WEBS OF INTIMACY AND INFLUENCE: UNRAVELING WRITING CULTURE AT *HARPER'S MAGAZINE* DURING THE WILLIE MORRIS YEARS (1967-1971)

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled:

WEBS OF INTIMACY AND INFLUENCE:
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Presented by Rebecca Townsend

A candidate for the degree of Master of Journalism

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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This thesis is dedicated to all the writers who ever suffered for their work.
And to Clyde and Jasmine, who suffered for mine.

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Introduction:
A Writing Culture Like No Other

"Each one of us is just a crossroads where things happen. I don't believe because I feel this way, I am entitled to conclude that mankind thinks that way too. But I believe that, for each scholar and writer, the particular way he or she thinks and writes opens a new outlook on mankind."

- Claude Lévi-Strauss[1]

Any story has multiple layers depending on who is doing the telling; each version, even if it conflicts with other accounts, can illuminate the greater topic. As such, the layers of story spun by writers working at *Harper's Magazine* from 1967-1971 weave a tapestry of American journalistic history reflecting an iteration of writing culture.

The analytical techniques employed in this work aim to pierce the surface coating on the cult of personality, not to pit good styles against bad or right journalistic approaches against wrong; instead readers of this thesis are asked to consider the meaning of *Harper's* writing culture and how individual participants – through what is termed webs of intimacy and influence - contributed to its development.

In 1967, a 32-year-old Yazoo City, Mississippi, native and Rhodes Scholar named Willie Morris became the youngest editor-in-chief of the nation's oldest general-interest magazine, *Harper's*. He drank too much and some say a petulant approach to business cost him his leadership of the magazine, which he left in 1971. But even after his death in 1999, legions of colleagues and admirers remember his editorial talents with fond reverence.

When Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Halberstam eulogized his former editor, he said Morris:

> was more than just a gifted writer and editor come to us from a distant place….we understood in some intuitive way that he was an ambassador from a new Mississippi, one that did not yet exist, but one day surely would – and that in the meantime he was a representative of a pained, troubled society…[2]

In *New York Days*, a 1993 memoir of his *Harper's* experiences, Morris said that upon assuming the chief editor's chair he wrote a letter of hope and ambition to his colleagues. It is unclear who exactly received this communiqué, but Morris recalled his editorial mandate as follows:

> The country badly needs a truly national magazine, unidentified with any intellectual clique or any religion, or city, or slice of city, willing to fight to the death the pallid formulas and deadening values of mass media. It needs a magazine young and courageous enough to carry the language to its limits, to reflect the great tensions and complexities and even the madnesses of the day, to encourage the most daring and imaginative and inventive of our writers, scholars and journalists – to help give the country some feel of itself and what it is becoming.[3]

Privately, he envisioned "a magazine that *had* to be read, that would take on the 'Establishment,' assume the big dare, move out to the edge, make people mad, edify and arouse and entertain, tell the truth."[4] He placed his faith in "sturdy empirical reporting buttressed by good writing," work he would showcase at great length, imposing no discernable word limit if he felt the piece was "strong, brave and evocative." [5] Even if the pieces were subjective or outrageous, Morris said he felt that "sometimes a magazine, like a person, must be reckless in behalf of the qualities it passionately cares for."[6] He saw truth in what Halberstam told him, that "the real tyranny of journalism has always been the lack of time and of space to break away from the pack;" that *Harper's*, which allowed time and space to develop exceptional stories, offered "emancipation from all those dopey rules which inhibit real reporting."[7]

Morris's reign as chief editor lasted about four years, until the spring of 1971, when he resigned in protest of the magazine's new corporate owner's failure to appreciate the power of his literary vision. The legacy he left in print captured the work of some of the nation's most acclaimed writers, many of whom were in the early days of their careers, covering one of the most provocative periods in American history. Examples of work published under Morris's lead include an advance section of William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*; Norman Mailer's coverage of the 1968 Republican and Democratic national conventions in Miami and Chicago, respectively; Gay Talese' on the *New York Times*; Bill Moyers' "Listening to America;" and "the first detailed (hour-by-hour) account" of the massacre at *My Lai* by Seymour Hersh.

This thesis seeks to explore the idea of a writing culture, not to scrape the scabs off wounds inflicted in old power struggles, engage in blind hero worship or character assassination. Morris provides the nucleus around which the web of *Harper's* writing culture is woven, but he is not presented as a journalistic paragon in eclipse of the surrounding community of writers. In particular, this study does not make a martyr out of Morris or a devil of his successor in chief editorship Lewis H. Lapham – or vice versa. That being said, understanding the bookends of this study's timeline - Morris's triumphant entrance and trauma-fraught exit from the office of *Harper's* editor-in-chief – provides necessary context from which to launch this inquiry.

Discouraged by the economic imperatives of owner John Cowles, son of a Minnesota newspaper publishing titan, and the business side's consistent chaffing against his editorial approach, Morris mailed a resignation letter in the spring of 1971. In his public announcement of resignation Morris wrote:

> I am resigning because of severe disagreements with the business management over the purpose, the existence and the survival of *Harper's Magazine* as a vital institution in American life. My mandate as its eighth editor in 120 years has been to maintain its excellence and its courage. With the contribution of many of this country's finest writers, journalists, poets and critics, I think we have succeeded.
>
> It all boiled down to the money men and the literary men. And as always, the money men won.
>
> The article in our current issue by Norman Mailer has deeply disturbed the magazine's owners. Mailer is a great writer. His work matters to our civilization.

> I have given eight years of my life, four of them as editor in chief, to help make *Harper's* true to its finest traditions. I leave *Harper's* with an honorable conscience. It is at its most vital. It matters to the nation as it seldom has before. My resignation grieves my heart, but I am leaving as a protest against the calculated destruction of *Harper's*.
>
> All writers, editors and journalists who care passionately about the condition of the written word in America should deplore with me the cavalier treatment by business management of American's oldest and most distinguished magazine. This is the saddest day of my life. [8]

In response to a *New York Times Book Review* of *New York Days*, William Blair, who served as *Harper's* publisher during Morris's reign, suggested the former editor-in-chief's book included errant circulation figures and other inaccuracies, concluding, "It is sad to see that this disdain for fact in favor of fantasy, which was the root cause of his problems at *Harper's*, continues to this day."[9]

Fanciful or not, the resignation of Willie Morris inspired a tremendous fit of communal journalistic conscientious objection. After Morris left and a last-ditch meeting at the St. Regis Hotel between the writers and Cowles failed to promote managing editor Robert Kotlowitz, Lewis H. Lapham remained the sole editor not to tender resignation. *Harper's* contributing editors David Halberstam, John Corry, Marshall Frady and Larry L. King resigned in protest, storming out of the meeting. Kotlowitz agreed to finish the issue then under production before leaving, assisted by Executive Editor Midge Decter, who tendered resignation before the Cowles meeting. Poetry Editor John Hollander also resigned. To cap the mutinous defection, Norman Mailer, Bill Styron, Gay Talese, Bill Moyers and Tom Wicker all pledged never to work for *Harper's* again. Lapham later assumed the position of editor-in-chief.

Of the pact sealed among this entire group of dissidents to withhold their work from *Harper's*, "thirty-four years later, none has broken it," King wrote.[10] The *Boston Globe* reported journalist and former *Newsday* publisher Bill Moyers, former *Saturday Evening Post* editor Otto Friedrich and Harvard University Professor Jim Thompson are believed "to have turned down the job [of *Harper's* editor-in-chief], largely because of fierce loyalty to Morris.'"[11]

Much ink has been spilt recounting the drama that left Lapham the only remaining editor at *Harper's* and the other writers looking for new jobs. Some of it reveals intense acrimony. Because the central focus of this thesis is meant to introduce the concept of a writing culture and illustrate its function, this work is most interested in the shared experience of the literary actors and the cultural connections they generated as writers at *Harper's* before the tumultuous happenings of their final days as an editorial unit. Still, a brief recounting of the split from various perspectives adds important context from which to consider materials collected years later when members of the writing culture look back with the benefit of hindsight.

Morris treated Lapham lightly in *New York Days*, mentioning him six brief times. Only on the final reference did he note that Lapham "switched sides and started agreeing with the owner" and eventually found his way to editor-in-chief.[12]

A *New York Times Book Review* critique of *New York Days* revealed Lapham's deep-seeded frustration with the version of truth Morris offered:

> My own memory of the time and place so flatly contradicts his portrait in nostalgic pastel (in specific instances as well as general propositions) that on reading his book and its attendant publicity, I assumed one of us was looking at the reverse images seen in a mirror. What Morris presents as a golden age I remember as an age of tinsel; his cast of fearless prophets I remember as a crowd of self-important Pharisees;…and well before I had reached the end of 'New York Days' I thought that it captured, all too perfectly, the spirit of an age that debased the currency of its idealism with the coinage of celebrity.[13]

"Willie Morris had this whole idea that there was a bitter hostility between art and money," Lapham said in a recent interview. "That's not necessarily true. J.P. saved *Harper's* in the 1890s. Morgan gave a $1.5 million loan and never called it. He said it was a national treasure."[14] Several scholars, including Exman and Winship, suggest that Morgan was no benevolent paternalist, positing the Harper family paid the price of their loan default by relinquishing control of the company.[15] But Morgan was not only the capitalist to intercede on behalf of *Harper's*, Lapham noted. In 1980, *Harper's* was rescued by the largess of Robert O. Anderson, the wildcat oil operator at the helm of the Atlantic Richfield Company who, together with the MacArthur Foundation, established the Harper's Magazine Foundation to ensure the magazine's survival.[16]

"I thought Willie could have worked things out with Cowles," Lapham said. "I thought that then. I think that now….That whole attitude: 'You're a philistine,' is wrong, romantic, fantastical..." [17]

Larry L. King later skewered Lapham in a book celebrating Morris:

> ‘They will never say of you as they said of FDR, that you are a traitor to your class,’ I hissed to Lapham. ‘You saw the opportunity to cozy up to power and another rich man’s spoiled son [Cowles] and zoomed in like a goddamned homing pigeon.’[18]

King also highlighted an article written by Michael Shnayerson and published by *Vanity Fair* in 1993, which dealt with Lapham’s relationship to the editors. When Shnayerson asked King, Halberstam, Frady, and Kotlowitz to confirm Lapham’s account of the great editorial exodus, the group took vociferous exception:

> “That’s almost a scandalous disremembering,” says Frady. “Unimaginable,” says Kotlowitz. “He’s a fucking liar,” says King. “He’s a pathological liar,” says Halberstam, barely able to restrain himself. “When you have misbehaved, and there are five or six witnesses, it takes a certain amount of hubris to lie like that.[19]

Asked whether he felt his well-heeled upbringing inflamed the vitriol directed at him following his decision to remain at *Harper’s*, Lapham replied:

> “The bias is in the culture that nobody who comes from the presumably opulent ruling class can be talented….Because my family was in banking and the oil business and I went to Yale, it was unthinkable I could become a writer. I was always under suspicion.” [20]

A few minutes later, before he slipped away into the night after about an hour-long interview at a Union Square bar, he added without explanation, “Money is fire.”[21]

The *Vanity Fair* piece echoed King's caustic accusations:

> Not long after the St. Regis meeting…Kotlowitz quit, leaving Lapham, the newest arrival, as the only remaining member of the Morris team. If he had hoped Cowles would appoint him editor, he was disappointed…Cowles's choice was Robert Shnayerson, a *Time* editor and, as it happens, my father. Against his better instincts, Shnayerson kept Lapham on…but when another recession, in 1975, brought heavy losses, Shnayerson was fired. Lapham, the scrappy survivor, was chosen to replace him. My father felt strongly that Lapham had betrayed him, bad-mouthing him to Cowles's people and lobbying for the job.[22]

As for the reporting following the editorial exodus, Lapham said:

> You can count on the media most of the time to get the story wrong. The only one to get it right was the London *Economist*. They were not interested in the micro-personality of it. They were interested in the economics…It [*Harper's*] was losing enormous amounts of money, as well as circulation.[23]

Reporting on what it called yet another example of the New York literary world's "surprising reversals of fortune," *The Economist* noted that "Mr. Morris's disagreement with the management of *Harper's* was all the more surprising in that his journalistic flare had made the magazine far more readable – in most people's opinion."[24] With regard to Morris's statement that the magazine's management objected to Norman Mailer's "The Prisoner of Sex," *The Economist* editorialized that "it would be a strange management that would object to an article which caused the magazine to be sold out in New York City."[25]

The article continued:

> *Harper's* had been losing money – just how much is not clear but the amount is considerable – and the search for a scapegoat seems to have brought about the clash between the editorial side and the management….
>
> Behind these dramatic doings lies the present state of the New York magazine industry in which the winners have a very specific audience – such as yachtsmen or golfers – and appeal to particular advertisers. General magazines like *Harper's* are problem children these days. But a general slaughter of journalists hardly seems likely to help towards a solution of their problems.[26]

Restaurateur Elaine Kaufman, who watched the dissolution of the *Harper's* editorial nucleus – including events immediately following their St. Regis meeting – observed that Morris's inner circle "acted like ninnies" in their treatment of Lapham, though she remembered them all with warm spirit.[27]

This thesis does not take sides in the drama, or try to justify the actions of any one individual; instead it acknowledges the roles these individuals played within the writing culture that existed at *Harper's Magazine* between the summer of 1967 and the spring of 1971. The episode certainly offers sensational fodder for gossip columns, but more importantly in this case, it marks the end of the editorial era in question. The details of the mass resignation and its aftermath will be rehashed no further than to position it within the framework of writing culture. To dive deeper into the event's significance would require adding an examination of the magazine's business side and would therefore push the study beyond the boundaries of the literary meanings and motivations that occupy this work's central focus.

The body of this work recalls a period of great change and excitement in American journalism and ultimately asks what might be learned about writing from a community of writers who existed at the nexus of this journalistic transition period. The journalists of this era were confronting, among other topics, the Vietnam War, the Summer of Love, the stolen life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and television's poaching of magazine readership.

The back issues of the magazine can speak for themselves; the stories are accessible online in the *Harper's* archives, a free service for all subscribers. But the pages, now well past their shelf life at the newsstand, represent much more than inked words waiting to be consumed. By transcending the boundaries of their individual existence, this study aims to invoke the consciousness of the magazine by bringing to life the conversations and experiences of the people involved its production, especially with respect to the attitudes, rituals, and peculiarities they may have brought to the writing process.

Above all, this study seeks to understand the meaning that the magazine's staff brought to their work and how their communion at the magazine influenced their individual evolution in literary philosophy and practice, as well as the development of *Harper's* writing culture at large. Beginning with one man's manifesto in favor of journalistic courage and greatness and ending when the same man sacrificed his position to uphold his honor and dedication to his ideals, the study will ask how these principles were manifest within magazine's writing culture and what other participants offered in response.

The cultural lens adjusts from individual to peer group to professional networks and beyond. Writing culture is presented as a more specific example of the broader concept of organizational culture. In fact, organizational culture at *Harper's* could extend from the editorial to include the publishing side of the magazine. But in this case, the study is limited to the culture as it pertains to the experience of writing at *Harper's*.

If one starts with chronological period defined by the chief editorship of Willie Morris, an inner circle of intimacy and influence emerges. The perimeter is not wholly rigid; it is capable of absorbing and expelling members. A cultural exploration can be launched using as a base any one participant, but given an editor's charge to bring order and vision to the writing process, the editor makes a logical nucleus from which to weave the cultural web.

Morris and John "Jack" Fischer, *Harper's* editor-in chief from 1953-1967, are bonded by the title and trust the latter handed the former. But in this study, the inner circle is chiefly defined by the people who served directly around Morris, helping him to create the monthly magazine: first Robert Kotlowitz, Midge Decter and Larry L. King, then David Halberstam, John Corry and Marshall Frady. In 1970, Morris announced Lewis H. Lapham's appointment to a contributing editor role. Lapham never truly bonded with the inner circle, but served to spark later manifestations of *Harper's* writing culture.

This thesis aims to revive these voices, rescue them from isolation and weave them into a form whereby the social sinew of *Harper's* writing culture is revealed.

The author attempts to accomplish this revelatory task by using the *Harper's* record established under Morris's reign, in-depth interviews with six people involved with the magazine's editorial output, and as well as books, magazine articles and memoirs that convey elements of the *Harper's* writing experience to draw meaningful and heretofore inexplicit connections about the culture of these celebrated writers. This effort will use as a foundation theories utilized in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history and journalism studies to explore how people manufacture meaning, identity and ideology. In this case, the author will use the theme of writing culture to explore how participants understood and approached their work.

Chapter 2
Literature Review:
Cultural Expressions and Manufactured Meaning

Harper's Magazine exists on its own as a wholly contained body of work. Established in 1850, the magazine's writers, photographers and artists have chronicled the development of the United States and its relationship to the world. Its legacy rests as a continuous reflection of the evolution of the long-form journalistic craft. Its issues are available for general consumption and content interpretation.

This literature review aims to explore theories capable of wresting deeper meaning from *Harper's* issues produced under the guidance of Willie Morris through the examination of the magazine's organizational culture in relation to the writing process. This paper refers to *Harper's* writing culture as a sub-strain of *Harper's* organizational culture and the larger literary and journalistic scenes. It seeks not to ignore, but to move beyond an understanding of the general practice of American journalism as a whole or the function of its organizational power structure. It is not primarily interested in the effects of the media message. It defines *Harper's* as a culture; the people involved in its production as actors engaged in a ritualistic process of communication through which "culture is created, modified, and transformed."[28]

This approach is justified in a treatise on communitarian ethics that suggests "organizations are cultures in the sense that their members engage in producing a shared organizational reality;" that within a "cultural paradigm," the communication practices of an organization's actors emphasizes "the construction and reproduction of symbolic meaning systems."[29]

In particular, this work seeks to explore how one man's interpretation of great journalism influenced the writers and editorial staff working with him and vice versa. In so doing, it seeks to enhance understanding of the surface legacy Morris and his writers left between the covers of their magazine and scattered in their memoirs.

Deciphering Meaning through Theories of Culture

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, suggested that man is "suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun."[30] In this assertion, Geertz took guidance from Max Weber, who acknowledged that a person's actions could have meaning at the individual level, but also in reference to a larger community. "Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals)," Weber said, "it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course."[31]

Cultural analysis is not a positivistic science and cannot identify an overarching universal law, Geertz said, encouraging scholars to attend to individual interpretation of meaning, to develop a theory of "fictions."[32] Such work, he said, involves "guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses."[33] Under his approach, to try to remove the object of interpretation from its context is to obviate its meaning and redirect the readers' attention to the researcher's constructs. In short, he valued both the structure within which an individual operated, as well as the symbolic meaning actors attached to their performances.

Geertz recommended a straightforward approach that valued above else the experience of the subject:

> The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others…have given, and thus include them in the consultable record of what man has said.[34]

This assertion is useful in assessing the value of *Harper's* organizational culture at the individual level. It suggests that significance may be found both in terms of the meaning the participants assign to their work and in the way they relate one another.

Journalism scholar James Carey, who spent his career arguing that cultural theory could enliven and inform studies of mass communication, embraced Geertz's approach. Like Geertz, Carey believed it necessary to identify the meaning individuals attach to their reporting subjects if a deeper understanding of journalism is to emerge; he challenged the mass communications academy "to grasp the meanings people build into their words and behavior and to make these meanings, these claims about life and experience explicit and articulate so that we might fairly judge them."[35]

Indiana University professor David Paul Nord reiterated Carey's attachment to the importance of individual words and actions within an organizational framework by saying that a cultural theory of communications must focus on the intellectual meaning of the written word, as well as a social history that gives context to environment in which the words were manifest.

"(T)he mere explication of texts…is not cultural history, even if couched in the terminology of Clifford Geertz," Nord wrote. "The text is not all. Indeed, without a 'new social history' of production and consumption – of writing, publishing and reading – the texts of mass media cannot be read."[36]

Carey conceived of culture as analogous to a text (of words – both spoken and written – and behavior) which expresses an interpreted meaning of all its composite parts. The researcher then becomes like a literary critic, and, Carey suggested, "The trick is to read these 'texts' in relation to concrete social structure without reducing them to that structure."[37]

Under Carey's premise, developing a fiction of *Harper's* organizational culture is to interpret the meanings of the words and actions of its participants in relation to the magazine without stripping the composite parts of all meaning beyond their relation to *Harper's*. Failing to recognize the greater meaning of cultural objects would be to fall victim to what he viewed as a common error of mass communication research wherein cultural and symbolic constructions must be validated in relation to a "hard existential reality."[38] He rejected the notion of one all-encompassing truth, espousing instead an assumption of "multiple realities," recognizing that culture "is never singular and univocal. It is, like nature itself, multiple, various and varietal."[39]

The years of *Harper's* under Morris certainly contain multiple realities given the range of its composite parts. Take, for example, when Lewis Lapham wrote, "What Morris presents as a golden age I remember as an age of tinsel."[40] A review of primary materials may unpack this recounting and identify the meaning Lapham meant to invoke by using the word tinsel. Would his writings from that time offer a clue? Would the writings of others? Would subsequent interviews? Many *Harper's* staff members have committed to paper their memories of working with Morris and at the magazine. These works taken individually and in relation to one another reveal the different levels at

which reality functioned within the organization where they all brought their past experiences and shaped new ones.

Ideology and Identity

Like Carey, Stuart Hall sought to wrest journalism studies from its insistent focus on empirical experiments, suggesting instead that an examination of ideology would extract noteworthy discoveries.

Regarding traditional media analyses, Hall said:

> …the message was assumed as a sort of empty linguistic construct; it was held to mirror the intentions of its producers in a relatively simple way. It was simply the means by which the intentions of communicators effectively influenced the behavior of individual receivers…But conceptually, the media message, as a symbolic sign vehicle or structured discourse, with its own internal structuration and complexity, remained wholly undeveloped.[41]

Instead he recommended attending to the meaning of the message in relation to the environment in which it was produced. In such a treatment, the notion of ideology emerges as the central subject.

"Ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes, rather than the intention of the agent," Hall wrote.[42] His concept of discourse assumes ongoing interactions between individuals in which the meanings presented to one another may be conscious or unconscious. Furthermore, the overarching ideology of the media message they produce cannot be reduced to the conscious intentions of one individual.

With respect to *Harper's*, Hall might concede that within the issues produced from 1967-1971, one could deduce the journalistic vision of Willie Morris, but he would probably argue that the magazine's ideology in fact represented much more because it is based on a process involving many actors.

Mark Deuze refined the notion of "journalism as an ideology," with a simple definition: "understanding journalism in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork."[43]

Crediting studies by Stevenson and Van Ginneken, Deuze saw the journalistic ideology "as an [intellectual] process over time, through which the sum of ideas and views – notably on social and political issues – of a particular group is shaped, but also as a process by which other ideas and views are excluded or marginalized."[44]

The shaping process Deuze discussed assumes the creative and interactive roles of the individuals, but doesn't highlight them. His notion of ideology is similar to what other journalism scholars have identified as "cultural identity."

In her analysis of newspapers in the Japanese-American internment camps of World War II, Catherine A. Luther defined identity as a notion shaped by "a gradual dialectical process composed of struggles and contradictions, a process largely determined not only by those in power but also by those considered to be subordinate."[45] Luther framed her approach within a specific time and place, building her concept of group identity on an examination of individual works; she said that documents provide a window to these individual struggles for meaning and the communication process whereby the text of journalism reflects cultural evolution. Furthermore, she said, "critically examining the meanings in printed texts should provide illumination on the identity or identities being promoted or reflected." [46] Given this assertion, it appears the cultural identity of the *Harper's* organization would also have been shaped by struggles and contradictions suggested by the evolution of the magazine's pages.

The idea that critical examination of text can illuminate identities promoted within a culture is consistent with a production perspective of cultural studies, which emerged in the mid-1970s with the claim that "social arrangements used in making symbolic elements of culture affect the nature and content of the elements of culture that are produced."[47] The production perspective is "not simply concerned with *intended* content….(its) methods facilitate the uncovering of the so-called "unintended" consequences of purposive productive activity; (it) focuses on how the content of culture is influenced by the milieux in which it is created, distributed, evaluated, taught and preserved."[48]

Framing

Theories of frame analysis share many similarities to the production of culture perspective, not the least of which is the use of an interpretive approach to its subject matter. In contrast to traditional sociological methods wherein *Harper's* writing would be determined by its social structure, the writing becomes a reflection of activities of the people within the organization. The writing "does not mirror society," to use scholar Gaye Tuchman's phrasing; its style is not determined by society, but it is engaged in a "shared social phenomenon."[49]

Gaye Tuchman used the approach to determine how happenings in the outside, everyday world become news; particularly how news emerges within the news organization.[50] She was not concerned with news workers as individuals, claiming such inquiries were better left to psychologists, but she focused on the process whereby the news was framed. Tuchman situated the context of the news process as "embedded in conflicting modes of territorial, institutional, and topical chains of responsibility requiring ongoing negotiation; in temporally grounded typifications rooted in the rhythm of work; and in the mutual constitution of fact and source…"[51]

A treatment of the journalistic vision within *Harper's* organizational culture would share an interest in at least the first two elements of Tuchman's context – the negotiation of responsibility and the "typifications" she discussed, interpreted to mean the ritualistic (or perhaps uniquely eccentric) patterns expressed in the writing process and its attendant activities.

Tuchman interpreted sociologist Erving Goffman's notion of a frame as "negotiated phenomena" capable of absorbing multiple realities; frames encompass "the principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them." [52] Based on Goffman's insistence that frames apply to experience, not to social structure itself, Tuchman asserted that through their actions, people "produce and reproduce, create and recreate" meaning.[53]

In contrast to Dorothy Smith's interpretation of ideology as a "means not to know" that represented procedures embedded in an institutional framework, which insured the reproduction but not the transformation of the organization, Tuchman sought to study social phenomena (like news work) as trails offering a roadmap of "social constructions and perpetual human accomplishments."[54]

This strategy reemphasized an organic approach to meaning; that it evolves and transforms within a social structure that is itself evolving and transforming.

In his *Sociology of Journalism*, Brian McNair also rejected rigid paradigms of the journalistic process that have cast journalists as idealized watchdogs working to ensure an open, democratic society, or, conversely, as agents in the propagation of capitalistic culture. He proposed a "chaotic flow model" that views the path to ideological dominance as "random and unpredictable rather than systematized and hierarchally ordered." [55] McNair encouraged scholars to focus "on the dynamics of the production environment and the relative impact of the elements within that environment on the form and content of output."[56] He suggested that such an approach would account for varying circumstances over time, as well as reactions and responses of journalists.

In direct support of the negotiated reality that Tuchman addressed through framing theory, McNair wrote:

> What journalism is, or aspires to be, is revealed truth, mediated reality, an account of the existing world as appropriated by the journalist and processed in accordance with the particular requirements of the journalistic medium through which it will be disseminated…[57]

The consequences of activity within a cultural framework should not be confused with overarching media effects theories as typified by Lasswell's statement that through propagandizing symbols, the media can "weld thousands and even millions of human beings into one amalgamated mass of hate and will and hope."[58] A more accurate depiction of the consequences of activity within an organizational culture can be deduced from the work of Saussure with respect to the development of language: "It is not that one system has produced another but that an element of the first had been changed, and that has sufficed to bring into existence another system."[59]

An analysis of *Harper's* in a cultural studies framework neither supports nor challenges quantitative effects models; instead it aims to identify a cultural history, through words and actions, of the various actors' attitudes toward the journalism they cooperated to create. The consequences can be traced as they react and respond to the changing circumstances in which they operate.

The Process of Communication

Catherine Luther, the analyst of wartime newspapers in Japanese-American prison camps, found truth in sociologist George Herbert Mead's observation that the symbology of communication doesn't simply project the practitioner's intended message to society, but it also serves to build and refine a personal sense of identity.[60]

Scholars from Saussure to Barthes have fixated on the meaning of language as symbolic communication. Foreshadowing Carey's assumption of multiple realities, Saussure distinguished between language as an overarching system – "la langue" – and methods by which an individual chose to employ language – "parole."[61] But in essence, Saussure felt that language functioned as a signifier by which people attached meaning to the natural world – it was all form, no substance.[62]

Berger and Luckmann insisted language is more concrete: "I encounter language as a facticity external to myself and it is coercive in its effect on me. Language forces me into its patterns."[63]

Those patterns make way for their famous position that reality is a social construction – that only through shared meaning is social interaction and understanding possible:

> Because of its capacity to transcend the "here and now," language bridges different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole. The transcendences have spatial, temporal and social dimensions…. As a result of these transcendences language is capable of "making present" a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from the "here and now."[64]

Barthes, on the other hand, suggested that the signs of language obscure historical meaning from a contemporary audience. In looking at history, he said that language makes a subject "intelligible," but cannot convey that subject's reality.[65] When historians encounter signs that had a distinct meaning within a particular historical context, scholars will attempt to make their interpreted meanings apparent to a contemporary audience by placing the sign within a narrative framework. Within this framework, mythology particular to the contemporary ideology arises. This ideology then becomes the "central problem of writing the history of a culture" because the reality of the subject becomes "tempered by the cultural perspective of the historian in the process of interpreting and writing history."[66]

This notion is acknowledged in Manning and Cullum-Swan's statement that "(t)he process of linking or connecting expression and content is social and depends upon the perspective of the observer."[67]

As different levels of meaning are construed and conveyed by the interpreter, the story reaches the "level of mythical interpretation."[68] To use their example of how one signifier can grow in meaning: 1) A 4.0 grade-point average →2) Excellent student → 3) Knowledgeable. By level three, the meaning of the 4.0 has achieved a mythical status as the recipient is assumed to be knowledgeable, but instead may be lucky or a cheat, among other possible explanations.

The social context and ideology of *Harper's* culture is far removed from today's world of journalism studies. Extracting meaning from across space and time may dip into the realm of the mythical, but this problem does not necessarily preclude meaningful work. Instead it insists that journalists and people interested in the craft of journalism can learn something from the people who in the past have paved a path for the profession's development.

Academics such as Maryann Yodelis Smith recognize the challenge contemporary researchers face when assigning meaning to dated items or ideas:

> The empirical historian fully recognizes that a systematic account of relationships among events and/or persons is only a history of communication and not *the* history of communication. Unlike researchers in disciplines where a complete database is available, the communication historian recognizes the limitations of the data and seeks a "*verisimilitude*" rather than the objective truth.[69]

In an essay that for decades has challenged journalism scholars like Nord to expand their modes of analysis, James Carey insisted that practitioners of contemporary journalism studies should turn their attention to the practices of the past. He wrote:

> The task of cultural history, then, is this recovery of past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness…not merely to recover articulate ideas…but a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living. [70]

To be sure, not all journalism scholars support Carey in this assertion. A particularly incredulous and outspoken example can be found in the work of Australian academic Keith Windschuttle, who wrote:

> (T)he field of cultural studies is both educationally corrupting and professionally embarrassing for journalism education. In particular it contradicts, by both argument and example, three of the central tenets of journalism: the pursuit of truth and objectivity, the ethical regard for media audiences and the promotion of good writing.[71]

He also contended that journalism as a written form belonged to the inverted pyramid alone:

> It is true that some feature stories in print journalism begin with a little anecdote that might have a narrative structure, but it is rare for the rest of the story to follow suit. In other words, to say that journalism has a narrative structure is to display one's ignorance of what journalists actually do.[72]

Perhaps he would say the long-form pieces of journalism endorsed by Morris do not qualify as journalism. But Carey, on the other hand, insisted:

> Our failure to develop the cultural history of journalism has led us to exclude from our literature any serious attention to what I believe is the central historical story we have to tell, namely the history of reporting.[73]

Carey's commentary supported and even insisted on the importance of identifying cultural significance in the exact historical period of journalism that Morris led *Harper's*: "(O)ur failure to understand journalism as a cultural form has left us virtually bereft of intelligent commentary on the 'new journalism.'"[74]

As suggested by Ronald Weber in his introductory comments to his book *Reporter as Artist*, the *Harper's* form of journalism was seen as a template for the changing journalistic framework embodied by the term "new journalism." He cited the text of a *Harper's* house ad:

> Somewhere west of journalism and this side of history…there is a place where reporting becomes literature. There are those – namely one in a million readers – who think Harper's Magazine is the place.
>
> For Harper's Magazine is dedicated to the idea that fine writing need not buckle under the pressure of a deadline, nor should literature be solely confined to the dim distant past or the recent inventions of a novelist's mind. It can deal with *now* – with the angers of our time, the beautiful beginnings of a changed society and sad vestiges of a violent past…[75]

Weber then added: "Somewhere west of journalism and this side of history there's a place where reporting becomes …*popular* literature. Call it the new journalism."[76]

And while for the purposes of this study, the larger cultural phenomenon of the new journalism movement will not be the primary focus, it is at least worth noting that the organizational culture of *Harper's Magazine* did not exist within a cultural vacuum, that indeed it was influenced by and an influence to an external reality, one in which new journalism was changing the way some people produced and consumed news. As the circle of cultural influence is ever expanding across space and time, the specific focus on the organizational culture of *Harper's* itself –limited at its most basic level to its direct participants – becomes necessary as a systematizing principle by which to explore and report this investigation. It becomes the giant, pulsating sun and the concentric circles of related social history are like a series of more distant planets, orbiting the same central

core. It is also worth noting that exploring the "consciousness" of the journalistic process at *Harper's* would fill the void identified by Cary on two counts – in terms of its historical positioning within the larger movement of new journalism and within its internal reporting and writing culture.

