WHY MANY OF THE LARGEST U.S. NEWSPAPERS DO NOT HAVE AN OMBUDSMAN AS DETERMINED BY EDITORS' RESPONSES TO A MAIL SURVEY

By

Kent F. Lauer

Bachelor of Science

Utah State University

Logan, Utah

1977

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
July, 1989

WHY MANY OF THE LARGEST U.S. NEWSPAPERS DO NOT HAVE AN OMBUDSMAN AS DETERMINED BY EDITORS' RESPONSES TO A MAIL SURVEY

Thesis Approved:

Thesis Adviser

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My wife, Gina, was forced to leave her home and her job in Northern California when I told her I wanted to enroll in graduate school at Oklahoma State University to begin a new career teaching journalism at the college level. She did not hesitate and has always been supportive. To my wife, I will always be indebted. Thanks, Gina.

I also want to thank Dr. Charles Fleming, thesis adviser, for his expert editing and guidance. To Dr. Marlan Nelson, a member of my thesis committee and director of the School of Journalism and Broadcasting at Oklahoma State University, I extend my thanks for all his support in my career change. I thank Dr. Harry Heath, another committee member, for passing on the suggestion that led to this study.

The Organization of News Ombudsmen, which gave its financial support, deserves a large amount of gratitude. Bob Kierstead, the ombudsman for The Boston Globe, was especially helpful. The editors who participated in this study made the project feasible.

I thank Professor Don Reed and Jack Lancaster, the adviser for OSU's student newspaper, for making my stay in Stillwater more enjoyable through our afternoon rounds of golf.

Last, but not least, I remain forever grateful to my mother, Joyce E. Lauer. She did a great job rearing three boys and continues to help a number of young people as a high school English teacher in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

A computer certainly is not required to keep track of the number of ombudsmen or reader representatives within the newspaper industry in the United States.

While Sweden originated the ombudsman concept in 1809 as a means to protect citizens from governmental abuse, it wasn't until 1967 that the first newspaper ombudsman in the United States was appointed in Louisville, Kentucky. The newspaper ombudsman movement generally has failed to catch fire since then.

Of the approximate 1,650 daily newspapers in the United States, about 35 have ombudsmen or reader representatives, who respond to complaints from the public about news coverage and critique the newspaper's editorial product. That number has remained fairly steady in the past several years.

As of May 1989, the Organization of News Ombudsmen listed 40 official members, representing 28 U.S. daily newspapers and 12 foreign newspapers -- five from Canada, three from England and one each from Sweden, Japan, Spain and Israel.[1] Several newspaper ombudsmen in the United States, however, are not members of the organization.[2] The author knows of no information source that lists

all the newspaper ombudsmen in the United States. Therefore, a precise tally is difficult to determine. Appendix A lists the members of the Organization of News Ombudsmen and their newspapers as of May 1989.

Ombudsmen, themselves, have recognized that they are a small minority within the journalistic community. "I've said it before: this is not your basic growth industry," Art Nauman, the ombudsman for The Sacramento Bee, was quoted as saying in 1985.[3]

Not surprisingly, ombudsmen have expressed concern over the general lack of respect they receive, especially considering what appears to be an increased public concern for newspaper credibility. Lou Gelfand, reader representative for the Minneapolis Star & Tribune, expressed his frustration during the 1984 meeting of the Organization of News Ombudsmen, saying, "If newspapers think they have to be responsive and the public thinks they have to be responsive -- then what the hell are they waiting for?"[4]

Call for Accountability

Long before credibility became a journalistic buzzword, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press urged the press to be more accountable through self-criticism and warned that failure to do so would invite government regulation. In its report, the 13-member commission, formed by magazine publisher Henry Luce and composed almost entirely of academicians, wrote:

> One of the most effective ways of improving the press is blocked by the press itself. By a kind of unwritten law, the press ignores the errors and misrepresentations, the lies and scandals, of which its members are guilty.[5]

Media critic Ben Bagdikian renewed the plea for accountability in 1967, 20 years after the Hutchins Commission's report. While criticizing newspapers for "riding a tide complacent in their monopoly status without making basic reforms that they and the readers deserve," Bagdikian, who would later fulfill a stint as an ombudsman for The Washington Post, wrote:

> Some brave owner, someday, will provide for a community ombudsman on his paper's board, maybe a non-voting one, to be present, to speak, to provide a symbol and, with luck, exert public interest in the ultimate fate of the American newspaper.
>
> Disclosure of financial interests, a greater openness in making of policy, a place for public representation could do for newspapers what it did for the Stock Exchange post Crash: restore public confidence in the men who stand behind pieces of paper.[6]

While Bagdikian predicted that a newspaper owner would put a "community ombudsman" on his newspaper's board of directors, Abe Raskin has been credited with providing the impetus for the first newspaper ombudsman. While assistant editor of The New York Times' editorial page, Raskin delivered a stinging criticism of the press in an article published by the Times' Sunday magazine in 1967, a few months after Bagdikian's prediction.

Raskin wrote that the "real long-range menace to America's newspapers...lies in the unshatterable smugness of their publishers and editors."[7] But his concept of an ombudsman differed from Bagdikian's:

> I feel there is a need in every paper for a Department of Internal Criticism to put all its standards under re-examination and to serve as a public protector in its day-to-day operations....
>
> The department head ought to be given enough independence to serve as an ombudsman for the readers, armed with authority

> to get something done about complaints and to propose methods for more effective performance of all the paper's services to the community, particularly the patrol it keeps on the frontiers of thought and action. Maintaining a "letters to the editor" column scarcely constitutes full recognition of a city's right of access to the paper...[8]

Top officials of the Louisville Courier-Journal and Louisville Times, who had failed to persuade Louisville residents to form a press council to monitor the newspapers' performance, put Raskin's suggestion into action within days by appointing an ombudsman to investigate and take action on readers' complaints.[9] John Herchenroeder, the Louisville newspapers' first ombudsman, recalled in an interview how Norman Isaacs, the executive editor, first pitched him with the job:

> Isaacs threw this New York Times piece on my desk and said, "Read this, I've got an idea." He didn't tell me what it was. When I read it, I gathered that he meant the part about an ombudsman.[10]

After nine months on the job, Herchenroeder evaluated the job in an inter-office memo:

> I know that our readers realize this is not just a publicity gimmick and that we have accomplished some real, solid rapport with our readers and have eliminated some of the misunderstandings that inevitably arise.[11]

Ombudsmen and Credibility

A 1985 survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors provided evidence that an ombudsman can help bridge the "credibility gap" between newspapers and readers.

Two of the group's findings on credibility from its nationwide, random survey of 1,600 adults who were interviewed by telephone were: (1) Three-fourths of all adults have some problem with the

credibility of the media. (2) One-fifth of all adults deeply distrust the news media.[12]

The survey, however, was not limited to the extent of the media's credibility problem. It also explored how different policies and practices relate to people's perceptions of the credibility of newspapers.

The survey showed that people who believe their newspaper has an ombudsman are more positive about several aspects of the credibility of newspapers. For example, readers who believe their newspaper has an ombudsman are more likely to say that reporters worry about how their stories might hurt people. These readers also are less likely to say powerful people manipulate the press, the editors' group reported.[13]

Statement of Problem

It is clear that editors of newspapers in the United States, for the most part, have rejected Raskin's 1967 call to appoint someone to head a "Department of Internal Criticism." Only about 35 of the 1,650 daily newspapers in the United States have ombudsmen.

But why don't the majority of the largest-circulation newspapers in the United States have an ombudsman or reader representative, especially in light of the credibility problem that seems to plague the press these days and the call for accountability lodged by the Hutchins Commission, Bagdikian and others? A survey of the top editors of the nation's largest newspapers without ombudsmen would, it seemed, shed light upon that question.

Purpose of Study

This study was designed to provide a fairly comprehensive description of why many of the largest newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen or reader representatives whose job entails responding to reader complaints about news coverage and evaluating their newspapers' journalistic performance. In addition to seeking why these large newspapers do not have ombudsmen, the study also explored editors' attitudes toward the overall ombudsman concept.

Finally, the study sought to explore differences in editors' reasons for not having an ombudsman and their attitudes toward the ombudsman concept based upon their journalistic experience and the circulation size of their newspapers.

Value of Study

A study of the reasons for the relative dearth of newspaper ombudsmen in the United States, based on a survey of editors, apparently has never been conducted. A review of the literature shows that the research has focused on the number of ombudsmen, their duties and the attitudes of readers and newspaper staff members towards them.

At the least, this study provides fodder in the long-running credibility debate within the newspaper industry by identifying editors' specific objections to what has been widely touted as a method of gaining readers' confidence.

The study should be of value to newspaper ombudsmen, newspaper executives, researchers and anyone interested in press credibility and accountability. But perhaps most importantly, the study is aimed at informing the public, which ought to know how editors feel about a matter that directly affects so many people.

The study also should provide groundwork for further research. For instance, the study may lead to research designed to test the veracity of the editors' comments on why their newspapers do not have an ombudsman. Are their assumptions grounded in reality? That could be the focus of additional research.

Limitations and Assumptions

Like any research, this study has certain constraints and assumptions that must be set forth to avoid the possibility of making erroneous or misleading conclusions.

The study is limited to a mail survey of editors of 68 large daily newspapers in the United States that do not have ombudsmen. The results apply only to those editors who participated in the survey.

It was assumed that editors would respond truthfully to a questionnaire designed to determine why ombudsmen have not been appointed at many major U.S. newspapers.

Another key assumption was that the editors are the most appropriate sources at their newspapers to respond to the survey. The study assumed that the top editors of the largest newspapers without ombudsmen are responsible for their newspapers' news coverage and the handling of reader complaints about that coverage. The editors also

were assumed to have the authority to appoint an ombudsman, if they so desired. It could be argued that publishers have the ultimate authority over such matters, but the study assumed that top editors have considerable influence when it comes to news functions.

In addition to an ombudsman, other potential methods of enhancing the credibility of newspapers, such as accuracy checks with news sources and community press councils, have been proposed and used. But these methods are beyond the scope of this study.

Summary

The credibility issue that haunts the press today does not show any signs of going away. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will shed further light on the issue and, in its own little way, turn the spotlight on the people who disseminate the news rather than on those who make it.

Gelfand, the Minneapolis ombudsman, had a good question when he asked what newspapers are waiting for if they and the public think the press needs to be responsive. This study is an attempt to provide Gelfand and others some answers.

This chapter highlighted the study's problem area, the study's purpose, scope, value and limitations. Chapter II reviews the research and popular literature related to newspaper ombudsmen. Chapter III explains the methods used in study. The study's findings are contained in Chapter IV, while Chapter V evaluates those findings and presents the researcher's recommendations.

END NOTES

[1] Organization of News Ombudsmen Membership List as of May 1989.

[2] The author has identified several ombudsmen for U.S. daily newspapers who are not members of the Organization of News Ombudsmen as of May 1989. Among newsppers with non-members are the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Cincinnati Post, the Milwaukee Journal and the Pittsburgh Press. As a consequence, the author estimates that the number of newspapers employing ombudsmen is about 35.

[3] Mark Fitzgerald, "Struggling for Recognition," Editor & Publisher, 13 July 1985, p. 8.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The Commission on Freedom of the Press, A Free and Responsible Press (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 65.

[6] Ben Bagdikian, "The American Newspaper Is Neither Record, Mirror, Journal, Ledger, Bulletin, Telegram, Examiner, Register, Chronicle, Gazette, Observer, Monitor, Transcript nor Herald of the Day's Events," Esquire, March 1967, pp. 124, 146.

[7] A.H. Raskin, "What's Wrong with American Newspapers?" The New York Times Magazine, 11 June 1967, p. 28.

[8] Ibid., pp. 28, 84.

[9] The Louisville Times, an evening newspaper, was discontinued in February 1987 when the Courier-Journal, the morning newspaper, went to an all-day publishing cycle.

[10] John Herchenroeder, interview, July 1978, quoted in Donald T. Mogavero, "The American Press Ombudsman," Journalism Quarterly 59 (Winter 1982): 549.

[11] John Herchenroeder, Louisville Courier-Journal/Times office memo to Public Service Department, March 12, 1968, quoted in Kay Hudgens, "The Ombudsman and the News Media," University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center, Columbia, Mo., August 1983. Dialog, ERIC, ED 236 714, p. 2.

[12] American Society of Newspaper Editors, ed., ASNE 1985: Proceedings of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Washington: ASNE, 1985), pp. 15-16.

[13] Ibid., p. 22.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The slow growth of newspaper ombudsmen in the United States has been documented by a few studies since the first ombudsman was named in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1967.

Researchers also have examined the nature of ombudsmen's work and perceptions of their work by themselves, newspaper staff members and newspaper readers. This research gives perspective to the present study, designed to determine why many large newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen.

While a comprehensive study on the reasons behind the relative dearth of newspaper ombudsmen apparently has never been conducted, some of the reasons for the slow growth of ombudsmen can be found in comments by opponents of ombudsmen in a relatively small number of articles published in magazines.

Studies on Number of Ombudsmen

William Barnett surveyed editors of what he described as 134 major daily newspapers in the United States. Barnett defined a major newspaper as one published daily and having a circulation of 100,000 or more, but he reported that he included at least one

newspaper from every state, regardless of circulation, for geographic representation.[1]

Barnett concluded that eight of the 80 newspapers that responded to the 1973 survey appeared to have a "genuine" ombudsman, whose function was defined generally as increasing "reader access to the paper." Five of those ombudsmen had authority to order further investigation of dubious reporting and to run their own stories.[2]

Barnett's study, designed to determine the extent to which three variations of ombudsmen were employed by major newspapers, indicated that editors in 1973 had vastly different perceptions of the position. Most of the 36 respondents who indicated their newspapers had an ombudsman program were referring to an "action-line" column that assisted readers with complaints and questions about business and government bureaucracies.

Only 17 of the ombudsmen cited by the editors investigated complaints about news reporting, while 15 of the ombudsmen were expected to be internal critics of the news operation. Complicating matters, Barnett wrote that 11 respondents indicated that their papers had an ombudsman program, but they described it as just another of the editor's duties.[3]

The ombudsman's standing within the U.S. newspaper industry was studied again through a 1977 survey by Suraj Kapoor and Ralph Smith. They received questionnaire responses from 132 of 198 publishers of U.S. newspapers with circulations of 50,000 or more.

The researchers reported that only 15 percent of the respondents indicated their newspapers employed a full-time

ombudsman, while four publishers responded that their newspapers had a part-time ombudsman.[4]

"This means that during the 10-year period (1967-1977) the number of ombudsmen has not increased substantially," Kapoor and Smith wrote. "Obviously the ombudsman concept has not caught on with the daily newspaper press in the United States."[5]

Ombudsmen's Duties

Besides looking at the growth of newspaper ombudsmen in the United States since 1967 when Louisville's sister papers, the Courier-Journal and Times, took the initiative, studies have examined the various functions of the position. The tasks ombudsmen perform and the perceptions of their duties provide a foundation for discussing why many major newspapers have not appointed ombudsmen.

Donald Mogavero, in a study published in 1982, examined 17 of the 22 ombudsman programs thought to be in existence at the time. The study was based on personal interviews with ombudsmen, editors, publishers and newspaper staff members. The author reported that follow-up surveys and telephone interviews were conducted in the summer of 1981 to "monitor any substantial changes in existing programs."[6]

Mogavero reported that the average ombudsman was 53 years old and had 30 years of newspaper experience, more than 20 years at the same newspaper, ranging from reporter to assistant managing editor.[7] Mogavero issued the following findings with respect to how the ombudsmen functioned:

- All of the ombudsmen have standardized procedures for processing reader complaints and questions.

- All of them generally have the power to question the staff about reader complaints but do not have the authority to change newsroom policy with the exception of requiring corrections of factual mistakes in some cases.

- Each ombudsman distributes some kind of internal report of reader concerns, but the extent to which the reports are made available throughout the newsroom varies.

- Eighteen of the 22 ombudsmen regularly publish columns, which Mogavero termed an important part of the public aspect of the job.[8]

Another profile of ombudsmen was drawn by James Ettema and Theodore Glasser in a research article published in 1987. The researchers mailed questionnaires to 33 members of the Organization of News Ombudsmen in an attempt to determine the members' professional values, their orientation and whether they characterized their work as being more related to a public relations practitioner or a press critic. All but one of the ombudsmen responded. The researchers did not disclose in the article when the questionnaires were sent out.[9]

Ettema and Glasser described ombudsmen as veteran and well-paid journalists who work for larger newspapers. Most of the ombudsmen responded that they write a column and believe an important part of their job is to ensure that necessary corrections are published. Nearly half of them, however, had no part in the decision-making on corrections.[10]

The ombudsmen's ratings on a six-point scale showed that, on the average, "several public relations activities are much more important to the ombudsmen's conceptions of their role than are several press criticism activities," Ettema and Glasser wrote.

"In general...at least some public relations activity is nearly universal among ombudsmen, but press criticism activity is not...," they wrote, while concluding that the survey results indicate that the ombudsman's role cannot be unambiguously defined even by ombudsmen themselves.[11]

Free-lance writer Cassandra Tate concluded in a 1984 article that public relations appeared to be the dominant theme of ombudsmen's columns. Wrote Tate:

> A reading of some 800 columns written by ombudsmen around the country shows that apologia is more the order of the day than incisive criticism....Some ombudsmen specialize in eye-gumming discourses on lofty but largely irrelevant issues; others are preoccupied with trivia. Most are inclined to explain rather than examine....[12]

The ombudsman's role has been defined by ombudsmen themselves. The Organization of News Ombudsmen, at its third annual meeting in 1982, adopted a set of guidelines for ombudsmen. The guidelines, based on the principles that an ombudsman must have "real" independence and that he should be answerable only to the person with the highest authority over the news department, listed the duties of an ombudsman:

> (1) Represent the reader who has complaints, suggestions, questions or compliments. (2) Investigate all complaints and recommend corrective action when warranted. (3) Alert the newspaper to all complaints. (4) Serve as an in-house critic. (5) Make speeches or write to the public about the newspaper's policies, attitudes and operations. (6) Defend the newspaper publicly or privately when warranted.[13]

Furthermore, the ombudsmen's group defined four objectives of an ombudsman:

> (1) To improve the fairness, accuracy and accountability of the newspaper. (2) To enhance its credibility. (3) To strive to improve its quality. (4) To make the newspaper more aware of the concerns and issues in the community.[14]

Perceptions of Ombudsmen

Another focus of research on ombudsmen has been on how readers and newspaper staff members react to the position. David Nelson and Kenneth Starck conducted a case study of the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times and Evening Independent, owned by Times Publishing Company. The sister newspapers established an ombudsman program in 1970, but the Independent, now defunct, decided a few years later to end its relationship with the ombudsman.[15] That provided the researchers an opportunity to examine whether news staff members of a newspaper with an ombudsman have different opinions on the position than staff members of a newspaper without an ombudsman.

Nelson and Starck distributed questionnaires to staff members of both newspapers in late 1972. They reported that they received 105 usable responses, representing 65.7 percent of the Times staff members and 34.3 percent of the Independent staff members. They concluded that employees of a newspaper with an ombudsman are generally more supportive of the concept than employees of a newspaper that does not have an ombudsman. Employees of both newspapers had "remarkably similar perceptions of the ideal ombudsman, seeing him as highly responsible, fair, etc."[16]

Furthermore they reported:

> As for the actual ombudsman, the fact that staffers with an ombudsman rated him as more wise, valuable, interesting and good than did those without an ombudsman suggests the role of ombudsman may gain respect and support from staff members after the function is fulfilled and the ombudsman proves himself. Actual practice could have the effect of soothing these fears if the ombudsman performs in a manner that induces trust and confidence.[17]

Another study, reported in 1987, suggested that while ombudsmen can head off a complaint before it turns into a libel suit, their role as media critics can encourage staff members to sit on complaints, thereby allowing them to fester into legal action.[18] Gilbert Cranberg, co-author of the study, was quoted as saying:

> Reporters and sub-editors told us in substance that no one relishes being (the target) of criticism and the ombudsman's role as critic induced the staff to try to keep complaints from the ombudsman.[19]

Besides looking at how staff members feel about ombudsmen, researchers also have studied public reaction to the position. One such study, in which James Bernstein questioned 393 Louisville residents by telephone in 1981, was designed in part to determine public awareness of the ombudsman employed by the Louisville Courier-Journal and Louisville Times, morning and evening newspapers under the same ownership. One of Bernstein's major hypotheses was that the greater awareness of the ombudsman program, the greater the public's perception of the newspapers' accountability. To test the hypothesis, Bernstein created an accountability scale, comprised of nine "fairness" items.[20]

Responses from 45 percent of the random sample, Bernstein reported, indicated that

> ...awareness of the ombudsman program does influence perceived accountability of the newspapers, as long as the

> awareness is accompanied by correct knowledge of what the ombudsman does.[21]

Bernstein also concluded that an ombudsman may work well as a public relations device with readers, but he warned that is not to suggest an ombudsman is merely a PR gimmick.[22]

The results, he wrote, were not surprising, particularly when "one considers the amount of promotional activity the newspapers have given the ombudsman system."[23]

In a related 1984 study, Barbara Hartung and Al JaCoby surveyed a random sample of people who had contacted JaCoby, then the ombudsman at The San Diego Union, and another random sample of people who had not called the newspaper.

