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Newspapers: The Rise and Decline of Modern Journalism

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In 1887, a young reporter left her job at the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* to seek her fortune in New York City. Only twenty-three years old, Elizabeth “Pink” Cochrane had grown tired of writing for the society pages and answering letters to the editor. She wanted to be on the front page. But at that time, it was considered “unladylike” for women journalists to use their real names, so the *Dispatch* editors, borrowing from a Stephen Foster song, had dubbed her “Nellie Bly.”

After four months of persistent job-hunting and freelance writing, Nellie Bly earned a tryout at Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, the nation’s biggest paper. Her assignment: to investigate the deplorable conditions at the Women’s Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell’s Island. Her method: to get herself declared mad and committed to the asylum. After practicing the look of a disheveled lunatic in front of mirrors, wandering city streets unwashed and seemingly dazed, and terrifying her fellow boarders in a New York rooming house

by acting crazy, she succeeded in convincing doctors and officials to commit her. Other New York newspapers reported her incarceration, speculating on the identity of this "mysterious waif," this "pretty crazy girl" with the "wild, hunted look in her eyes."¹

Ten days later, an attorney from the *World* went in to get her out. Her two-part story appeared in October 1887 and caused a sensation. She was the first reporter to pull off such a stunt. In the days before objective journalism, Nellie Bly's dramatic first-person accounts documented harsh cold baths ("three buckets of water over my head—ice cold water—into my eyes, my ears, my nose and my mouth"); attendants who abused and taunted patients; and newly arrived immigrant women, completely sane, who were committed to this "rat trap" simply because no one could understand them. After the exposé, Bly was famous. Pulitzer gave her a permanent job, and New York City committed \$1 million toward improving its asylums.

Within a year, Nellie Bly had exposed a variety of shady scam artists, corrupt politicians and lobbyists, and unscrupulous business practices. Posing as an "unwed mother" with an unwanted child, she uncovered an outfit trafficking in newborn babies. Disguised as a sinner in need of reform, she revealed the appalling conditions at a home for "unfortunate women." And after stealing fifty dollars from another woman's purse, she got herself arrested and then reported on how women were treated in New York jails.

A lifetime champion of women and the poor, Nellie Bly pioneered what was then called *detective* or *stunt* journalism. Her work inspired the twentieth-century prac-

tice of investigative journalism—from Ida Tarbell's exposés of oil corporations in the early 1900s to the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, which was shared by the *Chicago Tribune*, for a series about defective and ultimately fatal toys, and the *New York Times*, for stories on toxic products imported from China.²

But such journalism can also be dangerous. Working for Dublin's *Sunday Independent*, Veronica Guerin was the first reporter to cover in depth Ireland's escalating organized crime and drug problem. In 1995, a man forced his way into her home and shot her in the thigh. After the assault, she wrote about the incident, vowing to continue her reporting despite her fears. She was also punched in the face by the suspected head of Ireland's gang world who threatened to hurt Guerin's son and kill her if she wrote about him. She kept writing. In December 1995, she flew to New York to receive the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists.

When Guerin returned to Dublin, she began writing stories naming gang members suspected of masterminding drug-related crimes and a string of eleven unsolved contract murders. In June 1996, while stopped in her car at a Dublin intersection, she was shot five times by two hired killers on a motorcycle. She had become contract murder victim number twelve. Ireland and the world's journalists mourned Veronica Guerin's death. After her funeral, the Irish government invoked her name, creating laws that allowed judges to deny bail to dangerous suspects and opening a bureau to confiscate money and property from suspected drug criminals and gang members.

▲ **ALONG WITH THEIR INVESTIGATIVE ROLE**, newspapers play many other roles in contemporary culture. As chroniclers of daily life, newspapers both inform and entertain. By reporting on scientific, technological, and medical issues, newspapers disseminate specialized knowledge to the public. In reviews of films, concerts, exhibits, books, and plays, they shape cultural trends and tastes. Opinion pages trigger public debates and offer differing points of view. Syndicated columnists provide everything from advice on raising children to opinions on the U.S. role as an economic and military superpower. Newspapers help readers make choices about everything from what kind of food to eat to what kind of leaders to elect.

Despite the pervasive importance of newspapers in daily life, in today's digital age, the industry is losing both papers and readers. Newspapers still garner a significant portion of the nation's advertising dollars, but they have lost their near monopoly on classified advertising, much of which has shifted to popular Web sites like *craigslist.org*. According to the annual "State of the News Media" study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), in 2007 total newspaper ad revenues fell 7 percent across the industry, despite a 20 percent rise in online ad sales (compared to a 30 percent rise the year before). Because of the switch to online advertising, many investors in publicly held newspapers don't believe print papers have much of a future. The PEJ reports that newspaper stocks fell 42 percent from the start of 2005 through 2007. The loss of papers, readers, advertising, and investor confidence raises significant concerns in a nation where daily news has historically functioned to "speak truth to power" by holding elected officials responsible and acting as a watchdog for democratic life.³

In this chapter, we trace the history of newspapers through a number of influential periods and styles. We explore the early political-commercial press, the penny press, and yellow journalism. Turning to the modern era, we examine the influence of the *New York Times* and twentieth-century journalism's embrace of objectivity. We also look at interpretive journalism, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, and the revival of literary journalism, which followed in the 1960s. Finally, we review issues of chain ownership, new technology, citizen journalism, and the crucial role of newspapers in our democracy.

The Evolution of American Newspapers

The idea of news is as old as language itself. The earliest news was passed along orally from family to family, from tribe to tribe, by community leaders and oral historians. The earliest known written news account, or news sheet, *Acta Diurna* (Latin for "daily events"), was developed by Julius Caesar and posted in public spaces and on buildings in Rome in 59 B.C.E. Even in its oral and early written stages, news informed people on the state of their relations with neighboring tribes and towns. The development of the printing press in the fifteenth century greatly accelerated a society's ability to send and receive information. Throughout history, news has satisfied our need to know things we cannot experience personally. Newspapers today continue to document daily life and bear witness to both ordinary and extraordinary events.

Colonial Newspapers and the Partisan Press

The novelty and entrepreneurial stages of media development first happened in Europe with the rise of the printing press. In North America the first newspaper, *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestick*, was published on September 25, 1690, by Boston printer Benjamin Harris. The colonial government objected to Harris's negative tone regarding British rule,

"There's almost no media experience sweeter . . . than poring over a good newspaper. In the quiet morning, with a cup of coffee—so long as you haven't turned on the TV, listened to the radio, or checked in online—it's as comfortable and personal as information gets."

JON KATZ, *WIRED*, 1994

"Oral news systems must have arrived early in the development of language, some tens or even hundreds of thousands of years ago. . . . And the dissemination of news accomplishes some of the basic purposes of language: informing others, entertaining others, protecting the tribe."

MITCHELL STEPHENS, *A HISTORY OF NEWS*, 1988

and local ministers were offended by his published report that the king of France had an affair with his son's wife. The newspaper was banned after one issue.

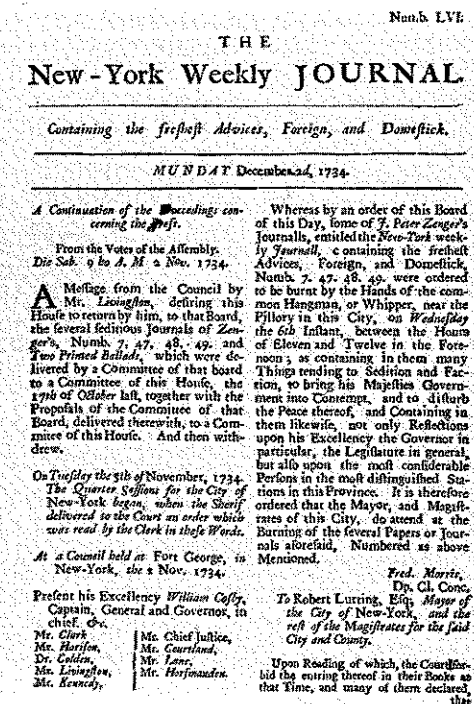
In 1704, the first regularly published newspaper appeared in the American colonies—the *Boston News-Letter*, published by John Campbell. Considered dull, it reported on events that had taken place in Europe months earlier. Because European news took weeks to travel by ship, these early colonial papers were not very timely. In their more spirited sections, however, the papers did report local illnesses, public floggings, and even suicides. In 1721, also in Boston, James Franklin, the older brother of Benjamin Franklin, started the *New England Courant*. The *Courant* established a tradition of running stories that interested ordinary readers rather than printing articles that appealed primarily to business and colonial leaders. In 1729, Benjamin Franklin, at age twenty-four, took over the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and created, according to historians, the best of the colonial papers. Although a number of colonial papers operated solely on subsidies from political parties, the *Gazette* also made money by advertising products.

Another important colonial paper, the *New-York Weekly Journal*, appeared in 1733. John Peter Zenger had been installed as the printer of the *Journal* by the Popular Party, a political group that opposed British rule and ran articles that criticized the royal governor of New York. After a Popular Party judge was dismissed from office, the *Journal* escalated its attack on the governor. When Zenger shielded the writers of the critical articles, he was arrested in 1734 for *sedition libel*—defaming a public official's character in print. Championed by famed Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton, Zenger ultimately won his case in 1735. A sympathetic jury, in revolt against the colonial government, decided that newspapers had the right to criticize government leaders as long as the reports were true. After the Zenger case, the British never prosecuted another colonial printer. The Zenger decision would later provide a key foundation—the right of a democratic press to criticize public officials—for the First Amendment to the Constitution, adopted as part of the Bill of Rights in 1791. (See Chapter 16 for more on the First Amendment.)

By 1765, about thirty newspapers operated in the American colonies, with the first daily paper beginning in 1784. Newspapers were of two general types: political or commercial. Their development was shaped in large part by social, cultural, and political responses to British rule

and by its eventual overthrow. The gradual rise of political parties and the spread of commerce also influenced the development of early papers. Although the political and commercial papers carried both party news and business news, they had different agendas. Political papers, known as the **partisan press**, generally pushed the plan of the particular political group that subsidized the paper. The *commercial press*, by contrast, served business leaders, who were interested in economic issues. Both types of journalism left a legacy. The partisan press gave us the editorial pages, while the early commercial press was the forerunner of the business section.

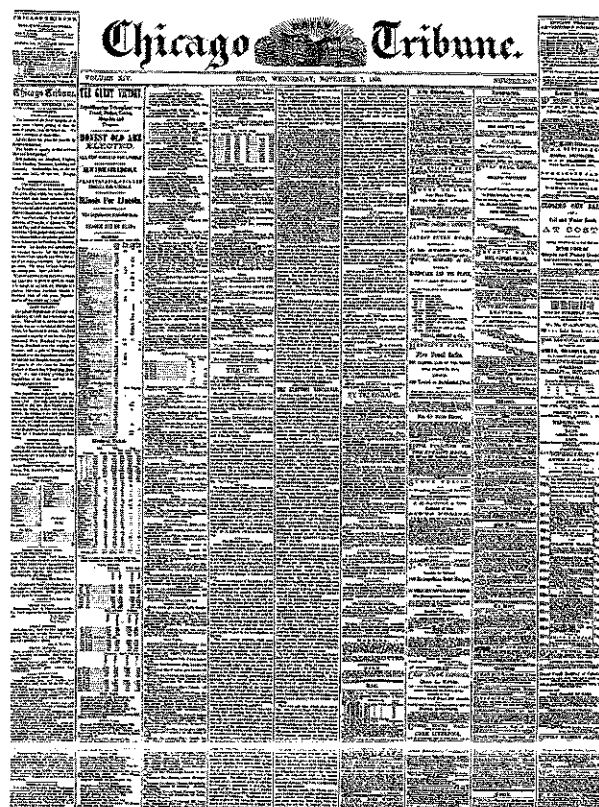
From the early 1700s to the early 1800s, even the largest of these papers rarely reached a circulation of fifteen hundred. Readership was primarily confined to educated or wealthy men who controlled local politics and commerce. During this time, though, a few pioneering women operated newspapers, including Elizabeth Timothy, the first American woman newspaper publisher (and mother of eight children). After her husband died of smallpox in 1738, Timothy took over the *South Carolina Gazette*, established in 1734 by Benjamin Franklin and the Timothy family. Also during this period, Anna Maul Zenger ran the *New-York Weekly Journal* throughout her husband's trial and after his death in 1746.⁴



COLONIAL NEWSPAPERS
During the colonial period, New York printer John Peter Zenger was arrested for libel. He eventually won his case, which established the precedent that today allows U.S. journalists and citizens to criticize public officials. In this 1734 issue, Zenger's *New-York Weekly Journal* reported his own arrest and the burning of the paper by the city's "Common Hangman."

▼ Newspapers: The Rise and Decline of Modern Journalism





THE RISE OF THE DAILY NEWSPAPER

Launched in June 1847, the Midwest's first great newspaper was probably the *Chicago Tribune*. (In 1924, the *Tribune* launched Chicago's WGN Radio, its call letters reflecting the *Tribune* slogan, "World's Greatest Newspaper.") The headline from the paper above announces Abraham Lincoln's election as president in 1860.