What Journalists Write About Writing

Based on a premise that people's understanding of themselves results from constant evaluation of their actions with respect to their social context and normative discourse, Donald Matheson suggested that journalists come to understand themselves by what they write and share with other journalists.

"(T)he negotiation of identity will be most strongly apparent in statements such as memoirs, written largely for, and within the context of, the journalistic community," Matheson wrote. "In these metatexts, journalists' negotiation of their position within journalism, their ways of holding themselves with respect to each other and to their material, are to the fore and should, therefore, be able to be observed."[77]

In his review of primary documents produced by British journalists reflecting on their journalism, Matheson was stuck by how the "texts' treatment of writing is that language is mentioned rarely if at all."[78] When the writing and text was treated, Matheson found it in a critical context "where there is a certain uneasiness or discomfort, or in a distancing manoeuvre, a wryness or sarcasm about how reporters have misled readers."[79]

Furthermore, "there appears to be little cultural capital attached to language in British news journalism….there does not seem to be a well-developed set of ideas in the discourse of journalism to describe what is good about news writing, what good writing would be or how to go about producing it."[80]

Journalists' struggle to find the proper words to translate their stories from raw notes into finished articles also presented attractive fodder for Matheson. The journalists' reflections on their struggle almost always took precedence over their ultimate decision as to which words best fit the purposes of their stories.

To model his interpretation of the journalistic struggle, Matheson used Bourdieu's theory that language acts as a symbolic tool that people, through their use and disuse of different phraseology, work to obtain power in their fields. Those who achieve status then are then likely to use language in a particular way. In the case of the British journalists he analyzed, Matheson found their struggle over choosing the right words as a significant reflection of their language.[81]

"(A)t times the writing is discussed as almost unmotivated," he observed. "If the journalist holds her or himself properly in relation to the task – behaves properly as Bourdieu would put it – the right words will emerge, the story will tell itself."[82]

Extending James Milne's observation, "Easy writing makes hard reading," Matheson claimed that, "to an extent, the harder the writing is to achieve, the more it is valued."[83]

Would the *Harper's* writers reveal similar themes? Once their reflections on the writing process with respect to *Harper's* are recorded, will they primarily reflect criticism of others' writing? Will they be specific about words? What about the writer's struggle?

One anecdote gleaned from the initial review of a primary source suggests the struggle was visible within the framework:

> [John] Corry…suffered over his writing more than any person I have ever worked with, a convulsive and nearly infectious agony. He would roam about our offices trance-like in his laborious throes, muttering often to himself that the task could not be done. Often he would stay up two or three nights in a row, sipping whiskey and smoking cigarettes, taking quick naps on the sofa in my office in the languishing hours.
>
> We had a ritual. He would turn in his story on the appointed day of a deadline at the maiden stroke of noon, not a moment sooner or later, walking in tentatively and with the deep stillness and suffering of the mendicant, after which I would read his piece and we would retire to a long and celebrative lunch at the Empire Chinese up the way. He would hand me the manuscript and say, "It's no damned good." He always looked awful. The story would be pristine, however, requiring not so much as the slash of a pencil.[84]

Viewing journalists as an "interpretive community" places a value on the "shared past through which journalists make their professional lives meaning and unite themselves."[85] Barbie Zelizer suggested the concept of interpretive community in an attempt to present a framework beyond the scope of professional norms as expressed through ethical codes and educational credos. In search of "a frame that might explain journalism by focusing on how journalists shape meaning about themselves," Zelizer finds conceptual support for her proposition in anthropological and literary studies, as well as folklore.[86]

Previous research suggests interpretive communities develop "through the informal associations that build up around shared interpretations," Zelizer said.[87] She added that journalists "come together by creating stories about their past that they routinely circulate to each other – stories that contain certain constructions of reality, certain kinds of narratives, and certain definitions of appropriate practice."[88] Within media studies, including Cary's "definition of communication as ritual and a shared frame for understanding" and Michael Schudson's notions about "how journalists construct knowledge about themselves," Zelizer said a unifying theme emerges that suggests "the importance of generating meaning through discourse."[89] She specifically identifies autobiographies, memoirs and interviews as vehicles that "create community through discourse."[90]

Zelizer's assertions support a treatment of the magazine's actors as participants in an interpretive community and analysis of their discourse as an appropriate method to identify a greater sense of meaning in that community. It seems such techniques could be used to delineate the concept of writing culture given the substantial amount of material documenting the *Harper's* culture of the Morris years.

In the task of casting a fair and, to the greatest extent possible, broad light on the cultural history of the practice and experience of writing at *Harper's* under the editorial leadership of Morris, justification and warning can also be found in the academic discourse of ethnographers. Theorist James Clifford refers to ethnography as "an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon" in which "'culture' is a newly problematic object of description and critique."[91]

As cultural critique evolves in the fields of anthropology, ethnography, semiotics and discourse analysis, Clifford notes that "non-celebratory histories are becoming common."[92]

Citing the works of Marvin Harris and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, Clifford writes:

> The new histories…are suspicious of promoting and demoting intellectual precursors in order to confirm a particular paradigm. They stress the historical discontinuities, as well as continuities, of past and present practices, as often as not making present knowledge seem temporary, in motion. The authority of a scientific discipline, in this kind of historical account, will always be mediated by the claims of rhetoric and power.[93]

This assertion suggests the validity of using an ethnographic approach in cultural history, but warns that the researcher's position as writer and interpreter of the examined event will produce work that may run contrary to expectations that generalized theory will necessarily be illustrated through the methodical review of the subject in question.

Moving Forward

This literature review has laid out the theoretical and philosophical approach underlying this study. In particular, it should justify the task of seeking a writing culture among the *Harper's* literary contributors. Theory suggests the existence of, but does not define, writing culture. One may posit that a writing culture could be a type of interpretive community as defined by Zelizer, and a subculture of larger organizational cultures, such as *Harper's Magazine* as a whole, which would include the management, publishing arms and subscribers, as well as the larger literary scenes swarming in New

York City and beyond. In line with Carey, this work posits that at any one moment in time *Harper's* writing culture will contain multiple realities as, through their interaction, the various actors negotiate meaning in their shared experience. As evinced in its reference to webs of intimacy and influence, this thesis uses as a central guiding tenant Geertz's notion of individuals suspended in self-created webs of significance that connect them to a larger cultural framework.

This work builds on ideas explored by Saussure and Barthes, who focused on language as symbolic communication, and of scholars such as Stuart Hall, Catherine A. Luther and Gaye Tuchman, who provided ammunition for the task of examining how journalism reflects ideology and identity. It also embraces the challenge proposed by James Carey in the 1974 inaugural edition of *Journalism History*, that scholars had hitherto failed to develop a cultural history of journalism and reporting.[94]

By exploring and comparing the work and words of individual participants in *Harper's* writing culture, this thesis will begin to conjure what Carey called "historical consciousness," a nebulous form with a weight greater than its underlying newsroom structure.[95] This academic quest also aims to fill some of the void he identified in "intelligent commentary on the 'new journalism.'"[96]

Chapter 3
Methodology: Exploring Culture Through The Written and Spoken Word

This thesis integrates in-depth interviews and textual analysis to identify themes about writing that currently exist in isolated accounts of *Harper's* history, as written and relayed by those who participated in its production from 1967 to 1971. By focusing on the cultural space in which writers work, this research aims to identify and define writing culture as expressed during a particular time and place. Also, through an exploration of different individuals' participation within writing culture over time, this work aims to reveal how cultural meaning evolves.

Donald Matheson's work on journalistic identity and Barbie Zelizer's theory of journalists as interpretive communities support the use of interviews and texts as avenues through which the work of writers can be explored. Matheson says journalists come to understand and interpret their work by positioning themselves within the context of a journalistic community.[97] Zelizer posits journalistic community is created through discourse, which is reflected in autobiographies, memoirs and interviews.[98]

But because the concept of writing culture as construed in this thesis has yet to be defined within the scope of journalism studies, ultimately, the methodology employed in this work mimics most closely the defining characteristics of ethnology as defined by James Clifford, who wrote:

> Ethnographic writing is determined in at least six ways: (1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieux); (2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions); (3) institutionally (one writes within, and against, specific traditions, disciplines, audiences); (4) generically (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or a travel account); (5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested); (6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing). These determinations govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions.[99]

Clifford called ethnographies "fictions," which he said "may raise empiricist hackles." But, he added, in contemporary textual theory the term no longer reflects "something merely opposed to truth." Instead, he said fiction "suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive."[100]

In an effort to limit this study's framework, it centers on the period in *Harper's* history defined by the editorial leadership of Willie Morris, who served as the magazine's editor-in-chief from June 1967 through April 1971.

Once the chronological bookends were determined, an inventory of the editorial staff at *Harper's Magazine* during the relevant timeframe was devised. Then, using the magazine's Web site, Harpers.org, which offers a complete scanned archive of every page printed in *Harper's* history, an outline was created listing every cover story, along with each story teased on the cover. The outline also listed all offerings submitted by members of the *Harper's* editorial staff. The editorial inventory and outline of the *Harper's* editorial staff offered a sense of the topics that were relevant to participants of the inner circle and deemed worthy of publication. It also served to illustrate various writers' productivity with respect to the magazine's published content.

A refined version of this inventory can be found in Appendix 1 in a document titled "The Cast of Characters and Their Contributions," which lists the members of the inner circle along a listing of their literary contributions to *Harper's* during the period in question.

With 45 issues of *Harper's* under consideration, the need to shape the work around the people most closely associated with Morris became apparent, but the need to acknowledge the cultural continuum stretching before his arrival and after his departure also existed. Like Clifford said, "'Cultures' do not hold still for their portraits."[101]

To help illustrate the fluidity and nebulous form of culture, this thesis conceptualizes its literary framework through the concept of a web. By thinking of cultural spaces and expressions as web-like structures that extend in uneven but flowing patterns from a central point of reference, this thesis set out to capture writing culture by tracing "webs of intimacy and influence," which fluctuate through time as editorial visions, duties and titles evolve.

In one instance, these cultural webs are explored in the distinction this research draws between members of the "inner circle" – those employed by Morris to advance his editorial vision – and the "Old Guard," members of the staff linked to his predecessor, John "Jack" Fischer. Connections exist between these two webs of intimacy and influence, but disconnections are apparent as well.

The Merlin electronic library database provided by the University of Missouri was used to search for memoirs and articles penned by members of the inner circle. This tactic yielded work by John Corry, Midge Decter, David Halberstam, Larry L. King, Lewis Lapham and Willie Morris, which was reviewed for text that would relate to their experiences at *Harper's*. "An Exhaustive Annotated Bibliography" of Willie Morris by Jack Bales, which contained a section of works about Morris, also helped identify book reviews and interviews that offered insight to the webs of intimacy and influence under examination.

Finally, a series of five interviews was conducted during the fall of 2007 with all surviving members of the inner circle, except contributing editor John Hollander, who joined the magazine in the summer of 1969.

Hollander wrote three poems for the magazine, one *"*Easy Chair*"* column and one article, "From beyond the cigarette: Notes of a redeemed smoker" in the April 1969 edition. His central charge was to provide consistency in *Harper's* approach to poetry. In its focus on journalistic contributions, this research neglected to recognize the poetry editor's role in the magazine's writing culture. In retrospect, the exclusion of Hollander represents a methodological blind spot. Should this research ever be revisited and continued, this oversight should be corrected. In its current iteration, though Hollander's comments would expand and enhance this thesis, the materials that were collected for this research are sufficient to explore the existence of *Harper's* writing culture and how participants experienced and manufactured cultural meaning as it related to their work.

Also, an extra interview was included with restaurateur Elaine Kaufman, who added many links within the web of *Harper's* writers' intimacy and influence. Kaufman is famous for her patronage of the New York literary scene, and she played a direct role in cultivating connections among writers involved with *Harper's*.

The voices of inner circle participants David Halberstam and Marshall Frady – both deceased – could be better represented if a more extensive search for their personal papers were conducted in an effort to harvest further evidence of the webs of intimacy and influence in which they operated. The approach laid out for this study, however, already yielded a formidable amount of material though which to define and explore *Harper's* writing culture.

Both James Clifford, as an ethnographer, and Maryann Yodelis Smith, as a historian, acknowledge the necessarily incompleteness of cultural history.

"Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial – committed and incomplete," Clifford wrote. "This point is now widely asserted – and resisted at strategic points by those who fear the collapse of clear standards of verification. But once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact."[102]

This representational tact precludes the use of full interview texts within this thesis body. The interviews, which at times ran several hours, included much material that one could argue did not apply directly to the exploration of writing culture or was specified as "off-the-record." Some readers may scream conceit or representational dictatorship at the selective use of interview materials to portray writing culture. Indeed, thoughtful ethnographers struggle with tempering the power of the interpreter's voice so as not to drown out the sound of the subject. But, in this case, Clifford's word "tact" is most important. The primary goal of this thesis is to define the writing culture of *Harper's* under Willie Morris's editorial leadership. If the interviews at any point dwelled on hurt feelings, resentments or slick jibes, this work proceeds from the thought that while such material may be mentioned, it need not be inflamed to accomplish an honorable evocation of the writing culture's spirit. Since scholars have repeatedly argued that the unbroken body of culture can never be wholly conjured, the spirit must suffice.

The interviews did not yield one uniform textbook definition of *Harper's* writing culture. The subject was open to each individual's interpretation. The members' reflections on the meaning of their experiences at the magazine yielded various elements –some unique to an individual, many overlapping with fellow members' offerings. In each interview, the subjects were asked about how they came to be familiar with *Harper's* and Willie Morris. They were asked about their experiences with writing and editing at the magazine. They were asked to recall their experiences with other *Harper's* writers and what stood out about these people's writing processes. They were asked what written works stood out in their memories and why. At times, the writers, who were

asked to reminisce about a scene nearly 40 years in the past, were presented with scanned copies of their work to aid memory recollection.

This thesis aims to take elements of the *Harper's* archive, subsequent writings about the era of focus and the collection of interviews to distill the cultural glue at the nexus of the magazine's editorial network. To capture the nebulous and organic force posited as writing culture, the interview transcripts were reviewed in search of overarching themes that reflected elements associated with the experience of writing at *Harper's*. Pieces of the transcripts were then pulled into an outline organized around the overlapping themes identified in the comparison of individual reflections.

Since this work centers on the editorial leadership of Morris, who is deceased, his legacy as recorded in the *Harper's* archive and the memoirs penned by him and others provide the springboard for this exploration of writing culture. The works of and interviews with other participants in the proposed experience of writing culture then build from that foundation. Without an established definition of writing culture to guide the exploration, this research established a set of parameters - namely the process and experience of writing under Morris's lead - then allowed the interviews to present the themes ultimately addressed instead of manipulating them to fit within a preconceived outline.

The central theme of writing and the journalistic endeavor served as a guide, but topics that the subjects suggested were relevant to their experience – such as how participants expressed humor at the office – were included, as well. Selections from the magazine, memoirs and other primary texts were then incorporated in support of the themes that emerged in the interviews. Whereas traditional remembrances of *Harper's*

during the Morris era evoke such marquee names of journalism as Bill Moyers, Seymour Hersh and Gay Talese, the stories of those men did not emerge as dominant themes in the narratives of inner circle members. Literary superstar Norman Mailer, however, did. Moyers and Hersh do not factor into this initial exploration of *Harper's* writing culture while Mailer plays a rather prominent role, and Talese makes a brief appearance.

Mailer died on the day of this work's Midge Decter interview, Nov. 10, 2007, before an interview request could be made.

This investigation focuses on writers whose work was produced for a fee for public consumption. An exploration of the publishing, advertising, circulation and readership elements of the magazine would further illuminate the themes evoked in this work. But the business of supporting writers and consuming their material offers enough material to supply reams of additional research as ratios of content and circulation are considered and the merits of literary prowess and profit margin are weighed. Once the space of writing culture is defined, the questions of financial operation and readership response could offer a platform for additional research – maybe even a mingling of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. But as stated earlier, the outlined methodology provided a wealth of research material from which the foundations of writing culture could be laid.

In light of Morris's declaration that he "never fretted too much about length if the writing itself were strong and brave and evocative," one should note that the language and style employed in the *Harper's* pieces he edited is often complex and that surgical reductions and summaries may not succeed in conveying the proper context.[103] The textual passages included in this work are often quoted at length so as to preserve the element of style, which was determined to be an important reflection of the values emanating from the writing culture. These selections are sometimes used to narrate various vignettes depicting the culture's existence and evolution. In a few sparing instances, they are removed from their context and – with blatant disclosure and with a certain degree of permissiveness on the part of readers – used for the pure power of their words to highlight a relevant point.

In one instance, a 354-word sentence is wholly excerpted from Norman Mailer's review of the feminist movement, "The Prisoner of Sex." Considering the question of efficacy in the selection's ability to convey its point, readers can ask themselves whether they feel the language begged for editorial pruning or was best left untouched. They can judge if such monumental run-ons were but a mild concession made by Morris to ensure continued cooperation of one of the day's most popular writers. Readers might also consider that Mailer so blew deadlines that editors had to literally rip the pages off the typewriter to have them delivered to production in time. If not an example of Morris's calculated preference to leave the work uncut, it is probable that with some of Mailer's material, Morris just did not have the time to edit.

This thesis was designed to open a door though which people interested in writing can explore it as a cultural expression, rooted in a particular time and place. But the breadth of the analytical construct as embodied in the reams of text at issue also acted as a limitation to the degree of depth that could be accomplished in this initial theory-building task.

Efforts to identify the contours of the cultural landscape evince glimpses of territory yet to be explored. Questions about how writing culture relates to issues of sex, race, politics or war – both in the magazine's pages and within its interpersonal framework – offer opportunity for future study. The goal of this research is to lay some of the groundwork for future academic expeditions to follow, either to illuminate these themes at *Harper's* or search for new expressions of writing culture elsewhere within the jungle of journalism's archives.

Chapter 4
Defining Writing Culture: Fluidity in Motion

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....that life was the light of man."

- John 1. 1, 4

When asked what he thought might define a *Harper's* writing culture during the late sixties and early seventies, writer John Corry, who spent most of his career - both before and after his *Harper's* stint - at the *New York Times*, said he found at the magazine "a sense of excitement and a high tolerance for eccentricity….Each issue was exciting. Each issue was a triumph. Each issue was fun. In a way it was a continual party." [104]

This sense of excitement and electrified engagement with the production of the magazine resurfaced throughout the course of this effort to identify and define the contours of *Harper's* writing culture under the editorial leadership of Willie Morris. In fact, Morris mandated stimulation, if not by overt decree, at least in sentiment, philosophy and ultimately in the memoir of his *Harper's* experience in which he insisted the magazine must be "willing to fight to the death the pallid formulas and deadening values of mass media."[105]

Calling the experience "formative," Corry said he "learned something about the world of ideas and the world of politics. I learned a lot at *Harper's* about how ideas worked; how empty, how fragile some of them can be. It gave me not a distrust but a skepticism of journalism."[106]

Harper's in those years was the "hot magazine," he added. "So it really was a very small circle and in a way it was a continual party."[107]

His reference to the circle plays nicely into the image of writing culture as a web of intimacy and influence. That circle of writers was each wrapped up in their own individual excitement and ambition, disappointment and despair; all had their own proclivities, fears and imperfections. But they all appreciated ideas of literary excellence and they all wrote for *Harper's*. The places their values and experience converge and diverge mark the fluctuating parameters of the writing culture this works seeks to identify. As this investigation progresses, elements of culture will often be tied back to the web of intimacy and influence

One of the core values that threads through the web is the commitment to and love for the written word, commonly shared by every participant in *Harper's* writing culture.

"I don't know if I understand what a writing culture is really," former contributing editor Larry L. King said in an interview. "It's not something I ever really thought about." But as his pondered the proposition, he immediately gravitated to words as a unifying force. "We were all really into the use of the language," he said. "We all really loved it."[108]

An understanding of each additional aspect of the inquiry into writing culture is amplified by its linkages to the underlying base of the word. Given the natural connection between writing and words, the assertion that they function as a cultural foundation presents an almost organic proposition: *Harper's* writing culture springs forth from a love of words. Commitment to the highest possible use of the word emerges at several points during this work, but the following pages pull on several threads associated with the *Harper's* experience in an effort to enable an authentic feel of writing culture's cloth. These threads are spun from the fibers collected in interviews with and writings of those involved in the editorial production of development of *Harper's* literary offerings. They include themes based on writing routines and standards, interpersonal relationships, careers, reactions to transition and crisis, collegial stimulation and intoxication, social environment, race and sex, politics and philosophy, capitalism and America, home and truth.

The exploration of how these themes work together to reveal a sense of writing culture begins with an assessment of the importance subjects of this review place on the word.

The Word

As editor-in-chief, Willie Morris set the tone for the magazine's writing culture, though the degree to which his editorial mission was embraced lessened as the proximity to his editorial inner circle decreased. Morris typified an approach associated with New Journalism in its acceptance of participatory, first-person, long-form narrative and rejection of obligatory commitment to simple, bare, just-the-facts prose. Even in basic style Morris – who preferred peregrination over walking in his writings – contrasted with the traditional tenets held by John Fischer, the previous editor-in-chief, who employed a crisp, concise approach. Longtime members of the staff, who worked at *Harper's* before the editorial transition, reportedly protested the antics of some the newer, Morris-sponsored writers. Despite the changes in style or interpretation of mission, *Harper's* commitment to a thoughtful use of language is one element of its writing culture that may be timeless. And while the respective webs of intimacy and influence traceable around Fischer and Morris may overlap in areas, distinct differences are also apparent. This suggests the utility in rooting a cultural investigation in a certain period of time and using a central character from which a broader exploration can expand.

Morris's successor Lewis H. Lapham framed the cultural shift that ushered in the Morris era this way:

> [Fischer's] generous a way of looking at the world didn't survive the shouting of the 1960's. Fischer found himself out of sympathy with street demonstrations and psychedelic flowers, also with Bob Dylan's harmonica and what was being touted as the genius of the New Journalism; knowing that the magazine's relevance depended upon its being attuned to the music of its times, [Fischer] resigned as editor in 1967… [109]

In this work, the web centered on Fischer is referred to as the Old Guard. In contrast, the web traced around Morris is termed the inner circle. The relationship between these two is revisited in a subsequent section, "Defining Good Writing."

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"Being an editor at *Harper's* was really a pleasure," said Robert Kotlowitz, who joined the editorial staff in 1965, served as Morris's managing editor, and together with Midge Decter handled most the magazine's daily operations while Morris was editor-in-chief. "If I hadn't worked there, I would have been a reader." [110]

Kotlowitz's comments about how he enjoyed editing *Harper's* writers, so much so that he would read them even if he wasn't on the payroll, underscore his appreciation for the words lining the papers on his desk.

Forty years later, contributing editor Larry L. King remembered a high-minded commitment to language as a unifying theme among the members of *Harper's* inner editorial circle:

> He selected those of us who he thought more or less agreed with him about writing, who were clearly dedicated to writing, the use of the language, to telling our story as best we could. Willie always said, 'Get it all and get it right, tell it all and tell it right.'[111]

Like Corry, Lapham said writing was the tool through which he came to grasp the nebulous gray matter that drives humanity – ideas. Lapham's writing career began in journalism. "I started out wanting to be a historian, but didn't have patience for grad school – that's why I went into journalism," he said. He had fun and traveled the world, but when he began to write essays, he said, "I began to understand ideas…(the essays) offered a chance to educate myself in public."[112]

While his direct experience at *Harper's* under Morris was limited, Lapham said, "Willie and I both agreed about good writing. I'm a big believer in good writing, but to make good writing correspond to good journalism is very hard to do; it's very hard to make it lay down in the same manger." [113]

His love of words stayed consistent, but as his writing evolved, Lapham said it moved away from purvey of traditional journalism:

> I write essays. But I don't pretend it's journalism, or at least not as journalism is properly defined. [Meaning: What happened and how, he said, adding again that only writers of "great talent" can successfully add a literary element to pure journalism.] I'm a great believer in the power of words. If I were running a major news media right now, I'd put more and more emphasis on the power of words. Not as much on data transmission, (which is) done better and more quickly by power of the Internet.[114]

The interviews with the *Harper's* veterans make clear that, at the beginning, an intoxication with language functioned as the common glue that bound the staffers together. Morris himself learned about "the deep dedication of the serious writer's calling, the hazards inherent in it, the long stretches of loneliness…" from watching writer William Styron and his "emotional connection with his words."[115] Morris wrote that acceptance of the profession's hazards, though, was a necessary capitulation of the core truth "that a writer literally cannot live without his words."[116] Morris expounded on his literary lifeblood:

> *Words*! I was lucky to have grown up in an American place obsessed with words, even in ordinary conversation – their rhythms, sounds, nuances, words in the churches, in the baseball bleachers, on the front porches: the older people giving us as children a great gift...giving us a way to see.[117]

The first precept King remembered learning from Morris was not to be afraid to use words that a lot of readers wouldn't understand. "He said, 'You can't write down to your audience.'" But, King added, big words were in a class apart from unnecessary words:

> I learned from Willie just from watching him personally on three or four pieces he did that I wrote for him. I learned more about writing from those edits; just to see that I didn't have to use as many words as was my wont, that I had opportunities to say things in a different way. How he edited those first few pieces improved my writing immensely. I just can't tell you. [118]

King also mentioned Morris's tact, noting "he was smart enough not to parade (writers' problems or failures) around the office."[119] Unfortunately, King did not save any drafts of Morris's edits. But Corry confirmed King's remembrances of Morris's approach, noting Morris was "a real reporter and a good pencil editor."[120] Morris ostensibly edited the writing Kotlowitz submitted, but never changed the words. "Maybe he hated them so much," Kotlowitz said.[121] He uttered his comment with a tone of reserved humor, yet captured a self consciousness shared by other inner circle members that suggests even the most accomplished writers confront moments of self doubt in the hands of their editors.

The *Harper's* writers shared a love for language and dedication to the craft of writing but their interviews and memoirs didn't much discuss the psychic-to-physical details necessary to pluck words from mental cultivation and usher them to paper, or how they actually accomplished their work. But some of the eccentricities surrounding their writing habits were revealed. Corry, for instance, would fret over his deadlines to the point of neurosis. At *Harper's,* and even in his later years at *The New York Times*, Corry was consistent in his habit of working right up against his deadlines:

> I'd agonize and turn it in at the very last minute. I'd sit in the office all night, smoke endless packs of cigarettes; I'd make myself quite ill. It's quite neurotic and I'm aware of this. I can use deadlines the same way I could use alcohol: keep the deadline in front of you, agonizing over it as a way of numbing yourself against something else. That's bad Psych. 101, but I think there's something to this.[122]

King's writing ritual involved "a little grass," a drink, "generally a beer," and cigarettes. [123] He did not agonize over deadlines like Corry, but shared a proclivity for perfection in submitted drafts voiced by both Corry and Kotlowitz. King explained:

> I never did second or third drafts. I worked on each sentence until I was satisfied with it, then on each paragraph till I was satisfied with it and on each page till I was satisfied with it. I never had writer's block. Not once. I couldn't afford to. And I didn't know I was supposed to. I was disappointed by how some pieces turned out for a number of magazines, but I never had problems writing… [124]

But it was at *Harper's* that King ran into the only piece in his career that an editor scrapped. Morris asked King, a native Texan, for a piece on Dallas, "which is not a town I liked and still don't," King said. "Somehow I couldn't get my hand around that story very well and I turned in a piece that I didn't think was very good. Willie just said, "Larry, this is not you. This is a piss poor piece and I'm not going to publish this."[125]

After a failed attempt to channel author Robert Penn Warren as he wrote his first novel, King said he never consciously aped any of his literary heroes or particular brand of stylistic approach. "I think once you've found your own voice you don't do that," he said, adding that, in general, "I let each piece play itself out as it would and I never stopped to think about how that might fit into anything schematically."[126]

Kotlowitz voiced a similar sentiment about the task of writing. He didn't start with a preconceived structure. Once in the upswing of a narrative arc, "I carry it and it carries me, if I'm lucky," he said. His writing process dictated that he "never showed a book manuscript to anybody until it was perfect. It's too interrupting to start dealing with suggestions a third of the way through."[127]

Kotlowitz's approach was defined by routine. He generally would arrive at the office around 9:30 a.m. and return home in time to eat dinner with his family, after which he would retire to his desk where he would focus on writing his books between 8:30 and 10:30 p.m.[128] "I just sit down and go to work," he said. "I don't fool around. I get up in the morning and sit down to write, if it doesn't work, I keep going until it does. I don't pace, I don't chew the pencil. I recall beating my first on my forehead and moaning…"[129]

Contributing editor Marshall Frady worked from his home in Georgia, thus colleagues were generally unfamiliar with his personal writing habits. By way of introduction to his first piece for *Harper's*, Morris wrote that the 29-year-old Frady's writing "derives from the violent and flamboyant experience of this generation of Southern politics and his prose from its rhythms and cadences."[130]

Halberstam, on the other hand, was often around the office. King marveled over Halberstam's prolific output and called him "the hardest working writer that I've ever known -- he never had 10 minutes between jobs."[131]

Prodigious piles of papers came to define Halberstam's writing style.

"Halberstam was a hurricane of work and he lived in a complete mess," recalled Midge Decter, who served as the magazine's executive editor during Morris's tenure. She continued:

> I've never seen a desk like his, or an office. How he could produce those books I do not know. His desk was piled high with paper of all kinds. There was a chair in there that you couldn't sit down on [as it was covered in research materials]. He worked on a typewriter and never understood margins. A David Halberstam manuscript went from this edge of the page to that and the spaces weren't very wide. Then there would be little notations all over the place.[132]

Kotlowitz also remembered the overwhelming about of material Halberstam used in his work, though he was somewhat reticent to reflect on the challenges of editing Halberstam, as he didn't want a writer's dependence on an editor to be mistaken for journalistic weakness or seem as if he was disparaging the gifts of a writer he respected greatly.

"He was a fabulous reporter," Kotlowitz said, describing his death in the spring of 2007 as "a horrible loss in personal terms."[133]

When pressed to share his editing experiences in a way that would offer insight into the writing process, Kotlowitz eventually explained that Halberstam's stories often encompassed too much material and tended toward repetition. To negotiate the stories into tighter forms when he approached Halberstam with editing changes, Kotlowitz said, "I'd go in with four times as many suggestions as I really wanted."[134]

Kotlowitz went home with the most challenging piece he received from Halberstam where he spent three days working it over.

