

2000

Effects of ownership and circulation on editorial presentation in West Virginia newspapers

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Effects of Ownership and Circulation on Editorial
Presentation in West Virginia Newspapers

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Thesis submitted to the Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism
at West Virginia University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Journalism

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Morgantown, West Virginia
2000

Key Words: state, opinion-editorial, ownership, bias, newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, which focuses on the post-yellow journalism era in West Virginia, further develops the body of research done on the influence of chain ownership in newspapers.

Historically, strong political biases in news coverage were found in the yellow journalism, early 20th century period. And this study finds a conservative bias on the opinion-editorial pages in a traditionally Democratic state with few competing media markets and reliance upon newspapers for local news. This thesis finds ownership status and circulation size affects the balance and variety of feature items presented within the opinion editorial content. Thus, previous research suggesting chain ownership influence of presentation is affirmed. Layout and editorial bias however, is not clear from this limited study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Dr. Schimmel who believed in my abilities to succeed and Dr. Hanson for guidance to succeed in this effort; Dean Martin for valued input; Dr. Hammersmith for career advice; my mother, friends and peers who gave their utmost encouragement, counseling and conversation when I needed it most; and to all, sincere gratitude for unending patience and valued time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Statement of problem.....	4
Methodology.....	7
Hypothesis.....	14
Review of literature.....	16
Results.....	29
Conclusions.....	45
Bibliography.....	48
Vita.....	55
Appendix I.....	56
Appendix II.....	57
Appendix III.....	58
Appendix IV.....	59
Appendix V.....	64
Appendix VI.....	70

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Skewness of Bias.....	30
Table 2: Size v. Bias.....	31
Table 3: Ownership v. Bias.....	33
Table 4: Ownership v. Feature Origin.....	35
Table 5: Circulation Size v. Feature Origin.....	37
Table 6: Ownership v. Feature Issue Focus.....	38
Table 7: Feature Type v. Placement.....	39
Table 8: Total Placement v. Bias.....	40
Table 9: Feature Type Placement v. Bias	41

INTRODUCTION

Mass syndication and chain-owned newspapers have gained a dominant voice in American print journalism in the last twenty-five years. Similar to the first chains established by E. Howard Scripps, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer of a century or more ago, newspaper chains today have enhanced control through their metamorphoses into large media conglomerate corporations. Ben Bagdikian (1997), a leading researcher on the effects of chain media conglomeration, documented the fact that approximately 10 media corporations control more than half of all news-producing entities in the United States. He identified the rise of a communications "cartel" and the decline of independent, competing rivalries. His research suggested these changes are a result of technological advancements and the federal government's deregulation of the media industry. The result according to Bagdikian, has been that large industrial corporations have used media power as political power.

While the yellow journalism styles of Hearst and Pulitzer have faded with their old empires, the new fourth estate cartel has molded the voice of news editorial to protect its advertising sector and corporate bottom line. In effect, the

Bagdikian analysis suggested that the integrated ownership of major media outlets with corporate giants, e.g. Walt Disney Company's ownership of ABC News, is one example as to how media groups have fallen prey to business interests and have indirectly created a corporate news bias.

But while there is research data that suggests a corporate bias exists in the news media, fellow researcher Herbert Gans concludes in earlier research that individual journalists likely impose values that can be found in various news story types - thus shaping opinions and determining what becomes news.

By using individual words as clues to determine these values, Gans focused on eight main perspectives; ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order and natural leadership.

Through each perspective, Gans describes how innate views and values of American society have shaped journalists' ideology as progressive reformers, much like the early 20th century political movement and not so much as being conservative or liberally biased (Gans, 1979).

This study will examine biases of chain and independent newspapers and how they may or may not affect the voice of opinion pages in West Virginia dailies both large and small.

This study will also probe the presentation and placement of features in cross-comparison analysis with ownership status to ask whether editorial pages reflect bias.

In addition to the aforementioned content and presentation factors, the environment and demographics of West Virginia are also an important canvas upon which this study will be presented. As a rural state where industrial giants and political machinery have historically been a strong voice in public affairs, newspaper ownership could exist as a bastion of support to the citizenry or remain as a factor which tilts the scales of opinion for the status quo of business and industry. This qualitative and quantitative study could prove significant to understanding the range of political viewpoints within the state, question if Mountaineers are indeed always free or have become enslaved by media outlets which have self-imposed censorship upon news and opinion that conflict with their readership's viewpoint (Ronald Lewis, personal communication, January 1999).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In accordance with the Sherman Act of 1890 and subsequent federal antitrust legislation enacted in the twentieth century, chain ownership in the American economy is permitted as long as "fair competition" exists for rival business and corporate entities. However, within the news industry, specifically, chain ownership presents a complex marriage between business and the reading public. Together, survival of the fittest may directly clash with the rights of free speech as defined in the Bill of Rights. Influence by chain ownership could be reflected on editorial pages. Such presentations may be designed to ensure financial stability through neutral or moderate perspectives to maximize readership and thus protect advertising interests. However, researchers who have studied chain newspapers like Gannett and Rupert Murdoch's corporate investments have found such owners to promote an ideological persuasion as well (Pasadeos, Renfro, 1997).

With small media markets in West Virginia, vital advertising sales volume is reduced and in effect possible rival media outlets are limited. Charleston, W.Va., is the only city in the state where such a competitive journalistic environment exists between two daily publications within state borders. The

Journal, located in Martinsburg, W.Va., competes across state boundaries with The Hagerstown Herald-Mail (West Virginia News Directory, 1999).

Thus, the motives of the state's newspapers lend themselves to examination. In this environment, the public's dependence upon newspapers for local news and information could also enhance dailies' influence on both news and opinion. Despite the growth of new media outlets, the extremely high median age of state citizenry suggests this dependence on newspapers for information remains (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998).

Yet, the problem could reveal independent newspapers are promoters of stronger ideology than chain owned dailies. For example, independent papers could be heavily influenced through the voice of industry advertising or their individual owner's interests, versus a corporate chain's push to own a profit-making publication. Thus, lack of competition and the existence of industry and dominant business influence could yield a less than objective, independent voice for the community and instead protect these interests from controversy.

JUSTIFICATION

This thesis further develops the body of research done on the influence of chain ownership in newspapers. While strong political biases in news coverage are historically prevalent, this comparative study of opinion presentation and content between independent and chain newspapers is important to understanding the function of chain newspapers and opinions in West Virginia.

Specifically, this study is needed to understand the impact of media in West Virginia - and whether generalizations of national trends in previous studies, show up in a rural, poorer state. And while these demographics may similar in other states, this research is needed to determine how the Democratic political landscape that has dominated West Virginia for several decades is portrayed by the state's most widely prevalent news medium.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This research defines and examines eight chain and three independently owned newspapers in a detailed comparison study from a qualitative and content analysis with relation to circulation size. The following publications chosen were the only dailies in the state to publish every day of the week (West Virginia News Directory, 1999).

Huntington Herald-Dispatch - The only state daily owned by Gannett, one of the largest newspaper chains in the nation. At the end of 1998, the chain giant owned 75 dailies across the U.S., including USA Today, its national flagship. The Herald-Dispatch presented nine editorial pages, two in the Sunday edition.

Charleston Daily Mail - At the time of this content analysis The Daily Mail was part of Thomson Newspaper Group, the second most prominent corporate chain entity in West Virginia. It presented eight pages of opinion - two on Sunday. As an afternoon publication, The Daily Mail competes with the independently-owned Charleston Gazette in the largest and only competitive print media market within state boundaries. Thomson owned three state dailies at the time of this study including: the Beckley

Register-Herald, the Bluefield Daily Telegraph and the Fairmont Times-West Virginian. Named after founder and billionaire Lord Alfred Thomson, the Canada-based, international publishing corporation was one of the largest media groupings in the world with properties in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Beckley Register-Herald - At the time of this study, the Register-Herald was owned by the Thomson group and was part of Beckley Newspapers. It presented seven pages of editorial in the sample exemplified

Bluefield Daily Telegraph - Thomson owned the Bluefield Daily Telegraph at the time of this study. The Telegraph has served southern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia since 1893. In this study, the Telegraph presented seven pages of editorial.

Fairmont Times-West Virginian - Thomson owned the Fairmont Times-West Virginian at the time of this study and presented seven pages of opinion editorial.

