
THE *TIMES* OMBUDSMAN:
AN HISTORICAL CASE STUDY AND TREND ANALYSIS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Major Professor: Robert W. Dardenne, Ph.D.

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This case study and trend analysis positions the history of the *St. Petersburg Times* ombudsman in the overall debate over news ombudsmen and uses that history to examine the current state of antinome in the debate. Interviews with the principals of that history at the *Times*, along with an examination of the newspaper's ombudsman columns through the 11 years that the *Times* employed one, established the case study. The research and synthesis of hundreds of journal articles and scholarly works on ombudsmanship and media accountability established the framework of the overall debate. The analysis resulted from overlaying the case study on the debate.

The case study found that the initial freedoms granted the *Times* ombudsman to critique the newspaper in a published column were later diminished by the arrival of a new editor, whose experiences with an ombudsman at another paper persuaded him that such criticism, originating in-house, could be damaging to staff morale and editorial authority. Through synthesis of other research, such thinking was found to pervade journalism, with a great many editors of influence coming down on the side against ombudsmen.

The overall study found that while certain dynamics of the *Times* experience with an ombudsman are unique to the newspaper and even editor-specific, the theoretical perspectives of *Times* editors was shaped - and has helped to shape - the broader debate over ombudsmanship. The evolution of the job at the *Times*, as occurred in the title of the

column and the ombudsman, as well as in the editors' attitudes and levels of control over the ombudsman, points to influences of the centuries-old struggle between press freedom and press accountability.

Abstract Approved: _____


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