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For a group of Michigan State students their college paper, the State News, was viewed as oppressive and stifled their ability to share the important issues with people in the community and their peers. Simply stated by one of their founding members and first editor Michael Kindman, “We hope unabashedly to be a forum for ideas, a center for debate, a champion of the common man, and a thorn in the side of the powerful.” 1 The Paper released its first edition on December 3rd, 1965 and what started as an outlet for a group of passionate students later evolved into a powerful voice in the underground press, and a founding member of the Underground Press Syndicate.

The Paper began as a publication founded on a strong sense of journalistic principles, and in its first issue promised readers that it would report on challenging issues. On the front page of its first issue, Michael Kindman announced their commitment and unapologetic take on the news in his article titled, “As We Begin: A Loyalty Oath.” In this article Kindman described the type of publication that The Paper would be, and what people could expect from it. “We seek to create an organization of unashamedly confident, critical, sincere talent, and with it to publish a newspaper (a magazine, if you prefer) which will be a credit to the community from which it emanates.” 2 This front-page article set the tone for future staff and readers, and later would draw criticism as the The Paper began to evolve.

Although The Paper began as a publication aimed at the East Lansing community, it slowly evolved as a publication whose reach extended across the

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globe. With the evolution of alternative papers springing up there became a need to organize the flow of information, in order to allow a mass audience to be exposed to what was going on in alternative news in different places. In 1966, *The East Village Other* recognized the need to bring the different alternative news outlets of the day together, and formed the Underground Press Syndicate. *The Paper* along with *The East Village Other* and three other publications formed the original Underground Press Syndicate. At its height there were six hundred papers that made up the syndicate. ³

To be a member of the Underground Press Syndicate you did not have to pay dues or agree to cover any specific type of news. The only requirements were that you printed the list of all the papers in the Underground Press Syndicate in every issue, and that you sent a copy of your paper to all of the other papers, without reprint restrictions. Thorne Dreyer, a founding member of the *Rag*, remembers his experience with the Underground Press Syndicate, “We had tables and racks and everybody would come in and read papers from everywhere... They all had kind of different looks, a different feel, but they all had a sense of community with each other.” ⁴

*The Paper* used information from the Underground Press syndicate for many purposes, and at times it was used mainly for commercial draw. Articles that were used to get people’s attention did not convey a specific message, but they did add a more alternative appeal. Celebrity interviews were often advertised on the front

page to entice readers. Without the information from the syndicate, staff was limited to covering what was happening in East Lansing and on the Michigan State Campus.

One example of The Paper running an interview of a well-known person was “The Turned-On Beatle” article, an interview with Paul McCartney, that ran in the January 23rd 1967 edition of The Paper. The interview, which originally ran in the International Times, London, discussed McCartney’s experiences with The Beatles and his personal philosophy. The article did not contain an anti-Vietnam message or encourage a specific outlook on social issues. Another popular interview was a reprint from the Rag that featured Judy Collins, who spoke about her experience with LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs. The interviews gave a glimpse of what was happening in greater society and allowed readers to experience the views of people outside of their own community.

Gradually social movements on campus and across the country became more extreme, and in turn so did The Paper. Although The Paper would continue to include interviews, information from the syndicate was used also to update the community on specific events happening in underground groups across the US. The February 3rd 1969 edition of The Paper featured short articles that almost resembled small advertisements but were all short-reprinted stories. One of the most detailed pieces featured was a Blank Panther article that focused on the murder of two Black Panther Party members at UCLA. “Bunchy and John entered the cafeteria at UCLA following a black student meeting concerning the control of the

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Afro-American studies program. Five minutes later they were dead on the floor…” 7 Pages were littered with these types of articles and although most were aimed at what were going on at other college campuses, there was always space that included anti-Vietnam sentiments.

With an increased amount of content from the underground press, also brought an increase in both the amount and style of imagery used in The Paper. Looking through editions of the publication its early publications feature hand drawn comics. As use of the Underground Press Syndicate intensified imagery in the publication became more elaborate and featured large spreads of collage-like images. The most recognizable change in imagery in the publication was the words “The Paper,” that appeared as the heading of each publication. They slowly began to change shape and become more interesting. It is as if they were a reflection of the different content that was beginning to appear within the publication itself, and act as a signal of its relationship to the Underground Press Syndicate.

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December 3, 1965

THE PAPER

October 6, 1966
February 7, 1967

As more information began to flow from the Underground Press Syndicate into The Paper, tensions between the staff began to play out in the pages of the publication. In the December 8, 1966 edition, Michael Kindman wrote a front-page
piece discussing *The Paper’s* role in the Underground Press Syndicate, titled, "The Underground Press Lives." In the article he discussed background on the syndicate and information on how it worked. He also discussed principles related to the use of "communications media in the overtechnologized society" by sociologist Marshall McLuhan. Throughout the piece Kindman seems to preach his views on the syndicate, and eventually revisits ideas and promises he previously made and promised readers of *The Paper*. 8

The most critical element to Kindman’s front-page article on the Underground Press Syndicate is his change in personal beliefs. In the first edition of *The Paper* Kindman went out of his way to establish a sense of trust with his audience. He even went as far to tile the piece, "A loyalty Oath." In almost exactly a year Kindman began to publicly question his former set of ideas. Kindman wrote, “Also, I cite the fact that we really didn’t have the slightest idea what we were getting into last year, when we thought we cared mainly about journalistic ideals.” 9 Although for most of the article he seemed to be speaking of his own opinion, in some instances it seems as if he was speaking for the publication as a whole. This would imply that the staff agreed with his opinions. Broad statements would later catch up to Kindman as other staff members presented their own ideas and criticisms.