The Penny Press Era: Newspapers Become Mass Media

By the late 1820s, the average newspaper cost six cents a copy and was sold through yearly subscriptions priced at ten to twelve dollars. Because that price was more than a week's salary for most skilled workers, newspaper readers were mostly affluent. By the 1830s, however, the Industrial Revolution made possible the replacement of expensive handmade paper with cheaper machine-made paper. During this time, the rise of the middle class spurred the growth of literacy, setting the stage for a more popular and inclusive press. In addition, breakthroughs in technology, particularly steam-powered presses replacing mechanical presses, permitted publishers to produce as many as four thousand newspapers an hour, which lowered the cost of newspapers. **Penny papers** soon began competing with six-cent papers. Though subscriptions remained the preferred sales tool of many penny papers, they began relying increasingly on daily street sales of individual copies.

Day and the *New York Sun*

In 1833, printer Benjamin Day founded the *New York Sun*. Day set the price at one penny and sold no subscriptions. The *Sun* (whose slogan was "It shines for all") highlighted local events, scandals, and police reports. It also ran serialized stories, making legends of frontiersmen Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone and blazing the trail for the media's enthusiasm for celebrity news. Like today's supermarket tabloids, the

Sun fabricated stories, including the infamous moon hoax, which reported "scientific" evidence of life on the moon. Within six months, the *Sun's* lower price had generated a circulation of eight thousand, twice that of its nearest New York competitor.

The *Sun's* success initiated a wave of penny papers that favored **human-interest stories**: news accounts that focus on the daily trials and triumphs of the human condition, often featuring ordinary individuals facing extraordinary challenges. These kinds of stories reveal journalism's ties to literary traditions, which today can be found in everyday feature stories that chronicle the lives of remarkable people or in crime news that details the daily work of police and the misadventures of criminals. As was the case in the nineteenth century, crime stories remain popular and widely read.

Bennett and the *New York Morning Herald*

The penny press era also featured James Gordon Bennett's *New York Morning Herald*, founded in 1835. Bennett, considered the first U.S. press baron, freed his newspaper from political parties. He established an independent paper serving middle- and working-class readers as well as his own business ambitions. The *Herald* carried political essays and scandals, business stories, a letters section, fashion notes, moral reflections, religious news, society gossip, colloquial tales and jokes, sports stories, and, later, reports from the Civil War. In addition, Bennett's paper sponsored balloon races, financed safaris, and overplayed crime stories. Charles Dickens, after returning to Britain from his first visit to America in the early 1840s, used the *Herald* as a model for the sleazy *Rowdy Journal*, the fictional newspaper in his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*. By 1860, the *Herald* reached nearly eighty thousand readers, making it the world's largest daily paper at the time.

Changing Economics and the Founding of the Associated Press

The penny papers were innovative. For example, they were the first to assign reporters to cover crime, and readers enthusiastically embraced the reporting of local news and crime. By gradu-



NEWSBOYS sold Hearst and Pulitzer papers on the streets of New York in the 1890s. With more than a dozen dailies competing, street tactics were ferocious, and publishers often made young "newsies" buy the papers they could not sell.

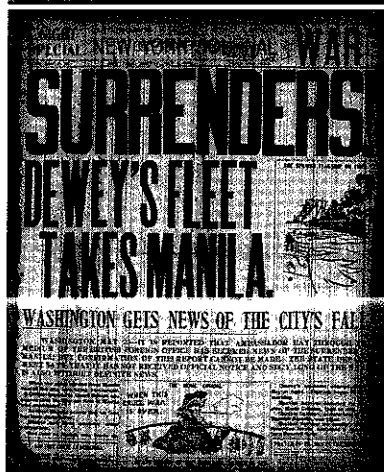
ally separating daily front-page reporting from overt political viewpoints on an editorial page, penny papers shifted their economic base from political parties to the market—to advertising revenue, classified ads, and street sales. Although many partisan papers took a moral stand against advertising some controversial products and services—such as medical "miracle" cures, the slave trade, and abortionists—the penny press became more neutral toward advertisers and printed virtually any ad. In fact, many penny papers regarded advertising as consumer news. The rise in ad revenues and circulation accelerated the growth of the newspaper industry. In 1830, 650 weekly and 65 daily papers operated in the United States, reaching a circulation of 80,000. By 1840, a total of 1,140 weeklies and 140 dailies attracted more than 300,000 readers.

In 1848, six New York newspapers formed a cooperative arrangement and founded the Associated Press (AP), the first major news wire service. **Wire services** began as commercial organizations that relayed news stories and information around the country and the world using telegraph lines and, later, radio waves and digital transmissions. In the case of the AP, the New York papers provided access to both their own stories and those from other newspapers. In the 1850s, papers started sending reporters to cover Washington, D.C., and in the early 1860s, more than a hundred reporters from northern papers went south to cover the Civil War, relaying their reports back to their home papers via telegraph and wire services. The news wire companies enabled news to travel rapidly from coast to coast and set the stage for modern journalism.

The marketing of news as a product and the use of modern technology to dramatically cut costs gradually elevated newspapers from an entrepreneurial stage to the status of a mass medium. By adapting news content, penny papers captured the middle- and working-class readers who could now afford the paper and also had more leisure time to read it. As newspapers sought to sustain their mass appeal, news and "factual" reports about crimes and other items of human interest eventually superseded the importance of partisan articles about politics and commerce.

The Age of Yellow Journalism: Sensationalism and Investigation

The rise of competitive dailies and the penny press triggered the next significant period in American journalism. In the late 1800s, **yellow journalism** emphasized profitable papers that



THE PENNY PRESS

The *World* (top) and the *New York Journal* (bottom) cover the same story in May 1898.

carried exciting human-interest stories, crime news, large headlines, and more readable copy. Generally regarded as sensationalistic and the direct forerunner of today's tabloid papers, reality TV, and newsmagazine shows like *Access Hollywood*, yellow journalism featured two major characteristics. First were the overly dramatic—or sensational—stories about crimes, celebrities, disasters, scandals, and intrigue. Second, and sometimes forgotten, are the legacy and roots that the yellow press provided for *investigative journalism*: news reports that hunted out and exposed corruption, particularly in business and government. Reporting increasingly became a crusading force for common people, with the press assuming a watchdog role on their behalf.

During this period, a newspaper circulation war pitted Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* against William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. A key player in the war was the first popular cartoon strip, *The Yellow Kid*, created in 1895 by artist R. F. Outcault, who once worked for Thomas Edison. The phrase *yellow journalism* has since become associated with the cartoon strip, which shuttled between the Hearst and Pulitzer papers during their furious battle for readers in the mid to late 1890s.

Pulitzer and the *New York World*

Joseph Pulitzer, a Jewish-Hungarian immigrant, began his career in newspaper publishing in the early 1870s as part owner of the *St. Louis Post*. He then bought the bankrupt *St. Louis Dispatch* for \$2,500 at an auction in 1878 and merged it with the *Post*. The *Post-Dispatch* became known for stories that highlighted “sex and sin” (“A Denver Maiden Taken from Disreputable House”) and satires of the upper class (“St. Louis Swells”). Pulitzer also viewed the *Post-Dispatch* as a “national conscience” that promoted the public good. He carried on the legacies of James Gordon Bennett: making money and developing a “free and impartial” paper that would “serve no party but the people.” Within five years, the *Post-Dispatch* became one of the most influential newspapers in the Midwest.

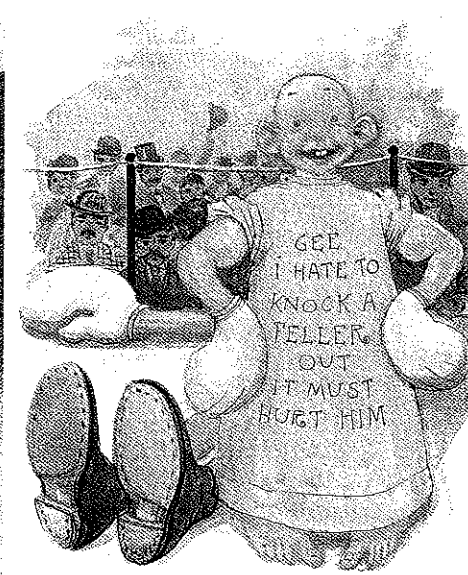
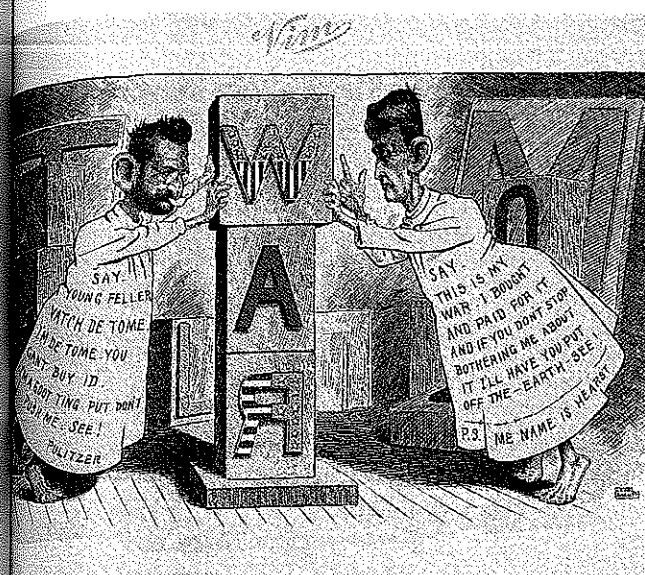
In 1883, Pulitzer bought the *New York World* for \$346,000. He encouraged plain writing and the inclusion of maps and illustrations to help immigrant and working-class readers understand the written text. In addition to running sensational stories on crime and sex, Pulitzer instituted advice columns and women's pages. Like Bennett, Pulitzer treated advertising as a kind of news that displayed consumer products for readers. In fact, department stores became major advertisers during this period. This contributed directly to the expansion of consumer culture and indirectly to the acknowledgment of women as newspaper readers. Eventually, because of pioneers like Nellie Bly, newspapers began employing women as reporters.

The *World* reflected the contradictory spirit of the yellow press. It crusaded for improved urban housing, better conditions for women, and equitable labor laws. It campaigned against monopoly practices by AT&T, Standard Oil, and Equitable Insurance. Such popular crusades helped lay the groundwork for tightening federal antitrust laws in the early 1910s. At the same time, Pulitzer's paper manufactured news events and staged stunts, such as sending star reporter Nellie Bly around the world in seventy-two days to beat the fictional “record” in the popular 1873 Jules Verne novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*. By 1887, the *World's* Sunday circulation had soared to more than 250,000, the largest anywhere.

Pulitzer created a lasting legacy by leaving \$2 million to start the graduate school of journalism at Columbia University in 1912. In 1917, part of Pulitzer's Columbia endowment established the Pulitzer Prizes, the prestigious awards given each year for achievements in journalism, literature, drama, and music.

Hearst and the *New York Journal*

The *World* faced its fiercest competition when William Randolph Hearst bought the *New York Journal* (a penny paper founded by Pulitzer's brother Albert). Before moving to New York, the twenty-four-year-old Hearst took control of the *San Francisco Examiner* when his father, George



Hearst, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1887 (the younger Hearst had recently been expelled from Harvard for playing a practical joke on his professors). In 1895, with an inheritance from his father, Hearst bought the ailing *Journal* and then raided Joseph Pulitzer's paper for editors, writers, and cartoonists.

Taking his cue from Bennett and Pulitzer, Hearst focused on lurid, sensational stories and appealed to immigrant readers by using large headlines and bold layout designs. To boost circulation, the *Journal* invented interviews, faked pictures, and encouraged conflicts that might result in a story. One tabloid account describes “tales about two-headed virgins” and “prehistoric creatures roaming the plains of Wyoming.”⁵ In promoting journalism as storytelling, Hearst reportedly said, “The modern editor of the popular journal does not care for facts. The editor wants novelty. The editor has no objection to facts if they are also novel. But he would prefer a novelty that is not a fact to a fact that is not a novelty.”⁶

Hearst is remembered as an unscrupulous publisher who once hired gangsters to distribute his newspapers. He was also, however, considered a champion of the underdog, and his paper's readership soared among the working and middle classes. In 1896, the *Journal's* daily circulation reached 450,000, and by 1897, the Sunday edition of the paper rivaled the 600,000 circulation of the *World*. By the 1930s, Hearst's holdings included more than forty daily and Sunday papers, thirteen magazines (including *Good Housekeeping* and *Cosmopolitan*), eight radio stations, and two film companies. In addition, he controlled King Features Syndicate, which sold and distributed articles, comics, and features to many of the nation's dailies. Hearst, the model for Charles Foster Kane, the ruthless publisher in Orson Welles's classic 1940 film *Citizen Kane*, operated the largest media business in the world—the News Corp. of its day.

Competing Models of Modern Print Journalism

The early commercial and partisan presses were, to some extent, covering important events impartially. These papers often carried verbatim reports of presidential addresses and murder trials, or the annual statements of the U.S. Treasury. In the late 1800s, as newspapers pushed for greater circulation, newspaper reporting changed. Two distinct types of journalism

YELLOW JOURNALISM

Generally considered America's first comic-strip character, the Yellow Kid was created in the mid-1890s by cartoonist Richard Outcault. The cartoon was so popular that newspaper barons Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst fought over Outcault's services, giving yellow journalism its name.

“There is room in this great and growing city for a journal that is not only cheap but bright, not only bright but large . . . that will expose all fraud and sham, fight all public evils and abuses—that will serve and battle for the people.”

