

THE REAL NEWS

WINTER 2005 EDITION

*The Winter of Discontent
Grows Deeper as Each Day's
Temperature Drops*

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**VIDEO KILLED
THE BRAIN STEM**

POKER JUMPS THE TANK

**MARCHING TOWARD
ONE PARTY RULE**

LOST: THE SECOND TERM

JOURNALISM JOURNAL

WANTED



UNACARTOONIST

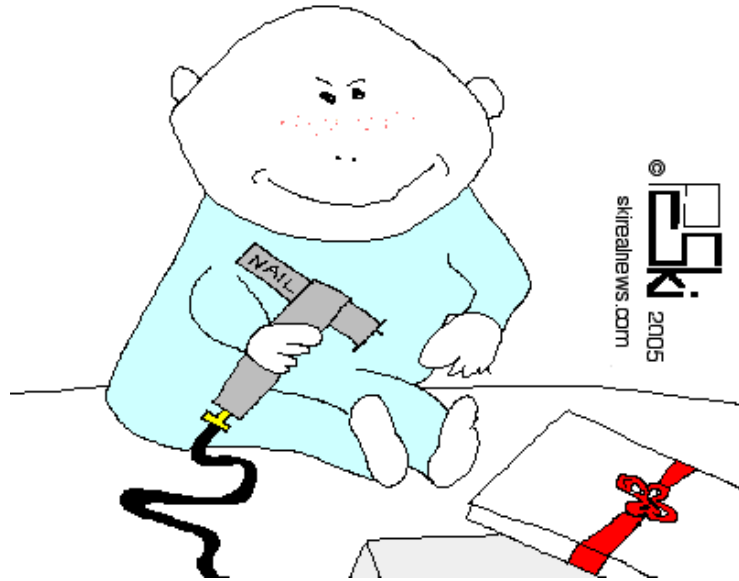
Oh my gawd,
he's still on
the loose!!!!



YOU KNOW THERE'S A HOUSING BUBBLE WHEN . . .

25 & 5: Twenty-five years of publishing with five years on the Net, the Real News continues to cynically, satirically, and culturally assault the "real" events shaping and mis-shaping our Lives.

Current Real News editions can be found at www.skirealnews.com; Archives can be located at www.pindermedia.com.



VIDEO KILLED THE BRAIN STEM

It only took a few years to finally figure It out. It was after passing out from boredom during the Bears-Saints football game. Why was this professional football contest, with a local root element, so unwatchable that my Brain had to put itself into PARK?

It is like watching my nephew play his video games. After a couple minutes, the eyelids get heavy. Very heavy. Unless you have a controller in your hands, you're not in the Game.

That's what professional sports has become; the coaches think the players are just 3D versions of their kids video games. The coaches attempt to control every aspect of the play; you have to wait for each play, player group, and check down before each snap. The video game

player mentality has permeated our entire culture.

The armed forces major recruiting and training tool is a video combat simulation. City councilmen across the country think that are Sim City gamers bulldozing block upon block of their real cities in the quest for development immortality. Carjacking, drive-bys and high speed police chases are turning into daily events on urban streets. The line between reality and virtual non-reality is getting blurred; someone just spend the equivalent of \$100,000 for a virtual resort in an on-line game community.

Everything can be explained in our current culture through the eyes of a teen gamer. Godlike games like the Sims for relationships; Sim City for city

planners using eminent domain to bulldoze neighborhoods for private development; Grand Theft for the street creed and larger than life homicide rates in the major metro cities. We have created a nation of thumbs and controller digit syndrome.

Children and their own parents can spend hours in front of the video monitor playing these virtual reality games. The kids think they are the next LeBron while their folks are sitting playing Texas Hold Em on-line like Phil the Mouth Hellmuth.

It is the mental reaction game that sells. The graphics take the place of the imagination. The confined living room or computer desk takes the place of fresh air. America is a chemistry dish that is molding into sim culture.

POKER JUMPS THE TANK

More than 5,600 people put down \$10,000 to play in the World Series of Poker Main Event, with the unlikely chance of becoming the next instant celebrity multimillionaire. The classic poker tournament has spawned an explosive growth of gambling at all age and demographic segments of society.

As the cable television shows beam in the hidden hole cards of the players, poker has become the favorite participation game in the land. (Professional football rules the couch viewer ratings, but it also has a large viewership devoted solely to this week's betting line.) The backroom professionals are now in the limelight; celebrities in fast lane of lights, camera, and high roller action!

