

A Real Media Utopia

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When one considers the notion of establishing a “real utopia” for media, the place to start is to understand media as a problem for society. By problem I do not mean one of poor or dubious media content that has negative effects upon our culture, politics, and society. By this framing, if the media were doing a commendable job, there would be no problem. Instead, I mean a different meaning for the word “problem;” its first definition in *Webster’s Dictionary* is “a question raised for inquiry, consideration, or solution.” The media, in this sense, are a political problem. Whether their content is good, bad or a combination, the media are a problem for any society, and an unavoidable one at that. Media systems of one sort or another are going to exist, and they do not fall from the sky. The policies, structures, subsidies and institutions that are created to control, direct and regulate the media will be responsible for the logic and nature of the media system. In other words, the first problem deals with content and the second, larger, problem deals with the structure that determines the content. Understood this way, the manner in which a society decides how to structure the media system, how it elects to solve the problem of the media in the second sense, becomes of paramount importance. These policy debates will often determine the contours and values of the media system that then produces the contents of media that are visible to all.

The problem of the media exists in all societies, regardless of their structure. A society does not approach the problem with a blank page, but the range of options is influenced by the political economic structure, cultural traditions, and the available communication technologies, among other things. In dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, the problem is solved by those in power, with the transparent goal of generating a media system that supports their domination of the nation and minimizes the possibility of effective opposition. The direct link between control over the media and control over the society is self-evident. But in democratic societies, too, the same tension that exists between those who hold power and those who do not, only the battle assumes different forms. Media are at the center of struggles for power and control in any society, and this is arguably even more the case in democratic nations, where the issue is more up for grabs.

The political nature of the problem of the media in democratic societies is well-known; virtually all theories of self-government are premised on having an informed citizenry, and the creation of such an informed citizenry is the province of the media. I hasten to add that the media system is not the only institution responsible for political education, though it provides a necessary foundation. The measure of a media system in political terms is not whether it creates a viable democratic society – that would be too much of a

burden to place upon it. Instead, the measure is whether the media system, on balance, in the context of the broader social and economic situation, challenges and undermines antidemocratic pressures and tendencies, or whether it reinforces them. Is the media system a democratic force?

What is much less understood or self-evident is the importance of media to economics; and it is the media's relationship to economics that goes a long way toward shaping their political role, and their relationship with the dominant political and economic forces in society. The starting point for grasping the problem of the media in the United States is to understand where the media system fits in the broader capitalist economic system. The crucial tension is between the role of media as profit-maximizing commercial organizations and the need for the media to provide the basis for informed self-government. It is this tension that fuels much of the social concern around media, and media policymaking.

In what follows I propose a way to imagine and understand a real media utopia following this approach. From the present U.S. experience, there are clear lessons and values that inform the policies and institutions that would present a more ideal media system, one that aggressively promotes democratic participation and control over society. Much of what follows presents this history and experience. There will be a few real utopian proposals toward the end of the paper; if the context and history are done well in the heart of the paper, such proposals will hang like ripe fruit for readers. My argument is that once we understand journalism as a public good requiring public subsidies, the flood gates can be opened for creative ways to address the problem. Until we get to that point, we are in intellectual and political quicksand.

I offer two provisos. First, in most of what follows I concentrate upon the news media or journalism. I understand that political education comes from many sources, not just news media. I believe that much of the argument I make regarding news media can be extended to other forms of media and communication, and I briefly return to this point near the end of the paper. Second, by the framing already presented, it is absurd to extract the process of creating a real media utopia from the process of creating a real political economy utopia. I seemingly will attempt the impossible in much of this paper, though I return to the matter of the relationship of media reform to broader political movements at the end of the paper. In my view, this is where the future of real media utopias lies.

Democratic journalism

If the idea behind a real media utopia is to develop policies to promote journalism, it is important to have a set of values and a vision of what good journalism looks and sounds like.¹ Fortunately, there is considerable consensus in democratic theory and among journalism scholars about what a healthy journalism should entail:

1. It must provide a rigorous account of people who are in power and people who wish to be in power, in the government, corporate and nonprofit sectors.
2. It must regard the information needs of all people as legitimate.

3. It must have a plausible method to separate truth from lies, or at least to prevent liars from being unaccountable and leading nations into catastrophes—particularly wars, economic crises and communal discord.
4. It must produce a wide range of informed opinions on the most important issues of our times—not only the transitory concerns of the moment, but also challenges that loom on the horizon. These issues cannot be determined primarily by what people in power are talking about. Journalism must provide the nation's early warning system, so problems can be anticipated, studied, debated and addressed before they grow to crisis proportions.

It is not necessarily the case that every media outlet can or should provide all these services to their communities; that would be impractical. It is necessary, however, that the media system as a whole makes such journalism a realistic expectation for the citizenry. There should be a basic understanding of the commons—the social world—that all people share, so that all people can effectively participate in the political and electoral processes of self-governance. The measure of a free press is how well a system meets these criteria of giving citizens the information they need to keep their freedom.

There is more. Great journalism, as Ben Bagdikian put it, requires great institutions. Like any complex undertaking, a division of labor is required to achieve success: Copyeditors, fact checkers, and proofreaders are needed, in addition to reporters and assigning editors. Great journalism also requires institutional muscle to stand up to governments and corporate power. It requires competition so if one newsroom misses a story it will be exposed by someone else. It requires people covering stories they would not cover if they were doing journalism on a voluntary basis. In short, to have democratic journalism requires material resources that have to come from somewhere and need to be organized on an institutional basis.

The emergence of the Internet can lower costs dramatically and make the creation of a viable democratic journalism far more plausible. The technologies are such that there will almost certainly be many innovations in the development of journalism that we cannot anticipate. Healthy policymaking will embrace this prospect, not attempt to thwart it merely to protect the turf of old media.

If the roots of understanding democratic journalism are found in liberal theory, two scholars in particular have been of central importance to developing these ideas in the modern context. Noam Chomsky is the scholar who revolutionized the study of linguistics and ranks among the most prominent U.S. intellectuals of the past 100 years. Beginning in the 1960s Chomsky began a parallel career as a social critic and activist, and soon he was arguably the most well-known and respected radical critic of U.S. foreign policy in the world. In the course of developing his criticism of international politics, Chomsky began to critique U.S. news media coverage of foreign affairs, which he found highly propagandistic on behalf of elite interests. It was this work that led to his collaboration with Edward S. Herman and the development of the propaganda model in

Manufacturing Consent in the late 1980s. Chomsky's contributions to the political economy of communication go beyond his collaboration with Herman. His own writings in the 1980s, most notably 1989's *Necessary Illusions*, developed a rich media critique that pursued the tension between capitalist and democratic societies.²

Chomsky, more than any other figure, argued that the United States was far from being a genuine democracy, and that the media system played a major role in cementing inegalitarian class relations. His work drew from a critical reading of mainstream scholarship and a rich understanding of the classical and Anglo-American democratic traditions. Chomsky's courage to take an anti-communist position, all the while refusing to budge from his democratic and egalitarian principles has been extraordinarily influential.

Jurgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* paralleled C. Wright Mills's critique of modern western liberal democracies. It made communication a central component of democracy, the structural/institutional basis for communication of paramount importance, and regarded both business and government domination of media as problematic for democracy.³ A central problem in the political economy of communication had been the matter of determining a more democratic media system than that provided by the market. The problem has been that much more severe because the "really existing alternative" to capitalism and commercial media for much of the twentieth century—the communist systems in Eastern Europe and Asia—were singularly unattractive from a democratic perspective. Habermas's notion of the public sphere, a place where citizens interact that is controlled by neither business nor the state, has provided an operating principle for democratic media. Following this logic, the policy trajectory of much political economic research in communication for a real media utopia, certainly my own, has been to establish a well-funded nonprofit, noncommercial, heterogeneous communication sector that is decentralized and controlled in a democratic fashion. Habermas's formulation was absolutely crucial in moving the debate in media studies away from the dominant notion that there were two and only two ways to organize media: the free, private media of democracy or the state-controlled media of authoritarian societies.⁴

This Manichean framing of media options was a function of the Cold war and the one-party Communist dictatorships; it had nothing to do with Karl Marx or socialist theory. Indeed, for all the tension between liberal and radical thought in other areas, there is considerable confluence in matters of journalism and a free press. In recent years scholars have taken a fresh look at Marx's writings on communication and have appreciated that Marx left us another vantage point to his perspectives on the press and society: Karl Marx devoted a large part of his life to journalism. He and Engels wrote over 800 newspaper articles, and published in some the most important newspapers of their day. Marx's most important journalistic period was from 1842-1849 when he was an editor and fighting journalist in Germany, and forced to confront issues of censorship and press freedom. He was arrested numerous times for his journalistic activities. This was Marx's principal occupation from 1842 until 1849, ending with his departure for London in 1849 at the age of 31 following the defeat of the 1848 revolutions. This did not end Marx's relation to

journalism, however. Marx wrote for ten years (1851-1861) for the *New York Daily Tribune (or New York Tribune)*, one of the leading newspapers in the United States, with a circulation as high as 250,000 during this period. It was the paper of Horace Greeley (founder and publisher) and Charles Dana (managing editor). Marx authored 356 articles as European Correspondent for the *Tribune* and co-authored 12 with Engels.

(Parenthetically, it is worth noting that the *Tribune* was the leading national newspaper of the emerging Republican Party in the 1850s, precisely when Marx was the paper's European correspondent. As such, Marx and the *Tribune* were read voraciously by Abraham Lincoln, in Springfield, Illinois.)⁵

There are two noteworthy aspects of Marx's career as a journalist. First, he was among the greatest journalists of the 19th century, and he is certainly on any short list for a first tier for all time. He did so under circumstances that were far from conducive. As Charles Blitzer noted, "The mystery of how Marx was able to produce such distinguished work under such inauspicious circumstances [his poverty, lack of high connections] can perhaps partially be solved by suggesting that at least some of the apparent handicaps under which he labored were in fact advantages. Thus, for example, it may be argued that Marx's very real isolation from the obvious and conventional sources of news compelled him to look elsewhere for material. In so doing, he turned to such published -- but seldom exploited -- sources as commercial statistics, official reports, treaties, and parliamentary debates. This gave to his articles a depth and a solidity that were not to be found in the writings of those who relied upon court gossip and political chit-chat. Similarly, the fact that while Marx was writing for the *Tribune* he was also regularly engaged in scholarly research, although obviously inconvenient for him, was unquestionably a source of strength rather than of weakness." Blitzer concludes: "If a preoccupation with the social and economic background of politics, and a determination to uncover the real motives that lie behind the words of politicians and governments are the hallmarks of modern political journalism, Karl Marx may properly said to be its father."⁶ Marx's practice of vision provides a sense of what quality journalistic practice might look like; interestingly, it looks very similar to the journalism practiced by I.F. Stone through the middle of the 20th century, and Glenn Greenwald today.