"It was just a result of that man's energy; he was raring to go," Decter said, noting his marked ambitiousness. "He had been unhappy at the *New York Times*, which is a funny thing for an ambitious journalist because you can't climb any higher on the tree than that. He must have felt they kept him too restrained."[135]

Morris's recollection of Halberstam's attachment to *Harper's* emphasized an appreciation for the magazine's editorial freedom. Morris said Halberstam came to *Harper's* for two to three times less money than CBS was interested in offering him. Morris said Halberstam later explained:

> (F)or those of us like myself who had worked in city rooms for twelve years, and chafed all those years at the form – who, what, why, when, where, and the space limitations [800 words] and the lack of time – everything reported and written in five or six hours, the freedom *Harper's* offered was precious.
>
> The real tyranny of journalism has always been the lack of time and space to break away from the pack. And then suddenly we were working for *Harper's* and we had six weeks on a piece! Six thousand words if need be! And emancipation from all those rules which inhibit real reporting.[136]

Morris's obsession with words and how they fit together acted as a unifying adhesive amongst the inner circle, bridging the gaps in the individual writer's ideological approaches by insisting the tools of their craft could be neither too bold nor too intricate.

"Willie wrote prettier than I wrote – a little more flowery," King said. He added:

> Willie used a dueling sword and I used a dagger. That's the difference the best I could put it. I told him that he made the world greener than God had made it when he wrote. He'd put a positive spin on nearly every thing.[137]

In his remarks eulogizing Morris, David Halberstam characterized the attraction of *Harper's* inner circle to their leader: "We, who were his writers, loved Willie: no one ever did it better, no one made it more fun, and no one did it with greater sweetness."[138]

In this expression, in which he refers to "We…his writers," Halberstam evokes a bond amongst members of the inner circle built on Morris's approach.

Decter's first article directly under Morris's chief editorship (her third for *Harper's*) chronicled the struggle for both power and satisfying sex lives in which she and her daughters were engaged as women in a male-dominated society. It also reflected her feelings about words: "…words constitute a kind of post amniotic fluid in which [children] grow and are both sheltered from and introduced to their surroundings."[139]

To extend Decter's observation, words seemed to nourish the cultural environment that supported the evolution of Morris and his inner circle at *Harper's*.

"He was just a sucker for a beautiful sentence," Decter said. "He produced them and he loved them." She added:

> That was the Southern tradition, beautiful writing….Willie was a sucker for a writer – there are not too many editors who are. Now there's a lot of ideology. Willie was always wooed by a nice sentence.[140]

In the effort to define writing culture based on the *Harper's* writers' reflections, a central assertion begins to develop that a high-placed value of words sits at its foundation. This is likely true beyond the confines of *Harper's* writing culture, but can be said with certainty about the inner circle. Also, an enthusiasm for the type of writing and editorial freedom that members of the inner circle associate with Morris's leadership presents a characteristic that can be rooted in that specific place and time and in ways extended to find common ground with other adherents of the New Journalism style.

Defining "Good" Writing

Within the framework of *Harper's* writing culture, and in addition to the universal appreciation of its members for the value of the written world, one can explore the notion of perfection as it relates to journalism and writing. The examination raises the question: Did *Harper's* writing culture have a general standard of criteria defining perfection or at least elements that may distinguish characteristics of work associated with *Harper's* writing culture? In this section, as different participants discuss personal standards of perfection with regard to the articles in the magazine, varying levels of influence and intimacy may be observed.

****

A Kotlowitz comment identifies a line between inner-circle editorial standards incubating under Morris and the Old-Guard sentiment:

> We were doing exactly what we wanted to do, we didn't talk about it. No bickering about the nature of the magazine. We were all pointed in the same direction, except the publishing end and some of the older editors (like) Catharine Meyers and Russell Lynes. [141]

Midge Decter also identified divergent standards of stimulating content between the generations of editorial leadership:

> If anybody asked him about the old *Harper's*, Willie's favorite line was: "Last year we published an article called 'All Cows Are Mean.'" …it gives you a sense in what a stage of rigor mortis the magazine was.[142]

The writing credit for the "Cows" piece goes to J.O. Harvey, described by the magazine as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who spent most of her life on "farming on eighty acres in Bucks County, Pennsylvania."[143]

The literary virtue of Harvey's piece is not within the scope of the current consideration and this work aims to cast no dispersion on farmer's or preacher's daughters, but one may hazard conjecture that an article exploring "the psychology of the cow – a mean, dangerous lady obsessed with sex, protocol and social climbing"[144] may not correspond with Morris's efforts to create "a magazine that *had* to be read, that would take on the 'Establishment,' assume the big dare, move out to the edge, make people mad, edify and arouse and entertain, tell the truth."[145]

Larry King felt Morris's approach represented a definite diversion from the magazine's prior editorial voice:

> Willie, he did make it a much better magazine than it had been [under the direction of] old Jack Fischer, whom I never really liked -- terrible, conservative man -- whatever the government did, pretty much, what the Powers That Be did was OK with Jack. He thought it was supposed to be that way. He neither comforted the afflicted or afflicted the comforted. And Willie changed all that.[146]

King's assertion about Fischer's editorial approach makes an interesting contrast to Fischer's own self-evaluation, presented in the *"*From the Easy Chair*"* column, which he continued to pen after handing the chief editor's title to Morris:

> …I am as mild and peaceable as anybody whoever cursed a typewriter; yet this column has kept me embroiled in almost continuous combat for the last fourteen years…
>
> From the time George William Curtis began writing the column in 1853, it has been a running affront to the genteel and the leisured… [147]

Fischer's submission also laid out his vision of meaningful writing, column writing in particular: "A prime goal must be clarity; the simplest statement of his case in the simplest, most precise, and most direct words that he can find. Ambiguity may be dandy for the poet or novelist, but for the reporter-analyst it is the unforgivable sin."[148]

Note how this style contrasts with the sybaritic sesquipedalism employed and advocated by Morris, who favored peregrination over walking. Fischer advocated E.B. White's "Plain Style," typified by a favored phrase of William Strunk, Jr., White's writing teacher at Cornell University: "Omit needless words."[149] That statement, through the multiple printings of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, has influenced the writing culture of several places and generations.

Fischer set Plain Style against a roster of alternatives cast in a more unfavorable vein, "stylistic modes…so much easier," such as "the Murky Academic, as found in practically every doctoral dissertation, or the Rococo Breathless, typified by Tom Wolfe (the youth culture kid, not the novelist), and the Long-Winded Profound, a speciality of *The New York Review of Books*."[150]

The blatant challenge to the journalistic validity – or at least skill – of Wolfe, widely considered as a founding father of so-called New Journalism, a form to which the inner circle subscribed and promoted if not by name, at least by style, reflects another bold division between the editorial values of Fischer and Morris. Yet Fischer hand-picked and groomed Morris to follow him as *Harper's* top editor. In a comparison of the men's respective approaches, distinctions surface in writing culture as it evolves under different leadership styles, embracing different sets of participants. Again, the notion of distinct yet connected webs of intimacy and influence illustrates the cascading iterations of writing culture where connections may overlap as their core structures spin off in unrelated or even opposite directions. The diverging views on the merits of New Journalism open a vein for academic observation through which run the culture's connections to the past and future.

Describing his path to *Harper's* in 1968, Corry talked about New Journalism. In addition to including himself under its heading, he categorized Tom Wolfe (whose wife, Sheila Berger, as it happened, joined *Harper's* in 1969 as art director), Gay Talese and Jimmy Breslin. He continued:

> It was quite new and it was different. It's how I got to *Harper's*. I was part of the New Journalism; there wasn't that much of a division in my mind between journalism and working at *Harper's*. I was already a path breaker from the *New York Times*, yet I didn't know it, I knew I was doing interesting things; I was noticed.[151]

Robert Kotlowitz recalled the night when Fischer introduced him to Morris, noting "devious is too strong a word" to describe Fischer's social networking strategy. But the introduction was done "behind the scenes," perhaps not to upset "poor Russell Lynes," another central figure of the Old Guard who may have considered himself heir apparent to the editor-in-chief title. "He had not a clue [of Fischer's intention to promote Morris over him]," Kotlowitz said.[152]

Like Morris, Kotlowitz was also chosen by Fischer to help steer *Harper's* editorial load – and the two new hires were in immediate synch. From the first "wonderful evening – we both accepted each other right away and agreed upon what we wanted *Harper's* to be, and how to make it what it was becoming," Kotlowitz said.[153]

Lewis Lapham described Fischer as "the old rural journalist….a depression youth who knew how to ride a horse, drill wells, find oil; he was country grit, a man of the Plains." [154]

While serving in an American World War II intelligence outfit, Fischer met Cass Canfield, president and chair of Harper & Brothers, who, Lapham said, "was so impressed with Fischer he brought him back to New York to be an editor at Harpers & Row in the same red brick building as magazine." [155]

After former Editor-in-Chief Frederick Lewis Allen died, Canfield promoted Fischer to the position. Soon after, Easy Chair columnist Bernard Augustine DeVoto also died and Fischer took the reins of The Easy Chair.

Reading Fischer's editorial note on DeVoto's final column traces the lines *Harper's* writing cultural web out even further, demonstrating the expandability of the writing culture through time:

> Perhaps it can best be said at such a time as this [referencing DeVoto's death] that in twenty years of occupying The Easy Chair he never missed a deadline. On November 14, the day after he died, this copy came in – on time, as always, as we had known it would.[156]

As for Fischer's writing approach, Lapham said he "was a columnist, an old newspaper guy, who could do something very fast…[and] would rewrite most manuscripts."[157] Lapham added, "Most manuscripts you get as editor are poorly written. It was true in 1954; it's true today."[158]

In his own Easy Chair column memorializing Fischer in 1978, Lapham, who eventually became *Harper's* editor in chief, noted that his introduction to Fischer was facilitated, in a way, by Willie Morris, though not in the most pleasant of ways:

> I first met Jack…in the midst of one of those literary quarrels that pass muster in New York for a crisis of international significance. Jack's immediate successor as editor of the magazine had resigned as a result of a dispute with the publisher, and a number of other editors also resigned….in the back rooms of cultural opinion it was being said that…Art had died….Jack had no patience for this sort of thing. [159]

The inner circle of *Harper's* writing culture that lined the web of Fischer's Old Guard, in addition to Morris and Kotlowitz, included Senior Editors Katherine Gauss Jackson, Catharine Meyer and Marion K. Sanders and Assistant Editor Judith Appelbaum, among others. When Willie became editor in chief, "he let them know they weren't in the future plans," King said.[160] The changes may have been more aggressive than Fischer had envisioned. "Once the transition became fully apparent, Jack was in a state of shock. He thought Willie was Jack Fischer the second, another country boy," Kotlowitz said.[161]

The change in editorial leadership under Morris accomplished more than a philosophical shift in the magazine's content; it also effected substantial change in the magazine's approach to production. "There were still a lot of Fischer holdovers when I got there," Decter recalled. "Hordes of people…half a dozen young women, editorial assistants…[to] read the slush pile." She explained it was business as usual:

> …until one day when across my desk came a poem by a poet named John Berryman [whose *77 Dream Songs* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1965] with a note that says, 'This is rather dull, but it does show some promise.'
>
> I picked this up and I walked into Willie's office and I said, 'You have got to get rid of these young women because they have nothing to do here. Look at this!'
>
> So little by little, the office became smaller and more intimate than the processes and papers floating around. It got to be much more informal. Jack Fischer would have editorial meetings where whole staff would come. We didn't have editorial meetings. Basically, the three of us [Morris, Kotlowitz and Decter] would just sit and have discussions. Sometimes we'd agree to disagree."[162]

Kotlowitz added that *Harper's* under Morris stood out for its loose and "sanely run" approach to writing and editing.[163]

Before his unplanned and unexpected resignation, Morris assigned scholar Jean Herskovitz to use her first-hand experience in Nigeria following the conclusion of its civil war to write a response to Herbert Gold's "My Summer Vacation in Biafra," which had been published in the November 1969 *Harper's*.[164]

"That was characteristic of Willie to take a chance," said Herskovitz, who met Morris as a fellow Rhodes scholar at Oxford. [Morris also introduced Herskovitz and Corry, now married after losing touch for several years.] Her story was set to run in the May issue, she said. But then Morris left and Herskovitz said Jack Fischer told her he was sorry, but "if it's not genocide, our readers are not interested" and he paid her a $1,000 kill fee.[165]

The fluidity of a writing culture is exemplified in the way members may relinquish power or fall out of favor without a permanent eclipse of influence. Members of the Old Guard, like Sanders, resurfaced when their leader, Fischer, stepped up to steer the magazine through the tumult of the inner circle's departure. When Morris left *Harper's* and the rest of the inner circle was gone – save Lewis Lapham, who had only published one article before the mass editorial exodus - the culture began to change again. Still, its evolution was influenced by its root connections to the cultures that came before and – through Lapham – those cultivated by Morris. Fischer's steady hand, a dependable and effective influence that defined the Old Guard approach, eased the magazine through the difficult transition. And Lapham, who was brought on my Morris, would stay on to guide the magazine for more than three decades.

Stimulating Writing Culture: Some Notes on the Use of Humor

As Kotlowitz noted, the Morris years were "loose" and presented a laced-down approach in the day-to-day interactions between the writers.[166] Humor served as common means many writers at *Harper's* used to entertain, encourage and challenge one another. Rather than trade praise, the writers were more apt to keep their colleagues egos in check; humor was the preferred mechanism.

In collegial interaction, "we'd say that's a good job, but we didn't talk about [each other's stories] all that much; we didn't pay direct compliments," said King. He recalled one particular ritual, in which he peppered Halberstam, whom King said "couldn't stand criticism from people about his writing," with eccentric or imaginative postcards and letters from fictional readers all over the country. [167]

Even in his late seventies after years of heavy marijuana use, King still could recite by memory poetry he wrote in his *Harper's* years under the nom de plume of Alma Faye Frumkin, a character he concocted to shower Halberstam with eccentric praise. As easy as one might order coffee at breakfast, he delivered one of the many missives he showered on Halberstam over 35 years ago:

> <u>Kites in the Wind</u>
>
> Look
> in the Sky.
> Kites.
>
> Red,
> Orange, Blue,
> Green.
>
> Then I run Free
> with the string in my hand,
> breaking wind.[168]

"That was Halberstam's favorite, King said. "He liked that. He thought it was funny."[169]

King explained Frumkin was a recurring character:

> She'd also write him letters saying she wished he'd come to her town. She claimed she lived in North Carolina. So she'd say: 'Please, I don't think you'd mistreat me. You've got an honest face. Not like that second baseman from the Cotton States who came and took advantage of me and broke my heart.'
>
> I'd get a woman to write that down in a woman's hand and then have somebody mail it from North Carolina.
>
> He figured it out, finally. But the first ones… I'd sent post cards because people could see. [Meaning the torment was of public knowledge to *Harper's* staff who happened to see the mail.]
>
> I got a little boy about eight years old to write:
>
> Dear Mr. Halberstorm, (I'd purposely spelled the name wrong…)
>
> I know you are a writer. I like your work because it is simple. Mommy and Daddy said you are the simplest writer they know. [King chuckles.]
> Love, George
> [King continues giggling]."[170]

King would check in with the secretary administrating his and Halberstam's affairs at *Harper's*. She reported that Halberstam, after reading the unexpected torments, stuffed them in his jacket pocket and continued working.[171]

Willie shared King's enthusiasm for practical jokes. "Larry and Willie had mean streaks in them; they played a lot of practical jokes," Decter said. "And the butt of these jokes was almost always David; he was kind of innocent.[172] At Morris's funeral, Halberstam remembered the jokes: "First….(t)he little boy in Willie always lived; he loved like life itself the telephone and playing telephone pranks."[173]

Halberstam recalled a time in 1973 when *Robert Atkins Diet Revolution* surpassed on the *New York Times* bestseller list his own book *The Best and the Brightest*:

> Watching [the Atkins book] rise was bad enough, but soon true tragedy struck….And then one day the phone rang. And there was the voice which sounded like the Oxford don, and it belonged to a man who said that he was Dr. Robert Atkins and that he had noticed both our books were on the bestseller list.
>
> Of course, he noted, he had just passed me. But, he said, he thought we could collaborate on a new book, and with our special talents that book would surely be the best seller of all time. I was surely, he quickly added, too big a man to let his ascendance over me stand in our way.
>
> We could call it, he said, 'The Best and the Fattest.'
>
> 'I know that's you, Willie Weaks Morris,' I said. And he giggled with a little boy's pleasure. [174]

Halberstam also recounted an instance in which Morris left a message and number for Bob Kotlowitz to call Leonard Bernstein:

> Only it wasn't the Leonard Bernstein who was the great composer-conductor, it was Leonard Bernstein who was a Manhattan dentist.
>
> And Bob called and said that he had been told to call, that he had an urgent need to talk to Leonard Bernstein. And Leonard Bernstein, the dentist, kept saying, 'Are you in pain? Are you in pain?' and Bob, quickly catching on, said, 'I'm always in pain.'[175]

Decter recalled Halberstam receiving at various times a telegraph from "the president" and another from "the prime minister." "And he always fell for it," she said. "Never in a million years would it ever have occurred to David to do anything crooked, everything was straight lines. He was a real sucker for these [jokes]."[176]

John Corry's wife, Jean Herskovitz, said that Corry and Morris shared an uncanny appreciation for the same style of humor. "At Oxford, he [Morris] was always enormously fun, nothing to do with anything serious," Herskovitz said. Before Willie and John ever met, she said, they had simultaneously played the same joke on opposite sides of the Atlantic.[177]

In 1957, the Soviets launched a dog named into space on the world's second satellite. "Willie called the American embassy in Britain to offer officials an interview with Laika," Herskovitz said. "John was doing the same thing in New York."[178] Corry recounted the details. One night in a fit of boredom on duty as a *New York Times* copy boy, he and a coworker hid beneath a desk and called the man charged with monitoring Associated Press bulletins, who sat on the other side of the newsroom: "Mr. Long, we think we're going to pick up a live satellite transmission with the dog… Just a minute Mr. Long…. Are you ready? Keep listening…" Then Corry's colleague barked into the phone. [179]

At times, Morris used the "About This Issue" section of the magazine, which introduced readers to the issue's content, to tease his writers, blending versions of truth with fiction without express disclosure.

The most ambitious and outrageous in its blatant mischief is Morris's introduction to Larry L. King's "Blowing My Mind at Harvard," an article about King's experience as a Neiman Fellow. Morris wrote:

> …the only dropout in the history of Texas Tech (he had been refused to drink beer during football practice)….is probably the only student to have failed Algebra One three times in two states. The exact worth of *x* remains a mystery to him, though he suspects that it fluctuates. At Fort Monmouth, in 1946, Private King was dismissed from cryptology school after complaining that everything was in code…King gradually learned to read, and eventually to write. This is his twenty-fourth appearance in *Harper's* in the last five years. The record for this magazine (aside from regular columns) is held by the late Elmer Davis, who wrote sixty-seven. One of Larry L. King's peculiar ambitions, aside from breaking the world's record for drinking a six-pack of Lone Star beer (one minute, fourteen seconds, set by "Mole" Dowling in 1948) is to surpass this mark.[180]

King shook his head as he reread the lines. "Willie made up a bunch of this," he said. "Refused permission to drink beer in football practice?! I mean come on, Willie. He got this algebra stuff right…Actually, I only failed it twice… A pack of Lone Star beer in 14 seconds?"[181]

Introducing John Corry's Cuban dispatch, Morris had some fun at Corry's expense, writing Corry "is not sure, but he thinks he got married in the Mexico City airport while on the way to Cuba on assignment:

> There are technicalities involved in leaving for Cuba, and Corry, craftily maneuvering around them, found himself with an official document saying he could return to Mexico after leaving Cuba only if he traveled with a fine, miniskirted American blonde he had just met. [He published a photograph of Corry in repose with an unnamed, miniskirted woman.] Since she was also on her way to Cuba, it did not make an insurmountable problem, but Corry thinks it did show a certain sense of whimsy on the part of the Mexican government."[182]

While not to the extremes he treated King or Corry, Morris also used his "About This Issue" platform to kid Robert Kotlowitz. Drawing a parallel with a description of an editor penned by H.L. Mencken, who hailed from Kotlowitz's hometown of Baltimore, Maryland, Morris wrote:

> Our fellow editor Kotlowitz dislikes some of these things, especially talking over the telephone, rye whiskey, and the sight of a woman eating, but he likes the Upper West Side after the garbage is collected, dry martinis in the Empire Chinese Restaurant, hate mail, lunar modules, literary agents who are soft touches, *Hair*, Igor Stravinsky, piano playing, his dog Claude, his wife Billie from Baltimore, his offspring Alex (who is fourteen and likes girls) and Daniel (who is twelve and a big spender), Fire Island after dark, and trips to France.[183]

Morris's nod to stiff drinks at the Empire Restaurant reveals a hint that *Harper's* writing culture was not constrained to the office. The playful attitude shared amongst inner circle members indicates a familiarity and friendliness not limited to stiff-necked professionalism. Next to the cornerstone of logophilia, the unassuming, informal and often liquor-laden environment buttressed the inner circle's cultural foundation.

Environment (aka Elaine's and the Scene)

Elaine's at 88th Street and 2nd Avenue on Manhattan's Upper East Side served as a second home to Morris and several other writers affiliated with *Harper's*. Through *Harper's* connections and many other outlets in New York's literary universe, Elaine's bred culture, forming new links in its customers' webs of intimacy and influence as introductions were made and writing contracts sealed.

One October afternoon in 2007, proprietress Elaine Kaufman sat at her front window table before the restaurant opened for the evening and reminisced about the writers of the late sixties and early seventies and the culture that fed itself within her walls, which were themselves adorned with literary posters celebrating her favorites, including Morris. Her place served not just drinks, but as an editorial incubator. Morris could unwind over cocktails while writers plied him with pitches and reinvigorated his spirit with the ideas of literary possibility. "One night Frank Conroy came in, had an idea," Elaine said. "And Frank took a bar napkin and wrote an outline [for Morris]."[184]

Conroy recounted the episode for Halberstam, who later included it in his memorial remarks of Morris:

> Conroy…told me the other night of running into Willie at Elaine's, a restaurant which served in those days as Willie's late-night office. It was 1969, just after the Manson murders.
>
> "Who's covering the Manson murders for you?" Frank asked. "You are," Willie answered, and so that night around midnight Willie drew up a contract –on an Elaine's napkin, with Elio, the headwaiter, as witness --$10,000 for the piece.[185]

The resulting piece, "Manson Wins! a fantasy: Reflections on the most garish crime of the decade," waxed philosophic on the meaning American society gleaned from the unusual killings unleashed at the homes of Sharon Tate and the LaBiancas. The article was published after Manson's arrest and trial but before his conviction. Reading the story through the lens of later-day cultural explorer, one finds evidence of how writing culture feeds on itself as it reincarnates – looking back as it moves forward.

Conroy doesn't blatantly name Elaine's, but conjures his "favorite bar in New York," where:

> people theorized endlessly….The one-killer theory, the two-killer theory, the witchcraft theory, the LSD freak-out theory, etc….
>
> '(I)t's too close. Think of how many times those people were right here in this bar one time or another. [Roman] Polanski [Tate's husband] used to come in here all the time.'[186]

The article, in a nod to an awareness of the surrounding writing culture of the city, referenced a joke circulating "around literary New York at the time, about bickering over the size of the advance a writer would receive for a book about killing someone":

> Fifty grand for Frank Sinatra, a hundred for Howard Hughes, a quarter million for Jane Fonda.
>
> If the murder took place in an unprosperous state, like West Virginia, it was argued the writer could bring more money to the trial than the prosecution, win acquittal, get that all-important first book published and move on to more serious work.[187]

Conroy's article exemplifies *Harper's* commitment to cultural commentary through creative and unconventional methodology:

> I do not know whether [Manson "family member" and central witness Linda] Kasabian told the truth or whether Manson *et al* are guilty. If they are guilty, why did it happen? What follows is a fiction, It is not intended to represent actuality. It is my fantasy of how and why such events could have occurred.[188]

Conroy noted that 20 of Manson's 35 years were spent in jail, having begun around the age of 12 a series of stays in boys' homes and juvenile centers. Building on comments attributed to a *Rolling Stone* interview with Manson – that jail life didn't bother him and that "spending 20 years in jail playing with yourself, a woman becomes almost an unbelievable thing to you"– Conroy determined Manson became a "fantast…to survive captivity," that "inner freedom…is the freedom of the man with his penis in his hand to dream whatever dream he pleases." [189]

Rather than a straight recounting of the facts to date, Conroy wove together a conjectural narrative that, in hindsight, might be considered prophetic in its insight. Conroy concluded that for Manson:

> (T)elling people what to do and having them do it was the kick, not so much what they actually did. Each enactment gratified a part of him, it would appear, but another part was disappointed, a part the kids [Manson's "family"] knew nothing about, a very deep part that was on a search for something in reality that would be better than fantasy. With each achievement Manson was forced further into the world, into larger arenas, and it made him nervous…

> So it ends. (H)e'll be safe in his cell. He'll reach down under the blankets, close his eyes, and live it all over again -- neatening it up, rounding off the edges until it drops, like a jigsaw puzzle piece, into the real world, the only one that counts, the vast splendid interior universe he has spent all his life creating. I imagine him dying of old age, with his prick in his hand.[190]

Conroy's ability to leverage a bar napkin into a *Harper's* spread was not unusual.

Elaine Kaufman said Jack Richardson, "the formidable playwright," secured a contract in much the same way as Conroy, noting "quite a few" articles were pitched and received in such a manner. "When Ali got out of prison… Jack asked if he could go down to Atlanta," Kaufman said. "Willie said, "Great idea." [191] She remembered the resulting piece as one of her favorite *Harper's* articles of the Morris era.

In John Corry's memoir *My Times*, he noted that it was at an Elaine's table where Morris cemented their *Harper's* relationship:

> On my first visit to Elaine's, [Morris] gave me a copy of his book [the autobiography *North Toward Home*]. Across the top of the flyleaf he wrote: July 27, 1968, the night Corry decided to work for *Harper's* Magazine. And under that: To John, who is going to make my North Toward Home, through his own work, a confirmation of my own work, but at the same time a more complicated and richer understanding. Affectionately, Willie.[192]

Elaine's place offered an outlet for *Harper's* web of intimacy and influence to expand in an informal and conversational way. Morris is not the only editor to have ever done business at Elaine's, but, in his time, he frequented the place as much as anyone. And, as Corry said when he considered the meaning of *Harper's* writing culture, "it was a continual party."[193]

Lapham suggested, by way of inference, that what Morris did at Elaine's defined his editorship style.

"Willie didn't do editing," Lapham said. "Willie did commissioning and the celebration. Willie was what we call an acquisitions editor. If it had to be re-shaped, the work of it was done by Midge Decter or Kotlowitz. Both had a sense of line editing and structure." [194]

Morris's loose commissioning style had a lagging hangover effect after he left that Decter and Kotlowitz were forced to confront during the weeks they stayed on to finish the issue in the works on the day of Morris's resignation.

"In came the letters and phone calls," Decter said, from people who would say, "Willie promised me I could get paid $6,000 for 15 articles…Willie promised…Willie promised.' That was Willie's doing…at Elaine's -- promises."[195]

Regardless of the merits of every pitch he encouraged with promises of big money, history shows that Morris's strategy underwrote some of the greatest journalistic efforts of the era. Take, for instance, the work of Elaine's regular Gay Talese.

Following Halberstam's death in an April 2007 car crash, reporter Peter Schrag wrote a memorial to Halberstam and the craft of long-form journalism in which he recalled Talese telling how he struggled to finish writing the eventual best-seller *The Kingdom and the Power.*

"Talese has run out of money to complete the project," Schrag wrote. "His friend Halberstam then introduced him to Morris, who paid him $10,000 (in 1960s dollars) for two long pieces from the book, enough to allow him to finish it. That kind of money is rare these days."[196]

Larry L. King's *In Search of Willie Morris* also recounted Talese's comments on receiving such financial support from Morris. According to King, Talese said, "His buying them [excerpts of *The Kingdom and the Power*] gave me a shot at having the kind of career I wanted…"[197]

Morris's open-ended enthusiasm and support for prospective writers also worked for Lapham, who pitched his first *Harper's* piece at Elaine's. "I was not particularly close to Morris; I didn't hang out with Larry L. King, Halberstam or Frady," said Lapham, who was an Elaine's regular but sat in "a different part of the restaurant," the part where he said one could easily find a high-stakes poker game. "I was not part of the literary, journalistic crowd. I was friends with them…There were a lot of other writers that would hang out at Elaine's those days; I was more interested in the ones that played poker. It was a movable feast."[198] During one of these feasts, about a half dozen people were sitting around a table and Lapham said to Morris, "Willie, I got a great story in Alaska."[199]

The state had just auctioned $900 million in oil concessions in the Arctic Ocean, Lapham said. He told Morris: "This is Tabula Rasa. No private corruption. They can make utopia. They've got 25,000 people, not counting Indians, and $900 million."[200]

Looking back with 21st Century hindsight, he added, "The legislature fell upon it like Eskimos on a beached whale."[201]

"Willie didn't take very long to think about it," Lapham said. "It took like two seconds." Lapham reflected:

> He was a good editor in that way because he would take chances and he loved talent. He was himself a very talented writer. The proposition was to go for about three months and see what they were doing. I spent two to three months in Juneau and on basis of that piece I became a contributing writer.[202]

Maybe, like Conroy, Lapham's prose, as seen below, can be viewed as prescient. In this case the meaning was unintended, yet fitting, almost a metaphor for the impending collapse of the writing culture that enabled his entrance into the *Harper's* organization.

In Lapham's piece, an opponent to developing Alaska's resources was characterized by an oil company representative as "(a) person who refuses to accept the economic imperatives and therefore dreams foolishly of a lost Eden…."[203] The economic imperatives the Alaskans faced in Lapham's story foreshadowed a similar situation in which Morris found himself soon after and ultimately pressed on the every other member of *Harper's* writing culture: "It becomes a question not of what you want, but of what you're willing to give up…. 'You want gas in the car? Okay, you get oil on the beach.'"[204]

In Morris's situation, the survival of his *Harper's* writing culture hinged on how much he was willing to compromise his leadership style to accommodate the fiscal concerns of the publishers. Morris knew he wanted a wild and open literary frontier and, in his attempt to leverage his star-level literary status to secure his vision from the capitalistic logic that drives oil executives and publishing magnates alike, he inadvertently sacrificed himself.

As Lapham observed the dynamic at work in Alaska, he reflected: "Maybe it is the voices that discourage me, or maybe it is the predictable transformation of the frontier. No doubt I suffer from a literary and therefore false nostalgia."[205]

In acknowledging the conflict between an economic imperative and "a literary and therefore false nostalgia," Lapham unwittingly identifies territory familiar to Morris. His passage captures the philosophical underpinnings of a man yearning for a story apart from capitalistic reality. In his confrontation with the economic imperative, Morris destroyed the object of his affection, sacrificing the very culture that cultivated the vital and engaging work he valued. But the sword cuts both ways: Reflecting on the state's capitulation to oil interests, an Alaskan told Lapham, "Yeah, well, that's the irony in it. We end up destroying the thing we loved."[206]

There is irony in the fact Lapham emerged from the ashes of the writing culture that bore him to later guide *Harper's* to a seemingly stable financial position in the hands of a not-for-profit foundation. Lapham said he did not feel Morris's sacrifice was necessary. "I thought Willie could have worked things out with Cowles," Lapham said. "I thought that then. I think that now….That whole attitude: 'You're a philistine,' is wrong, romantic, fantastical..." [207] But the dissolution of the *Harper's* writing culture resulted in acrimonious arrow-slinging and deep-seeded hatred. Lapham's refusal to resign was interpreted by some inner circle members as mutiny.

Elaine Kaufman, the nurturing restaurateur, took a pragmatic approach:

> Lewis didn't have a job, he didn't have anything going. There was no reason for him not take it. The other guys were hysterical, they acted like ninnies, saying 'You're taking [Morris's] job, you're putting him out of work.' He [Morris] was off the job.