The conservative local newspaper even has a weekly Gaming columnist. The growth of the gambling industry fills the void of more rust belt industries falling dark in a service economy. Local politicians believe that riverboats are the savior to local budgets because the cities get to take their take off the top gross. But just as sports stadiums and business tax rebates attempt to lure or reward rich owners to stay in town, gambling creates more vices than virtues.

People are quitting their jobs and moving to Las Vegas to become professional poker players. The mindset is that it looks easy on television. I can win my

home games; what's the difference?

The difference is that poker is a zero sum game. For each winner there is a loser. Professionals like to have these big heads come into town, they were easy marks; "dead money." But they have overtaken the Strip like locust. The swarm has made it difficult for the professionals to keep their tight club from being buried by lucky amateurs. The last four years has found an amateur player winning the World Series of Poker title (then going on to play full time, subsidized no doubt by sponsorships similar to a NASCAR race driver.) The old time professionals resented the new bucks hoarding in on their action.

But television has raised the entire prize pool to a Fortune 100 level. The old pros are now resigned that they may no longer win championships, but they will win more money in the long run. Now there is ancillary money: book deals, signing events, sponsorships, and staged television events.

But most professionals will tell you that they are never "up" or winning all the time. The way to keep an even keel is to know how to handle your losses. In streaks, that means potential bankruptcy. The psychological toll is what has to be mastered because this is a zero sum game with no "re-dos." And the rush of amateurs fall a part under the

pressure of a bad beat. The organizers of the World Series spent most of their time going from table to table to calm down abusive, swearing or inappropriate behavior. To get air time, people believe you need a stick, an attitude, a bad boy persona. It is the same reality television syndrome of Class D celebrity wannabees being recycled through unwatchable series to really unwatchable series. Players are almost coming to physical blows or emotional meltdowns. It is not good television; it is a group therapy session gone terribly wrong.

The major televised tours have now spawned regional mini-professional tours. Instead of million dollar purses, the mini-tours pay out tens of thousands of dollars for a weekend tournament. Just like gambling can be found by any person within two hours of their home, the poker tables are growing to meet the current craze in demand.

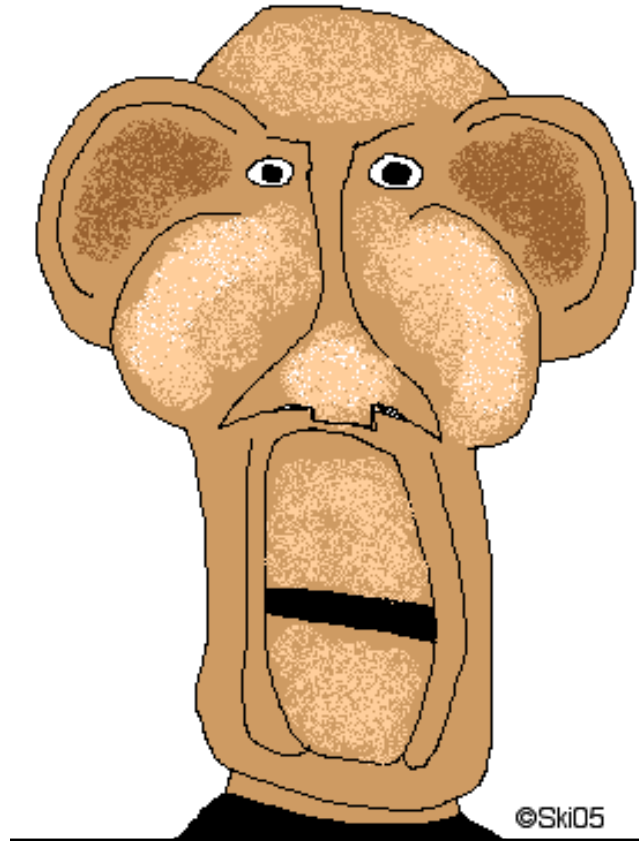
This is the point were the whole Texas Hold Em mania jumps the shark. It is at the point of collapsing under the weight of its sudden success. It has spawned an internet traffic jam of satellite tournament play. It has also created small, region poker tours. Grandma no longer has to go to church bingo to get her Fix. She can take her social security check to the local casino any weekend and sign in for a short stack of chips.