Just weeks after Kindman’s article about the publications role in the Underground Press Syndicate, fellow staff member Larry Tate voiced his own

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opinions in the February 13th, 1967 edition. In the article titled, “An Open Letter to Mike Kindman,” Tate attacked Kindman and the Underground Press article that he had written week’s prior. In the piece, which was accompanied by a large image of a caged tiger, Tate picked apart Kindman's sloppy writing and the message he was sending to readers. Tate disagreed with the use of the Underground Press Syndicate in The Paper, and felt it was too closely related to the drug culture. Tate wrote of the influence of drugs in The Paper, “It’s this sort of thing, Mike, that infests the Underground Press and has made its way into The Paper... It makes me more unhappy than I can say to think that The Paper might become just another underground newspaper.” 10 The letter was both straightforward and pointed, and in certain instances attacked Tate also attacked his personal relationship with Kindman.

In the same edition of the publication Kindman wrote a follow-up to Tate’s article that appeared on the same page. Kindman defended himself and his original piece, and argued that Tate’s view represented a small-minded approach to issues discussed in the Underground Press Syndicate. Kindman expressed more of his feelings about the syndicate, but most importantly he defended his new vision for The Paper. “Left-hippie means we represent a particular style and direction, in favor of radical politics and a freer way of life, about which I can say no more [than] that I wish to spread it...” 11 All of this turmoil playing out so openly gave readers an

understanding of the tension in the newsroom, and specifically the seriousness of disagreements between staff members.

Although The Paper used information from the Underground Press Syndicate to expose the community to more national information, they also reported on some high profile stories themselves. In the December 8, 1966 edition of The Paper, the same edition where Kindman had originally shared his views on the Underground Press Syndicate, an article about the situation in Berkley was featured. This piece however was written by an East Lansing native. Unlike information from the syndicate, which was presented in small advertisement like articles, this piece covered a full page and included a large block of pictures. At the top of the spread a disclaimer from the editors explained where the information was from and how the author had a connection to East Lansing. “This article was sent from Berkley by former East Lansing inside agitator Mike Price, who has been observing recent under-reported activities on the University of California campus.” 12 This article could have been used instead of syndicate information because of its coverage of “under-reported activities” as the editors said, but it is interesting that this article appeared in the same edition that praised the use of the Underground Press Syndicate.

The Rag was the sixth paper to join the syndicate, and just as The Paper was a voice in the Underground Press syndicate, their editor Michael Kindman was also noted to have made an impact on the underground press. Kindman visited Austin Texas and helped influence the writers at the Rag. “The Rag had become the South’s

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first undergrounder after an editor from Michigan’s Paper came through Austin Texas in 1966.” 13 Thorne Dryer, writer for the *Rag*, remembers meeting Kindman. “Austin was really tied into what was going on other places. I had met a guy named Michael Kindman who had a paper called The Paper in East Lansing [Michigan].” 14

It was also during this period when Kindman received acknowledgement from the mainstream press. “Around this time period [meeting Thorne Dreyer], he won a small degree of notoriety when he was photographed and quoted in an article in Time magazine on the emerging underground press.” 15 Not only was Kindman a key person in the development of the Underground Press Syndicate, but he also helped influence the development of other underground publications, and publicize the underground movement.

Along with Kindman inspiring writers and editors forming the *Rag*, he was an important voice that appeared in Underground Press Syndicate Membership Rosters as well. According to a membership roster that appeared in the *Rag*, he along with Walter Bowart, editor of the *East Village Other*, said of the Underground Press Syndicate, “the most real of the new media, the best answer to creeping fascism in the press and in the mind... [People are] looking to us for stimulation of the mind and senses that the dinosaur media can’t provide...” 16 Bowart was expected to be involved in the promotion of the syndicate as he was one of the editors of the *East Village Other* that helped to create it. Kindman’s addition

however simply proves that he was a figure in the underground press that people were familiar with, and suggests that he also had their respect and attention.

Gradually as social movements became more extreme, so did the staff of *The Paper*. Some writers on the staff became increasingly involved in the SDS movement, and others, including Kindman, became more attached to the drug culture. “Although everyone who contributed to the newssheet shared the New Left’s broad goals of ending the Vietnam War and bolstering student power, some among them championed the revolutionary aims of SDS’s ultramilitants, while others, like Kindman became increasingly involved in the psychedelic movement.” 17 All of the tension and different ideas on content eventually led *The Paper* to release its final publication in 1969.

In four short years *The Paper* evolved from an alternative student publication, into a radical member of the Underground Press Syndicate. Although the staff and editors faced challenges and publicly disagreed on the content that went into the publication, they set a high standard for alternative reporting and prompted important questions in their community. Without Michael Kindman and the success of *The Paper*, other publications like the *Rag* may have never existed, or had the impact that they did. For those looking back on issues of The Paper, its voice and arguments still resonate, and its contribution to the underground press will

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never lose significance. The Paper lived up to Michael Kindman original vision, as being a “champion of the common man” and “a thorn of the side of the powerful.” 18

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Final References
(References at a Glance)

Images:


13 Abe Peck, Uncovering the Sixties (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1991), 58.

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