JOSEPH PULITZER,
PUBLISHER, *NEW YORK WORLD*, 1883

emerged: the story-driven model, dramatizing important events and used by the penny papers and the yellow press; and the “just the facts” model, an approach that appeared to package information more impartially, and was favored by the six-cent papers.⁷ Underpinning these efforts is the question of whether, in journalism, there is an ideal, attainable objective model or whether the quest to be objective actually conflicts with journalists’ traditional role of raising important issues about the abuses of power in a democratic society.

“Objectivity” in Modern Journalism

As the consumer marketplace expanded during the Industrial Revolution, facts and news became marketable products. Throughout the mid-1800s, the more a newspaper appeared not to take sides on its front pages, the more its readership base could be extended (although editorial pages were still often partisan). In addition, wire service organizations were serving a variety of newspaper clients in different regions of the country. To satisfy all their clients and the wide range of political views, newspapers began to look more impartial.

Ochs and the *New York Times*

The ideal of an impartial, or purely informational, news model was championed by Adolph Ochs, who bought the *New York Times* in 1896. The son of immigrant German Jews, Ochs grew up in Ohio and Tennessee, where at age twenty-one he took over the *Chattanooga Times* in 1878. Known more for his business and organizational ability than for his writing and editing skills, he transformed the Tennessee paper. Seeking a national stage and business expansion, Ochs moved to New York and invested \$75,000 in the struggling *Times*. Through wise hiring, Ochs and his editors rebuilt the paper around substantial news coverage and provocative editorial pages. To distance the *Times* from the yellow press, the editors also downplayed sensational stories, favoring the documentation of major events or issues.

Partly as a marketing strategy, Ochs offered a distinct contrast to the more sensational Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers: an informational paper that provided stock and real estate reports to businesses, court reports to legal professionals, treaty summaries to political leaders, and theater and book reviews to educated general readers and intellectuals. Ochs’s promotional gimmicks took direct aim at yellow journalism, advertising the *Times* under the motto “It does not soil the breakfast cloth.” This strategy is similar to TV and Internet ads today that target upscale viewers who control a disproportionate share of consumer dollars.

With the Hearst and Pulitzer papers capturing the bulk of working- and middle-class readers, managers at the *Times* at first tried to use their straightforward, “no frills” reporting to appeal to more affluent and educated readers. In 1898, however, Ochs lowered the paper’s price to a penny. He believed that people bought the *World* and the *Journal* primarily because they were cheap, not because of their stories. As a result, the *Times* began attracting middle-class readers who gravitated to the paper as a status marker for the educated and well informed. Between 1898 and 1899, its circulation rose from 25,000 to 75,000. By 1921, the *Times* had a daily circulation of 330,000, and 500,000 on Sunday. (For contemporary circulation figures, see Table 8.1.)

THE NEW YORK TIMES established itself as the official paper of record by the 1920s (below, the front page from 1865 declaring the end of the Civil War). The *Times* was the first modern newspaper, gathering information and presenting news in a straightforward way—without the opinion of the reporter. This continued when the *Times* went online (below, inset). On the Internet, reporters continue to present a short overview on the paper’s home (or “front”) page with links to the full story. As with print, though, the majority of readers do not read past the first “page” of an article.



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Rank	Newspaper	Average Weekday Circulation
1	USA Today	2,284,219
2	Wall Street Journal	2,069,463
3	New York Times	1,077,256
4	Los Angeles Times	773,884
5	(New York) Daily News	703,137
6	New York Post	702,488
7	Washington Post	673,180
8	Chicago Tribune	541,663
9	Houston Chronicle	494,131
10	Arizona Republic	413,332

TABLE 8.1
THE NATION'S TEN LARGEST DAILY NEWSPAPERS, 2008
Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations FAS-FAX Report, March 31, 2008.

“Just the Facts, Please”

Early in the twentieth century, with reporters adopting a more “scientific” attitude to news- and fact-gathering, the ideal of objectivity began to anchor journalism. In **objective journalism**, which distinguishes factual reports from opinion columns, modern reporters strive to maintain a neutral attitude toward the issue or event they cover; they also search out competing points of view among the sources for a story.

The story form for packaging and presenting this kind of reporting has been traditionally labeled the **inverted-pyramid style**. Civil War correspondents developed this style by imitating the terse, compact press releases that came from President Abraham Lincoln’s secretary of war, Edwin M. Stanton.⁸ Often stripped of adverbs and adjectives, inverted-pyramid reports began—as they do today—with the most dramatic or newsworthy information. They answered who, what, where, when (and, less frequently, why or how) questions at the top of the story and then narrowed it down to less significant details. If wars or natural disasters disrupted the telegraph transmissions of these dispatches, the information the reporter chose to lead with had the best chance of getting through.

For much of the twentieth century, the inverted-pyramid style served as an efficient way to arrange a timely story. As one news critic pointed out, the wire services distributing stories to newspapers nationwide “had to deal with large numbers of newspapers with widely different political and regional interests. The news had to be ‘objective’ . . . to be accepted by such a heterogeneous group.”⁹ Among other things, the importance of objectivity and the reliance on the inverted pyramid signaled journalism’s break from the partisan tradition. Although impossible to achieve (journalism is after all a literary practice, not a science), objectivity nonetheless became the guiding ideal of the modern press.

Despite the success of the *New York Times* and other modern papers, the more factual inverted-pyramid approach toward news has come under increasing scrutiny. As news critic and writing coach Roy Peter Clark has noted, “Some reporters let the pyramid control the content so that the news comes out homogenized. Traffic fatalities, three-alarm fires, and new city ordinances all begin to look alike. In extreme cases, reporters have been known to keep files of story forms. Fill in the blanks. Stick it in the paper.”¹⁰ Although the inverted-pyramid style has for years solved deadline problems for reporters and enabled editors to cut a story from the bottom to fit available space, it has also discouraged many readers from continuing beyond the key details in the opening paragraphs. Studies have demonstrated that the majority of readers do not follow a front-page story when it continues, or “jumps,” inside the paper.

Interpretive Journalism

By the 1920s, there was a sense, especially after the trauma of World War I, that the impartial approach to reporting was insufficient for explaining complex national and global conditions. It was partly as a result of “drab, factual, objective reporting,” one news scholar contended, that “the American people were utterly amazed when war broke out in August 1914, as they had no understanding of the foreign scene to prepare them for it.”¹¹

The Promise of Interpretive Journalism

Modern journalism had undermined an early role of the partisan press: offering analysis and opinion. But with the world becoming more complex, some papers began to re-explore the analytical function of news. The result was the rise of **interpretive journalism**, which aims to explain key issues or events and place them in a broader historical or social context. According to one historian, this approach, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, was a viable way for journalism to address “the New Deal years, the rise of modern scientific technology, the increasing interdependence of economic groups at home, and the shrinking of the world into one vast arena for power politics.”¹² In other words, journalism took an analytic turn in a world grown more interconnected and complicated.

Noting that objectivity and factuality should serve as the foundation for journalism, by the 1920s editor and columnist Walter Lippmann insisted that the press should do more. He ranked three press responsibilities: (1) “to make a current record”; (2) “to make a running analysis of it”; and (3) “on the basis of both, to suggest plans.”¹³ Indeed, reporters and readers alike have historically distinguished between informational reports and editorial (interpretive) pieces, which offer particular viewpoints or deeper analyses of the issues. Since the boundary between information and interpretation can be somewhat ambiguous, American papers have traditionally placed news analysis in separate, labeled columns and opinion articles on certain pages so that readers do not confuse them with “straight news.”

In the 1930s, the Great Depression and the Nazi threat to global stability helped news analysis take root in newsmagazines and radio commentary. First developed in the partisan era, editorial pages also made a strong comeback. More significant, however, was the growth of the political column. Although literary and humor columns existed prior to World War I, the political column was a new form. More than 150 syndicated columns developed between 1930 and 1934 alone. Moving beyond the informational and storytelling functions of news, journalists and newspapers began to extend their role as analysts.

The Challenge of Broadcast News

With the rise of radio in the 1930s, the newspaper industry became increasingly annoyed by broadcasters who took their news directly from papers and wire services. As a result, a battle developed between radio journalism and print news. Although they would eventually lose most of these cases in court, mainstream newspapers attempted to copyright facts reported in the news and even sued radio stations, which routinely used newspapers as their main news sources (a common practice to this day).

Editors and newspaper lobbyists argued that radio should be permitted to do only commentary. By conceding this interpretive role to radio, the print press tried to protect its dominion over “the facts.” It was in this environment that radio analysis began to flourish as a form of interpretive news. Lowell Thomas delivered the first daily network analysis for CBS on September 29, 1930, attacking Hitler’s rise to power in Germany. By 1941, twenty regular commentators—the forerunners of today’s “talking heads” on cable, radio talk show hosts, and political bloggers—were explaining their version of the world to millions of listeners.

Some print journalists and editors came to believe that interpretive stories, rather than objective reports, could better compete with radio. They realized that interpretation was a way to

counter radio’s (and later television’s) superior ability to report breaking news quickly. In 1933, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) supported the idea of interpretive journalism. Newspapers, however, did not embrace probing analysis during the 1930s. Even Walter Lippmann believed that interpretation was misdirected without the foundation of facts and a “current record.” As he put it, “the really important thing is to try and make opinion increasingly responsible to the facts.”¹⁴

In most U.S. dailies, interpretation remained relegated to a few editorial and opinion pages. It wasn’t until the 1950s—with the Korean War, the development of atomic power, tensions with the Soviet Union, and the anticommunist movement—that news analysis resurfaced on the newest medium: television. Interpretive journalism in newspapers grew at the same time, especially in such areas as the environment, science, agriculture, sports, health, politics, and business. Following the lead of the *New York Times*, many papers by the 1980s had developed an “op-ed” page—a page opposite the traditional editorial page that allowed a greater variety of columnists, news analyses, and letters to the editor.

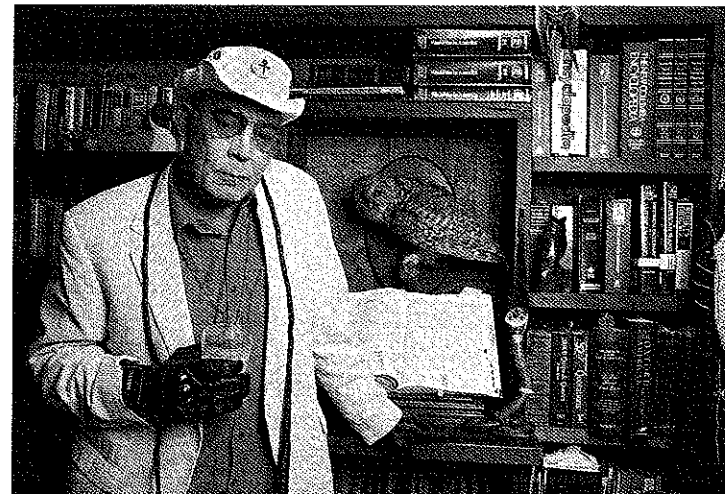
Literary Forms of Journalism

By the late 1960s, many people were criticizing America’s major social institutions. Political assassinations, Civil Rights protests, the Vietnam War, the drug culture, and the women’s movement were not easily explained. Faced with so much change and turmoil, many individuals began to lose faith in the ability of institutions to oversee and ensure the social order. Members of protest movements as well as many middle- and working-class Americans began to suspect the privileges and power of traditional authority. As a result, key institutions—including journalism—lost some of their credibility.

Journalism as an Art Form

Throughout the first part of the twentieth century—journalism’s modern era—journalistic storytelling was downplayed in favor of the inverted pyramid style and the separation of fact from opinion. Dissatisfied with these limitations, some reporters began exploring a new model of reporting. **Literary journalism**—sometimes dubbed “new journalism”—adapted fictional techniques, such as descriptive details and settings and extensive character dialogue, to nonfiction material and in-depth reporting. In the United States, literary journalism’s roots are evident in nineteenth-century novelists like Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser, all of whom started out as reporters. In the late 1930s and 1940s, literary journalism surfaced: Journalists began to demonstrate how writing about real events could achieve an artistry often associated only with fiction.

In the 1960s, Tom Wolfe, a leading practitioner of new journalism, argued for mixing the *content* of reporting with the *form* of fiction to create “both the kind of objective reality of journalism” and “the subjective reality” of the novel.¹⁵ Writers such as Wolfe (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*), Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*), Joan Didion (*The White Album*),



“Journalists must make the significant interesting and relevant.”

BILL KOVACH AND
TOM ROSENSTIEL,
*THE ELEMENTS OF
JOURNALISM*, 2007

NEW JOURNALISM

Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005), the most outrageous practitioner of new journalism, was a harsh critic of mainstream news and the ideal of objectivity. He was also the inspiration for the Uncle Duke character in the comic strip *Doonesbury* and for two Hollywood movies—*Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980) and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998). A longtime correspondent for *Rolling Stone*, he once called journalism “a cheap catch-all for . . . misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life.” Much of his work, sometimes called gonzo journalism, tested the boundary between the objective and subjective.

"Critics [in the 1960s] claimed that urban planning created slums, that school made people stupid, that medicine caused disease, that psychiatry invented mental illness, and that the courts promoted injustice. . . . And objectivity in journalism, regarded as an antidote to bias, came to be looked upon as the most insidious bias of all. For 'objective' reporting reproduced a vision of social reality which refused to examine the basic structures of power and privilege."