Second, Marx had constant run-ins with the authorities over his journalism, which led him to write continually on the subject of a free press in a democratic society. In his youth he repeatedly penned words along these lines: "The free press is the omnipresent open eye of the spirit of the people, the embodied confidence of a people in itself, the articulate bond that ties the individual to the state and the world, the incorporated culture which transfigures material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealizes its raw material shape. It is the ruthless confession of a people to itself, and self-viewing is the first condition of wisdom. It is the mind of the state that can be peddled in every cottage, cheaper than natural gas. It is universal, omnipresent, omniscient. It is the ideal world, which constantly gushes from the real one and streams back to it ever richer and animated anew."⁷ Marx opposed state censorship categorically.

Concurrently, Marx was aware from the outset that the existence of a free press under the regime of private property was in jeopardy as a result of its being turned into a business. "The first freedom of the press consists in it not being a trade...But is the press true to its nature, does it act according to the nobility of its nature, is it free, if it is degraded to a trade? The writer, to be sure, must earn a living in order to exist and be able to write, but he must in no way exist and write in order to earn a living."⁸ In another article, Marx wrote: "The French press is not too free, it is not free enough. It is not subject to intellectual censorship, to be sure, but subject to a material censorship, the high security deposit. This affects the press materially, because it pulls the press out of its true sphere into the sphere of big business speculations. In addition, big business speculations need big cities. Hence the French press is concentrated in a few points, and when material force is thus concentrated, does it not work demonically, as intellectual force does not?"⁹ In sum, in Marx's journalism we see already the basis for a critical approach to understanding the "press," and in much of his work, valuable insights for the critical study of media.

The comments on Marx are not cherry-picked from a record of otherwise condoning state censorship and repression of press freedom. To the contrary, the radical socialist tradition well into the third decade of the 20th century was one of being the foremost proponents of an independent, uncensored journalism. John Nichols argues persuasively that it was the socialists in the United States that "made" the First Amendment in the United States, by providing the basis for the seminal Supreme Court decisions in the decades following the First World War.¹⁰ Likewise, it has been the social democrats in Europe since the 1920s that have been most persistent in campaigning for extensive public service broadcasting.¹¹ The point is that as the global democratic left advances politically in the coming years, it has a rich media tradition to embrace and emulate. As the Hungarian socialist Gyula Hegyi put it in 2006, in a message to the successful left-wing governments in Latin America: "believe me, compañeros, there is no democratic socialism without democracy - and the kind of socialism that exists without democracy could kill your dreams for the future."¹²

2+2=5

Although we approach the task of imagining a real media utopia with the scientific notion of a problem, the matter has tremendous urgency because of the other sense of a media problem—the great crisis in journalism today that is rendering the notion of self-government problematic, if not absurd. This is not an academic matter.

To some extent, the crisis is inherent in a system of private capitalist control over news media combined with advertising providing the majority of revenues. As these news media markets invariably tended toward becoming concentrated and noncompetitive it afforded the owners tremendous political power, and tended to marginalize the voices and interests of the poor and working class. By the first two decades of the 20th century this became a major crisis for American journalism. The solution to the problem was the emergence of professional journalism. This embodied the revolutionary idea that the owner and the editor could be separated, and that the political views of the owner (and advertisers) would not be reflected in the nature of the journalism, except on the editorial

page. This was a 180 degree shift from the entire history of American journalism, which was founded on the notion of an explicitly partisan and highly competitive press that played an integral role in the political process. This partisan press remained intact through the 19th century only to be undermined by the increasing concentration and profitability of the news media.

Under professionalism, news would be determined and produced by trained professionals and the news would be objective, nonpartisan, factually accurate and unbiased. Whether there were ten newspapers in a community or only one or two would be mostly irrelevant, because trained journalists—like mathematicians addressing an algebra problem—would all come up with the same news reports. There were no schools of journalism in the United States (or world, for that matter) in 1900. By the 1920s all the major journalism schools had been established and by 1923 the American Society of Newspaper Editors was formed and had established a professional code for editors and reporters to follow.

It is important to understand that there is nothing inevitable or “natural” about the type of professional journalism that emerged in the United States in the last century. The professional news values that came to dominate in this country were contested; the journalists’ union, the Newspaper Guild, in the 1930s unsuccessfully attempted to have a nonpartisan journalism that was far more critical of all people in power, and viewed itself as the agent of people outside of power, to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted,” as Dunne’s saying goes. It regarded journalism as a third force independent of both government and big business, and wanted to prohibit publishers from having any control over the content of the news. As the leading history of the formation of the Guild reports: “The idea that the Guild could rebalance the power struggle between public and publisher through a new kind of stewardship of freedom of the press became a core tenet of their mission as an organization.”¹³

(This remains a compelling vision of journalism, worthy of being a portion of a good news system, and is still practiced today by some of our best journalists. In developing a real media utopia, I draw from the International Federation of Journalists’ Ethical Journalism Initiative, which was developed by journalists and media professionals “to restore values and mission to their profession. It aims to strengthen press freedom, reinforce quality journalism and consolidate editorial independence.”¹⁴)

This practice of journalism was anathema to most publishers, who wanted no part of aggressive reporting on their fellow business owners or the politicians they routinely worked with and relied upon for their businesses to be successful. They also were never going to sign away their direct control over the newsroom; editors and reporters had their autonomy strictly at the owner’s discretion. The resulting professionalism was to the owners’ liking, for the most part, and more conducive to their commercial and political needs.

The core problem with professional journalism as it crystallized was that it relied far too heavily upon official sources (i.e., people in power) as the appropriate agenda setters for news and as the “deciders” with regard to the range of legitimate debate in our political culture. There is considerable irony in this development; Walter Lippmann, generally regarded as the leading advocate of professionalism, argued that the main justification for and requirement of professionalism in journalism was that it provide a trained group of

independent nonpartisan reporters who could successfully and rigorously debunk government (and, implicitly, corporate) spin, not regurgitate it.¹⁵

This reliance upon official sources—people in power—as setting the legitimate agenda and range of debate removed some of the controversy from the news, and it made the news less expensive to produce. It didn't cost much to put reporters where people in political power congregate and report on what they say—certainly a lot less than it cost to send those same reporters around the world on a mission to determine whether the officials in Washington were telling the truth. This gave the news an “establishment” tone. It made reporters careful about antagonizing those in power, upon whom they depended for “access” to their stories.¹⁶ Chris Hedges, the former *New York Times* Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, describes the reliance on official sources this way: “It is a dirty quid pro quo. The media get access to the elite as long as the media faithfully report what the elite wants reported. The moment that quid pro quo breaks down, reporters—real reporters—are cast into the wilderness and denied access.”¹⁷ And it meant that people outside of power had less influence, or that their influence was determined to a certain extent by how people in power regarded them.¹⁸

This fundamental limitation of professional journalism does not manifest itself in the coverage of those issues where there is rich and pronounced debate between or within leading elements of the dominant political parties. Then journalists have a good deal of room to maneuver and professional standards can work to assure factual accuracy, balance and credibility. There tend to be slightly fewer problems in robust political eras, like the 1960s, when mass political movements demand the attention and respect of the powerful.

The real problem with professional journalism becomes evident when political elites do not debate an issue and march in virtual lockstep. In such a case, professional journalism is, at best, ineffectual, and, at worst, propagandistic. This has often been the case in U.S. foreign policy, where both parties are beholden to an enormous global military complex, and accept the right of the United States, and the United States alone, to invade countries when it suits U.S. interests.¹⁹ In matters of war and foreign policy, journalists who question the basic assumptions and policy objectives and who attempt to raise issues no one in either the leadership of either party wishes to debate are considered “ideological” and “unprofessional.” This has a powerful disciplinary effect upon journalists.²⁰

So it was that, even in the glory days of 1960s journalism, our news media helped lead us into the Vietnam war, despite the fact that dubious claims from the government could in many cases have been easily challenged and exposed. Such, writes journalist John Pilger, was “the insidious power of the dominant propaganda.”²¹ A great dissident Democrat, Oregon Senator Wayne Morse, for example, broke with both his own party and the Republicans to warn against imperialistic endeavors in places such as Vietnam. His perspective, which history has shown to be accurate, was marginalized in mainstream news media. Morse recognized the lack of critical coverage and debate in the news media were undermining popular involvement in foreign policy. “The American people need to be warned before it is too late about the threat which is arising as a result of monopolistic practices (in newspaper ownership.)”²²

Another weakness built into professional journalism as it developed in the United States was that it opened the door to an enormous public-relations industry that was eager to provide reporters with material on their clients. Press releases and packets came packaged to meet the requirements of professional journalism, often produced by former journalists. The point of PR is to get the client's message in the news so that it looks legitimate. The best PR is that which is never recognized for what it is. Although reporters generally understood the dubious nature of PR, and never embraced it, they had to work with it to get their work done. Publishers tended to love PR because it lowered the costs of production. The dirty secret of journalism is that a significant percentage of our news stories, in the 40-50 percent range, even at the most prestigious newspapers in the glory days of the 1970s, were based upon press releases. Even then, a surprising amount of the time these press releases were only loosely investigated and edited before publication.²³ It meant that powerful interests could subtly determine what was covered in the news and how it was covered.

The high-water mark for professional journalism was the 1960s and early 1970s. Since the late 1970s, commercial pressure has eroded much of the autonomy that professional journalism afforded journalism, and that had provided the basis for the best work done over the past 50 years. It has led to a softening of standards such that stories about sex scandals and celebrities have become more legitimate, because they make commercial sense: they are inexpensive to cover, attract audiences and give the illusion of controversy without ever threatening anyone in power. Mark Willes, the controversial publisher of the prestigious *Los Angeles Times* in the 1990s, exemplified the corporate contempt for professional autonomy. He announced his intent to tear down the "Chinese wall between editors and business staffers" with "a bazooka if necessary." He appointed a business manager to see that the editorial content would conform to the best commercial interests of the corporation.²⁴ Willes also authorized the *Times's* editorial staff to formally meet with representatives of the local PR community, so reporters would not have to waste time locating the proper PR agent.²⁵ Willes's shenanigans may represent the most extreme, and horrific, response to the challenges faced by modern newspapers. But the power of public relations is such that the PR industry—and the powerful interests it represents—really do not need pliant editors anymore.