Charleston Gazette - With the largest circulation in the state, the independently-owned Gazette in partnership with the Thomson-owned Daily Mail, is one of 13 remaining Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) ventures allowed by the 1970 Newspaper Preservation Act. Under such agreements, the U.S. Attorney General is empowered to grant antitrust law exemptions to allow financially troubled newspapers to merge their production and

commercial operations. At its peak, there were 28 such agreements in operation across the country. The Gazette presented eight pages of editorial, two on Sunday

The Journal - Formerly known as The Martinsburg Journal, it became the first property to be published by Ogden Nutting. As the most prevalent corporate or chain entity in the state, Ogden Nutting Newspapers originated in West Virginia and has expanded to include about 36 other dailies, weeklies and other publications mostly publishing in small media markets in the eastern half of the United States. Subsequent Ogden acquisitions also included in this study are the Parkersburg News and Wheeling News Register. The Journal presented 7 pages of editorial in this sample.

Parkersburg News - Owned by Ogden newspapers, the Parkersburg News serves the Mid-Ohio Valley and presented 8 pages of editorial in this sample.

Wheeling News Register - The Ogden Newspaper group is headquartered in Wheeling and the News Register presented eight pages of editorial in this sample.

The Dominion Post - Located in Morgantown, The Dominion Post is independently owned by the Raese family, who also own eight radio stations that make up West Virginia Radio Corporation. The Raese family also has corporate interests in diversified mineral

and energy production and extraction. The Dominion Post presented eight pages of editorial, two on Sunday.

The Clarksburg Exponent - Owned by Cecil Highland, the Exponent also owns the afternoon edition, The Clarksburg Telegram. The Exponent presented seven pages of editorial in this sample.

Apparatus

The eleven papers selected are divided into two size of circulation-based groups (large, small) in accordance with West Virginia Press Association award divisions. Random selection of seven publication dates are combined to present a constructed week of opinion editorial presentation of each newspaper examined. This was accomplished through the use of a random number generator provided by the University of Minnesota Department of Statistics.

Procedure

Each publication's constructed week of opinion pages was cross-examined from perspectives of qualitative and quantitative analysis (See Appendix I). The following feature types or specifically identified forms of editorial content, were identified and individually analyzed for political identification: editorial: guest editorial, political cartoon, staff contribution, syndicated column, guest column, letter to the editor. Aside from the general content, the headline for each item was also examined (See Appendix III).

The bias of each feature type was determined by using the following politically defined definitions of conservative, liberal and neutral/moderate;

Conservative - Defined as words or phrases of examined content that infer or are in direct support of the "religious right," Christian Coalition, lower taxes, business and industry friendly postures on environmental regulation, 2nd and 10th Amendment rights and anti-Clinton/Gore perspectives on policy and scandal. (E.g., "Tax cut should be New Year priority," an editorial headline that goes on to push for GOP-led cuts in taxes; .)

Liberal - Defines as words or phrases of examined content that infer or are in direct support of the women and minority issues, e.g., gay and abortion rights and affirmative action, labor unions, government program expansion and welfare, gun control, strict interpretation of the separation of church and state and sympathetic to Clinton's policies and scandals. (E.g., "Impeachment talk distracts attention from spending bills," commentary that cites Clinton's scandals, but focuses on the ills of a GOP-run Congress and inactivity on legislation).

Moderate/Neutral - Defined as words or phrases of examined content that collectively failed to more visibly support what is defined as a liberal or conservative, that appears to objectively thank or support civic welfare of the reading audience on apolitical issues or appears to be objective and fair in criticism or praise of both conservative and liberal viewpoints. (E.g., "Ensuring that 'monster trucks' are safe," a public welfare, apolitical editorial about child safety at an entertainment event; "Talk of new program, tax cuts, ignores national debt," a commentary about pleasing both political perspectives, but failing to address overshadowing issue.)

Dickson's (1994) examination of media bias categorized the number and types of article sources and then coded opinionated articles as being positive, negative or ambivalent coverage of

the U.S. invasion of Panama. Published ideological descriptions of syndicated contributors also was analyzed to further pinpoint the ideological presentation of the editorial pages sampled (See Appendix V).

For this examination, each opinion editorial item is coded for political identification in regard to state and local and national issues in relation to the newspaper's circulation size and ownership status. This study further identifies each item in the context of where it originated, issue focus, bias, placement, author's affiliation and number of each feature type presented. Calculating the number of each feature type presented also seeks to determine similarities and differences between chain and independent newspaper's diversity, or variety and balance of editorial presentation.

The placement of feature items above or below the fold on the opinion page will be examined in relation to the positioning on the page similar to Kinnick's (1998) research, which examined gender bias in newspaper profiles of Olympic athletes. (Appendix IV).

HYPOTHESIS

H1: A strong political bias will not be found among chain owned newspapers. This hypothesis is based upon Demer's 1996 study, which indicates that while such publications aggressively attack mainstream perspectives and institutions, they are consistently aggressive and critical regardless of political persuasion. (Demer, 1996).

H2: Chain-owned dailies will reflect influence from a dominant wire or syndication service. This is derived from the Glasser, Allen and Banks study of the effect of wire service influence on the coverage of the Gary Hart scandal. Research revealed that the prominence of the Hart story found in Knight-Ridder owned newspapers and dailies that subscribed to the Knight-Ridder wire service was much higher than non-affiliated dailies. This leaves probable reason to support the bleeding of this concept into the opinion pages of chain-owned dailies where similar questions can be raised (Glasser, 1989).

H3: Independent papers will have a defined bias and lack the corporate resources to reflect the number and diversity of features presented in chain publications. Demer's (1996) research indicated that chain-owned media's financial capabilities will be demonstrated through the diversity and

number of features exhibited. As a result, chain owned publications will focus more on local and state issues, as the corporate influence grows larger and a decrease in circulation size will be least apparent among chain publications. His findings suggested the increase or decrease in size of a corporate or chain will proportionately yield the hypothesized results.

H4: Layout/Presentation of articles will play a role in both ownership circumstances and may indicate bias. Barnhurst's research supports this hypothesis. Barnhurst found newspapers to downplay or dramatize the news in a particular selected edition to follow their political stance (Barnhurst, 1990).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rise of chain-owned newspapers in America has spurred researchers to perform various content analyses, similar to this project. These findings give a composite portrait that variances of influence exist between independent and chain newspapers news coverage and opinion editorial pages in America.

News coverage by the first giants (Hearst and Pulitzer) of American journalism were blatantly obvious for a unique style and sensational reporting. It is indicative that Pulitzer and Hearst also competed ruthlessly for market shares. Thus, the influence of these chain newspaper magnets dominated until a new style of chain owners, such as Scripps-Howard, Cox and Gannett began to start multi-newspaper purchases regardless of circulation size and began treating newspapers as corporate, profit-generating entities and less as political tools of influence (Bagdikian, 1997).

While it has been argued that many newspaper chains have claimed hands-off policies on news or editorial control, publications owned by the Hearst and Cox chain magnates, were known for promoting a specific editorial slant through their newspapers. In 1964, the Hearst Corporation forced all of their editors to support the Johnson-Humphrey ticket, while Cox

Newspapers instructed their publications to endorse Nixon in 1972 (Bagdikian).

The 20th century trend of diminishing independents, decreased existence of rival newspapers in large populated markets and public perception of monopoly in business all have smudged the view of newspaper giants. Like native-born Hearst's sensational news empire, the beginning of Rupert Murdoch's foreign media holdings which includes newspapers in the United States, elevated fears that his outside influence could be damaging to good journalism practices in the American audience. Casting criticism aside, Murdoch would not be stopped from buying into the American market. While his purchase of substantial media properties, such as Fox, The New York Post and Boston Herald, made him a multimedia giant, researchers have studied Murdoch's decisions to detect any potential influence (Pasadeos and Renfro).

Chain influence and editorial endorsement

Content analyses of chain newspapers have questioned in what ways, if any, has the influence of chain ownership affected the editorial content and overall message. The potential for influence by chain owned media groups was closely examined in a 1975 study of editorial comment in Canadian dailies. Wagenberg

and Soderlund (1975) examined the chain-owned Free Press group and compared two independently owned papers through a coding method with major issue categories. The topics included economic themes, political leaders, foreign policy, national, environmental and miscellaneous themes, along with political institutions and socio-cultural themes. Using a content analysis to examine seven newspapers, the researchers looked at the editorial coverage of the 1972 Canadian federal election campaign.

Their findings indicated no correlation existed between the chain-owned editorial in relation to issues or endorsements in the campaign. According to their conclusions, uniformity among editorial topics covered by the chain-owned newspapers and partisanship was also absent between chain papers during the campaign. Lastly, the researchers argued that a possibility of chain influence still existed in any future situation and that chain control of media is something to be watched (Wagenburg and Soderlund).

