

The Fourth Estate or State of Decline--Updated—what is the role of the press today in the US?

Tuesdays, September 21—November 23, 10 a.m. to noon. Zoom

How many of us can identify the issues affecting the upcoming election in Canada or what outcomes have come about with Brexit and the European Union? What do middle eastern countries think about our leaving Afghanistan?

There was a time when major news organizations had bureaus in every major country and news included detailed reports on world events. We will look at factors that have changed our news coverage including international news, local news, social media, cable news and major corporations dominating the television, radio and newspaper industries. Together, we will identify reliable news sources and areas that require attention so that we can be a well-informed society.

We will start with the factors that equipped our country for democracy and learn what challenges face our media today to cover major stories in depth. All of us will be influencing the way this course goes through our reports and questions and suggestions and all of us our consumers of the media and have our favorite sources—so be ready to share those sources with the rest of us. Also, be ready to question the quality of the news we receive as an underlying theme of every discussion and explore the role of journalism from an emphasis on reporters to the growing role of pundits.

America's founders considered a healthy press (the Fourth Estate) an indispensable element in the array of checks and balances and institutions necessary to sustain democracy in the new nation. In learning our past, we will be better able to evaluate our present and plan for our future.

Week 1, September 21: The Press in Early America (Presenters: Gene and Norma)

- Factors Pre-1750: Early press was largely for the British, but after that, English Crown regulations and taxation became highly relevant to American colonists
- More than 80% of population was literate
- Debaters led by Samuel Adams informed inhabitants of 260 towns of England's overbearing policies
- Thomas Paine's Common Sense incensed colonists, sold one half million copies and distributed through newspapers
- Ratification of the Constitution and little-known clause—the Postal Clause—brought an economical larger system of distribution and allowed the federal government to obtain a monopoly on mail delivery and use government funds and legal rights to expand postal network.
- Benjamin Franklin, first postmaster general. In 1788, less than 100 post offices. By 1800, almost 1,000 and by 1820, 4,500. With the Federal Government priority of having newspapers available to the public, low postal rates allowed for quick growth of newspapers. In 1790, there was less than one newspaper produced for every citizen; and by 1840, there were almost three papers printed per citizen.

Week 2, September 28: Establishing Journalism standards and celebrating/learning about the muckrakers—setting the stage for the world of competitive journalism

Reports:

- Standards and responsibilities for journalists: Eugene Mihaley from the book: The Elements of Journalism
- The Muckrakers—who, what, when where and why: Willard Van Horne
- Major events and personalities: The Sinking of the Maine and Yellow Journalism and description of Hearst and Pulitzer

Week 3, October 4: All Politics is Local—the state of the local media

Reports:

- Ghosting the News: Local Journalism and the Crisis of American Democracy by Margaret Sullivan: Ellen Ober
  - Success stories of local papers—growing influence of weeklies
  - Demise of local papers
- Black Journalism in the United States: Sheila and Dick Brush
- Class discussion on television and newspaper competition in major markets: state of newspapers in New York City, Los Angeles and Changing rules of the Federal Communications Commission

Week 4, October 11: What are the laws/guidelines for news media and how do we access the media? (digital, actual newspaper, television/radio)

Reports:

- Differences between defamation, slander and libel: Ruth Mills
- Open Source Intelligence Journalism (OSINT) refers to open sources for journalism and builds on a wide range of digital sources deriving from new camera technology and internet services. Ralph Jaspardo will report on this new investigative journalism technique using a combination of creative and critical thinking to navigate digital sources on the web.

Week 5, October 18: Major changes in media coverage include the shift from reporting-based to opinion-based coverage (newspapers emphasis on opinion columns) and The 24-hour news cycle and the story of the Cable News Channels—why they focus on what they do: Prior to October 18, each participant is to choose one of the media listed below or one of your choice and come prepared to describe their point of view and/or audience and influential reporters. Our goal with this session is to get a sense of the many viewpoints represented and to see how this plays out in the following sessions where we concentrate on one major news topic.

Prior to this discussion, we will have a report by Paul Alexander on James Reston—just to remind us what used to be.

Assignments: Each of us will choose a news source to describe and then follow as we review coverage of major issues in upcoming weeks: Please choose one and let Gene and Norma know

- Fox News

- MSNBC
- One America News (OAN) Ellen Ober will report and cover story of American Voting Rights on this station.
- CNN
- ABC
- CBS
- NBC
- Public Television
- News Nation
- Reuters
- AP
- NY Times
- Wall Street Journal
- Washington Post
- Politico
- Blog of your choice

Week 6, October 25:—describe coverage of Afghanistan in the media you chose to cover

Week7: November 2—describe coverage of the Pandemic—what does it say about us and our media—Naomi Appel will present on the pandemic and each of us will explain the coverage of the medium we are following.

Week 8, November 9--describe coverage of Climate Change—do you believe this to be accurate? Bob Siminski will present on climate change and each of us will explain the coverage of the medium we are following

Week 9, November 16: Social Media—who are they and who’s responsible: social media and their role publishing information content (Twitter, Facebook, Podcasts, Instagram—are they changing? Is their influence growing? Are their safeguards to preserve truth?) Carolyn Roberts will present and we could use another presenter on this huge topic—perhaps the issue safeguards to preserve truth...

Week 10, November 23: How do we know what is true and how do we check facts—group discussion and what did we learn to go forward

Points to consider as you prepare your report:

- What is the purpose of the media: to inform, educate, entertain, arouse emotions or make money?
- What is the goal of the customer: to learn, find validation, be entertained?
- All Politics Are Local, starting with the role and status of newspapers, radio and television news in cities throughout the country.
- How to know what is true, how do we rate “fairness” of media? Best strategies for fact checking and evaluating media?

Suggested References

- THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM: What News people Should Know and the Public Should Expect, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition—available on Amazon, August 10
- GHOSTING THE NEWS: LOCAL JOURNALISM AND THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, Margaret Sullivan, 2020
- Online Resources: Including New York Times, Journalism Schools: Stanford University, Northwestern University, University of Wisconsin, Columbia University

Guest Speakers: