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Thinking Globally, Reporting Locally

All-news radio has proven that it's possible to learn about the world in 22 minutes. We can find out about Bosnia, the O.J. trial or the "Contract with America" in one quick news cycle. But radio, TV and magazines thrive on national and international news while ignoring the local communities in which we live. As a result, we know more about faraway events and less about the people and places that affect us the most. New York Newsday successfully fought this trend by making all of New York City its domain, by going beyond the Park Avenue crowd and covering the conflicts and culture of all five boroughs.

New York is not an easy city to report on accurately. Unlike cities that shut down at the end of the workday, New York never stops. That's why our subways run day and night, unlike those in the nation's capital. And, unlike Washington, D.C., where there is one large employer, the feds, in New York no single industry or business dominates our economy or politics, even though many try. Here, spiritual leaders are politicians, corporate executives are more active in national than local politics, and community groups fight each other as well as public officials.

New York plays by its own rules, customs and values. Rudeness is a sign of strength, and ridicule is an instrument of combat. In what other city would Anthony Mason be a hero or Ed Koch the self-proclaimed "voice of reason"?

That's why newspapers are so vital to this city. Only the print media have the space and time to explain what the rough-and-tumble means to the day-to-day life of New Yorkers; newspapers link the worlds of politics, business and culture so that they can understand, if not appreciate, each other. Most New Yorkers will never set foot in City Hall, march in a parade down Fifth Avenue, or get injured in a subway crash and even fewer will spend time on Rikers Island or in a homeless shelter. So we rely on newspapers to tell us what goes on in these places.

Neither television nor radio can adequately report on a city of 7.5 million when their audience is a region of 20 million. Furthermore, television is a visual media that highlights bombings, drownings and fires, but not the nitty-gritty policy decisions of city bureaucrats.

Newspapers, however, have failed to keep up with the city's changing ethnic base. Local community and foreign-language newspapers are flourishing while the big dailies shrink. But New York Newsday went beyond the cops-and-robbers headlines to report on people and neighborhoods that most had never seen, much less cared about.

In a city where residents are more likely to visit their homeland abroad than travel to another

borough, only a daily newspaper can create a common point of reference that unifies rather than isolates individuals and communities. In a city like New York, we can't survive without a daily dose of information that keeps citizens informed and the politicians alert. Who will do this now?

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