As editorial staffs shrink, there is less ability for news media to interrogate and counter the claims in press releases. And powerful interests will be better positioned than ever to produce self-promotional "information"—better described as "propaganda"—that can masquerade as "news." The technology actually makes it easier. A major development in the past decade has been video news releases, PR-produced news stories that are often run as if they were legitimate journalism on local TV news broadcasts. The stories invariably promote the products of the corporation which funds the work surreptitiously.²⁶

The Current Crisis

The bottom has come out of the cup of journalism over the past generation, and has accelerated in the past decade. It is not simply that the quality has deteriorated; the quantity is in marked decline as well. We are now rapidly approaching a point where

there is nowhere near sufficient journalism for the constitutional system to succeed. In a nutshell, there is roughly 30 percent less labor and resources going to producing the news today than there was in 2000, and perhaps half of what there was 25 years ago, on a per capita basis. The wheels came off corporate journalism in 2007, and subsequently the number of newspapers and newsrooms has declined sharply. Why do corporations no longer find journalism a profitable investment? To some extent it is that increasingly monopolistic news media corporations gutted and trivialized the product for decades and this ultimately made the “news” irrelevant.²⁷ To some extent the crisis exploded as it did because the Internet destroyed the traditional business model by giving advertisers far superior ways to reach their prospective consumers. “The independent watchdog function that the Founding Fathers envisioned for journalism—going so far as to call it crucial to a healthy democracy,” a 2011 Federal Communications Commission study on the crisis in journalism concluded, “is at risk.”²⁸

A study that encapsulated the crisis was released by the Pew Center for the People and the Press in 2010. It examined in exhaustive detail the “media ecology” of the city of Baltimore for one week in 2009.²⁹ The object was to determine how, in this changing media moment, “original” news stories were being generated, and by whom. They tracked old media and new, newspapers, radio, television, websites, blogs, even Twitter “tweets” from the police department. What did they find? The first conclusion from the researchers was an unsettling one: Despite the seeming proliferation of media, the researchers observed that “much of the ‘news’ people receive contains no original reporting. Fully eight out of ten stories studied simply repeated or repackaged previously published information.” And where did the ‘original’ reporting come from? More than 95 percent of original news stories were still generated by old media, particularly the *Baltimore Sun* newspaper. In other words, a great many of the much-heralded online sites – even some that proudly labeled themselves as “news” operations – simply disseminated what was being produced by traditional old media.

It gets worse: The *Sun*’s production of original news stories was itself down more than 30 percent from ten years ago and down a whopping 73 percent from twenty years ago. The bottom line is this: Old media outlets are downsizing and abandoning journalism and new media are not even beginning to fill the void

A detailed examination of the causes is not necessary our analysis; what is important is that it has had devastating implications for political journalism. The numbers of foreign correspondents, foreign bureaus, Washington D.C. bureaus and correspondents, statehouse bureaus and correspondents, right on down to the local city hall, have all been slashed to the bone, and in some cases the coverage barely exists any longer.³⁰ In an era of ever-greater corruption the watchdog is no longer on the beat. It was striking that the biggest political scandals in Washington in the past decade—the ones that brought down Jack Abramoff, Tom DeLay and Randy “Duke” Cunningham—were all started by a daily newspaper reporter’s investigation. Those paid reporting positions no longer exist, and those specific reporters no longer draw a paycheck to do such work. This means the next generation of corrupt politicians will have a much lower degree of difficulty as they fatten their bank accounts while providing their services to the highest corporate bidder.

Blowing stories of corruption and misconduct, as horrific as they are, may not be the worst of it. Even more serious is the lack of coverage of the details of what is in legislation and budgets, what is debated at hearings and buried in official reports, and what regulatory agencies are doing, even when there is no explicit corruption, but just politics as usual. This is the stuff of politics; when people talk about wanting a serious issues-based politics, this is precisely what is meant. But everywhere in the nation most of this government activity is taking place in the dark, certainly compared to two or three or four decades ago. The Wisconsin budget battles of 2011 generated massive protests and, by recent standards, inordinate press coverage from what remained of the state's news media. Yet it was striking that key radical changes in the budget were missed by working reporters. Matt Rothschild, editor of *The Progressive*, stumbled across a major change in the budget where controversial Governor Scott Walker used a line-item veto "so that state employees are no longer vested in the pension system until they have worked for the state for five years, instead of being partially vested immediately."³¹ One or two decades ago this might have been a front-page scandal and possibly a major news story for weeks; in 2011 it made it into a blog, and had no echo effect, because there are so few journalists to follow up these loose ends.

Everywhere it is the same: far fewer journalists attempting to cover more and more. It is like an NFL team trying to stop the Green Bay Packers with only two players lined up on the defensive side of the line of scrimmage. As the FCC observes, reporters and editors "are spending more time on reactive stories and less on labor-intensive 'enterprise' pieces." Television reporters "who just once reported the news now have many other tasks, and more newscasts to feed, so they have less time to research their stories." It is especially disastrous at the local level, where smaller news media and newsrooms have been wiped out in a manner reminiscent to a plague. The *Los Angeles Times* is now the primary news medium to cover 88 municipalities and 10 million people, but its metro staff has been cut in half since 2000. The staff "is spread thinner and there are fewer people on any given area," Metro editor David Lauter laments. "We're not there every day, or even every week or every month. Unfortunately, nobody else is either."³²

For a chilling account of what the loss of journalism means, consider the explosion that killed 29 West Virginia coal miners in 2010. Following the disaster, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* did exposes that discovered the mine had 1,342 safety violations in the preceding five years, and 50 in the previous month alone. This was big news. "The problem," the FCC notes, "is that these stories were published after the disaster, not before—even though many of the records had been there for inspection."³³

There may not be much journalism, but there still is plenty of "news." On the surface, at least on cable and satellite television, it can seem like we are marinated in endless news. Increasingly, though, it is unfiltered public relations generated surreptitiously by corporations and governments, in a manner that might make Walter Lippmann, were he to return to life, never stop throwing up. In 1960 there was less than one PR agent for every working journalist, a ratio of 0.75-to-1. By 1990 the ratio was just over 2-to-1. In 2012, the ratio stands at *four* PR people for every working journalist. At the current rates

of change, the ratio may well be 6-to-1 within a few years.³⁴ There are far fewer reporters to interrogate the spin and the press releases, so the likelihood that they get presented as legitimate “news” has become much greater. The Pew Center conducted a comprehensive analysis of what the sources were for original news stories in Baltimore in 2009; it determined that fully 86 percent originated with official sources and press releases. These stories were presented as news based on the labor and judgment of professional journalists, but, as Pew noted, they generally presented the PR position without any alteration.³⁵ As Lance Bennett demonstrates, PR notwithstanding, this is a fertile environment for conjecture, gossip and half-baked stories to get into the news.³⁶

In short, journalism, especially political journalism, is facing an existential crisis in the United States. There has understandably been an increase in the number of people, to nearly one in five, who state they have gone “newsless” – not even glancing at Internet headlines – for the day before the poll. Who could blame them? By 2009 nearly a third of Americans aged 18 to 24 years were so self-described.³⁷ Forty years ago, young Americans consumed news at the same rate as their parents and grandparents. They may do so again, as their elders continue to jump ship.

The problem the collapse of journalism has for election coverage is devastating. Thomas Patterson’s research shows “a close association between the ups and downs in the amount of coverage and the ups and downs in involvement. As coverage rises, people increasingly think and talk about the campaign.”³⁸ Increasingly, what coverage remains, even by major news media like CBS News, is being done increasingly by inexpensive and inexperienced reporters in their 20s.³⁹

The most striking consequence is that for countless races there is barely any coverage at all. By 2010, it was common that there was a “nearly reporter-free campaign trail” in statewide races across the nation.⁴⁰ In Wisconsin, where Senator Russ Feingold was in a fight for his political life, he found himself traveling virtually alone during much of his campaign. In his three previous Senate campaigns, Feingold had been trailed by a posse of reporters. In Illinois, in 2010, so little attention was paid to the Democratic primary for the state’s No. 2 job, lieutenant governor, that a pawnbroker who spent heavily on TV ads was nominated. The ads failed to mention that he had been arrested in 2005 for domestic abuse or that he had failed to pay back taxes and child support. When those details were revealed, a scandal developed that would ultimately force Scott Lee Cohen from the ticket. So why didn’t voters know about Mr. Cohen’s, er, problems, before the election? As Mark Brown of the *Chicago Sun-Times* explained it: “We in the news media failed the voters by missing the story...” But the story wasn’t really “missed.” Like so many political stories these days, it was left uncovered by news media that no longer hire enough reporters to cover all the races, leaving most voters in the dark most of the time.⁴¹

This means politicians can pretty much avoid the press altogether if they so desire and let their commercials do their talking. This becomes the rational course for any candidate with a lead in the polls and a massive war-chest; it puts the challenger, especially if not an incumbent, in an even more daunting position.⁴²

The elimination of campaign coverage is masked to a certain extent because the gutting of newsrooms also encourages what Herbert Gans describes as the conversion of all political news into campaign coverage. As political campaigns have become permanent, so has campaign coverage. Political journalism has been subsumed into campaign coverage. So what journalism resources do remain are disproportionately devoted to either campaign coverage or the increasingly cynical assessment of public policy from a campaign angle, in the worst horse-race mode described above. “At times,” Gans writes, “it appears as if no government decision is ever made if it does not support White House campaign strategy.”⁴³ Strategy coverage is cheap and easy to do, lends itself to gossip and endless chatter, and provides the impression that the public is being duly served and serious affairs of state are under journalistic scrutiny.

The Internet

For a good decade, pundits have argued that the Internet would provide a new system of commercially viable journalism. Jeff Jarvis asserts that “Thanks to the web... journalism will not only survive but prosper and grow far beyond its present limitations.”⁴⁴ To the view of observers like Jarvis all Americans must do is let the Internet work its magic in combination with the market and the country’s problems will be solved.