The researchers sought to determine the public's knowledge of the newspaper ombudsman and his or her role at the newspaper. They hypothesized that people, after talking to the ombudsman about a complaint, are equally likely or more likely to feel the newspaper has a high interest in accuracy and correcting errors, compared to people who have not called to complain.[24]

The results showed that 57 percent of the sample of 152 people who had called the newspaper knew the ombudsman by name or referred to him as a readers' representative or ombudsman. On the other hand, those who had never called the newspaper about a problem indicated far less knowledge of the ombudsman and his role.[25]

The researchers wrote that the findings were not clear cut:

> The majority of callers (57 percent) and noncallers (56 percent) were equally likely to report that the Union was interested in accuracy. However, among the remaining respondents, noncallers were more frequent in the neutral category while callers were more frequent in the

disinterested categories.[26]

Those figures, the researchers wrote, tend to suggest that those who called the paper are polarized because they manifest more strongly held feelings toward the newspaper.[27]

Hartung and JaCoby concluded that an ombudsman "may be one of the newspaper's most effective public relations tools, particularly if credibility is of primary concern to editors," and that

> calling a newspaper ombudsman may have some positive effect. This is predicated on the assumption that callers probably are somewhat dissatisfied if they are moved to call the newspaper in the first place, but, after that call, their level of satisfaction is equal to or higher than non-callers.[28]

Debating the Need for Ombudsmen

Despite studies showing that ombudsmen are effective public relations tools, many editors remain unconvinced that ombudsmen are necessary. In fact, some critics contend that ombudsmen are more of a hindrance than a help.

Norman Isaacs, the former Louisville editor who appointed the first newspaper ombudsman, has said the slow growth of the ombudsman movement

> tells a lot about the reluctance of owners to invest in accountability and also, in many cases, resistance of both subeditors and staff members to the idea of oversight regarding their work.[29]

But is this an accurate assessment? Other objections to ombudsmen that have nothing to do with shying away from accountability have been raised. In a report on ombudsmen for the Freedom of Information Center at the University of Missouri, Hudgens identified five objections to ombudsmen:

> (1) Ombudsmen frequently are required to perform so many duties that they have difficulty doing any job adequately. (2) The danger of a conflict of interest arises when staff members are expected to criticize the organization that pays them. (3) Ombudsmen cannot develop an objective perspective when they are also required to work as reporters, as often happens on small newspapers with low budgets. (4) Internal critics can lower the general staff's morale. (5) Editors can perform the ombudsman's job more effectively.[30]

Some of these objections, especially the contention that editors, and not ombudsmen, should be responsive to reader complaints, have been voiced by editors.

When he was executive editor of the St. Petersburg Times, Bob Haiman was one of the most outspoken critics of ombudsmen to be quoted, touching off an exchange with ombudsmen and their supporters. During a panel discussion at the 1981 meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Haiman called ombudsmen a "bad idea" and a "sham" and said the newspaper industry needs "sustained, systematic, disinterested, objective criticism and analysis by intellectuals and ordinary citizens outside our papers."[31]

Furthermore, Haiman, who had eliminated the ombudsman's post at the St. Petersburg Times in 1980 after a dispute with the person who held the position, was quoted as saying:

> We are told that one reason to have an ombudsman is to open up lines of communication between readers and editors. If that is so, then why are we interposing this person called the ombudsman between the readers and the editor? If we want to get close to readers, then why don't we answer our own mail...rather than appointing an ombudsman to do it.[32]

The criticism did not stop there, however. Haiman made light of the work done by ombudsmen, saying it tended to give a Hollywood

spin to the newspaper business:

> I've heard of some ombudsmen whose job it is not to criticize their newspapers, but rather to write chatty little columns about who we are and what we do in this fascinating business called newspapering. Sort of a more accurate print version of the Lou Grant Show ...you know, what those newspaper people are really like.[33]

Haiman also used the Janet Cooke incident at The Washington Post as ammunition for his denouncement of ombudsmen. Cooke received a Pulitzer Prize for a story she wrote in the Post about a young heroin addict. The prize, however, was revoked after it was learned the story was a fake. In the aftermath of the hoax, Bill Green, the Post's ombudsman at the time, wrote a detailed account of how the fraud came about. Green's report was published on four pages of the Post about three days after the disclosure that Cooke's story was phony.

While Green and the newspaper should be admired for that effort, Haiman said, the incident should not be cited in support of ombudsmen because Green's effort came only after the fact:

> One hopes that the solution we seek to improve the credibility of newspapers would have more to do with trying to keep the plane flying...with monitoring the captain and crew who fly it...and with trying to avoid the crash in the first place. But you see, that's not the way most ombudsmen work.[34]

Haiman is not alone in arguing that ombudsmen needlessly fulfill the functions of an editor, perhaps the most frequent criticism of ombudsmen appearing in print. James Gannon, former editor of The Des Moines Register, once told Time magazine that "the person who should handle the complaints is the editor, not someone in a corner with no real power."[35]

Naturally, ombudsmen and their supporters scoff at the argument

that editors can effectively handle reader complaints. Ben Bradlee, executive editor of The Washington Post, who appointed the second newspaper ombudsman in 1970, was quoted in 1984 as saying:

> It's a very cheap and easy shot to say that the editor should be the ultimate ombudsman, and nobody disagrees with that, but anybody who's been the editor of a large newspaper who says he or she can manage to read everything that goes into that paper is kidding himself.[36]

JaCoby, the former ombudsman for The San Diego Union, put it like this: "Do you think readers get in to see the executive editor of The New York Times these days or any days?"[37] And Richard Cunningham, a former ombudsman for the Minneapolis Tribune, argued that critic Haiman "knows as well as any other editor that when someone comes in with a complaint (the) editor thinks is nonsense...we immediately go into a bunch of defensive techniques."[38]

Ombudsmen, of course, have come to their own defense by citing what they consider to be their value to newspapers. Former Washington Post ombudsman Sam Zagoria has said that ombudsmen may be able to head-off what he called the "let's-sue-the-bastards" attitude of some people with a complaint:

> A person seeking a correction or clarification may fare differently in the hands of an ombudsman than he would dealing with a busy editor, a power-happy news aide or a defensive reporter.[39]

While ombudsmen are reluctant to say they can prevent errors, they contend the job is worthwhile because it gives a disgruntled reader some outlet for his anger. Art Nauman, the ombudsman for The Sacramento Bee, perhaps summarized this attitude best when he wrote in a 1983 column:

> Even if it could be shown that the presence of the ombudsman did nothing to prevent mistakes, the function still would have a high, virtually unmeasurable, but still significant symbolic value. The mere act of ventilating readers' concerns and the sometimes mysterious -- and questionable -- practices of modern journalism surely must have a salutary effect.[40]

Ombudsmen and Broadcasting

The concept of an ombudsman has made virtually no headway among the broadcast news media in the United States.

ABC apparently is the only major U.S. television network to have an ombudsman-like position for its news operation as of 1989. In 1981, ABC gave the network's vice president of television news coverage additional job responsibilities of handling viewer complaints and monitoring the news for quality and fairness.[41]

As early as 1982, CBS had a vice president of news practices who functioned as an ombudsman, but the network phased out the office in 1987 during sweeping budget cuts, said Emerson Stone, who held the job from 1982 to 1987.[42]

"I think it says something negative -- that watching over ethics is expendable," Stone said of CBS's decision to get rid of the news practices department.

"It's not as though it cost a bundle of money," he said in an interview, noting that the department was manned by himself, an office manager and a secretary.

Outside of ABC and CBS, Stone said he has never heard of any broadcast news outlet on the national or local level in the United States that has employed someone to act as an ombudsman. Stone said that when he was employed by CBS, he functioned differently than a

newspaper ombudsman in that he could not deal with all the mail the network's news department received. He said he primarily responded to "significant pieces of mail" and "letter-writing campaigns." In addition, he said he made public appearances. The most important function of the job, he said, was conducting seminars for various CBS news operations around the world in which employees engaged in free-ranging discussions of ethics and news practices.[43]

Summary

While the print and broadcast news media have, as a whole, refrained from adopting the ombudsman concept, researchers and writers certainly have not steered away from the subject. Perhaps that is because ombudsmen are still seen as a novelty in the newspaper industry. Perhaps it is because an ombudsman can be a source of friction in the newsroom, especially when it comes to criticizing fellow workers. Perhaps it is because the whole issue of newspaper credibility has come to the forefront of journalism since the days when the Hutchins Commission urged the press to police itself or risk government intervention.

Whatever the case, newspaper ombudsmen have been examined from a variety of different angles. Immediately after the appointment of the first newspaper ombudsman in 1967, the research focused on numbers -- how many newspapers were following the lead of the Louisville papers in appointing someone to handle reader complaints and to critique the newspaper's performance. That research, for the most part, showed that while some newspapers have appointed

ombudsmen, the newspaper industry overall has been reluctant to adopt the concept.

The second wave of research, if it can be described as that, concentrated on ombudsmen themselves. Researchers attempted to draw a profile of ombudsmen and define their duties. The next phase in the research dealt with how newspaper staff members and the public perceived ombudsmen.

