level, holds that they need constant guidance. "I believe," he said, "that the role of editor in recent years has become subordinate to that of the reporter. Too many of us have yielded too many responsiblities and prerogatives to reporters." [6]

The young woman's case did not come to trial. She pleaded guilty and went on probation and into counseling. *The Gazette* covered the case normally. Two weeks later it published the week-long series and the community response was excellent.

Northhamption is a city of 30,000. Shanahan is a relatively young man. I hold that he has a sense of ethical proportion far greater than that of many far better-known big-city editors.

This aspect of "ethical proportion" brings us to the intriguing debate going on in many news operations. Reporters demand individual freedoms. As Sevareid said, we who are old in the craft conceded that objectivity was perhaps impossible, but that duty required us to try. This is now under persistent attack and reporters claim rights to be active in public causes — even as they take positions that seem to try to strip the same freedoms of action from those who own and manage their news organizations.

Just who is in charge here, anyway?

Tom Johnson, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, dealt with the whole thorny issue in his tough and eminently lucid Frank Gannet Lecture in Washington. Discussing a public that believes the media may have gone too far, he said:

> *This suspicion will persist until we are willing to apply to ourselves the same standards we demand of others. We investigate conflicts of interest on the part of public officials. Yet too many media executives are reluctant to acknowledge their own conflict of interest when they take editorial positions on legislation or community projects that can affect their own company's holdings. And that potential for conflict of interest is becoming ever greater in this era of diversification.*
>
> *We insist on greater access to government, to the courts, and to corporate board rooms. But too many of us apply a double standard when inquiries are made into the probity of our own actions. The common dismissal of such inquiries is that "we stand by our story" or "no comment" — a response we would not accept from others. We cannot have it both ways. — pleading our rights under the First*

Amendment while opting to remain silent under the Fifth. We exempt ourselves from accountability while demanding it of others. [7]

What I have been trying to describe is a journalism that has clung tenaciously to patterns that are anachronistic. Of all the news-and-editorial column matter in any newspaper, approximately 80% has no fundamental relationship to yesterday, today or tomorrow. Of course, there are breaking stories. And there are editorial responses to public policy positions that need be done fairly promptly. But investigative stories take time, often months. Personality profiles can be done with great care and skill and run a week or two later. Look at some of the high skills in magazine reporting. In themselves, these often make news, refuting the old idea that there is no story if it doesn't have a "today" angle. To use a good Hawaiian word, too many journalists remain guilty of *ho'omalimali* — full of baloney.

The simple truth is that most of standard journalism is slave-bound to outworn convention. In some of the higher fields of intellectual inquiry, such as the natural and physical sciences, leadership comes from the great universities. But little of this kind of advanced thought is offered in journalism. More often than not, journalism is treated as a craft. And that is what it is to most of those employed everywhere in the world.

No wonder the majority of news operations are examples of habit-prone maladministration.

We replate for Armageddon, every time

When I began, I said that the so-called creative side of journalism had clung tenaciously to patterns that are now anachronistic. Shanahan's newspaper in Northampton is a good example of how the staffs of smaller newspapers come to reflect the thought patterns prevalent in major-city communications. It is next to impossible for even the most ethical and experienced of editors in large news organizations to exercise the kinds of control in teaching and guidance that Shanahan can provide. What has grown up in the big operations are bureaucracies, competing for space and money, and for ever-larger staffs. Department chiefs most often rise to their positions through craft, and not intellectual, skills. For years I have been appalled by the incredible waste that comes from overstaffing. Many large news organizations are as guilty of featherbedding as is the case in other fields of work. Pruning out those who are merely seatwarmers and those who are demonstrably not suited to journalism makes for better operations and provides the dollars for investment in an executive staff that is urgently needed by most newspapers.

From experience, I have drawn a model of a four-person executive staff — an editor, with three deputies, each with a major authority.

One would be the deputy who would serve in relieving the editor of a vast amount of the daily work load that strips most editors of the time necessary for thinking, studying, innovating. A second deputy would be in charge of the entire process of decision-making on all staffing, of training and individual guidance. The third would be the deputy whose sole responsibility would be serving the public, whether this be ombudsman, reader's representative, or whatever title seems desirable.

These four people need to fit into the collegial harmony of shared mission.

Much of the current tension between reporters and editors would disappear with the kind of oversight editing I am advocating. The argument that most big papers have responsible editors for all these functions is hogwash. Yes, there are tiers of high-ranked editors. Usually they are competing bureaucrats. Many a younger journalist's progress is blocked because of standard bureaucratic insensitivity and the end result customarily is a discontented staffer who leaves for greater opportunity, or a malcontent poisoning the newsroom climate. Where good people are involved, the economic loss in the (a) employment of a new person, (b) the necessary training and (c) bringing the new staffer to satisfactory levels is in the range of six to eight months' pay. The kind of deputy editor I am describing can override all manner of departmental myopia and the end-product can be a staff with high morale, along with an executive function that pays for itself many times over.