Walkman, Gillmor, Gaziano and Dennis (1975) did a specific comparative analysis of chain newspaper endorsements. The authors questioned whether a degree of homogeneity existed within papers owned by the same chain. After defining a chain and editorial influence using previous studies on the topic, the

researchers performed a comparative analysis between chain and independent newspapers. The researchers found that independent papers did not tend to endorse candidates while the chain papers were much more likely to do so. Chain newspapers were found to switch endorsement en masse from one election to the next. However, a chain that controlled newspapers scattered across the country was found to be less uniform than other chains examined in endorsement during the last four presidential elections that were studied for the project (Walkman et al., 1975).

Hicks and Featherston (1978) took a similar approach to Workman's team of researchers whose content analysis examined editorial endorsement between chain versus independent papers. However, their study investigated whether jointly owned Louisiana dailies, one morning and one afternoon paper would have similar editorial and news content. Using chi-square analysis, the researchers failed to find any duplication on the editorial pages. While layouts were expected to be different, the authors saw this as a method to mask the same news coverage. But in addition to editorial pages, news coverage was also found to be vastly different and extreme competition existed between the newspapers to get the scoop on nearly all stories (Hicks and Featherston).

Layout and politics

In an important correlation of bias and layout, Barnhurst (1990) examined layout as political expression in the context of visual literacy of the Peruvian press. Following examination of issue coverage, Barnhurst suggested that layout biases were used to downplay or emphasize the focus upon the issue of terrorism. In this research, stories were examined for placement upon the page in addition to headline size, column width and typography. Conclusively, Barnhurst found newspapers downplayed or dramatized the news in a particular selected edition to follow their political stance (Barnhurst).

Chain and wire service influence

Glasser, Allen, and Banks (1989) performed a content analysis of a single story covered by the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain. The chain's coverage of the Gary Hart story was examined for similar or contrasting coverage between papers owned by the chain, dailies that exclusively purchased the chain's news service and newspapers that had no Knight-Ridder affiliation. The research revealed coverage was much higher in the Knight-Ridder papers, followed by newspapers that carried the news service of the chain. The least amount of coverage of the story existed in the non-affiliated newspapers. According to

the authors, this study only showed subtle influence by the chain and its wire service upon the newspapers directly or indirectly affected (Glasser, Allen, and Banks).

Continuing with a wire service related analyses, research completed by Stephen Lacy (1990) showed the effect of competing circulation on the amount of wire services carried by those newspapers. Although chain news wire services were not studied, results accurately predicted that an increased intensity of competition would increase the number of press services utilized and vice versa. After examining 100 monopoly and 98 competitive dailies in 1980, Lacy's study showed competing dailies increased their financial investment in editorial staff and wire services as a ploy to maintain or increase circulation sizes. In the opposite (un-competitive) scenario, the weaker paper posed no threat to the dominant daily, which as a result did not have to make any changes to wire services (Lacy).

Knight-Ridder was not the only newspaper group examined for potential chain influence in news-editorial content.

Akhavin-Majid, Rife and Gopinath (1991) published their study of news-editorial content published by Gannett newspapers. By comparing three separate public national issues covered in 56 Gannett newspapers, the authors found that Gannett publications

varied little in their stance on the issues studied (Akhavan-Majid, Rife, and Gopinath).

The researchers first identified and explained what types of editorial control could potentially exist. The authors hypothesized that editorial positions would be uniform when taken on national issues. Using dailies from the Gannett chain and a random sample of non-Gannett dailies, the study identified three issues (John Tower nomination as well as the Supreme Court's Affirmative Action and Webster decisions) in 1989 and surveyed both groups. The results indicated that Gannett had a near uniform response to all three issues in comparison to a diverse response to the sample group. The conclusion of the authors cited that research on the idea of indirect control by publishers was an important variable that may alter their findings. Indirect control was theorized to be Gannett's practice of hiring like-minded staff for its chain newspapers and thus not directly influencing day-to-day editorial presentations (Akhavan, Rife, and Gopinath, 1991).

Ownership status change from independent to chain

As a relatively new, albeit heavy influence in the U.S. media, researchers put Rupert Murdoch's chain ownership of

newspapers in the United States to the content analysis test. Renfro and Pasadeos (1997) compared dailies before Murdoch's ownership and then after Murdoch purchased publications. Their study looked for the news content and sensational style that Murdoch is known for utilizing in other properties. They found some increase in sensationalism and a refocusing of local news by the media giant's papers along with self-imposed Murdoch glorification. Otherwise, little editorial influence was detected. But the researchers did not specifically study Murdoch's influence on the opinion pages of the papers (Pasadeos and Renfro).

Editorial presentation, Hynds studies, insider polling

Whether a newspaper can maintain quality journalism and editorial strength once it becomes part of a chain was a central focus to one researchers work. As an author of several studies on the opinion pages, Ernest Hynds (1980) argued that the relevance of the opinion editorial page is in doubt when chain-ownership influences the editorial direction or overall presentation (Hynds).

Hynds is also a major researcher studying opinion pages. However, his studies over the last twenty-five years, have

emphasized the importance of opinion pages and their influence on the reading public. In a survey style format, Hynds questioned editorial page editors about editorial presentations and the relevance to their circulation audiences.

In the initial survey, Hynds (1976) found the size of a newspaper's circulation had considerable influence on authorship of editorial content. According to survey results, 85 percent of large papers write all or most of their editorials. However, small publications only write a fifth of their editorials (Hynds).

Among the papers sampled, the presentation of the opinion editorial pages consisted mostly of editorials, cartoons, columns and letters. According to the survey, the letter to the editor section generates many responses although the number published varies from large papers who indicated that they used a tenth of what they received, versus 70% being printed in smaller papers (Hynds).

Hynds indicated that various word limitation policies for letters to the editor were found among newspapers sampled. The author did not research the space allotted for letters. The tabulation of the survey revealed that political cartoonists were mostly employed by large publications while the small newspapers utilized syndicates for political cartoon features.

Sixty-two percent of the editors also indicated columns on their editorial pages were balanced between conservative and liberal views. Hynds' survey compiled rankings of syndicated columnists divided into various categories, from liberal to conservative and from a humorist to a reportorial style. According to his research findings, syndicated columnists were the dominant features for the opinion editorial page(s). But, local columnists were also significantly utilized as well. His conclusions pointed out that opinion editorial pages were balanced in political viewpoints while also remaining a voice of the audience by printing many letters to the editor. The author theorized that editors who took stands and constructed well-designed and balanced pages would achieve favorable influence among the readers (Hynds).

Hynds (1984) followed his study of editorial page research to find if any changes had occurred over time. The most noticeable change in the study revealed an increase in editorial space in the paper while all of the other factors were generally the same.

Hynds (1989) then asked editors for their perspective of the future. In response, editors indicated that they believed the vitality of the opinion page would play a stable role in the newspaper. In addition, over two-thirds of the editors expected

opinion editorial material would be consistently read and would increase readership. Yet, respondents to Hynds survey also indicated an immediate editorial concern is the need for better writing and a greater variety of opinions. Editors also reaffirmed intentions to reach out to readers through a broad audience presentation of material (Hynds).

By following up on three previous survey questionnaire studies, Hynds (1994) hoped to find if there were any noticeable trends in the editorial page. This time the editors' responses indicated an increase in minority input on opinion pages, which they viewed as a positive trend, while a decrease in the endorsement of political candidates was affirmed by Hynds as a negative in helping inform the public of their choices to vote for or against. Survey items previously mentioned here, maintained statistical similarity in a joint comparison among all three studies (Hynds).

An insider study performed by Kapoor and Kang (1993) surveyed publishers and opinion page editors about their political persuasions. The participating respondents indicated that a great amount of diversity in political opinion existed between both groups although final authority over editorial content in 59 percent of the cases rested in the hands of the publisher. The researchers created lists of political

statements upon which the respondents were to respond. Forty-three percent of opinion editors admitted they were concerned that the editorials are following the newspaper's stances on social, economic and political orientation. Overall the study indicated that political diversity is healthy between dailies and that monolithic control exerted by the publishers is a myth (Kapoor and Kang).

Returning to the independent versus chain comparison, David Coulson (1994) published a study that examined whether independently owned newspapers are thought to be better producers of quality journalism. Journalists from both ownership types were asked about their coverage of events. Journalists from independent publications responded that their coverage was very good and did not decrease in the amount of space devoted to local news. Chain journalists, however, were not as enthusiastic about their coverage. Both groups responded negatively about their publications' editorial development and support. Less than half rated their opinion editorial page attractive and interesting. A significant minority of journalists saw profit margins as a detriment to news publication (Coulson).