> They sat right over there [after the mass resignation. She points to a table.] They were really children. The job was open. What? Louie shouldn't take it? Let someone else take it? Willie was brilliant, but he couldn't make the compromises you have to. Come off it."[208]

Kaufman nursed the group's wounds and celebrated their accomplishments. King recalled:

> Elaine was a great person to us. She had this rough, tough exterior and she could get rough and tough if anyone made her. But she really did have what she called the family tables that were for the *Harper's* group and three or four others. And we could all go in there at any time and sit down and she didn't let anybody sit there that didn't belong. And that was sort of a little bit of elitism that I approved of.
>
> Some nights I didn't want to be up front and talk to a lot of folks. I just wanted to sit in the back room alone or with one or two others, or maybe just by myself. And she kept bugging me to come up front. I quit even trying to go into Siberia, as she called it. She said "Siberia's for people from Cleveland." [209]

The Role of Alcohol

Alcohol stimulated and encouraged much of the culture building that occurred at Elaine's and the Empire Chinese Restaurant, a favored lunch spot of the *Harper's* staff. The comingled acts of drinking and conversation fed a scene of literary appreciation, politicking and general hobnobbing in which story ideas were conceived, pitched and celebrated.

Determining whether - and to what extent - alcohol consumption affected the performance and ability of *Harper's* editorial staff far exceeds the scope of this inquiry. But the existence of alcoholism within the ranks of the inner circle bears acknowledgment because the disease existed within its ranks. Ultimately, two of the surviving group quit drinking – Larry L. King in 1980 and John Corry in 1982. Heart failure was the official cause of Morris's death on August 2, 1999, at the age of 64. But few doubt alcohol didn't help nail the casket. Morris's drinking habits were legendary.

New York Times obituary author Peter Applebome wrote:

> Mr. Morris drank too much bourbon and red wine, smoked too many Viceroys, stayed up too late and caroused too much. Indeed, friends have marveled at his ability to defy most of the conventions of good health. But, like his writing, his life style betrayed a singular personality, given to long, rambling evocative conversation, and the indelible stamp of his early days in Yazoo City.[210]

While David Halberstam would go out for evening socialization, "he'd nurse a drink," King said. "Willie and I would drink like they were about to take us off and shoot us; and to some extent Frady, too. Back in those days before we knew we were alcoholics, it was a sign of manliness to be able to drink a lot."[211]

On King's stops in New York to drop off new *Harper's* articles written at home in Washington, D.C., he and Morris would retire to "a two-hour liquid lunch."[212]

The practice, King explained, was not limited to *Harper's:*

> The times were much more drinking and partying than they are now. Editors at not only magazines, but book publishing houses, would go out to lunch with somebody every day and stay out two hours drinking. 'When did the work get done?' I wondered. That was the way the culture was. [213]

But, King added, successful members of writing culture did not have a blanket mandate: "I didn't see as much of Kotlowitz as I did the rest of them. I saw him around the office, but Bob was not a barroom journalist as some of us were."[214]

King recalled a mutual friend he shared with Morris who "used to jump on Willie for drinking so much, saying, 'You don't have to drink and die young like Scott Fitzgerald in order to leave a literary legacy, Willie.'" Then King added:

> But I don't think Malcolm [the mutual friend] understood that some of us are simply alcoholics and that it can be inherited to a certain extent, which is what I warned all my kids about. It really has less to do, when you are an alcoholic, with wanting to do it than the fact that somehow you build up a tolerance for it. It doesn't kill at first; it takes years and years, but by that time the damage is done.[215]

King had his last drink in 1980. He married his wife, agent/lawyer Barbara Blaine, in 1978, and "she did not take kindly to my carousing and drinking," King said.[216] Blaine charged King with "the same option that Laura Bush did -- of all things -- to George W.: 'It's me or the booze,'" and King, eager to save his marriage, said he went to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for years. "I don't go anymore because I can't get around very well," he said, gesturing to his oxygen machine. "But I haven't had a desire for a drink since, which is kind of amazing. What I miss is smoking [marijuana]. Of course that what's got me now with this emphysema."[217]

Corry had his last drink around 1982, after discovering he couldn't stop drinking without the assistance of a professional medical staff. "I find giving up cigarettes infinitely harder," Corry said. "The only reason I gave up cigarettes is I came down with a really bad case of pneumonia. Probably the best thing I've ever done in my whole life.[218]

Elaine's was "very trendy" and Corry drank there with Morris and King, "but the other people at *Harper's* really didn't [as much]," Corry said. "Did it make you feel dashing, did it make you feel a certain joie de vivre that you would not have had otherwise? Yes. Were there neurotic reasons where you just want to block things out? Yes."[219]

As one of *Harper's* writing culture's greatest supporters and bulwarks, Elaine just sat back in her chair, maybe giving her head a slight shake when asked if she regretted so generously offering the poison that plagued so many of her favorite writers:

> They were still bright, even in their stupor they were bright; they were amazing. You mean, I'm gonna tell 'em to stop drinking? That was the only thing that was wrong with [Willie]. The only thing I worry about is getting (her writer customers) to eat something. If they got something to eat, they'd be OK….True bright people are not covered by the alcohol… If they have a story, it's there.[220]

For her part, Decter acknowledged participating in the literary scene fueled by alcohol, but she deplores sentimentality toward behavior she believes killed Morris. In a 2006 review of King's *In Search of Willie Morris*, Decter struck a direct and unforgiving chord, tuned to vocalize the deep-seeded and bitter disappointment she said drunks feel when watching their dreams and potential vaporize into an alcoholic haze. The book, Decter wrote:

> is less a biography than the memoir of a friendship, cemented at *Harper's*…and bonded in alcohol and the mutual pretense to a deeper Southern wisdom.

> Mostly this story is told in the boozy tone of an old comrade-in-arms who is memorializing the peccadilloes of a major figure he has known, a figure whose loss is not only the author's but the whole world's. It is thus a false tale throughout, in the way the recitation of heroic memories offered up in the late night is false….
>
> The truth is that Willie was generous, and wanted to be a truly serious, man. He knew what was good, though he was not up to sustaining either what he knew or wanted for himself long enough to become what he might have been. Hence all the evasions and hidings and the never-given-up quarts of bourbon, which undoubtedly not only stymied his gift but led to his premature death…
>
> But the question of how bitterly the story he [King] tells must have been experienced by those stern better angels of Willie's nature is one his own hard-crusted literary imagination does not even come near grasping.
>
> That part of this story – and it is, after all, the story of more than one American literary striver, perhaps even of Larry L. King himself – is not likely ever to be written.[221]

King's book did acknowledge that the inner circle grew evermore concerned about Morris's unpredictability, that "(a)lcohol was becoming an increasing problem…and, unknown to us at the time, he also became dependent on Valium, taking 'a dozen or more' pills daily – potentially, and literally, a deadly combination."[222]

As for the role of alcohol in New York's literary culture of the late sixties, early seventies, Decter described throwing "great big parties" with "cases of liquor."[223] She characterized her time at *Harper's* as "wonderful…surrounded by colleagues I liked and respected and with whom I would drink many a beer and share many a laugh."[224]

Kotlowitz was not above having a cocktail or enjoying a dinner party, but he also liked to be home for dinner with his family and attend to his personal writing projects.

He managed to be straightforward about Morris's alcohol habits and yet, if not sentimental, then hopeful for what might have been. After recounting how Morris had been surprised when *Harper's* owners accepted his hastily mailed resignation, Kotlowitz said Morris was in shock "running around the office shouting 'They accepted it! They accepted it!'"[225]

"He did just what they wanted him to do," Kotlowitz said. And then he offered the following assessment of Morris:

> He was so talented, so gifted; he was so unfair to his gifts and talents so often. He was naïve in many ways. He really was 32. He had a serious drinking problem. That's no secret. That became a problem for everybody else. Willie often didn't get in till noon and then would leave around 2:30.
>
> He had a wonderful generous spirit and personal warmth. What you sensed in what you read about him and by him reflected the man. Without his self-destructiveness, he would have been the greatest American editor of the 20th Century.[226]

Morris's resignation, Lapham's appointment as interim editor and Fischer's return to active leadership demonstrates the continual evolution of writing culture – which is shaped by the literary mentorships and opportunities that personal relationships enable. In the writing culture of *Harper's* under Willie Morris, alcohol played a leading role. So did legendary writers.

To Morris, "the issue was not unreturned phone calls, the issue was censorship," said Corry.

Corry added that he personally felt "a sense of inevitability, a sense it was over" during the months before the mass resignation:

> We were on pretty shaky ground. We could talk about artistic rights and freedom to publish, but the magazine belongs to the person who owns it. Willie'd been good to us and he called in the markers – never overtly, never consciously. Yeah, we all walked except Lewis Lapham - thank heavens. It turned out [Lapham] turned out to be a hell of a good editor. I thought he was arrogant; he thought I was rude. We were both right. [227]

As his former colleagues indicated, Morris was known to duck his editorship's managerial and administrative duties. But after Norman Mailer's "The Prisoner of Sex" dominated Morris's last issue as editor-in-chief, the editor presented it as the central reason for his resignation -- when "it all boiled down to the money men and the literary men."[228]

Mailer

Mailer's "Prisoner," Morris wrote in his resignation letter, "deeply disturbed the magazine's owners. Mailer is a great writer. His work matters to our civilization."[229] Mailer was like the red rose of the journalistic bouquet that blossomed around the *Harper's* scene. King idolized him; Halberstam lost Democratic National Convention press credentials to him; Morris gave him carte blanche to write pieces as long and challenging as he desired.

Mailer's "On the Steps of the Pentagon" manuscript caused "the best and most thrilling [feeling] when that thing came in and we knew what we were going to do with it," Kotlowitz said.[230] Expanded into book form and renamed *Armies of the Night*, Mailer's piece on protest – centered on a 1967 anti-war rally held in D.C. – went on to win the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

Mailer was "the big event," Decter said. "I think Catharine Meyer probably left because of [Mailer]. I think Willie also fired someone because they said Mailer couldn't write. Mailer sort of represented the very last end of the old *Harper's*. When we got through with him, everybody was gone."[231]

Partially due to its length and complexity, Mailer's "Prisoner of Sex" piece contained several elements relevant to the exploration of *Harper's* culture. The article presents a panoramic view of writing culture at large in that it swam through the currents of a larger literary scene, but gained its position and strength by the support of the *Harper's* tributary. "Prisoner" also offers the primary narrative through which *Harper's* writing culture approached the women's liberation movement. During the following exploration of Mailer's work, the text is oriented toward two themes that illuminate a writing culture's contours: 1) his references to writing and the literary scene and 2) his treatment of women's lib as *Harper's* definitive answer to one of that generation's most significant broad-based cultural movements.

Some of the following citations are lengthier than one might find in traditional academic references, but Mailer in particular and *Harper's* writing culture overall eschewed abbreviated treatments of their subjects. To condense passages containing relevant references would run the risk of undermining the implied cultural value of the text.

The fall of 1969 was "the end of the year-of-the polymorphous perverse" and Norman Mailer heard he might win a Nobel. After all, half a year earlier he won a Pulitzer:

> After 21 years of public life he had the equivalent of a Geiger counter in his brain to measure the radiation of advancements and awards in the various salients, wedges, and vectors of that aesthetic battlefield known as the literary pie."[232]

His mental reveries explored the consequence of grasping from the clutches of the world's finest writers the title Famous Nobel Prize Winner (aka FNPW):

> Not Vladimir Nabokov, Famous Nobel Prize Winner; not Robert Lowell, FNPW; not Saul Bellow nor Malamud nor Gunter Grass nor Yukio Mishima nor Jean Genet. Not – he knew three or four huge literary names were eluding him at the moment. Indeed, it would be an embarrassment to win. How could one really look Nabokov in the eye? Or Henry Miller.
>
> By evening, the true report. Samuel Beckett had been given the prize over Andre Malraux. One had to be illiterate not to have thought of either name. Let us hope modesty prevented him from considering his own work for even an instant in comparison. [233]

In the last sentence, Mailer demonstrates similar self-deprecating humor as Kotlowitz used when he suggested that his own pieces were never touched by Morris because "maybe he hated them so much."[234]

If the actual and possible FNPWs were the suns of Mailer's literary galaxy, he treated media members and journalists as fit for nothing better than a table on the far side of Pluto. In discussing his own fame, the following passage provides of an example of how Mailer characterized reporters as lowly, lobotomized zombies:

> [Fame] was no more than a strange face holding a microphone in your own face, and asking questions one had answered a hundred times before…Most of the questions came from philosophical deserts the Media had left behind while washing and scouring the great collective brain.[235]

Mailer extended his treatment of the literary universe's media caste as he set the stage for the primary exercise of his "Prisoner of Sex" piece, dismissing *Time*'s worthiness of carrying his thoughts on the women's lib issue.

His "ghost phallus," or ego or "very reputation" was being "chewed half to death by a squadron of enraged Amazons, an honor guard of revolutionary vaginas," and Mailer found himself questioned by "the Editor/Potentate" of *Time*, whose magazine for a period had "solemnly took him out in the backyard every few weeks to give him a going-over."[236]

The *Time* editor informed Mailer he was the primary target of feminist tongue lashings and asked if the magazine could interview him about his views on the women's liberation movement:

> By the logic of survival, the Editor of *Time* had to be a man whose nose for oncoming trends was so acute that they could feed computers off this judgment. So the wave of Women's Lib, whether on the scene for the summer, a year, an era, or the duration of a great turn of the wheel of history, was then very much a phenomenon.[237]

Mailer encouraged *Time* to run a cover story on the issue, noting the story would be ill-advised only for "innocent or ambitious" writers, "when it appeared out of phase to the movements of their career." But as for Mailer's personal input and insight:

> …only a fool would throw serious remarks into the hopper at *Time*. The subject was far too large for quick utterances: the need of the magazine reader for a remark he could repeat at the dinner table was best served by writers with names like Gore Vidal; besides, it was improvident…. (H)e knew the High Media well enough to recognize that on the moment he agreed to a cover story a process had been initiated which would eventually deposit him in a box of condensed quotations on the middle of the page of a longer story about someone else.[238]

It should be noted that Mailer's previous article for *Harper's* also started by positioning himself with the framework of *Time Magazine*. Mailer's comments imply the existence of different writing subcultures within the larger literary world. Though he may have had multiple intimacies throughout a variety of writing cultures, he made clear his connection of the strongest influence by assuming *Time*'s failure to fully appreciate the scope of his stance on feminism and delivering his article to *Harper's*.

In the case of *Prisoner*, six weeks after his civil dismissal of *Time*'s interview invitation, Mailer saw Kate Millet on the cover as a poster child of the women's lib movement and – in her – found an intellectual whipping post for his musings on feminist philosophy. In his zest for reflecting on the significance of feminism, noting the ideas were "too large for quick utterances," Mailer led his reading audience through the labyrinth of his own personal and professional lives before leaping into a comparative analysis of feminist literature and theory. "Obviously no journalist could have done the job – it was the work of a novelist, or a critical approach," he wrote in another swipe at the journalistic profession. [239]

And inline with its support of work that came to be known as New Journalism, *Harper's* definitive piece on feminism was done as apparently only a critical novelist could. Mailer's "Sex" rested on the conclusion that:

> somewhere in the insane passions of all men is a huge desire to drive forward into the seat of creation, grab some part of that creation in the hands, sink the cock to the hilt, sink it in as many hilts as will hold it; for man is alienated from the nature which brought him forth, he is not like woman in possession of an inner space that gives her link to the future, so he must drive to possess it.[240]

Within a man's "insane passions" lays the need to subjugate women so as to cope with his inability to fully understand her internal mystery, he said. Mailer's piece offered homage to the downtrodden sex, acknowledging the womb as a unique endowment containing an exclusive connection to future, though the lewd, egocentric neurosis – virtually a Mailer trademark - radiating throughout his ruminations and wholesale assault on the feminist movement as typified by the more radical members of the sisterhood muddied any message of true respect for women. [241]

The approach generated letters to the editor of disgust and praise. It also nailed Morris's express hope that *Harper's* would "assume the big dare, move out to the edge, make people mad, edify and arouse and entertain, tell the truth." [242] And it highlights the degree to which edifying and truth telling are often relative, not absolute, acts.

To write "Sex", Mailer spent a summer in Maine, working and spending time with his three girls and two boys aged 4-13. Though admitting it took the help of a mistress, a housekeeper and his daughters to actually make it through the summer, Mailer cast himself what he characterized as the morally credible yet uninteresting role of housewife, suggesting the traditional arena of the woman was ever at odds with the intellectually superior work of writers:

> [he] could immerse himself in the unintriguing subtleties of the thousand acts of order and timing which made the difference between efficient and catastrophic keeping of house – could do all this year after year and never write another word, be content, honorably fatigued, empty of doubt about his worth, free of dread, all credit deposited to his moral foundations, but in no uncertainty that the most interesting part of his mind and heart was condemned to dry on the vine….So he could not know whether he would have found it endurable to be born a woman….
>
> …[he] now possessed an operative definition of remarkable banalities. 'The children almost drive me mad,' was rich in context to him, and he could hardly have done without the lament of the truly wasted, 'I didn't have a thought to myself all day.' They were clichés. They were also paving blocks at the crossroads of existence. Who could deny after an experience like his own that all the big questions might just as well originate here. [243]

But when it came to the writing of *Time* feminist cover-girl Kate Millet, Mailer's sympathies with the female lot evaporated as he indulged in a vituperative vitiation of her efforts:

> By any major literary perspective, the land Millett is a barren and mediocre terrain, its flora reminiscent of a Ph.D. tract, its roads a narrow argument, and its horizons low.… So her land was a foul and dreary place to cross, a stingy country whose treacherous inhabitants (were they the very verbs and phrases of her books?) jeered at difficulties which were often the heart of the matter, the food served at every inn was a can of ideological lard, a grit and granite of thesis-factories turned out aggregates of concept-jargon on every ridge, stacks of clauses fed the sky with smoke, and musical instruments full of the spirit of intellectual flatulence ran in the river, and the bloody ground steamed with the corpse of the amputated quote.[244]

He repeatedly derided what he said was sloppy and incorrect quoting, offering lengthy comparisons of Millet's feminist assessment of Henry Miller's prose to Miller's actual words. Often, Mailer let Miller's words run for almost a page so as to reflect the beauty and nuance of the sexually laced sentiment. Mailer said Millet had Miller's words:

> crudely assassinated, then so unceremoniously dumped, that the poor fellows are now martyrs beneath the sod….(I)f we are able to find such a literary world, when entrance requires no less than resurrection of the corpses in her graves, what is to be said of her method?[245]

Mailer obsessed on the quality of writing in question. He insisted Millet's had no life while Miller's was vibrant because it did not shrink from the honest examination of one's own faults. In his defense of Miller, Mailer flooded the page with a river of words. *Harper's* editorial process did not impede the following 354-word sentence:

Just as the Renaissance was a period in which men dared, as perhaps never before in history, to allow themselves to pursue the line of their thought and embark on exploration with the idea that such activities were good and valid in themselves and so did not have to be initiated with external blessing or forced to scurry under the shadow of inviolable taboo, but rather the world as a theater, and nature a laboratory open to the adventurer with an inquiring mind—so the late Twenties were a species of sexual renaissance where man emerged from the long medieval night of Victorian sex with its perversions, hypocrisies, and brothel dispensations, and set out to explore not the world, but himself, not man of Victorian reason with his buried sexual pocket, but man as himself, Henry Miller, with his brain and his balls in the intimate and continuing dialogue of his daily life, which meant that one followed the line of one's sexual impulse without a backward look at what was moral, responsible, or remotely desirable for society, that one set out to feed one's cock (as man from the Renaissance had set out to feed his brain) and since the effort was pioneer in the very real way that no literary man with the power to shift consciousness had ever given that much attention before to the vagaries and outright contradictions of a stiff prick without a modicum of conscience, no one had ever dared to assume that such a life might be as happy and amusing as the next, that the paganism of a big-city fucker had its own balance, and such a man could therefore wage an all-out war to storm the mysteries with his phallus as a searchlight instead of his mind, because all sexual experience was valid if one looked at it clearly, no fuck was in vain, well, it was a sexual renaissance sure enough, and it depended on a rigorous even a delighted honesty in portraying the detail of one's faults, in writing without shit, which is to say writing with the closest examination of one's own.[246]

In contrast to Millet, Mailer embraced the brand of feminist philosophy peddled by extreme female-power advocate Valerie Solanas, founder of the Society for Cutting Up Men. He riffed on her term "Pussy Envy":[247]

> Yes, three quarters of the men in the world might have it by now, have it just as secretly as the ruling classes of the nineteenth century must have wished for the simple life of the farmer, the worker, the shop girl; yes, the argument that women were a social and economic class exploited by a ruling class of men, that women were finally the largest and most exploited class of them all, more exploited than workers, colonial peoples, and blacks (since women were everywhere exploited and when black, laboring class, or colonial, twice exploited) was an argument which could at least begin to exist in the everyday of common consciousness.[248]

The bottom line, but not the final word, on the women's lib issue, according to Mailer: That women's oppression existed, should be acknowledged and was the result of men pining from their higher-status positions for the more plebian life of domestics and the internal mystery of the womb that would never be theirs.

Nearly 30 pages after his mammoth sentence, Mailer concluded with what may have been humorous jab at his own audacity by writing the following:

> (And so saying realized he had been able to end a portentous piece in the soft sweet flesh of parentheses.)[249]

The length of Mailer's pieces evinced the way Morris gave his writers almost infinite lead to confront stimulating topics for *Harper's*. But the length of the pieces may not have been all philosophical preference; Mailer left little, if any, time for editing. He would lock himself away, hovering over his typewriter as he completed page after page. To meet the printer's deadline for the March 1968 issue, slated to feature Mailer's "On the Steps of the Pentagon," Morris and Decter descended upon Mailer's writing lair/vacation spot in Provincetown, Massachusetts, to wrest from the pages from his hands.

"We took them off the typewriter," Decter said. "Willie would read five pages and hand them off to me. We flew back with the manuscript and lost [Fischer holdover] Catharine Meyer."[250] Officially, Meyer resigned from the magazine where for 24 years she "assumed the responsibility for the accuracy of every word and figure published in the magazine," a *Harper's* obituary noted after her death on November 20, 1972.[251] But Decter said Meyer was displeased with some of the cultural changes Morris led and that he set a tone meant to inspire leadership change at the magazine.[252] No statement from Meyer about the circumstances of her resignation could be found.

Decter contrasted Mailer's writing with Halberstam's, whose style she said separated the world into "good guys" and "bad guys," battling forces of good and evil – "the exact opposite of Norman Mailer, who, after he had been to the two (major political) conventions, noted Nixon's "lovely girls," and who commented that "a man who could have such daughters can't be all bad." David Halberstam took a less nuanced approach, Decter said, and "was no more capable of writing a sentence like that than the man in the moon."[253]

As of the spring of 2007, Mailer's *Harper's* pieces were still thought to hold the record for longest magazine articles ever published.[254] Regardless of how much of Morris's resignation could be blamed on *Prisoner*, Mailer's long-winded and multi-layered approach raised advertiser hackles. *Harper's* Publisher Bill Blair, whose sharp dressing, subway advertising and office redecorating failed to rejuvenate the financial fortunes of the magazine any better than the ongoing editorial efforts, insisted Decter and Kotlowitz devise a defense of the piece to mollify the magazine's roiled corporate benefactors.[255]

America, Home, Politics and the South

Whether through Bill Moyers' "Listening to America," a series of dispatches from Indiana, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, California, Texas, South Carolina and Washington D.C.; Marshall Frady's reports from Hilton Head; or Lapham from Alaska, the pages of *Harper's* were routinely stocked with chronicles of the people, places and politics of the American landscape.

"If you hung around Willie, if you got serious with him, you got serious about a place called America," Decter said. "He had this thing: 'Go back to your hometown. Let's send everybody back to their hometowns!' I went back [to St. Paul, Minn.], sat in the library and learned so much…."[256]

When she "first arrived a yearning young immigrant to New York City, no one had the least difficulty in recognizing me as an immigrant from the deep Middle West," Decter wrote as she considered the significance of her homeland.[257]

In her *Harper's* piece, Decter looked to her town's most famous hometown writer -- F. Scott Fitzgerald:

> What was best about Fitzgerald was the way he understood – as perhaps Middle Westerners preeminently are given the opportunity to understand—the crippling of the spirit that comes in a society incapable of making a clean breast of the order of its valuations. What was worst in him was the seepage from his own ability to make a clean breast of the order of his valuations and so to free himself from them. But they seem to care very little in St. Paul either for or about Fitzgerald.[258]

Decter grew to embrace and adopt New York City as her own, but, she said, Morris "never got over the idea of himself as a southern boy up in the Big Cave where the big boys play."[259] Morris's last major journalistic contribution to *Harper's* confirms Decter's account. The longer he lived in New York, Morris wrote, "the more Southern I seem to become, the more obsessed with the old warring impulses of one's sensibility to be both Southern and American."[260]

A heavy weight on both the Southern and American psyche throughout the country's history, racial relations experienced a period of dramatic change in the mid-20th Century, the milestones of which serve as defining events of the fifties and sixties. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision issued in 1954 insisted on racial integration of schools. By 1969, fewer than 100 black children were attending "white schools" where Morris grew up in Yazoo County, Mississippi.[261] Finally the day came when the issue was forced. The U.S. Supreme Court settled *Alexander v. Holmes* on October 28, 1969, declaring that all-black schools represented de facto existence of the separate-but-equal system rejected in the *Brown* case. Thirty Mississippi school districts, including Yazoo's, were ordered to integrate immediately.[262]

Morris wrote:

> I finally went home because the urge to be there in Yazoo's most critical moment was too elemental to resist, and because I would have been ashamed of myself had I not.
>
> …going back…would bring the most intense emotional pain. The change and attrition of the flesh ("Why, I almost didn't *recognize* you") are, for me at least, too much to bear with grace, much less with the finesse of the dilettante.[263]

Whether Morris referred to changes in himself or in the people of his hometown is not clear. But it seemed he needed the support of his writer peers to help him cope. Morris "could never go home without a crew of his friends," Decter said, explaining that King and her husband, the editor Norman Podhoretz, along with some friends from Texas all returned to Mississippi with Morris to attend a Yazoo City Library function at which he received an award.[264] And in researching his school integration story, Morris described guiding "my friends all over town, showing them the old houses surrounded by magnolias and elms and locust, and also lean-tos and shacks with stilts on the dirt roads of the colored section." [265]

Decter recalled Podhoretz's declaration upon return from his foray to Mississippi that "Yazoo City is an American town; Main Street looks like every other small town. Guess what? A plantation is a farm. Everything is covered in kudzu."[266] But Morris seemed to relish in revealing the mysteries of the South to visiting outsiders, recounting the surprised observations of friends to the unexpected twists in small-town life, such as Podhoretz's response to the ethnic origins of Mayor Jeppie Barbour: "Goddamnit, Willie, You didn't tell me Yazoo has a Jewish mayor."[267]

Decter recalled Morris expressing the reverse-image wonderment of a Dixie boy in Yankeeland during a drive around Provincetown, Massachusetts, with Norman Mailer, who narrated tales of its desolate coast and the pilgrims who rejected it before choosing Plymouth for their initial American landing. "Imagine that: I was shown this place by a Jewish boy from Brooklyn," Decter said Morris remarked. "Imagine that."[268]

To some extent this intercultural mingling of region and religion was reflected in *Harper's* featured content, but the cover stories also reflected some limitations, or possibly subconscious barriers, of the magazine's writing culture. For instance, in one passage Morris expounds on the "terrible burden" of memory that "makes writers a fraternity in blood."[269] His use of the word fraternity betrays the assumption that men occupy the writing desks of consequence.

But Morris was not the only writer bound by psychological or cultural barriers – be they acknowledged or unconscious mental blinders. King recognized his own blind spot in a 2007 interview:

> Women [writers] were few and far between in those days. I'm ashamed to say I didn't even notice it. As the father now of three daughters, I'm much more aware of things that I should have been.
>
> I was always aware of racial discrimination, but never gender discrimination. I can't believe I couldn't see it, but I didn't.[270]

Decter served as an exception of inclusion, far from the normal, unspoken and even unrealized rule. The one time King brought a woman who worked at the *Harper's* office to Elaine's, he was chastised. "Halberstam called me aside and raised hell with me for bringing a – quote – shop girl into our private club," King said.[271]

White men dominated the *Harper's* spotlight, but one of the notable exceptions was published before editor John Fischer promoted Morris to be editor-in-chief. occurred In the March 1967 issue, three young black writers interviewed Ralph Ellison about American writing. But a step forward for one underrepresented group accompanied a separate piece demonstrating the barriers another group still faced: "*A Way Out For Homosexuals*." Not to be confused with a way out of the closet of shame, secrecy and self denial imprisoning many homosexuals then and now, "*A Way Out*" offered a psychiatric diagnosis of "a grave social problem," in which a author Samuel Hadden advocated "an alternative to unthinking 'tolerance' or puritanical rejection in dealing with a widely misunderstood cause of human unhappiness."[272] Even as a celebrated black writer garnered top billings, the "homosexually afflicted" were labeled as a whole "deeply troubled people" to be treated as affected by "a handicapping disorder."[273]

Hadden wrote that "society has a right to expect those afflicted to seek treatment, just as we expect the cooperation of the TB patient."[274] He expressed concern that the root cause of homosexuality involved children deprived of a "healthy psychological development" and, he said, the "treatment of homosexuality is difficult and the outcome uncertain."[275] But, perhaps in a display of what was then considered forward thinking, Hadden deplored "the hostility and contempt which society so generally manifests toward homosexuals."[276]

Under Morris's lead, many white men wrote about black men and racial issues. Halberstam wrote about Martin Luther King, Jr., Larry L. King wrote what he later described as "a love letter" about Louis Armstrong and Peter Schrag wrote about the meaning of "The New Black Myths." Famous civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, who happened to be both black and gay, served as a rare exception to the glaring absence of non-fiction writers of color (and open homosexuality) from the pages of *Harper's*. His article, "*The Failure of Black Separatism*," earned a cover tease in the January 1970 issue. The next month *Harper's* published an excerpt of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Albert Murray's "Stonewall Jackson's Waterloo" was published in the February 1969 issue.

While Rustin's take on racial issues received top billing in the issue, his stance on homosexuality did not. During his tenure, Morris did not much alter the magazine's coverage of the gay community since "*A Way Out*" was printed in 1967. A tagline for Joseph Epstein's "*Homo/Hetero: The Struggle For Sexual Identity*" on the cover of the September 1970 issue ran across a close-up photograph of a muscle builder's pectorals, a racy shot that could easily work as promotion for a gay club. But Epstein's article didn't offer any progressive philosophy:

> *They are different from the rest of us*….in a way that cuts deeper than other kinds of human differences – religious, class, racial – in a way that is, somehow, more fundamental….
>
> One can tolerate homosexuality, a small enough price to be asked to pay for someone else's pain, but accepting it, really accepting it, is another thing altogether.

> I find I can accept it least of all when I look at my children. There is much my four sons can do in their lives that might cause me anguish, that might outrage me, that might make me ashamed of them and of myself as their father. But nothing they could ever do would make me sadder than if any of them were to become homosexual. For then I should know them condemned to a state of permanent niggerdom among men… [277]

The use of language here is particularly interesting in that Morris, so interested in America's efforts to defeat racism, would tolerate the use of a term so often used to isolate and dehumanize blacks. In this instance, the usage affirmed the term's use as a symbolic casting out of a category of people from the halls of acceptable society. But regardless of the appropriate role of censorship in the promotion of constructive social dialogue, the magazine's pieces did meet Morris's mandate of truth telling, at least in the sense that each individual carries a personal sense of truth. It is not necessarily true that a homosexual must live a condemned life (though certainly, then and now, some factions of society condemn openly gay people, and even blacks for that matter), but Epstein wrote of a true fear he felt.

This notion of reflecting larger truths through personal narrative as being important to Morris was also identified by scholar Doug Cumming. "Morris was not writing reminiscences, but writing of himself as a metaphor for America," Cumming wrote.[278] But Cumming also highlighted Larry L. King's observation that the editor "often used words 'to conceal as much as to reveal."[279] Cumming suggested:

> the autobiographical version of young Willie fails to account for the grown man's sorrows, contradictions, and self-destructive urges. King finds it significant that Morris, in all his literary self-reflecting, never conveys the truth that his mother was a cold, domineering, insecure social-climber and his father emotionally absent, almost silent.[280]

Still, in his effort to have *Harper's* "move out to the edge, make people mad, edify and arouse and entertain," Morris succeeded.[281] William Styron's novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which *Harper's* had excerpted in September 1967, caused a critical backlash by black intellectuals.[282] The Epstein piece on the struggle for sexual identity resulted in an actual sit-in at the *Harper's* office.

