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Book Reviews

The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq, by Phillip Knightley, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 3rd edition, 608 pages, \$21.95

Review by David Arant

When Philip Knightly wrote the first edition of *First Casualty* 30 years ago, its context was post-Vietnam. His purpose in the first edition, he writes, was "to record how war had been reported through the ages and to highlight the unforgiving verdict of history on those reports . . . important parts of the story had been omitted or twisted" (xiii). His new edition of *First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* continues to document how correspondents got the story wrong war after war.

Knightley, for 20 years an investigative journalist for London's *Sunday Times*, has added six chapters since his first edition (1975). Two chapters fill in gaps not included in the first edition: one on the Boer War, from which British correspondents Conan Doyle and Winston Churchill reported, and a fascinating chapter documenting the severe censorship, propaganda and political dangers facing correspondents covering the French in the Algerian War.

Four new chapters chronicle the war coverage since Vietnam. "Britannia Rules the News 1975-1989" examines the poor quality of war reporting from trouble spots after Vietnam: Rhodesia, East Timor, Lebanon, Afghanistan (Soviet invasion) and the Falklands. Then follow chapters on the Gulf War, NATO's campaign against the Serbs and the ongoing Iraq War. Knightley suggests that in these post-Vietnam conflicts, Western correspondents have been incorporated as "an integral part of the [military] task force, propagandists for the . . . cause" (481). In his forward to the third edition, Knightley challenges "journalists to examine their role in the promotion of war" (xiii).

The First Casualty, an excellent overview of major military actions and their coverage, puts the reporting of the current Iraq War in proper context. In his compelling account of World War I reporting, the writer sets up a vivid contrast between the British correspondents and their American counterparts as they

reported under the strictures of military censors and an intense propaganda apparatus. Knightley concludes that because British coverage of World War I was such a blatant whitewash of wretched conditions at the front, the public lost confidence in newspapers as a source of truthful information.

World War II did not produce much better coverage for the British public. Knightley highlights some of the myths generated by the war's reporting. We learn that the conditions of the Allied forces' heroic escape from Dunkirk were over-glamorized and that, in fact, "Dunkirk need not have happened" (254) because the Allies had superior troops and tanks compared to the German force that routed the Allies into a stampede back to Britain. Another myth Knightley challenges is that the bitter Russian winter defeated the German army on the Eastern front when, in fact, the Russian Army had more tanks, better winter uniforms and leaders capable of matching German military tactics.

Although Western correspondents began the Korean War censor-free, first a voluntary system and then strict censorship were imposed in the field. When critical commentary was received stateside, self-censorship stemmed dispatches that might further erode waning popular support for the war. Even an Edward Murrow commentary from Korea was spiked by CBS editors because they thought its criticism might hurt the war effort. Knightley concludes his chapter on Korea, "If a war correspondent's duty is not to tell the truth as he sees it, even if the truth appears to be against the national interest, what is it?"

Knightley finds that Vietnam was better reported than previous wars because there was no censorship and correspondents were free to move about. However, in many ways the results in trying to report the complex war were not that much better. Only after the massacre of the My Lai villagers was finally reported and correspondents saw the public was willing to hear such truth did war correspondents start reporting what they had witnessed and knew all along—that U.S. soldiers were killing innocent civilians. Knightley questions how the U.S. military was able to conceal its bombing in Cambodia for a year if Vietnam was so open and its reporting so good.

One thing missing at times in Knightley's review of 150 years of war reporting is depth – a single page on reporting the U.S. invasion Grenada and two paragraphs on Panama. However, in the 15 pages on the 1990-91 Gulf War, Knightley shows how the military retained careful control of the media images of the war: smart bombs, surgical strikes and almost no deaths. The military's sophisticated media management, in turn, reduced the role of the war correspondent as a source of accurate information that might challenge the government's version of the war. In the post-war analysis, we learn that smart bombs accounted for less than 7 percent of those dropped by coalition forces, that the storied Patriot Missile batteries probably did not shoot down a single Scud missile and that probably 250,000 Iraqis, including many civilians, were killed.

NATO, in its war against the Serbian Army in 1999, included a carefully crafted public relations program that sought to minimize NATO responsibility

for civilian casualties during its bombing campaign. Knightley suggests that NATO's true motive for war might not have been its stated goal to stop the ethnic cleansing but to establish NATO's military domination over the former Yugoslavia.

For the 2003 Iraq War, the U.S. military planners abandoned its Gulf War approach limiting correspondents' access by pool restrictions and introduced the concept of the embedding correspondents as a means of incorporating the media into the war effort. Knightley found that correspondents embedded with units bonded with their fellow soldiers and rarely reported critically. And those who chose to report unilaterally, outside of this structure, faced extreme dangers – 15 media people killed in Iraq.