The results of those studies should have been welcome news to ombudsmen. At least one study indicated that staff members, after some initial opposition, generally reacted favorably to ombudsmen. As for the public's attitudes, studies have provided some evidence that newspaper credibility and ombudsmen are positively related.

In the 1980s, criticism of ombudsmen began appearing in articles published in the journalism trade press. This criticism provided some explanation for the relative dearth of ombudsmen in the U.S. newspaper industry.

A more complete explanation, however, has apparently never been given by researchers. The present study is an attempt to answer a simple question that really has not been put to the majority of editors of large newspapers in the United States: Why haven't you appointed an ombudsman?

END NOTES

[1] William L. Barnett, "Survey Shows Few Papers Are Using Ombudsmen," Journalism Quarterly 50 (Spring 1973): 154.

[2] Ibid., pp. 154-155.

[3] Ibid., p. 155.

[4] Suraj Kapoor and Ralph Smith, "The Newspaper Ombudsman--A Progress Report," Journalism Quarterly 56 (Autumn 1979): 629.

[5] Ibid. p. 631.

[6] Donald Mogavero, "The American Press Ombudsman," Journalism Quarterly 59 (Winter 1982): 548-549.

[7] Ibid., p. 549.

[8] Ibid., pp. 550-551.

[9] James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, "Public Accountability or Public Relations? Newspaper Ombudsmen Define Their Role," Journalism Quarterly 64 (Spring 1987): 6.

[10] Ibid., p. 7.

[11] Ibid., pp. 8, 11.

[12] Cassandra Tate, "What Do Ombudsmen Do?" Columbia Journalism Review, May-June 1984, pp. 37-38.

[13] Richard P. Cunningham, "Guidelines Established for Newspaper Ombudsmen," Editor & Publisher, 21 May 1986, p. 12.

[14] Ibid.

[15] The Evening Independent ceased publication in November 1986.

[16] David R. Nelsen and Kenneth Starck, "The Newspaper Ombudsman as Viewed by the Rest of the Staff," Journalism Quarterly 51 (Autumn 1974): 455, 457.

[17] Ibid. p. 457.

[18] Mark Fitzgerald, "Avoiding Libel Suits," Editor & Publisher, 29 June 1987, p. 12.

[19] Ibid.

[20] James M. Bernstein, The Public's View of Newspaper Accountability, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Memphis, Tenn., August 3-6, 1985. Dialog, ERIC, ED 258 254, pp. 8-9.

[21] Ibid., p. 13.

[22] Ibid., p. 16.

[23] Ibid., p. 15.

[24] Barbara W. Hartung and Alfred JaCoby, Readers' Views Toward a Newspaper Ombudsman Program, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Norman, Okla., August 3-6, 1986. Dialog, ERIC, ED 270 771, p. 5.

[25] Ibid., p. 7.

[26] Ibid., p. 8.

[27] Ibid., p. 9.

[28] Ibid., p. 10.

[29] Norman E. Isaacs, Untended Gates: The Mismanaged Press (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 132.

[30] Kay Hudgens, The Ombudsman and the News Media, University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center Report No. 479, Columbia, Mo., August 1983, p. 1.

[31] John Consoli, "Editor Calls Ombudsmen a 'Sham' and a 'Bad Idea,'" Editor & Publisher, 2 May 1981, p. 74.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Tate, p. 37.

[36] Tate, P. 37.

[37] Mark Fitzgerald, "Struggling for Recognition," Editor & Publisher, 13 July 1985, p. 8.

[38] Tate, p. 41.

[39] Sam Zagoria, "I the Jury," Quill, April 1986, p. 15.

[40] Tate, p. 41.

[41] Hudgens, p. 9.

[42] Personal telephone interview with Emerson Stone, former CBS vice president for news practices, Greenwich, Conn., 21 May 1989.

[43] Interview with Stone.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Survey Sample

A survey of top editors of major daily newspapers in the United States was the foundation of this study. The editors were asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to determine why their newspapers do not have an ombudsman or reader representative and to assess the editors' attitudes toward the concept of an ombudsman.

Only editors of large daily newspapers that do not have ombudsmen were considered for inclusion in the mail survey. The essential research question only sought answers to why many newspapers do not have ombudsmen. Therefore, it seemed logical to pose the question to the sources who should be best able to answer it -- editors of newspapers without ombudsmen.

The sample of editors used in the study was not selected at random. Rather, a convenience sample was chosen. The sample was obtained from a list of the top 100 daily newspapers in the United States, based on circulation size as of September 30, 1987. The list came from the 1988 Editor & Publisher International Year Book.[1] The 1988 edition was the most recent one available when the study was started in early 1989.

The sample was obtained by eliminating newspapers with ombudsmen or reader representatives from the list of the 100 largest

newspapers. A membership roster of the Organization of News Ombudsmen, which the author received in January 1989, was used to help identify newspapers having ombudsmen. That roster showed that 29 of the top 100 newspapers had ombudsmen.[2] An updated roster of the Organization of News Ombudsmen, dated May 1989, contained only 21 ombudsmen among newspapers listed in the top 100 circulation list.

Not all newspaper ombudsmen, however, are members of the Organization of News Ombudsmen.[3] The organization's membership list seems to fluctuate from year to year. To the author's knowledge, there is no source readily available to determine precisely the number of actual ombudsmen employed by U.S. newspapers. As a consequence, the study's sample may have omitted editors of a few newspapers in the top 100 circulation list that do not have ombudsmen.

The sample eventually chosen consisted of editors from 68 of the largest 100 daily newspapers in the United States. The 68 papers had circulations ranging from nearly 2 million for The Wall Street Journal to slightly more than 116,000 for the Las Vegas Review-Journal.[4]

The study's nonprobability or convenience sample does not represent the population of editors of all daily newspapers in the United States because every member of the population did not have an equal chance of being included in the sample.

A nonprobability sample, however, was deemed more appropriate for researching why many of the major daily newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen. A major consideration behind the

selection of a convenience sample had to do with the size of a newspaper and its economic resources. It was assumed that many of the 1,650 daily newspapers in the United States are too small to have an ombudsman. A probability sample including editors of some of these smaller newspapers would, in all likelihood, have made the results more predictable. Many of these editors presumably would have responded that their newspapers could not afford to hire an ombudsman.

It also was assumed that readers have greater access to editors of smaller papers. Enhancing reader access has been cited as a primary function of an ombudsman. Thus, it was assumed that many small newspapers would not see a need for an ombudsman because their editors have closer contact with readers.

In addition, this study focused on the largest newspapers because they were perceived to be influential in establishing the tone of press coverage, especially in setting the agenda of what is newsworthy and what is not. They have larger audiences and larger news staffs. Therefore, they have more potential to affect public opinion. And, presumably, they are the largest targets for public criticism, such as that leveled in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press.

The top or senior editors of the 68 newspapers in the sample were identified for the survey. The senior editor was defined as one having the title of either editor, executive editor or editor-in-chief. In some cases, the senior editor also had another management title such as vice president. At a few of the newspapers, the

managing editor was determined to be the senior news executive. The 1988 Editor & Publisher International Year Book, Editor & Publisher magazine and the membership list of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, corrected to September 15, 1988, were used to help identify the senior editors.

It was assumed that the senior editor is in charge of the paper's overall news operation and ultimately responsible for newsroom staffing. As such, the senior editor was deemed to be most suitable newspaper executive for responding to a survey about the lack of ombudsmen at many large newspapers.

Research Instrument

A three-page questionnaire was devised to obtain editors' responses to why many major newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen. The objective was to keep the questionnaire as simple and as short as possible to encourage a high response rate while at the same time satisfying the requirements of the research problem. Facilitation is one way to increase the response to a survey.

> Facilitation means making participation as easy as possible....The underlying principle is broad: the avoidance of the perception by the respondent that the task is onerous and to be avoided.[5]

In an attempt to persuade busy editors to take the time to participate in the survey, the questionnaire was limited to 15 items. Eight were Likert-scale items, and one was a multiple-choice question. Each of these required the respondent to check one of the answers provided. The remaining six items were open-ended questions. Only one of the open-ended questions, pertaining to why the editors'

newspapers did not have an ombudsman, required any substantial thought. The rest were used to identify the respondent.

The first questionnaire item was designed to acquaint the respondents with the study and to determine if their newspapers had ever considered hiring an ombudsmen or had used an ombudsman in the past. The second aspect of this question was important because the research had uncovered instances in which an ombudsman had been dropped from a newspaper's staff. It also served as a way to gauge interest in the ombudsman concept and to ferret out any newspapers with ombudsmen that were not identified in drawing the sample.

The second and most important question dealt directly with the research question. Respondents were asked: "Why doesn't your newspaper have an ombudsman?" They were directed to be specific in their answers.

The Likert-scale items were used to elicit the editors' specific attitudes toward the ombudsman concept. Each of these items, which contained a statement, was based on a five-point scale. Editors were asked to respond to each statement by checking either strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree. Four statements covered possible benefits and four covered possible drawbacks in having an ombudsman. The researcher relied on previous research and published comments to arrive at these pro and con statements.

The pro-ombudsman statements were:

1. An ombudsman can help enhance a newspaper's credibility.

2. An ombudsman can handle readers' complaints more effectively than an editor.

3. An ombudsman can improve the accuracy of a newspaper.

4. An ombudsman provides a public relations benefit to a newspaper.

The con statements were:

1. The money for an ombudsman's position could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation.

2. The potential for a conflict of interest exists when an ombudsman is asked to criticize the newspaper that pays his salary.

3. An ombudsman, by criticizing editors and reporters, can lower staff morale.

4. An ombudsman creates an unnecessary layer between readers and editors.

The rest of the questions concerned identification of the respondent. The editors were asked to provide the name of their newspaper, their name, their formal title, the number of years they have been in their present position and the number of years they have worked in journalism. This information was needed to attribute written responses to the respondents. In addition, the amount of journalistic experience was needed to determine if it accounted for differences in the editors' responses.

Circulation figures from the 1987 Editor & Publisher International Year Book were used in the other comparison made in the study: whether editors' responses differed according to the circulation size of their newspapers. The figures came from the publication's list of the largest 100 daily newspapers in the U.S. in terms of September 1987 circulation, the same list used to select the study's sample.

Before it was distributed, the questionnaire was tested. Dr.