Decter arrived at work one day to find a small group gathered in front of the building who said, "Come on up. We're having a protest with pastries and coffee." The group occupied the office for hours. "The whole day was taken up by that demonstration, Decter said. She and Kotlowitz met with the protestors and defended the piece after which the group "finally decamped." She said when Morris was notified, he refused to appear – a strategy he frequently employed during times when a socially uncomfortable situation loomed.[283]

As the *Harper's* writers explored their own truths, they began discovered where their opinions differed from one another. John Corry remembered pressing the political envelope with his piece "The Politics of Style," which he said grew out of conversation with and encouragement from Decter.[284] The piece suggested that the Left was all style, no substance, that the Black Panthers and Women's Liberation shared similarities in the tendency of members to "tantrum a lot":

> They wear their oppression like both a badge and an excuse, and they do not seem to be seriously engaged in anything other than being oppressed, and in telling everyone else about it. Being oppressed, sad-assed, and sorry can be a way of life…[and oppressed parties] will fight hard to keep their way of life."[285]

Corry recalled Halberstam warning him "to be careful" in his approach to political/cultural criticism. But, Corry felt no need for coddling of any particular group. "I see very little difference in the Left and Right; an ideologue is an ideologue," Corry said. "It really doesn't matter… I began learning that at *Harper's* and God knows there's confirmation of that today."[286] Later in his careers, Corry wrote a *New York Times* piece about author Jerzy Kosinski that was so angered readers that people – including Halberstam – stopped talking to him.[287]

Lapham echoed Corry's comments with regard to the authenticity of the movements of the time, calling the "revolutionary rhetoric of the sixties" in various instances a "pose," "a charade" and "like a clothes promo."[288] Asked what he meant when he wrote that in *New York Days* what "Morris presents as a golden age I remember as an age of tinsel; his cast of fearless profits I remember as a crowd of self-important Pharisees," Lapham said civil rights activists "were genuine" in their activities, "but it was not true of the journalists."[289] He continued:

> The journalists were just along for ride, to make as much money as possible along the way. I did not take them seriously. They wanted it both ways: Romantic/revolutionary figures paid large sums of money for their displays of conscience.
>
> The whole sixties thing in New York started in San Francisco in '57. By time I got [to California] in '67 the Beat generation was dead. There'd been Zen, revolution, marijuana, LSD, very good jazz, Mort Sahl. By the time it got to New York in the sixties it was déjà vu, four years behind the curve.

> There was objection to war once the draft was extended to the Ivy League schools; no one gave a shit before that – just like now. There were some serious people in the sixties, but not many of them. That's why it failed and the liberal idea kinda dies in the U.S. around '68. It becomes about glamour and celebrity….The sixties made good copy.[290]

Societal unrest of the day also fueled a counter-culture to the counter-culture, a movement known as neo-conservatism; Midge Decter and Norman Podhoretz were instrumental in its establishment. "Everybody drank," she said, but Decter grew fearful as "drugs took over" amongst the younger members of the literary world.[291] Watching as "some people were destroyed," Decter said that facing drug culture at the same time she had the responsibility of raising teenagers was "one of the things that turned us conservative….I felt the radicals were out to get my children."[292] The pressure of the "radicalized" scene "cut very close to the bone," she added, noting that divisions in philosophy were evident within the *Harper's* inner circle. "We were all so very different; probably we were all on the way to a political break-up. It exploded right about the time Willie lost the magazine."[293]

Many of the writers interviewed for this thesis discussed how many, but not all, of the friendships forged at *Harper's* faded after the mass resignations disintegrated the nucleus of their bond. Kotlowitz did not criticize any of his former colleagues, but he expressed sorrow over his lost connection with Decter. "We were all friends; we would have dinner parties," he said. "Suddenly she took a sharp right turn and out of our lives. Here I am, 82 and still stunned…. The hurt is a lesson – it makes you weary, not a useful lesson."[294]

The experience of losing "the perfect job" was also heart-wrenching, but it was temporary in a way that the legacy they left behind was not, Kotlowitz explained. "We knew in our heart of hearts it [the work they created at *Harper's*] was very serious – it would last – that we would all be all right." he said. "We knew that, too."

In Halberstam's eulogy of Morris, he remembered the drive to challenge society through the written word as the editor's driving characteristic:

> There was a purpose to everything Willie did, and the pursuit of that purpose was often painful, for it meant going up against his own people, the people he knew best and loved the most.
>
> For he loved good writing and good books, but what he loved best was this [southern] region and this country….
>
> He knew all too well that the special American burden was race, the terrible legacy of slavery, and he knew that that burden weighed – if only in difference of degree – on the rest of country as well. He knew that Mississippi could not be whole until it began to deal with race. And he knew that as long as America had a region that practiced apartheid, it would not be whole either.
>
> So behind all the charm and all the jokes, the Huck Finn exterior, the better America was the driving purpose of his life.
>
> Race was always on his mind.[295]

Halberstam's assertion is supported by the fact that in his piece on integration in Yazoo City, the only cover story he authored while editor-in-chief, Morris explored his tortured relationship with issues of race in America. And just as the article demonstrated race's central importance to Morris, the piece also suggested he saw a thread that connected all writers.

At their core, Morris said, writers share a common burden that calls them to their craft:

> despite their seasonal expressions of malice, jealousy, antagonism, suspicion, rage, venom, perfidy, competition over the size of publishers' advances -- that common burden is the burden of memory.
>
> It is an awesome weight, and if one isn't careful it can sometimes drive you quite mad. It comes during moments when one is half asleep, or after a reverie in the middle of the day, or in the stark waking hours: a remembrance of everything in the most acute detail from one's past, together with a fine sense of the nuances of old happenings and the most painful reconsideration of old mistakes, cruelties, embarrassments, and sufferings, and all this embroidered and buttressed by one of the oldest of urges, the urge to dramatize to yourself about yourself, which is the beginning of at least part of the urge to create.[296]

The passage validates several of the elements of *Harper's* writing culture discussed in this thesis. Morris's burden of memory drove his passion for America's racial history and evolution; his home state served as not only a focal point, but a caricature of the legacy of inequality and injustice with which the whole country grappled. All at once, his words illustrate why he encouraged *Harper's* writers to report from their own hometowns and, by extension, how his interest in America developed. The passage demonstrates how he could be a part of the literati – with it jealousies, advances and the like – but recognize that writing represented an opportunity to be so much more. That being a writer meant confronting personal discomfort, the specters that haunt one in the middle of the night. To take the weight of feeling and channel it into words captured in ink on pages published for consumption by people who may find that a

stranger's work has given a voice to their own festering and unarticulated burdens. It justifies the practice of analyzing a community of writers as a whole – as a culture.

In his memoir, John Corry captured a sentiment that the rest of his inner circle colleagues all echoed:

> Willie's magazine was about something; Willie cared, and late at night, when his cherubic face turned owlish, he would say that the magazine had to matter. He pronounced it "mattuh," but the meaning was clear, and to matter meant something important – life and death and American literature and the soul of the Great Republic. To matter meant width and breadth and vision. To matter meant you cared.[297]

At a time when America had plenty of ghosts – whether they were members of a choir who had been singing since the first slave ships landed or new ones floating back from Vietnam – *Harper's* writers held to a common value of going deep and confronting the uncomfortable regardless of whether the stories generated enough advertising revenue or were too long for the average attention span in a nation bedazzled by the light of television's growing influence.

Webs of Writing Culture Expand and Contract

Tracing the career paths of writing culture participants helps to define the ever-unwinding and nebulous web of cultural intimacy and influence.

Lewis H. Lapham happened into the *Harper's* mix by virtue of an informal story pitch to Morris at Elaine's Restaurant. He had published only one piece in *Harper's* before Morris facilitated an editorial revolt resulting in at least seven resignations. The degree to which Lapham experienced influence or intimacy within the culture of the magazine's inner editorial circle is limited. He said he was friendly with the *Harper's* staff, but actually entered the office maybe only twice while Morris was editor.[298] He explained:

> I would write a certain number of pieces for an agreed sum of money. I can't remember what that sum was but, for the time and place at 1971 prices, it was good. I don't remember what else I was doing…I was trying to write a novel/screen play. In the fall I began working on a piece about Wall Street. It was going into type just at the moment Willie left *Harper's Magazine*.[299]

Prior to *Harper's* Lapham worked as a reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune* and contributing writer for *LIFE* magazine and *The Saturday Evening Post*. All three folded; historic voices crushed in part caused by America's shifting allegiance to television. Lapham credits *The Saturday Evening Post's* managing editor Otto Friedrich with teaching him "most of what I know about writing English prose and the better part of what I know about editing a magazine."[300]

In Friedrich's leading editorial role at *The Post* – a magazine that, like *Harper's*, held a storied position within the annals of American letters – his influence at the latter publication extended beyond Lapham. He was commissioned in the December 1969 *Harper's* to print advance chapters of his book *Decline And Fall*, chronicling the ultimate demise of *The Post* at the direction of a new, rich eager young owner. Perhaps the *Harper's* crew noted some similar pressures in terms of eroding market share at the

growing pressure of television's tide, if not the tensions of producing the best possible editorial product amidst the distracting direction of ownership.

The *Post*'s owner, Marty Ackerman, said in a *Wall Street Journal* interview that the magazine's current format couldn't compete with television. In his effort to reverse the *Post*'s fortunes, Ackerman pursued active participation in the magazine's editorial direction. Friedrich's story recounted Ackerman's comments to *Post* editor Bill Emerson at one point during what turned out to be *The Post*'s last year in print that, in return for his investment, Ackerman expected the magazine to reflect his personality.[301]

Editorial freedom was the norm for *Harper's* writers working under Morris, but even they weren't completely immune to publishing pressure. When owner John Cowles Jr. wanted Nelson Rockefeller to be president of the United States, King recalled being called into Morris's office:

> "Larry, I hate to ask you to do it, but I'm gonna ask you for the first time in my life to go in the tank for me." [Morris said.]
>
> I said, "What do you mean?"
>
> And he said, "Well, Cowles wants a piece on Nelson Rockefeller and, need I say, he wants it to be a favorable one. I'm not gonna tell anyone else that I'm telling you this, but that's the way it's got to be and I expect you to do it that way."
>
> I really hated doing it and I hated the piece. But I was never satisfied with the piece and was always sorry I agreed to do it, but Willie had always done so much for me I didn't feel like I could tell him no.[302]

Within writing culture at large exist infinite scenes within scenes; *Harper's* inner writing culture was a scene in which the individual actors possessed mutual and exclusive connections to other writing cultures in the larger scene. The effect of these influences affects the path of cultural evolution.

Lapham's experience working for two journals that ceased publication – the *Saturday Evening Post* and *The Herald Tribune* – had a profound influence on the decision he made to stay at *Harper's* even as others reluctantly or angrily resigned. "I was concerned for the institution of the magazine," Lapham said. "I was in a position unlike the other people…like an old cavalry officer who had a lot of horses shot out from underneath him."[303]

Within the webs of writing culture, some linkages are stronger. Executive Editor Midge Decter's connection to Norman Mailer, a close friend of her husband, *Commentary* Editor Norman Podhoretz brought the prize-winning author close to *Harper's* inner circle. John Corry came from the *New York Times*, as did David Halberstam, after beginning his career at a community paper in Mississippi followed by a stint at Nashville's *Tennessean*. Morris spent his early years at the *Texas Observer* where he crossed paths with a young Bill Moyers and soon-to-be President Lyndon Johnson, among others. The people and experiences each individual encounters influence their development as writers. And these encounters don't happen at static points throughout history; they are in continuous motion throughout a person's life. And as people with their various backgrounds and realms of influence converge with the like-minded purpose of creating something like a magazine, they are at once influenced by and influencing cultural development. The writers carry with them these connections; some of these

connections are mutual, some influence a single individual. Some connections and influences fade over time, others grow stronger. King and Halberstam, for instance, contacted each other often – even weekly – until Halberstam's death in April 2007.[304]

These linkages underscore the dynamic nature of the cultural construct, demonstrating the impossibility of drawing impermeable lines around a subculture and trying to examine its underpinnings without at least acknowledging an overarching and multidimensional cultural influence that is greater than the subculture under review.

Beyond the influence that Otto Friedrich's story may have had on *Harper's* inner circle in terms of acting as a warning about the dangers of ambitious, young ownership, the story also presented an example of the ever-evolving connections among writers. In his story about Ackerman, Friedrich referred to a story Marshall Frady had written for *The Post*. By the time *Harper's* published Friedrich's piece, Frady was a contributing editor for Morris. Likewise, Lapham straddled the spheres of both *Harper's* and *The Post*. The webs contract and expand.

Chapter 5
Conclusion:
Writing Culture Captures the Historical Consciousness of Journalism

Inspired by the lofty success Willie Morris achieved as a young writer with a maverick approach to editorial leadership and curious about the legacy associated with a tenure cut short in spectacular fashion, this research set out to ask what more could be learned from a man and a magazine that had already served as the central subject for several articles and books. What questions had not been asked or answered? Was a lens available to provide a new perspective?

Anecdotes of New York's late sixties literary society abounded in existing books and popular magazine articles, but it seemed that a defining undercurrent unique to the life of journalists lay scattered in fragmented allusions. This realization launched an attempt to illustrate a formless, yet powerful force. The central question behind this work asked, "What fertilizes the breeding ground that fosters the continuous production and review of the written word?"

This study proposed a cultural force was at work. The ensuing investigation sought to examine the process and practice of writing as a form of cultural experience and expression. The *Harper's Magazine* of Willie Morris served as a base from which a portrait of writing culture would be drawn.

The research process yielded a fruitful harvest of cultural artifacts that, taken together, helped shape an idea of writing culture as an intangible, yet influential and ever-evolving force in the lives of journalists. Writing culture influences and is influenced by the people it encompasses, like a web formed of cascading thread stretching in an uneven and potentially endless pattern. The structural characteristics of writing culture shift depending on which angle the lens of observation tracks, just like the shape of a web would shift depending upon the perspective from which it was viewed.

This shifting of angle allowed surviving members of *Harper's* writing culture to contribute new thoughts to old stories by considering their experience through a new framework. Instead of a myopic focus on the drama that accompanied the end of the Willie Morris days at *Harper's*, the writers' experiences were considered as a whole larger than the sum of its parts. In weaving together the writers' thoughts about the work they produced at *Harper's* with the trail of text they left, this study presented writing culture as an alternative to chronological history or biography. In so doing, it freed the individuals under examination from the constrictions of their historical relationships, allowing them to move into more reflective, even instructive, space.

For instance, the existing textual archive offered evidence of obvious divisions between writers such as Larry L. King and Lewis H. Lapham. But when the object of inquiry shifts away from drama and tension and toward the foundations of writing culture, even the most dissimilar people return to a common table. Both men's comments underscore an appreciation of the written word's power and of Willie Morris's tendency to encourage writers to follow ambitious projects. A focus on writing culture is not so much interested in whether individual writers consider the others in their group as friends; it is interested in what propels them to pursue their craft. Previous accounts of this period in *Harper's* history have not offered any appreciation for Morris by Lapham or any appreciation of Lapham by the remaining members of *Harper's* inner circle. This work allowed both to emerge. By reflecting on how he came to pitch his first piece to Willie Morris, Lapham also came to say that Morris was both a good editor and writer and acknowledge that Morris "would take chances and he loved talent."[305] Several of the inner circle members, though lacking personal warmth toward Lapham, acknowledged his role in saving the magazine from financial destruction.

Personal divisions and professional challenges were not altogether overlooked, however. Comments from writing culture participants also illuminated the inescapable, and sometimes painful, evolution writing culture takes as those who share in its creation drift apart, as demonstrated by Robert Kotlowitz's remarks about losing his connection to Midge Decter.

By focusing questions on writing and editing, the interviews were able to illuminate the difficulties that can be associated with editing a prolific writer or how one editor's drinking problem can affect a larger community. Questions about writing assignments and editing revealed that King's own editorial hero, Willie Morris, at one point asked him to sacrifice his journalistic ideals by going "in the tank" to write a puff piece on Rockefeller.[306]

This research asked interview subjects to identify important elements of their experience as writers at *Harper's*. Their responses identified the universal importance of the word to the *Harper's* writing culture, a value that held regardless of political persuasion or subsequent career path. By keeping a central focus on the writing at *Harper's*, the interviews that form the foundation of this work offer an unparalleled panoramic perspective on how these particular writers cultivated their craft. This research elicited new commentary from the participants of writing culture on their varied approaches to the task of writing, the experience of editing and the ultimate meaning of the work *Harper's* produced.

In setting the theoretical framework for this exploration of writing culture, theories of language, culture and media were reviewed in search of ties between the process of writing and the practice of journalism.

Cultural anthropologists and journalism studies of the past had explored communities of writers; the theories used in those works implied the existence of writing culture, but as it applied to the ever-evolving sphere in which journalists work, the term had yet to be defined.[307] Still, earlier studies did offer inspiration and validation for exploring "how journalists construct knowledge about themselves" and the creation of "community through discourse."[308]

Culture is a nebulous form, notorious for its evolving nature. As James Clifford said, cultures "do not stand still for their portraits."[309] A definitive method for capturing culture's essence, especially as it applies to journalists who, like Clifford said of ethnographers, "affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered" is not laid out in journalism studies texts.[310]

The act of writing creates a channel through which an individual's mental landscape finds concrete expression as thoughts transform to words captured on paper. Writing can remain locked in a personal journal as an imprisoned and controlled expression, but professional writers move that work to public space, first during editorial review and finally in the laps of a larger audience. Some of the cultural influences working on writers can be noted in their work. But culture is not a one-way street; its influences affect writers' work and the work of writers may, in turn, influence cultural exchange and evolution. Bernard Cohen suggested this sort of influence when he said "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about."[311]

Culture provides a framework for social exchange where shared sets of meanings given to words and actions are defined, refined, revised, reinterpreted or rejected. Anthropologists and sociologists spend lifetimes investigating, defining and measuring the consequences of how meaning is expressed and interpreted.

And so, with *Harper's Magazine* under Morris's editorial control delineated as this study's space and time of observation, the investigation launched into theory-building territory. It asked whether a review of what was written and said about writing by those involved with *Harper's* during the period in question would identify elements that could help define writing culture and, by extension, validate its use in journalism studies.

The challenge of defining writing culture involved confronting two distinct, yet dependant elements – form and function. To address this task, this research cast writing culture as cascading webs of intimacy and influence. Intimacy represents networks of personal connections - form; influence harkens the degree to which those connections foster cultural evolution - function.

When Willie Morris accepted *Harper's* chief editorship and began to actualize a cavalier vision of journalistic possibility, a writing culture – defined as a web of intimacy and influence - could be traced. Expanding from Morris, it encompassed his inner circle of writing comrades: Robert Kotlowitz, Midge Decter, Larry L. King, David Halberstam, John Corry and Marshall Frady. Lewis Lapham joined the network of *Harper's* writers toward the end of their tenure, but he never coalesced as an inner circle member. Instead Lapham became the link to another generation of *Harper's* writing culture that

germinated as the central members of the previous iteration dispersed to lodge in and influence new cultural landscapes.

Facilitated by Elaine Kaufman and other lubricants of literary society, additional layers of *Harper's* writing culture grew around the inner network of staff writers, enveloping the marquee names commonly associated with the magazine during the Morris years: Norman Mailer, Seymour Hersh, Gay Talese and Bill Moyers, to name some leaders.

Just as it could be traced forward beyond Morris, *Harper's* writing culture could be traced back before Morris, too.

Morris and Kotlowitz were connected to the former Editor-In-Chief John Fischer by way of the working relationship they had with Fischer before the magazine's editorial transition. The cultural bonds forged within the inner circle that surrounded Morris displaced the writing culture in place before the transition, pushing Old Guard members like Russell Lynes, Marion K. Sanders and Catharine Meyer to the fringes of intimacy and influence.

In exploring the intangible force of writing culture, the following theorems emerged: Each individual influenced and was influenced by the *Harper's* writing culture; each individual experienced cultural influences beyond *Harper's* and the evolution of *Harper*'s writing culture was not dependent on just one person. Neither the culture nor its participants could be reduced to a single unique factor.

The fundamental premise of this work rests on the idea that an understanding of the primary elements of writing culture will emerge through an analysis of how writers working at a particular time for the same magazine approached their work and viewed the work of their colleagues. Though deceased, Willie Morris left documentation of his experience at *Harper's* through his writing, as had many of his colleagues. The magazine itself plus memoirs, articles, books and interviews with surviving members of the staff and those who were intimately involved with them offered additional material from which to base an exploration of the nebulous concept of writing culture.

A review of the *Harper's* archive from 1967 to 1971 revealed premium placement for work on politics, race, the Vietnam War and the people and places of America. The cover designs usually teased the writings of inner circle members, reflecting the value placed on writing produced by the people most closely associated with the writing culture. Considering the magazine's journalistic inventory in light of subsequent pieces by and interviews with members of *Harper's* editorial inner circle, a group of themes was distilled around which this thesis framed cultural orientation and function.

At the base of *Harper's* writing culture it was determined that, not surprisingly, all members shared a deep love of words and an appreciation for their arrangement – probably a characteristic that is shared in writing culture at large, as it is surely not unique to Willie Morris or *Harper's*.

But Morris and his crew were not happy with arranging words in conventional ways. And this predilection offered insight into their particular iteration of writing culture. This study posits that definitions of what constitutes good writing can reveal characteristics that may define writing subcultures – such as the one examined in this work. By tracking a journal's or a writer's history, this work suggests one may see the evolution of writing culture as the webs of intimacy and influence expand and contract. This was demonstrated through a comparison of the styles and editorial approaches favored by Morris and his predecessor John Fischer. The writing culture of *Harper's* during the Willie Morris years favored a flagrant use of words in contrast to the carefully clipped and simplified style typified by Fischer.

This research also took note of how collegial interaction influenced writing culture; it explored how the writers expressed humor, how alcohol and social environment fostered their work and how these elements affected the evolving web of intimacy and influence. Willie Morris appreciated lively displays of humor, especially in the form of practical jokes, and he preferred boozy social interactions to dry ones. The degree to which different members of *Harper's* writing culture embraced hard drinking and boyish humor varied, but these themes shaped everyone's experience writing for the magazine. This premise is justified not just by several accounts of story assignments hatched over cocktails at Elaine's, but also by the way alcohol influenced some writer's time-management decisions.

Also, a brief review of some of the magazine's preferred topics, such as race and the American condition, were considered for what their treatment could reveal about *Harper's* writing culture.

At the outset of this academic adventure, Norman Mailer was an ancillary character, not a central focus. But the methodology drew him in. Not only did his pieces occupy more space and undivided spotlight than anything else presented during the period of examination, but inner circle members all treated him with a particular reverence not extended to any other writer within the *Harper's* framework.

While members of the *Harper's* editorial staff may not have agreed with everything Mailer wrote, his influence on their discussions and experiences at *Harper's* was unparalleled by any other writer. The *Harper's* framework for Mailer's three articles – "On the Steps of the Pentagon," "Miami and Chicago," and "The Prisoner of Sex," thrust him to an unequalled position of prominence. Two of the three covers – featuring Mailer's first and last piece published under Morris – were completely dedicated to Mailer's work. The articles gave new meaning to a magazine-length article, running not just a few thousand words, but the entire length of the magazine. Such unprecedented spotlight treatment implied that nothing was important enough to eclipse Mailer's work.

In examining his work "The Prisoner of Sex" for evidence of expressions of *Harper's* writing culture, this research identified a dichotomy Mailer drew between the lowly journalistic media and the literary gods, which provided underpinning to the general position that *Harper's* writing should somehow transcend ordinary journalism, that the magazine's pages should feature only the best writing on the market.

Mailer's position at the nexus of the writing culture of *Harper's* during the late sixties and early seventies exemplifies the cultural shift that accompanied Morris's editorship. The pieces celebrated by inner circle members underscored the contrast between Willie Morris's acceptance of longer-form, experimental pieces and the crisper, clean style associated with John Fischer.

Mailer emerged as not only an actor within the web of intimacy and influence, but his work served as an object of cultural reference – his articles embodied the ethos of *Harper's* writing culture. "The Prisoner of Sex" served as *Harper's* answer to the women's liberation movement – a defining cultural movement of the Baby Boomer generation. Being right or fair was not the point. The article represented Mailer's version of truth. Morris upheld such personal literary exploration of contemporary issues as a high journalistic ideal, a central tenant of the writing culture he fostered; he didn't care if readers got mad just as long as *Harper's* articles gave the country "some feel of itself and what it is becoming."[312]

Other articles offered insight as to how the *Harper's* writing culture encountered topics such as sex, race and the American condition, as well. The explorations offered in this thesis scratched just the surface of the ways in which a writing culture processes its place within a greater cultural universe. Still, it aims opens the door for future research to further pursue these ideas.

The aperture of the lens applied to writing culture determines what elements pop into focus. It could be dialed back to consider a long-term exploration of writing culture, from *Harper's* inception, or U.S. writing culture at the turn of the century, or even a history of writing culture throughout time. The wider the scope, it seems the less likely the individual influences will be captured, but different elements of cultural construction, impact and evolution could sharpen.

At its core, an investigation of any sort of writing culture can proceed from two basic premises. First, that written communication is a cultural artifact that provides a record of the culture under which it was created. Second, that by focusing on what writers write as well as what they say about their writing and the writing of their peers, an instructive narrative emerges.

The theoretical approach employed in this research is not positivistic and cannot provide with statistical accuracy a singularly correct definition for writing culture because the webs of intimacy and influence are ever-changing and shift according to the angle from which they are viewed. But given a particular set of writers within a defined historical period, this approach can provide a sense of their cultural foundations. It embraced the challenge James Carey laid out for journalism researchers when he wrote:

> The task of cultural history, then, is this recovery of past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness…not merely to recover articulate ideas…but a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living. [313]

It should be noted that for all the histrionics about the headiness of being associated with a journal of such literary merit as *Harper's*, all the anecdotal evidence indicated Morris also authorized the best payment on the journalistic scene. His liberal spending lent concrete value to the philosophical importance he placed on cultivating the best writing talent. Money enabled the celestial bodies of the day's literary stardom to align their orbits with *Harper's*. The magazine's writing culture offered a journalistic freedom that couldn't be found elsewhere, even for writers working at such lofty levels as *The New York Times*. The financial direction of the magazine was a primary object of friction between *Harper's* editorial and publishing ends.

David Nord suggested that a "without 'new social history' of production and consumption – of writing, publishing and reading – the texts of mass media cannot be read."[314] This thesis does not meet his challenge to explore the consumption of mass media, but it does offer a new social history by addressing the creative environment that fostered the written works of *Harper's* from 1967-1971. Using the groundwork laid in this study, future efforts can now link the business side of media, including consumption metrics, to the base of writing culture.

The writing culture of Willie Morris conflicted with the publishing culture of *Harper's* ownership, and it must be acknowledged that the work of this thesis only tells part of the story. Certainly an analysis of the magazine's balance sheets, circulation and readership response would expand an understanding of the magazine's cultural mechanics. But adding those elements threatened to be too ambitious in scope for this particular analysis in that it would have risked derailing the central purpose of elucidating the writing culture as presented by those actually involved with the writing. The

foundation laid in this thesis provides a framework future studies may use to expand the scope of examination.

The dearth in rigidity of the cultural construct does not present an insurmountable obstacle to meaningful research. The flexibility allows the time and place of study to help dictate the perimeters of the project; helping the researcher to avoid at least some of the pitfalls associated with a participant of one place and time assigning meaning to those occupying distant cultural territory.

Still, limitations exist. To paraphrase Maryann Yodelis Smith, an accounting of relationships among people and events can offer a history of communication, not *the* history of communication.[315] This thesis attempted to provide a framework for understanding writing culture, not *the* definitive framework through which *Harper's* or any other writing culture must be interpreted.

Harper's writing culture was not limited to the themes addressed in this work and the themes were not necessarily unique to *Harper's* writing culture, but they provided a sense of the variety of ideas and expressions through which its culture existed. And the particular arrangement of these themes around the lives of the people examined herein does offer a glimpse of a writing culture that belonged to *Harper's* alone.

In unwinding the thread connecting the web of intimacy and influence that evolved around the inner circle of *Harper's* under the leadership of Willie Morris, this research encountered additional stories and characters at just about every junction as the thread spun off in new directions. And in the oral histories collected during the interviews, the process also offered the opportunity for writers to reflect on the ways in

which greater meaning could emerge from their experience at *Harper's*, something beyond the value of one individual story – something beyond good, bad, right and wrong.

Interview participants knew this work would stand as a chapter in journalism history and it gave them a chance to explain, as Kotlowitz did, that a writer's life can be tough. But it also gave them a chance to emphasize the importance of following one's calling.

"Do what you want to do, don't compromise; it will cause you to live your life in agony," Kotlowitz said, noting he saw people sacrifice their dreams in favor of a seemingly safer path "countless times….It's living death."[316]

Through spoken words like those and written words like Morris left in his manifesto of journalistic vision, the webs of intimacy and influence expand, and writing culture makes its transition, evolving from one generation to the next.

Appendix 1: The Cast of Characters and their Contributions
(The nucleus of *Harper's* writing culture: July 1967 – April 1971)

Willie Morris, editor-in-chief
(1934-1999)

"About This Issue," (Introductory pieces celebrating *Harper's* contributors running monthly from April 1969 through April 1971, except February 1971 when Jonathan Aaron of Williams College English department took over to introduce James Jones' novel excerption of *The Merry Month of May*.)

"Yazoo…Notes on Survival," June 1970

"Provincial in New York," (Two-part excerpt of *North Toward Home*), June, July 1967

John "Jack" Fischer, contributing editor and former editor-in-chief
(1910-1978)

Monthly "Easy Chair" columns (Ranging from "A different kind of campus: The experiment at Santa Cruz" in July 1967 to "A modest contribution to the marijuana and folklore industries in April 1971.")

