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Book Review
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Women Journalists at Ground Zero: Covering Crisis

Judith Sylvester & Suzanne Huffman, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., August 2002, Pp. ix + 185; Biographies, Appendices and Index, \$60.00, Cloth ISBN 0-7425-1943-0 & \$21.95 Paperback ISBN 0-7425-1944-9

(Reviewed by Rohee Dasgupta, March 2004).

The book is a well-organised sampler of daring extracted from the personal and professional experiences of twenty-four women journalists belonging to news houses like CNN, AP, ABC news, WNYC radio, CBS news, People Magazine among reputed others, reporting the 9/11 crisis. *Women Journalists at Ground Zero: Covering Crisis* features telling tales of risk, though not always unusual but certainly adds colour to the prominent breaking news of the twenty-first century. The concept is symbolic and appreciable; the timely publishing definitely enhances the scope of getting the attention of readers interested in media communications and current affairs.

The presentation is much like twenty-four personal case studies, their responses and gripping experiences of covering the crisis. The narrative seems rather personal and the set-up of real-life sequences though much a teaching tool, are gender oriented as expected. The stories of prominent journalists and their deep rooted urge of finding the story to share it with the public responding to the need every minute is underscored quite strongly. The twin tower tragedy is observably more focused than the Pentagon to depict chaos, anxiety and the human hope for survival.

The sudden deconstruction in the smoky Manhattan skyline is hard for many to accept, as Suzanne Plunkett of the AP, NYC relates confessing an intense personal attachment with the huge bank of escalators at the World Trade Centre, "I have a sinking feeling when I see the skyline now. It looks like Boston, not New York. It's just a sick feeling, still. They are just gone. It's still hard to imagine".

The stories of photo editor, Madge Stager and photographer Beith A. Keiser of the Associated Press, NYC are particularly interesting. With the former recollecting on the tensions that arouse with missing co-workers and the bond they shared after being found is moving. The information that Stager imparts on the digital images and editing on AP's efforts to give the real picture is commendable. For Keiser who had earlier photographed the Oklahoma City bombing this was only a more intense act of terrorism as she witnessed windows being blown out, walking, miles after miles for the right picture. Her experiences of working amidst the dirt and caustic smell of ground zero being selected as the fire department's pool of reporters and photographers from September 13th is intriguing. "I stood on the pile of the World Trade Centre", Beth said, "The firemen

who were working there in the pile had dogs. And they would stop to listen for sounds of survivors...”

The incessant round the clock dealings with health officials, teachers, fire fighters, policemen, people searching for loved ones in around the Ground Zero debris and Manhattan is intense, with memorials adding to the emotional trauma. Besides getting the right news the plight of the commoners to help each other and the press, practically with communications and travel is touching and the overwhelming humane concern to make life ‘a bit easier’ deserves mention. From a father’s desperate search for his three-year old daughter, to people jumping out of windows to a policeman’s seeking his dog, the events are sure to make the readers feel the heat, distress and immediacy of the situation. Overall a suggestive volume on the inevitable agonies and relational settings while reporting on one of the major geo-spatial calamity of the 21st Century.