Charles Fleming, associate professor of journalism at Oklahoma State University and the adviser for this thesis; Jack Lancaster, adviser to The Daily O'Collegian, Oklahoma State University's student newspaper; and Robert Kierstead, the ombudsman for The Boston Globe, reviewed the questionnaire. The test revealed no major problems.

Data Collection

Questionnaires, accompanied by cover letters and stamped, pre-addressed return envelopes, were mailed to the 68 editors on February 7 and 8, 1989. The author stated in the cover letter that he wanted to write a complete and accurate account of why many large newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen. The letter also informed editors that the Organization of News Ombudsmen had agreed to help pay for the research and intended to review the findings at its yearly meeting in April 1989. The questionnaire also referred to the organization's cooperation in the survey.

Responses were received from 39 editors of 57.4 percent of the sample as a result of the initial mailing.

A second round of questionnaires, cover letters and stamped, pre-addressed return envelopes was mailed on February 28, 1989, to editors who had not responded to the initial mailing.

The second mailing was the same as the first except for minor changes in the cover letter, which noted that the author had not received a response from the first mailing. The second cover letter, like the first, mentioned the author's desire to get a complete response, the purpose of the questionnaire and the involvement of the

Organization of News Ombudsmen.

Appendix B contains copies of the questionnaire and cover letters. The copies were reduced in size to meet university thesis requirements.

In an attempt to persuade the remaining editors to respond, the researcher called many of them, talking to a few and leaving messages with the rest.

The second mailing and telephone calls produced an additional 12 responses or 17.6 percent of the sample.

A total of 51 editors, 75 percent of the sample, provided usable responses. Appendix C shows a list of the respondents' newspapers. The Pittsburgh Press, whose editor was asked to complete the questionnaire, has a reader representative, who wrote to confirm this fact. Because of this, The Pittsburgh Press was not considered to be part of the sample, composed only of large U.S. daily newspapers that do not have ombudsmen.

Of the editors who provided usable responses, 47 completely filled out the questionnaire. Incomplete, but usable responses were received from editors of USA Today, the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch, Atlanta Constitution and Journal and the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Data Processing and Analysis

The essence of this study was to determine why many major newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen. This research question called primarily for a descriptive study. Therefore, the editors' responses to the open-ended question concerning why their

newspapers does not have an ombudsman and the eight Likert-scale items assessing the editors' attitudes toward the ombudsman concept were summarized by descriptive statistics.

Responses to the open-ended question were categorized, and percentages were calculated for the number of responses in each category. This provided a simple way to describe the various reasons given by editors for not appointing an ombudsman.

For the Likert-scale items, the editors' responses were first translated into numbers: 1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree, 3 for neither agree nor disagree, 4 for disagree and 5 for strongly disagree. The responses corresponding to each answer on the five-point Likert scale were then totaled and put into percentages. Mean scores for all of the Likert-scale items also were used to describe the editors' overall attitude toward the various concepts associated with ombudsmen.

In conjunction with the primary research question of why many major daily newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen, two additional questions were explored in the study: (1) At newspapers that do not have ombudsmen, do editors with 30 or more years of journalistic experience have different attitudes toward the concept of an ombudsman than similar editors will less experience? (2) Do editors of newspapers without ombudsmen and with a circulation of 250,000 or more have different attitudes toward the concept of an ombudsman than editors of newspapers without ombudsmen and with a circulation of less than 250,000?

The chi square statistic, which can help detect the probability

that any differences occurred by chance, was used to answer these two additional questions.

To use chi square, the number of editors who selected each possible response to the Likert-scale items was computed. Thus, the responses, which had been translated to scores represented by numbers, such as 1 for strongly agree, were converted to frequency data. The number of responses for strongly agree and agree were combined, as were the number of responses for strongly disagree and disagree. Therefore, frequency counts for three categories were used in analyzing the responses to the Likert-scale items: (1) agree (2) neither agree nor disagree and (3) disagree.

Similarly, chi square was used to examine whether there were any differences in the editors' reasons for why their newspapers did not have an ombudsman based on (1) the editors' years of journalistic experience and (2) circulation size of their newspapers. To use chi square, the number or frequency of responses pertaining to each of the categories specifying the reasons why the newspapers do not have an ombudsman was tallied.

Limitations and Assumptions

One of the most obvious limitations was the study's relatively small convenience sample of 68 editors. But, as was explained in this chapter, the sample was deemed to be appropriate to answer the research question, especially since major newspapers were the focus.

The method of obtaining the editors' responses, a mailed questionnaire, also had weaknesses. The most notable were the lack of

control over who fills out the questionnaire, the inability to get respondents to elaborate on their answers, the inability to verify the accuracy of their responses and, finally, the restricted length of the questionnaire, which was deemed vital to ensure a high response rate.

Several assumptions also were inherent in the survey. The key assumption, as mentioned in Chapter I, was that the editors answered the questionnaire truthfully, particularly when they were told the Organization of News Ombudsmen would review the responses. The study also assumed that the questions posed in the survey would enlist an accurate and fairly comprehensive accounting of the editors' attitudes toward ombudsmen and the reasons why their newspapers do not have an ombudsman.

Summary

This chapter outlined in detail how survey research was used to determine why many major newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen, the primary question posed in the study. The selection of the survey's convenience sample of 68 editors was described, as was the design of the research instrument, a three-page questionnaire. In addition, the chapter documented the distribution of the questionnaire, the collection of the data and how the responses were analyzed. Finally, the constraints on the research methodology and assumptions were discussed.

END NOTES

[1] Orlando Velez, ed., 1988 Editor & Publisher International Year Book (New York: Editor & Publisher, 1988), front pages.

[2] Membership List of the Organization of News Ombudsmen, provided by Louis I. Gelfand, reader representative of the Minneapolis Star & Tribune, in January 1989.

[3] For example, the following newspapers in the top 100 list in terms of September 1987 circulation figures have ombudsmen who are named in the May 1989 membership list of the Organization of News Ombudsmen: the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Cincinnati Post, the Milwaukee Journal and the Pittsburgh Press.

[4] The circulation figures were taken from the 1988 Editor & Publisher International Year Book.

[5] Guido H. Stempel III and Bruce H. Westley, eds., Research Methods in Mass Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981) p. 153.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Background

Responses to a questionnaire mailed to the top editors of the largest U.S. newspapers without ombudsmen provided the data for this study. The survey sample consisted of editors from 68 of the largest 100 daily newspapers in the United States according to September 1987 circulation figures.

Of the editors surveyed, 51, or 75 percent, responded, with 47 completely filling out the questionnaire and four partially completing it. The first mailing of the questionnaire generated responses from 39 editors or 57.4 percent of the sample. The second produced an additional 12 responses or 17.6 percent of the sample.

The essential purpose of the study was to ascertain why most of the largest papers in the United States do not have ombudsmen or reader representatives. In addition to asking the editors why their newspapers did not have ombudsmen, the questionnaire also solicited the editors' attitudes toward eight statements reflecting pros and cons of ombudsmen. Editors also were asked whether their newspapers had ever considered appointing an ombudsman.

The study's results primarily describe the editors' attitudes toward the concept of an ombudsmen, particularly their reasons for not having such a position on their news staffs. The study, however,

also sought to determine whether there was a difference in the responses of editors based on the circulation size of their newspapers and on the editors' level of journalistic experience.

Consideration of Ombudsmen

Asked if their newspapers had ever considered appointing an ombudsman or reader representative, 39 or about 81 percent of the 48 editors who responded gave an affirmative answer, including six who indicated their newspapers used to have an ombudsman. Seven respondents replied that their newspapers had never considered appointing an ombudsman. Table I on the next page shows the responses to this question.

TABLE I

EXTENT TO WHICH EDITORS' NEWSPAPERS HAVE CONSIDERED APPOINTING AN OMBUDSMAN

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Yes, considered it	33	68.7%
Yes, paper used to have an ombudsman	6	12.5
No, never considered it	7	14.6
Don't know or not sure	2	4.2
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Editors' Reasons for Lack of Ombudsmen

The majority of editors surveyed responded that an ombudsman was not necessary because the editors of their papers perform the functions of an ombudsman or reader representative. Of the 50 editors who responded to the open-ended question of why their newspapers do not have an ombudsman, 29, or 58 percent, indicated that editors should respond to readers who have complaints or questions about news matters. Included in this category were responses that an ombudsman is a barrier between editors and readers or an ombudsman insulates editors from readers. Economic reasons were cited by 13, or 26 percent, of the respondents. Some of these editors described ombudsmen as luxuries, while others indicated they have tight budgets and consider other staffing needs to be more vital than an ombudsman. The reasons cited by the editors for why their papers do not have ombudsmen are represented in Table II on the next page.

TABLE II

EDITORS' REASONS FOR WHY THEIR NEWSPAPERS DO NOT HAVE AN OMBUDSMAN

Reason	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Editors Perform Or Should Perform That Role	29	58%
Economics	13	26
Not Sure or Miscellaneous	3	6
Other Methods of Fulfilling Role	4	8
Negative Effect On Staff Morale	1	2
TOTAL	50	100%

Sampling of Editors' Comments

While the raw numbers summarize the respondents' reasons for why many of the largest newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen, a sampling of the editors' written comments supply more detail to the central question addressed in the study.

Editors Are Ombudsmen

Among those who replied that editors perform or should perform the functions of an ombudsman was John Lemmon, managing editor of The (Baltimore) Evening Sun. "All editors should be ombudsmen," Lemmon wrote. "Newspapers should not shirk this responsibility and cop out by appointing someone else to take the heat."

From C. David Burin, editor-in-chief of The Houston Post, came this response: "At best, ombudspersons are self-conscious luxuries. Editors are ombudsmen. It gets redundant."

The Chicago Tribune, editor James D. Squires wrote,

> believes that the ombudsman function of reader advocate is a critical part of the job description of its senior editors. Ombudsmen tend to become dumping grounds for problems editors in the chain of command should deal with as a regular part of their daily duties....

Allan M. Siegal, assistant managing editor of The New York Times, also was one of the 29 editors who responded that editors should be ombudsmen. Wrote Siegal: "We do not believe the editors of this newspaper can or should abrogate their responsibility to deal with complaints or readers."

David Hall, editor and vice president of The Record in Hackensack, N.J., replied: "The angriest reader of a newspaper every

day ought to be its editor. If he, and his chief associates, can't perform the role of ombudsman, they aren't doing their jobs."

Other editors contended that ombudsmen act as an unnecessary layer between editors and readers. Ralph Langer, vice president and executive editor of The Dallas Morning News, wrote:

> I do not believe that an ombudsman is necessary or even desirable at a well-edited, well-managed newspaper. I believe that the top editors are the readers' representatives. Those same editors can insure that every staff member takes every reader complaint seriously and that every inquiry or complaint from the public is investigated and a response is forthcoming. If that is true, an additional job, an additional layer, is neither needed nor useful. It can even be counter-productive since the presence of such a person can signal to other staff members that such duties are concentrated in only that person....

Asked why his newspaper did not have an ombudsman, Andrew Barnes, editor, president and chief executive officer of the St. Petersburg Times, replied: "Because we think an ombudsman would serve to insulate the editors, and make them less rather than more responsive to the public."

Mike Lloyd, editor of The Grand Rapids (Mich.) Press, wrote:

> While the function -- responding to reader questions and complaints -- is important, if I do my job well as editor, a structured, single-focus appointee as reader representative is not needed. All editors and executives of the paper should be attentive to the customer. We are not different from GM or Sears.

Other editors who responded in essence that editors are ombudsmen gave brief replies. "I believe I perform that function," wrote Lionel Linder, editor of The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tenn. "Occasional columns by me fill the need," wrote Larry Allison, editor of Long Beach, Calif., Press-Telegram.

A Matter of Economics

John Haile, editor of The Orlando Sentinel, was one of the editors who characterized an ombudsman as a luxury. "It's a 'nice-to-have,' but in the scheme of things when you've got limited resources and plenty of turf to cover, the money is needed elsewhere," Haile wrote.

Another respondent who indicated money for an ombudsman could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation was John S. Carroll, executive vice president and editor of the Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader. Carroll wrote:

> Every time I get an extra position on the staff, I have a very specific requirement -- reporting, photography, graphics or editing -- that will make a real difference to the reader. Our staff size is such that there are still holes in our coverage, and I can't justify appointing a staff member to take complaints from readers when we can prevent many of those complaints simply by covering the news more thoroughly....

Beverly Kees, executive editor of The Fresno Bee, wrote that an ombudsman "would be nice, along with a lot of other things, but it's not vital. These days, only 'vital' counts at budget time."

Other Ways of Fulfilling Ombudsman's Role

Responses from editors at the Los Angeles Times, Indianapolis News, Chicago Sun-Times and the Birmingham News make up this category.

The Los Angeles Times has a media criticism reporting beat in addition to a more traditional beat that covers the media from a more objective stance, wrote John Brownell, assistant managing editor. Although he listed some "general reservations" about ombudsmen,

Brownell responded that the Times editors have felt that the two media reporting beats "make an ombudsman somewhat unnecessary."

The Indianapolis News publishes advertisements seeking public comments about its news coverage, wrote editor Harvey C. Jacobs. A brief questionnaire in which readers can comment on a story or correct an error is published along with the advertisment.

At the Chicago Sun-Times, a Bureau of Fairness and Accuracy functions as an ombudsman, wrote Tom Sheridan, bureau director.

James E. Jacobson, editor of The Birmingham News, wrote that rather than having an ombudsman, his paper relies on

> a combination of regular meetings between editors and community-representative editorial advisory boards, regular columns by the editor discussing newspaper operations and discussing specific situations, prominent treatment of letters to editor and prominent handling of errors/clarifications.

Not Sure or Miscellaneous

As for the three responses in this category, Thomas N. McLean, executive editor of The State in Columbia, South Carolina, responded that his newspaper didn't have an ombudsman because its former ombudsman "knew too little of how a newspaper operates, had an "inadequate background and no training" and thus "no real respect."

Gene Cryer, editor of the Fort Lauderdale News/Sun-Sentinel, simply wrote: "I'm not convinced an ombudsman is a positive move for a newspaper."

And Ralph Johnson, editorial director of The (Toledo) Blade, replied that he wasn't sure why his newspaper did not have an ombudsman, but one reason is that "several of us deal with

complaints."

Negative Effect on Staff Morale

Only one respondent, Murray B. Light, editor and senior vice president of The Buffalo News, cited this reason as one of two "principal negatives" to having an ombudsman. The other, he wrote, was the establishment of a barrier between the editor and readers.

Responses to Pro and Con Ombudsman Statements

A majority of the respondents agreed that an ombudsman can improve a newspaper's credibility and accuracy and also provide a public relations benefit. But a majority of the editors also agreed that an ombudsman can lower staff morale through criticism and that an ombudsman creates an unnecessary barrier between readers and editors. The majority disagreed that an ombudsman can handle readers complaints more effectively than an editor, while agreeing that money for an ombudsman could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation.

The editors' responses to these concepts of an ombudsman are summarized in Tables III-X on pages 51-58. Four of the statements are positive, while the other four are negative.

As Table III shows, about 56 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that an ombudsman can help enhance a newspaper's credibility. About a third was unsure, while about 12 percent disagreed with the statement.

The mean or average response to the statement was 2.46 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE III

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT:
AN OMBUDSMAN CAN HELP ENHANCE
A NEWSPAPER'S CREDIBILITY

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	4	8.3%
Agree	23	47.9
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	15	31.3
Disagree	5	10.4
Strongly Disagree	1	2.1
TOTAL	48	100.0%

As can be seen from Table IV, three-fourths of the respondents agreed that the money for an ombudsman's position could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation. Only about four percent disagreed with the statement.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.19 on a scale of 1.5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE IV

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT: THE MONEY FOR AN OMBUDSMAN'S POSITION COULD BE BETTER SPENT ELSEWHERE IN THE NEWS OPERATION

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	5	10.4%
Agree	31	64.6
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	10	20.8
Disagree	2	4.2
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Table V shows that nearly 73 percent of the 48 respondents disagreed that an ombudsman can handle readers' complaints more effectively than an editor, including about 15 percent who indicated strong disagreement. Only about 15 percent agreed with this statement, and about 12 percent indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed.

The mean or average response to this statement was 3.71 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE V

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT:
AN OMBUDSMAN CAN HANDLE READERS'
COMPLAINTS MORE EFFECTIVELY
THAN AN EDITOR

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	1	2.1%
Agree	6	12.5
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	6	12.5
Disagree	28	58.3
Strongly Disagree	7	14.6
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Table VI shows that half of the respondents agreed with the statement that the potential for a conflict of interest exists when an ombudsman is asked to criticize the newspaper that pays his salary. Nearly 23 percent were unsure, while about 27 percent disagreed.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.77 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE VI

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT: THE POTENTIAL FOR A CONFLICT OF INTEREST EXISTS WHEN AN OMBUDSMAN IS ASKED TO CRITICIZE THE NEWSPAPER THAT PAYS HIS SALARY

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	2	4.2%
Agree	22	45.8
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	11	22.9
Disagree	12	25.0
Strongly Disagree	1	2.1
TOTAL	48	100.0%

As shown in Table VII, about 54 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that an ombudsman, by criticizing editors and reporters, can lower staff morale. Of the 48 respondents, nearly 19 percent disagreed with the statement, while about 27 percent indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.67 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE VII

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT: AN OMBUDSMAN, BY CRITICIZING EDITORS AND REPORTERS, CAN LOWER STAFF MORALE

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	2	4.2%
Agree	24	50.0
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	13	27.1
Disagree	9	18.7
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Table VIII shows that 52 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that an ombudsman can improve the accuracy of a newspaper. Nearly 40 percent, however, were neutral, while about eight percent disagreed with the statement.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.54 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE VIII

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT:
AN OMBUDSMAN CAN IMPROVE THE
ACCURACY OF A NEWSPAPER

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	1	2.1%
Agree	24	50.0
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	19	39.5
Disagree	3	6.3
Strongly Disagree	1	2.1
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Table IX shows that nearly 65 percent of the respondents agreed that an ombudsman creates an unnecessary layer between readers and editors, while nearly 17 percent disagreed. About 19 percent indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.38 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE IX

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT:
AN OMBUDSMAN CREATES AN UNNECESSARY
LAYER BETWEEN READERS AND EDITORS

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	7	14.6%
Agree	24	50.0
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	9	18.7
Disagree	7	14.6
Strongly Disagree	1	2.1
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Table X shows that a large majority of nearly 71 percent of the respondents agreed that an ombudsman provides a public relations benefit to a newspaper, while only about nine percent disagreed. Nearly 21 percent of the respondents were unsure on this point, however.

The mean or average response to this statement was 2.23 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

TABLE X

EDITORS' RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT: AN OMBUDSMAN PROVIDES A PUBLIC RELATIONS BENEFIT TO A NEWSPAPER

Response	Number	Percentage of Total Responses
Strongly Agree	4	8.3%
Agree	30	62.5
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	10	20.8
Disagree	3	6.3
Strongly Disagree	1	2.1
TOTAL	48	100.0%

Comparison of Editors' Responses

A chi square analysis yielded no statistically significant difference between the responses to editors with 30 or more years experience and those with less. There also was no statistically significant difference between responses from editors of newspapers with a circulation of 250,000 or more and responses from editors of newspapers with less circulation.

This was true of the responses to all the pro and con ombudsman statements reflected in the Likert-scale items. It also was true for the responses to why the editors' newspapers do not have an ombudsman. The calculated chi square value in each case fell far short of the critical value at the .05 level of confidence.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was designed to document the reasons why the majority of the largest newspapers in the United States do not have ombudsmen or reader representatives to respond to complaints about news coverage and to critique that coverage.

Editors of 68 of the largest daily newspapers in the United States without ombudsmen were surveyed by mail in February 1989. The 68 are among the 100 largest U.S. daily newspapers in terms of September 1987 circulation figures. The editors in the convenience sample were asked why their newspapers did not have ombudsmen. They also were asked to respond to statements listing some of the disadvantages and advantages associated with the concept of an ombudsman.

Of the sample, 51 editors, or 75 percent, responded. The study also examined if there were any differences in the respondents' attitudes toward ombudsmen, including why their newspapers did not have such a position, based on the editors' amount of journalistic experience and the circulation of their newspapers.