Robert Kotlowitz, managing editor
(b. 1924)

"Taps At Utah Beach," October 1969

"Performing Arts: The Making of 'The Angel Levine,'" July 1969

"Books/Review: The Rebel as Writer," June 1969

"Performing Arts: Into the Fillmore East," May 1969

"Performing Arts: Aspects of Love," April 1969

"Performing Arts: Film: Short Takes," March 1969

"Performing Arts: Ballet: Saran Wrap Paradise," February 1969

"Performing Arts: Victims: Two Films and a Play," January 1969

"Performing Arts: Star!...Finian's Rainbow…Hot Millions," November 1968

"Performing Arts: Hair: Side, back, and front views," September 1968

"Performing Arts: Televisions Finest: An Emmy Log," August 1968

"Performing Arts: Short Takes," July 1968

"Performing Arts: The Fragile Ego: A Tenor Named Corelli," June 1968

"Performing Arts: Films: Intellectuals of the World," May 1968

"Performing Arts: From the Fourth Rose: American Types," April 1968

"Performing Arts: Capote's Killers, and Others," March 1968

"Performing Arts: Films: The Bigger They Come," January 1968

"Performing Arts: New Films: Adultery, Murder and a Big Revolution," December1967

"Performing Arts: Roseland," November 1967

"Performing Arts: Questions of Passion," October 1967

"Performing Arts: If You Must Build a Cultural Center," July 1967

"Performing Arts: Four Films from Europe," June 1967

Midge Decter, executive editor
(b.1927)

"St. Paul and the American condition," June 1969

"Books/Review: The Stevenson we lost," February 1969

"Anti-Americanism in America," April 1968

"Sex, my daughters, and me," August 1967

David Halberstam, contributing editor
(1934-2007)

"The Programming of Robert McNamara," February 1971

"The End of a Populist," January 1971

"Baseball and National Mythology," September 1970

"Mr. Nixon Meets the Language," July 1970

"Lyndon and Walter, Telling It Like It Is," May 1970

"The Questions Which Tear Us Apart," February 1970

"Ask Not What Ted Sorensen Can Do For You," November 1969

"The Very Expensive Education of McGeorge Bundy," July 1969

"President Nixon and Vietnam," January 1969

"The Man Who Run Against Lyndon Johnson," December 1968

"Daley of Chicago," August 1968

"Travels With Bobby Kennedy," 1968

"Notes From the Bottom of the Mountain," June 1968

"Claude Kirk and the Politics of Promotion," May 1968

"Politics 1968: McCarthy and the Divided Left," March 1968

"Voices of the Vietcong," January 1968

"Return to Vietnam," December 1967

"The Importance of Being Galbraith," November 1967

"The Second Coming of Martin Luther King," August 1967

"Love, Life and Selling Out In Poland," July 1967

Larry L. King, contributing editor
(b. 1929)

"The Road to Power in Congress," June 1971

"The Old Man," April 1971

"Books in Brief: Saturday's America (By Dan Jenkins)," January 1971

"Blowing My Mind at Harvard," October 1970

"What happened to Brother Dave?" September 1970

"LBJ's Secret Brother Meditates on History," April 1970

"Confessions of a White Racist," January 1970

"Warren Burnett: Texas lawyer," July 1969

"Harold E. Hughes: Evangelist of the Prairie," March 1969

"Good Night Chet, Goodnight David, Goodnight Rosemarie," November 1968

"Inside Capitol Hill: How the House Really Works," October 1968

"Recreations…and an epitaph," October 1968

"Lindsay of New York," August 1968

"The Grand Ole Opry," July 1968

"An Epitaph for LBJ," April 1968

"The Cool World of Nelson Rockefeller," February 1968

"Everybody's Louie," November 1967

"A Legal Party Line," September 1967

"Roughing it in the Football Business," August 1967

John Corry, contributing editor
(b. 1933)

"One Day in the Life of Guy Vander Jagt (R.-Mich.)," April 1971

"Mrs. Lieberman of Baltimore," February 1971

"Television/Review Watching It," December 1970

"The Politics of Style," November 1970

"A Man Called Perry Horse," October 1970

"Son of the Catskills: Portrait of a Country Boy, Making It," September 1970

"The Best Bartender in New York: Evenings in a Very Respectable Place, With an Old-Fashioned Professional Man," August 1970

"Books in Brief," August 1970

"Washington, Sex, and Power," July 1970

"The Many-Sided Mr. Meany," March 1970

"The Los Angeles Times," December 1969

"Greece: The Death of Liberty," October 1969

"The Return of Ted Williams," June 1969

"Castro's Cuba: Drums, Guns, and the New Man," April 1969

"God, Country, and Billy Graham," February 1969

"Strom's Dirty Movies," December 1968

"The Iowa Republicans: Politics without Passion," June 1968

"Cardinal Spellman and New York Politics," December 1967

Lewis H. Lapham, contributing editor
(b.1935)

"The Coming Wounds of Wall St.," May 1971

"About This Issue," May 1971

"Environmental Conflict: Alaska: Politicians & Natives, Money & Oil," May 197

Interviews

A note about these notes from author Rebecca M. Townsend: I wasn't planning on sharing them. My resistance was informed by a journalistic culture that drives people to jail to protect their notes. But during the defense of this thesis, committee member Lee Wilkins reminded me that reputable academic papers must reference discernable data. I conceded this point and consented to appending an edited version of my interview notes.

In a perfect world, these interviews would be taped on radio-quality audio equipment. Instead they were captured on a cheap digital recorder, transcribed and then erased to make room for subsequent interviews. A technical error botched the Kotlowitz recording, but a transcript of the written notes was created immediately after the interview. I regret I cannot share the amazing experience of sitting with these authors through their own voices, expressions and character. But I did the best I could to adequately record and transmit the ideas they shared. I thank them for their trust and take full responsibility for any shortcoming in my work.

The following pages contain edited interview transcripts of the conversations upon which much of this thesis is based. In some places my notes are incomplete or the tape recording was garbled. In cases where a general meaning was conveyed, but the exact words said were indeterminable, the section is recorded within parenthesis. For sections where extra context is necessary to understand the dialogue, I've done my best to include the information in brackets.

Edited John Corry Interview, Oct. 29, 2007.
(Includes contributions from Corry's wife Jean Herskovitz)
Their Upper-West Side apartment, New York City.

[How would you define *Harper's* writing culture?] A sense of excitement and a high tolerance for eccentricity. Midge would grumble a bit about Halberstam (but it was muted). (It was like) at worst, Halberstam would never understand an idea. If you told him an idea, he wouldn't recognize it. David was an enthusiast.

I went in 1968 and in the beginning, those were the birthdays of the neo-conservatives, Midge and Norman, of course, and Jean Kirkpatrick and, oh, about a half dozen people that you can fit into one living room on the Upper West Side. Politics is quite something. What they've become, I'm appalled. Midge was laying the foundation – it was meant as a bulwark against the cultural left (passionate – fresh ideas and David was clearly going the other way.) No warfare. No animosity. I had a good deal of respect for Midge as a pencil editor or idea person.

A couple times I heard her grumble about David…(a piece about Al Gore's father). To say fired up would be too munch.

Here's where it was political: I wrote a piece called "The Politics of Style" that grew out of a conversation I had with Midge. She said, "Write about it". I said, "I will. Thanks, Midge." What the piece said was: What is the Left? It's all style not substance. At Kennedy's inauguration Robert Frost read this awful poem that made no sense at all. So I began the piece that way. In the piece I attack.... the *Village Voice*, and a particular writer called Jack Newfield….. Criticized all the Georgetown intellectuals.

(David Halberstam said) you have to be careful.

Eccentricity. There was a lot of drinking, but that was me and Willie and Larry when he was in town. We went around the corner to Elaine's.

Willie was a real reporter, and a good pencil editor. He would never embarrass a writer. Some of the stuff turned in was unintelligible.

Willie and I were at Elaine's with Larry King. Willie and Jean were at Oxford together. At 11 or 12 o'clock at night Willie said "Let's get Jean over to Elaine's." So Larry was dispatched and rang Jean's doorbell and brought back Jean. And Jean sat next to me. And that began a relationship that lasted on an off for quite a few years, on and off. Jean went off and got married. I made a terrible second marriage (because I was) tired, exhausted and probably drunk.

I was the *Times* house conservative as a television critic. Could parlay that into something. The week before I was supposed to move to Washington I turned on a rerun of MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour and I saw Jean being interviewed about something in the [Nigeria's] Delta. Got in touch with her. And we had our first date, saw her for the first time in 15 years on Jan. 5, 1996. The next day was my birthday and we had our second date…. Thank God I turned on the television that night.

There wasn't much interoffice sex. I only know of one instance where a writer had a relationship with someone who worked there. Willie's sexual affairs were outside the office. He was married to Celia, eventually met Mariel Murphy.

If Willie trusted you (and Wille trusted me), you were simply left alone.

Agonize… I'd turn it in at the very last minute. I'd sit in the office all night, smoke endless packs of cigarettes, make myself quite ill. ……

At the *Times*, still right up against a deadline. It's quite neurotic and I'm aware of this. I can use deadlines the same way I could use alcohol. Keep the deadline in front of you, agonizing over it as a way of numbing yourself against something else. That's bad psych 101, but I think there's something to this. I no longer drink….But to stop drinking (McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass. five weeks). There was a friend of mine told me that I couldn't stop drinking and he said "Check yourself into a hospital." And I said "Me? I'm not an alcoholic." A week later I was in the hospital. About 1982. I find giving up cigarettes infinitely harder. The only reason I gave up cigarettes is I came down with a really bad case of pneumonia. Probably the best thing I've ever done in my whole life.

Elaine's very trendy. I'd been a heavy drinker all my life. I think Willie had too, though I don't know. I had begun drinking at a very young age. Larry drank when he was around but the other people at *Harper's* really didn't.

Drinking was involved. Did it make you feel dashing? Did it make you feel a certain joie de vivre that you would not have had otherwise? Yes. Were there neurotic reasons where you just want to block things out? Yes.

Hot magazine in those years, so it really was a very small circle and in a way it was continual party. Each issue was exciting. Each issue was a triumph. Each issue was fun.

I owe Willie Morris a lot. A lot. He gave me three very good years.

I'd turn the piece in. He'd say, "OK, Corry," or "That's good." That's it. I never expected to be praised. I didn't need praise, I've always written pieces for myself.

….When writing has meant something to me, it would be how a sentence sounded. If I could get that right rhythm … (The piece that turned into *Friends At Last*) I

started re-reading it and I must have re-read it 100 times…It was how could I have made it better? After about 100 readings I realized if I had changed one or two words, taken out a comma it would have improved the piece.

It was my own internal rhythm. It's all I've ever known about writing. And it's difficult to do. I can hear the rhythm. I can do that now, go back and read the *New York Times*…a good piece and it was 20 years later, I can tell where a copy editor screwed it up.

That book you read [*My Times*], I had such a difficulty getting that damn thing published. I could never get it past page two because I'd read page one and I'd think, "Goddamned it, I didn't write that, the editor changed that, the editor changed that." I'm very difficult. Every editor at the *New York Times* hated me. We were friends, but they all hated to work with me. And I don't blame them. I was a first-rate prima donna.

Willie knew that I didn't need praise so he didn't praise me. It was fine. We had a very good relationship. (No need to be a prima donna) I don't think Willie changed 10 words in my three years at *Harper's*. It was a very nice three years.

[The lady Willie wrote in an "About This Issue" entry for Corry's Cuba story…] A writer I used to have several affairs with. I learned something about the world of ideas and of the world of politics. It was quite formative for me.

In the book [*My Times*] I wrote about Jerzy Kosinski, who I first met at *Harper's* and the impulse came… (I wrote in 1982 a long piece about him.) People stopped speaking to me, including David Halberstam. Anyway, that was the piece I wanted to do. (Everyone was afraid of Abe Rosenthal at the time. Abe was enchanted with….he also knew Jerzy Kosinski…therefore I had written that piece to please Abe Rosenthal.)

Harper's was having a reception. Jerzy came over and said he wanted to meet me, said he had seen my story on Billy Graham….suggested we write a book together. ("What's the biggest topic you can think of?" he asked. Life and death.)

Norman Mailer said there were three reasons to write: Money, Sex and Fame. I guess I reached the point where it was money.

When I was at the *Times* in the 1960s, I had no idea how good I was. That sounds a little strange. There was something called the New Journalism. And Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese, Jimmy Breslin… The *Times* didn't know what to do with me. I started out in sports as a copy [staffer]....then on to the national desk. I started writing for the *Times* just on accident. I was the first copy editor they hired to write. I forced them to give me bylines.

Wanted to get out of the *New York Times* and try something….so I applied for the Neiman, did not know the *Times* stricture that you weren't supposed to apply. I got it and had a lovely year at Harvard.

In the book, I quote myself… Drug culture, just dazzling when it appeared. Now I think "My God, did I really write that crap?" It was quite new and it was different. I did a few stories like that. It's how I got to *Harper's*. I was part of the New Journalism. There wasn't that much of a division in my mind between journalism and working at *Harper's*. I was already a path breaker from the *New York Times*, yet I didn't know it. I knew I was doing interesting things; I was noticed. A lot of people [said]…"Who is this guy? He was an editor, now he's a reporter."

I see very little difference in the Left and Right; an ideologue is an ideologue. It really doesn't matter… I began learning that at *Harper's* and God knows there's confirmation of that today, particularly in foreign policy. The ignorant arguments and duplicity of this [George W. Bush] administration.

In Washington I worked for all kinds of publications- from *Readers Digest*… *Congressional Times*, the grimmest time of my life. I came back to be with Jean [and] my daughter.

Watched journalism change since the 1960s. We don't talk of the press any longer. We call it the media. In the beginning, the journalism informed you of who, what, when, where. John Smith bit a dachshund at the corner of Madison and 34th. Now it's who, what, where, when and *why*.

(Example: [Old] Front page of *Times*, what happened yesterday, what's going on the world in the last 24 hours – who, what , where, when – old school and relevant. Today's paper, things could run any day, they're forward looking.)

(David Carr's Media Corner explored….) *Why* has come the last 20 years. So man bites dog, so why? It could have been because he was hungry. He could have thought it was a hotdog. I could think of 55 other reasons. But the idea that a journalist can tell us why is absurd. Well sometimes they can. But in the old days, in the fifties, maybe six or eight journalists that could bless us with their opinion: (James "Scotty" Reston, Arthur Krock, David Lawrence.) Not everyone gave us their opinion. Journalism is like wallpaper now, it's all around. Don't pay much attention to it. It takes itself very seriously and it shouldn't.

You should take craft seriously, what you do, what you report, what you write. But….

David took himself too seriously. In fact, Willie and I used to joke about it, that David is like a character in Doonesbury.

[Literary Heroes?] Ernest Hemingway; George Orwell; in a major way. Orwell's essays and all Hemingway's journalism….Novelist, Dickens.

Marion Sanders – [Old Guard] editor there – bad editor. She was part of the old regime and had edited one of my first pieces before I went fulltime. I think I went to go see Bob Kotlowitz and he agreed with me about restoring the copy.

I was not edited. Willie would never embarrass a writer. I do know David Halberstam was edited.

(Cane, hearing aid, I'll be 75 in January.) Lucky man, took me a third marriage and it works.

I left the *Times* in '68, unheard of for someone to walk away from the *Times*. They asked me to come back. I left in '68 as a young reporter and I came back and I was a star. (Status had changed considerably) Yeah, so I had to live up to that. Working hard was an understatement.

[Did he see Willie Morris again after the *Harper's* days?] In the seventies at some point at a Madison Square Garden prize fight (I was with) with Hope Lange, an actress. "Hey Co-rry." It was Willie and I was appalled by his appearance. I felt badly for him. (If it hadn't been for Willie…I wouldn't have known or married Jean…and Willie did not know Jean and I got married.)

How things worked: It was formative. I learned a lot at *Harper's* about how ideas worked; how empty some of them, how fragile some of them can be. It gave me, not a distrust, but a skepticism about journalism.

Willie sort of disappeared after that. I went to visit him in Long Island.

Also part of my education: Willie had behaved very badly – he didn't return phone calls. You just don't do that…. The public issue then became "Prisoner of Sex." Willie made no effort, no effort at all to cooperate with Bill Blair, the publisher. I tried to get something going. They shared an ad staff with *Atlantic Monthly* and I suggested they put ad salesmen (on retainer/on commission)…Pumped up circulation, give aways.

The issue became censorship - John Cowles (or at least his family) was appalled by Mailer's piece - The issue was not unreturned phone calls, the issue was censorship.

A sense of inevitability – we were on pretty shaky ground. We could talk about artists' rights and freedom to publish… The magazine belongs to the person who owns it.

Willie'd been good to us and he called in the markers – never overtly, never consciously. Yeah, we all walked except Lewis Lapham. He turned out to be a hell of a good editor. Thank heavens….I thought he was arrogant; he thought I was rude. We were

both right. I had a sense it was over. In a way, *Harper's* had been a vacation for me; it had been a dream.

Jean Herskovitz: (Willie and I were Rhodes Scholars for three or four years…) At Oxford, he was always enormously fun, nothing to do with anything serious. The Soviet dog named Laika. Willie called American embassy…..John was doing the same thing in New York.

John: Copy boy: Bored to death; satellite went up (Dick Long had phones…and AP bulletin satellites.) We hid under the desk, called Long: "We think we're gonna pick up a live satellite transmission with the dog… Just a minute Mr. Long. Are you ready? Keep listening…" And Teddy went "Arf, arf, arf…."

Jean: Nigeria was having a civil war.. [Jean was going to summarize her experience in Nigeria following the conclusion of its civil war into a written response for Willie Morris to Herbert Gold's "My Summer Vacation in Biafra," published in the November 1969 *Harper's*.]

Willie said, "You ought to write about it." That was characteristic of Willie to take a chance….About to go in next issue (when Wille resigned)…Jack Fischer wanted to talk. He said, "I'm sorry, if it's not genocide, our readers are not interested." and paid a $1,000 kill fee.

Jean Herskovitz and John Corry share memories at their New York City Apartment. Oct. 29, 2007.

Edited Midge Decter interview Nov. 10, 2007.
(The morning Norman Mailer died in NYC at the age of 84 of acute kidney failure.)
Her Upper-East Side Apartment, New York City.

He (Morris) was drunk on fine writing. That was uppermost with him. Not so much the politics of the era because I was, not fully, but somewhat at a different political angle than everyone else on the magazine. And he didn't care. He was just a sucker for a beautiful sentence. He produced them and he loved them. And that's very Southern, by the way. That was the southern tradition, beautiful writing.

The magazine was more flexible politically and sociologically than it became under Lewis because by the time Lewis took it over some years later things had settled in politically. By Lewis enmities were enmities….He himself is an (elegant writer). The ideology became more distinct and predictable, more settled than under Willie.

[About King's *In Search of Willie Morris*:] Sentimental. There was Willie, a man who drank himself to death and was destroyed. If you really love someone, I don't think (you sentimentalize the thing that killed him).

[Willie] hired me. He was just taking over and Jack Fischer was still there and his people were still there. I can't remember how long, but it took some maneuvering for Willie to take over. He was not very tough, Willie. There was a lot hang over from the old *Harper's*, a year maybe. Little by little people departed.

I knew Catharine Meyer because she stayed on for a while and I think it was the publication of Norman Mailer that finally drove her away. She fought - that was an unpleasant separation.

Marion K. Sanders - I didn't know her that well. Although I had written for *Harper's* a couple of times and she had been my editor and she had not been a very good one, may I say, because she turned everything into something that could be called the old *Harper's* style, Jack Fisher's style. Though you couldn't hold him responsible for it. It had become a really dull, dead magazine.

If anybody asked him about the old *Harper's*, Willie's favorite line was: Last year we published an article called "All Cows Are Mean." Marion might have been responsible for that, that wasn't her style, but it gives you a sense in what a stage of rigor mortis the magazine was.

Jack Fischer found Willie in Texas. So here was this young Southern guy and Fischer gave him the magazine, which is a very unusual thing for someone to have done, and a very handsome one. I don't know if he knew or didn't know what Willie was going to do with the magazine.

The first thing Willie did was bring in these guys: Larry and David to be what he called contributing editors. It actually meant they were basically staff writers because they didn't do any actual editing, but he called them contributing editors. Then John Corry came somewhat later. They had offices. Larry wasn't around all that much. Marshall Frady came much later. He wrote some pieces, but he wasn't around and he didn't really spend his everyday life at that magazine the way the others did. And Larry wasn't around as much as David and John who were there all the time.

I was just an editor. I came in and after awhile I was made (executive editor)…Bob Kotlowitz was managing editor. Willie and Bob and I put out the magazine, basically is what happened. I was also in charge of actual production….

We didn't have computers then so it was a much more manual process of measuring and counting lines and drawing. Then I got a very competent assistant and she was a wild animal lover – big cage in her apartment. Then she left and went somewhere and got a job as an editor.

There were still a lot of Fischer holdovers when I got there - there were hordes of people working there. There were half a dozen young women working there, editorial assistants, what they did was read the slush pile. Until one day when across my desk came a poem by a poet named John Berryman (with a note) that says, "This is rather dull, but it does show some promise." I picked this up and I walked into Willie's office and I said, "You have got to get rid of these young women because they have nothing to do here. Look at this!" So little by little, the office became smaller and more intimate than the processes and papers floating around. It got to be much more informal. The personalities of these people….

There was Kotlowitz; gentle Bob, lovely, lovely man, a gentle amusable…

Halberstam a hurricane of work and he lived in a complete mess. I've never seen a desk like his, or an office. How he could produce those books, I do not know. His desk was piled high like this with paper of all kinds. You could never see something tidy. There was a chair in there that you couldn't sit down on it. He worked on a typewriter and never understood margins. I don't know what happened to him after the magazine because he produced many books and then computers came along and then I assume he had one and it took care of a lot of things for him. But a David Halberstam manuscript went from this edge of the page to that and it wasn't exactly single-spaced. The spaces weren't very wide. Then there would be little notations all over the place. It was just a result of that man's energy and he was raring to go. He was very ambitious. He had been unhappy at the *New York Times*, which is a funny thing for an ambitious journalist because you can't climb any higher on the tree than that. And he had started at some little Mississippi newspaper. He must have felt they kept him too restrained.

[Reflecting on Halberstam's death:] He was a generous friend. I read in the paper that a committee of his friend's decided they were going to do an author's tour to promote the book because he had done so much for them. When I read that I thought, "Yeah, that's David."

He called when *Best and the Brightest* hit the best seller list. He called Kotlowitz and said, "Don't worry, I've now just paid for your son's college education. Don't worry about him. He'll go to college now this has happened." Although, of course, Kotlowitz would never accept such a thing.

He [Halberstam] was also kind of innocent. Larry and Willie had mean streaks in them; they played a lot of practical jokes. And the butt of these jokes was almost always David. I can't remember all of them: a telegraph from "the president," and another from "the prime minister." And he always fell for it. It never in a million years would it ever have occurred to David to do anything crooked, everything was straight lines. In my opinion, it made him an extremely conventional thinker. He never strayed over the limits of conventional wisdom.

I never wrote about the Vietnam War. I was thinking of writing about David when he died. I was against the Vietnam War and also against the people that thought the United States was like Nazi Germany.

There were good guys and there were not good guys and the good guys were good. [Decter's assessment of Halberstam's core thinking.] The exact opposite of Norman Mailer, who was a very important writer for us. A man capable of writing, after he had been to the two conventions, (that Nixon) had lovely girls (and) a man who could have such daughters can't be all bad. David Halberstam was no more capable of writing a sentence like that than the man in the moon. He had a conventional mind….[but] most conscientious and hardworking writer I've ever known. Always working: If he didn't have a political book, he'd write a sports book….admirable and also occasionally made him quite exhausting to be hanging out with. And he was a real sucker for these (jokes).

Willie had a difficulty. At one point there was a question of who was going to cover the political conventions for us. David had been writing about the campaign and all that. Willie could only get one press accommodation because every newspaper, every magazine (was asking for press credentials). We could only get one and Willie had promised both of these guys. He got himself into spots like that. Basically Norman won, of course….Willie's solution: You guys will share the press pass. (You can't tell them to share a press pass.) (Larry and David did cover the conventions. Not with any help from us.)

He got himself into spots like that. That was the kind of mess that was always happening because he couldn't say no.

When he came in one morning, he had been hanging out at Elaine's a lot and drinking (more and more) and said "I have now appointed Lewis Lapham as a contributing editor." We said, "Lewis Lapham? Why him? He hasn't written anything in years. He's going to come into the office and he's going to become a contributing editor?" Well he didn't come into the office. And he didn't write anything.

He hadn't found himself yet. He was a rich kid. I had perfectly good relations with him. We don't speak at all now. Not at all. He started coming around right at the point where Willie was fighting for the magazine and question of what was going to happen.

I remember, Hersh came to our offices and said "I've got a scandal, you've got to do this." Willie said, "Sure." And [Hersh] took over an office and sat on the telephone phoning around the world to offer this scandal. Scoundrel, I tell you. We thought it was amusing, but I no longer think it's amusing…

Mailer was the big event. And I think Catharine Meyer probably left because of that. I think Willie also fired someone because they said (Mailer can't write). Mailer sort of represented the very last end of the old *Harper's.* When we got through with him, everybody was gone.

I'd like to tell you about the fight. One of things that happened, the magazine was owned by a youngish man who wanted to impress his father, a mean old bird.

Shortly after Willie became editor (John Cowles, Midge Decter and Norman Podhoretz…both "in their cups" and Willie was talking about his grand visions…The next day Podhoretz) called and said "Willie, promise you'll make it the most influential journal in America, but don't promise you can make money."

So the Cowles hired a guy (from the *Harper's-Atlantic* joint selling team) as the business manager. The first thing he did was decorate his office. The rest of us - the place was pretty sloppy, modest. Who cared? There wasn't anybody there. Who cared? Not Jack Fischer not Willie Morris. But he did, so it was all decorated to the nines. Then he hired an assistant and neither of them had a clue of what to do. Spent a fortune putting *Harper's* ads in the train stations. At another point they were going to do some school project. They horsed around and in fact had no idea what to do – how to increase circulation and sell more advertising. He was John Cowles' man. And Willie made the mistake of going head to head with him and finally made the stupid mistake of saying it's him or me (at) Minnesota. When he got back, I was in the office and he was sitting in a bar and he called me down and said, "It's Norman Mailer, I had to resign because of Norman Mailer." I did not believe that and I do not believe that. I think it was this promise (to make money)….to increase circulation. That wasn't Willie's fault, that was John's fault and Bill's fault. How the Cowles allowed this to go on, I do not know. So the magazine, which was doing very well,...just that the Cowles that were not interested in it

(because) it wasn't doing well financially, in circulation or in advertising. It wasn't doing so badly, but Willie hadn't been able to….

The "Hot Book" in importance and recognition doesn't necessarily make the big bucks....occasionally that does happen. *Vanity Fair* now is a "Hot Book" and a success.

What Willie was interested in was not circulation. That wasn't what any of us were really were concentrating on.

Willie decided that he had to say it was the publication of that Norman Mailer piece. When he said that I knew the fat was in the fire because then what was everybody gonna do? You couldn't live in this place. Willie's girlfriend started a whole campaign not to let Willie go and protesting…. (I was pissed at Willie and at everyone. Husband Norman Podhoretz said: You have to resign – it's the honorable move.)

I came in the next morning and there sat Bob Kotlowitz and he said to me "I didn't sleep last night….." [Decter told Kotlowitz] Norman helped me last night: "You're afraid of looking dishonorable," he said. That's right. I walked in said, "I quit." Kotlowitz walked into Willie and said he quits too. That was on a Friday.

David and Larry King and John and a few other people and this committee demanded a meeting with John Cowles. They had a meeting with John Cowles and at this meeting…I did not attend this meeting because I had already quit, so I was not on speaking terms with Cowles. At this meeting what they proposed was that Cowles should make Kotlowitz the editor....and Cowles said no. And then they went out and claimed that they were damaged and that they had marched out with Willie. Whereas only two of had and not Lewis Lapham. They said, "Come [to the St. Regis meeting]." And I said, "No, I'm not going."

They also wanted me to sign some statement. And I didn't do that either. I said, "I quit my job out of loyalty to Willie and out of the necessity to do so and that's it. I'm not taking part of any campaign to appeal to John Cowles to keep the magazine rolling or any of that stuff."

There was a two month hiatus. I said "I quit" but I stayed to put out the issue in the works. In came the letters and phone calls. "Willie promised me I could get paid $6,000 for 15 articles… Willie promised…Willie promised…"

That was Willie's doing…at Elaine's – promises. Then we [Kotlowitz and Decter] both left.

It was clear that the Cowles weren't long for this world. But Lewis Lapham did get a hold of this great foundation and saved the magazine. I was working for Basic Books as an editor, I took him out to lunch then three or four years ago. [But then] I went to a party where he was and he wouldn't say hello to me.

Willie was a sucker for a writer – there are not too many editors who are. Now there's a lot of ideology. Willie was always wooed by a nice sentence. When he left, moved out to Long Island and wrote a terrible novel because something had been broken in him. He never got over the idea of himself as a Southern boy up in the Big Cave where the big boys play….But it's the drink that got him.

[One of Willie's editorial missions] "Let's send everybody back to their hometowns!" Bob Kotlowitz had the idea (about how ordinary people make a living) for John Corry. John was always a very anxious writer. He suffered. He was very good. Dodge Plymouth dealer in little Delhi, NY. (A big fish in small pond- type story.) Had it have been a series, it would have added up, but it didn't. So there's this odd piece about the Dodge dealer which meant nothing, but would have if it were part of a series.

We had book reviews and they were terrible. Why don't Irving Howe and Jack Thompson (come as reviewers)? And that worked out very well.

And let's not circulate poems [among the entire editorial staff]. Just appoint someone to be the poetry editor. John Hollander at Yale – was and is a poet – "one of the Yale younger poets" He had his prejudices... (but represented a taste, a vision). [Joined the team] relatively late.

Mailer and my husband were very close friends. The first piece: "On the Steps of the Pentagon." We had a deadline – we went to Provincetown to take the pages from him and take them back. Took them off the typewriter. Willie would read five pages and hand them off to me. We flew back with the manuscript and lost Catharine Meyer.

Mailer had published a best seller, (then one that flopped), then *Advertisements for Myself*. In order to pay him, we were looking to make a deal so we could pay him, so we could put the money together. Last night up there [when Decter and Morris went to Provincetown], Mailer says "Let's see Provincetown." [At a certain point on the drive around time Mailer explained,] "When the pilgrims came, they were thinking of landing here and they didn't, they went on to Plymouth, (this was) too desolate."

(Morris said:) "Imagine that: I was shown this place by a Jewish boy from Brooklyn. Imagine that."

Not much (editing) done on Mailer, he edited himself. You can always use another pair of eyes and of someone you trust. Then there was the feminist movement. Mailer got interested and we were certainly interested.

The country was radicalized (but women listening to radicals began to get different ideas) [at first] they were interested in getting jobs, not changing the nature of nature.

Shulamith Firestone wrote: All babies should be born in test tubes. And the anti-war movement: Mixture of people against lies being told and people who were anti-America. They all came together about Vietnam. And of course Nixon public enemy number one. But they couldn't be anti-war and anti-Nixon (who said he'd get us out of war and it took him awhile, but he did.) But not Mailer. He had a whole theory about cancer, the U.S. is the chief producer. He saw a person. He was a real novelist. What he did was always interesting. You can laugh at the protesters. He was interested in these people and what they were up to. A different kind of voice – that's what made him vulnerable.

David was interested in the politics of everything. Always trying to figure out what to do next.

Kotlowitz had written a novel about his parents' hometown in Europe. (Gift from Wolfe's wife….photo of the town)

If you hung around Willie, if you got serious with him, you got serious about a place called America. This thing: go back to your hometown. I went back, sat in the library and learned so much. He could never go home without a crew of his friends, he could never go home by himself. Larry, Podhoretz, friends from Texas all attended Yazoo City Library function.

[Podhoretz told Decter upon returning from Mississippi:] Yazoo City is an American town – Main Street looks like every other small town. Guess what? A plantation is a farm. Everything is covered in Kudzoo.

[Role of alcohol:] Everybody drank. We lived on the West Side in a big apartment – later turned to co-ops. (A former ghetto, families settled and bought buildings as groups). We used to have great, big parties and buy cases of liquor. New Year's Eve party, two little rooms off the back of the kitchen from which Willie pours out at about noon the next day during the family's lunch.

In the literary world….among the young, drugs took over.

Mailer had then stopped, he describes chemicals and dosages in *Advertisements*…

One of the things that turned us conservative (was the drugs) having the responsibility of raising teens. Some people were destroyed by it.

Once published a piece by Joseph Epstein before beginning of homosexual movement – not hostile – his experience and ending with "I hope my children never turn out to be gay." [One day Decter] arrived at *Harper's* and there was a small group gathered around the front of the *Harper's* office saying "Come on up, we're having a protest with pastries and coffee." And they sat there all day. We called Willie. He said, "I

can't, I just can't." [Kotlowtiz and Decter] invited them in, defended the [Epstein] piece – they finally decamped. The whole day was taken up by that demonstration.

Each of us had his own set of interests. Willie interested in stuff about America. Kotlowitz high culture: music, theatre, ballet. He was a good editor – he knew (how to work with writers.)

Jack Fisher would have editorial meetings where whole staff would come. We didn't have editorial meetings. Basically the three of us would just sit. We would have discussions. Sometimes agree to disagree…

Ralph Ellison was a victim of his own success. Began as "Let's love our black brothers" and he was loved to death. He was a real hard case. (Couldn't match the brilliance of his first novel). Famous exchange between Irving Howe and Ralph Ellision. Irving Howe – blacks have obligation to write about social injustice and Ellison answered, "Blacks have the same obligation every writer has… (to tell story).

We were all so very different. And probably we were all on the way to a political break-up.

The Southerners had their own thing – it was the blacks. It had to do with their shame and sense of responsibility. Most of them responded by becoming radicalized. Not for the rest of us: We had different problems: we were all pro-civil rights – radically different attitudes about what should happen to make things (better.)

It exploded right about the time Willie lost the magazine.