After a good decade of experimentation, it is clear that as traditional journalism disintegrates, no models for making web journalism—even bad journalism—profitable at anywhere near the level necessary for a credible popular news media have been developed, and there is no reason to expect any in the visible future.⁴⁵ Today we have a few thousand paid online newswriters, interpreted liberally to include many aggregators who do little or no newsgathering or reporting or even writing. More often than not, the best-known bloggers and online journalists are supported by some old medium which provides the resources. When these old media go down, the number of paid digital journalists is likely to shrink, not grow. Severely underpaid or unpaid, research concludes that the original journalism provided by the Internet gravitates to what is easy and fun, tending to “focus on lifestyle topics, such as entertainment, retail, and sports—not on hard news.”⁴⁶

To the extent the corporate news media giants are locating a profitable niche online, it increasingly looks like it may be as a commercial “app” in the rapidly emerging wireless market. Rupert Murdoch announced his iPad-only newspaper, *The Daily*, in 2011, and the *New York Times* announced its long-anticipated plan for an online payment system in March 2011.⁴⁷ But there is no reason to believe these developments will ever come close to providing the resources for a full throttle popular journalism, or that this commercial product will avoid the limitations of commercial professional journalism as it has devolved over the past few decades. Instead, it will likely accentuate them. An internal memo on journalism from AOL CEO Tim Armstrong captured the commercial logic: he ordered the company's editors to evaluate all future stories on the basis of “traffic potential, revenue potential, edit quality and turnaround time.” All stories, it stressed, are to be evaluated according to their “profitability consideration.”⁴⁸

What happens when a story – like that of a distant war or the privatization of a local water utility – fails to achieve proper “traffic potential, revenue potential”? Does it disappear off radar? And with it the prospect that citizens will know what is being done in their name but without their informed consent? That might be an acceptable Brave New World for the CEOs, but it’s a loser for a democratic society.

At the heart of too many of the emerging corporate online journalism undertakings is an understanding that the wages paid to journalists can be slashed dramatically, while at the same time workloads are increased to levels not seen for generations, if ever.

Armstrong’s memo states that all of AOL’s journalistic employees will be required to produce “five to 10 stories per day.” Tim Rutten of the *Los Angeles Times* captured this in his assessment of AOL’s 2011 purchase of the Huffington Post: “To grasp the Huffington Post’s business model, picture a galley rowed by slaves and commanded by pirates.” In the “new-media landscape,” he wrote, “it’s already clear that the merger will push more journalists more deeply into the tragically expanding low-wage sector of our increasingly brutal economy.” With massive unemployment and dismal prospects, the extreme downward pressure on wages and working conditions for journalists is the two-ton elephant that just climbed into democracy’s bed. “In the new media,” Rutten concludes, “many of the worst abuses of the old economy’s industrial capitalism — the sweatshop, the speedup and piecework; huge profits for the owners; desperation, drudgery and exploitation for the workers. No child labor, yet, but if there were more page views in it...”⁴⁹

As one 2011 media industry assessment of the future of journalism put it, the future of news media will be to move the corporate “brands” to the digital realm, although “the future is still a little murky as to how these brands will turn a profit in terms of online advertising, paywalls and computer tablet apps.” The report says this is “good news for public relations professionals who are trying to pitch stories,” because “these sites will be looking for more content to fill their pages.” The report concludes: “As a direct result of changing media platforms, PR pros are now a part of the media in a way they have never been before.”⁵⁰ Increasingly, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what makes the most sense for the profitability of news media firms is entirely inadequate, even dangerous, for the requirements of a free and self-governing people.⁵¹

OK, things are not looking so great for working journalists, but what about the blogosphere and the newfound ability of unpaid people—rechristened “citizen journalists”—to go online, launch new websites, do their own thing, tell it like it is, and have the same caliber of Internet access to the world’s attention as the mightiest media conglomerate? Won’t that combine with the commercial journalism online to solve the journalism problem in the digital world? We devote considerable time herein assessing that claim and looking at the record. The evidence is thin, at best. Here Matthew Hindman’s extraordinary *The Myth of Digital Democracy* offers confirmation of our worst fears and a valuable new resource.

Although there are an infinite number of Web sites, human beings are only capable of meaningfully visiting a small number of them on a regular basis. The Google search

mechanism strongly encourages implicit censorship, in that sites that do not end up on the first or second page of a search effectively do not exist. As Michael Wolff puts it in *Wired*: “[T]he top 10 Web sites accounted for 31 percent of US pageviews in 2001, 40 percent in 2006, and about 75 percent in 2010.” “Big sucks the traffic out of small,” Wolff quotes Russian Internet investor Yuri Milner. “In theory you can have a few very successful individuals controlling hundreds of millions of people. You can become big fast.” And once you get big, you stay big.⁵²

Hindman’s research on journalism, news media, and political Web sites is striking in this regard. What has emerged is “power law” distribution where a small number of political or news media Web sites get the vast majority of traffic.⁵³ They are dominated by the traditional giants with name recognition and resources. There is a “long tail” of gazillions of Web sites that exist but get little or no traffic, and few people have any idea that they exist. There is also no “middle class” of robust, moderately sized Web sites; that aspect of the news media system has been wiped out online. It leads Hindman to conclude that the online news media are *more* concentrated than the old media world. This is true, too, of the vaunted blogosphere, which has effectively ossified. Its traffic is highly concentrated in a handful of sites, operated by people with elite pedigrees.⁵⁴

Don’t get us wrong, here. Free speech is alive and well on the web, at least for the time being. But as Hindman has put it, we should not confuse the right to speak with the ability to be heard. I appreciate the long tail of obscure blogs, websites and Facebook pages as much as anyone, and spend an inordinate amount of time on them, but they do not a free press make. Most of them languish at a certain point in time as the lack of readership diminishes the enthusiasm to keep the project going, and there are no funds so it must remain a volunteer operation. But the long tail points to a crucial point understood by the framers of the constitution: there is a difference between free speech and having a free press. It is why they are distinct entries in the First Amendment. Without a strong journalism, a credible independent news media, the right to freedom of speech, as indispensable as it is, loses some of its power and value. In the worst case scenario, it is a digital circle jerk where people can write to their hearts’ content and possibly locate kindred spirits, but not know what they are talking about, or what to talk about.

In April, 2010, one of the most thoughtful and well-regarded figures in American journalism, Karen Dunlap, the president of the Poynter Institute, testified before a Federal Communications Commission panel on the state of American journalism. She pointed to a fresh analysis of the media business by a Poynter scholar “who calculated that the newspaper industry has lost \$1.6 billion in reporting and editing capacity since 2000 or about 30 percent over that period. This comes from the sector that produces the vast majority of original reporting in local, national and international news. Even the many news start-ups replace only a small fraction of editorial capacity, and they, too, must find long-term sustainability.” Then Dunlap repeated the conclusion of a just finished Project for Excellence in Journalism report: “Unless some system of financing the production of content is developed, it is difficult to see how reportorial journalism will not continue to shrink, regardless of the potential tools offered by technology.”⁵⁵

Public Good

The evidence points inexorably in one and only one direction: If the United States, or any nation, is serious about improving journalism, not to mention creating a real media utopia, the only way this can happen is with massive public subsidies. The market is not getting it done, and there is no reason to think it is going to get it done. Journalism will require a huge expansion of the nonprofit news media sector as well. It is imperative to discontinue the practice of regarding journalism as a “business” and evaluating it by business criteria.⁵⁶ Instead, it is necessary to embrace the public good nature of journalism. That is my core argument. If one accepts that, everything else falls into place.

Let’s be clear on what is meant by the “public good” nature of journalism: That means journalism is something society requires but that the market cannot produce in sufficient quality or quantity. Readers or final news consumers have never provided sufficient funds to subsidize the popular journalism system self-government requires. For the first century of American history the public good nature of journalism was understood implicitly, and was addressed by massive postal and printing subsidies. For the past century the public good nature of journalism was masked by the infusion of advertising to provide the vast majority of revenues supporting the news. But advertising had no specific attachment to journalism, and is jumping ship as better alternatives present themselves in the digital universe, especially as news media appear less commercially attractive. Journalism increasingly is left standing naked in an unforgiving market, and it is shriveling in the cold gusts.

The future of journalism left to the market will likely approach what education would be like if all public subsidies were removed. With no subsidies, our education system would remain excellent for the wealthy who could afford private schools in the first place, mediocre at best for the middle and upper-middle class, and non-existent or positively frightening for the increasingly impoverished lower-middle and working class, the majority of the nation. It would be a nightmare for any credible democratic or humane society, and a major step back toward the middle ages. The same logic applies to journalism. That means, in the landscape of 2010s America, enlightened public subsidies.

Understanding “journalism as a public good” also helps explain one of the persistent questions I am asked when I discuss the crisis of journalism. “Isn’t the basic problem,” the question generally begins, “that most people are morons who either have no interest in journalism, or are only interested in idiotic stories about celebrities? If people wanted good journalism, isn’t it logical to expect the commercial news media to give it to them?” On the surface this seems like such a convincing premise, that it is generally posed as a rhetorical question, to which all who have any hope left for the human species are expected to retreat in shame. Public good theory explains that no matter how strong the consumer demand, it will never be sufficient to provide the resources for a popular democratic journalism. Even when Americans have been most rabid about news and politics, there was not sufficient demand for circulation revenues to subsidize a popular news media.

But public good theory is important in another way: it also highlights that it is impossible for the market to accurately gauge popular support for the news. The market cannot express all of our values; we cannot individually “purchase” everything we value. My experience discussing the crisis of journalism with tens of thousands of people over the past several years has reinforced my view that a preponderance of Americans, and especially younger Americans notorious for their lack of interest in newspapers and conventional news media, want to have credible reporting on corporate and government affairs, even if they do not necessarily plan to read or view the news reports thereby produced. But they want to know that the work is being done and people in power are being held accountable, issues are being covered, and they are willing use their tax dollars to pay for journalism even if they themselves prefer to watch a reality TV show or listen to their iPods.

And, who knows, to return rhetorical question fire, maybe if there were better and more compelling journalism, people might not find it so irrelevant to their lives?

Revisiting American History

The questions that often arise when one submits news media should be regarded as a public good, and should receive massive public subsidies, are “But, wait, doesn’t that violate the American constitution and the American Way? Isn’t the American free press tradition—indeed, the democratic press tradition—built on an explicit and unequivocal ban on government subsidies? What are you, some kind of weirdo?”

The jury may be out on the last question, but to the first two the answer is an emphatic No. The emergence of advertising to provide the preponderance of resources masked the public good nature of journalism. It gave the illusion that the market could provide a sufficient quantity of journalism, and professional standards could guarantee sufficient quality. But advertising always had an opportunistic relationship to the news, and now that there are superior means to satisfy commercial ambitions, journalism sees its revenue base evaporating. But if advertising has provided the majority of revenues to support journalism since the late 19th century, how did U.S. newspapers survive in the nation’s first century when advertising played a much smaller role? Indeed, when Tocqueville came to America he was astonished by the plethora of newspapers compared to anywhere else in the world. What’s up with that?