These editors are presumably key players in the continuing debate over press credibility and accountability in the United

States. They certainly have a say in how their newspapers react to public criticism and how their newspapers police themselves. As such, their views on ombudsmen, promoted as a means to bridge the apparent credibility gap between newspapers and readers, carry some weight.

So how do these influential editors respond to the credibility debate? Has the press, in the words of the 1947 Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, blocked one of the "most effective ways of improving the press" by refusing to engage in self-criticism?[1] Have newspapers, in the words of media critic Ben Bagdikian, been "riding a tide complacent in their monopoly status without making basic reforms that they and the readers deserve"?[2]

Such broad questions obviously were not explored by this study. But this study does provide insight into how some of the nation's highest-ranking newspapers executives view a potential method of enhancing press credibility and accountability--the ombudsman or reader representative. And in that sense, the study can be viewed as a small piece in the newspaper credibility puzzle.

A majority of the respondents in this study indicated that newspapers don't need ombudsmen because editors are responsible for responding to criticism, including complaints from readers.

One respondent who asked to remain anonymous expressed this viewpoint in no uncertain terms when he wrote:

> If person is sufficiently expert about newspapers, he or she should be the editor. All too often, the ombudsman is someone who has been shoved aside or demoted because he or she cannot successfully do other tasks at a newspaper. Further, the role of dealing with readers and explaining to them (as appropriate) what the newspaper does and why is part of the editor's

> responsibility. This can be successfully handled by an editor (and has for years at many papers), provided the editor takes this responsibility seriously and avoids defensiveness....

Twenty-six percent of the respondents indicated that, while they have no strong opposition to ombudsmen, they really do not consider such a position to be essential to putting out a high quality newspaper, especially when newsroom funds are tight. In essence, they viewed ombudsmen as a luxury that their papers could not afford.

These two principal reasons cited by respondents for not having ombudsmen show up in other findings of this study. For example, nearly 73 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement that an ombudsman can handle readers' complaints more effectively than an editor. About 64 percent agreed that an ombudsman creates an unnecessary layer between readers and editors. And 75 percent agreed that the money for an ombudsman's position could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation.

A majority of editors, however, did agree that an ombudsman can benefit a newspaper, which may seem to be somewhat contradictory. A slight majority, 52.1 percent, agreed that an ombudsman can improve the accuracy of a newspaper, although nearly 40 percent were neutral. More than 70 percent also agreed that an ombudsman provides a public relations benefit to a newspaper.

The editors' amount of journalistic experience and the circulation of their newspapers did not account for any significant difference in their attitudes toward an ombudsman.

Conclusions

The study's findings indicate that editors are unwilling to relinquish part of what they perceive to be their "turf" to an ombudsman, whom they consider to be somewhat an outsider. Such a viewpoint is not startling. One would not expect editors to acknowledge, even indirectly, that they are insensitive to readers and criticism and that they are not concerned about accuracy or credibility. That would sort of be like admitting that they are failures or that they have a cavalier attitude.

Editors, however, may be reacting hastily in their generalizations about ombudsmen. It has been argued that ombudsmen actually make editors more responsive to readers. Ombudsmen, as opposed to editors, can devote more time to receiving and investigating reader complaints, ensuring that the complaints do not get lost amid the paperwork and deadline constraints.

Editors may be too busy to handle every complaint, especially those that come during a newsroom crisis. And who can say that editors will be completely free from bias when confronting criticism? An ombudsman, on the other hand, potentially can be more objective, if he has been given independence.

In a 1978 article in Columbia Journalism Review, Michael Knepler and Jonathan Peterson, who questioned ombudsmen and their editors, wrote that giving someone the title of ombudsman does not constitute a magic guarantee of reader advocacy, but

> ...there is no question that readers need to be heard if newspapers can claim to be sensitive and fair. The ideals stressed by ombudsmen are fundamental to good journalism. When a

> newspaper establishes an ombudsman position, and gives it independence and backing, it undoubtedly makes it easier for readers to be confident about the fairness and accuracy of their newspaper.[3]

There is evidence that newspaper readers want to be heard more if they know an ombudsman is available to listen. After John Herchenroeder became the first newspaper ombudsman in the United States and as his availability became known through full-page advertisements in the Louisville, Kentucky., newspapers, reader-initiated contacts with the newspapers increased from 400 annually to about 3,000 per year.[4]

Research has shown that readers associate ombudsmen with credibility.

Apparently, editors of many large newspapers in the United States have made such a positive association or they have chosen to ignore the relationship. They have disregarded one possible method of providing the accountability that the Hutchins Commission and some media critics have requested. Whether the editors' reasons for not appointing ombudsmen are based on real concerns, misperceptions or fears of losing some of their authority can only be speculated upon at this time.

This study, however, has eliminated some speculation. It has shown that ombudsmen, if they want to increase their standing in the newspaper industry in the United States, must convince editors that accountability cannot rest with editors alone and that ombudsmen are more than luxuries.

Recommendations for Further Research

The response by the majority of respondents that ombudsmen are not needed because the functions of the position are fulfilled by editors calls for further research. Are these editors actually upholding standards of fairness and accuracy and seeing to it that readers' complaints consistently receive a fair hearing?

Editors who say they are more effective than an ombudsman in handling reader complaints need to be tested. Research examining how much time these editors actually devote to listening to readers, handling complaints and assessing their newspapers' performance should be conducted. A research project designed to simply find out how easy or difficult it is to talk with an editor of a large newspaper may prove interesting and useful in the accountability debate. Readers also could be surveyed to determine their attitudes toward the responsiveness and accessibility of editors.

In addition, research into the ombudsman concept as it relates to the broadcast news media has largely been ignored. How broadcast news executives perceive the concept of an ombudsmen and how they deal with reader complaints and criticism could be researched.

The Future?

For the newspaper industry, the ombudsman movement does not show signs of major expansion, if the results of this study are any indication. Despite the generally adverse comments by editors in this study, at least one ombudsman was not ready to declare the movement stalled.

Richard Harwood, The Washington Post ombudsman, remains optimistic that there will be more newspaper ombudsmen because he said the job is part of an irreversible consumer movement in the United States and because more newspapers are employing younger editors who "are more or less accustomed to ombudsmen and to criticism and critics."[5]

"Some editors may not like it, but the corporations that now control our media are likely to insist on...(ombudsmen) as part of their strategy for survival," Harwood said during a speech at the 1989 meeting of the Organization of News Ombudsmen. He urged his fellow ombudsmen to pressure top newspaper managers through columns and other activities "to invest some of their millions or billions in the improvement of their newspapers through the employment, care and feeding of ombudsmen."[6]

END NOTES

[1] The Commission on Freedom of the Press, A Free and Responsible Press (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947) p. 65.

[2] Ben Bagdikian, "The American Newspaper Is Neither Record, Mirror, Journal, Ledger, Bulletin, Telegram, Examiner, Register, Chronicle, Gazette, Observer, Monitor, Transcript nor Herald of the Day's Events," Esquire, March 1967, p. 146.

[3] Michael K. Knepler and Jonathan Peterson, "The Ombudsman's Uneasy Chair," Columbia Journalism Review, July-August 1978, p. 57.

[4] Ibid., p. 55.

[5] M.L. Stein, "How Editors View Ombudsmen," Editor & Publisher, 13 May 1989, p. 16.

[6] Ibid.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Society of Newspaper Editors, ed. ASNE 1985: Proceedings of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Washington: ASNE, 1985.

Bagdikian, Ben. "The American Newspaper Is Neither Record, Mirror, Journal, Ledger, Bulletin, Telegram, Examiner, Register, Chronicle, Gazette, Observer, Monitor, Transcript nor Herald of the Day's Events." Esquire, March 1967, pp. 124, 138, 142-144, 146.

Barnett, William. "Survey Shows Few Papers Are Using Ombudsmen." Journalism Quarterly 50 (Spring 1973): pp. 153-156.

Bernstein, James H. The Public's View of Newspaper Accountability. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Memphis, Tenn., August 3-6, 1985. Dialog, ERIC, ED 258 254.

Commission on Freedom of the Press. A Free and Responsible Press. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947.

Consoli, John. "Editor Calls Ombudsmen a 'Sham' and a 'Bad Idea.'" Editor & Publisher, 2 May 1981, pp. 74, 78.

Cunningham, Richard P. "Guidelines Established for Newspaper Ombudsmen." Editor & Publisher, 21 May 1986, p. 12.

Ettema, James S. and Theodore L. Glasser. "Public Accountability or Public Relations? Newspaper Ombudsmen Define Their Role." Journalism Quarterly 64 (Spring 1987) pp. 3-12.

Fitzgerald, Mark. "Avoiding Libel Suits." Editor & Publisher, 29 June 1987, pp. 12, 28.

Fitzgerald, Mark. "Struggling for Recognition." Editor & Publisher, 13 July 1985, pp. 7-8.

Hartung, Barbara A. and Alfred JaCoby. Readers' Views Toward a Newspaper Ombudsman Program. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August 3-6, 1986. Dialog, ERIC, ED 270 771.

Hudgens, Kay. The Ombudsman and the News Media. University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center Report No. 479, Columbia, Mo., August 1983.

Isaacs, Norman E. Untended Gates: The Mismanaged Press. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Kapoor, Suraj and Ralph Smith. "The Newspaper Ombudsman -- A Progress Report." Journalism Quarterly 56 (Autumn 1979): pp. 628-631.

Knepler, Michael K. and Jonathan Peterson. "The Ombudsman's Uneasy Chair." Columbia Journalism Review, July-August 1978, pp. 54-57.

Mogavero, Donald T. "The American Press Ombudsman." Journalism Quarterly 59 (Winter 1982): pp. 548-553.

Nelsen, David R. and Kenneth Starck. "The Newspaper Ombudsman as Viewed by the Rest of the Staff." Journalism Quarterly 51 (Autumn 1974) pp. 453-457.

Raskin, A.H. "What's Wrong with American Newspapers." The New York Times Magazine, 11 June 1967, pp. 28, 77-84.

Stein, M.L. "How Editors View Ombudsmen." Editor & Publisher, 13 May 1989, pp. 16-17.

Stempel, Guido H. and Bruce H. Westley, eds. Research Methods in Mass Communication. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1981.

Tate, Cassandra. "What Do Ombudsmen Do?" Columbia Journalism Review, May-June 1984, pp. 37-41.