It cut very close to the bone – that's why I brought up my kids because how you raise your children is key to your whole (self). I felt the radicals were out to get my children.

Around 1970 and by 1980, the people who are now called neo-conservatives were set on a different course – had to do with America. [Radicals were] Spelling America with a K – it affected friendships. It got to be there were people who were not accepted to know – that was me.

[Willie] He was not political at all – he was thinking about (words.) [From Long Island Decter received one letter from him professing love – she responded and left it at that. Never saw Willie again.]

[Recording stops here; the rest of this transcript is from hand-written notes only.]

One of the best days, Willie wasn't even there. He was in Minnesota making the biggest mistake of his life. Bill [Blair, publisher] said we had to do something about

Mailer piece – we have to issue a defense. (Those in the office that day had great fun crafting the defense.)

Drank a lot of coffee. That's true of every magazine. I've always had little tiny rooms to work.

Usually the better the writer, the easier the edit. When you're writing, you're inside your own head. Those who are insecure are the hardest.

[How did Morris do his editing?] How he did it, I'm not sure. He had his authors. I had mine….With Halberstam…. This is a paragraph - he had a very distinct voice - there was no way to alter it. It was all technical. With Corry…stroking his back, "Sit here. You can do it!"

The stuff that came over the transom. The magazine most famous for editing is New Yorker. (Hundreds of editors.) So powerful was that magazine to a writer's career (people would rewrite endings to satisfy editors' demands). Saul Bellow the only one (who said no).

I never loved a job as much as that [at *Harper's*]. Except in 1980, when I started my own thing, but that was anxiety-making because I had to raise money. Fighting the Cold War – Committee for a Free World. In the end 10,000 members, those of the same professions as those saying America was wrong….By then we were Reaganites. We had been supporters of the hard-line Democratic in '72 - Gene McCathy, then voted for Nixon because of Vietnam. He promised to get us out and he did. We're neo-conservative, but not Republicans.

Edited Elaine Kaufman interview, Oct. 4, 2007.
Elaine's Restaurant, 1703 Second Avenue, New York City.

[Morris] He was the best – one of the great guys, too creative. Gave people opportunities that no one else would give them. (Marshall Frady always dreamed of going to the Middle East…)

One night Frank Conrad came in, had an idea. And Frank took a bar napkin and wrote an outline for him to write the story. And then when Ali got out of prison for…Jack Richardson, formidable playwright asked if he could go down to Atlanta. Willie said, "Great idea." Went down and wrote it…

[Morris] He just loved writers… Faulkner one his heroes. [Elaine then tells a joke – perhaps told her by Willie…One day Faulkner was writing screenplays in Hollywood and getting tired. He asked if he could go home to finish it. They say "Yeah, sure." So he goes back to Mississippi.] That's a joke, like a ha ha. [Then she repeats it so the interviewer get it…Ah! Home doesn't mean back to his Hollywood apartment, it means back to Mississippi!]

(Willie's frustrations with publishers) We knew about that, but he was already spending..the financial…It was carte blanche – no magazine of that caliber (could do that)… They weren't wrong.

The one that was wrong was Mariel Murphy. She lived out in South Hampton. She was very friendly with him, I don't say how friendly. But she kept saying to him they didn't appreciate him and he should not be working for them….That he should go to them and if they didn't want to give him an increase in the right percentage, that he should move on, which was the worst thing he could do. He was in the Golden Place… But then she left him here and said, "Do it!" And she takes off for Africa so he has no support system.

It was just terrible. I feel so bad for him. He was so sweet. (One way or another it would have happened. But the articles…) They were beautiful.

[Lapham] He's very good. He's very good…brilliant….Lewis didn't have a job, he didn't have anything going. There was no reason for him not take it. The other guys were hysterical, they acted like ninnies, saying "You're taking [Morris's] job, you're putting him out of work." He [Morris] was off the job. They sat right over there [after the mass resignation. She points to a table.] They were really children. The job was open. What? Louie shouldn't take it? Let someone else take it? Willie was brilliant, but he couldn't make the compromises you have to. Come off it.

Talk to Louie about politics or anything. He's awesome.

[Halberstam] very bright.

Mailer (wonderful man, but long-winded.)

When Jack wrote the one about the Ali fight…[one of her favorite articles.]

They were still bright, even in their stupor they were bright [shaking her head]. They were amazing.

Willie could come in and I'd be sitting (with young kids from *The Times* or wherever) He'd say something about Thomas Paine and he begins to articulate. As a kid I read all this stuff, so what am I surprised at? True bright people are not covered by the alcohol… If they have a story, it's there…

[Any second thoughts about serving them when signs of alcoholism were apparent?] You mean, I'm gonna tell em to stop drinking? That was the only thing that was wrong with him. The only thing I worry about is getting them to eat something. If they got something to eat, they'd be ok.

Restaurateur extraordinaire and nurturer of writing culture Elaine Kaufman at her front table, Elaine's Restaurant, New York City. Oct. 4, 2007

Edited Larry L. King interview, Oct. 11, 2007.
His Washington D.C. home.

I don't know if I understand what a writing culture is really. It's not something I ever really thought about. We and, Willie especially, he selected those of us who he thought more or less agreed with him about writing (were) clearly dedicated to writing, the use of the language, to telling our story as best we could. Willie always said, "Get it all and get it right. Tell it all and tell it right."

So he got a bunch of like-minded people: Myself, Halberstam, Marshall Frady and, of course, Willie himself. Then there was John Corry, he was not quite with us then. Lewis Lapham….He wasn't there very long. We were not there very long after he came. But we were all really into the use of the language. We all really loved it. I'm kind of lonely now. All those guys are dead but me and Lapham and Corry. And I was never close with either one of those.

Kotlowitz. I like Bob Kotlowitz. He's a good man. I didn't see as much of Kotlowitz as I did the rest of them. I saw him around the office, but Bob was not a barroom journalist as some of us were. [Kotlowitz] is really one of the nicest and best men I know.

Elaine was a great person to us. She had this rough, tough exterior and she could get rough and tough if anyone made her. But she really did have what she called the family tables that were for the *Harper's* group and three or four others. And we could all go in there at any time and sit down and she didn't let anybody sit there that didn't belong. And that was sort of a little bit of elitism that I approved of…

I used to like to come in there once in awhile to the back room. Some nights I didn't want to be up front and talk to a lot of folks. I just wanted to sit back there alone or with one or two others, or maybe just by myself. And she wouldn't (hear of it)…bugging me to come up front. I quit even trying to go into Siberia, as she called it. She said, "Siberia's for people from Cleveland."

I miss those old days and a lot of those people. If you live long enough – and I'm gonna be 79 here before long [January, 2008] – you lose a lot of them. Halberstam is one of those I still can't adjust to. We were so very close. As you may have noticed I dedicated the Willie book to him. Hardly a day…two or three days would never pass till when we talked on the telephone. I'm not a telephone person, I despise being on the phone. But Halberstam was on the phone constantly. I do all mine by email. And I think much of that had to do with I worked in Congress for 10 years and I was on the phone constantly, either having to call somebody or take their calls. But Halberstam was always on the phone and he's calling all the time and I'd call him occasionally. He wasn't into

email. I'm not even sure David learned how to use email. He just used the computer as a type writer. (When he was killed…) he was a very vigorous 73-year-old.

[Encouragement] by teasing each other a lot. We'd say, "That's a good job." But we didn't talk about that all that much. We didn't pay direct compliments. But I knew Halberstam couldn't stand criticism from people about his writing. So I think you may have read where I'd have people send him postcards and letters. From all over the country. And he and I shared a secretary in the office. And she would tell me [his reactions]. I'd tell her, "I've got a few Halberstam letters coming in, let me know how he reacts." Same way every time. He'd look at 'em and stuff 'em inside his jacket.

He was the hardest-working writer that I ever met. He'd just finished his Korean War book and he was in California and he was on his way to go interview somebody, a former football player. He was going to write a book about pro football when he was killed.

He never had 10 minutes between jobs. He was the hardest working writer that I've ever known. He'd go out with us, but he'd nurse a drink. And Willie and I would drink like they were about to take us off and shoot us. And to some extent Frady, too. Frady was not very large. He couldn't (absorb) as much as Willie and I could. Back in those days, before we knew we were alcoholics, it was a sign of manliness to be able to drink a lot.

I haven't had a drink since 1980. I married to Barbara Blaine in '78 and she did not take kindly to my carousing and drinking and she sort of gave me the same option that Laura Bush did of all things to George W. And that was, "It's me or the booze."

And that got my attention. I went to AA meetings. I did that for years. I don't go anymore because I can't get around very well. But I haven't had a desire for a drink since, which is kind of amazing. What I miss is smoking. Of course that's what's got me now with this emphysema, but smoking… (grass). I do miss it. It's the one thing I really do miss. Oh, much more [than the cigarettes]. [Smoked] every day for years. I started using it when I was a teenager down in Texas. Not that regular then…. Time would go by when I wouldn't have it for months and years. There was a time when I was in my thirties…I had a guy I could buy it from whenever I wanted to and I wanted to. I smoked it a lot. It made me funnier, I think. I had a terrible time adjusting – once I quit – about writing. '80 when I quit. I wasn't gonna quit the dope at first, but then I discovered that the only time I wanted to drink really was when I smoked, so I quit it all.

[Been off cigarettes] for quite awhile. I guess it was about 1997 (when he quit). Not that long ago comparatively and I had pneumonia. I remember the doctor telling me, "Your next cigarette will kill ya." And I said, "Goddamn doc, didn't you cut it kinda close?" He didn't think that was funny at all. He didn't have any sense of humor, but he caught my attention, I knew what it meant.

Yeah [one upping]... There was to some extent. Willie was always getting in trouble because if I wrote a piece and Halberstam wrote a piece, generally we'd be kinda torn about which would make the lead article for the magazine and he'd promise us both because he couldn't say no, then he'd try to run and hide when the magazine came out.

There was that sort of rivalry. We each wanted to be number one. Sort of like athletes. I thought the best stuff (as a journalist when I was at *Harper's*) was Norman Mailer and I started calling him Pres because I thought he was the best at what we did. Much better at non-fiction than he was as a novelist, although he didn't like to hear that then or now. We still stay in touch. He can't get around very much, but his mind is still really good and clear.

[Decter] …she told the press "I owed Willie something and I paid it by resigning." She meant, I guess, she owed in the fact that he hired her.

Podhoretz… I guess he was considered a liberal in those days, but as far as I was concerned he wasn't. (He's written) "those barroom journalists were not serious-minded." And he used to drink as much as any of us. With us, too. You'd never know it from reading him.

And Midge gave the worse review to the Willie book that it got, in the *Wall Street Journal*. A long piece, a lot of space. My wife Barbara didn't think [the review] was all that bad….I admit it could have been a lot worse

She didn't write much for us. Mainly she was an editor. Now Willie was not worth a damn as an administrator. Kotlowitz and Midge were the two administrative editors more or less. She edited copy well and so forth. She wrote little for us, she wrote more after she left *Harper's*. But I don't think….I just don't think she had much to say as a writer.

I learned from Willie just from watching him personally. Three or four pieces he did that I wrote for him, I learned more about writing from those edits, just seeing it, than I knew about it before. Just to see that I didn't have to use as many words as was my wont…that I had opportunities to say things in a different way. Just watching Willie edit and looking at what I'd wrote and how he edited those first few pieces improved my writing immensely. I just can't tell you.

I don't think I [saved drafts] in those years. For many years now I've been a pack rat and saved everything. It always goes to the Southwestern Writers' Collection at Texas State University.

Frady went to Furman University in South Carolina (he lived in Atlanta). I don't remember who he was married to at the time he died….He used to call me up and have this complex plan that I was supposed to learn to tell his then wife. I said, "Goddamn it

Frady, you've got to do this. This is more complicated than a damn Faulkner story. If I'm gonna be your beard, you better give me (a simpler story)."

[*Harper's* as a good ole boys club?] Pretty much. Yeah, it was. Not just there. I did a lot of freelance work (beyond) *Harper's* and later, too….I also wrote for *Life* and *Playboy* and a lot of other places. All those magazines pretty much have good ole boys clubs, too. Women were few and far between in those days. I'm ashamed to say I didn't even notice it. As the father now of three daughters, I'm much more aware of things that I should have been. I was always aware of racial discrimination, but never gender discrimination. I can't believe I couldn't see it, but I didn't.

[Women who offered intellectual stimulation?] Elaine, I guess. Nora Ephron.

Halberstam and I laughed later. When we were both at *Harper's* we each didn't know we were both sleeping with the same two women. We didn't know. We didn't know for years.

(Once) a women who worked there at the office, I took her to Elaine's one time. Halberstam called me aside and raised hell with me for bringing a, quote, shop girl into our private club, as he saw it. [Didn't name the woman.] The gal, she was an innocent party.

A woman who was a good writer was Willie's first wife, Celia. She wrote several books… one about Fanny Wright, one of the first feminist activists in the country and then she wrote "Finding Celia's Place," her own memoir. You ought to get that one. I used quite a bit with her permission in my book about Willie.

Willie had to call and make me come in off the road. I was supposed to stay [with Louis Armstrong] 10-12 days and I stayed 30 days. He said "You're breaking us."

[Willie said] Not to be afraid to use words that a lot of readers wouldn't understand. He said, "You can't write down to your audience.…[But]Helen Gurley Brown was the editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and she paid just about more than anybody. And so I wrote a lot of pieces for her. The first piece I wrote for her was "Why I Love Southern Women Better than Northern Women and Vice Versa." That's not a serious piece and I got all these goddamned letters from idiots on line-tablet paper taking the thing very seriously. And I had a test thing in there…ratings by points and all that. Anybody could see that that was a joke and the points never added up. But they didn't see that. From then on every time I wrote for Helen Gurley Brown's magazine I tried to push that out of my mind, but I couldn't. And so as a consequence, none of those pieces in there were very good.

What would happen at those political pie suppers, if the candidates were smart and knew their audience very well – (for) local races, county-wide at most – they would know which family was the most prominent, had the most influence in certain ways and

they would always strive to buy that person's pies and cakes or whatever it was because then you got to go over and eat with that family. I thought it was just great, eat all that food brag on yourself and maybe get paid too.

[Was the way Willie financially supported the *Harper's* writers reasonable?] Yes it was, except….It did make that magazine the hottest book there was. But the problem was, especially after the Cowles family bought it, (they had newspaper) but no experience with a magazine. John Cowles Jr. had the notion that he could make money off the magazine. Willie knew better than that by then. But we let him believe that. When they did make money, then he started really (to hound) Willie for it and the money Willie paid out and all that kind of stuff. Willie did not do his homework with his owner. If he had, I think Cowles might have gone a little further along with it, hoping to turn it. But Cowles Jr.'s father was on his ass all the time to sell it or even just padlock it because he thought it was just a drain on the family resources. And Willie did not take care of that part of the business.

[Impossible to make *Harper's* self-sustaining?] Yes. *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly*, they were after the same audience, mainly. That audience is pretty much limited around the country. They'll never sell like a *Cosmopolitan* or a *Playboy* or a *Life* (back when *Life* was big) or *Saturday Evening Post*. They did too much with politics and culture. And the people by and large are not that interested in politics and culture compared to their other (pursuits)…

Willie, he did make it a much better magazine than it had been. Old Jack Fischer, whom I never really liked, terrible conservative man. Whatever the government did, pretty much, what the powers that be did was OK with Jack. He thought it was supposed to be that way. He neither comforted the afflicted or afflicted the comforted. And Willie changed all that. But again, I think he let Cowles believe that he had a chance to make money and that proved not to be true. And that's what led to Willie finally resigning (in a fit…) after they'd been on his ass it about it. And we all resigned in support of him.

I never had writer's block. Not once. I couldn't afford to. And I didn't know I was supposed to. I was disappointed by how some pieces turned out for a number of magazines, but I never had problems writing, or getting them accepted, pieces that were good enough to be published.

[Any rejected/killed?] I think only one piece that I remember that I turned into Willie. He wanted me to a piece about Dallas, which is not a town I liked and still don't. Somehow I couldn't get my hand around that story very well. And I turned in a piece that I didn't think was very good and Willie just said, "Larry, this is not you. This is a piss-poor piece and I'm not gonna publish this." And that's the only turn down I got, I think in my whole career. But I can see why he did; I wasn't satisfied with the piece with myself.

He didn't have any hesitation. Hell yes I'm glad. One piece that I didn't like that he published. He was trying to cozy up to John Cowles Jr. And John Cowles Jr. wanted

Nelson Rockefeller to be president. He was a liberal Republican, John Cowles, Jr. was. And Willie called me in and said, "Larry, I hate to ask you to do it, but I'm gonna ask you for the first time in my life to go in the tank for me."

I said, "What do you mean?"

And he said, "Well, Cowles wants a piece on Nelson Rockefeller and need I say he wants it to be a favorable one? I'm not gonna tell anyone else that I'm telling you this, but that's the way it's got to be and I expect you to do it that way."

I really hated doing it and I hated the piece….I was never satisfied with the piece and was always sorry I agreed to do it, but Willie had always done so much for me I didn't feel like I could tell him no.

[Writing rituals/peculiarities?] I had to have a drink, generally a beer right there and cigarettes and a little grass.

I never did second, third drafts. I worked on each sentence until I was satisfied with it, then on each paragraph till I was satisfied with it and on each page till I was satisfied with it. And when I was through, I was through. I learned that pretty early because I sold a novel. My first book, the one I say wasn't worth a damn, I thought it was great in the earlier days. It was pretty bad. But it was published and it was actually a Literary Guild Book Club alternate selection. It did mean I got $10,000, which is pretty good for a rookie.

In writing that book I did not do that. I wrote a draft and sent it to the editor and then he edited so much and wrote so many pages of what I ought to do instead of what I had done. I just hated having to go back over that stuff and do it and that's when I decided sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page so I'd never have to face that again ever.

I guess you know that "My Hero LBJ," that he [LBJ] called that a dirty story. I was bringing it out as a collection, it was going to be "My Hero LBJ and Other Dirty Stories." And the goddamned book editor said "Well, he's dead now, we can't….." So without really consulting me, they just truncated that and left it "...and Other Dirty Stories." Which made absolutely no sense and little old ladies in the bookstores in the Midwest and Southwest called it porno because of the title and they'd hide it under the counter. A couple salesmen told me that they'd go in and not see there and say, "Have you sold those books and they'd [the salespeople] say "No, they're back here." And they'd go dig them out from under a counter. So LBJ sort of got even with me on that.

Halberstam just worked incessantly on articles and at the same time he was working on a book always. Frady didn't come around the office all that much. As I say, he was married to several different ladies and courtin' others, always. So he spent most of his time in the South and we didn't see that much of him, so I didn't really know what he

was doing except that he wrote some good stuff I thought, maybe it was a little too Faulknerian at times.

John Corry….He had a lot of problems about finishing a piece. He'd procrastinate and wait till the last minute almost before he really got into it. Then he'd wind up saying it wasn't worth a damn and sometimes upchuck and all that. And while he wasn't a real stylist, he got a lot of information in his pieces and they weren't really all that bad. But he seemed to think so, that they were. I think maybe he didn't have confidence in himself. I don't know. Of course he was hard to get close to personally. We never really did get all that close. We weren't enemies, we just weren't close friends as I was with the rest of them. Maybe he didn't like me.

I never got close to Corry. Frady, when he was around, was fine, and Halberstam and Willie, of course. We really were a circle of friends. Willie never did play Big Editor with us, you know, like some editors might. He never pulled any rank or put himself above us in any way and a lot of editors do.

(Lewis Lapham) was a lying son-of-bitch. You can say I said so. I have not changed my opinion about him at all….He'd only been there a few days when the showdown came, literally just a few days when the showdown came between Willie and management. And so we all met at Halberstam's apartment and Halberstam said to him, "Lewis you don't have to be a part of this. You just got here and all the problems we're having now are none of your doing, so really, you don't have to associate yourself with us because, more than likely, if they don't agree to take Willie back or put him in some sort of role, even if it's just as a roving writer, we're just gonna resign, probably all of us." And Lewis made this big speech about "Oh, hell no. All for one and one for all and every goddamned thing else." Then we get to the meeting and he's the only one that kept popping in to agree with the things that Cowles, Jr. said. And when we all left he stayed behind and came into Elaine's an hour and a half later. That's when I told him that they couldn't say to him as a right-wing rich Republican what they did of FDR, that he was a traitor to his class. Because Lewis's father was very wealthy, had a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, Lewis didn't need any goddamned money. So, I said, "They can never say that of you. You flew right into the goddamned arms of management right after you told us you'd be with us. So fuck you, get up and get away from this table."

A good relationship with all those guys and the fact that there was great satisfaction….In those days magazines were much more important than they are now. And quite often I'd pick up a paper and there'd be a column or a story about how great *Harper's* was. And I'd get calls from people I knew who were writers, some of whom taught at universities in order to make a living, you know who couldn't do it off their writing alone, and they'd tell me about how everybody on the faculty and their writing students and all those people were so into the magazine. And all that made you feel good…that all this was happening and that you were part of making it happen.

I used to love New York. I didn't want to leave and come down here when I married Barbara, but she said I could move a type writer a lot easier than she could move a law practice. And she wanted to raise kids and I knew D.C. would be an easier place to raise kids than New York. If I was gonna live in New York, I'd have to live in Manhattan, there's no way not to. I really hated to leave. I had a hit show on Broadway and money was coming in well and all that. I wanted to stay up there and strut for awhile. We went back and forth. We spent a lot of time up there the first year, I guess. Then stayed down here. I've been happy here ever since. Of course I lived here for years before all that. I lived here until my second wife died of cancer.

Rosie died in 72, *Harper's* fell in 71. So I moved to New York and stayed there until I married Barbara and came back here. But I really enjoyed… in those days I was still running around drinking and carrying on. New York was a party and it would no longer be.

[Any other pieces that weren't good enough?] I don't know because Willie didn't talk unless he talked about a good piece that one of us had written. He didn't mention any problems or failures, though there must have been some. But he was smart enough to not parade it around the office. That's something Kotlowitz would have known because he saw everything.

[Did he remember Willie's letter of editorial vision for *Harper's* referenced in "New York Days"?] It wouldn't surprise me to know that Willie made that up. Willie did that some. And if I got such a letter, I paid small attention to it, though I do think I would have recalled it.

I put my first fan letter I got on my wall and it stayed there for years. Now it's down at the Southwest Writers Collection. It was from John Kenneth Galbraith. It was my piece ("Second Banana Politician"). It was my first piece for Willie. It was about working for a congressman and the senators and how you had to take the blame for everything that went wrong because they were supposed to be perfect. Galbraith wrote me a letter. It said he hadn't enjoyed an article by anybody so much in years. And since that was my first published piece in *Harper's* and (first paid piece anywhere) I was very impressed. In fact when the letter came, I remember getting it out of the mailbox and seeing John Kenneth Galbraith's address and I thought, "I wonder what he's writing me about." It never occurred to me that he was writing me a fan letter. And I opened it up and there it was.

When I went to Harvard a few years later as a Neiman Fellow, he was teaching economics there. He was one of my sponsors to be at Harvard, he and Willie and Bill Styron. Willie lined that up. I sat down in Galbraith's class that day and he…looked at me and when class was over he said "What were you doing here?" And I said, "I don't know, you're one of my sponsors, I thought I ought to be there." He said, "Well, have you read *The New Industrial State*?" (his latest book) and I lied and said "Yes." It's not a book I would have read for money. He said, "Well then, you don't need to come back,

that's what I'm teaching." He said, "I'll have you over for dinner some and we can chat and talk, but you don't need to be in here. Use your time more wisely."

So then after I'd been there for a few months, he asked me how I was liking being a Neiman fellow and I said, "Well one thing about it bugs me." And he said, "What's that?" And I said, "We're not to write anything while we're here. I write all the time, they said not to." He said, "Fuck that, you're a writer, write. Piss on such a rule as that." That's when I sat down and wrote "Confessions of a White Racist." We made it into an article. Willie published it. As soon as that happened I got a half dozen offers to turn it into a book. It got nominated for a National Book Award. The only time I ever got irked at Halberstam was when he told me that he didn't think it was as good as some book Gay Talese had written. I forgot what, but it didn't get nominated. It really pissed me off at Halberstam….I really got mad at him. I didn't stay mad very long.

[What do you think those men wanted who knocked at the door during the riots after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, as you referenced in Confessions?] I'm still curious about that. I was looking through the peephole and it wasn't anybody I recognized. I didn't know socially that many black people because the way society was then there wasn't that much intermingling. But with what was going on, I wasn't about to open the door to find out.

[You were obsessed with Norman Mailer a little bit, weren't you?] Yeah, I was. Talese I liked very well. He [Talese] and Halberstam were very close. I liked him. I like him as a writer and as a person. I used to tease him about being such a clothes horse, which he was. He didn't take to that too kindly. But we never had a falling out over it. I could never be accused of that, ever. [Being a clothes horse.] But he was really into it. I liked him a lot.

I got to know James Jones and I liked him a lot. He and Willie got to be very close friends. Stand up guy that will tell it to you straight about what he felt about anything.

[Larner/Schrag, well-positioned, non-staff writers during the Morris editorship?] Those kind of guys didn't hang around the office, obviously they weren't Elaine's regulars, or I would have seen them every night.

[Normal writing hours?] Hell no. I'd go in…Willie and I would go off and have a two-hour liquid lunch then I'd try to find a place… I didn't really do any work when I went up there. I did my work before I went there. I didn't really have to take it up there to him, but Willie wanted me to and, what the hell, I wanted to. I like hanging out. It was fun.

[Black writers?] Albert Murray did. He and Willie got to be friends somehow. I was friends with young Roger Wilkins. I don't think he ever wrote for *Harper's*. He wrote the afterward for *Confessions of a White Racist*, the book. We were pretty close

friends. But there was not that much interaction between black and whites. I'm not sure I ever saw a black person in Elaine's.

Maya Angelou wrote a fan letter after *Confessions of a White Racist*. (Got to know her pretty well.) We struck up a correspondence. She'd been living in Paris. And she came to the U.S. She called and said Bill Moyers was going to give her a party out on Long Island and would I come to it. Of course I did. We got to be pretty good friends and carried on a correspondence for a long time.

[Literary heroes?] Mark Twain. Norman Mailer for his journalism. William Styron wrote beautiful prose and good themes. But I didn't like Styron all that well, although he and Willie liked each other. Somehow he and I were never comfortable around each other. So I like his work, but didn't like him. Robert Penn Warren was another one who was one of my heroes. I went to a dinner party where he was there and Willie was calling him a red, I just couldn't believe it. (That ole Willie Morris had enough mischief in him to call Robert Penn Warren a red).

[Style?] It just happened. Except for that one time (with Rockefeller) I never did approach a story with a preconceived notion. Well, that's not true. I knew I was gonna write a love letter about Louis Armstrong because I loved being with him and that whole thing. I let each piece play itself out as it would and I never stopped to think about how that might fit in to anything schematically.

No, I think the only person that I ever really tried to ape was Robert Penn Warren when I wrote my novel that turned out so bad. I tried to ape him, but I missed by miles and miles because he was so much better than me. Other than that I never really consciously [imitated]...I'd read a piece by Talese, and I'd go "That's really good." But I'd appreciate it for what it was. I didn't try to analyze it. I think once you've found your own voice you don't do that.

Willie wrote prettier than I wrote – a little more flowery. Willie used a dueling sword and I used a dagger. That's the difference the best I could put it. I told him that he made the world greener than God had made it when he wrote. He'd put a positive spin on nearly every thing and I'm not a positive spinner.

That piece up there where it says Washington D.C. [he points to a wall of his office]… that was the piece I took up there [to New York City] the day that I got there and found out Willie was having problems and I went to lunch with the Willie. Kotlowitz and Decter told me, but mainly Kotlowitz, that Willie had written a tough letter of resignation and they were trying to get him not to mail it. And when Willie and I went out to lunch I told Willie there's no wiggle room and he shouldn't send it. And the next day he confessed to me that he had already mailed it.

[What about what Willie wrote about you in the "About This Issue" section of *Harper's*?] Willie made up a bunch of this… Refused permission to drink beer in football

practice?! I mean come on, Willie. He got this algebra stuff right…Actually, I only failed it twice and the second time Becky Smith the teacher said to me after class, "King, stay. I want to talk to you." And I thought, "What now?" She already failed me the year before and she came up and said, "I'll deny having this conversation, but if you promise me that you will not take algebra two, I'll give you a passing grade in algebra one." I said, "Miss Smith, you've got a deal." I was so surprised and happy. [Doubts he holds the Lone Star beer drinking record.] A pack of Lone Star beer in 14 seconds? Willie made that up.

[About Udall]…He and I were very close friends. I believed in what he was doing and when he ran for president in '76, I spent a lot of time campaigning with him. Jimmie Carter beat him in 26 out of 27 primaries. But 8 or 9 of 'em were just key votes that were so close. I think they even called Wisconsin I think it was for Mo and he was accepting victory speeches on TV and we were there whooping it up for the camera. He's the best man I ever knew in public life.

Of course it's wrong. [Making things up.] I would be embarrassed to make stuff up. It's not fair to the work, it's not fair to the readers. You're not true to yourself when you do this. Somehow it didn't bother Willie. It wasn't that he made up stuff that was important. All that little stuff he made up about me was fun. By and large I think the stuff he made up was like that. I don't think it hurt anybody.

I still feel uncomfortable with that and I don't think most writers do it. Halberstam, I can't imagine him doing it, or Talese. I was always surprised Willie did. "No," his son said to me when he read the book. He thought I'd misinterpreted what Willie was always saying that in order to tell the truth sometimes it was necessary for a writer to lie. But he didn't think his father said that. But as I say, I don't think it was about important things….But still I don't know what made him feel obliged to do that.

I think that some of our articles about politicians may have disappointed the politicians. But I don't think we got into any scandals. I used to say if you wrote a press release for a politician and wrote 44 lines and had his name in it 17 times, he'd want it reversed – he'd want 17 lines and have his name in it 44 times.

[Regrets?] No, not really. I was telling people when I was eight years old that I was gonna become a rich and famous "Arthur" one day. I have come pretty close to that. Got a theatre named after me there in Austin. I never thought would happen.

I once wrote if you have a Southern accent, and you dress like a cowboy and you could quote an act or two of Shakespeare, you could catch the attention of editors – more than if you didn't have it. So I played the role shamelessly. I wrote a piece about it later called "Playing Cowboy." The truth is I hated the goddamned country…(haha) ranches and farms and all that. I worked on some when I was a kid, but I despised all that. I wanted to get out and go to the city.

[Did Willie die because he drank too much?] I think that probably had a lot to do with it. I didn't see him much the last year or two of his life. (A friend) said that he really looked bad…puffed up and red in the face and just obviously not in good shape.

[Was partying culture necessary for *Harper's*?] No. We were all so different about drinking. Halberstam no problem. Corry no problem. [Corry later contradicted this point.] Willie and I: Great problems with it. Marshall Frady: In the middle. Kotlowitz: No problem.

(A mutual friend) used to jump on Willie for drinking so much. And saying "You don't have to drink and die young like Scott Fitzgerald in order to leave a literary legacy, Willie." But I don't think Malcolm understood that some of us are simply alcoholics and that it can be inherited to a certain extent, which is what I warned all my kids about. It really has less to do with, when you are an alcoholic, with wanting to do it than the fact that somehow you build up a tolerance for it. It doesn't kill at first it takes years and years but then by the time the damage is done.

The times were much more drinking and partying than they are now. I used to wonder, frankly, how editors at not only magazines but at book publishing houses, I knew a lot of them I'd go to lunch with 'em. They'd go out to lunch with somebody every day and stay out two hours drinking. "When did the work get done?" I wondered. That was the way the culture was.

[Bar napkin compositions?] No, unless it would be poems I wrote to be sent to Halberstam by Alma Faye Frumkin. And she'd write such poems as Kites in the Wind:

Look
in the Sky.
Kites.
Red Orange Blue Green.
Then
I run
Free
with the string in my hand
breaking wind.