The answer is simple: The American free press tradition has two components. First is the aspect everyone is familiar with, the idea that the government should not exercise prior restraint and censor the press. The second, every bit as important, is that it is the first duty of the government to see that a free press actually exists so there is something of value that cannot be censored. This second component of the American free press tradition has been largely forgotten or ignored since the advent of the corporate-commercial era of journalism, but the Supreme Court, in all relevant cases, has asserted its existence and preeminence. Justice Potter Stewart noted: “The Free Press guarantee is, in effect, a *structural* part of the Constitution.” (Stewart’s emphasis.) “The primary purpose of the constitutional guarantee of a free press was,” he added, “to create a fourth institution outside the Government as an additional check on the three official branches.” Stewart

concluded: “Perhaps our liberties might survive without an independent established press. But the Founders doubted it, and, in the year 1974, I think we can all be thankful for their doubts.”⁵⁷ In his opinion in the 1994 case *Turner Broadcasting System v. FCC*, Reagan appointee Justice Anthony Kennedy concluded, “Assuring the public has access to a multiplicity of information sources is a governmental purpose of the highest order.”⁵⁸

The formation of a free press was a central concern of the framers, led famously by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. As Jefferson wrote: “The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs thro’ the channel of the public papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. *The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people*, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. *But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.*”⁵⁹ James Madison famously observed in 1822, “A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.”⁶⁰

Press subsidies are as American as apple pie; indeed, our democratic culture was built upon them. In *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, John Nichols and I demonstrated the crucial role that postal and printing subsidies played in the formation of the republic and the first century of American history. *If the United States federal government subsidized journalism today at the same level of GDP that it did in the 1840s, the government would have to spend in the neighborhood of \$30-35 billion annually.*

Federal press subsidies —e.g. postal subsidies, paid government notices—have diminished in real terms to only a small fraction of their 19th century levels in real terms, though they remain to the present day. Public broadcasting is the most visible contemporary media subsidy and it received in 2008 approximately \$1.1 billion in public support annually, and only a fraction of that supports journalism. State and local governments as well as public universities provide much of this public subsidy, as well as some \$400 million by the federal government.

There are legitimate concerns about government control over the content of journalism, and I reject any subsidies that would open the door to that outcome. I also understand that a government with a massive military and national security complex like the United States could be especially dangerous with its mitts on the keys to the newsroom. But the United States, for all of its flaws, remains a democratic society, in the conventional modern use of the term. Our state is capable of being pushed to make progressive moves as well as regressive ones.

This is a crucial distinction. Most opponents of press subsidies assume that the places to look for comparative purposes are Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Russia, Pol Pot’s Cambodia and Idi Amin’s Uganda. I will be the first to argue that if a dictatorship or authoritarian

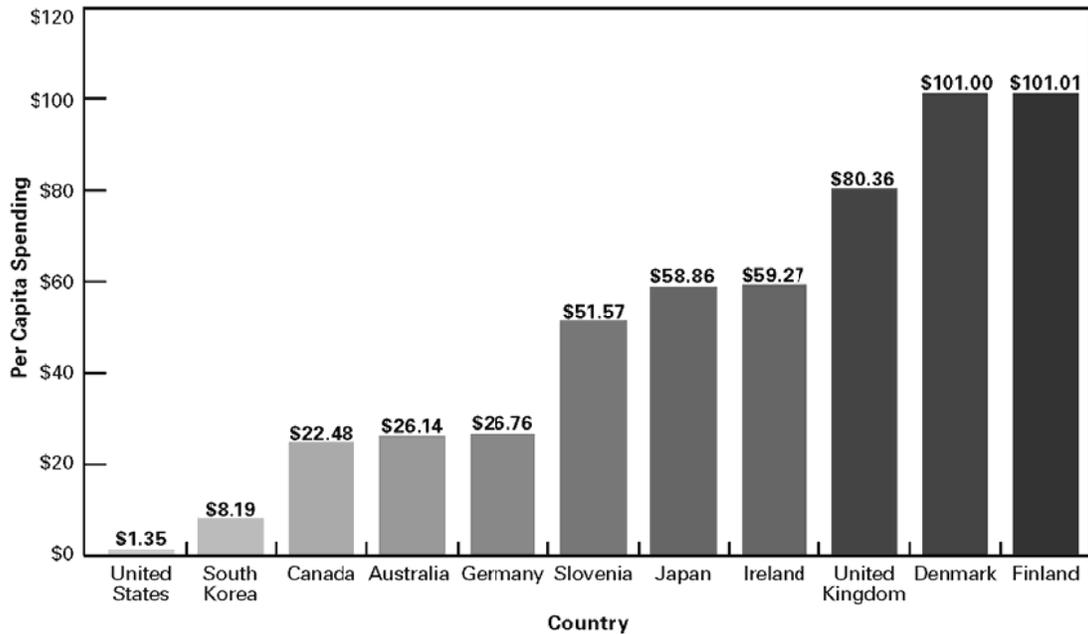
regime subsidizes journalism, the “news” will more likely than not be propaganda that is designed to maintain an anti-democratic circumstance. But that does not mean the same outcome necessarily occurs when democratic nations institute press subsidies. Indeed, there is little evidence that press subsidies in democratic societies comparable to the United States increase government propaganda or that they grease the wheels for a transition to a dictatorship by the dominant party and a loss of freedom. Most of the evidence—indeed, the overwhelming preponderance of evidence—is precisely the opposite.

The Real Democratic Free Press Tradition

The problem with this categorical rejection of public subsidies is that it not only ignores the actual history of massive democratic journalism subsidies in the United States, it also does grave injustice to the really existing track record of other democratic nations. What happens when we look at nations with multi-party democracies, advanced economies, electoral systems and civil liberties? Places like Germany, Canada, Japan, Britain, Norway, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Sweden, France and Switzerland?

What do we find? For starters, all these nations are huge press subsidizers compared to the United States. Let’s put it this way, what would the United States have to spend to support public broadcasting, not to mention other journalism subsidies, if it spent at the per capita rates of other democratic nations? If America subsidized public media at the same per capita rate as nations with similar political economies like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, U.S. public broadcasters would have a government subsidy in the \$7-10 billion range. If America subsidized public media at the same per capita rate as nations along the lines of Japan, France or Great Britain, U.S. public broadcasters would have a government subsidy in the \$16-25 billion range. If America subsidized public media at the same per capita rate as Germany or Norway or Denmark, U.S. public broadcasters would have a government subsidy in the neighborhood of \$30-35 billion.⁶¹ Chart 1 provides a comparative look for the year 2007.

Chart 1: Global Spending on Public Media, 2007



This does not even factor in the extensive newspaper subsidies that several democracies employ. If the United States federal government subsidized newspapers at the same per capita rate as Norway, it would make a direct outlay of approximately \$3 billion annually. Sweden spends slightly less per capita, and has extended the subsidies to digital newspapers. France is the champion at newspaper subsidies. If a federal government subsidy provided the portion of the overall revenues of the U.S. newspaper industry that France does for its publishers, it would have conservatively spent \$6 billion in 2008.⁶²

I have had the privilege of traveling to many of these nations in recent years and my impression is that these are far from police states, nor do their extensive public media systems and journalism subsidies invoke comparisons to a sham democracy, not to mention a one-party state. Quite the contrary. In fact, when my frequent co-author John Nichols addressed journalists from across Europe and around the world in the spring of 2010, as the keynote speaker at the Congress of the International Federation of Journalists, what he heard from the assembled reporters and editors was strong support for subsidies and other governmental interventions that are broadly viewed as *freeing* journalists from the pressures posed by corporate PR and advertisers.⁶³

But appearances can be deceiving, and one prefers harder evidence, from unimpeachable sources that would not necessarily be inclined to endorse press subsidies.

I start with Britain's *The Economist*, a business magazine keenly in favor of private enterprise, deregulation, privatization and disinclined toward large public sectors. Every year *The Economist* produces a highly acclaimed "Democracy Index," which ranks all the nations of the world on the basis of how democratic they are. In 2011 only 25 nations qualified as democratic. The criteria are: electoral process and pluralism; functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. The United States ranks 19th by these criteria, according to *The Economist*. Most of the 18 nations ranking

ahead of the United States had government press subsidies on a per capita basis at least ten or twenty times that of the United States. The top four nations on the list—Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden—are among the top six or seven per capita press subsidizers in the world. Yet these are the four most democratic and freest nations on earth, according to *The Economist*, and they all have perfect or near-perfect scores on civil liberties. (The United States is tied for the lowest civil liberties score among the 25 democracies, and on this issue trails a good 20 of those nations in the more dubious “flawed democracies” category in *The Economist’s* rankings.)⁶⁴

Although all of the Democracy Index criteria implicitly depend to a large extent upon having a strong press system—and the report specifically discusses press freedom as a crucial indicator of democracy—“freedom of the press” itself is not one of the six measured variables. Is there a more direct take on the relationship?

Fortunately, there is, if the Democracy Index is supplemented with the research of Freedom House, an American organization created in the 1940s to sponsor freedom and oppose totalitarianism of the left and right, with special emphasis on the left. Freedom House is very much an “establishment” organization, with close ties to prominent American political and economic figures. Every year it, too, ranks all the nations of the world on the basis of how free and effective their press systems are. Their research is detailed and sophisticated and particularly concerned with any government meddling whatsoever with private news media. For that reason, all communist nations tend to rank in a virtual tie for dead last as having the least free press systems in the world. Venezuela currently is ranked no. 163 in the world, despite having a large and vocal legal opposition press that opposes the elected Chavez government. State regulation of commercial broadcast media as well as the chilling effect of government criticism of the uncensored private print media are enough for Freedom House to consign Venezuela to the same group of nations largely consisting of outright dictatorships with scarcely a trace of significant domestic media dissent; Venezuela is the only nation in the Americas alongside Cuba considered to have a “not free” press. So Freedom House can go toe-to-toe with anyone when it comes to having sensitive antennae to detect government meddling with the existence or prerogatives of private news media.

Freedom House hardly favors the home team. It ranks the United States as being tied with the Czech Republic as having the 24th freest press system in the world. America is ranked so low because of failures to protect sources and because economic conditions have made journalism more difficult.

