

NOVA

A BRIGHT STAR KEEPING
CALIFORNIANS AWARE

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Dean Baquet

Dean P. Baquet became executive vice president and editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in August 2005, succeeding John S. Carroll. Mr. Baquet had been the newspaper's managing editor since 2000, after significant career stints at the *States-Item* and the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans; at the *Chicago Tribune*, where he and two other reporters shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for reporting corruption on the Chicago City Council; and at the *New York Times*, where he and another reporter were Pulitzer finalists for their series exposing substandard care in the city's public hospitals.

As a veteran investigative reporter, Mr. Baquet recognized that a great newspaper must attract and retain its share of the most gifted and experienced journalists. As a leader of journalists he recognized that stripping a first rate newspaper of talented people can at some point lead to irreversible decline in both public service and business viability. While fewer people may be reading newspapers in any event, no one wants to read a printed medium of any kind that has become downsized to the point of mediocrity.

Mr. Baquet, in taking the *Times*' top news job in 2005, was aware that its owner, the Tribune Company, had pressured his predecessor, Mr. Carroll, to make economies that Mr. Carroll felt unacceptable. That the tension would continue for whoever took the position was an open secret. But Mr. Baquet maintained a difficult balance of public optimism and openness to negotiate with top Tribune executives on the one hand, and frank public criticism of the cost-cutting trend within the *Times*' own pages on the other.

He kept this approach even as the *Times*' own publisher, Jeffrey M. Johnson, was fired last October for publicly resisting cost-cutting. The Tribune company's reported plan was to raise the paper's profit margin from 20 to 27 percent, in part by reducing its 940 news staff by 100 positions. But Mr. Baquet's measured opposition to the plan could not last long. He was forced out about a month after Mr. Johnson's departure.

Californians Aware salutes Dean Baquet for his stubborn resolve to use all of his influence to keep the *Times* capable of doing first rate reporting in what may be the nation's most difficult daily newspaper business market and coverage area. It may be that no newspaper can succeed at that challenge any more, but someone had to say that an insistence on restoring the profit margins of the good old cash cow days will never be the answer.



JW August
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