

knew they were eating genetically modified (GM) soybeans; six percent knew they were eating GM corn. According to Hart, Americans are unwitting guinea pigs.

The scientific history of genetically engineered food can be traced to the San Francisco lab where, in 1973, Herbert Boyer and Stanley Cohen developed the first method for engineering bacteria through a process of selecting genes with specific characteristics and inserting them into a bacterium, a process that would later be used to develop synthetic human insulin for diabetics and enzymes used by the food industry to control texture and taste. Boyer and Cohen's technique ushered in a rash of interest in bioengineering among scientists and corporations alike, fascinated by the mass potential in the new technology to make riper tomatoes, parasite-resistant spuds, and enriched golden rice that would combat blindness in the Third World.

Yet the feats of science and technology developed in the quarter-century since Boyer and Cohen's breakthrough tell only one side of the story. Once bioagricultural companies had mastered the science and were ready to take their products to the marketplace, a much tougher battle awaited, this one with a public that feared the health and environmental consequences of tampering with nature's original genetic recipes. Time and again, the public met the introduction of genetically modified food with anxiety regarding its long-term effects.

Monsanto's debut of bovine growth hormone in 1986 (which promised higher yields of cows' milk), and a year later Advanced Genetic Science's open-field test of the "ice-minus" bacterium (which lowered the temperature at which frost forms on crops) were met with protests and subsequent public relations fiascoes. Bovine growth hormone seemed to tamper with a food staple of children solely for the benefit of corporate farmers, and pictures of scientists dressed in space suits spraying strawberries with ice-minus were disconcerting, to say the least. The StarLink debacle and the subsequent recall of 300 products from grocery store shelves generated similar anxiety. Though critics of GM foods have not been able to shut down laboratories,

they have been mildly successful in scaring the public from buying such products by filling the vacuum of hard scientific information with "what if" scenarios, an alarmist strategy employed in nearly every paragraph of *Eating in the Dark*.

Though all the anecdotes and facts Hart presents are disturbing, her arguments never climax. Her primary contention is that there has been no testing done on GM foods to determine that they are in fact safe for human consumption. But the problem is that neither has there been any testing to suggest they are not. Thus, the reader is stuck in the midst of a scientific tug-of-war with no real clarity as to the potential threats to humans or the environment. Instead of facts, we are offered insinuations; in place of studies, opinions. Hart's strongest piece of evidence that GM food may be harmful turns out to be as dubious as the story about StarLink corn allergies. After dedicating an entire chapter to the supposedly ground-breaking work of British scientist Arpad Pusztai, who determined that Bt potatoes damaged the immune systems of mice, she shatters his credibility. Pusztai's findings and methods were questioned by his colleagues, his own research institute rebutted his claims, and the UK and EU both relieved him of his duties studying GM foods.

Hart hints, hollers, and shoves the reader towards a conclusion that the technological promise of GM food is as treacherous as that of atomic energy once proved. Her argument for more testing is persuasive. But after 14 chapters, when the smoke clears, she still can offer no clear-cut answer to perhaps the most significant question of all: Should I shop at Safeway or Whole Foods?

TYLER CABOT is a former Washington Monthly intern.

Weather Vain

By Brent Kendall

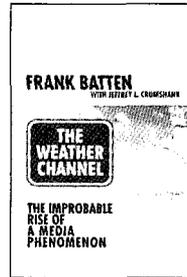
DON'T KNOCK THE WEATHER," the humorist Kin Hubbard once cautioned. "If it didn't change

once in a while, nine out of 10 people couldn't start a conversation." For the past 20 years, The Weather Channel has provided plenty of material for these conversations, establishing itself as one of the country's foremost media brands in the process. But success wasn't preordained. It was produced by a fateful combination of business skill and serendipity, says Frank Batten, who, with Jeffrey L. Cruikshank, has just given us *The Weather Channel: The Improbable Rise of a Media Phenomenon*.

When Batten, the now-retired chairman of Landmark Communications, announced his company's plan for a 24-hour weather network in 1981, the media and business communities responded with a collective snicker. Though cable was still in its infancy, stations like CNN, ESPN, and MTV were raising expectations. A weather channel, on the other hand, hardly seemed like the next big thing. But while much-

hyped cable ventures like CBS's arts-and-culture network came and went, The Weather Channel figured into the daily routine of more and more viewers. Today, it has achieved almost complete cable-market saturation, reaching 85 million households that tune in for its pitch-perfect blend of reality TV and news you can use.

In 1978, "Good Morning America" weatherman John Coleman spent his nights preparing his morning forecasts and his days plotting his dream venture, an all-weather channel to supplant the anemic TV news coverage, which he considered grossly inadequate given the effect weather has on people's lives. Eventually, Landmark signed on. The company's cable systems already carried a rudimentary weather channel, nothing more than the scrolling text of the day's forecast and a still shot of wind and temperature dials. Though it provided about as much action as fish swimming in a bowl, people seemed to be tuning in, as evidenced by the many customer complaints Landmark received when the station experienced technical problems. Batten's instincts convinced him that viewers would be intensely loyal to the



THE WEATHER CHANNEL:
The Rise of an Improbable
Media Phenomenon
by Frank Batten
Harvard Business School, \$29.95

channel and would value its weather reports as a public service.