So what nations rank at the top of Freedom House’s list of the freest press systems in the world? The list is dominated by the democratic nations with the very largest per capita journalism subsidies in the world. Four of the first five nations listed by Freedom House are the same nations that topped *The Economist’s* Democracy Index, and all rank among the top seven per capita press subsidizers in the world.⁶⁵ In fact the lists match to a remarkable extent. That should be no surprise, as one would expect the nations with the freest and best press systems to rank as the most democratic nations. What has been missing from the narrative is that *the nations with the freest press systems are also the*

nations that make the greatest public investment in journalism, and therefore provide the basis for being strong democracies.

What the Freedom House research underscores is that few of these successful democracies permit the type of political meddling that is routine in U.S. public broadcasting, particularly by those politicians who want to eliminate public broadcasting, with no sense of irony, because it has been “politicized.” Although no nation is perfect and even the best examples have limitations, these nations consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrate that there are means to effectively prevent governments-in-power from having undue influence over public media operations, much like how in the United States we have created mechanisms to prevent Governors and state legislatures from dictating the faculty research and course syllabi at public universities. In other democratic nations, public broadcasting systems tend to be popular and are defended by political parties from across the political spectrum.

Research demonstrates that in those democratic nations with well-funded and prominent nonprofit and noncommercial broadcasting systems, political knowledge tends to be relatively higher than in nations without substantial public broadcasting, and that the information gap between the rich and the working class and poor is much smaller.⁶⁶ Stephen Cushion’s recent research confirms this pattern and notes that public service broadcasters tend to do far more campaign reporting than their commercial counterparts. One conclusion of Cushion’s is especially striking: those nations that have maintained strong public broadcasting continue to have better campaign coverage (e.g. news about policy that can help inform citizens about the relative merits of a political party or a particular politician). Moreover the effect of strong public broadcasting is that commercial broadcasters tend to maintain higher standards than they have in nations where public broadcasting has fallen off in resources and campaign coverage.⁶⁷

Likewise, in a manner that evokes the U.S. postal subsidies on the 19th century—and that might baffle the contemporary American cynical about the possibility of democratic governance—the newspaper subsidies tend to be directed to helping the smaller and more dissident newspapers, without ideological bias, over the large successful commercial newspapers.⁶⁸ Recent research on the European press concludes that as journalism subsidies increased, the overall reporting in those nations did not kowtow but in fact grew *more* adversarial toward the government in power.⁶⁹

The point is not to romanticize other democratic nations or to put them on a pedestal. Journalism is in varying degrees of crisis in nations worldwide. In other countries, resources for journalism are declining as in the United States, even if the public subsidies provide a cushion. Moreover, the quality of journalism is hardly guaranteed even with greater resources; controversy and occasional sharp criticism of severe flaws properly attends any discussion of the caliber of journalism in every democratic nation.⁷⁰ Resources are simply a necessary precondition for sufficient democratic journalism.

To put it another way: journalism subsidies are compatible with a democratic society, a flourishing uncensored private news media and an adversarial journalism. The track

record is clear that the problem of creating a viable free press system in a democratic and free society is a solvable problem. There may not be perfect solutions but there are good and workable solutions. And in times like these, when the market is collapsing, they are mandatory. In this instance, Margaret Thatcher's aphorism holds true: This is no alternative.

Elements of a Real Media Utopia

If one accepts the thrust of my argument to this point, a few core values should guide the creation of a real media utopia. First, the news media system should have a dominant nonprofit and noncommercial sector. Commercial interests are welcome to conduct journalism just like anyone else, but commercialism and pure amateurism cannot be the heart and soul of a democratic news media. The evidence suggests powerful nonprofit and noncommercial news media sector will elevate and strengthen the commercial news media sector.

Related to this, as advertising is abandoning journalism, it cannot be relied upon as the basis for a credible journalism in the future. If advertisers wish to support some journalism—and they will, especially that aimed at the upper-middle class and higher—that is fine. But advertising can come with strings attached, and it has been grotesque to see websites twisting themselves into pretzels attempted to shake down advertising support. There is no future in this for a real utopian journalism.

Second, monopoly is the foundation of a real media dystopia, so a real media utopia must put tremendous emphasis on a pluralistic, competitive system, where there are differing funding structures and organizations. The system must be decentralized. In popular parlance the term competition is assumed to refer to commercial battle for maximum profits. I think we can just as easily imagine competition between various types of nonprofit and noncommercial enterprises. Establishing news media institutional structures is a central task for a real media utopia.

What this means is that a real media utopia is one where it is relatively easy for newcomers to enter the fray. Policies and subsidies should encourage nonprofit competition, and not discourage commercial competition.

Third, and this bears repeating, public subsidies are imperative. Based on American history, and the examples of the most democratic European nations, it appears that for a nation with the population of the United States, an annual subsidy in the range of \$30-35 billion should suffice. It may be that the Internet and digital developments will slash certain costs such that equal bang can be generated by fewer bucks. But the important point is that although I have termed these subsidies "massive," they are actually quite small as the price to have an effective self-governing society.

As a rule, subsidies should only go to nonprofit and noncommercial media. This is to avoid the problem of having commercial interests have a stake in subsidies and using their lobbying prowess to distort the system by getting ever larger subsidies. There can be some subsidies that commercial media may qualify for—low postage rates for magazines

is an example—but these must be subsidies that are equally of value or of greater value to nonprofit and noncommercial media.

Fourth, the prohibition against state censorship is unconditional, no matter who controls the government. I have said very little about what exactly the news should look like aside from my opening list of the constituent parts of a democratic journalism, and I have avoided normative critique for a reason. I share the libertarian apprehension about these discussions. I think wise policymaking establishes differing institutions in an open process, provides resources, minimizes corruption and assumes the best possible journalism will result. There is no justification for the state to enter a newsroom and tell people what to do and not do. Ever.

What Now?

In the near term one does not need to spend appreciably more or create new institutions out of whole cloth to move toward a far superior news media system, if not a real media utopia. In the United States, there are several steps that could be taken and should be taken that would improve news media, if not quite reach utopian levels. I present them in shorthand herein; they are developed in detail in *The Death and Life of American Journalism*.

First, and most important, dramatically increase the spending on public, university and community media. If the United States only adopted the per capita levels of Canada—still far below the per capita spending levels found in much of Europe—it would increase federal spending to five billion dollars annually. I use the term public media rather than broadcasting because everything done for broadcast is available online and much more as well. We are in a transition period and eventually the distinction between old and new media will be moot. The ideal is that nearly all of this increase in spending go toward journalism, especially at the local level, and that there be at least three—PBS, NPR and community—and possibly four (if colleges and universities developed their own operations) distinct unrelated systems each with newsrooms competing in every community of substance. This alone, putting at least 60,000 more reporters on the local beat, would be a major step toward a superior journalism. (Don't worry: there are probably that many unemployed or underemployed journalists, or young people wishing to enter the field, to fill the slots.)

To put this in concrete terms: I live much of the time in Madison, Wisconsin, a city with a population of 233,000. The broad metropolitan statistical area that includes suburbs and surrounding counties has a population of around 570,000. Madison presently has around 125-140 full-time journalists—liberally including reporters, editors and producers for everything from sports and weather and traffic to the crime beat, entertainment and political reporting. With the increase to Canadian levels of public media support, the Madison area's three public and community stations would get around 110 additional well-paid journalism positions, focusing primarily on what has been lost, and that commercial broadcasters have shown little interest in pursuing: expensive investigative and political reporting that requires skill and resources. I can state from experience that

this would have an astonishing, perhaps even revolutionary, effect on the political culture. And it would be the same everywhere in the nation.

Second, an immediate initiative that could be of value to a variety of journalistic endeavors that continue in print would be to dramatically lower the price of postage. To avoid putting the Postal Service in the position of having to determine which magazines “do” journalism, I would make this subsidy available to all publications, commercial and nonprofit alike, regardless of content, as long as they have less than 25 percent advertising content. It should come immediately so that well-written and -edited periodicals that are now making serious bids to compete in the marketplace of ideas—such as *The American Conservative* on the Right and *In These Times* on the Left—can be a part of the debate as they evolve their digital presences and explore new ownership structures and funding strategies. This will provide an invaluable service to the many millions of Americans who rely upon print as their media of choice. It will keep some of the country’s finest journalists employed. In addition, some of the most visited and influential websites—like those of the *National Review*, *The Atlantic* and *The Nation*—can only put quality material on the web at present as long as their print divisions generate revenues. So, ironically, the most old-school of subsidies assists digital journalism.

Third, “newspapers” as an organizing principle for gathering and communicating information—especially information that those in power would prefer to quarantine—have a crucial role to play in a democratic society. The quotation marks around the word *newspapers* emphasize an evolving definition of these institutions. When I mean by “newspapers” are locally based news organizations covering the full range of political and social activities in a community, providing the news and commenting on it. A collection of niche Web sites covering different aspects of a community are well and good, but in combination they cannot recreate the coherence and unity a well-edited and resourced newspaper can deliver. We believe this remains a crucial and distinct democratic institution.

In the near-term, it’s vital that at least one newspaper remain alive in every community that has traditionally had one. To this end, the federal government must intervene to aid the transition to post-corporate ownership models for daily papers. I oppose government-owned newspapers. There is actually a history of municipally owned newspapers in the United States, like the *Los Angeles Municipal News* nearly 100 years ago.⁷¹ The logic for municipal ownership is clear: the newspaper is a necessary institution, much like the police and fire department or schools. It could be supported by public monies and have an elected management, accountable directly to the voters. However, due to the nature of journalism, it seems better that newspapers remain independent of municipal governments. The goal should be to have many independently owned and managed newspapers. But there is still a defining role for the government to play. It can keep newspapers open that are failing, and help them convert to low-profit, cooperative or nonprofit structures. And, as with public media, newspapers are in the midst of a digital transition; it is the concept, not the ink and paper, which is important.

Fourth, Congress should establish a “journalism” division of AmeriCorps, the federal program that places young people with nonprofits to get training and do public-service work.⁷² The point here is to ensure that young people who love journalism will stay in the field, despite all the dire “news” of the moment and limited opportunities. Ken Doctor proposes young journalists in training be paid \$35,000 per year, and then be assigned positions with news media that wish to employ them.⁷³ I would prefer that the program only provide young journalists to non-profit media. For a variety of reasons, it makes sense that a project of this sort would be a component of the successful AmeriCorps program, which is already working in communities across the country. Were this done with, say, 5,000 young journalists, the annual budget would be in the area of \$200 million, including overhead. It strikes us as a win-win; we get more journalists covering our communities, and young journalists have a chance to gain valuable experience.