MARCHING TOWARD ONE PARTY RULE

Into the Second Term of the Republican Bush administration, the White House staff is seeking another increase in the federal debt spending limit. In the Contract with America, Newt Gingrich's new Republicans took back Congress with the pledge of fiscal conservative budget responsibilities. But the current Congress has been as free wheeling, spending like drunken sailors on shore leave. Bush claims that the spending is directly related to the serious issues: the War on Terror, the Reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq; the Southern Hurricane disaster relief.

The Charlie McCarthy talking heads continue to chime that there is not enough domestic spending. However, for 2006, more than fifty percent of federal spending will go for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Socialism has become the mainstream in Washington D.C.

For the past thirty years, the same issues have been debated by both parties: education, health care, social security, domestic security, crime, drugs and a host of special interest legislative initiatives. More and more money has been spent on these federal issues; the results have continued to be circular failure. For example, the tobacco issue. The states and federal government sued the tobacco industry claiming that cigarettes are bad for people. Even though kids in the 1940s called them "coffin nails," the litigation led to the tobacco industry paying billions and retreating from advertising their products. Now, if tobacco is truly the killer product that it is, then would it make logical sense to outright ban it? But that would hurt the tobacco farmers and this segment of the agricultural industry. So, what does the federal government do? It subsidizes the tobacco farmers to continue to grow this harmful product! Why? Because federal, state and local government TAX the crap out of each pack of cigarettes. The addictive nature of smoking is a real tax revenue generator. So the government coffers are skimming both ends of tobacco leaf; taxing the sale, then penalizing the manufacturers in litigation.



After the class actions cases were settled, some states like Illinois decided to sue the tobacco companies--again for more billions. Why? Governments have overspent, overtaxed other segments of the population, and greed rules all decisions no matter the political affiliation. Politician perks cost money, junkets be damned. The ruling class at all levels of government have pigged out on six figure pensions (their golden parachutes) and mainlining public debt issues to pay for these excessive spending.

There is no check or balance between the two parties. They are both spend and spenders. They each have the issues in which to gather political contributions and keep their cushy incumbencies. There are no roadblocks for these party buses roaming the nation's by-ways. Any time an independent candidate takes the forefront of an issue, the Republicrats take it for their own. So nothing changes. The inverse relationship between freedom and government spending rolls on.

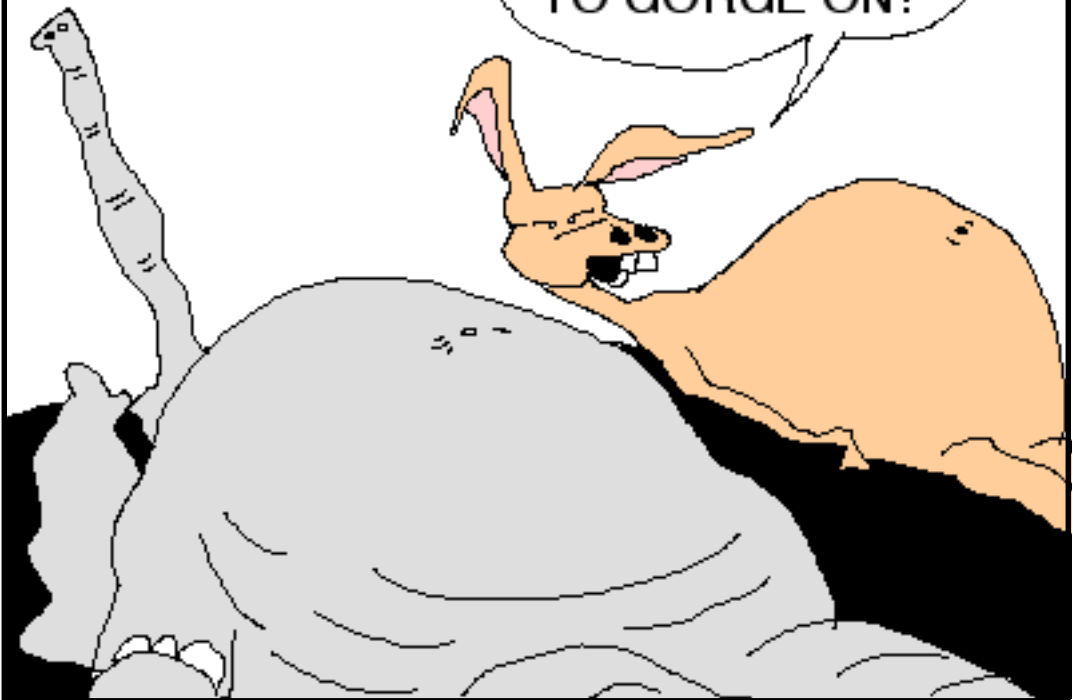
Soundbites have taken the place for debate. Where are the billions? There has been no accountability. The GAO is years behind on its audits. The IRS does not even know what happened to their own allocations, let alone what was collected from the taxpayers.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Congress appropriated seven billion dollars during the first week. Where did the money go? Because Congress