Newspaper as monolith

The role of the deputy serving the public is one that has demonstrated its value, yet remains widely ignored by most newspapers. There are only 26 ombudsmen in the United States and Canada, including one on *The (Honolulu) Advertiser*. Wherever they operate, the customary result is strongly heightened credibility for the news organization.

This model is not some unproved theoretical brainstorm. I was directing editor for four newspapers over a 24-year span before reaching the point I am talking about. I won awards, drew applause from my peers, but was not actually truly effective until the day I became a boss editor without line responsibility — no flow of regular work, no stories to edit, no chits to sign. Work was carried on in a living-room atmosphere where there were conversations with associates and staffers, where ideas were brainstormed, research instituted on a score of things. Our managing editors emulated the pattern by choosing administrative aides for one-year terms of duty. It is hardly surprising that a number of these ex-

aides are now first-quality editors in their own right. Out of this climate came the ombudsman concept and also one of the first major press-bar compacts covering both print and broadcast. Out of it flowed toughly independent, but responsible, award-winning journalism that served the highest principles of both a free and responsible press. Out of it also came technological advance, including the first major-city six-column newspaper, a boon to easier readership. If nothing else, that relatively short period probably justified my whole career in journalism. Not because of me. I was simply a catalyst. Yes, there were guidelines and rules. They came not by fiat, but through careful study, shared by all, from beginning staffer to senior editor.

Any thoughtful editor of conscience, given freedom through the operation of this kind of executive staff, becomes, not a bigger editor, but a far more rounded one who generates growth through his involvement in opening the windows to fresh, serious consideration of issues, both internal and public.

These are the kinds of news organizations that react thoughtfully to the findings of the eminent pollsters who tell us that there is a growing distrust of the press. George Gallup has said the credibility gap is the most serious in all his organization's years of research. [8] Daniel Yankelovich goes further. He believes that we can expect in this decade moves to re-word the protective shield of the First Amendment.[9]

Was it something we said?

Those of us who ponder the rising disaffection of the public with its press believe that almost all of it is cumulative effect — the result of years of resistance by journalists. People object ever more strenuously to basic lack of accuracy, failure to check facts, misquoting individuals, invading privacy, letting reporters' opinions stand in news stories, passing along information with sources disguised, a notable lack of compassion, and, as Tom Johnson emphasized, elevating press rights over all else in society. All true. All going on decade after decade. Little wonder that citizens feel used by this process and reflect bitterness over the press's role.

Yes, there is solid reason in many instances for the protection of sources. People whose jobs may be at stake if they provide information or whose personal security may be at risk, (these) need the guarantee of confidentiality. Reporters and editors who grant (such) cover must be prepared to spend time in jail, if need be, to protect those kinds of sources. But to stretch this anonymity to every political figure who leaks stories to serve personal purpose, or to prosecutors, sheriffs and others who have axes to grind, is not only unprofessional, but immoral.

The record proves that when the ethical issues are approached on a broad front, we fail every time. Perhaps a

The author's Modest Proposals

practical way is to choose a very few goals in response to the welter of current charges about journalistic malpractice. I am going to take the gamble of setting forth three such proposals:

1. That no consent to source immunity — confidentiality — can be given without the direct grant of authority from the top editorial officer. That the same principle be communicated to the major wire services. Get enough influential editors to apply their combined muscle and there will come movement, despite the spoiled-rotten prima donna set of reporters in Washington. A new book, *The Washington Reporters,* by Stephen Hess, published by the Brookings Institution, gives ample evidence of their failures. Hess' conclusion is that "Washington news is produced without regard for how its operation affects the totality of information that reaches the public." [10] He comes to a verdict many of us believe about most of journalism — that news people work mainly to impress other news people.

2. That news organizations adopt a rule that editorial opinion cannot be part of a news account of anything. And that those columns set aside for opinion be clearly marked as such. If nothing else, let editors recognize that of all the things that erode credibility it is the constant intrusion of opinion into reports displayed as "news." The two have their places. They do *NOT* mix. And . . .

3. That there be a rule forbidding any instant response to a protest with the comment, "We stand by our story." Let the rule be: "We shall double-check." And if the editor is convinced that the protest is without merit, any "We stand by our story" statement should include a reason so valid that every rational reader can trust the assertion.

You will note, I trust, that in each of these proposals there is not the slightest suppression of anything. All these three points demand is consultation. They restore to editors what was once a proud duty — to decide the kinds of newspapers they wanted to publish. It makes the kind of journalism that makes the calling a pride, rather than a career devoted to the trivial, the surreptitious, the misleading and, too often, the fraudulent.

I come toward an end. But first let me share something with you. About 45 years ago one of my mentors gave me a short creed and I've cherished it ever since. It is called "The Reformer."