Knightley concludes with a rather pessimistic assessment: Given the extreme dangers for war correspondents and the intense governmental manipulation and control of war news, the age of war correspondents as hero has ended. He wonders whether the remaining roles, propagandist and myth-maker, are worth the risks to be a war correspondent.

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The Moral Media: How Journalists Reason About Ethics, by Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005) 162 pages, \$19.95

Reviewed by Susan M. Keith

The main title of this book might lead those unfamiliar with the authors' work to expect an apologia for media increasingly distrusted by the public. Lee Wilkins of the Missouri School of Journalism and Renita Coleman of Louisiana State University's Manship School of Communication do show that journalists display higher-level ethical reasoning than adults in general as well as in several professional groups. This book, however, does much more than demonstrate that journalists may be more moral than the public perceives. It also provides a concise introduction to the psychology of moral development, a provocative examination of the role visuals play in ethical reasoning, and interesting lessons in research methodology.

The book, which includes sections by Seow Ting Lee of the Department of Communication at Illinois State University and Anne Cunningham of LSU, contains 10 chapters centered on a series of studies done by Wilkins, Coleman and Lee on ethical reasoning among journalists and by Cunningham on ethical reasoning among advertising professionals. All but one of these studies used the Defining Issues Test, a paper-and-pencil test of moral development designed by psychologist James Rest in the 1970s. The opening chapters of *The Moral Media* are usefully devoted to placing the test and the business of determining media professionals' ethics-related thinking into the context of psychology's quest to map moral development.

This will be familiar ground for media ethics professors who have used *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases* (McGraw-Hill, 2001), the textbook written by Wilkins and Philip Patterson, which contains a nice chapter outlining basic ideas on moral development. In *The Moral Media*, Wilkins and Coleman are able to go deeper, providing a more complete introduction to psychological theories of moral development that will be valuable for mass communication graduate students just beginning to wrestle with media ethics research and, one might hope, a prompt for more interdisciplinary work among established ethics scholars.

The heart of *The Moral Media*, six chapters recounting the execution and results of the studies, also may be familiar to some in journalism and mass communication because reports using some of the data have previously been published in journals or presented at conferences. In this book, however, the authors are able to establish the links and the logical progression among the studies.

They start by reporting the quantitative results of a study of 249 journalists, selected through multistage cluster sampling, that found those journalists, on average, use higher-level ethical reasoning than was found in similar studies of nurses, lawyers, veterinary students, orthopedic surgeons, adults in general, accounting auditors and other groups. The journalists were behind only seminarians/philosophers, medical students and practicing physicians. The book then reviews the qualitative data journalists provided when asked to explain their reasoning about the ethical dilemmas presented in the Defining Issues Test. Although reasonable people might quibble with a few of the categorizations of these comments, this section, like any good qualitative study, provides ample evidence from which readers can draw their own conclusions.

The authors report that students who received photographs generally responded with higher-level ethical reasoning. Wilkins and Coleman suggest this result may have been the result of being better able to imagine the dilemmas' of the stakeholders. Sadly, however, race also affected the results. Students who knew the race of people in the dilemmas demonstrated lower-level ethical reasoning when responding to scenarios involving African Americans.

The seventh and eighth chapters report on studies done by Lee on support for deception among members of Investigative Reporters and Editors and by Cunningham on ethical reasoning among advertising professionals. The former fare better than the latter, with most IRE members rejecting egregious examples of deception and with advertising professionals, on average, recording levels of ethical reasoning less than that of adults in general and slightly more than that of high-school students.

What does this all mean? Wilkins and Coleman attempt to give some answers in the final two chapters, which address the reasons why we teach media ethics and the implications of the book for journalism, philosophy and the study of the role of visuals in moral development.

The authors see the book as aimed beyond the mass communication academy toward journalists, psychologists and philosophers. Therein lies an extremely tough challenge that is not successfully met. The book, for the most part, employs a clear style that should be accessible to most journalists. But occasionally, as on Page 21, it uses the term "Cronbach's alpha," which few journalists could be expected to know. Although psychology researchers should not have a problem with the writing style, they might find some of the methodological procedures, such as offering the DIT online, to be at least provocative. Unfortunately, it might be the rare moral philosopher who would be attracted by such a book.

The book format gives the authors space to explain how they conducted their research and justified their design choices. Some researchers will find some of these choices or outcomes—including the use of students in one study and a return rate below 20 percent in another—less than ideal. However, the thoughtful explanation of the research-design choices and the explanation of the usefulness of even less-than-perfect methodological outcomes in an under-

researched area would make the book a valuable resource for discussion and debate in graduate mass communication seminars. Reading the book might prompt some enterprising researcher to continue this line of study with PR professionals or members of the alternative media, groups not covered in this volume.

This book would be indispensable for the graduate seminar in media ethics. While it is probably a bit advanced for undergraduate media ethics classes, it should, however, be on the shelves of media ethics teachers and any researchers interested in the connections between media and psychology.

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