appropriated another ten billion a week later. Where did that money go? No one knows. And the real problem is that no one is really looking for the accounting records. The news stories were about the flood pictures, and the pundit blame game. No national investigative reporting has been done of the topic of massive government spending without oversight or accountability. If there is a scandal, it would be a large one. Not the petty fraud of persons lining up at relief centers who were not in displaced New Orleans residents.

Voters are apathetic. New immigrants don't get involved in the process because of the old world ways of single party corruption is why they came to America. The opportunity to participate in a democracy should have some appeal to the new immigrant. But the capitalistic, work ethic is the

THE GLUTTONY OF SPENDING



sole driving force in their lives. They have no means or connections to take the easy road. But some fall into the ethnic neighborhoods' underground cash economy. The pipeline for goods to the old country is still a profitable black market. But trade, tariffs, balance of trade, black market issues are not the topics of Sunday morning coffee on the network news hours. Republicans and Democrats toe the single party mantra that they know what the issues are, they are the only ones who understand the issues, and they are the only ones that can solve the issues. After 40, 50 or 60 years, neither party has the solutions to these ever growing problems. For if there were a real solution, the elected officials would be out of their jobs. Then they would have to try to find a real job, like their underemployed constituents.



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**ROCKY MOUNTAIN BU-
REAU CHIEF
CRAG ANTLER**

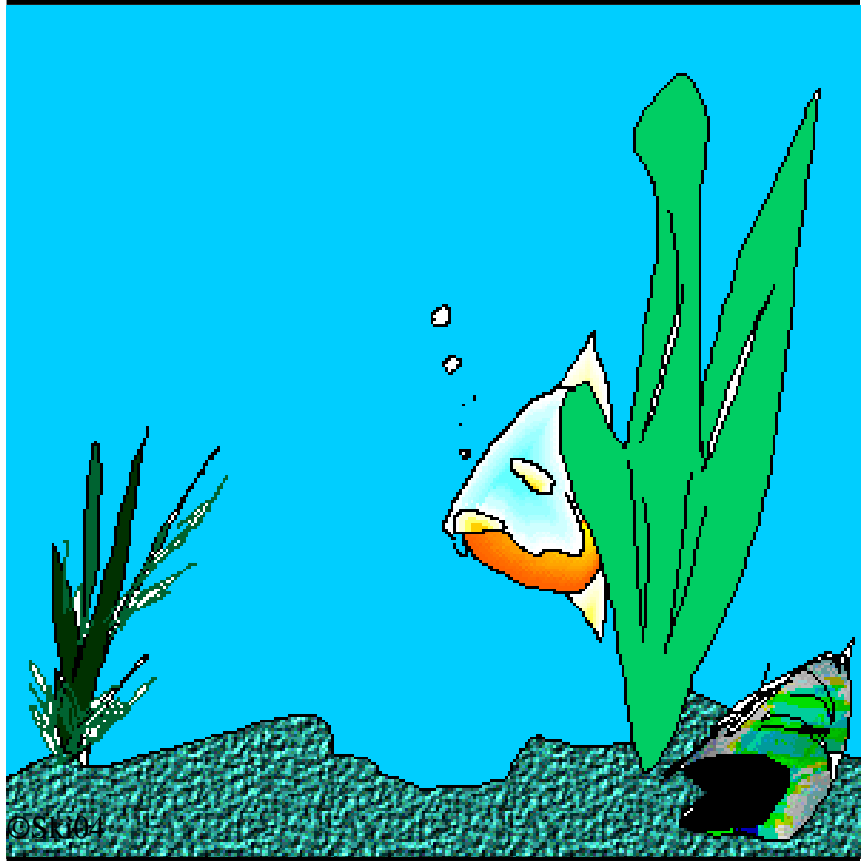
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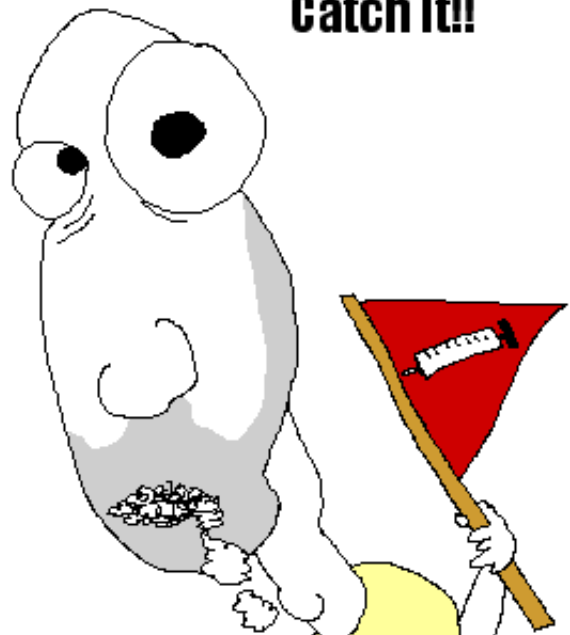
**GOPHER
SLICK WILLIE**