The Weather Channel debuted in May 1982, with a staff built on meteorological credentials instead of good looks, and with pioneering technology that provided each cable system with locally tailored forecasts. But the relationship between Coleman and Landmark soured quickly in the face of larger-than-projected losses and, in Batten's view, declining staff morale. The two parted ways just over a year later, but not before airing their dirty laundry in court, Coleman departing the venture entirely.

Perversely, the court battle helped The Weather Channel by publicizing its financial problems. Landmark's original business plan was a precursor of the basic Internet model—give away content and make money through advertising. Only the major networks were able to charge cable operators for their broadcasts. But those operators feared losing their niche weather programming and indicated a willingness to pay for it. Revenue stabilized, the cable industry boomed, and The Weather Channel finally broke even in 1986.

Batten surely enjoyed The Weather Channel's improbable rise, but he doesn't let the reader in on the fun. The narrative jumps from the problem-plagued early years straight to the current halcyon days, with hardly a mention of such Weather Channel celebs as Jim Cantore—the Kerouac of weathermen—who, traveling with the station's mobile "Storm Tracker," never met a hurricane he couldn't cover. Then there's the depressing Coleman, who casts a shadow over much of the book—a dreamer, says Batten, who "had written a part for himself that, sadly, he proved unable to play." (Coleman currently works for KUSI-TV in San Diego and recently dismissed *The Weather Channel* as self-serving and revisionist. Weather fanatics anticipate his scathing tell-all.)

Readers are left to ponder Batten's loftiest claim: that The Weather Channel has fostered "an enormous surge of interest in the weather." While it's probably true that your average weather-

watcher couldn't speak knowingly of El Niño 20 years ago, people have marveled at Mother Nature's wonders since time immemorial. Weather remains beyond our control. And despite The Weather Channel's climb to the top of the cable world, with its snazzy seven-day forecasts, its subject remains largely beyond our prediction.

BRENT KENDALL is a Washington Monthly intern.

Coulter Clash

By Jamie Malanowski

IN A WORLD OF LARGELY STATIC talking heads, there is no pundit more kinetic than Ann Coulter. She bobs her head, she shifts in her seat, she moves her hair around. She does more things with her mouth and eyes and eyebrows in one segment of a talk show than Jack Germond did in a decade on "The McLaughlin Group." She is also fast. She thinks fast, she talks fast, she blurts, she gasps, she interrupts, she makes noises of exasperation and disgust. She is also forceful, stating her opinions firmly and supporting them with facts. She has mastered the art of the talk show, of winning the segment, of getting the last word in before the commercial break or before the host changes the subject. All these elements together make her a formidable television presence.

Why, then, she would ever write a book is beyond me. Words just sit there. They don't move. They don't go away. The author's media-genic advantages and her theatricality are nullified. Her speed of thought and speech are useless. The pages accumulate, revealing every inconsistency, every mistake, every bad habit, every crutch. If I were Ann Coulter, and *Slander: Liberal Lies About the American Right* was the best book I could produce, I would never write another word.

Slander is basically a tour d'horizon of recent American politics during which Coulter reviews liberal commentary about personalities and events and attempts to show how very, very, very wrong liberals have always, always, always

been. And not always just wrong, but also mean, and unkind, and unfair. At the same time, she attempts to show how conservatives were always right, and how they were also scrupulous, precise, and consistently aboveboard and high-minded. The book does not try to argue, say, that Ronald Reagan was a great president, or that George W. Bush is a capable leader, or that Al Gore would have been a poor leader, or that the Republicans won the Florida election in 2000 fair and square. To argue those points would be too timid. Coulter's approach is to treat these and other precepts of the right as immutable laws of nature, and then to treat anyone who would object to them as un-American or heretical or lunatic.

Does it sound like I'm skewing what Coulter says? Here are some typical sentences:

"Every pernicious idea to come down the pike is instantly embraced by liberals to prove how powerful they are. Liberals hate society."

"Liberals hate America."

"[Liberals] are painfully self-righteous, they have fantastic hatreds, and they could not see the other fellow's position if you prodded them with white-hot pokers... They are completely unhinged"

"Principle is nothing to liberals. Winning is everything."

"Liberals explicitly view the dissemination of news in America as a vehicle for left-wing indoctrination."

Read that last sentence slowly; has she been eavesdropping at the Secret Liberal Club meetings? And how about this one? "For about twenty years now, all new ideas have bubbled up from the right wing." All new ideas? All? Air Jordans? The Macarena? Pizza Hut's Stuffed-Crust Pizza?

"Liberals have been wrong about everything in the last half-century," she writes. "They were wrong about Stalin (known as 'Uncle Joe' to Franklin Roosevelt) ... They were wrong about Reagan. ... They were wrong about the Soviet Union ... They were wrong even about their precious 'Abraham Lincoln brigade' in the Spanish Civil War ... Nicaragua. ... welfare ... crime ... the sexual revolution." For the sake of argument, let's say liberals were wrong about all those things, although it's really hard



SLANDER:
Liberal Lies About the
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by Ann Coulter
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