MICHAEL SCHUDSON, *DISCOVERING THE NEWS, 1978*

TABLE 8.2
EXCEPTIONAL WORKS OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM

Working under the aegis of New York University's journalism department, thirty-six judges compiled a list of the Top 100 works of American journalism in the twentieth century. The list takes into account not just the newsworthiness of the event but the craft of the writing and reporting. What do you think of the Top 10 works listed here? What are some problems associated with making a list like this? Do you think newswriting should be judged in the same way we judge novels or movies?

Source: New York University, Department of Journalism, New York, N.Y., 1999.

Norman Mailer (*Armies of the Night*), and Hunter S. Thompson (*Hell's Angels*) turned to new journalism to overcome flaws they perceived in routine reporting. Their often self-conscious treatment of social problems gave their writing a perspective that conventional journalism did not offer.

After the 1960s' tide of intense social upheaval ebbed, new journalism subsided as well. However, literary journalism not only influenced magazines like *Mother Jones* and *Rolling Stone*, but it also affected daily newspapers by emphasizing longer feature stories on cultural trends and social issues with detailed description or dialogue. Today, writers such as Jon Krakauer (*Into the Wild*) and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc (*Random Family*) keep this tradition alive.

The Attack on Journalistic Objectivity

Former *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker argued that in the early 1960s an objective approach to news remained the dominant model. According to Wicker, the "press had so wrapped itself in the paper chains of 'objective journalism' that it had little ability to report anything beyond the bare and undeniable facts."¹⁶ Through the 1960s, attacks on the detachment of reporters escalated. News critic Jack Newfield condemned journalistic impartiality and argued that many reporters had become too trusting and uncritical of the powerful: "Objectivity is believing people with power and printing their press releases."¹⁷ Eventually, the ideal of objectivity became suspect along with the authority of experts and professionals in various fields.

A number of reporters responded to the criticism by rethinking the framework of conventional journalism and adopting a variety of alternative techniques. One of these was *advocacy journalism*, in which the reporter actively promotes a particular cause or viewpoint. *Precision journalism*, another technique, attempted to make the news more scientifically accurate by using poll surveys and questionnaires. Throughout the 1990s, precision journalism became increasingly important. However, critics have charged that in every modern presidential campaign—including 2008—too many newspapers and TV stations became overly reliant on political polls, thus reducing campaign coverage to "race-horse" journalism, telling only "who's ahead" and "who's behind" stories rather than promoting substantial debates on serious issues. (See Table 8.2 for top works in American journalism.)

Journalists	Title or Subject	Publisher	Year
1 John Hersey	"Hiroshima"	<i>New Yorker</i>	1946
2 Rachel Carson	<i>Silent Spring</i>	Houghton Mifflin	1962
3 Bob Woodward/ Carl Bernstein	Watergate investigation	<i>Washington Post</i>	1972-73
4 Edward R. Murrow	Battle of Britain	CBS Radio	1940
5 Ida Tarbell	"The History of the Standard Oil Company"	<i>McClure's Magazine</i>	1902-04
6 Lincoln Steffens	"The Shame of the Cities"	<i>McClure's Magazine</i>	1902-04
7 John Reed	<i>Ten Days That Shook the World</i>	Random House	1919
8 H. L. Mencken	Coverage of the Scopes "monkey" trial	<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	1925
9 Ernie Pyle	Reports from Europe and the Pacific during World War II	Scripps-Howard newspapers	1940-45
10 Edward R. Murrow/ Fred Friendly	Investigation of Senator Joseph McCarthy	CBS Television	1954

Contemporary Journalism in the TV and Internet Age

In the early 1980s, a postmodern brand of journalism arose from two important developments. First, in 1980 the *Columbus Dispatch* became the first paper to go online. Today, nearly all U.S. papers offer some Web services. Second, the arrival of the colorful *USA Today* in 1982 radically changed the look of most major U.S. dailies.

USA Today Colors the Print Landscape

USA Today made its mark by incorporating features closely associated with postmodern forms, including an emphasis on visual style over substantive news or analysis and the use of brief news items that appealed to readers' busy schedules and shortened attention spans.

Now the most widely circulated paper in the nation, *USA Today* represents the only successful launch of a new major U.S. daily newspaper in the last several decades. Showing its marketing savvy, *USA Today* was the first paper to openly acknowledge television's central role in mass culture: The paper used TV-inspired color and designed its first vending boxes to look like color TVs. Even the writing style of *USA Today* mimics TV news by casting many reports in present tense rather than the past tense (which was the print-news norm throughout the twentieth century).

Writing for *Rolling Stone* in March 1992, media critic Jon Katz argued that the authority of modern newspapers suffered in the wake of a variety of "new news" forms that combined immediacy, information, entertainment, persuasion, and analysis. Katz claimed that the news supremacy of most prominent daily papers, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, was being challenged by "news" coming from talk shows, television sitcoms, popular films, and even rap music. In other words, we were changing from a society in which the transmission of knowledge depended mainly on books, newspapers, and magazines to a society dominated by a mix of print, visual, and digital information.

Online Journalism Redefines News

These new forms of news began taking over the roles of traditional journalism, setting the nation's cultural, social, and political agendas. For instance, Matt Drudge, the conservative Internet news source and gossip behind *The Drudge Report*, hijacked the national agenda in January 1998 and launched a scandal when he posted a story claiming that *Newsweek* had backed off, or "spiked," a story about President Bill Clinton having an affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Although Drudge's report was essentially accurate, *Newsweek* had delayed the story because its editors thought they needed more confirming sources before they could responsibly publish the allegations. Drudge effectively "outed" the *Newsweek* story prematurely, and critics debated whether his actions were legitimate or irresponsible.

Today, rather than subscribing to a traditional paper, many readers begin their day by logging on to the Internet and scanning a wide variety of news sources, including the sites of print papers, cable news channels, newsmagazines, bloggers, and online-only news sources.

This competition challenges newspapers, forcing their traditional role to change. For example, examine the way nontraditional TV and Internet media drove the story about the Reverend Jeremiah Wright during the 2008 Democratic campaign for president. As the former pastor of the Chicago church where candidate Barack Obama was a member, Wright had made several controversial statements—some of them highly critical of the U.S. government—that had been captured on video. After these clips spread on the Internet, mostly through YouTube, Obama criticized Wright's statements and delivered a major speech on race in America. However, the clips picked up momentum, and were aired on the 24/7 cable news channels for several months. In turn, the traditional TV network news and major newspapers felt obligated to cover the story, adding legitimacy and prolonging the media's attention. The Wright episode illustrates how a small story on the Internet can take on avalanche dimensions, picking up cable, network news, and newspapers as it careens downhill, forcing them to cover it.

Categorizing News and U.S. Newspapers

In the digital age, printed newspapers have to fight harder to keep their readers. By 2007, the nation's 1,430 daily papers were selling 53.5 million copies each weekday. This, however, was down from 2,600 dailies in 1910, the high-water mark for daily newspapers in the United States, and 1992, when weekday circulation was over 60 million.¹⁸

In the news industry today, there are several kinds of papers. *National newspapers* (such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *USA Today*) serve a broad readership across the country. Other papers primarily serve specific geographic regions. Roughly 100 *metropolitan dailies* have a circulation of 100,000 or more. About 35 of these papers have a circulation of more than 250,000. In addition, about 100 daily newspapers are classified as *medium dailies*, with circulations between 50,000 and 100,000. By far the largest number of U.S. dailies—about 1,200 papers—fall into the small daily category, with circulations under 50,000. While dailies serve urban and suburban centers, more than 8,000 *nondaily and weekly newspapers* (down from 14,000 back in 1910) serve smaller communities and average just over 5,000 copies per issue.¹⁹

Consensus vs. Conflict: Newspapers Play Different Roles

Smaller nondaily papers tend to promote social and economic harmony in their communities. Besides providing community calendars and meeting notices, nondaily papers focus on **consensus-oriented journalism**, carrying articles on local schools, social events, town government, property crimes, and zoning issues. Recalling the partisan spirit of an earlier era, small newspapers are often owned by business leaders who may also serve in local politics. Because consensus-oriented papers have a small advertising base, they are generally careful not to offend local advertisers, who provide the financial underpinnings for many of these papers. At their best, these small-town papers foster a sense of community; at their worst, they overlook or downplay discord and problems.

In contrast, national and metro dailies practice **conflict-oriented journalism**, in which front-page news is often defined primarily as events, issues, or experiences that deviate from social norms. Under this news orientation, journalists see their role not merely as neutral fact-gatherers but as observers who monitor their city's institutions and problems. They often maintain an adversarial relationship with local politicians and public officials. These papers offer competing perspectives on such issues as education, government, poverty, crime, and the

Media Literacy and the Critical Process

1 DESCRIPTION. Check a week's worth of business news in your local paper. Examine both the business pages and the front and local sections for these stories. Devise a chart and create categories for sorting stories (e.g., promotion news, scandal stories, earnings reports, home foreclosures, profit margins, and media-related news), and gauge whether these stories are positive or negative. If possible, compare this coverage to a week's worth of news from the business boom years of the 1990s. Or compare your local paper's coverage of the Enron trials, home foreclosures, or oil company profits to the coverage in one of the nation's dailies like the *New York Times*.

2 ANALYSIS. Look for patterns in the coverage. How many stories are positive? How many are negative? Do the stories show any kind of gender favoritism (such as more men covered than women) or class bias (management favored over workers)? Compared to the local paper, are there differences in the frequency and kinds of coverage offered in the national newspaper? Does your paper routinely cover the business of the parent company that owns the local paper? Does it cover national business stories? How many stories are there on the business of newspapers and media in general?

3 INTERPRETATION. What do some of the patterns mean? Did

Covering Business and Economic News

The 2001 collapse of Houston-based giant energy company Enron, the largest corporation ever to go bankrupt, put the spotlight on corporate corruption and journalism's coverage of such issues. Then in 2008 the subprime mortgage/home foreclosure crisis and record profits by oil companies led to new stories on lax government oversight of the banking and energy businesses. Over the years, critics have claimed that business news pages tend to favor issues related to management and downplay the role of everyday employees. Critics also charge that business news pages favor more positive business stories—such as manager promotions—and minimize negative business news (unlike the front pages, which usually emphasize routine crime news). In an era of corporate scandals, check the business coverage in your local daily paper to see if these charges are accurate or if business news coverage has changed.

you find examples where the coverage of business seems comprehensive and fair? If business news gets more positive coverage than political news, what might this mean? If managers get more coverage than employees, what does this mean, given that there are many more regular employees than managers at most businesses? What might it mean if men are more prominently featured than women in business stories? Considering the central role of media and news businesses in everyday life, what does it mean if these businesses are not being covered adequately by local and national news operations?

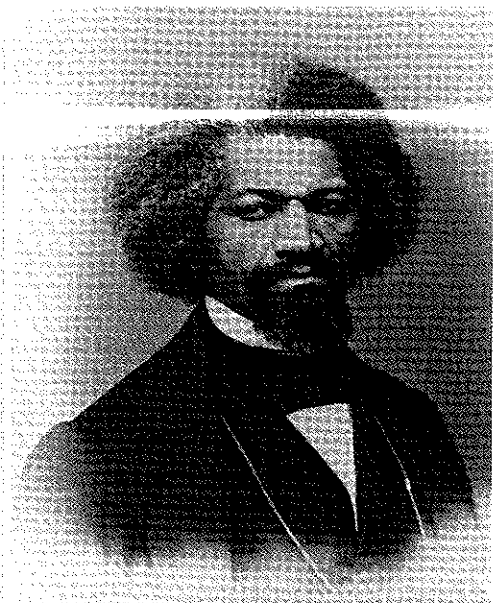
4 EVALUATION. Determine which papers and stories you would judge as good and which ones you would judge as weaker models for how business should be covered. Are some elements that should be included missing from coverage? If so, make suggestions.

5 ENGAGEMENT. Either write a letter to the editor reporting your findings or make an appointment with the editor to discuss what you discovered. Note what the newspaper is doing well and make a recommendation on how to improve coverage.

economy; and their publishers, editors, or reporters avoid playing major, overt roles in community politics. In theory, modern newspapers believe their role in large cities is to keep a wary eye fixed on recent local and state intrigue and events.

In telling stories about complex and controversial topics, conflict-oriented journalists often turn such topics into two-dimensional stories, pitting one idea or person against another. This convention, often called "telling both sides of a story," allows a reporter to take the position of a detached observer. Although this practice offers the appearance of balance, it usually functions to generate conflict and sustain a lively news story; sometimes reporters ignore the idea that there may be more than two sides to a story. But faced with deadline pressures, reporters often do not

FREDERICK DOUGLASS helped found the *North Star* in 1847. It was printed in the basement of the Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, a gathering spot for abolitionists and "underground" activities in Rochester, New York. At the time, the white-owned *New York Herald* urged Rochester's citizens to throw the *North Star's* printing press into Lake Ontario. Under Douglass's leadership, the paper came out weekly until 1860, addressing problems facing blacks around the country and offering a forum for Douglass to debate his fellow black activists.



"We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us."

FREEDOM'S JOURNAL, 1827

have the time—or the space—to develop a multifaceted and complex report or series of reports. (See "Media Literacy and the Critical Process: Covering Business and Economic News" on page 263.)