*All artwork, editorial cartoons,
graphics and design is by Ski.*

ROID RAGE!!!

Catch It!!



LOST THE SECOND TERM

Every American president enters his second term as a lame duck politician, usually with nagging scandals, sagging poll numbers and policy backlash. Bush 43 is no different. His second term has crash landed on the moderate headwaters of a legacy river of retribution.

The Harriet Miers nomination was the blowing-up-the-bridge to the Republican base. It also showed the nation that George W. Bush's general operating principles is to take the easy decision than make an informed one. He relied on a person that he knew rather than doing the hard homework and analysis. Miers was his personal attorney. He liked her. He rewarded her with a Supreme Court nomination. This got America scratching its collective head.

But he has done this before. His current appointee to the Import-Export Bank is an old college co-ed, whose last resume item is "housewife." It is not qualifications that matter with W., it is his personal connection.

Remember when he won the Republican nomination and he needed to find a vice president? He called Dick Cheney to run the search committee. When all was said and done, he asked Dick to be V.P. instead of the committee's candidates. Why? Because he worked with Cheney

on the V.P. issue.

The fallout from this management style is that he trusts his appointees with their own judgment. They run their areas in an autonomous fashion. Bush paints the broad brush policy statements while his cabinet is left to their own devices to implement the programs.

The White House is drifting off message as the Democrats are gearing up for the 2008 election two years before the primaries begin. The sharks smell blood in the water; the White House is up for grabs. Both sides

of the aisle are jockeying for position in the life boats.

Bush just wants to get off his island presidency without getting killed by his own political survivors. His attitude of trying to be "everybody's friend" has led to massive federal spending and a choking federal deficit. He would blame the war on terror, third world industrialization-outsourcing, and many natural disasters for his falling approval rating. Bush's own conduct (or lack thereof) is the problem and he is not the solution. He has fallen into the Congressional trap that the federal government is the answer to all the people's problems: including hurricane damage and loss of their homes and jobs.

FEMA was never intended to become a national guarantor of an individual's unlimited happiness and support from a natural disaster. Giving hurricane homeless \$2000 cash was like giving crack to addicts--- irresponsible. Months later we still are paying for hotel rooms for those people who refuse to get self-reliant, get a place to live, or worse, get a job. Why should someone who is now being pampered in a blanket of tragedy have to give up their extended vacation? Bush knows vacations well. Too well. And that's why his final term is LOST.



The entire Middle East policy is based upon de-stability. In order to change the status quo of violence, the policy is to de-stabilize and overthrow the extremist Islamic and secular dictatorships that have harbored international terrorism. In order to meet that goal, it puts the entire region under the sniper's scope.

This region of the world has historically been under conquest and siege. The Muslim world still looks upon western, white civilizations coming into their sphere of influence as 12th Century Crusaders hell bent on destroying their world and beliefs.

Bush doesn't back away from that impression. He is a devout Christian, inspired by his own beliefs. The administration has walked the fine line between invoking religious doctrine against anti-democratic regimes. The Arabs look at the involvement of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq as modern day European Christian crusaders who want to eliminate their religion.

So bin Laden's followers have taken religion as the mask to create a new career, the professional terrorist. Iraq sits at the traditional merchant crossroads between east and west; instability creates a profitable black market. Neighboring nations are making fortunes as transit points for this growing black market and arms dealing.