> *The reformer is one who sets forth cheerfully toward sure defeat. His serene persistence against stone walls invites derision from those who have never*

been touched by his faith and do not know what fun it is. He never seems victorious, for if he were visibly winning, he would forthwith cease to be dubbed "reformer." It is his peculiar function to embrace a cause when it can win no other friends and when its obvious futility repels that practical and timorous type of citizen to whom the outward appearance of success is so dear. Yet, in time, the reformer's little movement becomes respectable and his little minority proves that it can grow and presently the statesman joins it and takes all the credit, cheerfully handed to him by the reformer as bribe for his support. And then comes the politician, rushing grandly to the banner of the victor. And all the crowd! The original reformer is lost in the shuffle, but he does not care. For as the great bandwagon which he started goes thundering past with trumpets, the crowd in the intoxication of triumph leans over to jeer at him — a cheerful crank, confidently mustering a little odd-lot of followers along the roadside and setting them marching, while over their heads he lifts the curious banner of a new crusade.

Wherein, perhaps, is discovered the true value of awards

Obviously, what I have is not at all a new crusade. Even so, I can ask you to join this old one in the same spirit that motivates all honorable reformers. It asks that you recognize the journalistic role is not one of satisfying individual desires. Journalism is only one of the several service institutions in society. I argue that it is the most important of the institutions because it feeds the minds of the total society. As individuals, we serve as the eyes and ears of the citizenry. Much ado is made of the pollution of air and water and land and of the food we eat. But what of pollution of the mind? Providing untainted information is the journalistic obligation. When that mental food is made impure by any act — inadvertent and thoughtless as well as by design — then the journalist has polluted the well.

In short, no other institution stands in the journalist's position in terms of scope of influence. The mad, headlong rush of badly organized news operations distorts the entire process. Do you need reminding that history — including modern history — proves repeatedly that people can be induced to destroy, not only the freedoms of others, but also their own, including the freedom of speech?

Too many say it can't happen here. Give that another, deeper thought. Think on why the experts in the field of public opinion worry so deeply about the volatile, shifting beliefs in the American public. Grasping for that Superman

cloak that says "First Amendment" every time some question is raised about (whether) what we do is pretentious and spurious grandstanding.

The First Amendment will be preserved — and with it the democracy we claim to serve honorably — when the vast majority of today's journalists grasp intellectually the vital importance of the tools they have in their control and become willing to use those tools with an ethical conscience constantly at work.

1 James Melvin Lee, *A History of American Journalism,* (Garden City Publishing Co., N.Y., 1923), p. 388.
2 Eric Sevareid, "The Quest for Objectivity," *Nieman Reports* XXIV, No. 4 (December 1970), p. 13
3 Quoted in Nelson A. Crawford, *The Ethics of Journalism,* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1924), p. 190.
4 *Ibid.*, pp. 202-210.
5 *The Washington Post,* January 24, 1982.
6 *The New England Editor,* (New England Society of Newspaper Editors, January 1952), p.1.
7 Address delivered December 8, 1981, Washington, D.C.
8 Report delivered to the First Amendment Congress, Philadelphia, Pa., January 16, 1980.
9 George Yankelovich, *The Speaker and the Listener,* (Public Agenda Foundation, 1980), introduction.
10 Stephen Hess, *The Washington Reporters,* (The Brookings Institution, 1981), p. 132.
11 Origins unknown, and the author would welcome any clues thereto.

Throughout much of his long and distinguished career in journalism and journalism education, Norman Isaacs has been a leader in seeking high standards of ethics and responsibility, and in urging the news media to be more accountable to the public.

He was the first American editor to appoint an independent ombudsman to receive and respond to complaints from readers, a practice now followed by more than two dozen major U.S. newpapers. He later—as president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1969-70 and as vice-chairman of the 20th Century Fund's Task Force on Government and the Press in 1970-71—led in the movement to create the National News Council, which monitors the performance of news media regarded as national suppliers of news. He was among the original advisers to the National News Council, and, as its chairman since January 1977, he has been largely responsible for the stability and respect it now enjoys.

Mr. Isaacs, who began his professional career in 1925 as a reporter for the *Indianapolis* (Ind.) *Star,* has served as managing editor of the *Indianapolis Times* (1936-43), editorial director of the *Indianapolis News* (1943-45), managing editor of the *St. Louis* (Mo.) *Star-Times* (1945-51), managing editor of the *Louisville* (Ky.) *Times* (1951-61) and vice president and executive editor of both the *Louisville Times* and the *Louisville Courier-Journal* (1962-70). On retiring from daily newspaper work in 1970, he joined the faculty and staff of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where he remained until 1980, as editor in-residence and later as associate dean. While a professor at Columbia in 1975-76, he was loaned to the DuPonts of Delaware to correct the problems of their ailing newspapers in Wilmington, a task he accomplished in 18 months as the papers' president, publisher and chief executive officer.

Mr. Isaacs also has served as president of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association (1953), chairman of the national Sigma Delta Chi's committee to review the performance of the press (1954) and chairman of the Sigma Delta Chi ethics committee (1955-56). He has been chairman since 1978 of Dartmouth College's Amos Tuck Awards for Business Writing, and in the summer of 1982 he was teaching journalism at Stanford University as the first occupant of a new Hearst Foundation Chair for distinguished professional journalists.

He has received many awards. One of the most recent was from the New York State Society of Newspaper Editors "for career-long efforts in sustaining a free press, for originating the ombudsman movement and for abiding national leadership in fostering excellence in journalism."