Chain corporate structure, influence

In directly examining the corporate structure of chain newspapers, David Demers (1996) sought to answer critics who have argued chain publications are less vigorous editorially than independent newspapers. Demers hypothesized that as the characteristics of a chain grew larger, so would the proportionate number of editorials, letters to the editor, and staff contributions. His findings found newspapers published more of the aforementioned feature types and reasoned that chain newspapers had less parochial ties to the community and thus were less likely to filter what was published whether they be features presenting a positive or negative bias of mainstream institutions (Demers).

Future Trends

Researcher David Astor (1994) suggested that local commentary is increasingly important to opinion pages across the country. Astor especially focused on the economic costs incurred or saved by using local writers. Astor indicated that surveys reveal local commentary is attaining popular reader response and dailies are following the trend for local contributing commentary and less syndicated material on the Opinion-Editorial pages (Astor).

RESULTS

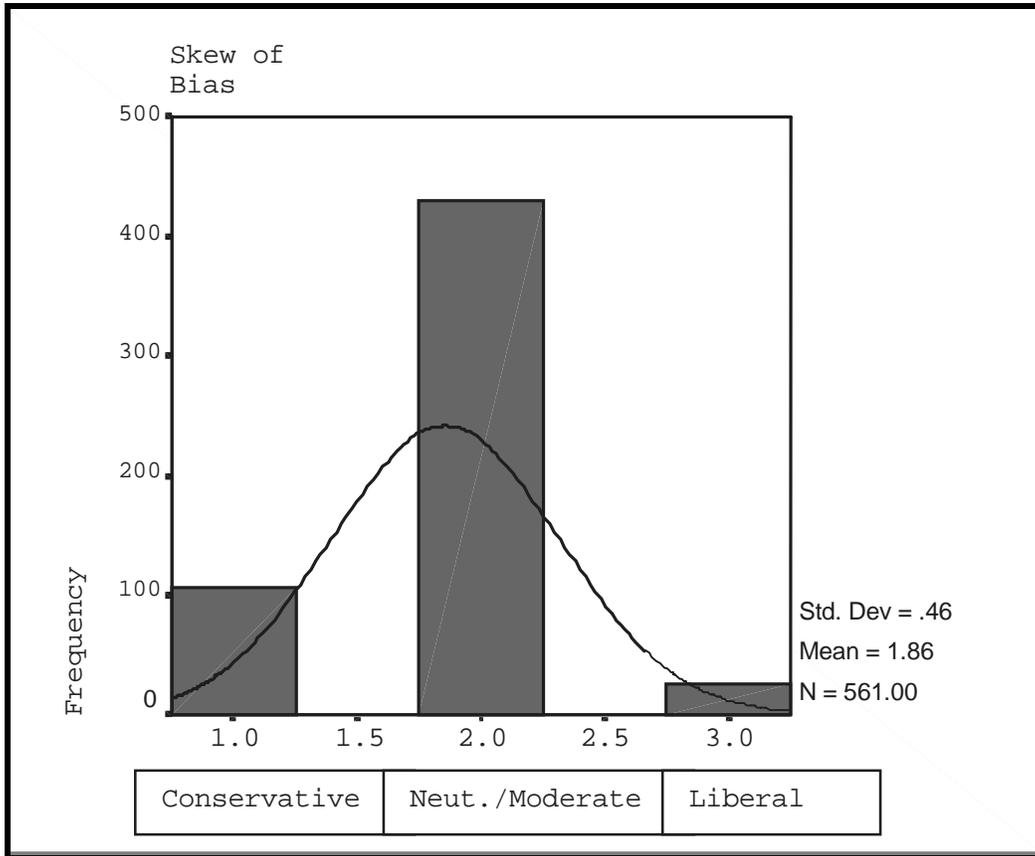
Ownership and bias

This study sought to determine the difference in opinion editorial page biases, if any, between chain and independent West Virginia newspapers in 1998. My first hypothesis proposed that a strong political bias would not be found among chain newspapers and the results indicate this.

As in Demer's (1996) research, chain publications in this study aggressively attacked mainstream institutions and appealed to a broad, but moderate/neutral political bias. In Table 1 shows that both ownership groups presented a large majority of neutral/moderate features. However, both ownership groups also presented many more conservative than liberal features. This latter finding partially refutes Demer (1996) if only so slightly and is exhibited by the skewness (see Table 1) that shows features are more conservative.

Table 1:

Bias of Total Sample



Bias					
Valid		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Conservative	106	18.9	18.9	18.9
	Neutral	430	76.6	76.6	95.5
	Liberal	25	4.5	4.5	100
	Total	561	100	100	

Statistics		
Bias		
N	Valid	561
	Missing	0
Mean		1.86
Std. Deviation		.46
Skewness		-.504
Std. Error of Skewness		.103
Kurtosis		.956
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.206

Examples of

conservative bias were found in the Ogden-owned Journal and Parkersburg News, which did not publish any liberal features. The Thomson-owned Daily Telegraph was the only publication to present more liberal than conservative features in raw numbers, among all newspapers sampled.

Table 2:

Ownership v. Bias

	Conservative	Neutral	Liberal
Chain	17.5% (<u>n</u> =71)	78.8% (<u>n</u> =319)	3.7% (<u>n</u> =15)
Independent	22.4% (<u>n</u> =35)	71.2% (<u>n</u> =111)	6.4% (<u>n</u> =10)
Total	<u>N</u> =106	<u>N</u> =430	<u>N</u> =25
Pearson chi-square: Value 4.137 – Sig. 0.126			

The independent Charleston Gazette was the only newspaper to present a higher percentage (of total presentation) of liberal features than the Daily Telegraph. And while the other Thomson publications reflected a conservative bias, these publications did publish more liberal features than Ogden publications. Except for the Dominion Post, which also failed to present any liberal features, The Charleston Gazette and Clarksburg Exponent published more liberal features than the Ogden chain, which published only one liberal feature (1.9 percent of its presentation) in the Wheeling News Register.

Despite the absence of liberal perspectives presented in the sample, the percentage of a publication's presentation that featured conservative viewpoints shows that the Dominion Post (31.9 percent), Parkersburg News (29.7 percent), Charleston Daily Mail (25.4 percent) and Times West Virginian (21.6 percent) were most conservative and less likely to take a neutral or moderate viewpoint.

However, joining the Daily Telegraph (4.3 percent of total presentations) as publications with lower percentages of conservative features were the Herald Dispatch (14.1 percent), Wheeling News Register (15.4 percent) and Register Herald (15.6 percent). These four publications also had high percentages of features that were presented from a neutral or moderate

perspective. The Journal (15.7 percent), along with two independents, the Gazette (17.6 percent) and the Exponent (20 percent) fell in the middle.

Table 3:
Size v. Bias

Size	Bias		
	Conservative	Neutral	Liberal
Division I	18.2% (n=44)	75.6%(n=183)	6.2% (n=15)
Division II	19.4% (n=62)	77.4% (n=247)	3.1% (n=10)
	N=106	N=430	N=25
Pearson Chi-Square .215			

Dropping the ownership status, size does indicate that the larger newspapers were less conservative than liberal publications. This finding, while not chi-square significant (see Table 3), can only suggest probable cause that larger publications serve a larger, more politically diverse reading audience. However, the first and second largest newspapers compete for the same audience and are generally thought to share near opposing political viewpoints. Regardless, their audience is larger and more urban than any Division II audience and would

be a substantial reason for a more neutral/moderate to liberal presentation.

Ownership, balance and diversity

My second hypothesis proposed that chain-owned publications would reflect influence from a dominant wire or syndication service. Although not significant when comparing chain and independent newspapers, The Thompson-owned Bluefield Daily Telegraph exhibited the single largest percentage of wire service feature types of the entire sample - most of which were provided by a wire service also owned by Thompson. Whether significant or not, the Gannett-owned Huntington Herald-Dispatch consistently utilized the cartoonist of the nearby Gannett-owned, Cincinnati Enquirer. Yet, overall few consistent links to wire services existed in the sample with Ogden-owned newspapers. As a whole, chain publications were not significantly dominated by a particular syndication service and published more local originating feature types than independent newspapers. Favorite syndicate cartoonists, however, were consistent in both publication groups.

Table 4:

Ownership v. Feature Origin

	Local	Non-local	Total
Chain	54.6% (<u>n</u> =221)	45.4% (<u>n</u> =184)	<u>N</u> =405
Independent	44.9% (<u>n</u> =70)	55.1% (<u>n</u> =86)	<u>N</u> =156
Total	<u>N</u> =291	<u>N</u> =270	
Pearson chi-square: Value 4.241 - Sig. 0.039			

The third hypothesis proposed independent newspapers will have a defined bias and lack corporate resources to reflect the balance and variety of features presented in chain publications. While my findings indicate chains do have a more balanced presentation, obvious variance in number of features presented is to some degree, a likely result of an imbalance in number of the chain (8) and independent (3) newspapers sampled.