Much as the Works Progress Administration of the New Deal era trained a generation of this country’s greatest authors through its Federal Writers’ Project—including Saul Bellow, John Cheever, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright and Studs Terkel—a “News AmeriCorps” could produce the great investigative reporters, editors and Pulitzer Prize winners of the 21st century.

Fifth, the United States presently spends some \$750 million dollars annually to provide noncommercial broadcasting to viewers and listeners... outside the United States. Yet, it is illegal to air these broadcasts, from the Voice of America and other networks, inside the United States. Remarkably, the budget for these programs is nearly *double* what the federal government spends to support public and community radio and television intended for Americans. The United States should take a large chunk of the existing \$750 million being spent and provide it to domestic public and community broadcasters with the express proviso that the funds be used for international coverage. Use a portion of the funds to translate this work into the world’s languages.⁷⁴ Then make the resulting stations and programming available both to Americans and to people outside the United States. Let’s end the idea that there are two types of journalism, one for Americans and one for foreigners. Were the government to do that, it would instantly provide sufficient resources so that, instead of the diminishing foreign affairs coverage provided by private media, public and community media could provide the United States with the most extensive and impressive international coverage in its history.

While we are at it, the U.S. federal government presently spends several billion dollars annually for public relations and “public information” workers in its various departments, especially the Defense Department.⁷⁵ Some, perhaps much, of that work may have legitimate purposes, but some of it is intended to encourage journalists to report from a perspective that is at least sympathetic to the government line. In other words, taxpayer dollars are being used to sway taxpayers to, presumably, approve of the spending of more taxpayer dollars on projects that, given even-handed coverage, would enjoy less public support. This sort of spending would be a bad investment at any time. But it is especially bad when the country is supposedly broke. What with the collapse of journalism, the nation would be much better off taking at least half of the money that goes to fund government PR, and simply apply it directly to subsidizing journalism in any of the ways

mentioned above, or some equally creative enterprise. Isn't it absurd to have a giant army of PR agents when there are few journalists left to spin?

All of these proposals have thorny administrative issues to be hammered out, and there are not going to be perfect solutions. But there are sufficient solutions.

Looking forward

The proposals for a real media utopia to this point grow directly out of historical and contemporary media practices. A crucial development must be studied and debated over how best to generate journalism in the digital realm. To date, the strongest idea has been developed by the economist Dean Baker and his brother Randy Baker; I embellish their core concept and call it the "Citizenship News Voucher." The idea is simple: every American adult gets a \$200 voucher she can use to donate money to any nonprofit news medium of her choice. She will indicate her choice on her tax return. If she does not file a tax return, a simple form will be available to use. She can split her \$200 among several different qualifying nonprofit media. This program would be purely voluntary, like the tax-form check-offs for funding elections or protecting wildlife. A government agency, probably operating out of the Internal Revenue Service, can be set up to allocate the funds and to determine eligibility—according to universal standards that err on the side of expanding rather than constraining the number of serious sources covering and commenting on the issues of the day. This will lessen attempts at fraud; after all, nobody wants to mess with the IRS.

This funding mechanism can apply to public, community and all other nonprofit broadcasters and the new generation of post-corporate newspapers as well as Internet upstarts. For a medium that is not a post-corporate newspaper or a public broadcaster to be eligible, it would have to be a not-for-profit, although that can assume a number of legal constructs, including 501(c)(3) or cooperative structures. The medium must do exclusively media content; it cannot be part of a larger organization or have any non-media operations. Everything the medium produces must be made available immediately upon publication on the Internet and made available for free to all. It will not be covered by copyright and will enter the public domain. (This would allow, for instance, a digital outlet to sell a print version of its work.) The government will not evaluate the content to see that the money is going toward journalism. My assumption is that these criteria will effectively produce that result, and if there is some slippage so be it.

Qualifying media ought not be permitted to accept advertising; this is a sector that is to have a direct and primary relationship with its audience. These media can accept tax-deductible donations from individuals or foundations to supplement their income. By banning advertising from public media and this new Internet sector, the pool of advertising that exists can be divided up between newspapers and commercial media, especially commercial broadcasters. In our view, this will give commercial media a better crack at finding a workable business model.

We would also suggest that for a medium to receive funds it would have to get commitments for at least \$20,000 worth of vouchers. This will lessen fraud and also

require anyone wishing to establish a medium to be serious enough to get at least 100 people to sign on. (In other words, you can't just declare yourself a newspaper and deposit the voucher in your bank account.) There will be some overhead and administration for the program, but it will not require a large regulatory body like the FCC.

The voucher system would provide a way for Web-journalism services to become self-sufficient and even have the funds to hire a significant number of full-time paid workers. Imagine a Web site in the blogosphere right now covering national politics that produces some great content and has hundreds of thousands of regular visitors, but it depends upon low-paid or volunteer labor and praying for advertising crumbs or donations for revenue. Now the Web site goes formally nonprofit, stops obsessing over advertising crumbs and appeals directly to its readers for their vouchers. Imagine this Web site getting 20,000 people to steer their vouchers into its accounts. That is \$4 million, enough to have a well-paid staff of 50 full-time journalists as well as ancillary staffers. Consider what a Web news service could do with that. And then start thinking about how motivated the reporters and editors would be to break big stories, maintain high quality and keep attracting the vouchers.

Or imagine you live in a city with deplorable news coverage of your community or neighborhood, as more and more Americans do. If someone starts a local news medium and gets 1,000 people to give her group their vouchers, that provides a nice start-up budget of \$200,000. For that money a group can have several reporters covering their turf, and build up a real following.

The benefits of the Citizenship News Voucher program are many. For instance, it gives the foundation community a coherent and necessary role to play. Rather than see themselves as being hit up in perpetuity to cover the operating costs of various Web-journalism ventures, foundations can do what they do best: they can help launch new ventures, fund them for three to five years, and then see if there is popular support for the venture in the form of Citizenship News Vouchers. In this model, philanthropists have much greater incentive to put money into journalism, because there is a way for their grants to lead to self-sustaining institutions.

This strategy also allows newcomers to enter the fray and hence encourages innovation. A group can raise start-up funds from donations or philanthropy, get underway, and then appeal directly for voucher support. It produces intense competition because a medium cannot take its support for granted. It rewards initiative and punishes sloth. It is democratic because rich and poor get the same voucher. And the government has no control over who gets the money. It is an enormous public subsidy, but it is a libertarian's dream: people can support whatever political viewpoints they prefer or do nothing at all.

As Dean Baker puts it, this is an economic model that recognizes in the Internet era that old-fashioned media economics no longer work. You can't produce a digital product, take it to market and sell it. And you can't get advertisers to bankroll your operation. The rational policy solution is to give media producers—journalists—money up front, and then

make what they produce available to all for free online. It will fill the Web with large amounts of professional-quality journalism, and provide a genuine independent journalism sector to complement post-corporate newspapers, public media and a retooled commercial news media. Those will be the four legs of our new media table.

Ultimately, the legs may be rearranged. More weight may go on one than another. Journalists may flee commercial media and start nonprofit Web sites. Post-corporate digital newspapers might be displaced by public-media Web sites. A new generation of Web-savvy editors might leap from medium to medium, perhaps creating journalistic platforms that we cannot yet imagine. The twists and turns are inevitable and should be welcomed rather than feared. If there are sources of funding, journalists will innovate and the people will decide what works. The possibilities are endless, and endlessly democratic.

When Dean Baker first broached this idea, a good decade ago, it was dismissed as utopian and absurd. After I wrote about the Citizenship News Voucher in my *Death and Life of American Journalism* book with Nichols, we visited the people heading both the Federal Communication Commission's and the Federal Trade Commission's formal panels that were studying the crisis in journalism in 2010. Each of them had read the book closely. They each stated, almost immediately upon our entering their offices, that the Citizenship News Voucher was exactly the sort of thinking that was necessary if there was going to be much journalism going forward.

In times of crisis, utopian ideas can get real, in a hurry.

Some Concluding thoughts

The separation of journalism from the balance of media is a tad arbitrary, and much of the logic applied in this essay can be extended to "entertainment" and culture. In particular, there are crucial policy fights over the Internet—ranging from Network Neutrality, privacy protection and restrictions on commercialism to universal broadband access and copyright reform—that are mandatory for a democratic media in the digital realm, journalism included. These areas are of such magnitude they have been assigned their own "real utopia" treatment.

In this paper I have presented the arguments and suggestions on behalf of a tremendously reformed news media sector, but I have ignored any discussion of the political process that might make these reforms plausible. This is an area I have considerable personal experience in as the co-founder of Free Press, the national media reform organization. The Free Press experience has confirmed what my academic research suggested: Media reform of the nature described herein will only be possible as part of a broader reform movement to democratize all the core institutions of American society; and indeed media reform must play a foundational role in any serious such reform movement. For decades such talk seemed hypothetical if not delusional; after the uprisings of 2011 from Wisconsin to Wall Street and then just about everywhere they appear more likely to be the defining developments of the coming generation.

Immediate political opposition to news media reform comes not from news media corporations, ironically enough. Those firms would possibly benefit from these reforms indirectly, and certainly would not be imperiled. But spirited opposition comes from right-wing media and the political right in general. These forces enjoy the present collapse of traditional journalism and are rushing to fill the void. More broadly, those corporate forces that benefit from a journalism-free environment in their dealings with governments also have no enthusiasm for the type of media reforms proposed herein. Hence the requirement that media reform is a necessary part of broader democratic reform.

Although journalism is most definitely an enemy of privilege and inequality, it is not necessarily hostile to capitalism per se. A strong argument can be made, and has been made, that a credible free press is necessary for there to be the information necessary for functioning free markets. Nations without a quality free press are prone to what has been termed “crony capitalism.” At the same time, capitalism is always per quo, not per se, and in the realm of really existing capitalism the highest priority appears to be the protection and promotion of profit-maximization (and those who immediately benefit from profit maximization) about all else, crony-style or not. At any rate, media struggles will be inextricably linked with battles over the nature of the economy going forward.

¹ See, for example, Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng, and Robert A. White, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

² Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

³ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1991).

⁴ The classic statement of this position ironically located four theories, but really came down to us versus them. See Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

⁵ See John Nichols, *The "S" Word* (New York: Verso, 2011).

