Don't be a spoil-sport and start grumbling when you find the price of grapefruit doubled at your supermarket. Try to understand, if you can, what a boon the disaster has been to the citrus fruit growers worried about a bumper crop that brought nothing but vitamin C at low prices to the nation. The Times *understood and, with the patience of a good teacher, repeated the lesson of Jan. 22 on Jan. 23. This, children, is how free enterprise, assited by an Act of God, works.*

The *Times* is a-changing

By James Aronson

There was a time when the *New York Times*, like Caesar's Gaul, was divided into three parts: the daily paper, the Sunday paper, and the Washington bureau. A strong managing editor ran the daily, a seeming editor-for-life, Lester Markel, ruled the *Sunday Times*, and in Washington, Arthur Krock, who sometimes confused his address with 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, was The Washington Correspondent.

This inflexible hierarchy created embarrassing and frustrating situations: the daily and Sunday papers existed in a state of armed truce, with occasional border skirmishes, and *Times* reporters from New York were required to present passports (at times declared invalid) to the Washington bureau when they crossed into the District of Columbia.

But there was little question that the three jealous fiefdoms strove for editorial excellence, if they did not always achieve it, and that the casualties of internal wars were carried out of headquarters quietly at night, in shrouds of old real estate sections, to be given difnified burials and respectful obituary notices in the *Times*.

Overall, the publisher watched impassively, moved an occasional knight or rook, and set a fresh white lily under the portrait of the Founder, Adolph Ochs. It was all in the family.

But, as Henry Luce predicted it would to all men, death came, as well as attrition. The men who married the bosses' daughters and became the publishers—Arthur Hays Sulzberger and Orvil Dryfoos—died. Arthur Ochs (Punch) Sulzberger, a son and heir in his own right, became publisher. Krock retired, as presidents and generals saluted. Markel figuratively was carried out of office in his editor's chair. A.H. Rosenthal became managing editor. And the New York Times Company went public.

It was not only stock that became available to the public, however; the royal family itself became news. Gay Talese wrote *The Kingdom and the Power* about the paper and its personalities and it became a best seller. Journalism reviews and gossip columns began to record internal jockeying for position, with anxious jockeys themselves leaking the tidbits.

►Hard times.
The most alarming leak of all was that hard times had come to the *Times*. The paper could not make it on its own.

So in 1970 a huge deal was consumated with Cowles Publications whereby for $52 million of *Times* stock the *Times* acquired five consumer magazines including *Family Circle*, eight medical and dental magazines, 13 daily and weekly newspapers in the South, a television station and three book publishing houses. In addition, the Times News Service, a facsimile service and other adjunct operations were expanded. Further properties have been acquired in the last six years.

Still the bad news persisted. Union contracts were draining, costs were soaring, and the word on Wall Street was that the Times Company was being woefully mismanaged.

The unkindest cut of all came in August 1976 with an article in *Business Week*, "Behind the Profit Squeeze at the New York Times." *Business Week's* diagnosticians found "festering" management and marketing shortcomings. The result "is that the financial health of the *Times* has seriously deteriorated." Then, more ominously: "Editorially and politically, the newspaper has also slid precipitously to the left and has become stridently anti-business in tone."

Back at the court there was hurt and anguish. Wasn't *Business Week* aware that the *Times* had taken drastic steps to set its financial house in order with strict budgets, new market analyses and circulation and promotional drives? More, innovations were in the works to reclaim readers fleeing the tormented city for the suburbs: special Sunday editions for Long Island, Westchester County and New Jersey where *Newsday*, the *Bergen Record* and the Gannett chain were trouncing the *Times*. Even more, special Wednesday and Friday food/style/entertainment sections where McDonald-surfeited readers could discover where to buy the best quiche and caviar in town at prices any junior corporate executive could afford; directions to those fun boutiques where That Cosmopolitan Girl gets her deliciously mod hooker outfits, and quite daring interviews with clergy who have come out of the choir room.

►Renewing confidence.
Most important of all were changes on the editorial side itself, designed, it would seem, to renew "business confidence." In April 1976, publisher Sulzberger had announced that cousin John B. Oakes,

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whose supervision of the editorial page had actually induced people to read a heretofore largely unread page, would retire in January 1977 to spend the two years before his mandatory retirement traveling the world in search of fresh insight for the readership.

Eyebrows rose over Oake's eight-month notice, and went even higher with the quick announcement of Oake's replacement: Max Frankel, Sunday editor and former chief of the Washington Bureau, whom the Sunday staff had affectionately name Attila the Hun.

Clearly the "lean to the left" would halt. Not that Oakes was "left," but he had an open mind, a decent regard for human rights and had the respect of all except the hard noses in the counting houses and the cold-war liberals who suspected him of being soft on the "international communist conspiracy."

The gap between Oakes and Sulzberger widened to a chasm in September 1976 when the *Times*, after its editorial board failed to agree on a choice, endorsed Daniel Patrick Moynihan for the U.S. Senate. Oakes protested in an unprecedented letter to the editor. The editorial had been ordered by Sulzberger, but the hand—at least to this observer—seemed to be the hand of the Hun.

►Changes on the Editorial Board.
Even before Oake's departure, drastic changes had been instituted on the editorial board. Seasoned and authoritative journalists were removed and offered a place elsewhere in the *Times*. Herbert Mitgang, for example, became publishing correspondent, one of the few happy transitions. James Brown, who had resigned as editor of the editorial page of the *Providence Journal* in disagreement with the publisher's hawkish position on Vietnam to join the *Times*, removed himself altogether from the *Times* for a job with a newspaper in Maine. Fred Hechinger, an authority on education and civic affairs, became director of the philanthropic New York Times Company Foundation.

As portentous as these departures were, the replacements were even more obvious: Roger Starr, former Administrator of Housing and Development for New York City, whom *Times* reporters had dubbed Mr. Benign Neglect for his attitude toward the city's ill-housed; Professor Richard H. Ullman of Princeton, a Council of Foreign Relations insider and Defense department policy-planner, and Walter Goodman, another cold-war liberal whose book on the Un-American Activities Committee blessed the drive against communists (but not liberals). The signals were clear, the fact of Frankel even clearer.

►Raise profits, raise the standard of normalcy.
Will all this make *Business Week* happy? First reports indicate that it will. Under the guidance of A.H. Rosenthal, now elevated from managing editor to executive editor, much of the *Times* has become reunited in a kingdom of trivia and trash. Advertising (for even more trivia) is up slightly, as is circulation. The battle for the suburbs has been joined. Westchester or bust!

While all this may seem to be born of the desperation of the *Times* family to restore the faith of the financial community and ensure the continuity of America's most prestigious newspaper, reality indicates otherwise. The Times Company is making money—perhaps not as much as it has in the past, but quite a nice piece of change, thank you. What is happening at the *Times* is also happening at the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and elsewhere in the press. It is almost as though the media as a whole has opened a peanut-flavored fortune cookie and read the slip: "Do not rock the boat. Raise the standard of normalcy."

That should make us all as pleased as Punch.

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