Ethnic, Minority, and Oppositional Newspapers

Historically, small-town weeklies and daily newspapers have served predominantly white, mainstream readers. However, since Benjamin Franklin launched the short-lived German-language *Philadelphische Zeitung* in 1732, newspapers aimed at ethnic groups have played a major role in initiating immigrants into American society. During the nineteenth century, Swedish- and Norwegian-language papers informed various immigrant communities in the Midwest. The early twentieth century gave rise to papers written in German, Yiddish, Russian, and Polish, assisting the massive influx of European immigrants.

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, several hundred foreign-language daily and nondaily presses existed in at least forty different languages in the United States. Many are financially healthy today, supported by classified ads, local businesses, and increased ad revenue from long-distance phone companies and Internet services, which see the ethnic press as an ideal place to reach those customers most likely to need international communication services.²⁰

Most of these weekly and monthly newspapers serve some of the same functions for their constituencies—minorities and immigrants, as well as disabled veterans, retired workers, gay and lesbian communities, and the homeless—as the "majority" papers do. These papers, however, are often published outside the social mainstream. Consequently, they provide viewpoints that are different from the mostly middle- and upper-class establishment attitudes that have shaped the media throughout much of America's history.

African American Newspapers

Between 1827 and the end of the Civil War in 1865, forty newspapers directed at black readers and opposed to slavery struggled for survival. These papers faced not only higher rates of illiteracy among readers but also hostility from white society and the majority press of the day. The first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, operated from 1827 to 1829 and opposed the racism of many New York newspapers. In addition, it offered a voice for antislavery societies. Other notable papers included the *Alienated American* (1852–56) and the *New Orleans Daily Creole*, which began its short life in 1856 as the first black-owned daily in the South. The most influential oppositional newspaper at the time was Frederick Douglass's *North Star*, a weekly antislavery newspaper in Rochester, New York, which published from 1847 to 1860 and reached a circulation of three thousand. Douglass, a former slave, wrote essays on slavery and on a variety of national and international topics.

Since 1827, more than three thousand newspapers have been edited and owned by African Americans. These papers, with an average life span of nine years, took stands against race baiting, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan. They also promoted racial pride long before the Civil Rights movement. The most widely circulated black-owned paper was Robert C. Vann's weekly *Pittsburgh Courier*, founded in 1910. Its circulation peaked at 350,000 in 1947—the year professional baseball was integrated by Jackie Robinson, thanks in part to relentless editorials in the *Courier* that denounced the color barrier in pro sports. As they have throughout their history, these papers offer oppositional viewpoints to the mainstream press and record the daily activities of black communities by listing weddings, births, deaths, graduations, meetings, and church functions. Today, there are more than 125 African American papers, including Baltimore's *Afro-American*, New York's *Amsterdam News*, and the *Chicago Defender*, which celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 2005.

The circulation rates of most black papers dropped sharply, however, after the 1960s. The combined circulation of the local and national editions of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, for instance, dropped to only twenty thousand by the early 1980s.²¹ Several factors contributed to these declines. First, television and black radio stations tapped into the limited pool of money that

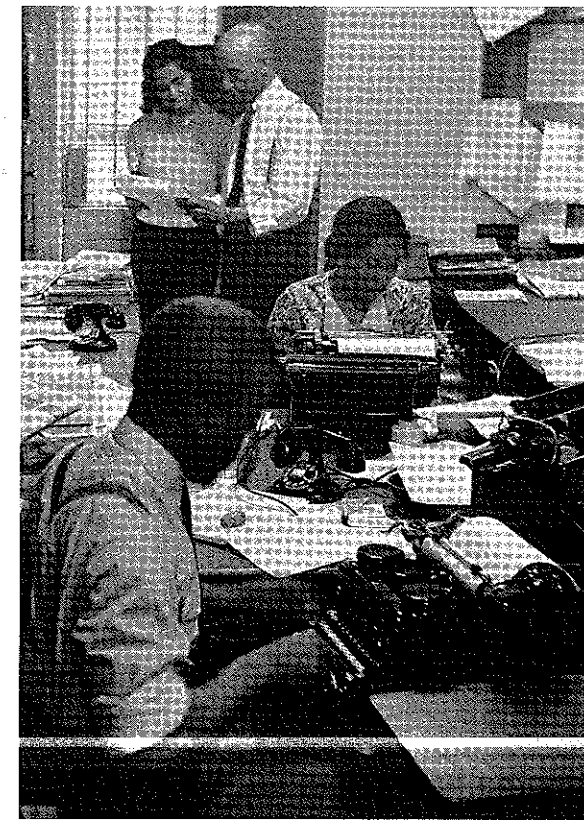
businesses allocated for advertising. Second, some advertisers, to avoid controversy, withdrew their support when the black press started giving favorable coverage to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. Third, the loss of industrial urban jobs in the 1970s and 1980s not only diminished readership but also hurt small neighborhood businesses, which could no longer afford to advertise in both the mainstream and the black press. Finally, after the enactment of Civil Rights and affirmative action laws, black papers were raided by mainstream papers seeking to integrate their newsrooms with good black journalists. Black papers could seldom match the offers from large white-owned dailies.

In siphoning off both ads and talent, a more integrated mainstream press diminished the status of many black papers—an ironic effect of the Civil Rights laws. In 2007, while one-third of the overall U.S. population was classified as part of a minority group, only 13.5 percent of the newsroom staffs at the nation's 1,400-plus daily papers were minorities, with blacks accounting for 2,790 or 5.3 percent of the newsroom workforce.²²

Spanish-Language Newspapers

Bilingual and Spanish-language newspapers have long served a variety of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Hispanic readerships. New York's *El Diario-La Prensa* has been serving Spanish-language readers since 1913, while Los Angeles' *La Opinión* was founded in 1926 and was the nation's largest Spanish-language daily. The two papers merged in 2004.²³ Other prominent publications are in Miami (*La Voz* and *Diario Las Americas*), Houston (*La Información*), Chicago (*El Mañana Daily News* and *La Raza*), San Diego (*El Sol*), and New York (*Hoy, El Noticias del Mundo*). By the 2000s, more than fifteen hundred Spanish-language papers operated in the United States, reaching more than 17.6 million readers nationwide, an increase of 5 million since 1984.²⁴

Until the late 1960s, Hispanic issues and culture were virtually ignored by mainstream newspapers. But with the influx of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban immigrants throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many mainstream papers began to feature weekly Spanish-language supplements. The first was the *Miami Herald's* "El Nuevo Herald," introduced in 1976. Other mainstream papers also joined in, but many folded their Spanish-language supplements by the mid-1990s. In 1995, the *Los Angeles Times* discontinued its supplement, "Nuestro Tiempo," and the *Miami Herald* trimmed budgets and staff for "El Nuevo Herald." Spanish-language radio and television had beaten the papers to these potential customers and advertisers. By 2007, as the U.S. Hispanic population reached about 14 percent, Hispanic journalists accounted for only about 4.5 percent of the newsroom workforce at U.S. daily newspapers.²⁵



AFRICAN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

This 1936 scene reveals the newsroom of Harlem's *Amsterdam News*, one of the nation's leading African American newspapers. Ironically, the Civil Rights movement and affirmative action policies in the 1960s served to drain talented reporters from the black press by encouraging them to work for mainstream white newspapers.

EL DIARIO-LA PRENSA is the oldest Spanish-language newspaper in the United States. Dominant in the New York City market, the paper has almost 300,000 daily readers.





THE WORLD JOURNAL is a national daily paper that targets Chinese immigrants by focusing on news from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Southeast Asian communities.

Asian American Newspapers

In the 1980s, hundreds of small papers emerged to serve immigrants from Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia, and China. More than fifty small U.S. papers are now printed in Vietnamese. Ethnic papers like these help readers both adjust to foreign surroundings and retain ties to their traditional heritage. In addition, these papers often cover major stories that are downplayed in the mainstream press. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, airport security teams detained thousands of Middle Eastern-looking men. The *Weekly Bangla Patrika*, a Long Island, New York, paper with a circulation of twelve thousand, not only reported in detail on the one hundred people the Bangladeshi community lost in the World Trade Center attacks but also took the lead in reporting on how it feels to be innocent yet targeted by ethnic profiling at New York's major airports.²⁶

Native American Newspapers

An activist Native American press has provided oppositional voices to mainstream American media since 1828, when the *Cherokee Phoenix* appeared in Georgia. Another prominent early paper was the *Cherokee Rose Bud*, founded in 1848 by tribal women in the Oklahoma territory. The Native American Press Association has documented more than 350 different Native American papers, most of them printed in English but a few in tribal languages. Currently, two national papers are the *Native American Times*, which offers a Native American perspective on "sovereign rights, civil rights, and government-to-government relationships with the federal government," and *Indian Country Today*, owned by the Oneida nation in New York State.

To counter the neglect of their culture's viewpoints by the mainstream press, Native American newspapers have helped to educate various tribes about their heritage and build community solidarity. These papers also have reported on both the problems and the progress among tribes that have opened casinos and gambling resorts. Overall, these smaller papers provide a forum for debates on tribal conflicts and concerns, and they often signal the mainstream press on issues—such as gambling or hunting and fishing rights—that have significance for the larger culture.

The Underground Press

The mid to late 1960s saw an explosion of alternative newspapers. Labeled the *underground press* at the time, these papers questioned mainstream political policies and conventional values. Generally running on shoestring budgets, they often voiced radical opinions and were erratic in meeting publication schedules. Springing up on college campuses and in major cities, underground papers were inspired by the writings of socialists and intellectuals from the 1930s and 1940s and by a new wave of thinkers and artists. Particularly inspirational were poets and writers (such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, LeRoi Jones, and Eldridge Cleaver) and "protest" musicians (including Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, and Joan Baez). In criticizing social institutions, alternative papers questioned the official reports distributed by public relations agents, government spokespeople, and the conventional press (see "Case Study—Alternative Journalism: Dorothy Day and I. F. Stone" on page 267).

During the 1960s, underground papers played a unique role in documenting social tension by including the voices of students, women, blacks, Native Americans, gay men and lesbians, and others whose opinions were often excluded from the mainstream press. The first and most enduring underground paper, the *Village Voice*, was founded in Greenwich Village in 1955. Today its circulation is 250,000 and it is still distributed free, surviving only through advertising. Among campus underground papers, the *Berkeley Barb* was the most influential, developing amid the free-speech movement in the mid-1960s. Despite their irreverent and often vulgar

CASE STUDY

Alternative Journalism: Dorothy Day and I. F. Stone

Over the years, a number of unconventional reporters have struggled against the status quo to find a place for unheard voices and alternative ways to practice their craft. For example, Ida Wells fearlessly investigated violence against blacks for the *Memphis Free Speech* in the late 1800s. Newspaper lore also offers a rich history of alternative journalists and their publications, such as Dorothy Day's *Catholic Worker* and I. F. Stone's *Weekly*.



In 1933, Dorothy Day (1897–1980) cofounded a radical religious organization with a monthly newspaper, the *Catholic Worker*, that opposed war and supported social reforms. Like many young intellectual writers during World War I, Day was a pacifist; she also joined the Socialist Party. Quitting college at age eighteen to work as an activist reporter for socialist newspapers, Day participated in the ongoing suffrage movement to give women the right to vote. Throughout the 1930s, her *Catholic Worker* organization invested in thirty hospices for the poor and homeless, providing food and shelter for five thousand people a day. This legacy endures today, with the organization continuing to fund soup kitchens and homeless shelters throughout the country.

For more than seventy years, the *Worker* has consistently advocated personal activism to further social justice, op-

posing anti-Semitism, Japanese American internment camps during World War II, nuclear weapons, the Korean War, military drafts, and the communist witch-hunts of the 1950s. The *Worker's* circulation peaked in 1938 at 190,000, then fell dramatically during World War II, when Day's pacifism was at odds with much of America. Today the *Catholic Worker* has a circulation of 80,000.

I. F. Stone (1907–1989) shared Dorothy Day's passion for social activism. He also started early, publishing his own monthly paper at the age of fourteen and becoming a full-time reporter by age twenty. He worked as a Washington political writer for the *Nation* in the early 1940s and later for the *New York Daily Compass*. Throughout his career, Stone challenged the conventions and privileges of both politics and journalism. In 1941, for example, he resigned from the National Press Club when it refused to serve his guest, the nation's first African American federal judge. In the early 1950s, he actively opposed Joseph McCarthy's rabid search to rid



government and the media of alleged communists. When the *Daily Compass* failed in 1952, the radical Stone was unable to find a newspaper job and decided to create his own newsletter, *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, which he published for nineteen years. Practicing interpretive and investigative reporting, Stone became as adept as any major journalist at tracking down government records to discover contradictions, inaccuracies, and lies. Over the years, Stone questioned decisions by the Supreme Court, investigated the substandard living conditions of many African Americans, and criticized political corruption. He guided the *Weekly* to a circulation that reached 70,000 during the 1960s, when he probed American investments of money and military might in Vietnam.