An example of the balance between local and non-local originating features by chain newspapers is best exhibited by the Register Herald (Beckley), which had near perfect balance - of local (48.9 percent) and non-local (51.1 percent) features presented.

In second part of this hypothesis, chain newspapers were also hypothesized to devote more space to local contributors. But the Journal was the only Ogden publication to give more

space on the opinion page to local (60.8 percent) features than non-local (39.2 percent) features. Ogden's larger circulation size properties, The Parkersburg News and Wheeling News Register, presented a majority of non-local features. Among Thomson's other properties the Charleston Daily Mail and Bluefield Daily Telegraph both presented more locally submitted features. The Thomson-owned Times West Virginian had only a slightly greater ratio of non-local (56.9 percent) to local features (43.9).

Aside from the Journal, Daily Telegraph and Daily Mail, the Gannett-owned Huntington Herald Dispatch was the only additional chain publication to present more locally (67.2 percent) submitted features than non-local (32.8 percent) ones.

Overall, Thomson-owned newspapers clearly presented more local features than Ogden Nutting newspapers - a smaller corporate chain.

This result supports Demer's findings that an increase in the size of a chain will proportionately yield additional variety and balance among publications. As the only Gannett-owned publication, the Herald-Dispatch, though slightly smaller in circulation, compared similarly with the Daily Mail's local (72.9 percent) to non-local (27.1) ratio, Thomson's largest publication within this sample.

The Charleston Gazette is the only independent publication that exhibits a majority of locally submitted features. The other two independents, The Dominion Post and Clarksburg Exponent have the lowest number of locally submitted features among all publications examined. Results indicate more balance is found among the Thomson publications, than Ogden or independent newspapers and supports Demer's research.

Table 5:

Circulation Size v. Feature Origin

	Local	Non-local
Division I	65.7% (<u>n</u> =159)	34.3% (<u>n</u> =83) <u>N</u> =242
Division II	41.4% (<u>n</u> =132)	58.6% (<u>n</u> =187) <u>N</u> =319
Pearson chi-square: Value 32.610 - Sig. 0.000		

As expected, circulation size did play a significant role when examining the amount of local versus non-local features. Three of four publications within Division I had greater local than non-local contributions. The smallest publication in Division I, the Register Herald, fell short. In Division II, circulation size lost some significance as the Journal surpassed all larger publications - except for the Bluefield Daily

Telegraph - within its division and presented more local than non-local features. However, this publication does compete across state lines with the Hagerstown, MD, Herald-Mail, and may offer a plausible explanation for its exception to the size variable.

Ownership and issue focus

Table 6:

Ownership v. Feature Issue Focus

	Local/State	National
Chain	41.7% (<u>n</u> =169)	58.3% (<u>n</u> =236) <u>N</u> =405
Independent	38.5% (<u>n</u> =60)	61.5% (<u>n</u> =96) <u>N</u> =156
Pearson chi-square: Value 0.498 - Sig. 0.481		

Despite significant input from local contributors, the issue focus of features drops substantially among chain newspapers. Of 54.6 percent of locally-contributed features, only 41.7 percent focused on local or state issues. Among independent papers surveyed the variance between local origins and local issue focus was less significant (6.4 percent). This finding contradicts Demers findings that chain-owned publications would focus on local and state issues.

Placement and bias

Table 7:

Placement v. Feature Type

	Top	Bottom
Cartoon	59.8% (<u>n</u> =76)	40.2% (<u>n</u> =51)
Editorial	74.3% (<u>n</u> =75)	25.7% (<u>n</u> =26)
Guest Editorial	69.6% (<u>n</u> =16)	30.4% (<u>n</u> =7)
Guest Column	47.6% (<u>n</u> =20)	52.4% (<u>n</u> =22)
Letters to Editor	39.3% (<u>n</u> =55)	60.7% (<u>n</u> =85)
Staff	66.7% (<u>n</u> =12)	33.3% (<u>n</u> =6)
Syndicate	48.8% (<u>n</u> =40)	51.2% (<u>n</u> =42)
Wire Service	53.6% (<u>n</u> =15)	46.4% (<u>n</u> =13)
Total	<u>N</u> =76	<u>N</u> =252
Pearson chi-square: Value 35.506 - Sig.0.000		

The fourth hypothesis proposed that the placement of feature types would play a role in both ownership circumstances and would indicate bias. This, however, was not the case. In general findings, the sample clearly shows cartoons, staff contributions, editorial and guest editorials were placed above the fold or on the top half of the opinion pages sampled. Letters to Editor, were most often relegated to below the fold or on the bottom half of the page. Syndicated commentary, wire

service and guest columns appeared to fall in the middle or share near equal placement above and below the fold.

Table 8:

Placement v. Bias

	Conservative	Neutral	Liberal
Top	20.7% (<u>n</u> =64)	74.4% (<u>n</u> =230)	4.9% (<u>n</u> =15)
Bottom	16.7% (<u>n</u> =42)	79.4% (<u>n</u> =200)	4.0% (<u>n</u> =10)
Total	<u>N</u> =106	<u>N</u> =430	<u>N</u> =25
Pearson chi-square: Value 1.887 - Sig. 0.389			

The examination of each feature type for bias indicates that of the liberal features presented, most were letters to the editor and thus likely to be placed on the bottom half of the page(s). An equal number of conservative and liberal guest columns were presented. Through its layout, this feature type may exist the closest balance of political bias when comparing bias to their proportional placement on the opinion page.

Table 9:

Feature Type v. Bias

	Conservative	Neutral	Liberal
Cartoon	25.2% (<u>n</u> =32)	72.4% (<u>n</u> =92)	2.4% (<u>n</u> =3)
Editorial	6.9% (<u>n</u> =7)	90.1% (<u>n</u> =91)	3.0% (<u>n</u> =3)
Guest Editorial	13.0% (<u>n</u> =3)	78.3% (<u>n</u> =18)	8.7% (<u>n</u> =2)
Guest Column	9.5% (<u>n</u> =4)	81.0% (<u>n</u> =34)	9.5% (<u>n</u> =4)
Letters to Editor	21.4% (<u>n</u> =30)	72.9% (<u>n</u> =102)	5.7% (<u>n</u> =8)
Staff	5.6% (<u>n</u> =1)	88.9% (<u>n</u> =16)	5.6% (<u>n</u> =1)
Syndicate	31.7% (<u>n</u> =26)	65.9% (<u>n</u> =54)	2.4% (<u>n</u> =2)
Wire Service	18.9% (<u>n</u> =3)	76.6% (<u>n</u> =23)	4.5% (<u>n</u> =2)
	<u>N</u> =106	<u>N</u> =430	<u>N</u> =25
Pearson chi-square: Value 34.581 - Sig. 0.002			

Guest editorial, staff and wire service features also appeared to have more balance between conservative and liberal features via placement and sum of each bias presented. However, these features represent the smallest percentages of the total presentation.

Syndicated commentary and cartoons both presented high numbers of conservative viewpoints and minute percentages of liberal biases. Thus, mostly conservative-biased cartoons were given prominence on the top half of opinion pages. Traditionally

placed on the top half of the page, most editorials did not take a conservative or liberal bias, taking a neutral/moderate stance instead.

In a cross-comparison analysis, this research found feature presentation differences between both ownership status and circulation size. Independent newspapers utilized free, uncompensated features, including letters to editor, guest columns and guest editorials that presented no added financial burden. These features offered independent newspapers an opportunity to divert their resources to other features. On average, independent newspapers led chain publications in all four features.

However, independent publications' substantial advantage in cartoon presentation is somewhat less clear. All three independents used multiple cartoons on a near daily basis. Whether this significant financial outlay is a result of their dedication to uncompensated features is unknown.

While the amount of space devoted to letters to editor was nearly equal in chain and independent newspapers, the prominence of editorial, syndicate, wire and staff contributions among chain publications demonstrates a more balanced and diverse presentation and financial resource advantage. The Thomson-owned Daily Telegraph's significant use of wire service - 17.4 percent

of total presentation - and staff contributions - 19.6 percent - is an example of this outcome. Albeit somewhat smaller in circulation size, the independent Dominion Post had no wire service or staff contributions.

From a circulation-size analysis, this study found the composition of the opinion editorial section similar to Hynds' survey of editors about their publications (Hynds 1976). From the letters to editor aspect, Hynds found that the number of letters to the editor published varied due to larger papers printing a much lower percentage of letters due to a larger volume received than smaller papers.

As the largest newspaper in West Virginia, the Charleston Gazette presented more letters to the editor than any other feature type. The Gazette's opinion editorial features often expanded to fill more than one page and more than half of all features were from local sources, including staff and editorial contributions.