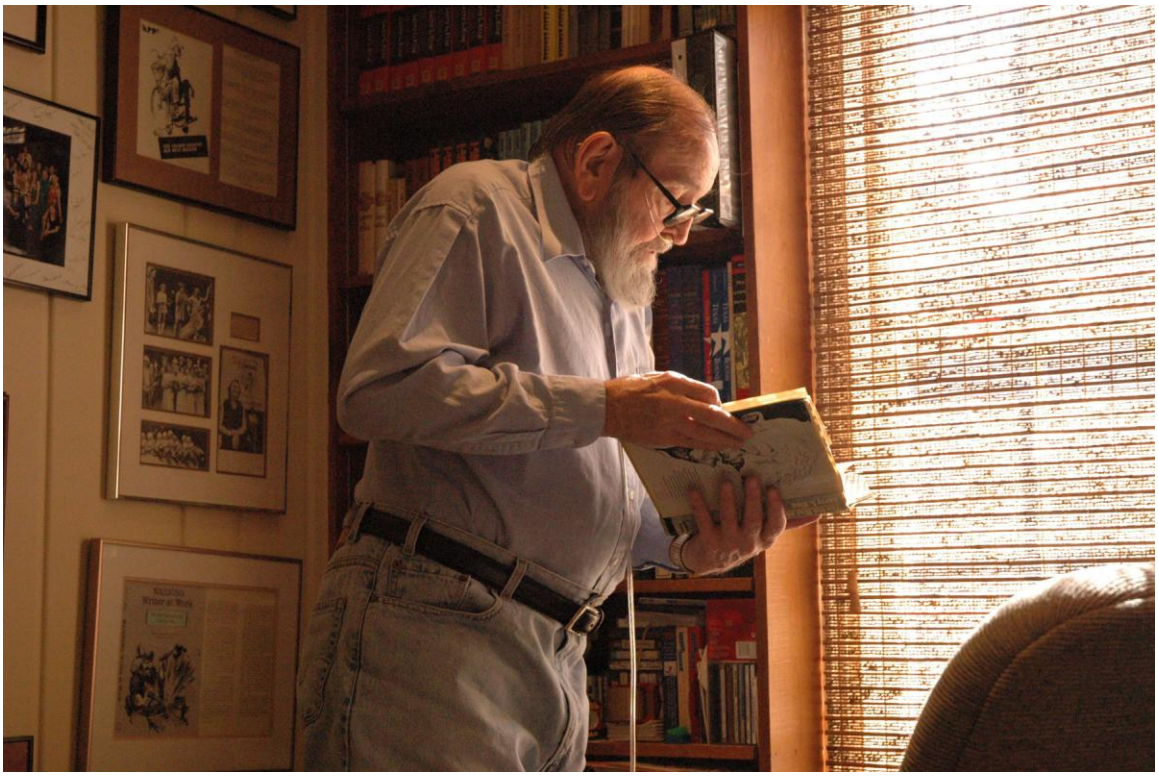
That was Halberstam's favorite. He liked that. He thought it was funny. But she'd also write him letters saying she wished he'd come to her town…claimed she lived in North Carolina. So she'd say, "Please, I don't think you'd mistreat me. You've got an honest face. Not like that second baseman from the Cotton States who came and took advantage of me and broke my heart." I'd get a woman to write that down in a woman's hand and then have somebody mail it from North Carolina. He figured it out finally, but at first… He figured it out pretty quick. But the first ones I'd sent post cards because people could see.

I got a little boy about eight years old to write: Dear Mr. Halberstorm, (I'd purposely spelled the name wrong) I know you are a writer. I like your work because it is simple. Mommy and Daddy said you are the simplest writer they know. [chuckles] Love, George [continues giggling]

Halberstam would read that and put it in his pocket, according to our shared secretary.

[Experiences with some of the staff that preceded the chief editorship of Willie Morris like Virginia Hughes, Judith Appelbaum, Katherine Gauss Jackson…] They were older writers who were there before Willie became editor-in-chief and he let them know they weren't in the future plans.

[Work now?] (It's not going so good…) [Working on book, which he says is probably his last] Called *Safe at Home: Life on the American Home Front in World War II*. I was a teenager then. For the first time in my life I don't feel pushed to write; I don't feel compelled to write. I'd really just rather read and rest. I really got to get with it and I've been telling myself that for a year. Now I've got a year and a half left to work on it and it will take another year and half to get it ready. I've got to get with it because hell, I'm gonna be 79 here January 1. SO as it is, I'll be 80 when it's finished and 81 when it's published, if I'm still around. So that's the bright side. That's the best that can happen. So I've got to get with it and get it done.



Larry L. King in congress with the written word in his home library in Washington, D.C. Oct. 10, 2007.

Edited Robert "Bob" Kotlowitz interview, Oct. 2, 2007.
His Upper West Side City apartment, New YorkCity.

Willie spent a lot of time at Elaine's (hanging out, drinking and talking. So did Lewis Lapham.) Lewis was one of Willie's buddies. At one point he came to office and said "I want to make Lewis Lapham a contributing editor." The magazine was designed to have contributing editors as its staff. (Reduced assignment headaches.) If I saw Lewis once at the office, it was a lot. I don't remember (him there). The clash [with management] came so fast, it was over before he became a part of it…

Lewis Lapham was not part of our (inner circle/office); he chose to be an outsider. He had his own agenda….wasn't a presence – he wasn't there. When he chose the role he chose for himself, he set a tone for the other contributing editors….

I decided to leave because…all night meeting at the St. Regis Hotel. Contributing editors had a meeting before the meeting with John Cowles. He was in Minnesota waiting for jury duty. [The editors said] John, if you don't come to New York, you will not have a magazine. I was alone in the office. I would not let that magazine just fold. John got on a plane, came to New York and (booked) a suite in the St. Regis.

Contributing editors said, "We're meeting before the meeting and we want you to be there. We'll only stay if they make you editor in chief." I knew there was about as much a chance of that happening as us going to the moon in the morning.

They did not mince words – it was tough stuff. Larry in his inimitable way. One by one they left (until Lewis Lapham and Kotlowitz and Cowles were left). (Lapham) said nothing, did nothing. I went home, called Cowles about 9:30 the next morning and resigned. I was not prepared to stand up and make any kind of speech. [Just said] "I will make sure this issue comes out."

Bill Blair calls and said, "You can be editor of this magazine. All you have to do is go out to (Minnesota) and talk to John."[Kotlowitz replied] "If John Cowles wants me to be editor-in-chief of this magazine he can fly me out."

In my heart (I knew it was over.) I could not turn my back on the guys who stood up on my behalf….it was impossible.

Never saw Cowles again until six months ago at a party (wives were friends) "What have you been up to?" He knew what I'd been up to.

[The next editor] Bob Schnayerson…it was wrong (bad fit) It was over. Willie was in shock. (He wrote the letter, but he didn't think they'd accept it.) Running around the office shouting "They accepted it!" He did just what they wanted him to do.

He was so talented, so gifted; he was so unfair to his gifts and talents so often. He was naïve in many ways. He really was 32. He had a serious drinking problem. That's no secret. That became a problem for everybody else. Willie often didn't get in till noon and then leave around 2:30 to do his work.

He had a wonderful generous spirit and personal warmth. What you sensed when you read about him and by him reflected the man. Without his self-destructiveness he would have been the greatest American editor of the 20th Century.

When I became managing editor, I must have [received Willie's editorial mission statement letter]…. I thought I had finally found the perfect job where I could write my book….served all my personal concerns and interests…(job I was) dreaming of since I was a teenager. Worked with David Halberstam, Midge Decter….Very collegial… intellectual, beautifully designed. [Decter] Great companion – highly intellectual. Started writing (books/articles) like *Liberal Parents, Radical Children*. And Norman began to become a neo-conservative.

We were all friends. Would have dinner parties. Suddenly sharp right turn and out of our lives. Here I am, 82 and still stunned. I run into his children and they cling to me like we're the oldest of friends. Every now and then (she would write something about *Harper's* days… the Bubba Boys at *Harper's*). In a paragraph about me, she went out of her way to say the nicest things. (I sent her a note of thanks, nothing. The snub…) stretched out over time. The hurt is a lesson – it makes you weary, not a useful lesson. I don't like lessons (like those, those kind are useless, don't need them).

Willie did not choose me to be managing editor. I came to *Harper's* through Jack Fischer. Willie was writing *North Toward Home*. Jack was going to resign and this young man would become editor-in-chief. Poor Russell Lynes had not a clue. Jack – devious is too strong a word, but (he was capable of working behind the scenes…introduced Willie and Kotlowitz over dinner). We had a wonderful evening – we both accepted each other right away.

The other full length (pieces were)….Moyers' *Listening to America*….Styron's *Confession of Nat Turner*….*On the Steps of the Pentagon* (*Armies of Darkness*) the best, most thrilling of all… When that thing came in and we knew what we were going to do with it…

John Cowles was never (born to be) a magazine publisher… What we wanted *Harper's* to be, to make it what it was becoming… Jack (Fischer) was in a state of shock. He thought Willie was Jack Fischer the second, another country boy.

[After Kotlowit'z resignation he was] Walking down Madison Avenue, head hanging. And I heard a deep (familiar) voice say "Looking for another magazine?" It was Gloria Steinem's boyfriend. (Made me feel better.)

Willie's marriage not in good shape. This event caused that to break. It wasn't good for anyone. The contributing editors all had to go out and re-create their lives. I was sitting in the office (alone…thousands of stories as news of crash spread.) "Bob, what do you need?" It was my oldest friend from Baltimore calling…

We knew in our heart of hearts it was very serious – it [the work they had created] would last – that we would all be alright. We knew that, too.

The Rat won that battle. Not the war, though. I'll never forget Sage Cowles saying "Maybe we'll meet in the airport in Madrid!" People really talk like that! "And I hope we'll still be friends!" I wanted to deck her. Degree of callowness on John Cowles part that I had never experienced. It was impossible to repair it again…

Got to the office about 9:30 and stayed as long as I had stay… (not late) I had a family. I liked to be home with them for dinner. About 6:30, have a drink, dinner. At 8:30 back to work (writing books) in this little room until 10:30.

Very small staff. Everybody was responsible for a lot. Contributing editors took a load off. Editing David was a major job. He was a fabulous reporter, but (I had to) sit down with (his) material.. [With one piece Kotlowitz] had to come home and work for three days…

Being an editor at *Harpers* meant you were only working with the best writers. Harold [Schonberg/Clurman?]…. His copy barely had to be touched and…. Irving Howe was a joy to work on. Being an editor at *Harper's* was really a pleasure. If I hadn't worked there I would have been a reader.

A staff of young people and assistant. editors. A few older editors…Sheila Berger, art director who married Tom Wolfe and is still married to him. (The magazine) just didn't go out every month, it was designed.

Each contributing editor had an office. Larry…I loved it when he was in town… I had to get used to that…I never knew anybody from Texas. They were guys with big personalities.

[Halberstam] His death this spring was a horrible loss in personal terms.

We were doing exactly what we wanted to do, we didn't talk about it. No bickering about the nature of the magazine. We were all pointed in the same direction, except the publishing end and some of the older editors...(Catharine Meyer/Russell Lynes).

Willie and I had talked so much..go out with Celia and my wife…

Willie did not like confrontation, neither did the contributing editors. They want to know what they're doing next (and they were off). I'm not crazy about confrontation myself. David liked to stir it up a little. [In general, the magazine was] surprisingly easy going.

David did a lot of writing at home. Corry did most of his at the office. I never saw Larry working. He was in New York (infrequently because he worked in DC). Marshall worked at home…was in office (rarely). Some contributing editors this was not the only thing they did.

Always worried about Corry making deadlines..locked in his office until (midnight/wee hours at deadline time). I never worried that much, (light-night lock-ups) went with the territory.

Staff meeting once a week for ideas…Most loose (magazine) and run sanely, I like to think.

Magazine writing in the office and my own writing at home. I did a piece about growing up in Baltimore...

I just sit down and just go to work. I don't fool around. I get up in the morning (and sit down to write), if it doesn't work, (I keep going/sit there until it does). I don't pace, I don't chew the pencil. (No coffee, no beating head on typewriter) I recall beating my fist on my forehead and moaning…All kinds of things I had done …..

Up in Columbia County, near Tanglewood, had a place on Fire Island. At times I broke away from where I would work and would walk on the beach. (Then I thought) I'm creating these moments (of writing frustration) because it's so great to walk on the beach… (You have to be careful).

The very act of finishing anything… a book (is the greatest.) I really don't know how I wrote those books at night. Only one was written in (what he considers to be ideal circumstances)..I think it was the best book I wrote…I didn't have the confidence when I was younger to just sit down and write a book. I took a leave for three weeks to finish my first novel.

I'm very disciplined….I love to swim. Every day in the steam bath with the old men. I'm not made for an artists' colony.

[About his wife's views on the writing life.] I think she had a pretty good idea about how everything was, that it would be tough. My younger son was in the theatre (lighting design) and his wife (stage management). [At hospital his wife, Billie, was dying from lung cancer.] I heard Billie say [to their son, David] – "You're gonna have a tough life." I wish she hadn't said that because they knew it. They got married. Now full professor at Dartmouth…

They have a really wonderful life and (to see) how they live…(wonderful)

Both of my kids chose risky lives. They're disciplined and I think the message they [received from Kotlowitz was absorbed].. Do what you want to do. Don't compromise. It will cause you to live your life in agony. I've seen it countless times. It's living death.

I have really enjoyed my life. When I left *Harper's* I had a lot of job options. All in the magazine world and I thought, "Enough." I had an invitation to go into public television and I'd never been in a television station in my life. Editorial director. We're going to transform public television. Endless conversations and I began to believe him. You can always go to *Atlantic Monthly*. *Time* made me a nice offer. So I said yes to public TV. I (loved it) and won an Emmy in my second year. It's like running a low grade fever (constantly)…. It was something.

Searching for my father's family's past. Vanished in the Holocaust from Poland. I began writing about my father's life in Poland. I had a difficult life (with him)…trace the beginnings of what made it so difficult….

German-Jewish refugee boys coming to Baltimore, being adopted… Never talked about Germany, Europe and the family..bright, ruddy complexions.. I became obsessed by them. I began to make friends with as many as I could.. All these things interested me so much. My father, my family… [experience in] infantry during the war, sole survivor (of ambushed platoon). I've written 5 books and maybe there will be more.

At 82 I like being lazy for a change. I do miss getting up in the morning and not doing it. [But] I get to really read the *New York Times* and really answer those phone calls. I read at my own leisure. I keep discovering new writers. I love not being pressed and music is important to me….ballet…

[Edits on his own *Harper's* work?] Willie looked at mine. He never touched it. (I said) "You have to take a look…" Maybe he hated it so much…

I never showed a book manuscript to anybody until it was perfect.
[Good editing relationships?] I did with Judith Jones at Knopf.

Too interrupting to start dealing with suggestions a third of the way through. I don't know where the book is going when I start.

[The (narrative) arc] I carry it and it carries me, if I'm lucky. I can't take suggestions (in the midst of the arc). (After complete, then re-writing and word mincing is OK.) I'll consider anything.

[Halberstam's work featured] repetition and too much material. I'd go in with four times as many suggestions as I really wanted. A review of his new book in the *Times* last week…repetitiveness was one of the themes. Being an editor means being (an editor).

[Catchy writing slogans?] I don't think that way.

When you're working with (the best writers like Irving Howe.) They won't let anything fall (into your hands that's not perfect). They want to look wonderful all the time, especially to you. (Never show anything that's not complete.) I was eager to read it because I knew (it most copy would be perfect)…so happy, so pleased. Fine writing and first-rate thinking – Rare and rarer all the time.

Robert Kotlowitz opens the door to *Harper's* writing culture from a living room chair at his New York City home. Oct. 2, 2007

Edited Lewis H. Lapham interview, Dec. 2007.
A Union Square tavern, New York City.

Contributing writer for *The Saturday Evening Post* from 1962 until the *Post* folded in 1968, maybe ’69, then contributor to *LIFE*, then the *Herald Tribune*, then contributing writer to *Harper’s* in late 1969 jut before I went to Alaska…

Ran across Morris one night at Elaine’s and pitched the Alaska idea because Alaska had just gotten $900 million from an oil company. The proposition was to go for about three months and see what they were doing. Two to three months in Juneau…Came back to New York and on basis of that piece I became a contributing editor.

I would write a certain number of pieces for an agreed sum of money. Can’t remember what that sum was, but…for the time and place at 1971 prices, it was good.

I don’t remember what else I was doing…I was trying to write a novel/screenplay… In the fall I began working on a piece about Wall Street. It was going into type just at the moment Willie left *Harper’s Magazine*.

I was not particularly close to Morris. I didn’t hang out with Larry L. King, Halberstam or Frady. (Went to Elaine’s, but) a different part of the restaurant. I was into gambling and Elaine’s in those days had lots of gambling. Poker, very high stakes games. Those are the people I hung out with. I was not part of the literary, journalistic crowd. I was friends with them….There were a lot of other writers that would hang out at Elaine’s those days; I was more interested in the ones that played poker. It was a movable feast.

[Culture]

I thought revolutionary rhetoric of the sixties was a pose. I didn’t take it very seriously….It was a charade; a toy revolution. So I didn’t take it seriously. There were some genuine: I wouldn’t say that of….people who were part of the civil rights movement. But it was not true of the journalists. The journalists were just along for the ride; to make as much money as possible along the way. I did not take them seriously. They wanted it both ways:…romantic/revolutionary figures paid large sums of money for their displays of conscience. The whole sixties thing in New York started in San Francisco in ’57. By time I got there in ’67, the Beat generation was dead. There’d been Zen, revolution, marijuana, LSD, very good jazz, Mort Sahl. By the time it got to New York in the sixties it was déjà vu, four years behind the curve.

The whole hippie thing was like a clothes promo. There was objection to war once the draft was extended to the Ivy League schools; no one gave a shit before that – just like now.

There were some serious people in the sixties, but not many of them. That's why it failed and the liberal idea kinda dies in the U.S. around '68. It becomes about glamour and celebrity… The sixties made good copy.

Journalism is about a balancing act. Kierkegaard once said if his daughter strayed and turned into a prostitute and then repented of her ways, he would take her back. But if she went into journalism, never.

Homer Bigart – the New York Times – it was the facts. Today most of what you read is a feature story. Today most of them start with feature leads (an Iraqi widow stands by her door)… What Wolfe calls New Journalism gets started in the sixties. Before: what is happening, what a reporter sees. Reporting subject to rules of the house, and they're up to the proprietor.

Culture of the sixties. Most of us – true of Wolfe – came out of the culture of fifties universities. The only real writer was a novelist – non-fiction. You have a lot of would-be novelists turned journalists. Applied techniques of fiction and melodrama to real events (Wolfe, Talese, Didion).

The other thing that happened in the sixties is that the news business moves out of print into T.V. T.V kills the big magazines: *The Saturday Evening Post, LIFE, Colliers, Look* (all collapse). If a sixties president wanted to talk to the U.S. people, he would sit down for an interview with Teddy White of *Life* – (or *The Saturday Evening Post*) Late sixties [moved] to T.V. Now whatever percentage of people get their news from T.V. But in order to try and stay alive, the print press morphs into entertainment, a writer as an end to itself, the journalist as celebrity.

It's actually an old story: It's exactly what W.R. Hearst did with Yellow Journalism. He had an eye for talent / for writing – had Ambrose Bierce for columnist.

[Yes, Lapham agreed, he has a true love of words] But I don't pretend it's journalism (or at least not as journalism as properly- defined). I write essays. I'm a great believer in the power of words. If I were running a major news media right now, I'd put more and more emphasis on the power of words. Not as much on data transmission, because data transmission is done better and more (quickly) by power of the Internet.

I don't even remember whether I read it [*Harper's*]. I'd been used to working at *The Saturday Evening Post*. And to me the greatest editor of the sixties was Otto Friedrich I learned almost everything I know about editing I learned from Otto.

I'm a big believer in good writing, but to make good writing correspond to good journalism is very hard to do. It's very hard to make it lay down in same manger. Journalism properly defined in just the facts. What happened…(Homer Bigart is that kind of reporter). When it starts to go literary…(Belle-Lettres….Then you have to be an essayist like Edmond Wilson – a real writer). It takes great talent to be able to do it.

People do it for all magazines (*Rolling Stone, Harper's, Vanity Fair*). There are not a lot of them, but there are a number of them. There is a lot of talent around. Thank God.

Not enough to support an industry. We're not talking about Elizabethan England.

I said "Willie, I got a great story in Alaska. They got a lot of money and it's in hands of the state. This is Tabula Rasa – no private corruption; they can make utopia …They've got 25,000 people (not counting Indians)… $900 million is a lot of (money) enough to make the perfect (society)…." The legislature fell upon it, like Eskimos on a beached whale.

I sat down and talked to him. Always five or six people sitting at the table. Willie didn't take very long to think about it. He said "Sure, fine." It took like two seconds: "Here's the deal." "Yeah, fine. Go ahead and do it." He was a good editor in that way because he would take chances and he loved talent. He was himself a very talented writer.

Willie didn't do editing. Willie did commissioning and the celebration. Willie was what we call an acquisitions editor. If it had to be re-shaped, the work of it was done by Midge Decter or Kotlowitz. Both had a sense of line editing and structure. They were much less rigorous than the *Post*.

Fischer was the old rural journalist. He grew up in either the Texas Panhandle or rural Oklahoma. Sandy desert in the middle of he U.S. – must have been born abound the turn of the century. Depression youth. Knew how to ride a horse, drill wells, find oil. Country grit, a man of the Plains. Served American government in WWII intelligence (also may have some active service.) That's where he met Cass Canfield, (president) and owner of Harper Brothers. So impressed with Fischer, he brought him back to New York to be editor at Harper & Row, same red brick building as magazine. After awhile Canfield made Fischer editor of magazine. (Former editor died in '54 at same time columnist – Bernard Augustine DeVoto – one of the truly great 20th century writers.)

Made Fischer editor and "Easy Chair" columnist… An old newspaper guy, could do something very fast. He would rewrite most manuscripts. Most manuscripts you get as editor are poorly written. True in'54, true today.

[Fischer] liked short sentences and facts. A very sparse and clean style. Starts in '54. In '67, Fischer resigned by that time…Harpers Bros. had become Harper & Row and sold the magazine to John Cowles in Minnesota. Cowles was a great admirer of fiction-had been to Harvard, inherited a great newspaper empire in the Midwest and married Canfield's daughter – wanted to show her (he could be as good as her father).

Fischer was a very wise man and a real figure in the New York literary world. But it was the old New York literary world that got destroyed in the sixties. (Along with $400 advances…) belief in literature died in the sixties.

In the fifties, it was believed that literature could answer the important questions of our time. People still look to writers to guide them through…

Mailer/Updike/Bellow/Roth and essentially nothing has happened since. Those four guys are the Alpha and Omega of American literature. By and large (nothing else…) baton passed to the journalists and the gurus and the movie people. Brad Pitt and Sean Penn are the conscience of the age. Mailer was last of the 19th Century novelists. People do not look for answers to the questions they consider important [in the written word]…Change happened in the sixties.

[Memoirs?] A couple publishers would like me to do that…. Tempted…cultural changes, cultural and political…. Broad picture. I'd put in telling anecdotes [he grins].

I'd only been in the office twice in two years (in the spring of 1970 and the next year for the piece on Wall Street). Friendly with everyone, but same arrangement with *LIFE* or *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Completely changed my life: Married in 1972. For the first time in my life I had to wear a suit to the office (had to be responsible). As a contributing writer, I'd spent six months a year (traveling). Now, not doing that…Married man and member of the bourgeoisie. Taught myself to write essays….A chance to educate myself in public. Journalism was fun, got to travel around the world. Like post-graduate education with the essay writing… I started out wanting to be a historian, I didn't have patience for grad school – that's why I went into journalism. As I began to write essays, I began to understand ideas.

Magazine journalism….10 mediocre manuscripts, maybe bring two B+ or A. With this you're starting with an A. I was editor of *Harper's* for 30 years and published the first pieces of a lot of very young, talented people. But it doesn't have any affect. (Obvious – oblivious – from 2002 – attack on Iraq. Futile destruction. Bull shit.) A very interesting problem. How do you reach people? Journalism has lost so much credibility….

Willie Morris had this whole idea that there was a bitter hostility between art and money. That's not necessarily true. The Renaissance was based on banking. Reason: Arabic numerals introduced to Italy in the First Century, which teaches people to count….New empire: ….new Renaissance flows…pawn brokers acquire riches, political power…nouveau riche start hiring people like Fragonard.

J.P. Morgan saved *Harpers* in the 1890s. Morgan gave a $1.5 million loan and never called it, said it was a national treasure. Robert O. Anderson in 1980 – wild cat oil operator (another bail out). Foundation took over in 1984.

Willie and I both agreed about good writing.

Lost Illusions…Balzac 1840s – the hero of that…Lucien Chardon. That is Willie Morris Part II…. The year I was at Yale, I used 3 texts to teach journalism: Balzac's *Lost Illusions,* George Orwell's: *Politics and the English Language* and Guy de Maupassant's Bel Ami.

I didn't buy that (trite) notion that (art) had to go out the window. I was concerned for the institution of the magazine. I was in a position unlike the other people. None of them had suffered any reversals (of fortune)…. I'd worked for the *Herald Tribune*, *The Saturday Evening Post*: like an old cavalry officer who had a lot of horses shot out from underneath him.

I don't believe in non-negotiable demands – (the divorce between money and art).

As editor of a magazine [*Lapham's Quarterly*], I'm also in publishing and my learning curve is straight up (circulation, book stores…) I enjoy it. I do not distain the commercial market.

I thought Willie could have worked things out with Cowles. I thought that then. I think that now. I still see Cowles. The whole attitude: you're a philistine is wrong, romantic, fantastical attitude.

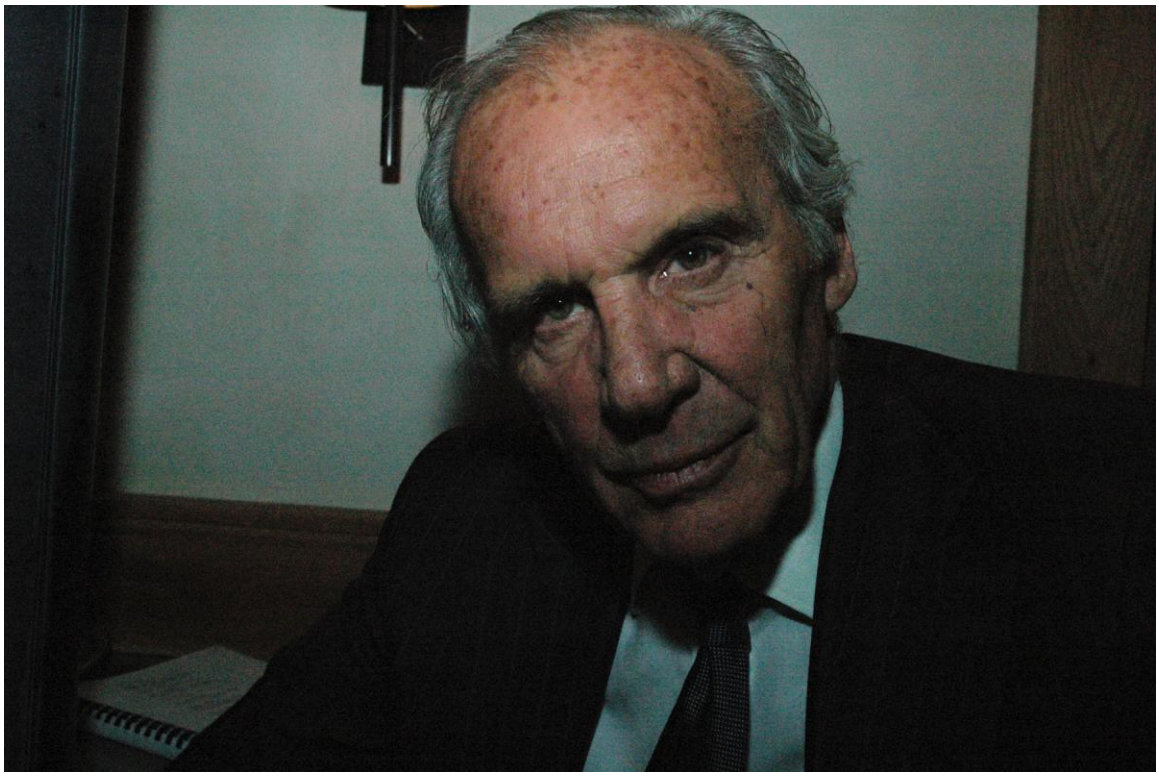
One of the things that happens with electronic media which triumphs….it supersedes print media: new sensibility, new revolution. A different form of expression. (TV demands eye, radio the ear – electronic requires something of reader/listener: a joint venture.)

[Did his upbringing color how people treated him as a writer?] The bias is in the culture that nobody who comes from the presumably opulent ruling class can be talented. It's the same kind of mistake Willie made, the same division between art and mind….Because my family was in banking and the oil business and I went to Yale, it was unthinkable I could become a writer. I was always under suspicion. (Like Shakespeare: the idea that a semi-literate…wrote those works…Plays probably written by the Earl of Oxford.)…[Lapham said common supposition suggests] an aristocrat cannot be a writer.

You have to prepare yourself for surprises. You can count on the media most of the time to get the story wrong. Only person to get [the *Harper's* editorial meltdown of 1971] right was the London *Economist*. They were not interested in the micro-personality of it. They were interested in the economics…It was losing enormous amounts of money, as well as circulation.

Willie had no respect for the market: the market was money and therefore wrong….

Money is Fire



Lewis H. Lapham takes a break from launching *Lapham's Quarterly* and other assorted obligations to reflect on the writing culture he encountered in 1970 when he became a contributing editor at *Harper's*. December 2007.

Institutional Review Board Study Documentation

Date, 2007

Dear Editor,

The thesis I am writing to earn my master's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism seeks to recall the years from 1967 to 1971, a period of great change and excitement in American journalism. My research involves asking what lessons might be learned by examining the writing culture at *Harper's*, which existed at the nexus of that change and excitement.

By transcending the boundaries of the inked pages of the magazine and the words of individual actors, this study aims to invoke the consciousness of the magazine and bring to life the conversations and experiences of the people involved its production, especially with respect to the attitudes, rituals and peculiarities they may have brought to the writing process.

Above all, this research seeks to understand the meaning the magazine's staff brought to their work and how their mutual communion at the magazine influenced their individual evolution in literary philosophy and practice.

Given your association with *Harper's* between 1967 and 1971, I am asking for your participation in my study. I ask that you consent to at least one personal interview with me, preferably at your home or office, at a time most convenient for you. If an in-person interview is deemed impossible, a telephone interview will suffice.

The interview process will involve a series of open-ended questions. The length will be dictated by how much information you are willing and able to share. I estimate an average interview to last about two hours. If you have more information than can be shared comfortably in one sitting, a follow-up interview can be scheduled.

This study will benefit society by amalgamating scattered bits of journalistic history into an in-depth work designed to illuminate the cultural dimensions of the writing process. You may benefit from the personal satisfaction of having contributed to this effort.

The potential risks to you as a participant are minimal and are not likely to exceed discomfort you experience in daily life. You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions asked. If you feel undue discomfort, you may ask to move to the next question or to return to the uncomfortable question later. You may also choose to end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Your name and responses may be included in the text of my thesis, which will be available online or in a bound copy through the University of Missouri's journalism library.

Please feel free to contact me at (317)509-0939 or hoosierchild@yahoo.com if you have any questions or would like to discuss my research or your rights as a research subject. You can also contact my faculty advisor Berkley Hudson, assistant professor of journalism: (573) 882-4201 or hudsonb@missouri.edu.

For additional information regarding human subject participation in research, please feel free to contact the University of Missouri-Columbia's Campus Institutional Review Board Office at 573-882-9585.

Refusal to participate involves no penalties or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

You will receive a copy of this document, should you wish to refer to it in the future.

If you agree to participate, please indicate your willingness by signing this document.

I, _____ , acknowledge that I have been informed about the purpose, risks and benefits of the study Exploring the Writing Culture at *Harper's* Magazine 1967-1971. I agree to participate in this study, but I am aware that I may withdraw my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I might otherwise be entitled.

Signed _____

Date _____

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