I. F. Stone and Dorothy Day embodied a spirit of independent reporting that has been threatened by the decline in newspaper readership and the rise of chain ownership. Stone, who believed that alternative ideas were crucial to maintaining a healthy democracy, once wrote that "there must be free play for so-called 'subversive' ideas—every idea subverts the old to make way for the new. To shut off 'subversion' is to shut off peaceful progress and to invite revolution and war."²⁷

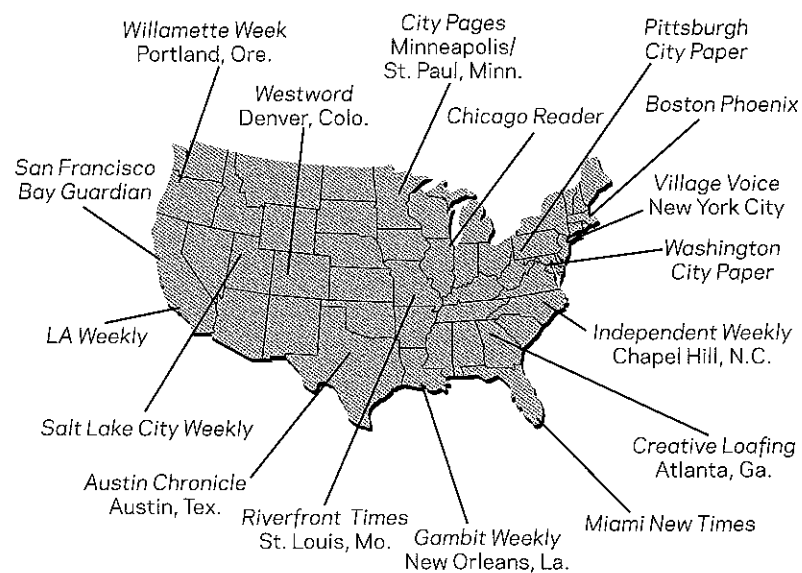


FIGURE 8.1
SELECTED ALTERNATIVE
NEWSPAPERS IN THE
UNITED STATES

Source: Association of Alternative
Newsweeklies, www.aan.org.

tone, many underground papers turned a spotlight on racial and gender inequities and, on occasion, influenced mainstream journalism to examine social issues. Like the black press, though, many early underground papers folded after the 1960s. Given their radical outlook, it was difficult for them to generate sponsors or appeal to advertisers. In addition, like the black press, the underground press was raided by mainstream papers, which began expanding their own coverage of culture by hiring the underground's best writers. Still, today more than 120 papers are members of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (see Figure 8.1).

Newspaper Operations

Today a weekly paper might employ only two or three people, while a major metro daily might have a staff of more than one thousand, including workers in the newsroom and online operations, and in departments for circulation (distributing the newspaper), advertising (selling ad space), and mechanical operations (assembling and printing the paper). In either situation, however, most newspapers distinguish business operations from editorial or news functions. Journalists' and readers' praise or criticism usually rests on the quality of a paper's news and editorial components, but the business and advertising divisions drive today's industry.

Most major daily papers devote one-half to two-thirds of their pages to advertisements. Accounting for about 17-18 percent of all ad dollars spent annually in the United States, newspapers carry everything from expensive full-page spreads for department stores to classifieds, which consumers can purchase for a few dollars to advertise used cars, furniture, and old TVs. In most cases, ads are positioned in the paper first. The **newshole**—space not taken up by ads—accounts for the remaining 35 to 50 percent of the content of daily newspapers, including front-page news reports, horoscopes, and advice columns.

News and Editorial Responsibilities

The chain of command at most larger papers starts with the publisher and owner at the top and then moves, on the news and editorial side, to the editor in chief and managing editor, who are in charge of the daily news-gathering and writing processes. Under the main editors, assistant editors and news managers run different news divisions, including features, sports, photos, local news, state news, and wire service reports that contain much of the day's national and international news. In addition, copy editors check each story for accuracy, style, and grammar, and write the headlines for each report.

Reporters work for editors and are grouped into two broad categories: *general assignment reporters*, who handle all sorts of stories that might emerge—or “break”—in a given day, and *specialty reporters*, who are assigned to particular beats (police, courts, schools, government) or topics (education, religion, health, environment, technology). On large dailies, *bureau reporters* also file reports from other major cities, such as Washington, D.C., or their state's capital. Daily papers feature columnists and critics; these reporters have usually worked their way up the hierarchy and may review or analyze everything from fashion to foreign policy.

By the early 2000s, many newspapers employed a separate staff for their online operations, even though the vast majority of these operations were losing money. In recent years, media convergence has meant that most traditional print reporters are now expected to file online versions of their stories first. Many reporters are now also asked to carry digital cameras to

“We received no extra space for 9/11. We received no extra space for the Iraq war. We're all doing this within our budget. It is a zero-sum game. If something is more important, something else may be a little less important, a little less deserving of space.”

JOHN GEDDES,
MANAGING EDITOR,
NEW YORK TIMES,
2006



NEWSPAPER MISPRINTS
In 1948, the *Chicago Tribune* miscalled the race between President Truman (far left) and his challenger, Thomas E. Dewey. Now, newspapers wait to declare winners (as in 2008, left) after a similar miscall occurred in 2000.

record images or video to complement their online stories. Such practices allow newspapers to make the news as timely as possible and better compete with the immediacy of radio and television. Still, online demands and newsroom cutbacks have put a strain on reporters and editors, who are increasingly being asked to do stories in multiple formats. According to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the workforce in daily U.S. newsrooms declined by 4.4 percent in 2007, the largest percentage decrease in the newsrooms since ASNE began its annual study in the late 1970s.²⁷

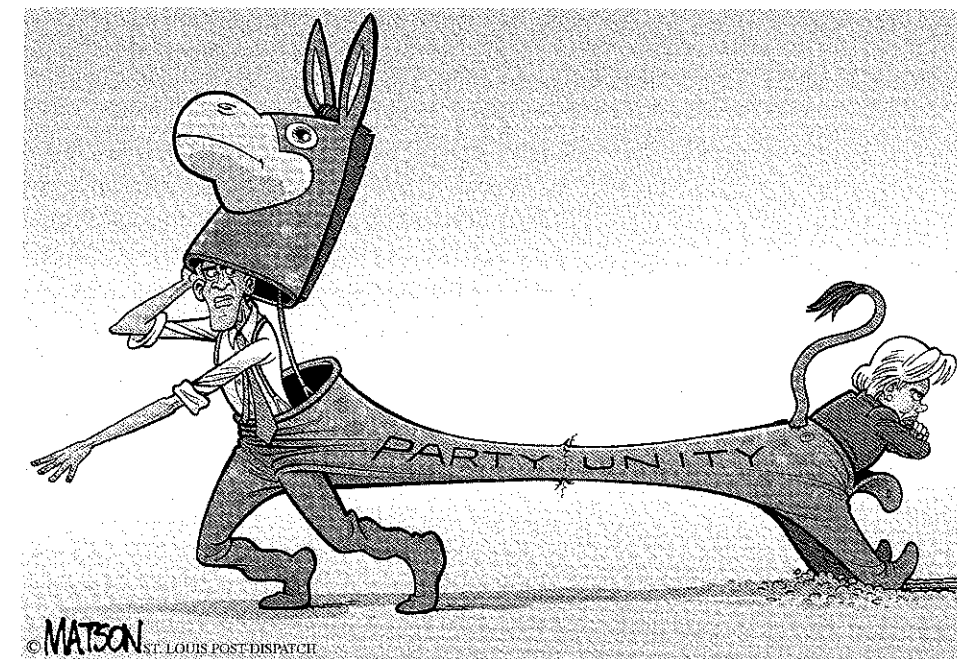
Wire Services and Feature Syndication

Major daily papers might have between one hundred and two hundred local reporters and writers, but they still cannot cover the world or produce enough material to fill up the newshole each day. Newspapers also rely on wire services and syndicated feature services to supplement local coverage. A few major dailies, such as the *New York Times*, run their own wire services, selling their stories to other papers to reprint. Other agencies, such as the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI), have hundreds of staffers stationed throughout major U.S. cities and world capitals. They submit stories and photos each day for distribution to newspapers across the country. Some U.S. papers also subscribe to foreign wire services, such as Agence France-Press in Paris or Reuters in London.

Daily papers generally pay monthly fees for access to all wire stories. Although they use only a fraction of what is available over the wires, editors carefully monitor wire services each day for important stories and ideas for local angles. Wire services have greatly expanded the national and international scope of news, as local editors put their trust in a handful of powerful wire firms when they select a newsworthy issue or event for reprinting.

In addition, **feature syndicates**, such as United Features and Tribune Media Services, are commercial outlets that contract

POLITICAL CARTOONS are often syndicated features in newspapers and reflect the issues of the day.



STUBBORN AS A...

"Teens have a greater interest in news than the generations before them. Newspapers have a great future as news organizations on the Web and perhaps elsewhere. Sadly, today in America when a newspaper reader dies, he or she is not replaced by a new reader."

JEFFERY COLE,
DIRECTOR, CENTER
FOR THE DIGITAL
FUTURE, USC
ANNENBERG
SCHOOL, 2006

with newspapers to provide work from the nation's best political writers, editorial cartoonists, comic-strip artists, and self-help columnists. These companies serve as brokers, distributing horoscopes and crossword puzzles as well as the political columns and comic strips that appeal to a wide audience. When a paper bids on and acquires the rights to a cartoonist or columnist, it signs exclusivity agreements with a syndicate to ensure that it is the only paper in the region to carry, say, *Dilbert*, Clarence Page, Maureen Dowd, Bob Herbert, George Will, Anna Quindlen, or cartoonist Tom Toles. Feature syndicates, like wire services, wield great influence in determining which writers and cartoonists gain national prominence.

Challenges Facing Newspapers

Publishers and journalists today face worrisome issues like the decline in newspaper readership and the failure of many papers to attract younger readers. However, other problems persist as well, including the inability of most cities to support competing newspapers and the capability of Web sites to vie with newspapers for lucrative classified advertising. Finally, the newspaper industry also struggles to find its place on the Internet, trying to figure out the future of digital news.

Readership Declines in the United States

The decline in newspaper readership began during the Depression, with the rise of radio. Between 1931 and 1939, six hundred newspapers ceased operation. Another big circulation crisis occurred from the late 1960s through the 1970s with the rise in network television viewing and greater competition from suburban weeklies. In addition, with an increasing number of women working full-time outside the home, newspapers could no longer consistently count on one of their core readership groups. (In fact, by 2007, women made up only 44 percent of all daily newspaper readers.) By the mid-2000s, circulation dropped by more than 20 percent in the nation's twenty largest cities (even though the population declined by only 6 percent in those areas).²⁸ The "State of the News Media 2008" report showed that readership since 2000 had declined 1 to 2 percent each year among most demographic groups, with the largest decline—10 percent—among thirty-five-to-forty-four-year-olds. In 2000, 53 percent of that age group said they read a paper in a typical week, but that fell to 43 percent in 2007.²⁹

Between 1970 and 1990, yearly circulation flattened out at just over 60 million copies per day. By 2007, though, only 52 million copies circulated each weekday and 54 million on Sunday. Although the overall population increased during that period, the percentage of adults who read a paper at least once a day dropped from 78 percent in 1970 to 51 percent by 2007 (58 percent on Sunday). In all, between 1950 and 2007, the number of daily papers in the United States dropped from 1,772 to fewer than 1,440. (For a new trend, see "Case Study: Newspaper Circulation Up! [for Free Papers]" on page 271.)

Remarkably, while the United States continues to experience declines in newspaper readership and advertising dollars, many other nations—where Internet news is still emerging—are experiencing increases. For example, in 2007 the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) reported that global newspaper sales were up 2.3 percent in 2006 and up 9.5 percent over the previous five years. Total newspaper sales increased in Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America, "with North America the sole continent to register a decline."³⁰ Worldwide, newspaper ad revenues were up 3.8 percent in 2006 and 15.8 percent over the previous five years. WAN reports that in 2007 "more than 515 million people buy a newspaper each day, up from 488 million in 2002."³¹ The five top countries for daily newspaper sales for 2006 included China (99 million copies), India (89 million), Japan (69 million), United States (52 million), and Germany (21 million).

CASE STUDY

Newspaper Circulation Up! (for Free Papers)

The big story about the mainstream newspaper industry in the 2000s has been the decline of circulation and revenue for the print version, and the slow but promising growth of online editions. But in one segment of the newspaper industry—free newspapers—circulation is actually up, way up.

Unless you live in a large city with public transportation, you might not have even noticed. But take a trip to places like New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, San Diego, or San Francisco, and you'll find free newspapers at newsracks, pushed by hawkers at entrances to subway and rail stations, and even delivered to certain neighborhoods.

There have been free alternative weekly newspapers in the United States since the 1950s. But the free newspapers that have emerged in the past decade are different: They're daily, they're widely available, and they're becoming immensely popular in the United States and worldwide.

Piet Bakker, a communications professor at the University of Amsterdam, is the leading expert on the free newspaper industry (see www.newspaperinnovation.com). He notes that 36 million copies of



FREE NEWSPAPERS

The Tribune Company's *amNew York* and Metro International's *Metro New York* are distributed free in subway stations and other high pedestrian traffic locations.

free dailies are now circulated in forty-nine countries, including Korea, Chile, Austria, and Botswana. The growth in Europe—where the world's first free commuter daily began in Sweden in 1995—has been especially phenomenal. The continent's total circulation of free dailies has grown five times over since 2000—to 125 titles with a combined circulation of 26.5 million by 2007. The market is highly competitive, with most of Europe's major cities having three or more free dailies. In at least a dozen European countries, the top paper is a free daily, and in Spain, Denmark, and Iceland, free dailies command a greater total market share than paid newspapers.