The Gazette's chain rival, the Daily Mail, the second largest publication, presented an even higher percentage of its sample that were editorial, staff, and letters to editor features. The third largest publication, Gannett-owned Huntington Herald-Dispatch followed a similar pattern. Overall, the larger Division I newspapers led Division II in every

feature presented except for syndicated material and wire contributions. By presenting a much higher percentage of letters to editor, Division I appeared to reflect a larger reading audience. Cartoon features appeared in both size divisions on a near equal basis (Hynds).

To some extent, comparison between chain and independent publication groups is difficult to quantify due to the small sample examined and the significant majority of chain and Division II newspapers in this research. However, as indicated through individual examples cited in this section, there are clear differences in overall presentation and diversity of content. This finding supports the hypothesis that often it is the larger circulation or chain ownership status that exhibits the most variety of feature types.

CONCLUSIONS

In a world with diminishing voices of independently owned published opinion, there is little doubt, as Bagdikian suggested, that corporate conglomeration of the press asserts a dynamic upon the reading public that is difficult to quantify. The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of corporate conglomeration, if any, on the opinion editorial presentations of West Virginia daily newspapers.

The results of this research, which examined bias through analysis of content and layout, shows influence of this national trend in the state's print media.

With arguably more financial tools at their disposal over independent publications, chain newspapers in this study clearly demonstrated a more diverse feature type presentation on the opinion editorial page. Yet, with this financial advantage, chain publications, similar to their independent counterparts, presented a conservative bias, but in a more dynamic and arguably, more readable layout.

Together, the layout of feature types on the opinion page in both groups appeared to demonstrate a conservative bias. Thus, chain newspapers did not present a more objective political viewpoint as hypothesized.

While the neutral, moderate ideological stance of feature types dominated both conservative and liberal items presented in chain and independent newspapers, chain owned publications did publish more moderate features. Thus, the conservative bias presented in chain newspapers may not be noticed as easily by the general reading audience. A more careful examination by individuals and organizations with interests that fall within the scope of the public eye are more likely to detect the conservative bias found in this research.

Circulation size differences between publications acted as a scale of variance among presentations. However, smaller chain newspapers did exhibit more variety in the feature types presented than independent counterparts.

Overall, independent publications frequently utilized uncompensated features. By doing this, independent newspapers appeared to appropriate financial resources carefully and only seemed to compare favorably with chain-owned counterparts' presentation of cartoons. This may be indicative of Hynds' research that found editors' views of cartoons as a traditional, high priority feature of newspapers' opinion editorial presentation.

The absence of competition found among most state publications appeared to further ensure that presentation of

opposing political viewpoints depends on community input and an editorial staff that is under little pressure to publish them. Further research is needed to understand what policies print publication's editors and/or editorial staff act on to present opinion editorial pages. A survey of editors, similar to Hynds' research would likely shed new light on the discretion of publication of opposing political viewpoints in relation to ownership and bias.

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VITA

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Matthew Edward Umstead received a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in political science from West Virginia University in 1997. In the fall of 1997 he began graduate studies in Journalism working at the same time with The Daily Athenaeum. In 1998, he was selected to be the staff intern at The Journal, Martinsburg, WV., where he continued to work intermittently until January 1999. In May, he joined USA Today/Gannett Corporation as a content developer for USAToday.com. In 2000, he along with a fellow graduate of West Virginia University started The Mountain Ear, a new weekly print publication in Morgantown, WV.

APPENDIX I - Random publication date selection formula

Use of sampling formula mechanism created by the University of Minnesota Department of Statistics (sample (iseq 1 365) 1), random selection of seven publication dates to encompass each day of the week are generated.

Formula Data: (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (249) ; Sunday, September 6; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (72) B Friday, March 13; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (251) B Tuesday, September 8; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (8) B Thursday, January 8; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (66) B Saturday, March 7; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (302) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (265) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (5) B Monday, January 5; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (211) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (356) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (219) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (33) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (136) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (117) B repeat day; (sample(iseq 1 365)1) (280) Wednesday, October 7(Hornak, personal communication, December 1998).

APPENDIX II - Circulation division formula

The following circulation divisions created by the West Virginia Press Association for award programs (25,000+ (Division I), 15,000 - 24,999 (Division II), under 15,000) will be used (West Virginia Press Association). Only one newspaper fell into the third category. By exception it was lumped into the second division for this study.

APPENDIX III - Definitions

Feature - Any written or animated item that contains opinionated content including headlines and/or captions that contribute to the overall presentation and interpretation of the item.

Origin - A general identification as to where features specifically originated.

Bias - A descriptive label of each feature indicating variances in opinion on a societal issue or cause.

Political Cartoon - Any animated sketch presented on the Opinion-Editorial page that attempts to provoke reader and/or audience reaction to a societal issue or cause.

Editorial - An unsigned body of text written by the editor or editorial staff that most often appears in the top left of the first page of an opinion-editorial section.

Staff column/feature - A signed body of text written by a staff member of a publication who is not a member of the editorial staff of the same publication.

Guest Editorial - A signed body of text written by an individual or individuals not employed by the publication or the publication's owner, that most often appears in place of an editorial upon the discretion of the editor and/or editorial staff.

Wire feature - A signed or unsigned body of text that is at minimum, attributed to a news wire service, such as the Associated Press and/or other similar services.

Syndicated column - A signed body of text written by an individual officially recognized by a media group that distributes such writings to other newspapers who pay a fee for the writer's work and republication.

Guest Column - An uncompensated, signed body of text written by an individual or individuals who are allotted such space on the opinion page upon the discretion of the editor, editorial staff and/or publication's owner.

Letter to Editor - A signed body of text most often limited in size and submitted by a member of the publication's reading audience.

APPENDIX IV - Coding data sheet*

Newspaper Name

Size (Small-Large) 1 2

Ownership (Chain-Independent) 1 2

Is an editorial featured? (Y-N)? 1 2

a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2

b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3

c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2

d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5

e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+

f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

Is a guest editorial featured? (Y-N) 1 2

a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2

b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3

c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2

d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5

e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+

f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

- Is a cartoon featured? (Y-N) 1 2
- a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2
- b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3
- c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2
- d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5
- e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+
- f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2
- Are letters to editor presented? (Y-N) 1 2
- a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2
- b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3
- c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2
- d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5
- e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+
- f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2
- Are syndicated columnists featured? (Y-N) 1 2
- a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2
- b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3
- c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2
- d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5
- e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+
- f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

Are wire services featured? (Y-N) 1 2

a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2

b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3

c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2

d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5

e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+

f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

Are guest columnists featured? (Y-N) 1 2

a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2

b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3

c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2

d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5

e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+

f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

Are editorial staff featured? (Y-N) 1 2

a. Issue focus of feature? (Local-National) 1 2

b. Bias of feature? (GOP-NEUT-DEM) 1 2 3

c. Placement of feature? (Top half-Bottom half) 1 2

d. Authors affiliation? (Staff-Reader-Synd-Chain-Wire) 1 2 3 4 5

e. Number of features? 1 2 3 4+

f. Origin of feature? (Local-Non-local) 1 2

**This analysis did not examine non-editorial information, e.g., letters to editor policies, Congressional representation contact information. It also did not take into consideration of the actual size of the feature presented (e.g. word length of letters to editor, cartoon print sizes).

APPENDIX V - Identification of syndicated contributors

(Note: Information about the columnists was obtained from syndicate web sites. Hynds' survey compiled editor's rankings of syndicated columnists as most liberal, conservative, humorous or reporter-style objective). The following is a similar categorical division and identity of syndicated columnists by the syndicates who distribute their features and appeared in the sampled newspapers:

Conservative/Republican

Mona Charen - According to Creators Syndicate, Charen tackles current political controversies with intelligence and a sharp conservative wit (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

Tony Snow - Articulate, clever and conservative, according to Creators Syndicate, Snow reports on politics and policy from the nation's capital (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

James L. Kilpatrick - Writer of 'A Conservative View,' for 28 years, Kilpatrick became the most widely syndicated columnist in the country. He now covers the Supreme Court and has served as a 'talking head' on various news television programs (<http://www.uexpress.com/ups/opinion/column/jk/bio.html>).

Charley Reese - Identified as a conservative columnist by King Features Syndicate who distributes his prose to more than 150 newspapers (<http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/index.htm>).

William F. Buckley - Identified 'On the Right' as a passionate conservative, at one time had own conservative political punditry television production (<http://www.uexpress.com/ups/opinion/column/wb/bio.html>).

Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley - The celebrated conservative reporter-duck comic strip is distributed by King Features to about 400 newspapers nationwide (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

Cal Thomas - The Los Angeles Times Syndicate distributes Thomas' conservative-values commentary. LATS calls Thomas a persuasive spokesperson for traditional views (<http://www.lats.com/lats/what/index.html>).

George Will - Pulitzer prize-winning columnist recognized and widely read in more than 450 newspapers including The Washington Post, where he is a member of The Writers Group (<http://www.postwritersgroup.com/comment1.htm>).

Neutral/Moderate

Walter Mears - While not a syndicated columnist, Mears, an Associated Press news analyst, contributed significant reporting style analysis to opinion pages sampled.

Garry Trudeau - Doonesbury has been a thorn in both the right and left sides of America's politicians for generations (<http://www.uexpress.com/corporate/ups/>).

Bob Greene - Author and master storyteller, this Chicago Tribune columnist, according to Tribune Media Services, paints a compassionate portrait of America and takes millions of loyal reader's places they've never been before (<http://www.tms.tribune.com/catalog/commentators.html>).

Andy Rooney - This "60 Minutes" commentator, best known for his curmudgeonly look at life, gives way to wry observations on big business, government and day-to-day life in America (<http://www.tms.tribune.com/catalog/commentators.html>).

Clarence Page - Twice a week, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Clarence Page addresses the social, economic and political issues affecting Americans. Writing with passion and style, Page delivers lively commentary on today's pressing issues, such as crime, education, housing, hunger and bigotry. He is syndicated in more than 200 papers nationwide (<http://www.tms.tribune.com/catalog/commentators.html>).

Richard Reeves - Award-winning columnist, writer and filmmaker, Reeves is a professor at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California (<http://www.uexpress.com/corporate/ups/>).

Thomas Sowell - Sowell has published a large volume of writing. His dozen books, as well as numerous articles and essays, cover a wide range of topics, from classic economic theory to judicial activism, from civil rights to choosing the right college. Moreover, much of his writing is considered groundbreaking -- work that will outlive the great majority of scholarship done today (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

Jack Anderson - With his 'Merry Go Round' column appearing in over 800 newspapers daily, Jack Anderson is the most widely syndicated columnist in the world. Anderson is a legend in journalistic circles, a champion of the common good, and the spirit of First Amendment freedom personified. Anderson's success in journalism stems as much from his commitment to honesty as from his talent for sleuthing and reporting according to his syndicate. (<http://www.unitedmedia.com/info/ufs.html#commentary>).

David Broder - As a national political correspondent for The Washington Post, Broder writes a twice-weekly column and was rated by a survey of opinion-page editors as 'least ideological'

among 123 columnists in 1990

(<http://www.postwritersgroup.com/comment1.htm>).

Mary McGrory - McGrory writes for the Washington Post and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1975.

David Hackworth - Serves a voice and military expert. The 'Defending America,' commentary feature is distributed by King Features Syndicate

(<http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/index.htm>).

Robert Novak - After over 30 years, Novak's weekly 'Inside Report' is one of the nation's longest running political columns (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

Liberal

Lars-Erik Nelson - Washington-based, Nelson offers a penetrating look through a liberal lens at national, foreign, economic and political issues, according to his Los Angeles Times Syndicate (<http://www.lats.com/lats/what/index.html>).

Molly Ivins - Labeled by her Creators Syndicate as a brash liberal Texan, Ivins is known for poking fun at politics and pomposity (<http://www.creators.com/opinion/>).

Ellen Goodman - An astonishing writer capable of bringing a deft personal touch to any issue, public or private. Humanity, compassion and thorough reporting are hallmarks of Goodman's

columns. Associate editor of The Boston Globe. Although not specifically labeled, Goodman is widely believed to lean to liberal perspectives. Most representative of her causes, are awards and writing commendations from women's and civil rights groups (<http://www.postwritersgroup.com/comment1.htm>).

APPENDIX VI - Bias coding of feature items

Conservative

Arial (1998, September 6) At the bankruptcy summit of Clinton and Yeltsin: I'm moral, I'm fiscal. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A4.

Atkinson, Tony and Nettie (1998, March 7) Send Rockefeller letters on abortion. The Journal, pp. A4.

Auth, Tony (1998, March 13) The White House, stonewalling and diversion tactics. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Berry, Jim (1998, October 7) Berry's World. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. B2.

Berry, Jim (1998, September 6) Berry's World. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A5.

Block, Herbert (1998, September 6) Once more under the breach dear friends (of Clinton and cabinet) once more... The Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Block, Herbert (1998, September 6) William Jefferson Clinton's credibility. The Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Borgman, Jim (1998, January 5) My (Clinton's) dog ate some more documents you supoenaed. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Borgman, Jim (1998, October 7) Trust is difficult for Clinton to regain now. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Branch, John (1998, September 8) Al Gore for 2000 and Lewinsky scandal cloud. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Broder, David S. (1998, October 7) Are Dems doomed in Michigan? The Dominion Post, pp. A6.

Buchanan, Pat (1998, March 13) Vote on expanding NATO may be declaration of war. Parkersburg News, pp. A6.

Buchanan, Pat (1998, March 7) Digging dirt on Starr is just a ploy used by Clinton's staff. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Buchanan, Pat (1998, October 7) Tax cuts take back seat to the IMF. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Buchwald, Art (1998, March 13) Art's anatomy of love. The Journal, pp. A4.

Buchwald, Art (1998, October 7) The love story of the year. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Buckalew, Jack (1998, September 8) Lisa Smith is honest and capable. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Carter, Hazo W. (1998, March 7) W.Va. State is a unique resource. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A5.

Chambers, James H. (1998, October 7) Shop Goodwill for good bargains. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Charen, Mona (1998, January 5) College studies, majors on sexuality waste of time and money. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Clinton library among strip clubs and peep shows. (1998, October 7) The Journal, pp. A6.

Clinton. (1998, January 5) Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Cole, Brian S. (1998, March 7) Don't be deceived by this cultist. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A6.

Dotson, S. Jean. (1998, September 6). Dump Cassells, keep Page, Lewis. The Register-Herald, pp. A4.

Flanagan, Jo Ann (1998, September 8) Clinton on China is not a surprise. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Frame, David W. (1998, October 7) Spin doctors, press ignore Clinton's lies. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Gabordi, Robert C. (1998, March 7) Naming of sex offenders a challenge to all views. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Goodman, Ellen (1998, March 7) Paying for the pill cheaper in the long run. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Grady, Sandy. (1998, September 6). Smearing Congress will backfire on Bill. The Dominion Post, pp. D2.

Gray, Carlton T. (1998, September 8) Time for nation to return to God. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A4.

Guthrie, Bill (1998, September 6) President deserves our pity. The Journal, pp. B2.

Hackworth, David (1998, March 7) Is it Monica's or black gold's war. The Dominion Post, pp. A8.

Hawley, Karl Owen (1998, October 7) Republicans defy the majorities desire. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Hitgh, (1998, January 5) The forecast calls for a lead pipe forecast for global warming. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Hitgh, (1998, September 8) Reno opens probe of Gore. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Holbrook, Harmon (1998, March 13) Clinton's word can't be believed. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Horne, Terry L. (1998, September 6) Trying to get something on Dan Quayle. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A4.

Hoy, Joseph W. (1998, October 7) Fewer white lies mean fewer prisons. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Impeachment. (1998, October 7) Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. B2.

International Figures. (1998, September 6) Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Ivins, Molly (1998, January 5) We may learn but don't count on it. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Ivins, Molly (1998, September 8) Lets privatize Social Security. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Joiner, Cress (1998, October 7) GOP doesn't have monopoly on morality. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Judging the would-be judges. (1998, January 5) Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Kenny, Bruce F. (1998, March 7) Next to Clinton, Nixon was a saint. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Kerr, Richard (1998, September 8) Require truth from officials. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Kingsbury, Jim (1998, January 8) Underwood now symbol of the state. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Kuhn, Alans (1998, March 7) Saddam, Clinton use same playbook. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Kurtz, Paul (1998, March 7) In defense of secularism. The Dominion Post, pp. A8.

Lemon, Roy (1998, September 8) Clinton's supporters are morally bankrupt. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Lewis, Melissa S. (1998, September 8) Pastor Heyliger unites people of God. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Lezar, Tex (1998, January 5) Estate tax changes not adequate. Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Lewinsky mess allows Congress to get nothing accomplished.
(1998, October 7) Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Luckovich, Mike (1998, March 13) Vernan Jordan getting
Starr a Revlon job. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Luckovich, Mike (1998, October 7) Starr Report: Global
economic crisis not mentioned - must not be important. Bluefield
Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

MacNelly, Jeff (1998, January 8) Neutuvus Rex, Newt for
president in 2000. The Dominion Post, pp. A6.