Bush has done nothing to curb the profitability of the growing terrorist black market. If he thought that the Iraq war and democracy nation building would not be an unresolved issue in his second term, he was grossly mistaken. As each year goes by, the US becomes more and more an Israeli bunker. But America's enemies don't want a piece of Arkansas as a homeland; they want the wealth and power of an oil producer, like Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis and OPEC used to keep oil at \$20/barrel to avoid global recessions and industrialized nations from drilling their own reserves at a profit. No longer; more instability.

JOURNALISM JOURNAL

On November 10, 2005, ESPN conducted the worst possible stunt in journalism: a fake news conference. It was a stunning overproduction to blur the casual viewer into a staged "news" event, a Dodger press conference.

How this ever got on the air is beyond belief. But then, television, even sports journalism, is not run by journalists, but by entertainment marketing executives.

Why ESPN sports journalists and anchors would play the "role" of the press during this mock press conference is also beyond belief. Burn their press cards; get them SAG dues slip. They shredded any last aspects of being a credible, objective reporter gathering facts for the public. The staffers who contributed their time and reputation to this mockery have lost their credentials. Across America, journalism degrees suddenly combusted into flames.

Keith Oberman left ESPN to become a real broadcast journal-

ist. Now, as he fades to static on MSNBC, his "news" hour is morphing into a light version of a Jon Stewart faux newscast.

Did journalism schools turn into tumbleweed ghost towns after Deep Throat was revealed? Woodward and Bernstein were the icons of a generation of professional scribes; the architect of investigative, meaningful, important stories of the Fourth Estate.

But this Estate seems to be on the verge of foreclosure. The Old Gray lady, the New York Times, has had more scandals in recent years than Pulitzer awards. The conglomerate media giants have found themselves with expensive properties that are losing advertising dollars and readership. The cash cow days of television feeding the news divisions are over. The next generation will find their "news" on the internet, or worse, in the vehicle of the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Don't they realize that Stewart's show is a parody?? It's not news, but some think it is!

People don't think as news as News. Cable news is shouting matches between spinmeisters from each side of an issue. News is now more entertainment in the minds of the reader or viewer. It is also that perception from the heads of the national media conglomerates.

The Tribune was willing to spend \$50 million to sign a free agent shortstop for its Chicago Cubs team. But it could not afford to keep the City News Service, reporters inside city government covering the basic stories, operating for another year. So another journalism training ground bites the dust; and there are less reporters covering the news.

The national news outlets also got spanked by the Courts in the last year. Many reporters gave up sources in criminal leak investigations. The courts were ruling that there is no shield law for national security matters or to cover-up a crime.

National news companies also blew a chance to stop the court swing against journal-

ism. The national media should have come to the legal aid of the internet information sites that had been sued by companies like

The problem with the national media is that all journalism is citizen journalism.

Apple Computer over alleged trade secret publication of rumored new products. If it was the Wall Street Journal, it would have been called an investigative piece, or an opinion article on future technology trends. But since it was a small time operator, the courts smashed the owners setting a bad precedent for all news organizations in future.

There is no difference between the single blogger or the New York Times. Both are publishers. Both are operating under the guise of the same First Amendment Right. But major media players believe that they are above the low brow blogger or the minor cyber-publisher. Such arrogance will lead to further erosion of the place quality journalism has in our society.

The boards of directors and editors of the conglomerates fail to realized that all journalism is citizen journalism. Benjamin

Franklin was a pamphlet publisher who helped spark the intellectual presence to shape a nation. It was the man who had something to say, for good or ill, that was protected by the framers of the Constitution. The citizen journalist that Matt Drudge and bloggers have started have their place. But the major media players believe that it is unwarranted competition.

Distracted by falling readership, falling advertising dollars, and their own newspaper circulation scandals, truth should be the one commodity that the owners of the Fourth Estate should attempt to secure. It is the keystone to its existence. But with the consolidation of newspaper chains with radio-television operators, the

merger of hawking entertainment programming with news has diluted the meaning of modern journalism.

When ESPN presented a mock Dodger press conference as a real one for dramatic effect, journalism fell into the gutter like a dying wino. The sports reporters and anchors who were props in this production nightmare gave no second thought on how badly this would be perceived by a concerned public. The producers had no idea of the angry backlash after that first mock story?!

Who will write Journalism's obit? The New York Times has its share of scandals, retractions and head scratching policies in 2005.

It is not just the national media. Local television and newspapers have cut back on staff. As a result, less and less basic news is in the paper or broadcast each day. Five or six fire calls pass the office each day, but nothing is reported in the paper. People stop reading the paper when they realize that the local news is no longer found within it.