Free dailies are available in every major Canadian metro area, and now account for 20 percent of the nation's newspaper market share. In the United States, where growth has been steady but not quite as fast, there are now forty free newspapers with a combined circulation of more than 3 million.

New York has one of the liveliest free newspaper markets. Hawkers wearing green vests for *Metro New York* and red vests for *amNew York* plant themselves at opposite sides of sidewalk entrances to busy subway steps and press their papers into commuters' hands. The two newspapers illustrate ownership patterns in the free daily market, as some companies specialize in free dailies, while others develop free dailies to complement their established "paid" daily newspaper business. *Metro New York* is published by Metro International, a Luxembourg-based company that is the largest free daily publisher in the world, with newspapers in more than one hundred cities. The Tribune Company, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* and several other newspapers, owns *amNew York* as a way to maintain a presence in the New York market.

Although the free dailies don't make money on subscriptions, they are inexpensive to operate. They tend to be slim tabloids, with wire copy and short, easy-to-read stories developed by a small editorial staff. The newspapers are designed to be read in twenty minutes, the time of the average commute (in fact, some European free dailies call themselves "20 Minutes"). As Metro International says, their newspapers target "a high proportion of young and active, professional readers. This demographic group is not typically reading daily newspapers but is most attractive for advertisers." One company in the United States goes one step further in targeting upscale audiences. In 2004, Denver media billionaire Philip Anschutz bought the *San Francisco Examiner* (once the flagship newspaper of William Randolph Hearst) and converted it into a free daily. The company has since launched the *Washington Examiner* and *Baltimore Examiner*, and delivers them free to wealthy neighborhoods, a practice one Bay Area media critic likened to "a kind of 21st century journalistic redlining," where the poorer neighborhoods get excluded.³²

But a study by the *New York Times* and Scarborough Research found encouraging news in the free newspaper trend for both traditional newspapers and democracy. First, it found that free dailies don't cannibalize paid newspapers. In fact, many paid newspaper readers use free dailies as a secondary newspaper source. Second, it discovered that free papers bring in new readers who have often shunned the paid papers—"the young, those from lower to moderate income households, and non-white ethnic groups."³³ Acculturating new people into the daily habit of newspaper readership is ultimately a good thing for the future health of the newspaper industry and for democracy. ▀

"In 2009, the [Christian Science] Monitor will become the first nationally circulated newspaper to replace its daily print edition with its website."

DAVID COOK,
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
MONITOR,
OCTOBER 2008

India in particular is a growth area for newspapers, with "more than 150 million people" reading a paper each day, "compared to 97 million Americans and 48 million Germans."³²

Joint Operating Agreements Combat Declining Competition

Although the regulation preventing newspaper monopolies has lessened, the government continues to monitor the declining number of newspapers in various American cities as well as mergers in cities where competition among papers might be endangered. In the mid-1920s, about five hundred American cities had two or more newspapers with separate owners. However, by 2008, fewer than fifteen cities had independent, competing papers. In 1995, for example, the *Houston Post* folded, leaving the nation's fourth-largest city with only one daily paper, the *Houston Chronicle*. In 1998, the *Nashville Banner* closed, leaving the Gannett-owned *Tennessean* as the dominant daily print game in town.

In 1970 Congress passed the Newspaper Preservation Act, which enabled failing papers to continue operating through a **joint operating agreement (JOA)**. Under a JOA, two competing papers keep separate news divisions while merging business and production operations for a period of years. Since the act, twenty-eight cities have adopted JOAs. In 2008, just nine JOAs remained in place—in Charleston, West Virginia; Denver; Detroit; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Las Vegas; Salt Lake City; Seattle; Tucson; and York, Pennsylvania. Although JOAs and mergers have monopolistic tendencies, they sometimes have been the only way to maintain competition between newspapers. The success of JOAs, though, is variable. When a JOA in Cincinnati expired in 2007, the *Cincinnati Post* couldn't survive on its own and folded, leaving only the Gannett-owned *Enquirer*.

In another example, Detroit was one of the most competitive newspaper cities in the nation until 1989. The *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* both ranked among the ten most widely circulated papers in the country and sold their weekday editions for just fifteen cents a copy. Faced with declining revenue, the papers' managers asked for and received a JOA in 1989. In the largest JOA to date, the *News*, then owned by Gannett, and the *Free Press*, then owned by Knight Ridder, began sharing business and production operations, while maintaining separate news and editorial departments. In 1995, a prolonged and bitter strike by several unions sharply reduced circulation. One union concern involved reduced competition under the JOA, which allowed both papers to cut jobs to sustain high profits for stockholders. Before the strike, Gannett and Knight Ridder had both reported profit margins of well over 15 percent on all their newspaper holdings.³³ In 2005,



NEWSROOMS

In this photo of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* newsroom, employees stop to watch a press conference on a dispute over its JOA with the *Seattle Times*. The *Post-Intelligencer* was started in 1863. Hearst bought the paper in 1921 and it remains part of the Hearst Corporation today.

Gannett sold the *News* to MediaNews Group and bought the *Free Press*. While both were ranked in the Top 10 circulated papers in the 1980s, neither paper was ranked in the Top 25 in 2008.

Newspaper Chains Consolidate Ownership

Edward Wyllis Scripps founded the first **newspaper chain**—a company that owns several papers throughout the country—in the 1890s. By the 1920s, there were about 30 chains in the United States, each one owning an average of five papers. The emergence of chains paralleled the major business trend during the twentieth century: the movement toward oligopolies in which fewer and fewer corporations control each industry.

By the 1980s, more than 130 chains owned an average of nine papers each, with the 12 largest chains accounting for 40 percent of the total circulation in the United States. By the early 2000s, the Top 10 chains controlled more than one-half of the nation's total daily newspaper circulation. Gannett, for example, the nation's largest chain, owns about eighty-five daily papers (and a thousand more nondailies), ranging from small suburban papers to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the *Nashville Tennessean*, and *USA Today*. (See "What Gannett Owns".)

Around 2005, the consolidation trend in newspaper ownership had leveled off. Despite the fact that most newspapers still generated 10 to 20 percent profit margins, the decline in newspaper circulation and ad sales led to panic with investors and major declines in the stock value for newspapers. Many newspaper chains responded by reducing their newsroom staffs significantly. The effects were nationwide as papers from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and the *Seattle Times* suffered staff cuts. In fact, the "State of the News Media 2008" report says that since 1990, there are 25 percent fewer reporters now working in mainstream U.S. newsrooms.³⁴

The cost cutting was particularly wrenching at the *Los Angeles Times*, which was bought by the Chicago-based Tribune Company in 2000. Continuing demands from the corporate offices for more cost reductions led to the resignation of editor John Carroll in 2005. In 2006, new editor Dean Baquet and publisher Jeffrey Johnson also resigned to protest demands for further cuts, which they said would damage the journalism capabilities of the *Times*. More cuts in 2007 resulted in the departures of some of the most talented staff members, including six Pulitzer Prize winners. The newsroom staff dropped to 850 from about 1,200 in 2000.³⁵ In 2007, the Tribune Company was bought by a private investor, Chicago real estate developer Sam Zell, who made the company private. This move insulated it from investors and stock market demands for unreasonably high profit margins. The Tribune Company took on \$13 billion in debt at the time of the sale and sold the Long Island, N.Y.-based *Newsday* to Cablevision to earn some money. However, in 2008 the Tribune Company faced declining ad revenue and a tough economy and was forced to file for bankruptcy protection (excluding the Chicago Cubs baseball team). While the company continues to operate, this is an indicator of the type of troubles newspapers face.

About the same time, large chains started to break up, selling individual newspapers to private individuals and equity firms. For example, in 2006, Knight Ridder—the nation's second-leading chain with thirty-two daily newspapers—was sold for \$4.5 billion to the McClatchy Company. McClatchy then resold twelve of the thirty-two papers, including the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, to several private buyers. McClatchy also sold its leading newspaper, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, to a private equity group for \$530 million, less than half of what it had paid to buy the newspaper just eight years earlier.

Ownership of one of the nation's three national newspapers also changed hands. The *Wall Street Journal*, held by the Bancroft family for more than one hundred years, accepted a bid of nearly \$5.8 billion dollars from News Corp. head Rupert Murdoch. News Corp. already owned the *New York Post*, one of the nation's Top 10 papers. At the time of this deal, critics raised serious concerns about the recent tendency in the newspaper business toward takeovers by large entertainment conglomerates. As small subsidiaries in large media empires, newspapers are increasingly treated as just another product line expected to perform in the same way that a movie or TV program does.

WHAT GANNETT OWNS

Newspapers

- 85 daily papers and 900 nondaily publications
 - USA Today
 - USA Weekend
 - Asbury Park Press (N.J.)
 - Detroit Free Press
 - Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (N.Y.)
 - Arizona Republic (Phoenix)
 - Cincinnati Enquirer
 - Courier-Journal (Louisville, Ky.)
 - Des Moines Register (Iowa)
 - Honolulu Advertiser
 - Indianapolis Star
 - News Journal (Wilmington, Del.)
 - Tennessean (Nashville)
 - Army Times Publishing Company (newspapers)
 - Newsquest plc (newspaper publishing, United Kingdom)
 - Texas-New Mexico Newspaper Partnership (41 percent, community newspapers)

Television

- Captivate Network (advertising-based television in elevators)
- 23 TV stations
 - KARE-TV (Minneapolis)
 - KNAZ-TV (Flagstaff, Ariz.)
 - KSDK-TV (St. Louis)
 - KTHV-TV (Little Rock, Ark.)
 - KTVD-TV (Denver)
 - KUSA-TV (Denver)
 - KXTV-TV (Sacramento, Calif.)
 - WATL-TV (Atlanta)
 - WBIR-TV (Knoxville, Tenn.)
 - WCSH-TV (Portland, Me.)
 - WGRZ-TV (Buffalo, N.Y.)
 - WJXX-TV (Jacksonville)
 - WKYC-TV (Cleveland)
 - WTLV-TV (Jacksonville)
 - WTSP-TV (Tampa)
 - WZZM-TV (Grand Rapids, Mich.)

Internet

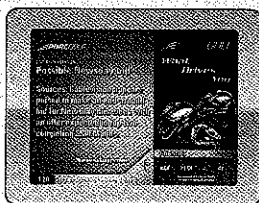
- CareerBuilder (40 percent)
- Classified Ventures (24 percent, online content publishing)
- Planet Discover
- ShopLocal.com (42 percent)
- Topix.net

Magazines and Printing

- Clipper Magazine (direct mail advertising)
- Gannett Healthcare Group (periodical publishing)
- Gannett Offset (commercial printing)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

- Gannett employed more than forty-six thousand people worldwide in 2007.¹
- Gannett's 2007 revenues were more than \$7 billion.
- Gannett is the largest U.S. newspaper chain, with eighty-five daily papers and nine hundred nondaily publications. It also owns three hundred papers in the United Kingdom.
- Gannett owns publications in 35 states.
- Gannett owns 11 nondaily publications aimed at audiences in their 20s and 30s through its Young Reader Publications.
- Gannett owns twenty-three television stations in twenty U.S. markets that reach over 20 million U.S. households.
- Gannett's flagship newspaper, *USA Today*, began in 1982. Circulation passed 1 million by the end of 1983. Today it is considered the largest newspaper in the United States with a circulation around 2.3 million in 2007.
- In 2000 Gannett sold its cable operations to Cox for \$2.7 billion.
- In January 2008, Gannett's Web sites had 25.8 million unique visitors, reaching about 15.9 percent of the Internet audience.²



CAPTIVATE NETWORK reaches 2.4 million people a day in office tower and hotel elevators.

By 2008, a number of concerned journalists, economists, and citizens began calling for a new business model that would help protect newspapers in the transition to the digital era. One idea to insulate papers from stock market expectations is to mimic Sam Zell's model and take newspaper companies private. Another model is nonprofit ownership. For example, the Poynter Institute owns and operates the *St. Petersburg Times*, Florida's largest newspaper. As a nonprofit, the *St. Petersburg Times* is protected from the unrealistic 16 to 20 percent profit margins that publicly held newspapers have historically earned. National Public Radio (NPR) represents another nonprofit model where funding is provided by government subsidies and private contributions. Another nonprofit possibility is that wealthy universities like Harvard or Yale could use their billion-dollar endowments to buy and support newspapers, better insulating their public service and watchdog operations from the expectations of the marketplace. Finally, wealthy Internet companies like Microsoft and Google could also decide to get into the news business and start producing content for both print papers and online.

Newspapers Go Digital to Survive

Because of their local monopoly status, many newspapers were slower than other media to confront the challenges of the electronic and digital revolution. But faced with competition from cable, newspapers responded by developing online versions of their papers. While some observers think newspapers are on the verge of extinction as the digital age eclipses the print era, the industry is no dinosaur. In fact, the history of communication demonstrates that older mass media have always adapted. Actually, with more than fifteen hundred North American daily papers online in 2008, newspapers are solving one of the industry's major economic headaches: the cost of newsprint. After salaries, purchasing paper is the industry's largest expense, typically accounting for more than 25 percent of a newspaper's total cost.

Now, online newspapers are truly taking advantage of the flexibility the Internet offers. Because space is not an issue, newspapers can post online stories and reader letters that they weren't able to print in the paper edition. They can also run longer stories with more in-depth coverage, as well as offer immediate updates to breaking news. Also, most stories appear online before they appear in print, so they can be posted at any time and updated several times a day.