Velez, Orlando, ed. 1988 Editor & Publisher International Year Book. New York: Editor & Publisher, 1988.

Zagoria, Sam. "I the Jury." Quill, April 1986, pp. 12-16.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

MEMBERSHIP LIST OF THE ORGANIZATION OF NEWS OMBUDSMEN

Leo Della Betta
Reader's Advocate
The Arizona Daily Star (Tucson)

David Bishop
Ombudsman
The Ann Arbor (Mich.) News

Charles Bond
Listening Post Editor
The Palm Beach (Fla.) Post

Jack Briglia
Ombudsman
London (Ontario) Free Press

John P. Brown
Ombudsman
Edmonton (Alberta) Journal

John V.R. Bull
Assistant to the Executive Editor
Philadelphia Inquirer

Mike Clark
Reader Advocate
Florida Times-Union and Jacksonville Journal

Kenneth Donlan
Managing Editor
The Sun (London, England)

Bengt Erlandsson
Ombudsman
Svenski Dagbladet (Stockholm, Sweden)

William Flynn
Associate Editor and Reader Representative
The Patriot Ledger (Quincy, Mass.)

Louis I. Gelfand
Readers Representative
Minneapolis Star and Tribune

Rod Goodman
Ombudsman
Toronto Star

Charles G. Griffo
Reader Representative
Indianapolis Star

Joe Grimm
Reader Representative
The Free Press (Detroit)

Richard Harwood
Ombudsman
The Washington Post

Wayne Hassell
Assistant to the Executive Editor
St. Paul Pioneer Press & Dispatch

Bill Hosokawa
Ombudsman
Rocky Mountain News

Tim Hunt
Ombudsman
Alameda Newspaper Group

Donald R. (Casey) Jones
Reader Representative
Kansas City Star and Kansas City Times

Robert Kierstead
Ombudsman
The Boston Globe

Jeff Langley
Reader Representative
Amarillo (Texas) Globe News

Takeshi Maezawa
Senior Staff
Ombudsmen Committee
The Yomirui Shimbun (Tokyo)

Henry McNulty
Reader's Representative
Hartford (Conn.) Courant

Barry Mullin
Ombudsman
Winnipeg Free Press

Arthur C. Nauman
Ombudsman
The Sacramento Bee

Pat Riley
Ombudsman
The Orange County (Calif.) Register

Frank Ritter
Deputy Managing Editor
The Tennessean (Nashville)

Jesus de la Serna Gutierrez-Repide
Ombudsman
El Pais (Madrid)

Kerry Sipe
Public Editor
The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger Star (Norfolk)

Stan Slusher
Ombudsman
Louisville Courier-Journal

William G. Stothers
Reader's Representative
The San Diego Union

Jim Stott
Ombudsman
The Calgary Herald

Gavriel Strasman
Ombudsman
Maariv (Tel Aviv)

John Sweeney
Public Editor
The News-Journal (Wilmington, Del.)

Frank Wetzel
Ombudsman
The Seattle Times

Stephanie Whittaker
Ombudsman
The Gazette (Montreal)

Ralph Williamson
Ombudsman
The Home News (New Brunswick, N.J.)

Sue Ann Wood
Reader's Advocate
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Sir William Wood
Ombudsman
Mirror Group Newspapers (London)

Jim Zofkie
Reader's Representative
Dayton (Ohio) Newspapers

APPENDIX B

COPIES OF QUESTIONNAIRE

AND COVER LETTERS

Kent F. Lauer
1125 S. Blakely
Stillwater, Okla. 74074 Telephone: (405) 624-8249

QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE RELATIVE DEARTH OF NEWSPAPER OMBUDSMEN

DESCRIPTION: Designed to determine why many large newspapers in the United States do not have an ombudsman.

Part of a research project by Kent F. Lauer in association with the Organization of News Ombudsmen.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete the questionnaire, marking your answers as directed. Mail completed questionnaire in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

1. Has your newspaper ever considered appointing an ombudsman or reader's representative to respond to readers' complaints and review the performance of the paper's editorial staff?

_____ yes, considered it

_____ yes, paper used to have an ombudsman

_____ no, never considered it

_____ don't know or not sure

2. Why doesn't your newspaper have an ombudsman?
Please, try to be specific in your answer written below.

PLEASE GO TO NEXT PAGE

PAGE TWO

For Questions 3-10, please indicate how you feel about each statement by checking one of the spaces below the statement.

3. An ombudsman can help enhance a newspaper's credibility.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. The money for an ombudman's position could be better spent elsewhere in the news operation.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. An ombudsman can handle readers' complaints more effectively than an editor.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. The potential for a conflict of interest exists when an ombudsman is asked to criticize the newspaper that pays his salary.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. An ombudsman, by criticizing editors and reporters, can lower staff morale.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

PLEASE GO TO NEXT PAGE

8. An ombudsman can improve the accuracy of a newspaper.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. An ombudsman creates an unnecessary layer between readers and editors.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. An ombudsman provides a public-relations benefit to a newspaper.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

For identification purposes, please provide the following:

11. Name of newspaper _____

12. Your name _____

13. Your formal title _____

14. How many years have you been in your present position? _____

15. How many years have you worked in journalism? _____

This completes the questionnaire, unless you have additional comments that you may write below. Thanks for your help.

February 7, 1989

1125 S. Blakely
Stillwater, Okla. 74074

F. Gilman Spencer
Editor
The Daily News
220 E. 42nd St. Suite 817
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Spencer:

I've agonized over what to write in this letter. I guess it's because I don't know any sure-fire methods to get you to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it as soon as possible.

I sincerely want to write a complete and accurate account of why many major papers do not have an ombudsman. Obviously I can't do that if I fail to persuade my sources - you and other top editors of large daily newspapers - to fill out this simple, brief questionnaire.

Before I become a graduate student and part-time journalism instructor at Oklahoma State University in January 1988, I worked as a reporter for 10 years. I know editors are busy. And I know they get a lot of questionnaires from academia.

My questionnaire, however, is not merely part of an academic research project to be put on a shelf in the college library. I intend to share the results of my survey with the Organization of News Ombudsmen. The ombudsmen's group has invited me to its yearly meeting in April and has agreed to help pay for the research.

I would appreciate it if you would take just a few minutes, and it really is just a few minutes, to complete the questionnaire and mail it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. It would mean a great deal to me and to the Organization of News Ombudsmen.

If you have questions, please call or write me. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kent F. Lauer

Kent F. Lauer

February 26, 1989

1125 S. Blakely
Stillwater, Okla. 74074
(405) 624-8249

F. Gilman Spencer
Editor
The Daily News
220 E. 42nd St. Suite 817
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Mr. Spencer:

A few weeks ago I sought your help in filling out a questionnaire on why many major newspapers do not have an ombudsman or reader's representative.

Perhaps you didn't receive the questionnaire, you misplaced it or maybe you just ignored it. If you responded, please disregard this letter and accept my thanks.

As I said in my original letter, I know editors are busy. I was a reporter for 10 years before going to graduate school at Oklahoma State University. I also know editors receive a lot of questionnaires. I don't expect you to spend a lot of time with a complicated questionnaire. For that reason, I designed a simple one that takes only a few minutes to complete.

I also want to stress that this research is not merely an academic exercise. The Organization of News Ombudsmen also is interested in your response. The group wants to review the survey results at its meeting in April and has agreed to help pay for the research.

Naturally, I want the research to be as thorough as possible. This is why I am again asking you to please fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. The response to my first mailing was encouraging, but I sincerely want to hear from all the editors in the survey.

I would certainly appreciate hearing from you. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

Kent F. Lauer

Kent F. Lauer

APPENDIX C

NEWSPAPERS REPRESENTED

BY RESPONDENTS

USA Today

Los Angeles Times

The New York Times

Chicago Tribune

The Sun-Times (Chicago)

San Francisco Chronicle

The Plain Dealer (Cleveland)

Houston Chronicle

The Miami Herald

The Dallas Morning News

The Buffalo News

The Houston Post

St. Petersburg Times

The Journal and Constitution (Atlanta)

The Columbus Dispatch

Philadelphia Daily News

Dallas Times Herald

The Orlando Sentinel

Los Angeles Herald Examiner

The Denver Post

The Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City)

The Sun (Baltimore)

Tampa Tribune

The Commercial Appeal (Memphis)

The Des Moines Register

Milwaukee Sentinel

The Evening Sun (Baltimore)

San Antonio Express-News

The Birmingham News

Daily News (Los Angeles)

The Record (Hackensack, N.J.)

Akron Beacon Journal

Fort Lauderdale News/Sun-Sentinel

The Blade (Toledo)

Asbury Park Press

The Tribune (Oakland)

The Fresno Bee

Richmond Times-Dispatch/The Richmond News Leader (Richmond, Va.)

The News & Observer/The Raleigh Times (Raleigh, N.C.)

The Grand Rapids Press

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

The Morning Call (Allentown, Pa.)

Democrat and Chronicle/Times-Union (Rochester, N.Y.)

Tulsa World

Press-Telegram (Long Beach, Calif.)

The Wichita Eagle-Beacon

The Tribune (San Diego)

The Indianapolis News

The State (Columbia, S.C.)

Lexington Herald-Leader

Las Vegas Review-Journal

VITA

Kent F. Lauer

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: WHY MANY OF THE LARGEST U.S. NEWSPAPERS DO NOT HAVE AN OMBUDSMAN AS DETERMINED BY EDITORS' RESPONSES TO A MAIL SURVEY

Major Field: Mass Communication

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on October 2, 1956. Son of Joyce E. Lauer.

Education: Graduated from Lincoln Senior High School, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in June 1974; earned Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism from Utah State University in August 1977; completed requirements for the Master of Science degree in Mass Communication at Oklahoma State University in July 1989.

Professional Experience: Teaching Assistant, School of Journalism and Broadcasting, Oklahoma State University, January 1988 to May 1989; Reporter, San Francisco Banner Daily Journal, 1987; Reporter, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1981-1986 and 1978-1979; Reporter, Odgen (Utah) Standard Examiner, 1979-1980; Reporter, Idaho Falls, Idaho, Post-Register, 1977-1978; part-time stringer for The Associated Press, Salt Lake City bureau, 1977.