



J. Anthony Lukas

Deconstructing Power

“When I was a young reporter on the Baltimore *Sun* in the late '50s,” J. Anthony Lukas wrote in 1973, “Scotty Reston was the man I wanted to be when I grew up.” Lukas grew up to be something different, an outsider, a maverick, a man who believed that journalists ought to deconstruct power and privilege. In a talk before a group of Nieman fellows in 1978, Lukas urged them to write about the “power relationships which exist in society at large” as opposed to those that pertain to “quadrennial or biennial struggles that go on around an election to a particular office.”

Lukas began his career in the belly of the establishment, covering the Congo and India for *The New York Times*. In 1968, he won a Pulitzer for “The Two Worlds of Linda Fitzpatrick,” which chronicled the downward trajectory of a young woman whose life began in the affluent suburbs of Connecticut and ended in the hippie squalor of New York’s East Village, where she was beaten to death along with her boyfriend. Later, Lukas clashed with his editors at the *Times* — he felt they manipulated his coverage of the Chicago Conspiracy trial in 1969-70 — and in 1971 he was instrumental in founding the antiestablishment journalism review *MORE*, to which he contributed superb essays and profiles.

Lukas left the *Times* in the early 1970s to dedicate himself to book writing, his true forte. His book *Nightmare*, which emerged from a series of lengthy pieces for *The New York Times Magazine*, is a harrowing account of the Nixon years. After years of obsessive research and interviewing, Lukas published *Common Ground*, a panoramic tale of Boston’s wrenching busing crisis and a magisterial history of the city itself. It garnered him a second Pulitzer in 1986. Lukas spent most of the 1990s writing *Big Trouble*, a sprawling tale of class warfare in turn of the century Idaho. In June 1997, shortly after he finished the book, Lukas, who had spent decades battling depression, took his own life. “His death is an incredible waste,” his friend and *MORE* colleague Richard Pollak wrote in *The Nation*, “but he remains a role model with few peers.” — S.S.

Murdoch Expands

Fox network is launched;
Cable growth follows as he adds
news and sports to his tabloid approach

“Cher turned to Pee Wee Herman and said, ‘I love you,’” wrote *The Globe and Mail* on October 11, 1986, reviewing the launch of *The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers*. “Elton John revealed that he dresses modestly at home. David Lee Roth bent over and shook his thick tush at the audience as he departed.” It may have seemed like humble beginnings. But with that thick shake, the Fox television network began.

From this first hour of programming on his new station, Rupert Murdoch — already the owner of a mini media empire that included his hometown Australian papers, *The Sun* and *The Times* in London, and the *New York Post* — hoped to create a fourth television network. Cher and Pee Wee Herman didn’t necessarily spell instant success, but it was just one step closer to the ultimate goal of total world domination. Correction: total media domination. Fifteen years later, it just feels like the former.

The *Arrogant Aussie*, as one biography of Murdoch is titled, started his network with six independent television stations in top U.S. markets — New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Dallas, and Houston. Already schooled in the ways of media acquisition, Murdoch collected more and more television stations. He quickly beefed up his programming, and just three years later, Fox looked like it was on its way to turning the Big Three into the Big Four.

The *Tabloid Baby*, as another biography is titled, and his Fox Broadcasting Company now own thirty-two television stations and boast hit shows like *The Simpsons*, *The X-Files*, and *Ally McBeal*. Murdoch, who never really abandoned his tabloid style (epito-

... EXPLOSION OF SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER

From NASA AND THE SPELLBOUND PRESS

by William Boot, July/August 1986

NASA was until January 28 generally seen by the press as an exemplary federal agency — the one that put men on the moon without major cost overruns while the Pentagon was squandering billions. But in a scramble to scrutinize the space agency after the shuttle disaster, news organizations have shattered NASA’s pristine image, uncovering evidence that the agency was long aware of problems with the O-rings; that it rejected Thiokol engineers’ launch-eve scrub recommendation; that it downplayed O-ring problems for the sake of maintaining an unrealistically brisk launch schedule; and that it cut corners on safety in a number of other ways to lower costs while at the same time wasting billions of dollars through mismanagement.