Online newspapers are also making themselves an invaluable resource to readers by offering hyperlinks to Web sites related to stories and by linking news reports to an archive of related articles. Free of charge or for a modest fee, a reader can search the newspaper's database from home and investigate the entire sequence and history of an ongoing story, such as a trial, over the course of several months. Taking advantage of the multimedia capabilities of the Internet, online newspapers offer readers the ability to download audio and video files—everything from presidential news conferences to sports highlights to original video reports. Today's online newspapers offer readers a dynamic rather than a static resource.

Despite these advances, online revenue accounted for only about 6 to 7 percent of U.S. newspaper advertising in 2007. Print newspapers are still among the media leaders in collecting advertising revenue, attracting about 17 to 18 percent of all ad revenues spent in the United States, down from a 27 percent share in the late 1980s (see Figure 8.2). Unfortunately, this means that the traditional printed newspaper will remain the big generator of revenue for the time being. To move this process forward faster, in 2008 more than four hundred daily newspapers collaborated with Yahoo! (the number one Web site where readers start their search for news) to begin an ad venture that promised to increase online papers' revenue by 10 to 20 percent.

Blogs Challenge Newspapers' Authority Online

The rise of blogs in the late 1990s and early 2000s brought amateurs into the realm of professional journalism. It was an awkward meeting. As National Press Club president Doug Harbrecht said to blogger Matt Drudge in 1998 while introducing him to the press club's members, "There

aren't many in this hallowed room who consider you a journalist. Real journalists . . . pride themselves on getting it first and right; they get to the bottom of the story, they bend over backwards to get the other side. Journalism means being painstakingly thorough, even-handed, and fair." Harbrecht's suggestion, of course, was that untrained bloggers weren't as scrupulous as professionally trained journalists. In the following decade, though, as blogs like the Daily Kos, the Huffington Post, AndrewSullivan.com, and Talking Points Memo gained credibility and a large readership, traditional journalism began to slowly try blogging, allowing some reporters to write a blog in addition to their regular newspaper, television, or radio work. Some newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* even hired journalists to blog exclusively for their Web sites.

By 2005, the wary relationship between journalism and blogging began to change. Blogging became less a journalistic sideline and more a viable main feature. Established journalists left major news organizations to begin new careers in the blogosphere. For example, in 2007 top journalists John Harris and Jim VandeHei left the *Washington Post* to launch Politico.com, a national blog (and, secondarily, a local newspaper) about Capitol Hill politics. Eric Black—a veteran political writer for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, who wrote the highly regarded blog the Big Question for the paper—left during newsroom downsizing in 2007 to start his own blog for the Center for Independent Media. Nancy Cleeland, a labor reporter who won a Pulitzer Prize for a 2004 investigative team series on Wal-Mart's labor and outsourcing practices, left the *Los Angeles Times* during staff cuts in 2007.³⁶ Another breakthrough moment occurred when the Talking Points Memo blog, headed by Joshua Micah Marshall, won a George Polk Award for legal reporting in 2008. From Marshall's point of view, "I think of us as journalists; the medium

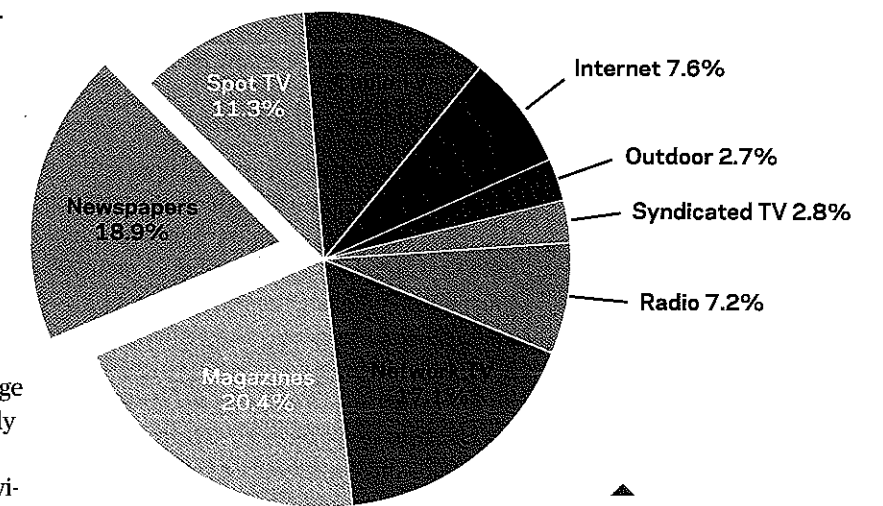
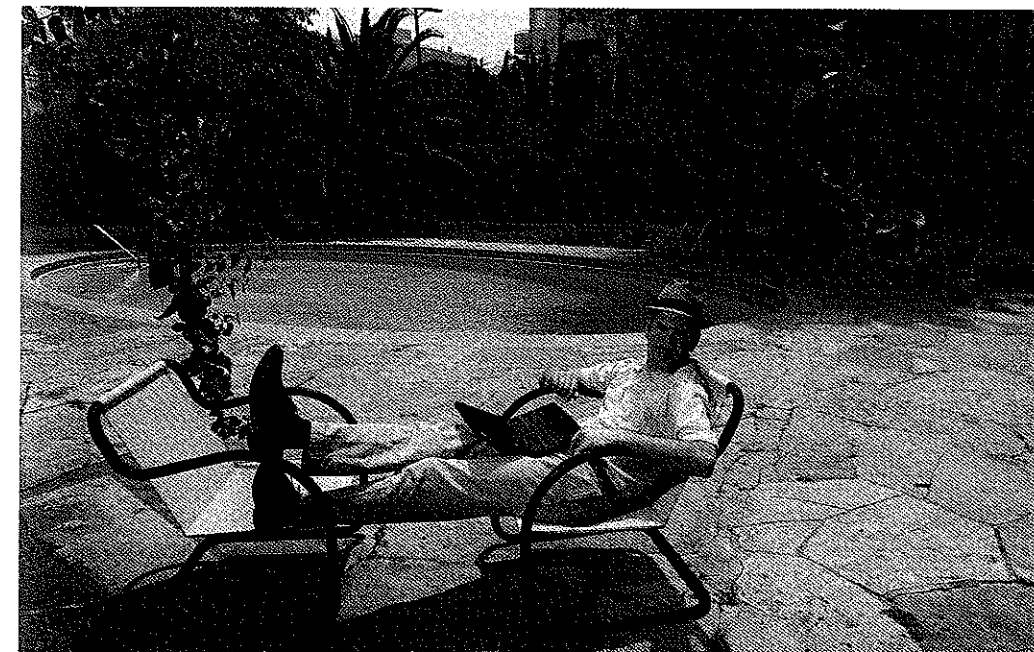


FIGURE 8.2
NEWSPAPERS' SLICE OF THE U.S. ADVERTISING PIE, 2007

Source: Advertising Age, "100 National Leading Advertisers," June 23, 2008.



EARLY NEWS BLOGS like The Drudge Report helped bring journalism and news commentary to the Web. (Left, Matt Drudge.)

"Now, like hundreds of other mid-career journalists who are walking away from media institutions across the country, I'm looking for other ways to tell the stories I care about. At the same time, the world of online news is maturing, looking for depth and context. I think the timing couldn't be better."

NANCY CLEELAND, ON WHY SHE WAS LEAVING THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, POSTED ON THE HUFFINGTON POST, 2007

we work in is blogging. We have kind of broken free of the model of discrete articles that have a beginning and end. Instead, there are an ongoing series of dispatches."³⁷

Alternative Voices

The combination of the online news surge and traditional newsroom cutbacks has led to a new phenomenon known as **citizen journalism**, or *citizen media*, or *community journalism* (in those projects where the participants might not be actual citizens). As a grassroots movement, citizen journalism refers to people—activist amateurs and concerned citizens, not professional journalists—who use the Internet and blogs to disseminate news and information. In fact, with steep declines in newsroom staffs, many professional news media organizations—like CNN (iReport) and many regional newspapers—are increasingly trying to corral citizen journalists as an inexpensive way to make up for journalists lost to newsroom "downsizing."

A 2008 study by J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism reported that more than one thousand community-based Web sites were in operation, posting citizen stories on local government, police, and city development. This represented twice the number of community sites from a year earlier. J-Lab also operates the Knight Citizen News Network, "a Web site that advises citizens and traditional journalists on how to launch and operate community news and information sites."³⁸ These sites mostly use free software and target communities that get little media attention. Another example is the Philadelphia-based Media Mobilizing Project, which teaches community members, including immigrant rights groups and non-U.S. citizens, how to make community news using video and stream it on the Internet. In 2008, the group planned to produce stories on school violence, gun control, and neighborhood gentrification.³⁹

Newspapers and Democracy

Of all mass media, newspapers have played the longest and strongest role in sustaining democracy. Over the years, newspapers have fought heroic battles in places that had little tolerance for differing points of view. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), from 1992 through April 2008, 685 reporters from around the world were killed while doing their jobs. Of those 685, 72 percent were murdered, 17 percent were killed in combat assignments and war reporting, and 10 percent were killed performing "dangerous assignments."⁴⁰ Most of the recent deaths reported by the CPJ have come from the war in Iraq. From 2003 to mid-2008, more than 125 reporters had died in Iraq, along with 35 media workers and support staff. For comparison, 63 reporters were killed covering the Vietnam War; 17 died covering the Korean War; and 69 were killed during World War II.⁴¹ Our nation is dependent on journalists willing to do this very dangerous reporting in order to keep us informed about what is going on around the world. (See Figure 8.3, "The Most Dangerous Countries for Journalists," on page 277.)

In addition to the physical danger, newsroom cutbacks, and closing of foreign bureaus, a number of smaller concerns remain as we consider the future of newspapers. For instance, some charge that newspapers have become so formulaic in their design and reporting styles that they may actually discourage new approaches to telling stories and reporting news. Another criticism is that many one-newspaper cities cover only issues and events of interest to middle- and upper-middle-class readers, thereby underreporting the experiences and events that affect poorer and working-class citizens. In addition, given the rise of newspaper chains,

"The danger is omnipresent for journalists in Iraq. There are few places to take refuge."

JOEL CAMPAGNA, COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS, 2006

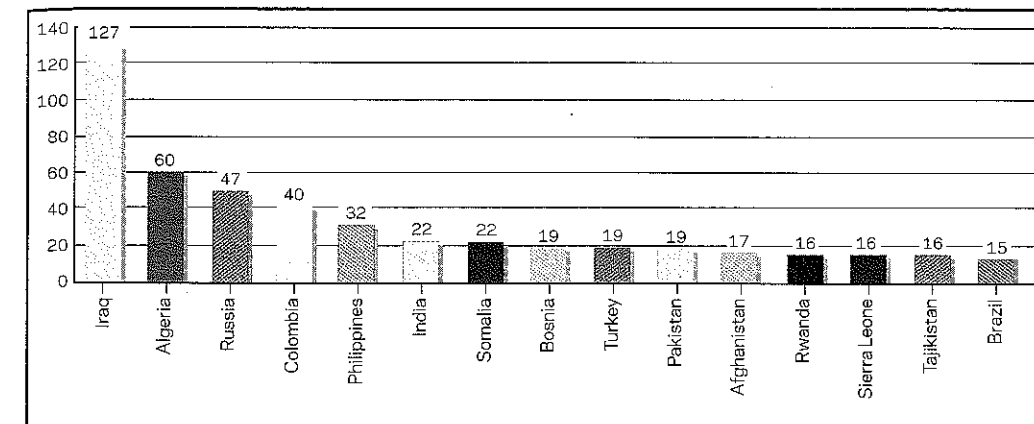


FIGURE 8.3
THE MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRIES FOR JOURNALISTS (NUMBER OF DEATHS 2003-2008)
Source: Committee to Protect Journalists

the likelihood of including new opinions, ideas, and information in mainstream daily papers may be diminishing. Moreover, chain ownership tends to discourage watchdog journalism and the crusading traditions of newspapers. Like other business managers, many news executives prefer not to offend investors or outrage potential advertisers by running too many investigative reports—especially business probes at a time in 2008 right before the financial crisis hit and few people seemed to know why. This may be most obvious in the fact that reporters have generally not reported adequately on the business and ownership arrangements in their own industry.

Finally, as print journalism shifts to digital culture, the greatest challenge is the upheaval of print journalism's business model. As print journalism loses readers and advertisers to a wide range of digital culture, what will become of newspapers, which do most of the nation's primary journalistic work? John Carroll presided over thirteen Pulitzer Prize-winning reports at the *Los Angeles Times* as editor from 2000 to 2005, but left the paper to protest deep corporate cuts to the newsroom. He lamented the future of newspapers and their unique role: "Newspapers are doing the reporting in this country. Google and Yahoo and those people aren't putting reporters on the street in any numbers at all. Blogs can't afford it. Network television is taking reporters off the street. Commercial radio is almost nonexistent. And newspapers are the last ones standing, and newspapers are threatened. And reporting is absolutely an essential thing for democratic self-government. Who's going to do it? Who's going to pay for the news? If newspapers fall by the wayside, what will we know?"⁴² ▶

"The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing."

BILL KOVACH AND TOM ROSENSTIEL, *THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM*, 2007