⁶ Charles Blitzer, "Introduction." In Henry M. Christman, editor, *The American Journalism of Marx & Engels* (New York: New American Library, 1966).p. xxvii.

⁷ Quoted in Saul K. Padover, "Introduction." In Saul K. Padover, editor and translator, Karl Marx, *On Freedom of the Press and Censorship* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. xiv

⁸ Marx, *Freedom of the Press*, pp. 40-41.

⁹ Marx, *Freedom of the Press*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰ See John Nichols, *The "S" Word* (New York: Verso, 2011).

¹¹ See, for example, Hakon Larsen, "Public Service Broadcasting as an Object fro Cultural Policy in Norway and Sweden: A Policy Tool and End in Itself," *Nordicom Review* Vol.32, No. 2 (November 2011): pp. 35-48.

¹² Gyula Hegyi, "Learn from our failures and create a socialist democracy," *The Guardian*, December 22, 2006.

¹³ Ben Scott, "Labor's New Deal for Journalism: The Newspaper Guild in the 1930s," PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009, ch. 7.

¹⁴ Ethical Journalism Initiative, International Federation of Journalists. IFJ general secretary Aidan White has written an excellent book on the campaign, *To Tell You the Truth: The Ethical Journalism Initiative*, which is available from the federation at <http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en>.

¹⁵ The two classic works are: Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, "A Test of the News," *The New Republic*, August 4, 1920.

¹⁶ See John Nichols and Robert McChesney, "Bush's War on the Press," *The Nation*, December 5, 2005.

¹⁷ Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), p. 170.

¹⁸ For a long discussion of the reliance on official sources and other problems built into the professional code for journalism, see Robert W. McChesney, *The Problem of the Media* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), ch. 2, ch. 3.

¹⁹ For a variety of treatments of this issue, see Howard Friel and Richard A. Falk, *The Paper of Record: How the New York Times Misreports U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Verso, 2004); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); Jonathan Mermin, *Debating War and Peace: Media Coverage of U.S. Intervention in the Post-Vietnam Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁰ For a superb treatment of this issue, see W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²¹ John Pilger, *Heroes* (London: Jonathan Cape 1986; New York: Vintage, 2001), p. 178.

²² "The Press: The Newspaper Collector Samuel Newhouse," *TIME*, July 27, 1962.

²³ Ronald D. Smith, *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* (Mahwah, N.J.: Routledge, 2004), p. 191; Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992), p. 66; Trevor Morris and Simon Goldsworthy, *PR—A Persuasive Industry? Spin, Public Relations and the Shaping of the Modern Media* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also: http://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/media_rel.html.

²⁴ Iver Peterson, "At Los Angeles Times, A Debate on News-Ad Interaction," *New York Times*, November 17, 1997, pp. C1, C11.

²⁵ "PR Day at the L.A. Times," *Extra! Update*, August 1998, p. 4. This period and these developments are covered at length in Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New York: New Press, 2000).

²⁶ See Diane Farsetta and Daniel Price, "Fake TV News: Widespread and Undisclosed," Center for Media and Democracy, April 6, 2006, <http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/execsummary>.

²⁷ See James O'Shea, *The Deal from Hell: How Moguls and Wall Street Plundered Great American Newspapers* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

²⁸ Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), p. 5.

²⁹ All quotations and statistics mentioned from: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City," January 11, 2010. http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/how_news_happens

³⁰ For chilling detail, see Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), pp. 44-45.

³¹ Matthew Rothschild, "Gov. Walker Uses 'Vanna White' Veto to Rob New Public Sector Workers," *The Progressive Blog*, July 6, 2011. <http://www.progressive.org/wx070611.html>

³² Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), pp. 12, 90, 46, 52.

³³ Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), p. 23.

³⁴ Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution that Will Begin the World Again* (New York: Nation Books, 2011). See the preface to the paperback edition and Appendix 3.

³⁵ Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City," January 11, 2010. http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/how_news_happens

³⁶ W. Lance Bennett, "Press-Government Relations in A Changing Media Environment," In Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

³⁷ Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), p. 226.

³⁸ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), p. 90.

³⁹ Jeremy W. Peters, "Covering 2012, Youths on the Bus," *The New York Times*, August 31, 2011.

⁴⁰ Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), p. 86.

⁴¹ See Michael Miner, "Whose Fault Is Scott Lee Cohen? The reporter who didn't pay enough attention is now the scapegoat for everybody who paid none at all," *The Chicago Reader*, February 11, 2010.

⁴² This has been something candidates have been angling toward for awhile; only with the disintegration of journalism is it a simple strategy to pursue. See Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 27.

⁴³ Herbert J. Gans, *Democracy and the News* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 54.

⁴⁴ Jeff Jarvis, "foreword," to Elliott King, *Free for All: The Internet's Transformation of Journalism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2010), p. x.

⁴⁵ For a treatment of the scorched-earth approach of a newspaper publisher who is regarded as a visionary in the move from print to digital, see David Carr, "Newspapers' Digital Apostle," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2011, pp. B1, B6. For a treatment of the handful of the most successful new digital newsrooms at the local level, which depend overwhelmingly on donations and foundation grants, see *Getting Local: How Nonprofit News Ventures Seek Sustainability* (The Knight Foundation, October 2011).

⁴⁶ Steven Waldman and the Working Group on Information Needs of Communities, *The Information Needs of Communities: The Changing Media Landscape in a Broadband Age* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Communications Commission, June 2011), p. 16.

⁴⁷ *Vocus State of the Media Report 2011*, p. 2; Jeremy W. Peters, "Times Rolls Out Its Pay Design for Web Users," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2011, pp. A1, A3.

⁴⁸ Tim Rutten, "AOL Hearts HuffPo. The Loser? Journalism," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-rutten-column-huffington-aol-20110209,0,7406565.column>

⁴⁹ Tim Rutten, "AOL Hearts HuffPo. The Loser? Journalism," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-rutten-column-huffington-aol-20110209,0,7406565.column>

⁵⁰ *Vocus State of the Media Report 2011*, pp. 2, 3, 8.

⁵¹ For an important book that touches on this point, see constitutional scholar Bruce Ackerman's *The Decline and Fall of the American Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁵² Michael Wolff, "The Web Is Dead; Long Live the Internet: Who's to Blame: Them," *Wired* 18 (September 2010): 122-27, 166.

⁵³ Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 51-54.

⁵⁴ This discussion of Hindman relies upon John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, "The Internet's Unholy Marriage to Capitalism," *Monthly Review*, March 2011, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ Karen Dunlap, "FCC Testimony: Media Cross-Ownership Bears Watching, but is Not Most Critical Issue" These remarks were prepared for testimony offered April 20, 2010 at the FCC workshop, "Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Impact on Competition and Diversity in the

Media Marketplace.” They can be found online at:
<http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/102162/fcc-testimony-media-cross-ownership-bears-watching-but-is-not-most-critical-issue/>

⁵⁶ See David A.L. Levy and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, editors, *The Changing Business of Journalism and its Implications for Democracy* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2010).

⁵⁷ Potter Stewart, “Or of the Press,” *Yale Law Report*, vol. 21, no. 2, (Winter 1974-75), pp. 9-11.

⁵⁸ Cited in Donald R. Simon, “Big Media: Its Effect on the Marketplace of Ideas and How to Slow the Urge to Merge,” *The John Marshall Journal of Computer and Information Law* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 273.

⁵⁹ *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11: 48-49, http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/print_documents/amend1_speechs8.html.

⁶⁰ John Nichols and Robert W. McChesney, *Tragedy and Farce: How the American Media Sell Wars, Spin Elections and Destroy Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Rodney Benson and Matthew Powers, *Public Media Around the World: International Models for Funding and Protecting Independent Journalism* (Washington, D.C.: Free Press, 2011), p. 61.

⁶² Benson and Powers, pp. 49-53, 34. The French government provides roughly 13 percent of the revenues of the French newspaper industry. The total revenues of U.S. newspaper industry in 2008 were approximately \$48 billion. See the data of the Newspaper Association of America. <http://www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers.aspx> Our estimate does not include the emergency three-year \$950 million subsidy the French government made to address the crisis facing French newspapers. On a per capita basis that would be like the U.S., government making a three-year \$5 billion additional subsidy.

⁶³ We highly recommend that readers review the IFJ’s conclusions regarding the future of journalism, as contained in texts and online projects such as Aidan White’s To Tell You the Truth: The Ethical Journalism Initiative and the federation’s www.ethicaljournalisminitiative.org

⁶⁴ *Democracy index 2011: Democracy under stress*. A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit. http://pages.eiu.com/rs/eiu2/images/EIU_Democracy_Index_Dec2011.pdf

⁶⁵ *Freedom of the Press 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2010). <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pfs/371.pdf>

⁶⁶ James Curran, Shanto Iyengar, Anker Brink Lund and Inka Salovaara-Moring, “Media System, Public Knowledge and Democracy: A Comparative Study,” *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2009): pp. 5-26.

⁶⁷ Stephen Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News: Why Public Service Media Matters*, forthcoming 2013.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-53, 34.

⁶⁹ Rodney Benson, “Public Funding and Journalistic Independence: What Does the Research Tell Us?” In Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard, editors, *Will the Last Reporter Please Turn Out the Lights* (New York: New Press, 2011), pp. 314-319.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News* (London: Vintage, 2008); Jay G. Blumler and Stephen Coleman, “Political Communication in Freefall: The British Case—and Others?” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* (2010), 15(2): pp. 139-154.

⁷¹ Nikki Usher, “New Business Models for News Are Not That New,” *Online Journalism Review*, December 17, 2008.

⁷² This idea originated, as far as we can tell, with Eric Klinenberg, Craig Aaron, Victor Pickard and Josh Silver in the spring of 2009, calling it a “Journalism Jobs Program.”

⁷³ Ken Doctor, “It’s Time for a News Corp,” *Content Bridges*, May 26, 2009, <http://www.contentbridges.com/2009/05/its-time-for-a-news-corps.html>. We are sympathetic to the argument that News AmeriCorps journalists should be limited to public and nonprofit media down the road, but we believe it best to make them available to all news media during the present crisis.

⁷⁴ Have a portion of these funds go to stations and programs in languages other than English, especially Spanish, that serve immigrant communities in the United States, and that have a strong interest in what is happening in their nations of origin.

⁷⁵ By a conservative calculation, there were over 31,000 public relations workers in the federal government in 2009. Source: Minnesota Population Center. 2010. “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), USA (Version 5.0).” Machine-readable database. Compiled by Steven Ruggles, J. T. Alexander, Katie Genadek, et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.