MacNelly, Jeff (1998, September 6) Hurrigan (Monica) stalls
over coast (Bill Clinton). The Dominion Post, pp. D1.

Margulies, Jimmy (1998, September 6) Clinton to Reno: Let
me know if you turn anything up on him (Gore). The Charleston
Gazette, pp. A4.

Matson, Margaret (1998, March 7) 'Doonesbury' decision was
a moral victory. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Mears, Walter (1998, October 7) Clinton scandal has altered media's outlook on sex, politics. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Meisner, Tim P. (1998, March 13) Gazette misguided in gun-rights attacks. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Money well spent. (1998, September 6) The Dominion Post, pp. D1.

Morris, Winston (1998, September 6) Clinton's predator who should resign. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A10.

'Mr. Starr, its Linda Tripp...(1998, March 13) Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Nicholas, Phil (1998, January 8) Brother Paul DeBord finished his course. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

No surprise. (1998, October 7) Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Novak, Robert (1998, March 7) Impeachment by Rep. Henry Hyde. The Journal, pp. A4.

Omicinski, John (1998, March 7) Expanded NATO may supplant U.N. in 21st century. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Payne, Henry (1998, January 5) Reverend Gore. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Payne, Henry (1998, January 8) So you're the presidents new best friend...you'll need a lawyer. Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Payne, Henry (1998, September 8) They got (Clinton's) DNA tests back...Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Payne, Henry, (October 7) Clinton tied to testimony. Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Payne, Henry. (1998, January 5) A quick study: Buddy learned to fetch his master's (Clinton) morning campaign contributions. Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Plagenz, George (1998, March 7) Having a few casual conversations with God. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A4.

Powers, Ray (1998, September 6) Hitler no match for United States. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A11.

Rebrook, William E. (1998, September 6) Nominating Monica to the 'Hall of Shame.' Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A5.

Reese, Charley (1998, January 5) We deserve better than troops in Bosnia. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Reese, Charley (1998, March 13) Restore original constitutional republic. The Journal, pp. A4.

Reese, Charley (1998, September 6) Private Ryan should send message to younger generation of Americans. Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Rittenhouse, Charlie (1998, March 7) Deregulate electric companies? Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A5.

Roderick, Michael (1998, October 7) Mother Teresa took Jesus at his word. Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

Shrewsbury, Olen V. (1998, September 6). Our nation on the wrong path. The Register-Herald,

Smith, Tracy (1998, March 7) Doc Hertzog was man of principle and integrity. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A6.

Shribman, David (1998, January 8) While you work, they're hardly working. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Tax cut should be New Year priority. (1998, January 5) Wheeling News Register, pp. A4.

Telnaes, Ann (1998, March 7) Press flooding people with Lewinsky scandal. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

The defiant one. (1998, September 8) The Journal, pp. A4.

Thomas, Cal (1998, January 8) Stations shield public from political abortion films. The Dominion Post, pp. A6.

Thomas, Cal (1998, March 13) David Brock joins string of Clinton apologists The Dominion Post, pp. A14.

Thomas, Cal (1998, October 7) Secret Service catches Clinton virus. The Journal, pp. A6.

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Valentine, Patricia (1998, October 7) Ministers had obligation to join prayer service. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Vandall, Berchie (1998, September 6). Monica deserves some of blame. The Register-Herald,

What's he hiding? (1998, March 7) Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Whitehead, John (1998, September 8) Bring back the Bible in W.Va. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Will, George (1998, January 5) Valley's secession is the future happening - again. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Will, George (1998, September 6) Bellweather state Illinois key to GOP's Senate hopes. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A10.

Wright, Dick. (1998, March 13) If you don't approve of praying in school would it be okay if I prayed for public school. The Dominion Post, pp. A14.

Wright, Dick. (1998, October 7) Clinton is heavy to Democratic candidates. The Dominion Post, pp. A6.

Zeitz, Ava C. (1998, September 8) Clinton's private life now public. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

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Cardill, Agnes T. (1998, September 6) Americans warned. Wheeling News Register, pp. A5.

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Fisher, Ronald D. (1998, October 7) Why is Clinton being singled out? Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

GOP can't count. (1998, September 6) The Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Gore may be next. (1998, September 6) The Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Killing. (1998, October 7) Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

King, James (1998, March 13) Same-sex measure is a waste of time. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Kinz, Richard A. (1998, March 13) Gazette lauded for gay-oriented articles. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Kondracke, Mort (1998, January 5) My New Year's resolution: Help politicians. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A5.

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Margulies, Jimmy (1998, October 7). Despite the perjury, coverup, abuse of power and obstruction of justice, Clinton's poll numbers are up... The Register-Herald, pp. A4.

Mcfatters, Ann (1998, September 8) Clinton learning to say he's sorry. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Mears, Walter (1998, March 13) Clinton tests do-nothing Congress with 70 days left in session. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Morrison, Jere D. (1998, March 7) Charleston is out to get Logan General. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A5.

Nichols, Charlie (1998, March 7) Corridor H article straight from heart Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Page, Clarence (1998, October 7). Showdown at Gender Gap: Why men are angrier at Clinton. The Register-Herald, pp. 4-A.

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Peyton, David (1998, October 7) Mining officials makes points for other side. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Robinson, Jeff (1998, September 6). Make coal industry buy our mountains. The Register-Herald, pp. A4.

Russo, Dan (1998, September 6) Present day Democrats, Republicans defined. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Sconyers, Jim (1998, January 5) Canyon case shows PSC is blind to duty. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Sowell, Thomas (1998, March 7) It's time to start dealing with tomorrow's opportunities. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A6.

Taylor, Ellnore (1998, March 7) New words for state song. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

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Wright, Don (1998, October 7) GOP: Clinton's escaped the noose again. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

Moderate/Neutral

10,000 of us can't read this. (1998, September 8) The Dominion Post, pp. A8.

4th district. (1998, October 7) Charleston Daily Mail pp. A4.

A few good spies. (1998, October 7) The Journal, pp. A6.

Action needed on coal dust. (1998, October 7) Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Adams, Charlie D. (1998, March 7) Dwight Weidman is not a racist. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Adams, Scott (1998, January 5) Dilbert. The Journal, pp. A4.

Adkins, Gary (1998, October 7) New U.S. 35 shows poor planning. Charleston Gazette, pp. A4.

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Albright, Denise (1998, October 7). Economy benefits from temp workers. The Register-Herald pp.A4.

All natural ice cream anybody. (1998, March 13) The Journal, pp. A4.

Altman, James (1998, September 6) Prutsok is not protecting Clinton. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A6.

Ambrose, Jay (1998, January 5). Liberation via the Net. The Register-Herald, pp. A4.

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Anderson, Jack (1998, October 7) Racism is still alive and well in modern Germany. The Dominion Post, pp. A6.

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Archer, Bill (1998, October 7) 'Your grace and mary soundtracks a memorable experience.' Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Arial (1998, March 13) U.N. calls for severest of consequences for Iraq - taking their cable away. Clarksburg Exponent, pp. A4.

Arthers, Gary L. (1998, January 8) W.Va. people blessed because they do care. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Auth, Tony (1998, January 8) California bars, no smoking and smog outside Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Auth, Tony (1998, March 7) Attention people of Iraq.. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Babin, Rex (1998, September 6). Yeah, I was a Wall Street investor, but I found (the casino) this to be a safer place for my money The Journal, pp. B-2.

Ball, Jo Ann (1998, March 13) Dog poisoning a sick act. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

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Bernard, Neal D. (1998, January 5) Animal agriculture creates disease. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

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Biker safety. (1998, March 7) Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

Billie, Michael (1998, January 8) Planning Commission needs abolished here. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. A4.

Blas, L.G. (1998, March 13) GM still provided great health care. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A8.

Board made right choice. (1998, January 8) Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

Bodkin, Nellie A. (1998, September 8) Rockefeller, Wise are willing to help. Charleston Daily Mail, pp. A4.

Borgman, Jim (1998, January 8) A brief (finger pointing) history of mideast relations. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A6.

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Boster, Carole (1998, September 8) Property owners may not exclude. Huntington Herald Dispatch, pp. A4.

Branch, John (1998, March 7) Smart bomb vs. Diplomacy, smarter than bomb. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Branch, John (1998, October 7) Irony definition: Perot illustration. Parkersburg News, pp. A4.

Branch, John (1998, January 8). How on earth did you convince him that wearing a school uniform... The Register-Herald, pp. A4.

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Colley, Tom (1998, March 7) Homeplaces: Bill Shields makes a big project very personal. Bluefield Daily Telegraph, pp. A4.

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Cooper, Robin (1998, October 7) Are crowded classes affecting students' education. Fairmont Times West Virginian, pp. B2.

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